

Document Citation

Title	Zegen
Author(s)	Shohei Imamura
Source	<i>Toei Company Ltd.</i>
Date	
Type	press kit
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	7
Subjects	Baisho, Mitsuko (1946), Japan Ogata, Ken (1937), Tokyo, Japan Imamura, Shohei (1926-2006), Tokyo, Japan
Film Subjects	Zegen (The pimp), Imamura, Shohei, 1987

SELECTED FOR OFFICIAL COMPETITION AT 40TH CANNES INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

A SHOHEI IMAMURA FILM

ZEIGEN

THE GRAND PRIX WINNING DIRECTOR, SHOHEI IMAMURA, CONCENTRATING VIGOROUS ENERGY ON THIS VERY WORK!

"Everything is only for wealth and military power of Meiji Japan.
For the sake of a great cause,
I PROCURE WOMEN!"

Directed by: **SHOHEI IMAMURA** Screenplay by: **SHOHEI IMAMURA, KOTA OKABE**
Director of Photography: **MASAO TOCHIZAWA** Art Director: **YOSHINAGA YOKOO**
Sound-recording by: **KENICHI BENITANI** Lighting by: **YASUO IWAKI** Music by: **SHINICHIRO IKEBE**
Starring: **KEN OGATA, MITSUKO BAISHO**
NORIHEI MIKI, TAJI TONUYAMA MAMI KUMAGAYA, KO CHUN-HSIUNG

AD & D: MICHIO HORI Photo: TERUO KATO



Directed by : **SHOHEI IMAMURA**
Screenplay by : **SHOHEI IMAMURA**
KOTA OKABE

Director of Photography : **MASAO TOCHIZAWA**

Art Director : **YOSHINAGA YOKOO**

Sound-recording by : **KENICHI BENITANI**

Lighting by : **YASUO IWAKI**

Music by : **SHINICHIRO IKEBE**

Starring :

KEN OGATA — as Iheiji Muraoka ("Zegen")

MITSUKO BAISHO — as Shiho

NORIHEI MIKI — as Tomonaga (Bizenya)

TAIJI TONUYAMA — as Shimada (The Barber)

MAMI KUMAGAYA — as Iheiji's Last Wife, Kino

KO CHUN-HSIUNG — as The Chinese Pirate "Boss" Wang

ZEGEN

The Story

As the film opens three Japanese sailors have jumped ship from aboard a Chinese freighter and come swimming into Hong Kong. One of them is Muraoka Iheiji, the hero of our tale (Ogata Ken). From his first person voice-over narrations we learn that Iheiji split up with his woman Shiho eight years earlier in Shimabara, Japan and went to sea to seek his fortune. The year is 1902.

Down and out, penniless, Iheiji steals a chicken and is turned over to the Japanese consulate in Hong Kong. He is introduced to a Japanese barber, Shimada, (Tonoyama Taiji) who takes him in as an apprentice. However, he is soon pressed into service by Captain Uehara, a fanatical militarist (Koniishi Hiroyuki) and forced to go to Manchuria to spy on the Russians.

At a brothel in the Manchurian capital, Hoten (Mukden) he comes across Tomé a hometown girl from Shimabara, who tells him that Shiho, his old flame, is now in Singapore working as an indentured servant in the skin trade. Iheiji collects a large sum of money from the other Japanese girls in the brothel promising them that he will bring this money back to their poor families in Japan, and heads back to Hong Kong.

In Hong Kong Iheiji visits the home of another Japanese acquaintance, Tomonaga (Miki Norihei) who runs a clothing shop called "Bizenya". He is astonished to find that "Bizenya's" new concubine is none other than Shiho (Baisho Mitsuko). Asanaga has purchased her by paying off her debts. Iheiji, furious, uses his Manchurian money to buy Shiho from asanaga and also buys the Bizenya which he promptly turns into a Japanese brothel.

He now decides to devote himself to liberating Japanese women who have been made into sex slaves by Chinese pirates and puts them to work under

Wang renews his amorous liaison with Shiho but Iheiji goes about the business of bribing British officials to open up a casino and purchase a rubber plantation. Iheiji's business is booming when word arrives of the unexpected Japanese victory over the Russians in Manchuria.

