

*Roningai Dai Ichiwa / Dai Niwa*  
(Samurai Town, Story 1 and 2) and  
*Sozenji Baba*



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Masahiro Makino produced more films than any other director in the history of Japan. He became a director at the age of eighteen, and was active for more than sixty years. A man famous for quickly finishing films, he left behind over 260 works. He had a knack for creating films that made money, and so was in great demand at many film studios. Makino primarily made *jidaigeki* (period drama), and was especially skilled at yakuza films, many of which can be called masterpieces. Makino himself bragged that he was a craftsman of commercial films, and this is how he is usually seen, but there was a period during his younger days when he gained notice and acclaim as a genius at the forefront of art. The greatest work in the series of films he produced at that time is *Roningai Dai Ichiwa: Utsukushiki Emono* (Samurai Town, Story 1: Beautiful Quarry; 1928), released when Makino was only 20. It is truly unfortunate that only a portion of this work, which stunned critics and audiences alike, remains. That the remaining portion happens to be the climax of the film, which so excited the film's fans, can however be said to be a small consolation.

When a group of arrogant *hatamoto* (retainers), fond of showing off their rank, attempt to torture a woman beloved by the group of poor *ronin* (masterless samurai) who have been nonviolently opposing them, the two groups finally clash. The resulting superb and massive fight scene is both gruesome and thrilling.

*Roningai* (Samurai Town) was serialized, and both *Roningai Dai Niwa: Gakuya Buro* (Samurai Town, Story 2: The Dressing Room Bath) and *Roningai Dai Sanwa: Tsukareta Hitobito* (Samurai Town, Story 3: Obsessed People) were made by Masahiro Makino.

*Sozenji Baba* is a masterpiece made in the period between the films in the *Roningai* series which overflows with the passion of the cinematic expression of Masahiro Makino's younger days. Regrettably, with this film too, a complete version has not been preserved. The most popular theme for *jidaigeki* made in pre-war Japan was vengeance. The majority of these works are admirable for the way they use vengeance as a means to show the virtues of loyalty and filial piety, and within these there are also works, particularly from the Showa era, which criticize the inhuman nature of vengeance. Masahiro Makino's *Sozenji Baba* is representative of this type of work. Based upon a simple vengeance story, it is a drama by Itaro Yamagami showing the human suffering of a man with enemies. Yamagami was the writer of the *Roningai* series, a pioneer who revolutionized *jidaigeki* by applying a modern, social and humanist view to what had until that point been a genre that inherited feudalistic morals at face value. Near the end of World War II, he was embedded with the military as a press corps member and sent to the front lines in the Philippines, where he met his demise.