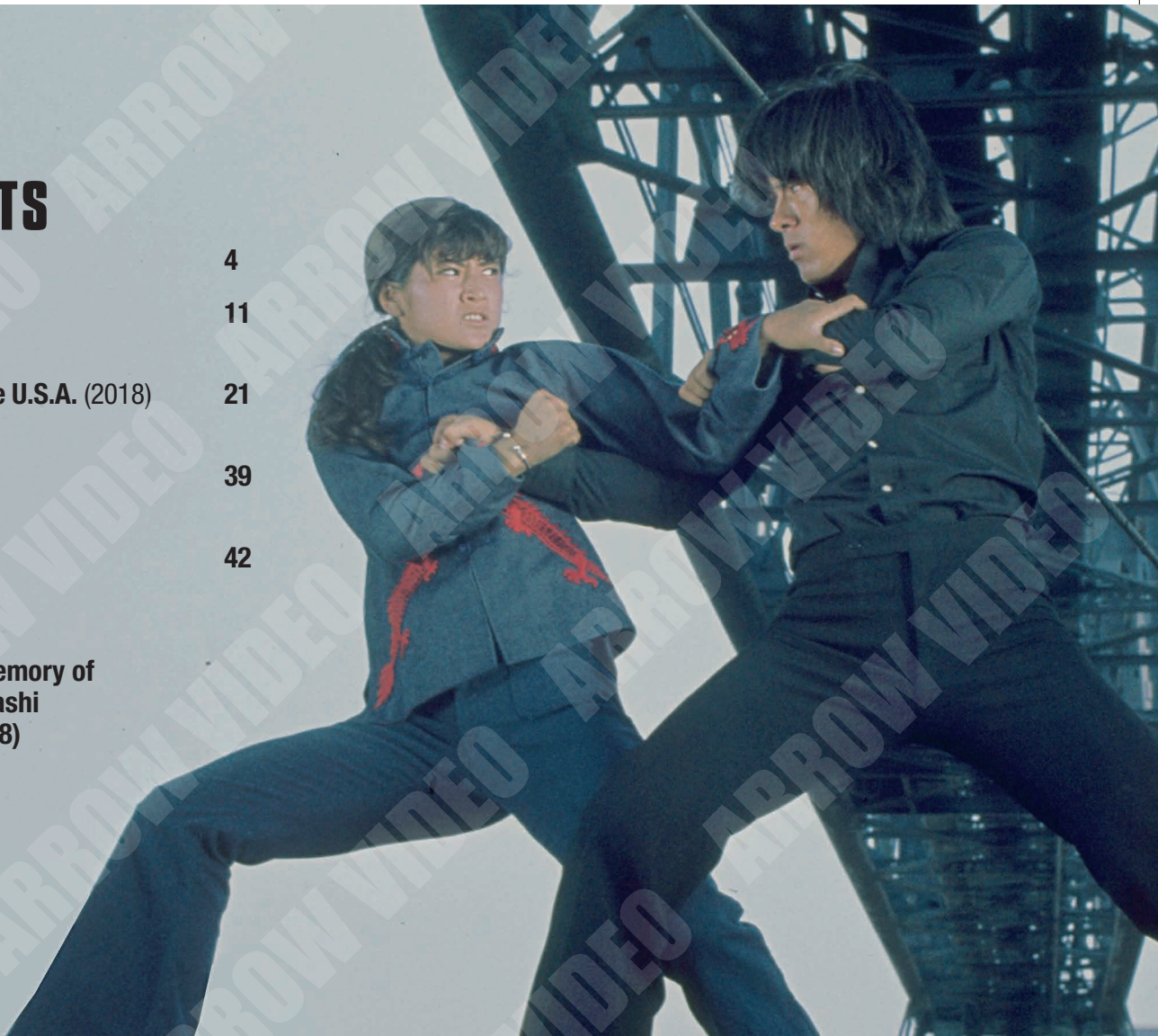




# CONTENTS

<b>Film Credits</b>	4
<b>The Legend of Lady Karate (2018)</b> by Patrick Macias	11
<b>Made in Japan – and Reborn in the U.S.A. (2018)</b> by Chris Poggiali	21
<b>Etsuko Shihomi Biography (2018)</b> by Patrick Macias	39
<b>About the Transfers</b>	42

Dedicated to the memory of  
**Masashi Ishibashi**  
(1933 — 2018)



## SISTER STREET FIGHTER

女必殺拳  
*Onna hissatsu-ken*

Original release date: 31 August 1974  
86 minutes

### CAST

Koryu Lee: **Etsuko Shihomi**  
Kenichi Hibiki: **Shinichi Chiba**  
Kakuzaki: **Bin Amatsu**  
Inubashiri: **Masashi Ishibashi**  
Hayashi: **Shohei Yamamoto**  
Gyokudo Lee: **Hiroshi Kondo**  
Jiro: **Tatsuya Nanjo**  
Reiko: **Nami Tachibana**  
Fang Shing: **Xiu-rong Xie**  
Fujita-sensei: **Asao Uchida**  
Emi Hayakawa: **herself**

Shinobu Kojo: **Sanae Ohori**  
Mansei Lee: **Hiroshi Miyauchi**  
Spingel: **Kazuyuki Saito**  
Tettoso: **Hisao Mizoguchi**  
Tesshin Uezu: **Ryoichi Koike**  
Neray: **Akira Kuji**  
Eva Parrish: **herself**  
The Amazon Seven: **themselves**  
Ba-yuan Ma: **Toshio Minami**  
Akazawa: **Takashi (aka Koji) Hio**

### CREW

Directed by **Kazuhiko Yamaguchi**  
Screenplay by **Norifumi Suzuki, Masahiro Kakefuda**  
Produced by **Kineo Yoshimine, Kenji Takamura**  
Director of Photography **Yoshio Nakajima**  
Lighting by **Hideo Motomochi**  
Audio Recording by **Shudo Nagai**  
Production Design by **Shuichiro Nakamura**  
Music by **Shunsuke Kikuchi**  
Edited by **Osamu Tanaka**  
Action Director **Takashi (aka Koji) Hio**  
Assistant Director **Hideki Fukamachi**

## SISTER STREET FIGHTER: HANGING BY A THREAD

女必殺拳 危機一発  
*Onna hissatsu-ken – kiki ippatsu*

Original release date: 7 December 1974  
85 minutes

### CAST

Koryu Lee: **Etsuko Shihomi**  
Shunsuke Tsubaki: **Yasuaki Kurata**  
Kazunari Osone: **Hideo Murota**  
Inoichiro Honiden: **Masashi Ishibashi**  
Akaushi Sai: **Riki Harada**  
Kidai Sha: **Toshiyuki Tsuchiyama**  
Enmei Oh: **Hideaki Nagai**  
Birei Oh: **Hisako Tanaka**  
Ko Byaku: **Kinya Tsukasa**  
Chozaburo Honiden: **Daikyo Rin**  
Kuroki: **Koji Fujiyama**

Nezu: **Takashi (aka Koji) Hio**  
Byakuran Lee: **Tamayo Mitsukawa**  
Kohinata: **Gozo Soma**  
Landlord: **Hachiro Tako**  
Shikajiro Honiden: **Kazuyuki Saito**  
Dr. Sugano: **Shohei Yamamoto**  
Mayumi: **Madame Joy**  
Fujita-sensei: **Asao Uchida**  
King Hessian: **Shunsuke Kariya**  
Nijinosuke Mayuzumi: **Osamu Kaneda**  
Warrior from the mountains: **Rikiya Yasuoka**