July, 1912. Emperor Meiji passes away and Iheiji goes through the ridiculous motions of a sympathetic harakiri which he, of course, flubs in comical fashion. Anti Japanese demonstrations break out and Iheiji is forced to the wall.

June, 1919, Iheiji's world caves in. Anti-prostitution laws are passed, Iheiji's women want to go back to Japan, and even Shiho deserts him and runs off with the powerful Wang who buys Iheiji out lock, stock and barrel...

Iheiji, a mere shadow of his former self, settles down in Malaya and fathers many children. Years pass and with his brood Iheiji creates a "tiny Japan" in Malaya. — 1941 — The Pacific War is starting and Iheiji is now 70 years old. Japanese troops land in Kota Bahru. Iheiji, wrapped in a Japanese flag but still a "Zegen" to the core, runs after the young soldiers offering to procure women for them, but is scornfully rejected by his own countrymen...

TEXT and Historical Tables
by HERMAN PEVNER, Film Critic, Tokyo



good conditions in his own brothel. With Shiho as his consort and business partner he is soon prospering as Zegen, the Flesh Trader. Iheiji is convinced that he is doing this as a "Higher Duty" for the good of Japan. The money that his girls send back home does indeed bring hard currency into the Japanese treasury and Iheiji never loses a chance to make a display of his steadfast devotion to the Japanese Emperor Meiji.

Iheiji now decides to expand his operations further afield and goes to Malaya where he proposes to Japanese consular officials that brothels sponsored by the Japanese government be established. However, they have more important things on their minds — the Czar's Baltic Fleet is seen steaming through the Straits of Malacca on the way to a showdown with the Japanese at Port Arthur. It is 1904 and the Russo-Japanese War is about to start.

In Malaya's Port Swettenham Iheiji and Shiho meet Wang, the handsome Chinese pirate, and negotiate the setting up of more brothels. But, from their conversation in Cantonese, a Chinese dialect that Iheiji does not understand, we can infer that there has been something between Shiho and Wang before.

Profiles of the Director and Stars.



SHOHEI IMAMURA -- Director

Shohei Imamura was born in Tokyo on September 15th, 1926. After graduating from Waseda University in 1951, he joined Shochiku Co., Ltd. as an assistant director at their Ofuna Studio. He began working under director Yasujiro Ozu on the film "Bakushu" and continued to work with Ozu for three films. Then, he began working with director Yoshitaro Nomura and continued with him until 1954 when Imamura transferred to Nikkatsu where he began working as a first assistant director under Yuzo Kawashima. In 1958, Imamura wrote the screenplay, "Bakumatsu Taiyo-Den" jointly with director Kawashima and the resulting film became one of Kawashima's masterpieces containing Imamura's unique disposition.

In the same year (1958) Imamura was promoted to director and made his first film, "Nusumareta Yokujo" (Stolen Carnal Desire), a rather serious type comedy describing the energetic life of Kochi Osaka's traveling theatrical group, based on a story by Toko Kon.

His fourth work was based on a composition written by a Korean-Japanese girl entitled "Nian-chan" (Big Brother), describing the lives of poverty-stricken, yet admirable children of down-and-out neighborhoods. For this film Imamura received the Ministry of Education Prize.

His next work was "Buta to Gunkan" (Hogs and Warships) describing the lives of the parasite gangsters who made their base of operations around the American Naval Base at Yokosuka.

With these films, Imamura established himself as a first-rate director. But three years went by before he made his next film, "Nippon Konchu-Ki" (Nippon Insect Story) (also known as The Insect Woman). It was during this three year period that he kept refusing to work on any film that was distasteful to him, and at the time he completed the writing of the screenplay "Akai Satsui" (Red Murderous Attempt). The studio refused to allow him to make the film, and he went on to write a play "Parody - Gods and Hogs" which later became the original story of his film "Kamigami no Fukaki Yokubo" (God's profound desire) which he made in 1968.

His attitude for pursuing total realism, coupled with the decline in the motion picture industry, drove him to making documentary films and his "Ningen Johatsu" (Human Evaporation) in 1967, filmed mostly with hidden cameras, was an epoch-making documentary. His "Nippon Sengoshi" (Post War Nippon), in 1970, was almost a documentary treatment of his previous "Nippon Konchu-Ki".

In 1976, Imamura returned to directing theatrical films with "Fukushu suru wa Wareni Ari" (Vengeance is Mine) completed in 1979 and "Eeja Naika" (Swing Along) in 1981.

