

Jitsuroku Chushingura (Chushingura: The Truth) and *Raiden*

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The first film studio in Japan to have a small glass-covered set opened in Tokyo in 1908. That year, there were 54 films produced in Japan. It was that year in Kyoto, a city which did not yet have a single film studio, that the leader of a *kabuki* troupe, Shozo Makino, rented out a nearby temple and filmed a performance of the *kabuki* play, *Honnoji gassen* (The Battle of Honnoji), at the request of the production company Yokota Shokai. During the performance, Mr. Makino became fascinated by the filming process, and this interest inspired him to become one of the first creators of film in Japan. From 1908, up until his death in 1929, Mr. Makino directed and produced approximately 300 films, all of them *jidaigeki* (period drama).

With no one to teach him how to make a film, the first movies produced by Mr. Makino were primitive works in which the location of the camera was placed in the same location as the audience would be, were the work a play. After a few movies in this style, Mr. Makino managed to produce a blockbuster hit with a *ninja* film in which he tried out some trick camerawork. From then on he began to experiment more and more with cinematography and editing. He was a film pioneer. While he was eventually employed for a time by the major film studio, Nikkatsu Studios, the majority of his films were made independently, and it was in these works that he fostered the growth of many who would later become the *Jidaigeki* superstars, superior directors and technicians of the Showa period (1926-1989). The role he played in raising the future stars of the Japanese film industry has caused many people to call him the father of Japanese cinema. To say it precisely, he was actually the father of Kyoto *jidaigeki* film, but no matter how you put it, no one can deny that he was a major figure in the cinematic history of Japan.

Jitsuroku Chushingura (Chushingura: The Truth), produced in the later years of Mr. Makino's life, is not just another movie by this pioneer of film, but is a monumental work meant to show filmmakers coming after him the way forward for Japanese motion pictures. It is a piece in which Mr. Makino shows his true ability as a filmmaker. The amount of passion that Mr. Makino put into the project allowed him to gather a star-studded cast for the film. Even great stars of the time agreed to take parts with little screen time just to have the chance to work on the project, giving the work an unparalleled level of dramatic depth.

An accidental fire during post-production editing caused the destruction of many important scenes within the film. Mr. Makino was not able to easily recover from this loss, and thus managed to produce only one film in the last year of his life. That film was *Raiden*.

Some portion of the scenes in *Jitsuroku Chushingura* (Chushingura: The Truth) were unharmed in the fire, and these were edited together for theatrical release. It is not a perfect work, but it is nevertheless one in which viewers can still feel the incredible passion of this great director and producer, the father of Japanese cinema. The version of the film presented here was compiled by the man who dug up the original movie, the motion picture benshi (narrator) Shunsui Matsuda. Under the supervision of Shozo Makino's son, Masahiro Makino, Mr. Matsuda edited in a new version of the scene in which the 47 samurai raid Lord Kira's mansion. The new scene was directed by Masahiro Makino using his father's original cast. This film is one of the great treasures of world cinematic history.