### CREW

Directed by **Kazuhiko Yamaguchi**  
Screenplay by **Norifumi Suzuki, Masahiro Kakefuda**  
Produced by **Kineo Yoshimine, Kenji Takamura**  
Director of Photography **Yoshio Nakajima**  
Lighting by **Kenzo Ginya**  
Audio Recording by **Tadayuki Komatsu**  
Production Design by **Shuichiro Nakamura**  
Music by **Shunsuke Kikuchi**  
Edited by **Hiroshi Suzuki**  
Action Director **Takashi (aka Koji) Hio**  
Assistant Director **Akihisa Okamoto**

## RETURN OF THE SISTER STREET FIGHTER

帰ってきた女必殺拳  
*Kaette kita onna hissatsu-ken*

Original release date: 30 August 1975  
77 minutes

### CAST

Koryu Lee: **Etsuko Shihomi**  
Takeshi Kurosaki: **Yasuaki Kurata**  
Ryu-mei Oh: **Rinichi Yamamoto**  
Hebikura: **Masashi Ishibashi**  
Sho: **Jiro Chiba**  
Fuha: **Takashi (aka Koji) Hio**

Michi: **Mitchi Love**  
Reika: **Miwa Cho**  
Shurei: **Akane Kawasaki**  
Killer in red uniform: **Myoshin Hayakawa**  
(aka Chen Lee)  
Samezu: **Riki Harada**

### CREW

Directed by **Kazuhiko Yamaguchi**  
Screenplay by **Takeo Kaneko, Masahiro Kakafuda**  
Produced by **Kineo Yoshimine**  
Director of Photography **Masahiko Iimura**  
Lighting by **Shigeru Umetani**  
Audio Recording by **Hiroyoshi Munakata**  
Production Design by **Hiroshi Kitagawa**  
Music by **Shunsuke Kikuchi**  
Edited by **Hiroshi Suzuki**  
Action Director **Takashi (aka Koji) Hio**  
Assistant Director **Shunichi Kajima**

## SISTER STREET FIGHTER: FIFTH LEVEL FIST

女必殺五段拳  
*Onna hissatsu godan-ken*

Original release date: 29 May 1976  
77 minutes

### CAST

Kiku Nakagawa: **Etsuko Shihomi**  
Shuji Takagi: **Tsunehiko Watase**  
Fujiyama: **Nobuo Kawai**  
Katbara: **Akira Shioji**  
Takeo Nakagawa: **Masafumi Suzuki**  
Ippei: **Iwao Tabuchi**  
Film director: **Eiji Minakata**  
Miyamoto: **Hiroshi Tanaka**  
Kudo: **Ryuji Katagiri**

Mr. Spencer: **Claude Gagnon**  
Michi: **Mitchi Love**  
Jim: **Ken Wallace**  
Security guard: **Yoshiki Yamada**  
Professor Douglas: **Tony Cetera**  
Dan Shirai: **Hal Gold**  
Aya: **Masako Araki**  
Osawa: **Shunji Sasaki**

### CREW

Directed by **Shigehiro Ozawa**  
Screenplay by **Motohiro Torii, Isao Matsumoto, Seiko Shimura**  
Produced by **Norimichi Matsudaira**  
Director of Photography **Sakuji Shiomi**  
Lighting by **Koji Inoue**  
Audio Recording by **Koichi Ito**  
Production Design by **Yoshikazu Sano**  
Music by **Hajime Ueshiba**  
Edited by **Isamu Ichida**  
Assistant Director **Hideo Suzuki**



# THE LEGEND OF LADY KARATE

by PATRICK MACIAS

## SISTER STREET FIGHTER

Dubbed or subbed, presented in state of the art high-definition or simply screened in a flea-bit grindhouse (as it is in Quentin Tarantino's script for *True Romance* [1993]) makes no difference. *Sister Street Fighter* (*Onna hissatsu-ken*, literally "Lady Killing Fist," 1974) is a classic of '70s exploitation cinema. It's not just the liberal helpings of sex and violence that make it so...although they certainly help. Sure, there are lots of sleazy bits and surreal bursts of comic book villainy (that guy with the mohawk, the "Amazon Seven" girl hit squad, and the entire plot of smuggling heroin using wigs) but such things are contrasted with the fierce and stoic spirit of self-discipline, typified by the Shorinji Kempo martial arts seen in the film. Holding it all together is the electrifying debut lead performance of Japan's first, and to date, only female action icon: Etsuko Shihomi.

But before *Sister*, there was *The Street Fighter* (*Gekitotsu! Satsujin-ken*, 1974) featuring Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba. Already an action star for his "Key Hunter" TV series (1968-1973), Chiba had officially kicked off the age of the Japanese karate movie with a pair of *Bodyguard Kiba* features for Toei studios in 1973. His *Street Fighter* films that quickly followed, in which Sonny played ultimate anti-hero Takuma "Terry" Tsurugi, turned-up the violence and gore in martial arts films to historic new levels. The original *Street Fighter* was the first film to be branded with an X-rating when released in the US for violence alone.

During the early '70s, as television threatened to woo audiences away and Japanese studios struggled for survival, Toei's output consisted mainly of pairings of yakuza films (such as the *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* series, *Jingi naki tatakai*, 1973-74), sexploitation (like the *Girl Boss* films, *Sukeban*, 1971-74), and revenge flicks (including the *Female Prisoner Scorpion* series, *Joshu Sasori*, 1972-73). Chiba's first two *Street Fighter* films turned out to be modest hits, so the studio sought to create even more action titles to add to their program picture double-bills. Specifically, they wanted a *Street Fighter* spin-off that would showcase a female lead with Chiba in a supporting role (note that he does not reprise his Tsurugi character from the earlier films).

Toei's first pick was Taiwanese-born Angela Mao, a veteran of numerous Hong Kong action films who had previously played Bruce Lee's sister in *Enter the Dragon* (1973). But when



the studio found out Mao was unavailable, a new lead actress had to be found fast. Sonny Chiba personally recommended one of the star pupils of his Japan Action Club stunt training school, Etsuko Shihomi. The 18-year-old Shihomi had only been featured in bit parts in film and television before, so the choice was something of a risk. But Shihomi rose to the occasion, rigorously training in Shorinji Kempo in preparation for her role and performing all of her own stunts.

There were some last minute switches among the staff as well. *Sister Street Fighter* was originally to have been directed by Norifumi Suzuki, who wrote the film's screenplay in conjunction with long-time collaborator Masahiro Kakefuda. Suzuki had previously written numerous scripts for actress Junko Fujii's *Red Peony Gambler* series (*Hibotan bakuto*, 1968-1972). He imagined *Sister Street Fighter* as a modern take on female gambler period films, which featured a beautiful woman righting wrongs with violence, but only when necessary. Suzuki had been a director since the mid-60s, but had only recently relocated from Toei's Kyoto branch to its Tokyo facilities. It was eventually decided that a Tokyo regular should handle the film instead. (In 1975, Suzuki would finally collaborate with Chiba and company on *The Killing Machine*, aka *Shaolin Karate*, *Shorinji kempo*).

