

# Samurai Movies

## The Kurosawa Collection — The Daddy of the All

Kagemusha — The Shadow Warrior

*Tatsuya Nakadai*

Tatsuya Nakadai gets to play the good guy as Takeda Shingen and his double – kagemusha – in a story covering the death of Shingen to the demise of the Takeda at Nagashino.

Ran — Chaos

*Tatsuya Nakadai*

Another Shakespeare play, this time King Lear, adapted to Medieval Japan. Tatsuya Nakadai plays Lord Ichimonji Hidetora, who abdicates and divides his fief between his sons. Corruption and the pursuit of power soon lead to chaos as the brothers fight each other. A long film, with some excellent battle scenes.

Rashomon

*Toshiro Mifune*

A rape and murder in a forest is reported by four witnesses, each from their own point of view. Who is telling the truth? What is the truth?

Seven Samurai — Shichinin no samurai

*Toshiro Mifune, et al.*

A village hires some samurai to defend them against bandits.

The Hidden Fortress — Kakushi toride no san akunin

*Toshiro Mifune*

Toshiro Mifune plays Rokurota Makabe, a general of a defeated clan seeking to escort a Princess and the clan's gold to the safety of their allies through the domain of their enemies. Notable for largely telling the tale from the viewpoint of two peasants recruited to the cause, which inspired George Lucas to create the two robots who link all the scenes in Star Wars.

Throne of Blood — Kumonosu j

*Toshiro Mifune*

Kurosawa's version of 'Macbeth' and considered one of the best film adaptations of the play ever. The demise of Mifune's Washizu (Macbeth) at the hands of his own archers is a moment of cinematic history.

Yojimbo — The Bodyguard

*Toshiro Mifune, Tatsuya Nakadai*

Kurosawa's masterful invention of the ronin Sanjuro Kuwabatake fleshed out by Toshiro Mifune. While rival gangs keep a village in fear, a wandering samurai decides the solution is to clean up both gangs. Gave birth to the Spaghetti Western and launched Clint Eastwood when Sergio Leone remade the film as 'A Fistful of Dollars'. Tatsuya Nakadai stars as the gun-toting scion of one of the gangs.

## Sanjuro — Tsubaki Sanjuro

*Toshiro Mifune, Tatsuya Nakadai*

Kurosawa reprises his wandering ronin Sanjuro Kuwabatake who comes to the aid of a group of naive young samurai determined to root out corruption within their clan. Tatsuya Nakadai once again plays Sanjuro's formidable adversary, and the duel at the end of the movie was a startling piece of work in its day.

## Kenji Mizoguchi

It is acknowledged that if Kurosawa understands the samurai, then Mizoguchi understands women – he made critically acclaimed historical films on a par with Kurosawa, and the more appropriate are listed here.

### Genroku chushingura — The Loyal 47 Ronin of the Genroku Era

**Kenji Mizoguchi**

The Japanese military commissioned this film as a morale booster for the WWII war effort. But it was a commercial failure, being released in Japan one week before the attack on Pearl Harbor. The military and most audiences found the first part of the film to be too serious. However, the studio and Mizoguchi both regarded it as so important that Part 2 was put into production. The film was finally shown in America in the 1970s.

### Life of Oharu

**Kenji Mizoguchi**

Mizoguchi's masterpiece. Mizoguchi risked all to tell the devastating story of one woman's fall from lady-in-waiting to concubine to prostitute. Avoiding melodrama, Mizoguchi focuses on Oharu's dignity as she is betrayed repeatedly by her father, her lovers, and society. Saikaku Ihara's classic 17th-century novel is brilliantly realized through a masterful screenplay and the heart-rending performance of Kinuyo Tanaka.

### Sansho dayu — Sansho the Bailiff

**Kenji Mizoguchi**

Set in the 11th century, a story of injustice and suffering. When a kindly governor is exiled, his wife is forced into prostitution, and his son and daughter are sold into slavery to the tyrannical bailiff Sansho. With authentic sets and rich imagery, Mizoguchi chillingly re-creates the barbaric feudal society.

### Shin Heiki Monogatari — New Tales of the Taira Clan

**Kenji Mizoguchi**

Tadamori and his son Kiyomori return from defeating an army of rebel monks, but the Fujiwara regents refuse to acknowledge or reward their help, a humiliation especially to Kiyomori. He's further offended when a merchant tells him that he's the illegitimate son of the emperor, and a family friend implies that his real father was a monk. Although Tadamori claims paternity, Kiyomori thinks he's doing so only out of pity. Disgusted with his parents, he rejects all forms of authority and refuses entry to the aristocracy when it's offered to him. But when palace courtiers, jealous of Tadamori, plan his assassination, Kiyomori rushes to his aid.

### Ugetsu Monogatari

**Kenji Mizoguchi**

Hailed by critics as one of the most masterfully directed and beautifully photographed films of all time, Kenji Mizoguchi's stunning classic is an eerie tale of misguided ambition and forbidden

passion. Two 16th-century peasants abandon their families to seek fame and fortune as ashigaru, but in attaining their desires, both men destroy their lives and bring tragedy to their families. A powerful testament to the illusory nature of happiness, Ugetsu firmly established Mizoguchi's reputation in the West, and helped earn him recognition as one of the world's greatest directors of women.

... and the rest

After the Rain — Ame Agarū

**Takashi Koizumi**

A samurai, stranded by rains at a country inn, breaks up a duel between the retainers of the local lord, who invites him to his castle.

