

LONE WOLF AND CUB SWORD OF VENGEANCE

A note regarding the Trailers:

This disk contains three original theatrical trailers from the Lone Wolf and Cub series, for #1- "Sword of Vengeance", #4 - "Baby Cart in Peril", and #5 - "Baby Cart in the Land of Demons", as well as a bonus trailer: Zatoichi #2: "Zatoichi the Outlaw."

At the present time, original trailers are not available for #2- "Baby Cart at the River Styx" and #3- "Baby Cart to Hades."

The trailer for #6 - "White Heaven in Hell," along with another Zatoichi trailer, will be included in the next DVD in the series.

We hope to be able to include several samurai film trailers on each DVD we release.

Translation Notes:

Lone Wolf & Cub takes place in mid-eastern Japan, sometime during the early Tokugawa Era (approximately 1603-1868, also called Edo Period), the period named for the 15 generations of Tokugawa Shogun (Military Overlords) who ruled the nation, maintaining a relatively static society, for over 250 years. This period of military-rule was characterized by its relatively peaceful order overall, clear division of the social hierarchy, extravagance by the privileged classes, isolation from the West, and a lot of convoluted treachery, as well as many important cultural and intellectual developments.

For many centuries, Japan had a form of feudal system, in which the servants, vassals and palace guards of the Daimyo (the military Lords of independent regional domains, who maintained a castle, a home base, and several strategically-located satellite fortresses) were granted a piece of land (a fief), or in most cases, a stipend that came with a specific official post. In return, the vassals were expected to dedicate their lives to the service of their masters. The relationships between masters & vassals were based on this reciprocity of services and rewards, and were emotionally very strong. It was not uncommon for the servitors and followers of a Lord to join him in death. Such a custom (or at least, a public declaration of such an intent) is portrayed in the opening scene of "Sword of Vengeance." Similar master-follower relationships and customs developed among the Samurai and their servants, craftsmen and their assistants, and so on.

Almost two-hundred Daimyo-ruled domains and their associated castle-towns existed in the early Tokugawa period, whose sizes varied according to the Daimyo's holdings and the agricultural production of the fiefs under their control. However, the number of Daimyo decreased quickly during this era, as the Tokugawa Shogunate practiced strict enforcement over Daimyo domains; the severe taxation, as related in the narration following the opening scene in LW&C, did indeed take place, and the Shogunate was always maneuvering to reduce the power of the Daimyo.

Daimyo also employed vassals who acted as spies, solely to monitor other "trusted" members of

his entourage, to ensure that no one is plotting against him. Turncoats in Daimyo domains were in fact not uncommon. This was “The Age of Turncoats,” referred to as such by many historians, and its portrayal plays an important part in LW&C.

The Shogunate was the official governing body of the Nation, consisting of the Samurai centered around their Lord, a Shogun. He was the chief administrator, who gave orders through his councilors, the Tairo (Great Councilor, only appointed during special circumstances) and the Roojuu (Senior Councilors). Although the former were only required to be present at the Shogun's castle 2 days each month, Roojuu were officially at the top of the administrative hierarchy, and were mostly responsible for managing the various administrative affairs of the Shogunate. They in turn gave orders to the commissioners who were responsible for matters relating to finance, taxation, the monasteries, and city administration & justice.

Also taking orders from Roojuu were the Oometsuke (Inspector Generals), who dealt with examining a person's loyalty to the Shogunate, Shogunate-associated members and officials' conduct and performance, and the Shogunate's relationship with the many Daimyo that still remained. Under them were the 16 Metsuke (Inspectors) and further below, the Wakadoshiyori (Junior Councilors). Many of these officials appear in the Lone Wolf & Cub films.

Also notable in LW&C are the ‘emblems’ of the Shogunate and the Yagyu. They were called “mon,” and were similar in function to flags, designating each Daimyo or the Shogunate itself. Like flags, it was considered sacrilegious to desecrate them. In fact, any official Shogunate document was considered somewhat sacred, and as such demanded great respect. This is illustrated in LW&C when Ogami first shocks the Yagyu by not only disobeying but also destroying his death-sentence, and then escapes their wall of swords by revealing his official Shogunate robes, hidden under the white Death-robos he had been wearing.

Tokugawa society as a whole was divided into four basic classes. Class was somewhat hereditary, in that once born into a particular class, it was impossible to become a member of a higher class. Although not a wealthy class and owning no land (land was owned by the Daimyo alone), at the top were the privileged class of Samurai (about 10% of the total population), the governing, sword-carrying members of the society. The Samurai class originally emerged around 800 AD, and they were highly skilled in military arts, and highly educated, especially in Confucianism, whose basic philosophy taught virtues of benevolence, propriety, righteousness, fidelity, wisdom and loyalty. Each person was expected to follow the virtuous examples of the ancient sages.

The Shogunate demanded that Samurai closely follow these rules of conduct and ordered that they study Confucian classics. In the early years of the Tokugawa Era, the Shogunate was heavily concerned with the problem of a large number of Samurai who became masterless as many Daimyo fell and lost their domains. These detached Samurai were called “ronin,” and many of them went on to become teachers of swordsmanship, Confucian scholars, somewhat-privileged farmers, or simply became a part of the townspeople.