The job of directing *Sister Street Fighter* instead went to Kazuhiko Yamaguchi, who had made his directorial debut at Toei in 1970, frantically grinding out four *Delinquent Girl Boss* (*Zubeko bancho*, 1970-71) pictures within one year. *Sister Street Fighter* would be Yamaguchi's first martial arts film, and far from his last. In addition to handling three films in the series, he would direct six more karate films for Toei within a three year span, including five with Chiba.

Scant months after it first went into production, *Sister Street Fighter* debuted on August 31, 1974, as part of a double bill with the yakuza comedy *Gokudo vs. Mamushi*. Toei was ahead of the game, however, and had already ordered the staff and cast back into the trenches to deliver a new *Sister Street Fighter* film in time for Christmas.

The original *Sister Street Fighter* would appear on US screens when New Line Cinema released it in 1976 in the wake of their success with Chiba's *Street Fighter* films. The English dub was supervised by actor Peter Fernandez, who performed similar duties for the "Speed Racer" (*Mahha go-go-go*, 1967-68) and the "Ultraman" (*Urutoraman*, 1972) TV series. "She's a one woman death squad," screamed the posters, which re-christened its star "Sue Shiomi." Another baffling alteration was the unfortunate trimming of over five minutes of violence and gore.

But no matter how you cut it, you now hold in your hands a collection of stone cold karate classics: the *Sister Street Fighter* Collection!

## SISTER STREET FIGHTER: HANGING BY A THREAD

Toei Studio sure made 'em fast in those days...

*Sister Street Fighter* hadn't even opened yet in the summer of 1974 and director Kazuhiko Yamaguchi had no time to catch his breath. In an interview with "Movie Treasures" magazine he remembered, "The minute I'd wrapped on the first one, they told me 'we need a big New Year's, so make a second!'" Along with director Yamaguchi and screenwriters Norifumi Suzuki and Masahiro Kakefuda, many of the original staff came back to lend their talents to the new production, *Sister Street Fighter: Hanging By a Thread* (*Onna hissatsuken - kiki Ippatsu*, 1974), once again rallying around rising star Etsuko Shihomi in the lead.

However, one major absence in *Hanging By a Thread* would be the original *Street Fighter* himself, Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba. Having helped launch his protégé Shihomi's new series, Chiba was off to make more sequels of his own including *The Streetfighter's Last Revenge* (*Gyakushu! Satsujin-ken*) and *The Executioner 2* (aka *Karate Inferno*, *Chokugeki jigoku-ken - dai gyakuten*), two of seven titles to feature Chiba in 1974.

But the new film did not lack for martial arts action one bit. In addition to the return of real-life karate master Masashi Ishibashi (who had also tormented Chiba in the original *Street Fighter* films) as the villainous Honiden, Yasuaki Kurata now entered the saga as lone wolf Tsubaki. Hailing from Ibaraki prefecture, Kurata had begun his career in martial arts cinema by appearing in numerous Hong Kong and Taiwanese pictures, such as *The King of Boxers* (1972) and *One by One* (1973), before returning to Japan to co-star in Chiba's *The Executioner* (*Chokugeki! Jigoku-ken*, 1974). In addition to co-starring in the second and third films in the *Sister Street Fighter* series, Kurata would also do a turn in Yamaguchi's astonishing *Which is Stronger, Karate or Tiger?* (aka *The Tiger's Claw*, *Butoh-ken - moko gekisatsu*, 1976), in which he tangled with a real-life Bengal tiger! Kurata survived the battle and continued to star in Asian action films including *Eastern Condors* (1987), *Fist of Legend* (1994), and Corey Yuen's *So Close* (2002). He also currently runs his own martial arts school in Japan, the Kurata Action Club.

If anything, *Hanging By a Thread* seems to increase the amount of crazed sex and violence from the first *Sister Street Fighter* film. Diamonds are ingeniously smuggled via women's behinds, people tend to lose their eyes in awful ways, and two of the main villains include a transvestite – played by "Madame Joy" – and a guy with a parrot on his shoulder (the same gang, bird and all, had previously appeared in Hideo Gosha's *Violent Streets* [*Boryoku-gai*, 1974]). It must have made for a woozy double feature with the yakuza picture *Escaped*

*Murderer from Hiroshima Prison (Datsugoku – Hiroshima satsujin-shu)* when released, just in time for the holidays, on December 7, 1974.

There wouldn't be another *Sister Street Fighter* film until the following summer, but the hard working staff and cast were soon back on the Toei treadmill. Etsuko Shihomi was becoming a fast-rising star at the studio and was off to headline two new features, *The 13 Steps of Maki (Wakai kizokutachi – 13-kaidan no Maki, 1975)*, for which she also sang the theme song, and *The Great Chase (Karei-naru tsuiseki, 1975)*. Meanwhile, director Yamaguchi would ring in the New Year with the erotic-horror picture *Haunted Cat of the Turkish Bath (Kaibyo Turco-buro, 1975)*, which was produced in a single whirlwind month.

## RETURN OF THE SISTER STREET FIGHTER

It's hard not to notice that a certain kind of formula has firmly taken hold while watching the last official film in the *Sister Street Fighter* series, *Return of the Sister Street Fighter (Kaette kita onna hissatsu-ken, 1975)*.

As in previous films in the series, there's an opening sequence in Hong Kong just before our heroine Koryu (Etsuko Shihomi once again) is off to Japan to find a missing person. Soon, she's up against a pack of cruel and unusual villains who like classical music and who seem to have watched *Enter the Dragon* a few too many times. After delirious detours into strip clubs and enemy hideouts, it all builds up to a final battle with an unexpected ally in our heroine's corner. Am I complaining? Not one bit. This is the final curtain call of everything that made the *Sister Street Fighter* series great. And, really, who can blame the filmmakers, who were working on a brutal two-week shooting schedule, for leaning on all that's come before?

Adding to the sense of déjà vu in *Return* is the recasting of several familiar faces in new parts. Yasuaki Kurata, formerly in *Hanging By a Thread*, plays yet another lone wolf part, here named Kurosaki. Meanwhile, Masashi Ishibashi, who previously tormented Shihomi in the first two entries, now inexplicably appears as a cross between Lee Van Cleef's Sabata character and a tarot card-packing 42nd street pimp. But what's really changed is the sheer amount of screen presence generated by Etsuko Shihomi. Thrown into the spotlight while still in her teens for the first *Sister Street Fighter* film, Shihomi now radiates confidence, her martial arts skills sharpened by numerous turns in front of the camera. Upon *Return*'s release in Japan in the summer of 1975, highly respected film critic Sadao Yamane proclaimed that its star was "becoming more and more beautiful with each movie. Maybe it's the pressure of having to carry such films that causes her to shine even brighter with

each outing." He wasn't just referring to a pretty face either. Yamane concluded, "Shihomi is beautiful the way an older sister is when protecting her younger siblings."

Speaking of younger siblings, Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba's brother Jiro appears in *Return* during the Hong Kong sequence as Sho, although he is quickly shuffled out of the film. Despite supporting parts in numerous martial arts titles for Toei Studio, Jiro Chiba never really emerged from his more famous brother's shadow, although he did finally secure a martial arts lead of his own in 1975's *The Power of Aikido (Gekitotsu! Aikido)*.

