

General Info:

Eiichi KUDO's SAMURAI REVOLUTION TRILOGY revolutionized the samurai film by focusing on realism, long hand-held camera sequences, and large group battles. The three films, 13 ASSASSINS, THE GREAT KILLING, and ELEVEN SAMURAI are acknowledged classics of the genre. AnimEigo is proud to be a part of their first North American DVD release.

The first film, 13 ASSASSINS (aka THE THIRTEEN ASSASSINS, JŪ-SAN NIN NO SHIKAKU) was remade in 2010 by Japan's hottest director, Takashi MIIKE.

13 ASSASSINS is also available from AnimEigo and ELEVEN SAMURAI will be released in the near future.

About the film:

Screenplay writer Kaneo IKEGAMI and Director Eiichi KUDO, who teamed up to create a new genre in Samurai Cinema with 13 ASSASSINS, continued their collaboration in this film. Based upon the mysterious death of TOKUGAWA Tsunashige in 1678, Ikegami wrote a story of JIMBO Heishiro, who joins the sure death revolt group against a large Shogunate Army. Director Kudo was happy what he accomplished with 13 ASSASSINS, but this film, THE GREAT KILLING, is regarded as his masterpiece.

One thing Kudo did for the first time in Japanese film history is have his cinematographers hand-carry cameras so they could chase after actors in order to depict the close realistic shots as if viewers are right in the battle.

Cameras at that time weighed over 50kg (110+ lbs) and it took two men to carry just one. Not only that, they they could not even look into the viewfinders. Toei's executives were not happy since some of the scenes were not even in focus. However, using this technique ensured that Kudo would have a deserved place in film history.

Another unique thing Kudo did for this film was the sound. The battle scenes in the Red-light district required some special sound effects to make them powerful. In the 1960s in Japan, there were lots of students opposition movements in Japanese Universities protesting against the US/Japan alliance, which they feared that would drag Japan into the wars led by US. Despite massive disagreements within his staff, Kudo pushed ahead with his idea of throwing modern riot noise into 17th century staged Samurai cinema, and used actual recordings of student protesters clashing with riot police. If you listen carefully, you can even hear the sound of police cars in the background.

SAKAI Tadakiyo (1624-84) and TOKUGAWA Tsunashige (1644-78)

In real-life, Sakai Tadakiyo, also known as Uta-no-kami, was a daimyō (feudal lord) and a Great Elder, and a high-ranking government advisor and official in the Tokugawa shogunate during the reign of the 4th Tokugawa Shogun, Ietsuna.

The 3rd Shogun, Iemitsu, had 5 sons, but his 2nd and 5th sons died as children. His firstborn son, Ietsuna, became the 4th Shogun but produced no heirs. He would normally have been succeeded by Iemitsu's third son, Tsunashige, but he died under mysterious circumstances at age 35, so the mantle actually passed to the fourth son, Tsunayoshi.

The mysterious death of Tsunashige was the seed from which screenwriter Kaneo IKEGAMI created THE GREAT KILLING.

Sakai was in fact a deeply influential figure during the 4th Shogunate, but it is not clear whether he was scheming to make Tsunashige the heir. However, when Ietsuna was on his deathbed, Sakai tried to get a son of the Emperor named the heir.

There are several modern theories about why Sakai was opposed to Tsunayoshi as the heir; one is that he considered Tsunayoshi to be incompetent, another that he was trying to buy time in the hopes that one of Ietsuna's concubines would deliver a son.

Once Tsunayoshi was Shogun, however, Sakai's power evaporated. He was dismissed from his post as Great

Elder and died suddenly a year later. It was rumored that he committed suicide.

HOJO Ujinaga (1609-1670)

As depicted in the film, in real-life, Hojo was an O-Metsuke or Inspector General. However, Hojo died in 1670, 8 years before the story is supposed to take place.

Ujinaga was a descendant of the Hojo family who controlled the Kamakura Shogunate Government (1185/1192-1333), and was the founder of the Hojo school of strategy. He originally studied at the Kofu school under OBATA Kagenori, then created his own distinct doctrine.

As depicted in the film, one of his students was YAMAGA Soko (1622-1685), the mastermind of the assassination plot.

Bios:

Koutaro SATOMI - Actor (11/28/1936 -)

Satomi is best known for his roles in the longest running Samurai TV series of all time, MITO KOMON, which lasted 42 years, 43 series, and 1227 episodes until 12/19/2011, a Guinness Book World Record. At various times, he was part of the cast in three different main roles; Suke-san, Kaku-san and finally as Mito Komon himself.

He also appeared in all three of the Samurai Revolution Trilogy films.

Mikijiro HIRA - Actor (11/21/1933 -)

One of the best theatrical performers in Japan, Hira has been active in the theater, films and TV for many decades. He is probably best known in the US for his starring roles of THREE OUTLAW SAMURAI (1964) and SWORD OF THE BEAST (1965), both directed by Hideo GOSHA. Hira also appeared in Takashi MIIKE's 2010 remake of 13 ASSASSINS.

Hira became a star when he played the lead in the innovative Samurai TV series THREE OUTLAW SAMURAI (dir. Hideo GOSHA). Since then, he has been a continual presence in both lead and character roles. He is particularly well-known in Japan for his work in Shakespearean roles.

Eiichi KUDO - Director (7/17/1929 - 9/23/2000)

Best known for this trilogy and legendary TV series "Kizu darake no tenshi" (Injured Angels) and "Sure Death" (Hissatsu), Kudo directed over 30 films between 1956 and 1999. His 1982 film Yaju-Deka was nominated for the Golden Bear Award at the Berlin International Film Festival. In 2001, he won a postmortem Special Award at the Mainichi Film Concours.

Kaneo IKEGAMI - Screenplay Writer (5/16/1923 - 5/6/2007)

Ikegami was known as the father of Shudan Jidaigeki (Large Group-battle Samurai Cinema). He first pioneered the style with SEVENTEEN NINJA (1963). As opposed to the traditional story of one hero battling a large group of enemies, this story features a group that works as a team. SEVENTEEN NINJA was a hit, and spawned 13 ASSASSINS and THE GREAT KILLING. Due to the success of the SHUDAN JIDAIGEKI genre, Ikegami had a prolific career as a film and TV screenwriter. Furthermore, he became a novelist at his age of 69, using the pen name of Shoichiro IKEMIYA. His first book was adapted into a film in Japan which was later released by AnimEigo on DVD as "Kon Ichikawa's 47 Ronin".