

Oatsurae Jirokichi Koshi (Jirokichi the Rat) and
Yajikita Sonno no Maki, Yajikita Toba Fushimi no Maki
(Yaji and Kita: Yasuda's Rescue, The Battle of Toba Fushimi)



Tadao Sato
(Film critic and President of the Japan Academy of Moving Images)

From the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s, Denjiro Okochi (1898-1962) was highly regarded as the definitive superstar of *jidaigeki* (period drama). Even after the 1930s, he continued to be a large presence in the film world and was well renowned as an actor who performed exquisitely in both tragedies and comedies; but it is those films at the end of the silent era, films directed by Daisuke Ito and involving the cameraman Hiromitsu Karasawa, which excited fans the most and gained the most acclaim as artistic works. It is unfortunate that aside from the famous *Chujitabi Nikki Sanbukyoku* (Chuji's Travel Diary), of which two of the three episodes remain, only fragments of most of Okochi's films from this period are still in existence. The only film of his from this era which is still almost entirely intact is *Oatsurae Jirokichi Koshi* (Jirokichi the Rat) from 1931, a movie preserved largely thanks to the efforts of Shunsui Matsuda of Matsuda Film Productions.

Daisuke Ito (1898-1981) had wanted to be a screenwriter since he was a young man and began writing scenarios from approximately 1920. His directorial debut was in 1924. In 1926 when Denjiro Okochi moved to the Nikkatsu Kyoto Studio, Ito was quick to notice the actor's potential and had him star in *Chokon* (Unforgettable History of the Last Days of the Shogunate). His devilish performance caused quite the commotion at the studio, ensuring his next role in the 1927 masterpiece *Chujitabi Nikki Sanbukyoku* (Chuji's Travel Diary), a work which caused a lot of wild enthusiasm in fans. According to Kazuo Miyagawa, assistant cameraman at the studio at the time, in order to carry out director Ito's dynamic vision (Ito at that time had begun to be called "Ito Daisuke = *Ido Daisuki*" [Mr. Loves Movement] because of his frequent use of sudden movements while shooting), cameraman Hiromitsu Karasawa actually tied the camera on to his body and plunged in and out of the mob during fight scenes.

Among the works in the series of films made by the three, which are notable for their use of such violent fight scenes, *Oatsurae Jirokichi Koshi* (Jirokichi the Rat) possesses the most comparatively quiet manner. Denjiro Okochi, who had gained a reputation by this time for roles as a rampaging monster, shows a very different face in this work. He portrays the subtle image of a man that lives a hard life, who is pained by thoughts of the women who have sacrificed so much so that he can continue on, a self-contemplating man who sheds his tears in private. Opposite Okochi are the sisters Naoe and Nobuko Fushimi. The elder sister was a famous actress, and the younger sister was popular for her work in modern pieces.

Aside from being a heroic sword-fighting star, Denjiro Okochi was also skilled at comedy. The 1927 films *Yajikita Sonno no Maki* (Yaji and Kita: Yasuda's Rescue) and *Yajikita Toba Fushimi no Maki* (The Battle of Toba Fushimi) are good examples of the actor's comedic abilities. The director, Tomiyasu Ikeda was a major figure in the orthodox school of *jidaigeki* (period drama). In the opposing role to Okochi was Goro Kawabe, a popular action star. The cheerful sides of the two actors are shown in this light-hearted comedy.