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DAIMAJIN

大魔神

Also known as:
Majin
Majin, the Monster of Terror
Majin the Hideous Idol
The Giant Majin
The Devil Got Angry
The Vengeance of the Monster

Original Release Date: 17 April 1966
Runtime: 84 minutes

CAST

Miwa Takada Kozasa Hanabusa
Yoshihiko Aoyama Tadafumi Hanabusa
Jun Fujimaki Kogenta Sarumaru
Ryūtarō Gomi Lord Samanosuke Odate
Ryūzō Shimada Lord Tadakiyo Hanabusa
Tatsuo Endō Gunjūrō Inugami
Chikara Hashimoto Majin

CREW

Directed by **Kimiyoshi Yasuda**
Screenplay by **Tetsurō Yoshida**
Produced by **Masaichi Nagata**
Edited by **Hiroshi Yamada**
Director of Photography **Fujio Morita**
Music by **Akira Ifukube**
Art Director **Akira Naitō**
Special Effects Director **Yoshiyuki Kuroda**
Majin Design **Ryōsaku Takayama**

RETURN OF DAIMAJIN

大魔神怒る

Also known as:
The Return of the Giant Majin
The Giant Majin Grows Angry (lit.)

Daimajin ikaru
Original Release Date: 13 August 1966
Runtime: 79 minutes

CAST

Kōjirō Hongō Jūrō Chigusa
Shiho Fujimura Sayuri
Tarō Marui Todohei
Asao Uchida Heibei Nakoshi, Sayuri's father
Takashi Kanda Lord Danjō Mikoshiba
Chikara Hashimoto Majin

CREW

Directed by **Kenji Misumi**
Screenplay by **Tetsurō Yoshida**
Produced by **Masaichi Nagata**
Edited by **Kanji Suganuma**
Director of Photography **Fujio Morita**
Music by **Akira Ifukube**
Art Direction by **Akira Naitō**
Special Effects Director **Yoshiyuki Kuroda**
Majin Design **Ryōsaku Takayama**

WRATH OF DAIMAJIN

大魔神逆襲

Also known as:
Majin Strikes Again
Daimajin's Counterattack (lit.)
The Return of Majin

Daimajin gyakushū
Original Release Date: 10 December 1966
Runtime: 87 minutes

CAST

Hideki Ninomiya Tsurukichi
Shinji Horii Daisuku
Masahide Iizuka Kinta
Muneyuki Nagatomo Sugimatsu
Tooru Abe Hidanokami Arakawa
Junichirō Yamashita Jōhachi
Takashi Nakamura Sanpei
Tanie Kitabayashi Kane
Chikara Hashimoto Majin

CREW

Directed by **Kazuo Mori (a.k.a. Issei Mori)**
Screenplay by **Tetsurō Yoshida**
Produced by **Masaichi Nagata**
Edited by **Toshio Taniguchi**
Directors of Photography **Fujio Morita and Hiroshi Imai**
Music by **Akira Ifukube**
Art Direction by **Yoshinobu Nishioka and Shigeru Katō**
Special Effects Director **Yoshiyuki Kuroda**
Majin Design **Ryōsaku Takayama**

by Jonathan Clements

Shot back-to-back in 1966, the three *Daimajin* films formed a grand project for the Daiei studio – an attempt to bootstrap an entirely new franchise to match the success of its earlier *Gamera, the Giant Monster* (*Daikaijū Gamera*, 1965). Distantly inspired by Julien Duvivier's *The Golem* (*Le golem*, 1936, aka *The Man of Stone*), *Daimajin* was directed by Kimiyoshi Yasuda, a Daiei man better known for his work on the *Zatoichi* films, and scored by Akira Ifukube, a composer most recognizable for his work on the *Godzilla* franchise. The first instalment was released on 17th April 1966, with production already underway on its sequel.

Unfortunately, for almost everybody in the audience, we know we have come to see a film called *Daimajin*, about a big menace stomping on things, so the opening dialogue between a husband and a frantic wife, worried about the "footsteps of the evil creature", is sure to be taken literally, and not as a common concern about Japan's earthquake-prone history, and the superstitions it might have engendered. Just as the poster and title for the disaster movie *Deep Impact* (1998) take away much of the early mystery that otherwise would have made it a more surprising film, we go into *Daimajin* knowing that the villagers' midnight prayer meeting is literally intended to ward off an angry monster, and not a glimpse of ancient rituals to hold off natural disaster.

But when the action switches to the feudal lord in his castle, indulgently assuring his son that there is nothing to worry about, there is a sudden turn in the Japanese dialogue. Yes, chuckles Lord Hanabusa (Ryūzō Shimada), there is indeed a dangerous force below the mountain, but there is an even greater deity that will keep them all safe. The term he uses is *Kamisama* – the word in Japanese for the Christian God, immediately placing the events of this film not in the vague several hundred-year span of the 'samurai era', but in the violent clashes of culture and fluctuating fortunes of the 'Christian century', roughly 1550-1650. It also hints, momentarily, that this is a film in the slipstream of Japan's 1960s revival of interest in its Christian past, an echo of Nagisa Ōshima's *Shiro Tokisada from Amakusa* (*Amakusa Shirō Tokisada*, 1962, aka *The Rebel*), which was an account of the explosive purge of Christianity from Japan. But this is all a red herring, since Lord Hanabusa is about to be removed with extreme prejudice, and his successor doesn't care about any religion – not Christianity, and not the Shintō 'way of the gods'.

Daimajin's opening scenes set up the story in gloriously swift and cunning strokes – the samurai, many of them only a generation removed from the farmers they rule over, are smug and confident, scoffing at superstition, unheeding of a peasant community that is still in touch with the land and respectful of old traditions.

And yet, samurai in the castle grounds tell each other about the 'footprints' left in the ground. In the real world, such phenomena were liable to be another sign of the destruction of the old ways – the removal of prehistoric menhirs and monuments, torn up from the ground as building material for the walls of samurai castles. Conversely, ancient traditions are very much alive among the peasants, whose rituals are pointedly supervised by a priestess rather than a priest, and festooned with paper talismans.

Although it is not initially stated outright in the film, the action takes place in Tanba, sometimes incorrectly glossed in synopses as "remote." But there's nothing all that remote about Tanba – historically, three river basins separated by mountain ridges, not far from Lake Biwa. Rather than being off the beaten track, it is right in the center of ancient Japan, a crucial strategic choke-point on the northern road into Kyoto, making it a common battleground in Japan's many civil wars.

Using the peasant ceremonies as a handy distraction, the scheming samurai Samanosuke (Ryūtarō Gomi) murders Lord Hanabusa and seizes control of the castle, forcing the faithful warrior Kogenta (Jun Fujimaki) to spirit the lord's two children out of the castle to safety in the nearby peasant village. The revolt is realistically grubby and small-scale, the forces ranged against each other counted merely in the dozens. And Samanosuke's men impose a new order that takes things one fatal step further towards disaster. Whereas Lord Hanabusa had indulged the villagers with what he regarded as a harmless superstition, Samanosuke shuts down what he regards as a pointless distraction. The wiser characters among both groups observe that 'No Good Can Come of This', and that, in a generation, there will surely be a reckoning.

Japanese history transforms into a fuzzy, quantum state, the further one looks back into the past. The earliest extant chronicles of Japan appear to have been assembled from at least three clan histories that probably ran concurrently in their original form, now rearranged so that they are *consecutive*, shunting historical events farther back in time until Japan's imperial line legendarily extends for over 2,600 years. Archaeology might help sort some of this out, but this only drags academics into a dangerous political arena. The Imperial Family forbids the excavation of what are putatively the graves of its ancestors, although the surge in post-war construction would inevitably lead to the uncovering of many other forgotten sites, and a boom in rescue archaeology.

Of particular interest, here, are the *haniwa* statues – terracotta figurines from a culture that flourished between the third and sixth centuries AD, mainly in Kyushu and the Kansai area. These were funerary objects – a comment in the *Nihon shoki* chronicle, attributed to the ancient emperor Suinin, alludes to a point in time where the Japanese stopped burying human sacrifices in tombs of the aristocracy, and replaced them with clay statues. These grave guardians and boundary markers are often found clad in *keikō* armor – iron plates redolent of Chinese or Korean designs, clearly a heavy inspiration for the look of the Daimajin.

Daimajin was released at the very start of a boom in popular interest in Japan's ancient history, fueled by pushy local tourist initiatives designed to get people using the railways in the wake of the 1964 Olympics. In particular, the popular press developed a fascination for stories about Japan's ancient kingdom of Yamatai – the legendary society ruled, at least nominally, by a teenage priest-queen, and mentioned in ancient Chinese chronicles. In the year after *Daimajin* was released, Kōhei Miyazaki's book *Maboroshi no Yamatai-koku* ("The Phantom Kingdom of Yamatai", 1967) started an entire mini-industry of speculative books about where it might have been – more of an issue than one might think, since the Chinese sources were vague enough to place it anywhere from Nagasaki to Nagoya.[1]

However, overwhelmingly, although not unanimously, Japanese scholars have come to accept 'the Kyoto position' – the argument that Yamatai, the very foundation of the bloodlines and traditions that would lead, 'unbroken' to the Imperial Family of modern Japan, was some sort of prehistoric chieftainship in the Kyoto-Osaka-Nara region, which is still dotted with ancient gravemounds. In fact, we could even say that 'Japan' as a concept derives from the likely march northwards of these people, as a culture initially established in Kyushu drifted along the edges of the Inland Sea, and eventually found a strong, enduring home on the Kansai plain.

1 - Kidder, J. Edward. *Himiko and Japan's Elusive Chiefdom of Yamatai: Archaeology, History and Mythology.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007. pp.31-2.

Daimajin evokes an ancient, atavistic sense of the Japanese past, a lost culture from a thousand years before the time of the samurai, forgotten during the medieval onrush of Buddhism, and the centuries of civil war that followed. Tetsurō Yoshida's script introduces a little historical license by placing a small *haniwa* statue in the home of the priestess Shinobu (Otome Tsukimiya), as if Daimajin is a god worshipped, or at least appeased by the villagers. But who is to say that such beliefs did not arise on multiple occasions throughout Japanese history, as various rural folk sought some religious explanation for the troubles they faced, and found it in the statues that littered forest clearings and ancient tumuli? When the fugitive children first see the *haniwa*-like statue on the mountain-top, Shinobu tells them that it is not the 'evil god' (*majin*) itself, but the talisman that locks the *majin* within the mountain.

Ten years on, Shinobu tries to warn Samanosuke of the risks he is taking, but the "god" (*kami*) she refers to is not the *Kamisama* worshipped by the late Lord Hanabusa; she is speaking specifically of the ancient deity that Samanosuke refuses to appease. She, too, threatens them with a dire fate, but we are still some way away from the Daimajin's awakening.

This, in fact, was something of a complaint among audiences of the time. The first *Daimajin* film was screened on a double bill with Daiei's *Gamera vs Barugon* (*Daikaijū kettō: Gamera tai Barugon*, 1966), thereby attracting a relatively young audience, but forcing them to wait almost seventy minutes before the titular statue comes to life. Daimajin's wrath in the film, in fact, is summoned twice – once by the hubris of Gunjūrō (Tatsuo Endō) and his men, who are swallowed beneath the ground, and then by the prayers of Kozasa (Miwa Takada), the now full-grown fugitive princess, who seeks the god's aid in saving her brother and Kogenta from crucifixion. It is Kozasa, unwittingly taking the role of the village's new shaman, who both summons the vengeance of the Daimajin, and dispels its power when its work is done.

Fujio Morita, a former camera assistant to Eiji Tsuburaya, had established himself as one of Daiei's experts in special effects work. He came to *Daimajin* after an unhappy time working on the US co-production *Flight from Ashiya* (1964), in which special effects had been composited using a huge blue-painted cyclorama. Uneven colors, however, caused 'noise' on the blue screen, compromising the quality of the footage and leading director Michael Anderson to insist on taking the film back to the USA to finish. Affronted at the suggestion that the Japanese could not do as well, Morita retaliated by making a test film that showed a (toy) tank driving out of the main entrance of Daiei's Kyoto studio.

Brought onto the *Daimajin* project on the strength of his tank footage, Morita insisted on being the cinematographer for the first and second films. He insisted that the only way for the special-effects shots to match the live-action work was if the same man shot them both – it's this stipulation that has led to some confusion among film historians, since some accounts consequently credit Morita, not his actual boss Yoshiyuki Kuroda, as the special effects 'director'. As well as a blue screen bought from the USA at immense cost, he also persuaded producer Masaichi Nagata to fund a ten-million-yen lighting rig, featuring 190 halogen lamps in an 11x4-meter diamond configuration, with the studio electrics converted to run on direct current in order to reduce the chance of the remotest flicker for the blue-screen shots.

Morita spent a busy year working on all three *Daimajin* films, as well as *Dynamite Doctor* (*Yoidore hakase*, Kenji Misumi, 1966), but it was the effects work that truly caused him the most stress. The shots required more time to set up, but also more time to develop, since blue-screen work had to be left to 'set' for two days before it could be developed. This led to every special-effects shot in *Daimajin* racking up twenty working days from studio to laboratory, and significantly increasing the cost of the final film.

The resultant *Daimajin* film is riddled with animated special effects, not merely the lightning strikes that punctuate the opening credits, but even a distant wolf that howls on a mountain-top – a tiny dot of black, given the barest suggestion of a beast lifting its head to the sky. Other subtle effects, often overlooked in the rush to discuss the grand finale, include the red talisman that fades and reappears on the forehead of Shinobu as she officiates in the Daimajin ceremonies.