His 1983 film, "The Ballad of Narayama", won the Cannes "Grand Prix".



KEN OGATA -- Actor

Born in 1937, Ken made his film debut in 1960 and was busy in TV as well as film all through the decade. In the seventies key roles in major films such as "Sand Castles" ('74) and "Hakkodasan" ('77) established his reputation as a major actor. Including this year's Japan Academy Awards bestowed in February, Ken Ogata has won Japan's Best Actor Award three times in their brief ten year history. The last time was, in fact, for his role in Imamura's "The Ballad of Narayama" the Cannes prize winner of '83. Ogata was also the star of Imamura's 1980 Cannes film, "Vengeance Is Mine" but is probably best remembered along the Croisette for his performance two years ago (1985) in the title role of Paul Schrader's "MISHIMA".

Somewhat along the lines of a Dustin Hoffman (But totally different in terms of persona and style) Ken Ogata is that rarity among screen actors, a character actor who is also undisputably a top star - particularly unusual in that Ken often plays unsavory characters such as Iheiji, the protagonist of "ZEGEN".

MITSUKO BAISHO -- Actress

Born in 1946 Baisho-san is without any doubt one of the sexiest forty year old women in film today but, as testified by two "Best Actress" awards (Blue Ribbon and Japan Academy Awards) she is also one of Japan's finest screen actresses as well. Films in which she has appeared include Kurosawa's "Kagemusha" and also all of the Imamura films that have been shown at Cannes. In the key role of "SHIHO" she boldly personifies a "liberated" Japanese female image such as has rarely, if ever, been seen in the West before.





7p #27209



Contact: TOEI's Stand No.25-01

Mr. Y. Sugiyama/T.Higuchi
T. Oyama/S. Saito/R. Romero

TOEI COMPANY' LTD.

Head Office: 2-17, 3-chome, Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104, Japan Phone: 535-4641 Cable: TOEIMPC TOKYO Telex: 2524541TOEICO
Paris Office: 6, rue Lincoln, 75008 Paris, France Phone: 4225-0987 Cable: TOEICO PARIS Telex: 642887 RAFATO

“Japan and the Japanese...”

What is it all about, anyway ???”

Director Imamura talks about his film, “ZEGEN”

Just about fifteen years ago, while I was shooting a documentary in Malaysia, I happened to come across 23 elderly Japanese women who were living there. They turned out to be former “Karayukis” – women who had been forced into prostitution and smuggled into Singapore and Malaya many years before, during the late Meiji and early Taisho eras (roughly, 1900–1920).

From what I already knew about the “Karayuki-san” phenomenon, having read several accounts of their miserable lives, I expected to hear nothing but heart-rending tales from each and every one of them. However, to my utter surprise, and despite the fact that all agreed they had been “taken for a ride” they were, nevertheless, amazingly light-hearted under the tropical sun, and looked back with a kind of bemused detachment at the horrible experiences of their youth. It was as though the very bitterness of their lives, pummeled and tossed about on the waves of history, had instilled in them the toughness they needed to transcend their agonies.

They told me how, having been brought to a foreign country at the tender age of 15 or 16 they continued to long for their families and yearned for home. They had the emperor’s picture up on the wall, sent money home to their families and even contributed as much as they could manage, to the Japanese military! To a certain extent, they were motivated by extreme poverty, ignorance and greed, however, as I listened to the fragments of their recollections, I could not help seeing in my mind, behind it all the image of a “Nation” . . . a nation that, for the sake of “catching up to the Western countries” could be totally indifferent to the trampling of individual human lives, of its own people and young women.

One of the more bizarre figures that came out of this Meiji Era in Japan was a man by the name of Ihei Muraoka. Ihei was a “Zegen” which is an obsolete word for what we would today call a procurer or brothel entrepreneur. Ihei referred to himself as “The Big Boss of the South Seas” but he assumed the air of a devoted patriot claiming that all was for the “greater good” of Japan. His “go for broke” attitude kind of endears him to us but, let’s face it – in reality he was nothing but a scoundrel. Yet, in a way, one might say that Ihei was a typical product of the Meiji mentality. His extreme vitality and dynamism, his naive patriotism, his impetuous disposition and amazing ability to bounce back undaunted from stunning blows . . . are qualities that today’s Japanese have perhaps lost somewhere along the way.