Ambush at Blood Pass

**Hiroshi Inagaki**

*Toshiro Mifune*

Mifune plays Yojimbo, who is commissioned to travel to Sanshu Pass. When he arrives there he must wait for an event to happen...

Chushingura

**Hiroshi Inagaki**

The tale of the Loyal 47 Ronin.

Cruel story of the Bakumatsu — Bakumatsu Zankoku monogatari

**Tai Kato**

A brutal story set at the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate

Gohatto — Taboo

**Oshima Nagisa**

*Beat Takeshi*

O-er! Passions are aroused when a beautiful young swordsman joins the shinsengumi. You may not take to the subject matter, but the fencing is top-hole!

Heaven and Earth — Tonto chito

**Haruki Kadokawa**

Kenshin and Shingen battle it out for supremacy.

Kwaidan

**Masaki Kobayashi**

A collection of four ghost stories: 'The Black Hair', 'The Woman of the Snow', 'In a Cup of Tea' and 'Hoichi, the Earless', this last the story of musician who's retelling of the last battle of the Taira at Ichinotani is so moving that he is summonsed to give a performance to the ghosts of the dead. Shot entirely in the studio, the film creates a balletic battle as the Minamoto and the Taira fight at sea.

The Last Samurai

**Edward Zwick**

'Nuff said.

Onibaba — The hole

**Kaneto Shind**

A horror story about a mother and daughter who murder wandering samurai, and then exchange their arms and armour for food. One day a neighbour returns from the wars...

Red Lion — Akage

**Kihachi Okamoto**

*Toshiro Mifune*

Mifune plays a peasant who persuades his commander to lend him his Red Lion Mane.

Roningai — Street of the Masterless Samurai

**Kazuo Kuroki**

Samurai Assassin

**Kihachi Okamoto**

*Toshiro Mifune*

Mifune plays Niirō Tsurichiyo, the illegitimate son of a powerful nobleman, brought up in a merchants household, harbouring ambitions to become a samurai. A swordsman of outstanding ability, a social outcast, earning his living through brawling and blackmail. Now the Mito Clan suspect him of being a spy.

Samurai Banners — Furin kasan

**Hiroshi Inagaki**

*Toshiro Mifune*

Mifune plays Yamamoto Kansuke, the notable strategist of Takeda Shingen, from his joining the Takeda until he was outmanoeuvred at the 4th Battle of Kawanakajima. Great if somewhat stagey battle scenes, including the moment when Kenshin rode into Shingen's HQ.

Samurai Rebellion — Jo-iuchi

**Masaki Kobayashi**

*Toshiro Mifune, Tatsuya Nakadai*

Mifune's loyal retainer Sasahara is pushed too far when his son is obliged to marry the abandoned concubine of his Lord, and then the clan require the woman's return. Nakadai plays his friend, obliged to fight him in the end. Both men are loyal, both betrayed by the cause they serve. Samurai Rebellion caused quite a stir in its day.

Samurai Trilogy:

Miyamoto Musashi / Duel At Ichijoji Temple / Duel and Ganryu Island

**Hiroshi Inagaki**

*Toshiro Mifune*

Based around the life of Musashi Miyamoto.

**Musashi Miyamoto:** The first episode of the trilogy covers Miyamoto's formative years. **Duel At Ichijoji Temple:** At first a contemptuous wanderer whose only interest is to prove his prowess against the best Japan has to offer, Miyamoto is brought to understand that mastery of the sword is mastery of the self. **Duel At Ganryu Island:** Musashi is drawn into protecting the villagers against marauding bandits. And beyond this battle lies the ultimate contest with the driven and obsessive Kojuro Sasaki. The epic closes in a stunning sunset duel...

Seppuku (Hara-kiri)

**Masaki Kobayashi**

*Tatsuya Nakadai*

Nakadai plays a samurai who learns of the fate of his son-in-law, a young samurai who was forced to commit seppuku with a bamboo blade. In flashbacks the samurai tells the tragic story of his son-in-law, and how he was forced to sell his sword to support his sick wife and child. Nakadai sets in motion a tense showdown of revenge.

Shogun's Gold — Goyokin

**Hideo Goshu**

*Tatsuya Nakadai*

A young samurai returns to his province. On his way he encounters a small fishing village in the aftermath of a massacre. He sets out to take revenge.

Sword of Doom — Daibisatsu toge

**Kihachi Okamoto**

*Toshiro Mifune, Tatsuya Nakadai, et al.*

An excerpt from the middle longer tale apparently, Sword of Doom suffers from an erratic storyline with no proper resolution. Nakadai playing the bad guy once again, and Mifune the good.

Twilight Samurai — Tasogare Seibei

**Yoji Yamada**

Seibei Iguchi, a low-ranking samurai, leads a life without glory until drawn into defending an old flame, and its unforeseen consequences.

When The Last Sword Is Drawn — Mibugishiden

**Yojiro Takita**

A samurai family man who can no longer feed his wife and children due to the low wages paid from his small town clan joins the Shinsengumi, where he will lead a difficult, but enriching life during one of the most tumultuous times in Japanese history.

Zatoichi The Blind Swordsman

**Beat Takeshi**

*Beat Takeshi*

Takeshi's take on the long running Zatoichi franchise.

... not forgetting

The **Babycart** series: a handful of films

The **Zatoichi** series: 25 films in the series!