Following *Return of the Sister Street Fighter*'s release in August 1975, director Kazuhiko Yamaguchi would soon embark on a new trilogy of films starring Chiba, dramatizing (in their own unique way) the life of the founder of Kyokushin Karate, Masutatsu "Mas" Oyama (1923-1994). *Karate Bull Fighter* (aka *Champion of Death, Kenka karate – kyokushin-ken, 1975*), *Karate Bear Fighter* (*Kenka karate – kyokushin burai-ken, 1975*), and *Karate for Life (Karate baka ichidai, 1977)* form a loose trilogy detailing episodes in Oyama's semi-legendary life. In between these titles, Yamaguchi and Chiba would also deliver the semi-official, fourth *Street Fighter* film with *Karate Warriors (Kozure satsujin-ken, 1976)*. As for the increasingly popular Etsuko Shihomi, she and Jiro Chiba would be reunited for *The Power of Aikido* before she brought it all home in 1976 with the final, unofficial entry in her signature series.

## SISTER STREET FIGHTER: FIFTH LEVEL FIST

As befitting a film whose posters exclaimed, "Shihomi's karate will soar across the world!" *Sister Street Fighter: Fifth Level Fist (Onna hissatsu godan-ken, 1976)* is a bit of an odd bird. A sequel in name only, *Fifth Level Fist* does away with the characters and continuity of the first three *Sister Street Fighter* films and instead swerves continually between comedy and tragedy with large sections of dialogue spoken by an international cast in English. Without the overtly grotesque touches that marked the core films (like gratuitous nudity and nut job karate killers right out of a comic book) the movie seems to be on a quest to incriminate the very studio that produced it. Toei's Kyoto facilities, the home of many classic Japanese period films and television programs, actually doubles here as the front for an international drug smuggling ring!

The break with the established tone is likely due to the changing of the guard behind the scenes. While previous director Kazuhiko Yamaguchi was off making more films with Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba, Shigehiro Ozawa took over the reins for *Fifth Level Fist*. Ozawa had been a director at Toei since 1954, just three years after the studio's formation. In addition to delivering a pioneering Japanese action film in 1956 with *Get Angry! Rikidozan (Okore!*



*Rikidozan*), Ozawa helmed numerous period and chivalrous yakuza titles during the 1960's. While never a top name director, Ozawa certainly made an impact in 1974 with his original *Street Fighter* film, which helped to make Chiba an international martial arts superstar. He also directed and co-scripted the sequels *Return of the Street Fighter (Satsujin-ken 2, 1974)* and *The Streetfighter's Last Revenge* prior to *Fifth Level Fist*. Sadly this would be the last theatrical film he would direct. Ozawa passed away in 2004.

Aside from the somewhat misleading title and Etsuko Shihomi in the lead, there are a few remaining ties connecting *Fifth Level Fist* to the first three *Sister Street Fighter* films. One of them is actress Mitchi Love, who plays two entirely different characters named "Michi" in both *Return* and *Fifth Level Fist*. Born in Okinawa to American and Japanese parents, Love was, like Shihomi, a graduate of Sonny Chiba's Japan Action Club stunt training school, but Love's acting career played out mainly on TV. In 1977, she put on a pair of red hot pants and essayed the role of "Heart Queen" for the proto-Power Rangers superhero show "J.A.K.Q. Dengekitai" (aka "Jacker Blitzkrieg Squad," *Jakka dengekita!*) and was also seen in Toei's infamous live-action "Spider-Man" show (1978-79). Fans of such programs, smitten by Mitchi in their childhoods, believed that she retired from acting and became an English teacher sometimes during the late 1980s.

Another noteworthy face in *Fifth Level Fist* is Tsunehiko Watase in the role of G-Man Takagi. The younger brother of screen idol Tetsuya Watari (star of Seijun Suzuki's *Tokyo Drifter [Tokyo nagaremono, 1966]*), Watase was a staple of Toei films in the '70s, appearing in yakuza films like the *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* series, sexploitation (the *Girl Boss* films and others), and whatever else the studio required of him. The high point in his long career is probably the car chase film *Crazed Beast (Kurutta yaju, 1976)*, where Watase did his own crash-prone stunt driving. Sadly, Watase preceded his older brother in death in 2017.

And so, Watase's grimacing face and the sound of someone pounding on a piano brings the curtain down on the *Sister Street Fighter* saga. But there are still plenty of Etsuko Shihomi movies waiting to be rediscovered. Let's hope that her karate will "soar across the world" once again before too long.

*Patrick Macias is the author of TokyoScope: The Japanese Cult Film Companion.*



# MADE IN JAPAN — AND REBORN IN THE U.S.A.

by CHRIS POGGIALI



A decade before New Line Cinema became known as “the house that Freddy Krueger built” thanks to the success of their *Nightmare on Elm Street* series (1984-2003), the Manhattan-based indie had another blood-soaked franchise character who could pull in big bucks at the box-office: Terry Tsurugi, a.k.a. the *Street Fighter* – “6 feet 6 of half-breed fury” but played by the purely Japanese, 5 feet 10½ Sonny Chiba. *Playboy* called him “the natural successor to Bruce Lee,” but that wasn’t what New Line president Robert Shaye was thinking of when he traveled to Japan in 1974 to look for the quote-unquote next big thing. Aware of the rising popularity of subtitled *yakuza* gangster movies in New York, Los Angeles, Honolulu and other American cities with large Asian populations (and theaters that catered to them), Shaye believed that an English-dubbed *yakuza* movie released ahead of the eagerly anticipated *The Godfather: Part II* might potentially kick off a trend similar to the kung fu craze of the previous year.

In Japan, he quickly realized he had his work cut out for him. “I had to sit through about 50 *yakuza* films with a woman translator who would giggle during the translations of the witty or off-color stuff,” Shaye told freelance journalist Donald Liebenson in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1996. None of the films he watched struck his fancy, but as he was leaving he noticed a poster for a recent karate movie, *Gekitotsu! Satsujin-ken*, starring an actor named Shinichi Chiba. “They screened the film...and it was pretty far out,” Shaye remembered. “I think of myself as relatively sensitive, but the fact that [Chiba] went that extra step to really lay people out cold was done with such elan I couldn’t help but laugh.” He made a deal for that film and two others starring Chiba.

Back in New York, Shaye showed the film to his friend Jack Sholder, an editor who performed numerous duties for New Line including the creation of nearly all of their trailers. It was Sholder’s idea to give the leading actors and actresses American first names – changing Yutaka Nakajima to *Doris* Nakajima, Goichi Yamada to *Gerald* Yamada, and Masashi Ishibashi to *Milton* Ishibashi – though it was Shaye who famously renamed the leading man “Sonny” Chiba. Somewhere along the way, the title of the film itself was changed to *The Street Fighter*. D.C. Comics artist Nick Cardy, best known for his work on *Aquaman* and *Teen Titans*, painted the eye-catching poster art. Sholder created the film’s

title sequence, cut the trailer and wrote the narration ("You beat a man, they call you tough – you beat an *army*, they call you... *the Street Fighter!*"). Shaye came up with the tag line "6 feet 6 of half-breed fury," possibly to introduce an additional racial element to draw in black and Hispanic audiences.