The ultimate special effect, of course, is the Daimajin itself, built by Ryōsaku Takayama, a monster-maker for Eiji Tsuburaya, who was seconded to Kyoto for three months to create both it and the early stages of the Barugon monster for the second *Gamera* film, before returning to Tokyo to work on *Ultra Q* and *Ultraman*. Chikara Hashimoto (aka Riki Hashimoto) was coaxed inside the costume on the promise that the monster was the 'star' of the film. Hashimoto fell into his part with true gusto, refusing to blink on camera, even as he was pelted with debris made from potato flour, cork dust and coal dust. This only added to the ethereal nature of his performance, with his bloodshot, rheumy eyes peering out from beneath his armor – irritated to such a degree that they could only be soothed by poultices of warm tea.[2]

Hashimoto would go on to play the Daimajin – or, considering the multiple locations, each with their own guardian statue – *a* Daimajin at least, in both the sequels, but would become most recognizable for one of his last acting jobs, an appearance as the master of a Japanese martial arts school in the Hong Kong film *Fist of Fury* (*Zingmou Men*, Lo Wei, 1972). Despite having already played two different roles in two *Zatoichi* films, leading lady Miwa Takada would appear in a third *Zatoichi* film as yet another character, and go on to a long career on stage and television that stretched into the 21st century – her oddest role was perhaps that of the voice of *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (Larry Roemer, 1964) in the Rankin/Bass animated TV special when it was dubbed into Japanese in 1967. Yoshihiko Aoyama, who played her brother Tadafumi, would also crop up in multiple film and TV appearances in the years that followed, including over a dozen different roles in the long-running TV series *Mito Kōmon* (1969-2011).

As for the Daimajin itself, its life after the film was even more varied. Tetsurō Yoshida's scripts were adapted into a manga version by Osamu Kishimoto in 1967, but although there was talk of a spin-off TV series in the early 1970s, producers backed away on the grounds that it was difficult to come up with too many plots for a vengeful god. Plans for a movie revival, with a script by *Akira* creator Katsuhiro Ōtomo and the claim that Steven Seagal was onboard to star, were mooted in the late 1990s, but again came to nothing.[3] In the meantime, the ancient god of revenge somehow managed to appear in commercials for Toyota motor cars, the Suntory liquor company (for which he was the punchline to a fortified oolong cocktail called Daima GIN), and for Acecook noodles, in which he would fly into a rage if he didn't get any squid yakisoba. Eventually, the TV series *Daimajin Kanon* (2010) retold the events of the first film in a modern setting.

The original surviving 4.5-meter statue of Daimajin, made for the original production, was kept at the Kyoto studio for twenty years, but eventually sold off to the Kaiyodo model company, which used it as something of a headquarters mascot. In 1991, there were even tall tales at the company that it could be heard stomping around the lobby halls at night.[4] Its most recent appearance was in 2015, following a series of vandalism incidents against temple properties in the Nara region. The local police used Daimajin in their poster campaign to catch the culprits, hoping that residents would remember whose side it was best to be on when it came to messing with ancient traditions.

***Jonathan Clements is the author of* A Brief History of Japan (2017) *and* Christ's Samurai: The True Story of the Shimabara Rebellion (2016).**

2 - Shimizu Takashi. "Daimajin Series" in Black and Blue editions' *Japanese SF Movies*. Tokyo: Neko Publishing, 1999. pp.152-3.
3 - Inoue Shinichirō. *Daiei Tokusatsu Daizen Daikaijū Kusō Kessen: Gamera tai Daimajin*. Tokyo: Kadokawa, 2010. p.8.
4 - Tsutsui Kazuyuki. *Gaki ijō, Gurentai miman*. Tokyo: Diamond-sha, 2010. p.144.

OF DUBS AND TITLES (2021)

by Keith Aiken

Shortly after producing the original *Daimajin*, the Daiei Motion Picture Company Ltd. began promoting the film for international distribution. Under the slightly modified title *Majin*, the movie was screened in a few American theaters with both English subtitles and a Daiei-commissioned dub supervised by Bernard Lewis of the English Language Dubbers Association (ELDA), a Rome-based group founded by American actor Tony Russel. *Majin* was quickly joined for international marketing by the second and third films in the trilogy, which were given the English titles *Return of Majin* and *Majin Strikes Again* by Daiei.

The first two movies were licensed for North America by the independent film production and distribution company, American International Pictures. Both were released through AIP-TV, the company's television division that also handled the US release of Daiei's first five Gamera sequels. American International renamed the original movie *Majin, the Monster of Terror* and used the ELDA dub. The second film, now called *The Return of the Giant Majin*, was given an English dub created by the New York post-production facility Titan Productions, Inc. (better known as Titra Sound Studios), which was directed by Lee Kressel and supervised by Salvatore Billiteri.

Majin, the Monster of Terror and *The Return of the Giant Majin* debuted on American television in 1968. While not as widely seen as other AIP Japanese monster movies like the Gamera series, *Godzilla vs. the Thing* (*Mosura tai Gojira*, 1964, aka *Mothra vs. Godzilla*), and *Destroy All Monsters* (*Kaijū sōshingeki,* 1968), the two *Daimajin* films were syndicated to independent UHF stations across the United States into the 1970s. The final broadcast dates are not known, but the television syndication model used by AIP effectively came to an end with FCC deregulation in the early 1980s that allowed major corporations to buy up the UHF stations and turn them into affiliates for new networks such as Fox and the CW.

After a long absence, Daimajin returned to North America in 1999, courtesy of the home video label A.D. Vision, Inc. (ADV Films). ADV's license with Daiei included all three films, which were first made available on VHS. While the English dubs were not included, the ADV editions did offer the first official American release for the long-overdue final movie. Unfortunately, ADV mixed up the order and titles of the last two films. *Return of Majin* was renamed *Wrath of Daimajin* and set as the third in the trilogy while the true third movie, *Majin Strikes Again*, was now called *Return of Daimajin* and placed in the second slot. These errors were repeated when ADV re-released the trilogy as a DVD set in 2002. The order, but not the titles, of the movies was finally corrected when ADV reissued them individually on DVD in 2005.

In 2002, Daiei was acquired by Kadokawa Shoten Publishing Co., Ltd., who merged the studio with their own film division to form the new Kadokawa Pictures. As the older American licensing deals expired, Kadokawa turned to the sales agent Joyplex, Inc. and their Los Angeles-based representatives, Golden Media Group, Inc. (GMG), to handle foreign sales of their film library. Founded by former Paramount executive Roy McAree and former

Kadokawa producer Aki Komine, Golden Media Group was responsible for licensing a number of Japanese titles, including the *Gamera* and *Daimajin* movies, to US television and home video companies. In 2012, the Daimajin trilogy was picked up by Mill Creek Entertainment, based in Minneapolis, MN.

And that's where I made my small contributions to the story.

To give some background, I was one of those children who grew up during the era of syndicated television. The local TV stations of my childhood were based in Philadelphia, which happened to be a major market for broadcasting English dubbed Japanese programming from AIP and similar distributors of that time. The *Godzilla* series and other Toho special effects films like *Rodan* (*Sora no daikaijū Radon*, 1956) and *Mothra* (*Mosura*, 1961) aired frequently, as did the *Gamera* movies, *The X from Outer Space* (*Uchū daikaijū Girara*, 1967), and live action and anime shows such as *Ultraman, Space Giants, Speed Racer, Spectreman, Kimba*, and *Johnny Sokko and His Flying Robot*. Given my later career choices, this constant saturation of Japanese monsters and animation from an early age clearly had an impact on me.

I became a professional comic book artist in the early 1990s, working on *Godzilla* comics published by Dark Horse, including their infamous adaption of the *Godzilla vs. Barkley* Nike ad campaign. In 1998, I was hired by Sony Pictures as a storyboard artist for the animated show *Godzilla: The Series*. Over the years to come, I developed friendly and professional relationships with Japanese filmmakers and executives at Toho, Tsuburaya Productions, Kadokawa and other studios, and worked with them and their licensees on several projects. My credits include assisting with publicity for Rialto Pictures' 50th anniversary US theatrical release of the original *Godzilla* (*Gojira*, 1954), doing some promotion for Toho's world premiere of *Godzilla: Final Wars* (*Gojira: Fainaru wōzu,* 2004) in Hollywood, and arranging U.S. premieres for movies like *Godzilla: Tokyo SOS* (*Gojira x Mosura x Mekagojira Tōkyō esu ō esu,* 2003) and *Gamera The Brave* (*Chiisaki yūsha-tachi Gamera*, 2006). This led to my friend Bob Johnson and I launching SciFi Japan.com, a news site sharing information and images provided by our contacts in the Japanese film industry, in 2006.

In 2005, my friends Steve Ryfle, Ed Godziszewski and I were hired by the British Film Institute to create the audio commentary and provide bonus content for their DVD of the original *Godzilla*. The following year, we did the same for the US DVD edition of that film as well as several other early *Godzilla* and Toho FX films for Classic Media. In the years since I've had the good fortune to work on literally dozens of Japanese sci-fi movie DVD and Blu-ray releases for Sony Pictures, Miramax, Media Blasters, Discotek Media and other labels, doing everything from commentaries to writing packaging and advertising copy, providing assets, tracking down materials, and offering very minor assists when needed. Since 2019, I've worked for Mill Creek Entertainment as a consultant for their Blu-rays of the *Ultraman* television and movie library, and last year Bob Johnson and I did one of the audio commentaries for Arrow Video's jam-packed *Gamera: The Complete Collection.*

After Mill Creek acquired the Daimajin trilogy, I was contacted by Barrett Evans, VP of Marketing and Product Development, and Marketing Manager Chris Smith to help with the Blu-ray release. Among my assignments were writing most of the copy for the packaging as well as the retailer solicitations. I was also asked to make suggestions that might improve the set and please fans of these films. One of my suggestions was that the titles for the movies should be closer to Daiei's original English versions rather than the mixed-up ones used for the ADV releases. Barrett and Chris agreed, deciding on *Daimajin, Return of Daimajin* and *Daimajin Strikes Again.*

Upon learning that, in addition to the Japanese audio tracks, Kadokawa had provided the classic English dubs used by AIP-TV, I also pitched that a dub finally be created for the third film. I firmly believe that American home video editions of Japanese movies should present the original, uncut Japanese versions – whether the viewer

understands the language or not, it is important to have the option to watch the actors perform with the true voices. But as someone who discovered Japanese monsters and animation as a pre-preschool age child, I truly value the English dubs and their importance in expanding the audience to include kids too young to read or those who don't like subtitles. The Mill Creek team saw the value in having dubbing available for all three films and commissioned an all-new Dolby Digital 5.1 English language track for *Daimajin Strikes Again…* 46 years after it was first released!

Due to their familiarity with the *Daimajin Trilogy* and the previous dubs, Joyplex Inc. took charge of coordinating the dubbing efforts for the third film. Despite this, there were still some hiccups as their first attempt was rejected by Mill Creek. The second pass was much more successful, and the new English dub was made a part of the Mill Creek *Daimajin* set.

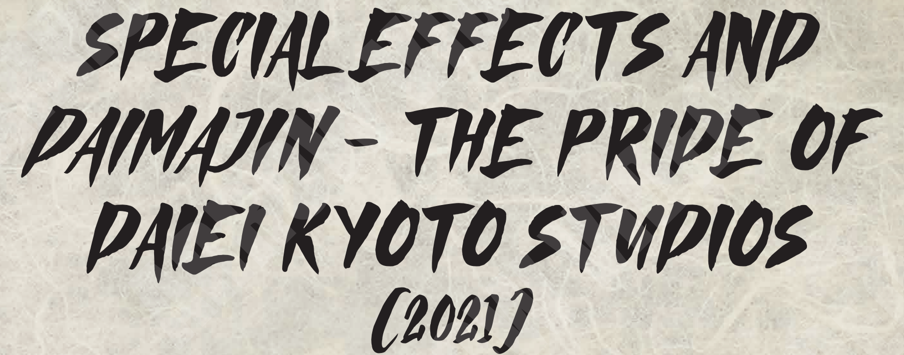
Mill Creek's *Daimajin* rights expired a few years ago, with ownership of the *Daimajin Strikes Again* dub reverting to Kadokawa. Now that Arrow Video has licensed the films, I was pleased to learn that that English dubbing would be included in their new Blu-ray set. I'm honored that it will live on beyond the previous edition, and that Jasper Sharp and Matt Frank asked me to share the story of how it came to be.

Arrow has chosen to return to the *Wrath of Daimajin* title, but this time for the third film rather than the second. I think that is close enough to the old Daiei title to be a good fit for the movie and, regardless of what it's called, the film and its prequels will be given the highest quality treatment that fans have come to expect from Arrow Video!