Swordsmanship was an interesting tradition that was carried on from one school of practitioners

to the next. Each 'school' or 'style' was called a "ryuu," and was centered around a set of teachings, principles, customs and techniques. There were and are many ryuu in existence, in various sectors of martial arts. Shin-kage-ryuu (New Shadow), was devised by Yagyu Muneyoshi in 16th century. His son, Munenori (1571-1646), a character mentioned in LW&C, had taught swordsmanship to the first three Tokugawa Shoguns. One of Munenori's sons, Jubei-Mitsuyoshi (1607-1650), a Samurai upon which many movie and video game characters are based, formulated his own ryuu called "Yagyu-ryuu" between the years of 1644-1648, laying upon many principles of the Shin-kage-ryuu.

In addition to strict adherence to Confucianism, also among the Samurai's codes were many related to ritual combat. As cumbersome as it may seem, if, for example, Samurai from two different Daimyo domains decided to fight each other, both sides would agree on the site of combat and avoid using dishonest means to take unfair advantage of each other. This is portrayed in "Sword of Vengeance," in the scene where Retsudo offers Ogami a duel in return for removing his Shogunate robes -- and Ogami accepts because he knows that even the evil Retsudo would not act treacherously after making such an offer in public.

Accounting for approximately 80% of the population were the peasants, the class of people whose functions were, in short, to serve the Shogunate and the ruling classes' economic requirements. These villagers were required to till the land, producing grain (rice, barley, and wheat), and were taxed harshly; 50% or more of the crop (esp. rice, which often played a role of currency in many official functions) they produced. However, as the Shogunate's expenses (which included expensive constructions and renovations, as well as the extravagant lifestyles of its members) skyrocketed, the tax burden on the peasantry became higher and higher. Many families were severely punished for failing to pay the required taxes, and some had to sell family members into temporary bondage (slavery was illegal, but this form of service was a common practice). In fact, the brothels (whose customers were largely Samurai) were filled with daughters of these peasants. In addition, the Shogunate considered the peasants to be a readily available labor force. They regularly called upon the peasants to participate in maintaining public roads and facilities.

The majority of the townspeople consisted of artisans and merchants. Many of these, as well as the retainers of the Daimyo and Shogunate gathered around castle-towns where most of the business was done. Among these were wholesalers and moneylenders, some of whom accumulated enormous fortunes and survived into the modern era, transforming themselves into some of Japan's largest companies.

One interesting trade that boomed during this era was the messenger service. Although it had been in existence for many centuries, the "express" (about 60 miles a day) messenger-horsemen in the Tokugawa period were affiliated with the Shogunate, and were instrumental in carrying official documents and letters, especially via many trunk highways which were constructed during these years. Eventually, private entrepreneurs took over these functions, laying a foundation for the modern information network.

At much lower social rank were the "commoners," which the Shogunate classified as a part of the

“outcast” population. These included exiled and ostracized members of villages, as villages had their own appointed chiefs who punished unruly members of their villages by sentencing them to exile. Others, the so-called “non-people” and “lowly-people” included: descendants of slaves, people with physical disabilities and abnormalities, beggars and prostitutes. This class was at the bottom of social hierarchy, and as such, they were not accounted for in official surveys, and were required to live in certain fixed (and undesirable) areas. The Shogunate even went so far as to state that a sub-class of outcasts were only worth a seventh as much as other individuals. Interestingly, actors and performers were officially considered to be outcasts, as they were also required to live near their theaters, and to hide their faces in public.

Administration of justice was loosely based on rule-by-status, therefore the governing class of Samurai was allowed to take the law into their own hands against the lower classes at will, if they so desired. Crimes carried extreme measures of punishment, and many criminals were indeed put to death. However, the official edicts stated that no individual could be punished unless a confession was obtained. As such, the use of many forms of torture, many more gruesome than their medieval counterparts, was often authorized.

Seppuku was a ritual form of suicide-execution, mainly indulged in by the Samurai, which originated in the late 1200's. It involved disemboweling oneself with the sword, after which the execution-assistant, or “Second,” delivered the decapitating coup-de-grace. This was Ogami Itto's official role in LW&C. There were many reasons for which Samurai committed, or were sentenced to commit, seppuku (breaking the code of conduct or being on the losing side of a plot were the most common) but Samurai would also sometimes commit seppuku to protest an action by their Lord which they felt to be unfair. In LW&C, the three Ikoma Clansmen allegedly commit seppuku to gain attention for their protest that Ogami is a traitor.