This was certainly not the first attempt to sell a Japanese action movie to the same urban moviegoers who were fueling the Chinese kung fu craze. In March of 1974 the third *Lone Wolf and Cub* movie, *Baby Cart to Hades* (*Kozure okami – shi ni kaze ni mukau ubaguruma*, 1972), had been released by Columbia Pictures as *Lightning Swords of Death* with the tag line "Raise a kung-fu fist against Ogami... and he'll chop it off!" Six months later, Hideo Gosha's *Goyokin* (lit. "Official Gold," 1969) – shorn of nearly 40 minutes and dubbed into English – began making the rounds under the title *The Steel Edge of Revenge*. A few weeks after that, English-dubbed prints of the decade-old *Zatoichi on the Road*, a.k.a. *Zatoichi and the Scoundrels* (*Zatoichi kenka-tabii*, 1963), surfaced on the action circuit as *Zatoichi, The Blind Swordsman*. Still, even the most hardened grindhouse audiences were thrilled by the bloody fight scenes in *The Street Fighter*, which earned an X rating from the MPAA and a "C" (for Condemned) rating from the U.S. Catholic Conference's Office for Film and Broadcasting. The original newspaper ads for the film carried a notice that the film was "unsuitable for viewers under the age of 18 because of its extraordinary fight sequences."


The X may have been more hindrance than help, but it did bring the film a lot of attention and some notoriety. "Billed as the first film rated X for violence, New Line Cinema's Japanese-made *The Street Fighter* offers a non-stop parade of gore: eye gougings, a castration and a throat-ripping, among numerous crushed skulls. The Toei production should cause a sensation here," predicted *Boxoffice*.

"Even going under the logical assumption that audiences have been so inundated with kung fu entries that their tastes have become pretty jaded, *The Street Fighter* should prove a powerhouse along the gore and action circuits," the *Monthly Film Bulletin* reported. "The wide screen spectacle of muscled hands ripping out eyes, necks and even a pair of testicles is bound to go a long way toward renewing patron fervor, even though it all boils down to the same insanity."

*Variety* agreed, at least regarding the blood and insanity. "New Line obviously thinks new sanguinary twist will make its Japanese pickup more gory and sensational than its competition, and therefore more profitable. Question is perhaps more suited to a psychiatric discussion rather than a critical one."

**SENSATIONAL NEW YORK OPENING!**  
CINERAMA, RKO 86th ST. TWIN #2, RKO 59th ST. TWIN #2

**\$80,250**  
FIRST 7 DAYS



THE FIRST  
X-RATED  
FIGHT SCENES  
IN SCREEN  
HISTORY!

"CHIBA is the natural  
successor to  
Bruce Lee!"  
—PLAYBOY MAGAZINE

**THE STREET FIGHTER** INTRODUCING  
THE INCREDIBLE  
**SONNY CHIBA**

CONTACT: STANLEY E. DUDELSON at NEW LINE CINEMA  
853 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10003 Tel. (212) 674-7460  
or your local distributor.

"The movie is a mess of faked blood, faked vomit and faked anatomical parts ripped from his opponents by Sonny Chiba, playing an invincible fist for hire," wrote Ernest Leogrande of the New York *Daily News*, before throwing in this curious observation concerning the film's leading man: "He's very beefy-looking to be the vegetarian he's supposed to be in real life."

Calling the combination of polished production value and graphic violence "sickening and slick," Linda Gross of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, "Although nonstop eye-gouging, throat-ripping, skull-crushing and body-breaking are customary kung fu gore, *The Street Fighter*'s dubious distinction is to show the results of the characters' actions. When Chiba castrates a rapist and tears the throat out of another enemy, the camera lingers ad nauseam."

Lynn Minton, a regular columnist for *McCall's* magazine, mistook *The Street Fighter* sight unseen as a "put-on, camp version of a martial-arts movie" and sent her 16-year-old daughter and 17-year-old son to cover it for her column "Movie Guide for Puzzled Parents" ("Monthly listings to help you answer the question: 'But is it really all right for the kids?'"). Apparently unfamiliar with the concept of irony, Minton wrote "My children felt battered by the almost continuous fighting – a man's leg chopped off at the knee by a butcher knife, a double knifing in stomach and eyes, a man executed in front of his son – and didn't find it funny at all. They called it brutal, boring and difficult to bear – in fact, my daughter watched most of it through her fingers."

As expected, there were attempts to cash in on the controversy surrounding the film. *The Dragon Squad*, a Chinese martial arts movie starring Wang Yu, showed up in theaters a few weeks later with a tag line boasting "The 4 top living kung fu street fighters all in one motion picture." In February of 1975, a movie titled *Bogard* – about an African-American bare knuckle fighter named Leroy Fisk ("the meanest, baddest streetfighter in town," according to the ads) – opened alongside *The Street Fighter* in its second week in Manhattan at the RKO 86th Street Twin. *Bogard* was also rated X for violence, but failed to attract the same amount of press as the Chiba film and disappeared quickly from theaters. A year and a half later, New Line acquired it from the producers, trimmed enough of the violence and nudity to get an R rating, and reissued it with Neal Adams poster art as *The Black Street Fighter*. Walter Hill's directorial debut, *Hard Times* (1975), was released in the U.K. as *The Streetfighter*, which forced the distributor of the Chiba movie, Eural Films, to change the title to *Kung Fu Street Fighter*. (The first sequel, *Return of the Street Fighter* [*Satsujin-ken 2*, 1974], was renamed *Blood of the Dragon* there.)

In order to expand the release of *The Street Fighter* and land bookings with major theater chains, New Line cut the film drastically to get an R rating. They also added "Watch for

*Return of the Street Fighter*" in red lettering to the original "The End, for now" closing. The sequel began its regional release in August 1975, sometimes on a double bill with *The Strangers Gundown* (*Django il Bastardo*, 1969) in the same theaters that had played the R-rated cut of *The Street Fighter* just a couple of months earlier (New Line also paired *The Street Fighter* with *Return of the Street Fighter* on a program they labeled "Back to Back and Twice as Mean!"). "Bereft of the gore that scored popularity points for its predecessor, *The Return of the Street Fighter* emerges as a quickie run-of-the-mill entry in a cycle that probably has approached the point of diminishing returns," the *Monthly Film Bulletin* surmised. "Like the Hercules epics, Italian westerns, beach blankets, bikers and secret agents before them, the karate musclemen appear to have had it."

In his half-star review in the New York *Daily News*, Jerry Oster admitted, "Chiba's so mean-spirited a fellow that it took me half the movie to realize that he was the good guy. I spent the second half rooting for the bad guys. They lost, but, mercifully, they did it in short order." Linda Gross in the *Los Angeles Times* dismissed it as "a bad sequel to a movie that was boring and confusing the first time around."

Lynn Minton of *McCall's* decided to give her kids a break and review the sequel herself, calling it "not as repulsively graphic as its predecessor" in her "Movie Guide for Puzzled Parents" column. "For example, you see only blood under the eyes of a girl who has been blinded; you do not see the action itself. What I'm getting at, I guess, is that, though I hated the movie, I didn't have to cover my eyes in order to survive it."

"*The Return of the Street Fighter* is a Japanese karate action film dubbed into an ever-surprising English, perhaps by Armenian linguists working on a grant from the Woody Allen Foundation," wrote one of the smart alecks at the *Catholic Film Newsletter*. "Less consistently diverting but funny enough is the American arch villain, the ruler of the Mafia in the Eastern Hemisphere, a role taken by a skinny little non-actor with a full beard and shoulder-length hair, probably a Columbia graduate student abroad who would have been better occupied at home on his *tatami* studying his ideograms. He is burnt to death atop a Mobil Oil truck, but one should hesitate before accusing so simple-minded a movie of anything as devious as symbolism."