Keith Aiken
scifijapan.com

Keith Aiken is a professional illustrator and storyboard artist on comics, books, and video games featuring such characters as Superman, Spider-Man, the X-Men, Green Lantern, Ghost Rider and the Silver Surfer for companies including Sony Pictures, Marvel Entertainment, DC Comics and Activision. A lifelong fan of Japanese monsters and tokusatsu, *Keith has worked on numerous licensed projects for the likes of Godzilla, Gamera, Ultraman and others. His credits include* Godzilla *comic books, the animated* show Godzilla: The Series, *curating official film festivals and the U.S. premieres of* Godzilla *and* Gamera *movies, publicity for movie previews and theatrical releases, and working on dozens of Blu-ray and DVD editions for distributors in the U.S., U.K. and Australia. He is currently a consultant on the American* Ultraman *Blu-rays from Mill Creek Entertainment, and co-editor of SciFi Japan (https://www.scifijapan.com), the only English language genre site regularly running content provided by Japanese studios including Kadokawa, Toho, Tsuburaya Productions, Toei and Shochiku.*

ARROW VIDEO



Special Effects and Daimajin – The Pride of Daiei Kyoto Studios (2021)

by Ed Godziszewski

By the mid-1960s, the Japanese film industry was in flux. Film production was still going strong, but major challenges were starting to eat away at its foundation. Foreign film, particularly big budget productions, had begun to draw box office way from domestic production, while at the same time television was extracting a toll on audiences in general. In the realm of special effects films, Toho was by far and away the leader, but Daiei Studios had successfully mounted a challenge to their position in 1965 with its own giant monster production of *Daikaijū Gamera* (later released in the US as *Gammera The Invincible*). By the following year, Shochiku and Nikkatsu joined Daiei in challenging Toho with their own giant monster film productions. With *Ambassador Magma* (*Maguma Taishi* aka *Space Giants*), *Ultra Q*, and *Ultraman* all offering TV-based giant monster fare on a weekly basis, the market was flush with special effects product. In this crowded field, Daiei Kyoto Studios decided to take on the field with its own unique special effects production featuring the avenging god, Daimajin.

The president of Daiei Studios during this period was Masaichi Nagata, somewhat of a maverick in the Japanese film industry. While each studio had its own niche, Nagata's idea was to produce big budget, high quality titles, but this strategy yielded mixed results since what he was looking to make did not necessarily line up with what audiences wanted, causing Daiei to suffer financially. Always looking for something high profile to enhance Daiei's brand, in 1963 he entered into a co-production arrangement with Harold Hecht Productions and United Artists to produce the rescue drama *Flight from Ashiya*. American cast and crew came to Japan to film at Daiei Kyoto Studios, which provided facilities and special effects. According to Yoshiyuki Kuroda, who worked on special effects for this film, American people were quite surprised at how the Japanese were making films. "The American way was to just let the camera go and then pick the best shots of many takes. For us, film was precious. The Japan staff had nothing that they could waste, so someone like Arnold Gillespie, a famous SFX guy who won an Oscar, he thought that Japanese SFX don't do anything. But when he saw the rush film, he was completely shocked at how well made our film was. Especially compared to our production, the sets were so much smaller, the film was limited, but still we could produce high quality output."

Having success with *Flight from Ashiya*, Daiei Kyoto wanted to continue in this direction and further their own brand in special effects. This was the impetus for creating *Daimajin*, to see how far Daiei Kyoto could go in becoming a leader in making quality special effects. Additionally, there was a kind of rivalry that further fueled the fire at Daiei. As a company, Daiei looked at Toho as the competition, but within Daiei, the Kyoto studio had

Yoshiyuki Kuroda (1928-2015)

their own pride at stake, looking to make something that exceeded what the Tokyo branch was doing with Gamera. The first person to push this idea was Akinari Suzuki, then studio chief at Daiei Kyoto, and to realize his special effects project, he suggested the concept of Julien Duvivier's 1936 film *The Golem*, but adapting it to a Japanese setting. He brought in a Japanese art book and showed a picture of an old clay soldier statue to Akira Naitō of the Art Department, asking if a movie could be made based on a five-meter-tall version of the figure. With a positive reply from Naitō in hand, Suzuki quickly assembled staff. First to come on board was producer Hisashi Okuda who immediately tapped Yoshiyuki Kuroda to handle the special effects.

Before agreeing to take the job, Kuroda insisted that there be only one crew for filming everything, both special effects and the live action, as opposed to the way things were done elsewhere. He had a strong conviction about having a single crew: "We don't separate the drama from the SFX – we can maintain the same tone throughout that way. Something like Noriyaki Yuasa did for *Gamera* in Tokyo – that's no good. When you try to put something different into the drama, the cameraman, director, whoever, you have to be able to deal with different types of things. In Tokyo they were making everything separately; they don't know what they are doing if I may say so. Daiei Kyoto films like *Majin* and the *Yokai* films – the SFX are a part of the drama. When you open the door, it's there." For his cameraman, Kuroda asked for Fujio Morita, a long-time friend and colleague who had also worked on *Flight from Ashiya*, a sort of kindred spirit who shared the same sensibilities as Kuroda. Reaffirming Kuroda's thoughts on a unified crew, Morita remarked: "You can't do it with two crews. You're trying to meld together realism with the film's atmosphere *and* the actions of the characters. *Godzilla* is a well-made film, but I thought it was flat and lacked realism. I wondered why there was so much contrast between the real footage and the special effects. There's no way the air would be that clear after all that commotion. Why do things filmed at the same time look so different? That concerned me. Every time I watched *Godzilla*, I felt the same way."

Kuroda and Morita were given free rein to select the staff. Kuroda recalled, "Teamwork is very important. We got the best people for everything. The art staff were fantastic – we had maybe 200-300 people working for us. Only they could have done that job. But the type of people we picked were those who would do the job for the joy of it rather than for money. Kyoto people had that attitude, so at times we would work through the night or without meals if necessary."

Once producer Okuda picked Kimiyoshi Yasuda as director, a meeting was held in mid-November with Kuroda, Morita, and Akira Naitō of the Art Department to determine their basic approach to the film and design the title character. As a guiding philosophy, Morita recalled: "We tried to make it different from *Gamera*, which is just monster from start to finish. We didn't want the whole movie loaded with SFX, we wanted to save it for the climax, like the last 10 minutes. We wanted to make it as if there was no Majin, that it was just like a normal *jidai geki*. It should be something that the adult audience would watch as well. We made sure that the SFX part fit into the drama rather than standing apart from it. This is what Daiei Kyoto was good at."

Perhaps the most important decision to be made was the scale for Majin. It had to be big enough to be scary, but not overly large compared to a human. Models had to be easy enough to handle, and the team took into consideration the height of the stage as well as how they would be able to transport a full-size figure. To that end, they settled on Majin's height at 4.5 meters, approximately 2.5 times the height of an average person. In contrast to the alternate reality created in a typical Japanese SFX film, true realism was the creative team's goal. Kuroda offered a blunt comparison of Daiei Kyoto's approach to that of the competition. "Daiei's special effects are completely different from Toho's. Their (Toho's) main purpose was to make special effects as the central feature, so you can recognize their SFX scenes were effects, but Daiei's idea was that SFX were just a part of the movie. Our goal was *not* to reveal the effects scenes as special effects. That's why Majin was made as 2.5 times human size, to keep it more real. Also, because the 1:2.5 sized set was made so large, we could make

everything so accurate, and each piece of the set was made separately. As a result, our work looked more real. Under the roof panels, we put dirt and stuff, then filmed at 3 times speed, so when they were destroyed, the dirt under the panels created a dense atmosphere that was more realistic. When a monster was made at 50 meters, the miniatures got to be so much smaller, which is why they started to look like toys rather than the real thing. Making realism was our purpose here – if we made Majin too big, we would not succeed."

Once the issue of scale was settled, the creative team worked hard on designing the look of Majin. There were many different versions suggested. Among the more unusual rejected ideas was for Majin to have three eyes, and in one version it had long fangs reminiscent of an *oni* (a traditional devil spirit). The tall flaps of the helmet, which the staff referred to as horns, also went through various iterations, one of them long and pointy, another being somewhat wing-like. After settling on a final image, since Daiei Kyoto did not have any sculptors on staff, they hired a local professional, Shunzō Okawara, to build one-meter-prototype models of Majin and Bujin (the benign pre-transformation version). As for the final look of Majin, Art Director Naitō commented, "The only thing where I made the final decision was the color of the face. The bluish green, I felt something mysterious about it – it wasn't logical or anything, I just decided to go with it. It had a lot of character. By the time that director Yasuda came, mostly the basic image was all set. The only thing he wished for was the cleft in the chin. He wanted to make the face look like Kirk Douglas, so that face came from Kirk Douglas."

With design settled and prototypes created, Ryōsaku Takayama, a famous designer and suit maker, was brought in from Tokyo to build all of the props and suits of the title character, guiding a small crew for three months of stress-filled effort. The task was enormous and the pressure intense. The ambitious full-sized prop of Majin reached the set less than three weeks from the theatrical premiere, and Takayama successfully realized the finale's crumbling Majin just five days before its first screening.

While the Japanese crew received a lot of praise from their American counterparts when making *Flight from Ashiya*, one aspect of the production left the Japanese side humbled. For process shots requiring blue screen work, the American side did not trust the Japanese and executed all of the optical work back in America. "When we made *Flight from Ashiya*," explained cameraman Morita, "we tried to paint a backdrop blue, but that was not something we could light evenly, so when we made composites, we couldn't hide the line. We really felt defeated by that part." This prompted Daiei to invest in a huge blue screen system in 1965, the largest in all of Japan. Obtained at a cost of ¥10 million, the screen was 11 meters wide by 4.6 meters tall, used 190 bulbs, with a light output of 100kW. It was the acquisition of this blue screen that prompted talk of making an SFX film to utilize it, so in a sense, the original roots of *Daimajin* were the desire to make something with blueback processing in Japan. While the system created impressive composite effects, it was used sparingly since each shot cost around ¥300,000, a significant hit against *Daimajin*'s already high budget of ¥10 million. Sadly enough, like most special equipment purchased for use at Daiei Kyoto Studios, the system sat unused after the *Daimajin* series was completed.

SFX director Kuroda was proud that his team could realize so much, with hard work and creativity substituting for resources. "Making SFX does not have to be elaborate all the time. What making film is about is how to fake it, how to BS it. How good you can fake it is what it's all about. Someone who can do that is a real pro."

Cameraman Morita reflected on what Daiei accomplished with *Daimajin*. "I have to give it to Kyoto Daiei for using and promoting SFX technology and showing the world that films can be shot in a different way than before. Daiei specified that SFX were meant to portray a story – they were part of it, not to be forgotten. People questioned the importance of SFX. Whether it's George Lucas or Steven Spielberg, you use SFX as part of the drama and story. That's their success. It isn't really all about technique all the time."

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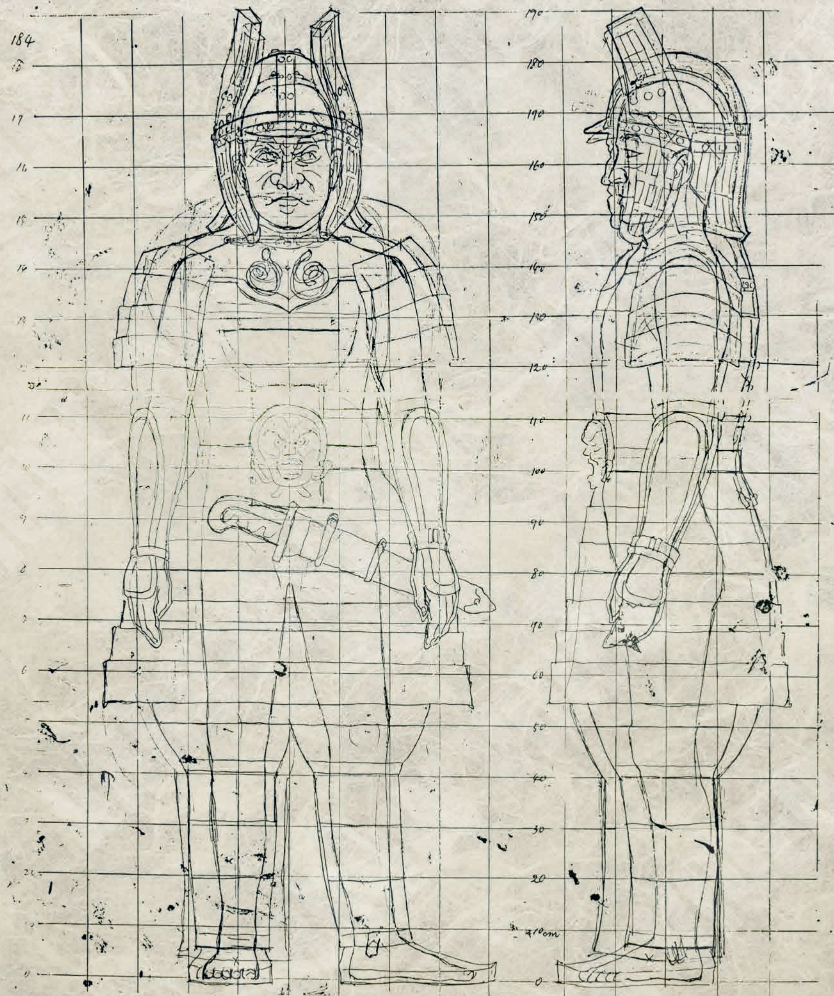

by Raffael Coronelli

Steam rises from a bubbling sulfur pit surrounded by snow. Crisp mountain air mixes with volcanic fumes and hot vapors releasing from the Earth with fiery retribution. A rumble sounds in the distance. It could be thunder from the blizzard, or it could be something else – footsteps, coming down from the mountain.

There are a number of sulfuric basins in Japan with the name *Jigokudani*, literally "Hell Valley." The climax of the third *Daimajin* film, *Wrath of Daimajin* (*Daimajin gyakushū*, 1966) features a locale with this name, providing a backdrop for the final battle that combines burning volcanic power with the divine retribution of the title character. It's an effective use of the setting and contributes to the film's atmosphere and themes, but where exactly in Japan is this Hell Valley?