During the Meiji and Taisho eras thousands of Karayuki Sans found their way into foreign countries as an advance contingent of Japan’s military expansionism and Ihei was very adept at taking advantage of the situation. Japan played both ends against the middle in World War I (as a technical member of the Western “allies”) to emerge from that conflict as a first-class international power. Having attained such an elevated status Japan turned her back on the embarrassment of the “Karayukis”, denying their very existence.

Now, half a century later, feverishly exporting automobiles, semi-conductors and the like, Japan is the central cause of world-wide trade imbalances and economic tensions. In this context the deep-seated Japanese xenophobia and “closed off to the outside” mentality has been taken to task on many occasions but, what I am trying to do (in this film) is to get at the roots of what this country Japan, and what we Japanese, as a people, are really all about, by getting into the soul of this man Ihei, as he scampers madly about the countries of Southeast Asia with a massive load of Meiji nationalism on his back.

While criticizing Ihei I still have great affection for him and, since I am also a man who loves his country deeply, it is hard to say to what extent my quest will succeed.

Translation by Alex De León
ABC Enterprises, Tokyo

The Historical Background of “ZEGEN”

In 1868 Emperor Meiji ascended the throne of Japan and instilled his people with a vigorous spirit of modernization. Japan embarked on the “Miracle of Modernization” which would make her a world power within a few decades. Meanwhile the major capitalist powers (England, France, USA, Russia and Germany) were engaged in heavy competition for markets and spheres of influence in Asia. The greatest victim of Western imperialistic greed at this time was “The Sleeping Giant”, China. By the 1890’s Japan was ready to compete with the West (as she continues to do today) in the exploitation of the rest of Asia.

Chronology

- 1889: Promulgation of the “Meiji Constitution” and the Imperial Rescript on Education reasserting the divine sovereignty of the emperor, establishing Shinto as the State Religion and affirming patriotic nationalism as the highest value.
- 1894: First Sino-Japanese war. Japan quickly victorious. Obtains concessions by Treaty of Shimonoseki.
- 1896: Japan takes over Formosa (now, Taiwan) and makes it into a Japanese colony.
- 1901: Ihei arrives in Hong Kong.
- 1902: Goes to Manchuria as a spy.
- 1903: Returns to Hong Kong, saves Japanese girls from pirates. Starts first brothel “for the sake of Japan”.
- 1904: Japan declares war on Russia in February. Ihei gets Wang’s permission to open Japanese brothels in Malaya.
- 1905: April; The Czar’s Baltic Fleet appears in the Straits of Malacca. September; Russo-Japanese Peace Treaty signed in Portsmouth, N. H. Japan victorious. Japan stations troops in Korea to “protect” Japanese business interests there.
- Note:** It is around this time that the large trading companies such as Mitsui, Mitsubishi and Sumitomo supported by the government to aid in the policy of colonization and empire building, began to expand rapidly and take on their present “zaibatsu” form.
- 1908: Japanese Prime Minister, Ito Hirobumi, assassinated by Korean nationalist in Harbin, Manchuria.
- 1910: Japan annexes Korea. Makes it a colony.
- 1911: Chinese Republic established under Sun Yat-Sen
- 1912: July; Emperor Meiji dies. General Nogi, the hero of the Russian war follows the emperor to the Other World committing “Junshi” seppuku. Ihei tries to follow suit but flubs it.
- 1914: World War I breaks out in Europe. 72 Japanese “pimps” expelled from Malaya.
- 1917: Russian Revolution. Establishment of Soviet state.
- 1918: World War I ends.
- 1919: Violent anti-Japanese riots in Chinese territories. Prostitution banned in Malaya.
- 1920: League of Nations established.
- 1929: Worldwide Economic Depression begins.
- 1931: Japan invades Manchuria.
- 1932: Japan sets up puppet Government of “Manchukuo” making Manchuria into another colony.
- 1933: Japan withdraws from the League of Nations.
- 1937: Marco-Polo Bridge Incident. Japan invades China. Second Sino-Japanese War begins. Japan occupies all of major coastal cities but is unable to gain a decisive victory over Chiang Kai-Shek.
- 1941: Dec. 8 ... Pearl Harbor (Japanese date), World War II Pacific phase, begins and Japanese land in Malaya.