The next year saw four more Chiba films reach U.S. shores, beginning with two based loosely on the lives of famous – and at that point, still living – martial arts masters. In *Shorinji kenpo* (1975), directed by Norifumi Suzuki, Chiba portrays Doshin So, a military intelligence agent who escapes Manchuria during the Soviet invasion and returns home to the grim realities of postwar Japan. Hoping to restore a sense of morality and national pride to a demoralized population and teach self-defense to the poor and disenfranchised,

he combines *jujutsu* with the *quan fa* skills he acquired in China to create the titular martial art. The film was released stateside as *The Killing Machine* by Cinema Shares International, a distribution company that existed primarily to release tax shelter films and had entered the overcrowded 'chop-socky' market six months earlier with a package of four 1973 kung fu quickies from First Films of Hong Kong, all starring Japanese martial artist Yasuaki Kurata: *Dragon Fist* (aka *Knight Errant*), *A Girl Called Tigress*, *Gold Snatchers* and *Seven to One*. Going by the spotty distribution of these Kurata pics in the U.S., there couldn't have been more than one or two prints of each in circulation, but Cinema Shares had more faith in *The Killing Machine*, opening it in 48 theaters in the New York City area in late January 1976.

Meanwhile, the company's editors were creating TV-friendly versions of their theatrical properties, and within a few months *The Killing Machine* was part of a package of 23 feature films that had been sold to stations in New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Los Angeles and other key cities. As a result, it had already played on TV in some markets when the film hit Los Angeles in May 1977 as the second feature to *Exit the Dragon*, *Enter the Tiger* (1976). Linda Gross of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, "*The Killing Machine* has vigor and relevance as directed by [Norifumi] Suzuki, who knows how to combine social realism with action-adventure. Screenwriter [Isao] Matsumoto vividly captures the sense of frustration of people who have no control over their lives." She notes that, like Chiba's previous films, it "contains the requisite bone-crushing, throat-ripping and blood-spitting. There is even the usual bloody castration scene following the inevitable gang-rape. But the violence is more affecting because it has a social context."

Next came *Karate Bull Fighter* (*Kenka karate – kyokushin-ken*, 1975), the first of three films based on the life of master Mas Oyama, founder of Kyokushin Karate (and instructor to Chiba), as chronicled in the popular comic *Karate baka ichidai* (lit. "A Karate-Crazy Life"), written by Ikki Kajiwara. United Artists released the film as *Champion of Death* beginning in October '76, with a poster showing Chiba karate-chopping the head of a charging bull. Their exploitation-style trailer was narrated by voiceover master and future Academy Award nominee Adolph Caesar, whose distinctive voice and colorful delivery was already familiar to many people thanks to an effective PSA for the United Negro College Fund ("A mind is a terrible thing to waste.") and TV spots for *Blacula* (1972), *Slaughter's Big Rip-Off* (1973) and *Truck Turner* (1974). "In *The Street Fighter*, he proved himself to be undisputed king of karate," Caesar excitedly announces. "Now, Sonny Chiba creates the most devastating display of deadly destruction ever captured on film! Fearlessly facing flying lead and slashing steel! Battling a raging bull with his bare hands! Alone against an endless onslaught of enemies in the ultimate in martial arts mayhem, Sonny Chiba is...the *Champion of Death!*" Incredibly, UA had this in circulation during the

same three-year period when the studio was collecting Best Picture Academy Awards for *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), *Rocky* (1976) and *Annie Hall* (1977).

"With the untimely death of Bruce Lee, kung-fu action films lost a potentially great international star," the *Hollywood Reporter* noted. "Moving into that void and filling it is the chunky figure of Sonny Chiba, a flamboyant personality and sterling karate fighter. Chiba is building up a following [with] movie fans who delight in violent action – the rougher, the better. He is really something to watch. *Champion of Death* emerges as one of the better Sonny Chiba films."

Linda Gross didn't share that opinion. "Director Kazuhiko Yamaguchi has a slick visual style and a theatrical flair for staging fight sequences but he doesn't work with the same perspective as [the director of Chiba's] *The Killing Machine*," Gross wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*. "Yamaguchi doesn't care about violence in a social context; he makes nonstop action movies using racism, anti-Americanism sentiments and bitterness to punctuate the fighting."

*Bodyguard Kiba* (1973) was director Ryuichi Takamori's adaptation of Kajiwara's manga *Karate jigoku-hen* (lit. "Karate Hell-Picture") and starred Sonny Chiba. It was acquired for U.S. distribution by Terry Levene of Aquarius Releasing, who had courted all sorts of trouble while releasing the hardcore X-films *Deep Throat* and *Belinda* (both 1972) and decided it was less stressful to specialize in kung fu blood-spillers like *The Tongfather* (1974), *Queen Boxer* (1972) and *Kung Fu Massacre* (1974). Levene hired Simon Nuchtern and Joseph Ellison of August Films not only to dub and reedit the film, but also "Americanize" it with a seven-minute opener shot around New York City. This new footage consists of newspaper headlines reacting to a Mafia rubout, karate practitioners chanting "Vi-va, Chi-ba!" while chopping and kicking boards in half, a training scene between special guests Bill Louie and Aaron Banks (filmed inside the latter's New York Karate Academy in Times Square), and an opening crawl rendition of Ezekiel 25:17 that made a big impression on a certain Southern California video store clerk a few years later. The result was *The Bodyguard*, which premiered in Chicago on September 3rd, 1976 and became one of Aquarius' greatest successes thanks to an action-packed trailer narrated once again by Caesar. "Faster than Ali! Meaner than Bruce Lee! Sonny Chiba, the Street Fighter, is back as the meanest, bloodiest, most violent ass-kicking and arm-ripping mother yet!"

Caesar also narrated the trailer for *Sister Street Fighter* (*Onna hissatsu-ken*, 1974), which New Line sold as the second sequel to *The Street Fighter* but was actually the first film in a separate trilogy by director Kazuhiko Yamaguchi. The star of all three movies was Etsuko Shihomi, a supporting actress in the *Street Fighter* films and a member of Chiba's



stunt training school, the Japan Action Club. She was renamed "Sue Shiomi" for one of the best New Line ad campaigns of the '70s. Comic artists Neal Adams and Dick Giordano provided brilliant poster art depicting Chiba and Shiomi punching and kicking a handful of thugs. Equally irresistible is Caesar's trailer narration: "She's a one-woman death squad! He's a one-man army! They won't be hard to find – there'll be a trail of bodies leading right to them! Karate's deadliest team in *Sister Street Fighter!*" Eural Films released the film in the U.K. under the title *Revenge of the Dragon*.