Jigokudani of *Wrath of Daimajin* is a fantasy location. The sulfuric pits themselves were constructed in Daiei's Kyoto studio out of necessity – the script calls for throwing actors into the scalding natural cauldrons. Not wanting to make a snuff film, the filmmakers understandably opted for a simulation. It also allowed for more control of the elements to seamlessly blend the snowy, blizzard-laden finale with the special effects sequences of Daimajin's onslaught.

However, the film's locale bares similarities to several real-life places that no doubt provided inspiration. Partially shot on location in the Japanese Alps, the cinematography by Hiroshi Imai and Fujio Morita captures sweeping mountain vistas that take us on the characters' journey to Jigokudani. These mountain ranges of central Japan contain a Hell Valley of their own.

Jigokudani Monkey Park is a popular tourist destination in Nagano prefecture. As the name suggests, it has two primary attractions – the bubbling, sulfuric hot springs, and the monkeys that inhabit the area and often bathe in them. It's a lush, paradisiacal environment – rather unlike Daimajin's valley, despite being the most likely candidate for proximity to where the film was shot. The film's created, hellish atmosphere is closer to another valley, much further north.

Desolate and unforgiving, Hokkaido's Noboribetsu Jigokudani spends part of the year encased in snow — much like the over-the-top environment portrayed in the film. Its pits roil and burst with volcanic fury, their scalding temperatures ready to cook anyone who gets too close. The clash of extremes between hot and cold instill a respectful fear of the elements that crops up throughout the *Daimajin* films. When visiting, one gets the impression that the angry mountain god may appear at any moment.

Despite this iteration of Hell Valley being the one that bares the closest resemblance to the one portrayed on screen, it's historically impossible for the film to take place in Hokkaido. The island was wholly uncolonized by the mainland Japanese during the Sengoku period, and the conflict portrayed in the film is squarely set within that time and culture.

That doesn't end the possible Hokkaido influence, though. The third *Daimajin* film introduces another element to the series – a hawk that serves as Majin's animistic avatar. The notion of a god wholly embodied in a mundane animal is a belief held by the Ainu, Hokkaido's indigenous people. It's possible that this was an influence on the film's concepts, just as the northern Hell Valley is similar to the fictional one. It also ties into the notion that Majin's character in the film predates Japanese culture as we know it, the statue itself being based on prehistoric *haniwa* terracotta figures found in Gunma prefecture. By an interesting coincidence, the film's composer Akira Ifukube grew up in Hokkaido, and credited Ainu music with heavily influencing his compositions and musical development.[1]

Another famous Jigokudani resides in Kyushu, but this southern valley bares almost no resemblance to the snowy, northern setting of the third film. Southern Japan is more the territory of the installment preceding it.

Return of Daimajin (*Daimajin ikaru*, 1966) is set almost entirely at a sunny, idyllic lake, called Lake Yakumo. This is another fantasy locale, dreamt up by screenwriter Tetsurō Yoshida. The layout of the area appears on screen in a fascinating map used by the villains to plan their invasion early in the film, showing the fictional lands surrounding the lake and the island at the center. Once again, there are striking similarities to real-life places, including one that astute viewers may recognize with a frame of reference for a famous shooting location utilized to portray it.

Lake Yakumo's most obvious parallel is to Lake Biwa, conveniently located near Daiei's Kyoto studio, where location footage for the movie was shot. *Return of Daimajin* was the second Daiei *tokusatsu* film in 1966 to shoot at the lake, which also featured in the climax of *Gamera vs. Barugon*. Lake Biwa's proximity to the former Japanese capital Kyoto gives it a long history of cultural prominence. It's also notable as Japan's biggest freshwater lake, and appears frequently throughout Japan's art and literature – an instantly recognizable locale to people in Japan. It's unlikely that the filmmakers thought they were fooling anyone into thinking they weren't looking at a place as famous as Lake Biwa, but turning it into a fictitious version allowed them certain historical liberties that they wouldn't have gotten away with if they'd had to stick to the well-documented history of the real lake.

Lake Biwa contains an island called Chikubu, seen in the film's long shots from the shore as a stand-in for the fictitious island inhabited by Majin's statue. This real-life island is home to Hogon-ji, a Buddhist temple constructed in the 7th century AD. Prior to the Meiji era, Buddhist temples in Japan had *torii* gates, associated with and now exclusively featured in Shintō shrines. This accounts for the gate being visible on the shore of the island, something that was commonplace before Buddhism and Shintōism were fully separated in the 19th century.

Specifically, the 1868 Meiji Restoration spurred the separation of Shintō shrines from Buddhist temples as the government sought to downplay the influence of foreign religions. Taking place long before the Restoration, *Return of Daimajin* injects an entirely made-up god into a shrine with Shintō attributes, but a very prominent *bonshō*, or Buddhist temple bell. This may or may not be part of the film's messaging, but it certainly paints an interesting picture of the culture surrounding the island.

On this fictional *Kami-shima* (literally "God Island"), as it's called in the film, the temple has been constructed around Daimajin's statue. Perhaps this insinuates that the newer construction adopted the existing Majin deity, who inhabited the island prior to the temple's establishment. Majin's statue may even have been on the island prior to the arrival of the current civilization, much like the *haniwa* statues that date back to before Japanese history.

1 - Eric Homenick. 'Biography, Chapter 1 — Family Origins and Childhood' In *AkiraIfukube.org* (Web. www.akiraifukube.org/biography-part-i, retrieved 2021)

The female lead, Lady Sayuri Nagoshi (Shiho Fujimura), is portrayed similarly at first glance to a shrine maiden. Like the island's shrine itself, her role has a complex array of elements. She appears to draw influence from Japan's long history of shamanist women whose role was to commune with the gods, predecessors to modern Shinto shrine maidens. Sayuri acts as a direct link between the warring samurai who drive the conflict and the Majin deity who remains detached from the proceedings until the final act. Adding to the complicated symbolism of her role, she rings the island's Buddhist *bonshō* bell and is eventually placed on a cross. The presence of the Lady Sayuri character further blurs the lines between the film's portrayal of Shintōism, Buddhism, occasional Christian and Old Testament iconography, and reverence to the fictional Majin himself.

Kami-shima's interior was portrayed in the film by a massive indoor set constructed at the Kyoto studio. The cave, the lagoon leading in from the ocean, and the Majin statue all had to be built at full scale to house the actors and crew in the dramatic sequences set inside the temple, including several action set pieces involving boats and live pyrotechnics.

Another island shares the name Kami-shima, though it doesn't reside in a lake. Instead, the real Kami-shima lies at the mouth of Ise Bay, between Mie and Shizuoka prefectures. Home to a Shintō shrine from which it gets its name, this island is larger than the one in the film, but it stands to reason that its name was an inspiration.

This brings us back to the original *Daimajin* (aka *Majin, the Monster of Terror*, 1966), the most thoroughly documented of the trilogy. This film takes place in an area that lies near modern Kyoto, which would place the action near to where it was mostly shot, at Daiei's Kyoto studios. In a conversation this writer had about the movie trilogy with *Ultraman Max* (2005-2006) director and *Daimajin* super-fan Takeshi Yagi, he stated in no uncertain terms "If you love *Daimajin*, you have to go to Kyoto."

This is partially because of the Kadokawa Daiei studio, which still has a Daimajin statue on display despite the lack of a new movie to resurrect the character. On a tangential level, Kyoto (Japan's second biggest tourism city after Tokyo) does have much to offer to those interested in the series' period settings. This is thanks to the historic and significant architecture, most of which was spared from the Second World War bombings that decimated many Japanese cities. Much of the intrigue of the first *Daimajin* takes place in and around a palace, setting an intimate tone. These interior sets were built in the middle of a city that contains bountiful examples of the architecture they were reproducing, including the former Kyoto Imperial Palace, which is fully intact and open to the public. Inside the spectacular palace, floorboards creak by design to warn of incoming assassins – or a violent coup, like the one portrayed in *Daimajin*'s opening act.

That Daiei's Kyoto studio handled *Daimajin* is very "on-brand," in a sense. While the studio's branch in the more comparatively modern Tokyo simultaneously produced *Gamera* movies, the Kyoto staff used their knowledge of constructing and filming period sets to create the three installments of the Daimajin trilogy back-to-back. They were the studio behind *Rashomon* (1950) and the long-running *Zatoichi* series, after all. That expertise in recreating the period setting was fully utilized in the *Daimajin* films – including the incredible miniatures used for the rampage sequences, which had to be built by the full scale set construction crew while most of Daiei's special effects department were busy making *Gamera vs. Barugon* in Tokyo.

Out of all the well-known *kaijū* movie series to emerge from the mid-60s "*kaijū* boom," the period in which every major Japanese film studio were producing giant monster movies, *Daimajin* stands out as the one with the strongest and most immediate ties to Japan's history and culture. This is the result of combining the *kaijū* genre with the *jidaigeki*, or period-drama genre. To the uninitiated, the movies may feel more removed from reality than a *kaijū* movie shot in a present-day city that one can readily visit – but the reality is there, if the viewer goes in with a frame of reference.

The themes of the films – retribution against corrupt and cruel rulers, punishing villains driven by greed to oppress those beneath them – are built around the brutal feudal system in place during the time period portrayed. In that context, *Daimajin* is an attempt to learn from the past in the form of a fable. It presents its ideas in a heightened setting where evildoers get their comeuppance at the hands of an angry mountain demon-god.

The locales and ideas of the *Daimajin* series and their links to Japan's history play as important a role in the films as the title character itself. Try as you might, you can't visit the fictional Jigokudani of *Daimajin Strikes Again* — but looking at places that may have inspired it will build an appreciation for just how close the fantasy on screen gets to the real, historical Japan.

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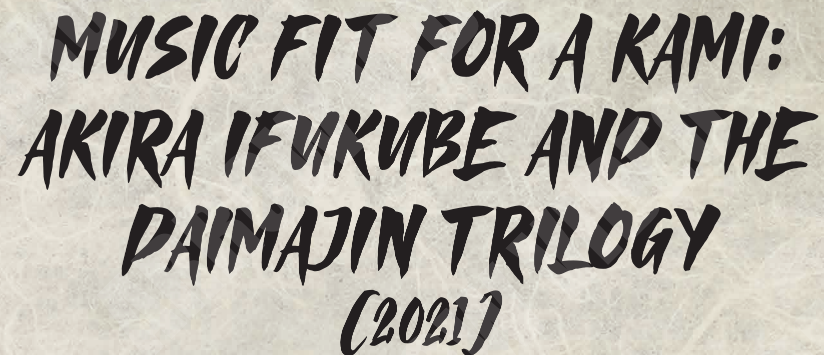

by Erik Homenick

When Daiei began producing its trio of Daimajin films in 1966, Akira Ifukube (1914-2006) was the natural choice to pen their musical scores. Although the composer's career is most often associated with another studio, namely Toho, Ifukube had a history with Daiei going back to 1948 when he scored his first film for that company, Yasuki Chiba's *Beautiful Leopard* (*Utsukushiki hyō*). After *Beautiful Leopard*, Ifukube would go on to score a multitude of high-profile films for Daiei over the subsequent 18-year period leading up to the Daimajin trilogy, including Akira Kurosawa's *The Quiet Duel* (*Shizukanaru kettō*, 1949), Kōzaburō Yoshimura's *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*, 1951), and Kenji Misumi's *Buddha* (*Shaka*, 1961). In 1962, Misumi and Ifukube would again collaborate on *The Tale of Zatoichi* (*Zatōichi monogatari*), a *jidaigeki* concerning the misadventures of a blind swordsman played with roguish delight by the inimitable Shintarō Katsu. *The Tale of Zatoichi* was a smash hit for Daiei and, by the end of 1966, the studio had cranked out no less than thirteen sequels, of which Ifukube wrote the music for seven.

Ifukube had a slightly longer history with Daiei's rival studio Toho where he had inaugurated his career as a film composer in 1947 with Senkichi Taniguchi's *Snow Trail* (*Ginrei no hate*). At Toho, as at Daiei, Ifukube was no stranger to scoring popular *jidaigeki* productions such as Hiroshi Inagaki's *Samurai Saga* (*Aru kengō no shōgai*, 1959, aka *Life of an Expert Swordsman*) and *Chūshingura* (1962). Ifukube's most outstanding successes at Toho were undoubtedly, however, associated with his music for that company's slew of giant monster films – or *kaijū eiga* – of which Ishirō Honda's *Godzilla* (*Gojira*), unleashed on the world in 1954, is assuredly the most famous. Since Ifukube had made by the mid-1960s such a prominent name for himself within Japan's film industry as a deft and reliable composer of not only monster music but of music for stylish period dramas such as the *Zatoichi* series, his talents were virtually tailor-made for the Daimajin trilogy, where the worlds of *daikaijū* and *jidaigeki* storytelling collide and, ultimately, fuse seamlessly together.

Akira Ifukube was born on 31st May 1914 on the northernmost Japanese island of Hokkaido. From his youth Ifukube harbored an insatiable fascination with music. Growing up in various rural villages throughout Hokkaido, the young Ifukube encountered music on a daily basis: some of his earliest memories were of hearing the old Japanese folk songs sung by the residents of these locales. In 1923, Ifukube's family moved to the small town of Otofuke where about half of the population were Ainu, an indigenous people culturally and ethnically distinct from the Japanese who principally reside in Japan's far north. In Otofuke, Ifukube heard traditional Ainu music for the first time and was completely enthralled by its characteristic sacred chants and persistent rhythms.