Long before the Tokugawa Era, in the ages plagued by many catastrophic disasters, both natural and man-made, people felt as though the end of the world was coming, and therefore looked to religion for emotional comfort and security. The role that Buddhism (the philosophical and religious movement that was introduced to Japan in 552 from Korea) played in Japan was enormous. Like some world religions, various sects had emerged since its introduction, but virtually all Buddhist sects in Japan spent great efforts to organize their doctrines during the Tokugawa period, yet they did so by carefully accommodating portions of Confucianism (the core philosophy of the ruling class) to avoid disastrous political conflicts. Amida Buddhism belonged to a branch of Buddhism that taught that there exists a land of bliss, a paradise in another world, to which the faithful may gain access. Many prominent monks taught that reciting the name of Amida Buddha would be the absolute minimum requirement for seeking salvation, but one monk, Hoonen (1133-1212), had even stated that it would be the most sufficient. In LW&C, there is a monk who is constantly praying, reciting Amida's name, and getting on everyone's nerves. For most common people, this became a spiritual goal of a sort, and they found Amidism's simple demands, and a reliance on Amida's (though a non-deity) saving power, attractive. Amida Buddhism had gone through several schisms over the centuries, yet because of its egalitarian beliefs, it remains today, and has one of largest bodies of followers.

Among Buddha's teachings were those related to the so-called Six Modes (or States) of

Existence. While there are many translations and interpretations of these, they were all based on Buddha's own observations of human conditions, which may be summarized as follows.

An individual might be preoccupied with:

- 1) eternal craving for things --- the so-called "hungry ghost" state.
- 2) ignorant outlook, not examining theoretical possibilities --- the "animal" state.
- 3) eternal anger, constantly at fight with himself or others --- the "hell" state.
- 4) overly-competitive, always out-doing others using any means --- the "jealous-god" state
- 5) overly-contemptuous with a false sense of having attained a god-like state --- the "god-being" state

The sixth state is what Buddha taught as being free from the other five states, calling it the "Human" state, which lacks the preoccupations of the other states, and exhibits inquisitiveness and virtuous reasoning abilities. In LW&C, Ogami named his son "Daigoro" as a Japanese mnemonic warning about the 5 states.

In the last years of the Tokugawa Era, the Shogunate's expenses were increasing at a much more rapid pace than their revenues, despite their ability to raise taxes at will (mostly from the agrarian base). Also, the last of the Shoguns had employed many prominent scholars, who showed great interest in western science and technology, in an era when the nation adhered to isolationist disciplines. In 1853, Commodore Perry arrived in Japan. The US was developing its power in the Pacific, and wanted to develop commercial relations with Asian nations. It also had many whaling ships in the Pacific that required shelter and supplies in the vicinity, another reason why it felt a need to open Japan's doors using any possible means. Upon Perry's arrival, coupled with a great scholarly interest in western knowledge, many leading Bakufu (another word for Shogunate) officials felt that the western powers were so far advanced that it would be irrational for Japan to continue to refuse to establish full diplomatic ties. The Shogunate thus felt a great internal pressure to abandon isolationism and anti-foreign sentiments. In 1866, the 14th Shogun, Iemochi, died, and Hitotsubashi Keiki was appointed the 15th Shogun. Keiki appealed for unity, by restoring political power to the Imperial Court (restricted by the Shogunate until then to only handling scholastic affairs). In a matter of months, faced with opposition within the Shogunate, Hitotsubashi resigned. A new provisional government, with no former Tokugawa associates, was formed, and a brief civil war followed. In the ensuing power vacuum, it was relatively easy for the Imperial Court to gain influence, and more than 250 years of Tokugawa rule was at an end.

During this era, there were also great cultural developments, many of which would not have been possible without the extravagance of the ruling classes. Such developments included literary works, especially haiku (seventeen-syllable poetry) and fiction. The higher classes enjoyed literature, because education, which included literature among other topics such as military arts, was fairly well organized. Even the commoners could receive some form of education at temples, or by masterless Samurai. Puppetry and Theater also became very popular, primarily in the Yoshiwara entertainment district of Edo (Edo was renamed Tokyo, in 1868, after the new Meiji government was established), where many Kabuki theaters, teahouses, and brothels, were located. Aside from these were developments in the fine arts. Woodblock printing and painting, originally introduced to Japan from China around the 8th century, while mainly commercial

productions subject to the censorship and approval by the city magistrates, took art to new heights.

Ukiyo-e, “the pictures of the floating world,” and others by such famous artists as Hokusai and Hiroshige, influenced many European artists, especially the French Impressionists. Military crafts were also being perfected by a few artisans, most of whom worked as retainers for Daimyo and Shogunate. Prior to the isolation of Japan during the Tokugawa rule, Japan had a short-term trading relationship with the Portuguese, and in 1543, muskets were introduced, and many smiths quickly learned to produce them. Despite the Samurai preference for honorable swordplay, a fair amount of dirty work “got done with guns.”

A considerable amount of historical research was necessary in translating these films and in compiling the information contained here. Among the many sources we have consulted, the following were especially helpful:

- 1) “Tokugawa Japan - The Social and Economic Antecedents of Modern Japan” Chie Nakane, Shinzaburoo Ooishi and Conrad Totman, eds. Univ. of Tokyo Press, 1990
- 2) “Japan - A Historical Survey” Mikiso Hane. Scribners, 1972
- 3) “A History of Japan: 1615 - 1867” George Sansom. Stanford Univ. Press, 1963
- 4) "Kozure Ookami", vols.1-28, Koike Kazuo & Kojima Goseki, published by Koike Shoin, 1995 (re-issue)