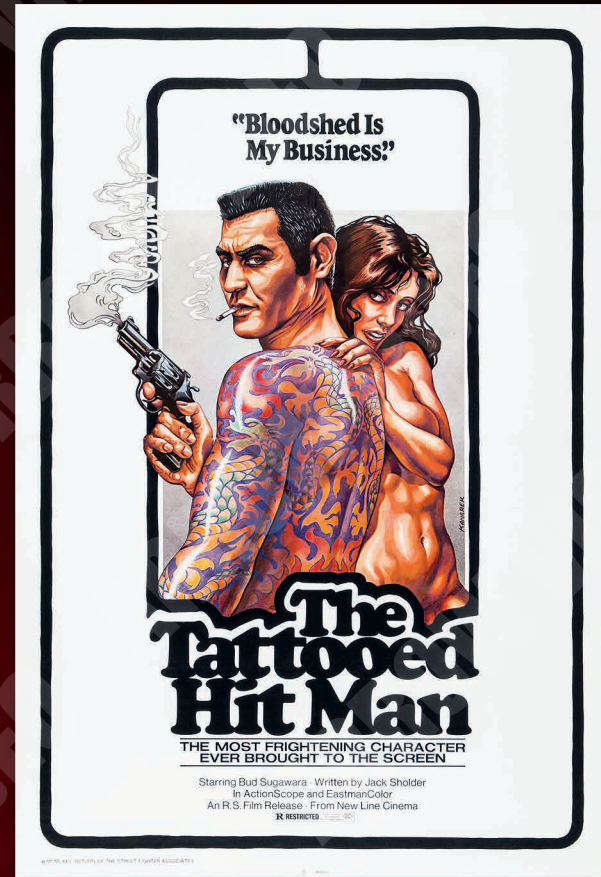
Not all of the New Line acquisitions from Japan had Chiba's fingerprints on them. *The Tattooed Hit Man*, which began a regional release in August 1976, stars Bunta Sugawara from popular Kinji Fukasaku yakuza films like *Street Mobster (Gendai yakuza – hitokiri yota, 1972)* and *Battles without Honor and Humanity (Jingi naki tatakai, 1973)*. He's billed as "Bud" Sugawara in the New Line ad campaign, which features art by Michael Kanarek and promises, "The most frightening character ever brought to the screen." The film is a shortened, rereleased version of *Yamaguchi-gumi gaiden – Kyushu shinko-sakusen* (lit. "Yamaguchi Gang Side-Story: Kyushu Invasion Tactics, 1974), the second of two Kosaku Yamashita films that chronicle the rise of Japan's largest crime syndicate, the Yamaguchi-gumi, and use the autobiography of the organization's then-godfather, Kazuo Taoka, as source material. Jack Sholder not only edited *The Tattooed Hit Man* but also rewrote the script ("it's so hot you can fry tempura on the sidewalk!"), supervised the dubbing, and then wrote and edited the film's trailer, which includes ad copy like "He slept with a gun in one hand and a girl in the other!" For its New York opening, New Line co-billed *The Tattooed Hit Man* with *The Black Street Fighter* in 16 theaters on May 18, 1977.

A documentary about the First Kyokushin World Tournament, filmed in 1975 by producer Hisao Masuda and titled *The Strongest Karate (Chijo saikyo no karate, 1976)*, was also picked up by New Line for theatrical release. Because of the presence of several African-American competitors, it was re-titled *Fighting Black Kings* and advertised as a blaxploitation action movie, complete with trailers and TV spots narrated by Adolph Caesar. Masuda followed it with *The Art of Killing (Eien naru budo, 1979)*, another sober and revealing documentary about Japanese martial arts. Similar in style and tone to *The Strongest Karate*, and even sharing the same narrator (Harry J. Quini), *The Art of Killing* took First Prize at the 1978 Miami International Film Festival, where *Variety* praised it as "a powerful and frequently amazing insight into Japanese history, point of view and vocation." Unfortunately, *The Art of Killing* languished without a distribution deal in the U.S. until 1981, when it was acquired by Crown International Pictures and given a limited release the following May under the title *Budo*.

*Za Karate* (1974) was the first film in a trilogy by Yukio Noda about a Japanese-American martial artist (Tadashi Yamashita) who travels to Kyoto to compete in a Budo tournament, hoping to use the \$50,000 prize money to save his family's farm in Ohio, but runs afoul of gangsters who try to rig the fight and end up blinding him. The New Line Cinema version – released with a PG rating in 1978 as *Bronson Lee, Champion* – was edited by Jack Sholder and dubbed by future *Don't Go in the House* director Joseph Ellison for Simon Nuchtern's August Films. "He turned the Olympic contest into a game of death," was the tag line on the poster and newspaper ads. The U.K. title is *Kung Fu Killers*.

Noda and Yamashita reunited for *Gekisatsu! Jado-ken* (lit. "Extreme Kill! Evil Fist," 1977), a cheap Sonny Chiba revenge tale shot in Thailand in the mid-70s and co-starring Etsuko Shihomi and Bolo Yeung. It was released in the U.S. in 1977 as *The Soul of Bruce Lee*, with ads featuring a photo of Chiba hooked up to electrodes alongside a misleading tag line that promised a kung fu master brought back to life Frankenstein-style with "a Dragon's soul!" It was one of many wacky releases from L&T Films, a company run by a Hong Kong shipping magnate named Siu-Lin Tan who relocated to Guam in the early '70s and began producing and distributing martial arts movies. L&T's product was distributed in the U.S. by Ark Films, a partnership between Tan, his sons Henry and Willie, and southern sub-distributors Harry & Belton Clark of the Jacksonville-based Clark Film Releasing. Some of L&T/Ark's other offerings include *Kung Fu Exorcist* (1976), *Dragon vs. Dracula* (1977), *Revolt of Kung Fu Lee* (1977), and *The Sabertooth Dragon vs. the Fiery Tiger* (1977). They must've received complaints from exhibitors about *The Soul of Bruce Lee*, because they reissued the movie with a more accurate ad campaign as *Soul of Chiba* in 1978.

That same year a new distribution company, Trans-Continental Film Corporation, signed a three-picture deal with Toei that included the rights to two Sonny Chiba movies. The jovial president of Trans-Continental, Larry Joachim, was a former standup comedian and co-producer of *Murder, Inc.* (1960) who became a distributor known as "the king of the kiddie matinees" in the New York City area during the 1960s and early '70s. His marriage to actress Barbara Loden resulted in a son, Marco Joachim, who was remarkably savvy when it came to the marketing of the weekend matinees for kids. At the height of Bruce Lee fever, it was 10-year-old Marco who came up with the idea of compiling a feature film from episodes of the TV series "The Green Hornet" (1966-67), and even assembled the rough cut on the equipment that was used to edit his mother's acclaimed film *Wanda* (1970). The box office success of *The Green Hornet* (1974) and its sequel, *Fury of the Dragon* (1976), enabled Larry to produce his own martial arts epic, *Black Samurai* (1977), and start importing Asian movies for distribution. During a screening of Teruo Ishii's *Chokugeki! Jigoku-ken* (lit. "Direct Hit! Hell-Fist," 1974), Marco told his father that co-star Yasuaki Kurata resembled Bruce Lee and suggested that "introducing



**STARTS TODAY! 2 GIANT KUNG-FU HITS!**  
**BRUCE LI vs. SONNY CHIBA • ACTION-PACKED**

**CHINA'S No.1 ACTION HIT**

**FIST OF FURY**  
**BRUCE LI**

All New And Packed With Action!

**BOB WALL**  
FROM ENTER THE DRAGON

**BRUCE LI • CHEN XING • DANA BROOKS**

**BUDDO REGENCY 2**  
16th & CHESTNUT ST. • LO7-2310

**Sonny Chiba THE STREETFIGHTER Is Back!**

The DRAGON Died! But His Spirit Never Rested! Now! Sonny Chiba In A Rampage Of Destruction Against The Evil Foes That Slew The Dragon To Release...