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Ifukube's older brother Isao listened to Western classical music and it was through his sibling's guidance that he also came to be acquainted with art music from overseas. Ifukube was particularly impressed by composers from outside of the Austro-German tradition such as Manuel de Falla from Spain, Maurice Ravel from France, and especially Igor Stravinksy from Russia. Ifukube taught himself to play the violin and by about the age of 17 he began writing original scores. Taking his cues from musical "nationalists" such as Falla and Stravinsky, Ifukube sought to express in his compositions what he would have considered to be an essential Japanese spirit – an indomitable ethnic vitality – by combining elements of Japanese, Ainu, and Western classical music into one potent sonic mixture. His first orchestral work, a raucous showstopper entitled *Japanese Rhapsody* (*Nihon kyōshikyoku*), aptly demonstrates the fantastical extravagance of Ifukube's hybridized aesthetic and would go on to be the very work that launched his international career as a composer when, in 1935, it won the prestigious Tcherepnin Prize in Paris.

After the Second World War, Ifukube, now an established musician of some reputation in Japan and abroad, had a conversation with his old friend, the composer Fumio Hayasaka, who was living in Tokyo and had already been scoring films for some years. Hayasaka, who is best known for his music in Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950) and *Seven Samurai* (*Shichinin no samurai*, 1954), convinced Ifukube that he should flee the wilds of Hokkaido and relocate to Tokyo to try his hand at writing music for the cinema. Hayasaka apparently made a compelling case and, in 1946, Ifukube and his family began a southward journey to the Japanese capital. In 1947 Ifukube landed his first film gig with Toho's *Snow Trail* and the rest is history.

Akira Ifukube recalled when the opportunity to score the Daimajin trilogy was offered to him in early 1966:

"I got a call from [...] Daiei Kyoto [...] and I was asked to compose the [*Daimajin*] score by the director of the studio, Akinari Suzuki. He said he wanted to make a film like Paul Wegener's *Der Golem* (1920) [...] When I told him that I had seen that movie, he said, 'The new film will be like that, so please write the music for it.' I was also working on *Godzilla* [films] at the time, so I said, 'Okay'."[1]

Immediately upon accepting the *Daimajin* assignment, Ifukube packed his bags and headed straight for Kyoto. "I composed the music for all three films at my regular *ryokan* (Japanese-style inn), the Mikado in Kyoto," Ifukube reminisced. "The innkeeper's daughter had a piano and it was moved to my room. I often wrote music in the middle of the night at that time, so I played the piano being careful not to make any loud noises."[2]

While the composer was burning the midnight oil at the Mikado, attempting to remain as silent as possible while writing music so often characterized by its tremendous bombast, he had two self-imposed directives in mind: first, the *Daimajin* music should sound distinct from his *Godzilla* work at Toho. "I think of Godzilla as a monster and Daimajin as a god," Ifukube remarked.[3] In Ifukube's estimation, Toho's *daikaijū* were portrayed as real animals, beings of the natural world. Since Daimajin was to be portrayed as a *supernatural* being – a deity – it was necessary that the god's music sufficiently reflect the character's unearthliness and awesome (if not terrifying) divinity.

Ifukube's second directive was that since Daimajin is a purely fictitious deity not worshiped in any real-world cult, congregation, or sect, the character's eventual theme should not contain recognizable references to any true religious practices of any sort. Although Ifukube admitted that Daimajin resembles at least superficially a

1 - Atsushi Kobayashi, *Ifukube Akira Kataru: Ifukube Akira Eiga Ongaku Kaiko-roku* (Tokyo: Wides Shuppan, 2014), 307.
2 - Ibid., pg. 323
3 - Ibid., pg. 307

Shintō *kami*, or sacred spirit, whose physical appearance is immediately redolent of ancient *haniwa* statues, overt signifiers of Shintō music in the *Daimajin* theme would not be desirable since the being is by no means a true *kami*; rather, Daimajin is wholly one-of-a-kind, the god of a singular "local religion," as the composer himself put it.[4] Indeed, Ifukube's insistence on eschewing melodic material and instrumental effects that would readily evoke Shinto music in the minds of the audience drove his decision to use only drums during the ritual exorcism scene in the opening minutes of Kimiyoshi Yasuda's *Daimajin.* "If I had added melody, it would have been closer to Shintō music, so I decided to use only percussion instruments," Ifukube stated.[5]

As it turns out, the composer's first directive was rather difficult to adhere to: despite his desire to avoid *Godzilla*-like music, Ifukube's *Daimajin* scores are, in terms of instrumental effects, discernibly cut from the same cloth as the composer's monster work at Toho. Ifukube's standard issue *daikaijū* soundscape can be thought of as a colossal orchestral tapestry in which the requisite snarling brass outbursts, groaning low woodwinds, and ever-turbulent percussion interweave to create hulkingly imposing textures. With these more salient elements of Ifukube's sonic tapestry in mind, let us focus on some of its finer common threads.

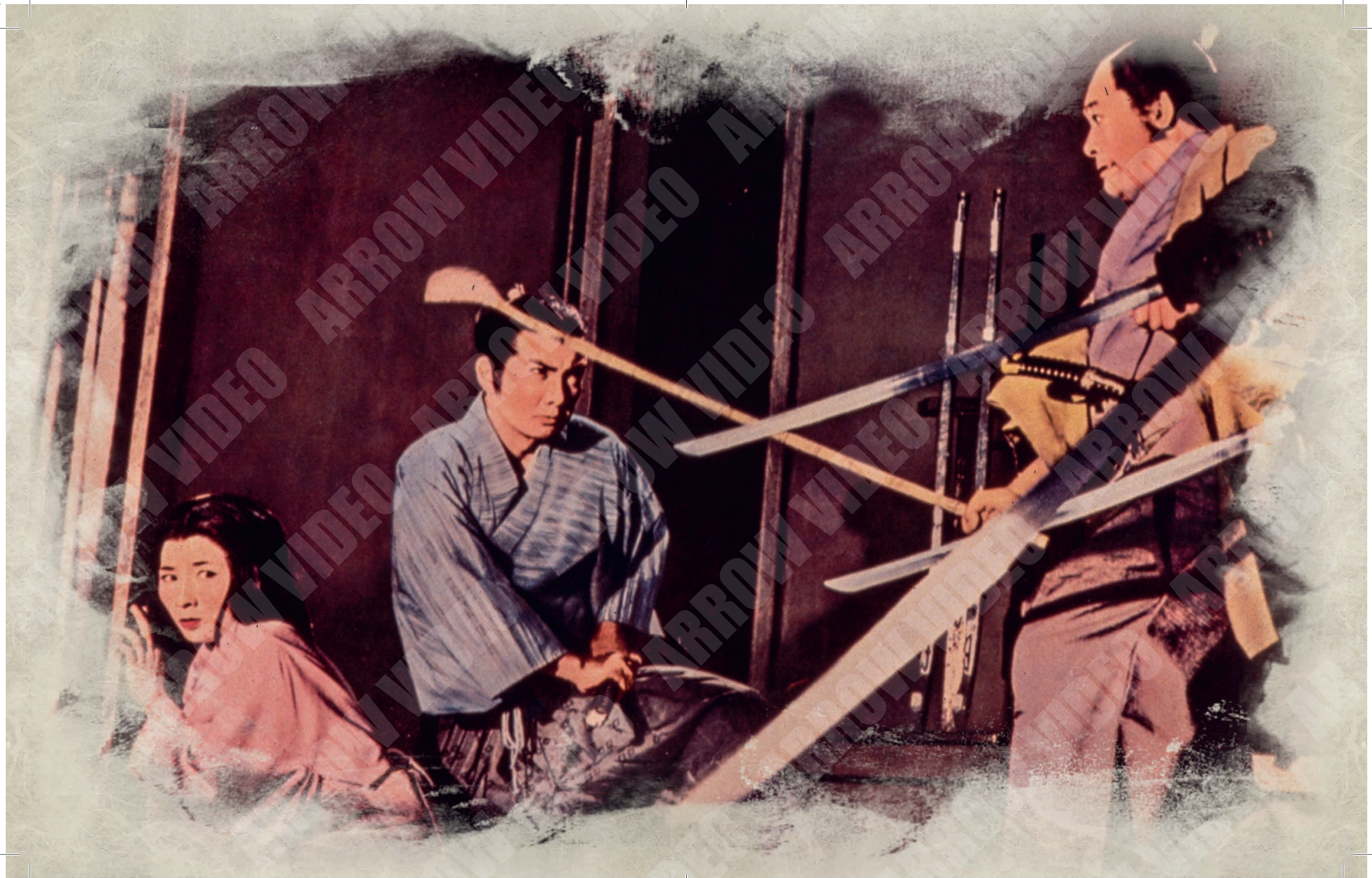
One of Ifukube's favorite methods of illustrating monstrosity with instrumental sound is through his eliciting of jarring tone clusters from the piano. To achieve these shockingly harsh dissonances, Ifukube would require his pianist to smash down on the keyboard either with the palm of the hand or with the elbow and forearm. An outstandingly colorful example of this technique can be heard in Yasuda's *Daimajin*: when the ireful *kami* begins its onslaught against Samanosuke and his minions, the music is often undergirded by rhythmic, stony-sounding piano tone clusters that suggest, quite unsubtly, Daimajin's weighty footfalls and relentless march forward.

Another preferred technique of Ifukube's involving the piano is his direct manipulation of the piano strings. The composer enjoyed releasing the piano's dampers and striking the strings with sticks, wire brushes, or even coins to draw out from the instrument deep, otherworldly resonances. This effect is heard quite clearly during the opening credits of the Yasuda film: a stick is dragged up and down the piano's innards and the unsettling reverberances that result alert the listener that something ominous is stirring to life – the joints of the stone god are slowly grinding awake in some hidden subterranean cavity.

In monster films, Ifukube was inclined to make use of another keyboard instrument, the Electone, which was debuted by the Yamaha Corporation in 1959. The Electone is an electronic organ that achieved great popularity in Japan throughout the early 1960s and beyond. Although Ifukube virtually never used electronic instruments in his concert works, he apparently felt at ease experimenting with them in his cinema scores, the Daimajin trilogy included. Certainly, when contemporary audiences hear electronic instruments such as these in films from the mid-20th century, their warbly, "far-out" tones cannot help but come off as dated and clichéd. One must bear in mind, however, that electronic music was still considered something of a curious novelty even by the mid-1960s, and Ifukube's Electone in the *Daimajin* films, with its sustained drones (also known as pedal points) and peculiar melodic turns, was meant to augment, by means of its unnatural timbres, the atmosphere of weirdness and estrangement from reality that permeates *kaijū eiga*.

One element that *does* set Ifukube's Daimajin music apart from his Toho monster scores is in how he constructs the divine being's theme, which really is not a coherent and consistent theme at all. Whereas Ifukube had previously tended to write music for monsters that contained more fully developed and self-contained musical phrases, the music that represents Daimajin is essentially a mixture of various leitmotifs that the composer assembles in different combinations and in different orders from film to film. In Yasuda's *Daimajin*, the titular

4 - Ibid.
5 - Ibid., pg. 308



character's theme, so to speak, is an aggregation of four simple leitmotifs. The first leitmotif is a guttural, mostly chromatic run on the notes A - B♭ - G - G# | G - F# - F, articulated twice. The second leitmotif is characterized by a distinctive, lumbering four-note motto, C - E♭ - B - D. The third leitmotif is distinguished by a simple but majestic C - B - A figuration that repeats several times. The fourth leitmotif is comprised of a ponderous, Slavic-sounding melodic line of A – E | A - B♭ - B - C - E - A | F - E - D - C - C - C - B. In Kenji Misumi's *Return of Daimajin* (*Daimajin ikaru*) and Kazuo Mori's *Wrath of Daimajin* (*Daimajin gyakushū*), Ifukube makes repeated use of leitmotifs one, two, and three but dispenses with the fourth leitmotif and introduces several other melodic fragments in its place.

Whether the composer was conscious of it or not, the way in which he constantly shatters the Daimajin "theme" only to reassemble it into various incarnations throughout the trilogy – a game of musical "mix and match" – cleverly recalls how the stone god itself is so often disassembled only to reconstitute at a later time: at the conclusion of Yasuda's film, the sacred statue crumbles to pieces when Kozasa's tear drops on its foot. In *Return of Daimajin*, after the effigy is blasted apart by explosives, the fragments – thanks to the *kami*'s omnipotence – join back together. At the end of the same film, Daimajin liquifies and rains down into Lake Yakumo. Finally, the statue of the deity disintegrates into a flurry of snow in the final scene of *Wrath of Daimajin*.

Just as Ifukube was apparently incapable of keeping the influence of *Godzilla* at bay during the composition of the Daimajin scores, it appears he was equally unable to honor his second self-imposed directive, which was to avoid allusions to religious tradition in the music. We can see where the composer may have let down his guard when we focus our attention on one of the aforementioned Daimajin leitmotifs, the one consisting of the C - E♭ - B - D motto. The complete leitmotif has a contour of C - E♭ - B - D | C - E♭ - B - D | C | B - C - C# - D - E♭. It appears consistently in each film of the trilogy and is probably the most immediately distinctive of all the Daimajin melodic fragments. Fascinatingly, it is almost identical to a melodic phrase – C - E♭ - B - D | C - E♭ - B - D - C - E♭ - B - D – that appears throughout the second movement of the *Symphony of Psalms*, an orchestral work written in 1930 by Igor Stravinsky, Ifukube's most admired composer. The *Symphony of Psalms* is Stravinsky's musical setting of text from Psalms 38, 39, and 150, which, of course, have their origins in the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) and are part of the Book of Psalms from the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. The Psalms, of which there are one hundred and fifty in total, are sacred songs addressed to God.

Despite the striking similarity between the recurring C - E♭ - B - D phrase from the *Symphony of Psalms*' second movement and the C - E♭ - B - D leitmotif so prominent in each Daimajin film, Ifukube seems never to have stated one way or another if a direct quotation from Stravinsky was at play. Although a conscious act of quotation cannot be confirmed, my theory is that Ifukube *must* have had Stravinsky's piece firmly in mind when fashioning the *kami*'s theme fragments.

This begs the question: why might Ifukube have desired to quote Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* in the first place? An obvious answer may be that Ifukube, aware of the conspicuous biblical imagery that permeates the films (Daimajin's parting of the waters of Lake Yakumo, the scenes of crucifixion, etc.), was tempted to sneak in a nod to Stravinsky's *Psalms* for that reason alone. I assert, however, that Ifukube's reasoning had to be more complicated than that: when Ifukube agreed to take on the *Daimajin* assignment, and Daiei advised him from the get-go that the films would purposefully seek to evoke the European Golem films, this undoubtedly would have triggered Ifukube's natural instinct to delve into the background of that film and thus the Golem myth in general.

Certainly, Ifukube was inclined to undertake significant amounts of background research before scoring films that, like the *Daimajin* trilogy, involved distinctive historical settings and/or narratives operating against specific cultural backdrops. For example, while writing the music for Hiroshi Inagaki's *The Three Treasures* (*Nippon tanjō*, 1959) at Toho, Ifukube studied the musical practices of Japan's ancient Yamato Period to endow that film's mythical setting with an authentically archaic mood. For Ishirō Honda's *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (*Kingu Kongu tai Gojira*, 1962) at the same studio, Ifukube dutifully researched the languages and folk music of the South Pacific and incorporated the fruits of his findings into the score to encourage a sense of verisimilitude during the film's Solomon Islands scenes.

If Ifukube had indeed been brushing up on the origins of the Golem myth during research for the *Daimajin* films, he would have noted that the first mention of the word *golem* in the literature is found, of all places, in the Psalms, namely Psalm 139, verse 16, which describes the birth of the first man, Adam. In this particular Psalm, Adam personally recounts his own creation at the hands of God:

> Your eyes saw *my substance, being yet unformed* (*golmi ra'u e'necha*)
> And in Your book they all were written,
> The days fashioned for me,
> When as yet there were none of them.

In the original Hebrew, the word *golmi*, which is a variation of *golem*, means "unfinished or imperfect matter, matter without form."[6] In the context of the Psalm, *golmi* simply describes the primordial material from which Adam was created by the deity. In the centuries upon centuries since the composition of the Psalms, the word *golem* has evolved from being an obscure biblical reference concerning the creation of Adam to a term well-known in Jewish folklore denoting inanimate effigies, built of clay or mud, that can be brought to life through mystical acts of conjuring.

Assuming Ifukube carried out such research into the Golem myth and discovered its origins in the Psalms, might the composer have subsequently made a connection between those sacred songs and works of art based on them? It is entirely possible since Ifukube once revealed how the narrative elements of the Daimajin films actively provoked him into establishing linkages between the trilogy and other cultural productions dealing with related themes. While contemplating Kenji Misumi's *Return of Daimajin*, Ifukube had the following thoughts:

"In the final scene, the sound of bells can be heard from the bottom of the lake. I pondered over this. I was reminded of Gerhart Hauptmann's [poetic play] *Die versunkene Glocke* (*The Sunken Bell*). Debussy also has a piece with a similar title, *La Cathédrale engloutie* (*The Sunken Cathedral*). There are also stories in Japanese folk beliefs that the evening bell can be heard from the swamp or Lake Biwa."[7]

Considering how prone Ifukube was to dive deep into research when writing film scores and considering how clever he could be when linking the themes of a particular film assignment to folklore, literature, or the works of other composers as the above anecdote illustrates, the notion that Ifukube may have drawn a parallel, albeit obliquely, between the Golem-like Daimajin and the Golem myth – via the Psalms and Stravinsky's music based on them – is certainly plausible. But since we will likely never know for sure the answer to the C - E♭ - B - D riddle, this can only add an element of captivating intrigue to Daimajin's musical representation, an aura of mystery. Who are we to believe that we should be made privy to all of the *kami*'s divine secrets, anyway?

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6 - Walter A. Strauss. 'The Golem on the Operatic Stage: Nature's Warning' in *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 7, no. 2/3 (1995)

7 - Atsushi Kobayashi, *Ifukube Akira Kataru: Ifukube Akira Eiga Ongaku Kaiko-roku* (Tokyo: Wides Shuppan, 2014), 318.

Golem theories aside, it is undisputable that Akira Ifukube, while holed up in his room at the Mikado, scribbling away in the dead of night at the score paper propped up on the piano's music rack, created three of the most iconic scores of his career for Kimiyoshi Yasuda, Kenji Misumi, and Kazuo Mori's respective Daimajin films. Although Ifukube may have gone into that room seeking to conjure up music for Daimajin that honored two self-imposed limitations – again, he admonished himself to avoid both God and Godzilla – the truth is, like the rogues' gallery of villains in the denouement of each Daimajin film, Ifukube could not outrun his fate. The composer, inevitably compelled to give in to his natural creative instincts, went on to pen music for the Daimajin trilogy that truly hits all the right notes – it functions so perfectly in its role *precisely* because it dips, rather readily, from the same well of artistic inspiration that made Akira Ifukube the man for the job in the first place.

I could not have written this essay without the kind help of Joyce Boss, Robert Cohen, John DeSentis, Steve Ryfle, and Shogo Yamaguchi. I heartily thank each of them for their invaluable assistance.

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A TRIBUTE TO FILM GIANT FUJIO MORITA (2021)

by Raffael Coronelli

The late Fujio Morita (1927-2014) was among Japanese cinema's greatest cinematographers, alongside Kazuo Miyagawa (*Ugetsu*, 1953) and Chikashi Makiura (*Lone Wolf and Cub* [*Kozure Ōkami*], 1972-1974). He straddled the Golden Age of the major film studios and the independent era following the collapse of Daiei in 1971, lensing films for such directors as Kenji Misumi, Kazuo Mori, Hideo Gosha – with whom he made 13 films, including *Hitokiri (*1969, aka *Tenchu!)* – and actor-producer-director Shintarō Katsu.

Born in 1927 in Kyoto – he moved near the Uzumasa area at the age of six – Fujio Morita loved the mechanics of photography. He studied industrial architecture and chemistry, and learned a lot from a certain Mr. Miyata, who was instrumental in the development of Toyo Laboratory (Tōyō Genzōsho; renamed Imagica in 1986). By chance Fujio Morita was called upon to give private tuition to the child of Daiei Kyoto's CEO Masaichi Nagata. Morita subsequently entered Daiei in 1947, where he started out as an apprentice cameraman with Kōhei Sugiyama (*Gate of Hell* [*Jigokumon*], 1953) and Sōichi Aisaka (Kurosawa's *The Quiet Duel* [*Shizukanaru kettō*], 1949). In 1950, he replaced future director Tai Katō as trailer director on Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950). This assignment gave him the opportunity to visit the set several times, especially around the Kōmyō-ji Buddhist Temple, where a high-tension line was used to feed the lighting and electrical equipment required to shoot outdoors and record a synchronized soundtrack. Morita recounted that Kurosawa had to replace unavailable Mitchell cameras with Eyemo cameras (used during the war by combat cameramen) in order to shoot the scenes with Takashi Shimura. He also remembered how Buddhist monks from the nearby temple got angry after Kurosawa and his crew started to fell bamboo trees for the sake of the shoot.

At the time, in the early 1950s, it was still impossible for Morita to buy an exposure meter, which cost up to thrice his monthly salary. In 1955, he worked as a focus puller on Kenji Mizoguchi's *Taira Clan Saga* (*Shin Heike monogatari*). He was promoted to director of photography in 1962, on Mitsuo Murayama's *Yamaotoko no uta* (lit. *Song of the Mountain Man*), and in 1965/66 he was assigned as director of photography on Kimiyoshi Yasuda's *Daimajin*.

DAIMAJIN

Fujio Morita was insistent about filming both the narrative parts of the film and the *tokusatsu* parts involving special effects with the 14-foot high golem, which were actually shot using a large backlit blue screen (or 'cyclorama') with 190 iodine bulbs arranged in a 36x15 foot rhombus, at Daiei's Kyoto studios. The very costly equipment took some 20 days to set up and was seldom used afterwards, except for the *Yokai Monsters* trilogy (1968-69).

ARROW VIDEO

ARROW VIDEO

In Kenji Misumi's *Return of Daimajin*, Fujio Morita filmed actress Shiho Fujimura – who also appeared in Misumi's *Destiny's Son* (*Kiru*, 1962) – whose character is sentenced to be burned at the stake. Misumi was so displeased with the dummy used as a substitute for Fujimura that the actress volunteered to go up to the stake herself and got her legs burned by the heat of the gas fire. Fujio Morita filmed the 'Japanese Golem' at a rate of up to 36 frames per second, in order to create very subtle slow-motion effects. "It's not dramatic enough if you film at normal speed," he later said. Eventually, Morita earned the Miura Prize for his work on *Daimajin*. Even though Daiei was already almost bankrupt in 1966, Morita, in a 2009 interview, praised the studio for using and promoting SFX technology "and showing the world that films can be shot in a different way than before."

KAZUO MORI

Among the fastest directors working at Daiei was Kazuo Mori, known for *Secrets of a Court Masseur* (*Shiranui kengyō*, 1960), with Shintarō Katsu, as well as *A Certain Killer* (*Aru koroshiya*, 1967) with Raizō Ichikawa. Mori tolerated Morita's slowness to a degree, for he was still young. But when Morita, during a night of drinking, had the nerve to tell Mori that he was shooting way too fast, the director blew his top and told the fledgling assistant that he was fired and not allowed to be part of his team anymore. However, the two men buried the hatchet a few years later, with Morita lensing such Mori films as *Spy on the Masked Car* (*Ano shisōsha o nerae*, 1967) and *Zatoichi At Large* (*Zatōichi goyōtabi*, 1972).

In 1969, Shintarō Katsu urged Morita to take on photography of Hideo Gosha's *Hitokiri*. Though Morita did not care much about Gosha as a director, due to his background in television, he had been impressed with *Goyōkin* (1969) and felt anxious to film such stars as Yūjirō Ishihara, Tatsuya Nakadai, and writer-actor-director Yukio Mishima in what was a last-ditch film effort to stop Daiei's downhill slide. However, Morita and Gosha hit it off perfectly, and given that the rule at Daiei was to put directors and cinematographers on an equal footing, Morita found himself in charge of continuity throughout the film, while Gosha could focus on directing his stellar cast.

HITOKIRI

The difference between *Goyōkin* and *Hitokiri* in terms of telephoto lenses and zooming was due mostly to the fact that Fujio Morita did not have the new generation of Panavision lenses at his disposal, but the old Mitchell cameras – which his Toho-based colleague Kōzō Okazaki compared to heavy propeller planes. "I could not have done an über-*Goyōkin*," Morita once admitted. "Mechanically speaking, it was still difficult to zoom in and out with the cameras we had, even more so with the CinemaScope format." However, Morita made up for the lack of lens smoothness with frame composition skills, and, like Kōzō Okazaki, a willingness to experiment with what he had at his disposal. This is how he tried out a difficult reticulation effect in Izō Okada's death scene. Perfectly poised between film studio tradition and modernity, Morita created a cartoonish effect in the first part of Okada's great marathon race, by which the character, played by Shintarō Katsu, would leave small clouds of dust in his wake, like characters running in manga and Japanese animation.

Although *Hitokiri* was a commercial hit and won several awards, it could not fix Daiei's finances. The Kyoto-based studio went bankrupt in 1971. Morita and set decorator Yoshinobu Nishioka then set up an association called Eizō Kyoto, which included directors and technicians of the former Kyoto-based Daiei company. They all resumed work on Shintarō Katsu's films and TV series, especially the long-running *Zatoichi* saga.

ZATOICHI

Like Daiei assistant director Mitsuaki Tsuji and the editors who worked for the actor-turned-director, Fujio Morita had a difficult relationship with Shintarō Katsu, who had decided to discard traditional film grammar in favor of a free, handheld camera style and extensive use of zooming. This was much to Morita's chagrin, for the rational DP always cared about shot-to-shot continuity and master shots, which Katsu as a director simply did not care about. The two men almost butted heads on the set of *Zatoichi in Desperation* (*Shin Zatōichi monogatari: Oreta tsue*, 1972).

Still, Morita lensed several episodes of the *Zatoichi* TV series with great success, including the much-appreciated *A Lover's Suicide Song*. This visually stunning 23rd episode from Season 1, about Zatoichi helping a *goze* (blind shamisen player) played by Ruriko Asaoka, was directed by Shintarō Katsu and rooted in a more traditional film language which highlighted Morita's tremendous composition skills in snowy landscapes, his ability to match, light-wise, interiors and exteriors in a single shot, and his perfectly timed use of close-ups. Seiichi Sakai, who used to assist editor Toshio Taniguchi, said that this particular episode was hailed as a minor masterpiece and was much discussed by audiences and critics alike. This kind of top-notch quality also helped Katsu feel that he could still maintain the highly professional standards of movie production in his TV creations, with the precious help of such technicians as Yoshinobu Nishioka and Fujio Morita, and directors like Kenji Misumi, though this method would prove too money and time-consuming for the fast demands of the TV market.

After having made a few feature films himself, Katsu eventually told Morita how he regretted discarding Daiei's film grammar and Kenji Misumi's aesthetic legacy in favor of mostly anarchic visuals. "He started to measure up his own films by the standards of Misumi's work and felt that his were simply below par," Morita said.

LONE WOLF AND CUB

In 1973, Morita, despite some back problems, lensed Kenji Misumi's *Lone Wolf and Cub: Baby Cart in The Land Of Demons* (*Kozure ōkami: Meifumadō*). The two men had known each other well since the Daiei days, and had a smooth collaboration, though the director could be overly harsh with actresses. Morita remembers how young actress Kaori Momoi (in a wedding dress) angrily left the set of a TV series because Misumi would have her repeat a scene countless times. *Baby Cart* gave Morita the opportunity to shoot what may be the best *chanbara* scene in his career. He experimented again with film speed in the sword fights and action scenes, with a rate of either 36 frames per second, in order to have slow-motion effects, or 18 frames per second, so as to speed up some movements (this effect was called *motion nusumi* and used for instance in Takeshi Kitano's 2003 *Zatoichi* remake). Morita also liked to use the *nakanuku* effect, which meant removing several frames in the editing of an action scene. Morita did all this in order to go beyond photorealism and give the film a kind of manga-like stylization, as in *Hitokiri*.

HIDEO GOSHA

After Kenji Misumi's death in 1975, Morita still had his hands full with the *Zatoichi* series, although Katsu's production company was becoming weaker and weaker until its bankruptcy in 1981. After one more television series and a film shot in Tokyo, Morita had a chance encounter with Hideo Gosha, who was then in Kyoto looking for a DP for his upcoming renaissance film, *Onimasa* (*Kiryūin hanako no shōgai*, 1982). Morita quickly accepted the offer and urged the producers to start filming as quickly as possible, for the script called for hot, summer scenes that had to be shot before the season ended and before actress Masako Natsume's scheduled surgery (she was then very ill and would die in 1985). Morita said he always remembered the *Onimasa* shoot for the

talent of the late Natsume, who was the only actress to make him weep on the set, behind the lens of his camera, in the scene where her character had to cry when reunited with her father, played by Tatsuya Nakadai. After the commercial success of *Onimasa*, Gosha and Morita went on to make 11 more films together, though the latter and his associate, set decorator Yoshinobu Nishioka, were initially reluctant to work for Toei – Morita once said how he hated filming *The Yakuza Wives* (*Gokudō no onnatachi*, 1986), though he was bent on not making the usual Toei yakuza flick. Thanks to the skilled duo, Gosha was able to focus on directing his actors, and even more so his actresses, as passionately as he wished, while Morita and Nishioka were allowed to experiment with sets and visuals.

For *Tokyo Bordello* (*Yoshiwara enjō*, 1987), Morita filmed through gauze in order to emulate the soft style of Shinichi Saitō's paintings. On *Four Days of Snow and Blood* (*Ni-ni-roku*, 1989), he used a bleach bypass to create a de-saturated effect and show a world devoid of 'human colors.' Morita was especially proud of Gosha's last film, *The Oil-Hell Murder* (*Onnagoroshi abura no jigoku*, 1992). The director was then terminally ill, and Morita did his very best, for instance in the shot where an embarkation floats towards a hut on a lake, a shot which Morita cited above all others in the book *Interviews with 40 Japanese Cameramen* by Takeshi Yamaguchi (Heibonsha, 1997). Morita also filmed what may qualify as the greatest fire scene in Japanese cinema (together with the castle scene in Kurosawa's *Ran* [1985]) in *Tokyo Bordello*, namely the recreation of the great inferno that destroyed the pleasure quarters of Shin Yoshiwara, back in 1911. The 150-metre long set was thus burnt to the ground in front of up to seven cameras, and later re-used in Kinji Fukasaku's *A Chaos of Flowers* (*Hana no ran*, 1988).

In his later days, Fujio Morita started to give classes and lectures, and he liked to stress the fact that he valued films that, beyond fantasy, possessed a real socio-historical content, very much like *Tokyo Bordello*. He would often remind film students when and how, for instance, Japanese women had gained the right to vote. Having grown up in a Kyoto area where there were real geisha and poor prostitutes, Morita stressed that he greatly valued Gosha's unblinking approach to "the realities of life," such as sexuality, contraception, venereal diseases, illnesses, insanity, and death. Morita also stressed how Gosha was probably the only director ever to rehearse sex scenes with a male assistant in order to ease the anxiety experienced by his actresses.

Fujio Morita deemed it impossible to still make good Japanese costume films, because the orthodoxy of the genre had simply died away and directors had no great knowledge in terms of its aesthetics, and Japanese history as a whole. Maybe, like Kurosawa, he lamented the fact that the younger generations of directors would no longer make films based on great literary classics and historical subjects, but rather flavor-of-the-month TV dramas and comic books.

A LEGACY

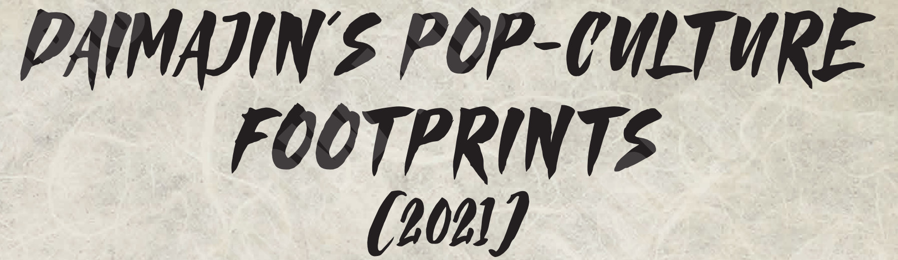
In 2012, Fujio Morita was called upon to help supervise for Imagica (formerly Toyo Laboratory) the 4K grading and restoration of *Gate of Hell*, a film that retains Daiei's aesthetic legacy (Morita had filmed Hideo Gosha's *Death Shadows* [*Jittemai*] in 1986, the last film ever shot at Daiei's Kyoto-based studio.) "Fortunately, legendary front-line cinematographer Fujio Morita, who was a camera assistant on *Gate of Hell*, understood the intention of art and color of the film, and was able to supervise the grading to revive the vibrant look," said Imagica's technical advisor Norimasa Ishida.

The late Seiichi Ichiko, who was Shintarō Katsu's assistant on the *Zatoichi* TV series, once said that there were three great directors of photography working at the Kyoto Daiei studio: "Kazuo Miyagawa, Chikashi Makiura and the younger Fujio Morita. Miyagawa was classic and Makiura very artistic, while Morita had a great visual flair. Morita was especially adroit with the long telephoto lens, slow forward-backward zooming and color matching

shots." All in all, Fujio Morita was one of the last great Daiei cameramen, whose work was perfectly poised between film studio tradition and aesthetic innovation. Let us hope that his legacy will not be lost to the younger generations of DPs and directors, so as to allow them to make the kind of Japanese cinema that we all love, challenging in both its aesthetics and socio-historical commentary.

Robin Gatto is a French writer and translator mainly involved in subtitling for films, TV series and documentaries. A former video director, he has produced and edited numerous DVD featurettes about Japanese cinema and directors such as Kenji Misumi, Akira Kurosawa, Eiichi Kudō, Tomu Uchida and Mikio Naruse. His 52-minute documentary Lame d'un père, l'âme d'un sabre (2005) features among the extras of Criterion's Blu-ray special edition of Lone Wolf and Cub. *As a writer, he has authored* Hideo Gosha, cinéaste sans maître, *a book (in French) about the Japanese director Hideo Gosha; contributed to* Coffret L'Âge d'or du cinéma japonais 1935-1975 *(2016) a biographical book on Japanese directors edited by Pascal-Alex Vincent; and has also contributed several pieces, interviews and reviews to Midnighteye.com. His next projects include an English version of his French monograph on Hideo Gosha, with an introduction by Chris D.*

Special thanks to Seiichi Sakai, Fujio Morita, Yoshinobu Nishioka and Masaya Yamashita.



DAIMAJIN'S POP-CULTURE FOOTPRINTS (2021)

by Kevin Derendorf

Those that burn brightest often burn shortest, and at first glance that certainly seems to be the case with the Daimajin franchise, which released a whopping three films within the span of eight months, without a theatrical feature since. That was not, however, the end of things. Much like its titular giant, the titanic trilogy left an indelible aftermath, sinking into the popular consciousness and inspiring waves of imitators. Its own premise emerging from a blend of influences, combining an unmade *Gamera* sequel concept with Julien Duvivier's *The Golem* (1936) and Daiei's previous giant statue efforts in Kenji Misumi's *Buddha* (*Shaka*, 1961), *Daimajin*'s mythos created a new archetype for the *kaijū* genre, echoes of which can be seen in numerous following works, such as the giant Guan Yu in the Taiwanese science fiction monster movie *War God* (*Zhànshén*, 1976), the titular ancient guardian robot in the anime series *Giant Gorg* (1984), the enormous blue warrior Trismejistan in Toei's *Fatal Prediction* (*Daiyogen: Fukkatsu no kyojin*, 1992), the heroic deity Takemajin, voiced by Beat Takeshi in *The Monster X Strikes Back: Attack the G8 Summit* (*Girara no gyakushū: Tōyako samitto kiki ippatsu*, 2008), and arguably even the titular beast in the infamous North Korean production *Pulgasari* (1985). The two heavyweights of the *kaijū* genre have certainly aped Daimajin's style: Ultraman with monsters such as *Return of Ultraman*'s Kodaigon and *Ultraman Taro*'s Enmargo, and Godzilla with Gekido-jin in the 1992 comic *The Godzilla Color Special*. There's been some speculation as to how much the paradigm-setting super robot, Gō Nagai's *Mazinger Z*, owes to Daimajin, but certainly its 1984 spin-off *God Mazinger*, which replaces the robot with a living statue in a fantasy setting, invites comparison from critics both within Japan and abroad.

Daimajin permeates the culture outside the genre as well. Daimajin statues, constructed for the 2008 Edogawa boat race, greet visitors to Kadokawa Daiei Studios in Tokyo. International baseball star Kazuhiro Sasaki is known by the nickname for his scary face. Richard Woo & Kōji Kōno's police procedural manga about a burly, intimidating investigator is titled *Keibuho Daimajin* ("Assistant Inspector Daimajin"). Majin's been referenced in popular titles including *Ranma ½*, *Kinnikuman*, *Doraemon*, *Samurai Jack,* and *Aggretsuko*. In short, it's everywhere, including some unexpected appearances outside of the silver screen.

THE FIRST WAVE

The trilogy's contemporary apocryphal media was relatively typical for the movies of the mid-60s *kaijū* boom: Osamu Kishimoto adapted the original movie into manga for *Shōnen Hyundai*, while 'father of seinen manga' Shinji Nagashima adapted *Wrath of Daimajin* for *Shōnen King* and Hideo Baba (the manga author, not the video

game producer) adapted *Return of Daimajin* for *Shōnen Book*. There was an Asahi Sonorama record,[1] so kids could play audio from *Wrath of Daimajin* while looking at illustrated depictions of the film's events. Artists like Shōji Ōtomo, Yoshiyuki Takani, and others contributed Daimajin illustrations to several children's magazines and picture books, including a trademark anatomical drawing in *Saishin kaijū no subete* ("All of the Latest Monsters"), and Tatsuji Kajita's legendary two-page spread of Majin's deathmatch against Godzilla in *Shōnen King*. In terms of the character's wider popular influence in 1966, of special note is the 16th chapter of 'king of manga' Shōtarō Ishinomori's series *Mutant Sabu*, which features the heroes battling a giant robot nearly identical to Majin in appearance.

The advent of television was a double-edged sword. Though it drummed up interest (particularly in what would become the *kaijū* boom), it also saturated the market and drew away talent, making it difficult for theatrical films to compete. While able to support lavish productions in the mid-1960s, Daiei was only five years away from bankruptcy, and it's notable that both *Zatōichi* and *Sleepy Eyes of Death* (*Nemuri Kyōshirō*) diversified their franchises with TV series to keep afloat. Perhaps sensing that this was the future of things, Daiei approached *Gamera* director Noriaki Yuasa and *Ultraman* scribe Mamoru Sasaki about helming a *Daimajin* TV series sometime after the third movie was released. They turned it down,[2] which may have been the ultimate cause of the franchise's long hibernation after a brief, intense career. The studio's label of *Tokusatsu jidaigeki* ("special effects period pieces"), which Daimajin originated from, then shifted to the *Yōkai Monsters* franchise instead, exploiting a contemporary boom of horror riding the new *Gegege no Kitarō* anime, and eventually ended with 1970's *The Invisible Swordsman* (*Tōmei kenshi*) just prior to Daiei's bankruptcy.

THE RETURN

Hints of Daimajin's pop-culture revival began in the 1980s, when, as is often the case, the kids who grew up with the property in the 1960s entered adulthood and began creating content themselves. It was a gradual build, but each step added to the buzz. In 1979 Daimajin appeared alongside other iconic monsters in a TV special titled *Kaijū Quiz*. In 1981 the first movie was issued on home video, and Japan's premier science fiction magazine *Uchūsen* ran a cover story on the trilogy (for comparison, Godzilla did not grace their cover until 1989). Other VHS and laserdisc releases followed, then a novelization of the trilogy by Nashio Kitani, and by 1984 there were already plans of a remake swirling, directed by none other than the original 1954 *Godzilla*'s Ishirō Honda,[3] thanks to the renewed interest in the genre surrounding *Return of Godzilla* (1984).

However, at the same time, depictions of Daimajin were getting stranger. For example, "Locker Inspections", the 117th chapter of Rumiko Takahashi's hit science fiction sitcom manga *Urusei Yatsura*, was released in 1982. In the story, the alien princess character Lum has purchased the golem as a personal assistant, using it to carry her books to school for her. Since this Daimajin was created primarily for combat, it becomes restless simply waiting in the schoolyard for Lum's classes to be let out, and decides to help some frustrated students in their own battle against the school's faculty. As with every chapter of *Urusei Yatsura*, hijinks ensue. The story was adapted for television as the 162nd episode of the *Urusei Yatsura* TV series "Daimajin Appears! Lum's Dangerous Purchase!?" in 1985 and appears to be a popular one with the fandom, inspiring self-published *dōjinshi* comics even into the 2010s.

1 - Originally Asahi Sonopress, the publishing division of Asahi Shimbunsha gained so much popularity for its monthly *Asahi Sonorama* magazine (which included tapes and flexi disc phonographs to complement their written/illustrated content) that in 1966 the entire company's name was changed to Asahi Sonorama, operating under that name until 2007. The word is a portmanteau of the Latin *sonus* ("sound"), and the Greek *horama* ("vision").
2 - Karasawa, Shunichi. *Gamera Sōsei-ki Eiga Kantoku: Yuasa Noriaki* (Tokyo: Enterbrain, 2006) pp. 216-217.
3 - Ryfle, Steve, and Ed Godziszewski. *Ishiro Honda: A Life in Film, from Godzilla to Kurosawa* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 2017) pp. 285-286

A more obscure but longer-lasting manga outing was *Daimajin-kun*, written and drawn by Shōtarō Ishinomori's student Jō Azuchi (AKA Shizuo Kanayama) for the short-lived manga anthology *Super BomBom*, across five chapters between 1987 and 1988.[4] The gag comic parodies superhero tropes and features a human-sized juvenile Majin in modern day, with a squat physique resembling Gō Nagai's Ghastly Prince Enma character. There was also an unrelated manga by the same title from prolific *tokusatsu* comicalizer Minoru Nonaka in *Televi Land* in 1984, but magazine copies are long out of print, so details remain elusive. The same year, Daimajin made an appearance visiting Godzilla at the hospital in a Godzilla gag comic by *Osomatsu-kun* creator Fujio Akatsuka, and an uncredited artist did an adaptation of the original *Daimajin* film (in a rather flowery *shōjo* style) for the anthology *SF Kaijū Daihyakka* ("SF Monster Encyclopedia").

In 1986, the sketch comedy program *What a Fantastic Night!* (*Konya wa saikō!*), the same show which had previously done the famous Godzilla/Mothra mashup "Modzilla" featuring Akihiko Hirata and Yoshiko Tanaka, introduced a recurring character of "Daimajinko", which was host Tamori in a Daimajin costume, complete with the comedian's trademark aviator sunglasses. The character's gag revolved around a typical monster entrance, stomping the countryside to Akira Ifukube's music, then he would introduce himself using the cadence of a bubbly teenage pop star. Daimajinko would sing and dance to songs like 'Daimajin Love' and interact with the various celebrities that came on the show, such as actress Keiko Takeshita, musical group Checkers, and kabuki star Kichiemon Nakamura (who donned the Daimajin costume).[5] There was even a crossover with another 'majin' when Kyūsaku Shimada appeared on the show in character as Yasunori Katō to promote *Tokyo: The Last Megalopolis* (*Teitō monogatari*, 1988).[6] Funnily enough, those two characters would meet again decades later across the globe, in English author Kim Newman's 2017 novel *One Thousand Monsters*, the fifth entry in the pop-culture purée of the *Anno Dracula* series.

The confluence of burgeoning *otaku* culture, new technology, and the bubble economy saw a boom of independent filmmaking in 1980s Japan, and, in the absence of proper studio outings, many fans took it upon themselves to create lavish, high-quality amateur films celebrating their favorite old properties, including Hideaki Anno's *Return of Ultraman* (*Kaettekita Ultraman*, 1983), Shizuo Nakajima's *Wolf Man vs. Godzilla* (*Ōkami otoko tai Godzilla,* 1983), and Minoru Kawasaki's *Espalaser* (1983). A standout from this movement was Masahiko Kattō, whose studio Kattō Productions was particularly known for professional-grade independent features, and pinnacle among those, his 1988 picture *Resurrection of Daimajin (Daimajin fukkatsu),*
stands apart as one of Japanese cinema's most impressive fan works. The ninety-minute feature took Kattō three years to complete with an unprecedented 6-million-yen budget [7] (over twice that of Shinpei Hayashiya's much-lauded 2003 *Gamera 4* fan film), with a twelve-meter Daimajin rampaging through modern buildings for the first time. (The plot involves Majin time traveling to 1987 in search of a miscreant who escaped his wrath.) While the miniature work is quite strong, the film has never been issued on home video for copyright reasons.

THE REBOOT...?

The economic bubble saw the character being used to sell more grown-up products, such as Toyota's automobiles or Suntory's alcohol (leveraging the pun "DaimaGIN"); even consumer electronics magazine *Technopolis* had him host an issue. With such undeniable brand value, it behooved Daiei (and later Kadokawa) to look into proper reboots for the character, and over the 90s and 2000s many projects fell through, including a Golden Harvest

4 - "Daimajin-kun." *Mangaseek*. 2017. https://mangaseek.net/work/56020.html (2 March 2021)
5 - 'Kaiko Shugi ~"Konya wa Saikō" no Heroine! "Daimajin-ko"-chan (by Tamori)' in *Keibundo Himajin Nikki* (https://plaza.rakuten.co.jp/sagaenokeibun/diary/200608080000/, 2006)
6 - Xmbhwfqdx. (2020, Feb 29) [Tweet]. https://twitter.com/xmbhwfqdx/status/1233720121832529921
7 - 'Daimajin no Tsuiseki' in *Zanburonzo no Kaijin Nikki* (http://blog.livedoor.jp/kabutoganienji/archives/50598702.html, 2006)

co-production starring Kevin Costner,[8] an attempt with the Heisei *Gamera* director Shūsuke Kaneko, a version by *Akira*'s Katsuhiro Ōtomo,[9] and a Takashi Miike reboot announced in the wake of his *Yōkai Monsters* relaunch *The Great Yokai War* (*Yōkai Daisensō*, 2005).[10] These remain mysterious, but we did get to see a 1999 treatment for star Ken Ogata (with Steven Seagal!) by award-winning science-fiction novelist Yasutaka Tsutsui (*Paprika*, *The Girl Who Leapt through Time*), which was published in 2000, and again in 2001 and 2016, with illustrations by *Blade of the Immortal*'s Hiroaki Samura and *Shin Godzilla*'s Katsuya Terada. Despite the allegedly more modern take on the story, it retained the Sengoku-era setting and didn't stray far from the source material.

A delightful side effect of the Tsutsui treatment was that the author hired to work on its (cancelled) novelization, Hirofumi Tanaka, was pretty much given no guidelines, so he could write whatever he pleased.[11] Filing away his concept for many years (and whetting audience appetites with his 2002 short "The Secret Memoir of the Missionary - Prologue" [12]), he eventually published *Daimajin Denki* ("Daimajin Legend") in 2015 as part of Sōdosha's *Cthulhu Mythos Files* imprint. After a prologue in which missionary Francis Xavier comes to Japan under the influence of an ancient Lovecraftian horror, the bulk of the novel's events take place against a backdrop of the Shimbara Rebellion, a Christian uprising that should be familiar to fans of Kinji Fukasaku's *Samurai Reincarnation* (*Makai tenshō*, 1981) or the video game *Samurai Shodown*, with mytho-historic figures based on Shirō Amakusa, Jūbei Yagyū, and Musashi Miyamoto rounding out the cast. The result is the titular stone deity battling against an invading western interloper (i.e. Cthulhu) in a multifaceted historical crossover which should appeal to fans of literary mashups like *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* or *Anno Dracula*.

In terms of proper suitmation, though, the closest we got in the 1990s is an oft-overlooked performance by Atelier Koganemushi, the puppet theater troupe now widely known for the popular Godzilla YouTube series *Godziban*. A full Daimajin costume was produced, in the troupe's trademark adorable aesthetic, as a mascot character for a 1997 exhibit on the original's modeler Ryōsaku Takayama. As with much of Koganemushi's early live stage-show output, not much remains, but one photo of the suit itself can be viewed from when it was reused for a prefectural festival the following year. [13]

KANON AND BEYOND

There was eventually a reboot that stuck, when Kadokawa put Shigenori Takatera in a producer role, the same man who had revitalized the *Kamen Rider* franchise a decade prior with *Kamen Rider Kuuga* (2000-2001). Takatera came up with a number of concepts, such as the inclusion of *yōkai* and music (major elements of his *Kamen Rider Hibiki* [2005-2006]), and Kadokawa mandated that the project should appeal to a female audience (based on the success of the 2006 *The Girl Who Leapt Through Time* [Toki o kakeru shōjo]), so a female protagonist was decided upon. An unusual approach, the reboot's initial draft was done by character designer Konami Suzuki as a manga titled *Daimajin musume*,[14] which was kept internal to the studio rather than being published to drum up hype for the project.

8 - 'Daiei's Idol of Terror: DAIMAJIN, THE AVENGING GOD' in *SciFi Japan* (https://www.scifijapan.com/articles/2006/12/26/daieis-idol-of-terror-daimajin-the-avenging-god/, 2006)
9 - LeMay, John. *The Big Book of Japanese Giant Monster Movies: The Lost Films: Mutated Edition* (Roswell: Bicep Books, 2019) pp.328
10 - 'A DOUBLE DOSE OF TAKASHI MIIKE NEWS' in *SciFi Japan*. (https://www.scifijapan.com/articles/2006/06/07/a-double-dose-of-takashi-miike/, 2006)
11 - Tanaka, Hirofumi. *Daimajin Denki* (Tokyo: Sōdosha, 2015), pp. 346
12 - The short story is available in English in the third *Lairs of the Hidden Gods* book from Kurodahan Press.
13 - G-zanika. (2020, March 22) [Tweet]. https://twitter.com/g_zanika/status/1241638065392631816
14 - 'DAIMAJIN KANON: The Complete Series Guide' in *SciFi Japan* (https://www.scifijapan.com/articles/2012/11/05/daimajin-kanon-the-complete-series-guide/, 2012)

The end product was the TV series *Daimajin Kanon*, which debuted on 2nd April 2010, one full year after its announcement.[15] The 26-episode show was a big deal; it was one of the most expensive programs ever produced in Japan, costing the same as a high-budget movie or four-to-five typical late-night dramas combined. However, it's also very unconventional as a *tokusatsu* series, and thus failed to gather much fan following, despite some excellent effects work from industry veteran Toshio Miike. Set in modern day, the show follows Kanon Misaki (Yuka Rikuna), a girl from a small mountain town who's moved to Tokyo. She's severely depressed after the boy she dated not only dumped her, but also stole her family's traditional folk song for his own rock band, making something personal to her a ubiquitous pop culture hit. Kanon has vowed to never sing again, but a ragtag group of *yōkai* (who can transform like a sort of pseudo-*sentai* team) approach her to try to get her out of her funk, as Kanon's song is the key to reviving the ancient mountain god Bujin (meaning "warrior"), the only being that can defeat evil spirits which have been reawakening lately. The program is tonally in line with most J-drama (with a large dose of comedy relief), and, consistent with the Daimajin movies, the title god really doesn't show up until the very end, which may be frustrating for those watching for a weekly *kaijū* fix. On top of not appearing until the final few episodes, one could argue that Bujin isn't very Daimajin-like: echoing Kanon, he too is depressed at the way humanity has treated him, which he relates through speech (unlike his silent theatrical counterpart). The show was accompanied by a multimedia blitz including figures, photobooks, soundtracks, and a manga adaptation by Seijurō Mizu, which can now be obtained inexpensively on secondary markets.

The following decade was quiet for Daimajin, and for the time being, it seems the brand is relatively dormant. But, perhaps, with enough prayers, the sleeping franchise will someday awaken again, to burst forth and rampage across the pop culture zeitgeist.

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15 - The Japanese fiscal year starts on 1st April, so it's a popular date for big announcements (such as when Hideaki Anno was announced as director for *Shin Godzilla*). It's also April Fool's Day, which makes parsing news difficult at times.

ABOUT THE TRANSFERS

Daimajin, *Return of Daimajin* / *Daimajin ikaru* and *Wrath of Daimajin* / *Daimajin gyakushū* are presented in their original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with mono sound. The High-Definition masters were produced and supplied by Kadokowa, with additional grading and restoration by Arrow Films at R3Store Studios.

Additional English language version materials for *Majin, the Monster of Terror* (*Daimajin*) and *The Return of the Giant Majin* (*Return of Daimajin*) for were sourced from MGM. The picture elements were scanned at Company 3 and audio transfer work was completed at Deluxe Media, Los Angeles. Grading and restoration and audio work was completed at R3Store Studios and The Engine House Media Services.

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MGM:
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Deluxe:
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Technical Producer **James White**
Disc Production Manager **Nora Mehenni**
QC **Alan Simmons**
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **Engine House Media Services**
Artist **Matt Frank**
Design **Scott Saslow**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Keith Aiken, Sarah Appleton, Jonathan Clements, Raffael Coronelli, Kevin Derendorf, Matt Frank, Stuart Galbraith IV, Robin Gatto, Ed Godziszewski, Bill Gudmundson, Erik Homenick, Masaki Karatsu, Matt Kennedy, Tom Mes, Kayoko Nakanishi, Kim Newman, Yoneo Ota, Steve Ryfle, Yukiko Wachi (Kawakita Memorial Film Institute)