**SOUL of CHIBA**

Starring: **SONNY CHIBA**  
 JAMES YAMASHITA • ETSUKO SHIOMI

**STARTS TODAY! SEE 2 BIG FEATURES!**

"FIST" 1:30-4:00-7:45-10:55 "CHIBA" 12-3:05-6:15-9:20

Bruce Lo!" could be added to the trailer narration over a shot of Kurata in action. It was also Marco's idea to have the image of Sonny Chiba smashing two heads together appear on the posters and newspaper ads for the film, which Trans-Continental released as *The Executioner*. "The meanest Chiba movie yet!" made its U.S. debut in New York on July 19th, 1978, and reportedly did so well at the Cine 42 on 42nd Street that it single-handedly established the theater's reputation as the premier showcase for martial arts movies on the east coast. When the film opened in Atlanta two months later, Sonny Chiba posters were given away free to the first 1,000 patrons at the two theaters showing the movie.

Kazuhiiko Yamaguchi's *Which is Stronger, Karate or Tiger?* (*Butoh-ken – moko gekisatsu*, 1976) begins with Kurata karate-chopping live chickens and ends with him wrestling a Bengal tiger. In between, he plays a masked ring fighter called the Iron Man who tangles with a crime syndicate led by Masashi Ishibashi. Whenever he appears in the mask Kurata bears a passing resemblance to Kato in *The Green Hornet*, which probably appealed to Larry and Marco. They released the movie as *The Tigers Claw* in January 1979, with Kurata billed again as Bruce Lo. The third and final film in their Toei deal was also the oldest of the bunch: *The Assassin*, which opened in some 20 theaters in the New York area during the week of Thanksgiving 1979, was the second of four *Yakuza deka* (lit. "Yakuza Detective") movies Chiba made for director Yukio Noda nearly 10 years earlier (*Yakuza deka: marifana mitsubai soshiki*, 1970). "Part fists... Part death... Part hell... Pure dynamite!" the posters and ads exclaimed.

The third *Street Fighter* movie, *Gyakushu! Satsujin-ken* (1974), opened in Hawaii with English subtitles in November 1975 as *The Street Fighter Counterattacks*, but New Line postponed the release of their version in the continental U.S. several times, opting instead to repackage the first two movies and *Sister Street Fighter* as a "Sonny Chiba Festival" that toured the country for a year. With dubbing again provided by August Films, *The Streetfighter's Last Revenge* – advertised as "All New" – finally premiered on April 6th, 1979 in 14 theaters in the New York tri-state area. The term "street fighter" still had some exploitation value: Etonic Inc. added a "Sister Street Fighter" sneaker to their "Street Fighter" line of footwear. L&T/Ark had a Bruce Le movie called *Kung Fu Streetfighter* in circulation, and late '79 saw the release of *Lady Street Fighter*, a James Bryan cheapie starring Renee Harmon and someone calling himself Trace Carradine.

*Karate Warriors* (*Kozure satsujin-ken*, 1976) is another retelling of *Yojimbo*, with Chiba as the opportunistic antihero pitting two rival gangs against each other in contemporary Japan, directed by Kazuhiko Yamaguchi. *Sonny Chiba's Dragon Princess* (*Hissatsu onna kenshi*, 1976), from director Yutaka Kohira, stars Shihomi as a vengeful martial artist who witnessed the disfigurement of her father, a karate instructor (played by





Chiba), at the hands of vicious rivals years earlier. Sam Silverstein, a former employee of Cambist Films and Monarch Releasing, handled the U.S. distribution of both movies through his own short-lived Silverstein Films in 1980 and '81, respectively.

*Hoero tekken* (lit. "Howling Iron Fist," 1981) was a sometimes goofy action showcase for Hiroyuki Sanada, a protégé of Chiba's since the 1960s and a member of his Japan Action Club. New Line Cinema renamed him "Duke" Sanada for the film's U.S. release as *Roaring Fire* in 1982. "He's total destruction," the ads claimed. "The grace of Bruce Lee... The speed of Sonny Chiba... The force of Chuck Norris... Duke Sanada is *Roaring Fire*." Despite lively direction by Norifumi "Norry" Suzuki, the prominent billing of Chiba and Shihomi in the advertising, and a regional release that lasted almost a year, *Roaring Fire* failed to make much of an impression on the American action market and was the last Toei film to be handled by New Line. Still, when the Entermedia Theater in Manhattan (now the Village East Cinema) began a five-week retrospective called "The Best of New Line Cinema" in August-September of 1984, *Roaring Fire* was included on a triple bill with *The Crippled Masters* (1979) and *Bronson Lee, Champion* (the "Sonny Chiba Festival" lineup of *The Street Fighter*, *Return of the Street Fighter* and *Sister Street Fighter* screened the next day).

By this time the audience for martial arts movies was actually expanding thanks to the emergence of home video and television syndication. Suzuki's earlier *Shogun's Ninja* (*Ninja bugeicho momochi sandayu*, 1980) – also starring Sanada, Chiba and Shihomi – went straight to video in the U.S. via Media Home Entertainment in 1983. That same year, English-dubbed versions of *The Bullet Train* (*Shinkansen daibakuha*, 1975) and *Kowloon Assignment* (*Gorugo 13 – kuryu no kubi*, 1977) bypassed theatrical release through World Northal, debuting instead on TV as part of the company's popular Black Belt Theater syndication packages. At least one subtitled print of Kinji Fukasaku's *Shogun's Samurai* (aka *The Yagyu Clan Conspiracy*, *Yagyu ichizoku no inbo*, 1978), starring Chiba as real-life ninja Jubei Yagyu, reached the mainland United States, but only played a handful of theatrical engagements: at the Bleecker Street Cinema and the Thalia in New York in 1982 and '83, respectively, and the Kokusai theaters in San Francisco and Los Angeles in 1984. Fukasaku and Chiba's followup, *Makai tensho* (1981), only got as far as Hawaii, where it screened with English subtitles as *Samurai Reincarnation*.

New Line Cinema made deals with several different companies during the early days of home video. *The Street Fighter* and *Return of the Street Fighter* were released on videocassette in 1981 by MGM/CBS Video. Charles Band's Wizard Video put out *The Tattooed Hit Man* in 1982. *Fighting Black Kings* and *Bronson Lee, Champion* came out through Warner Home Video in 1983, and that same year *Roaring Fire* was issued by Thorn/EMI. Others

**The SONNY CHIBA  
FILM FESTIVAL**

**THE STREET FIGHTER  
Sister Street Fighter  
RETURN OF THE STREET FIGHTER**

FROM NEW LINE CINEMA **R RESTRICTED**

**STARTS TODAY AT A THEATER NEAR YOU**

<b>MANHATTAN</b>	<b>BRONX</b>	<b>DOVER</b>	<b>BROOKLYN</b>	<b>QUEENS</b>
NEW AMSTERDAM 42 ST. BET 7 & 8 AVES	KENT - RKO WAKEFIELD	FORDHAM	GRAMADA RUGBY	ALDEN JAMAICA
<b>NEW JERSEY</b>				
<b>BRANFORD</b>	<b>CINEMA TONY</b>	<b>FABIAN</b>	<b>ORMONT</b>	<b>STRAND*</b>
NEWARK	UNION CITY	PATERSON	EAST ORANGE	PLAINFIELD

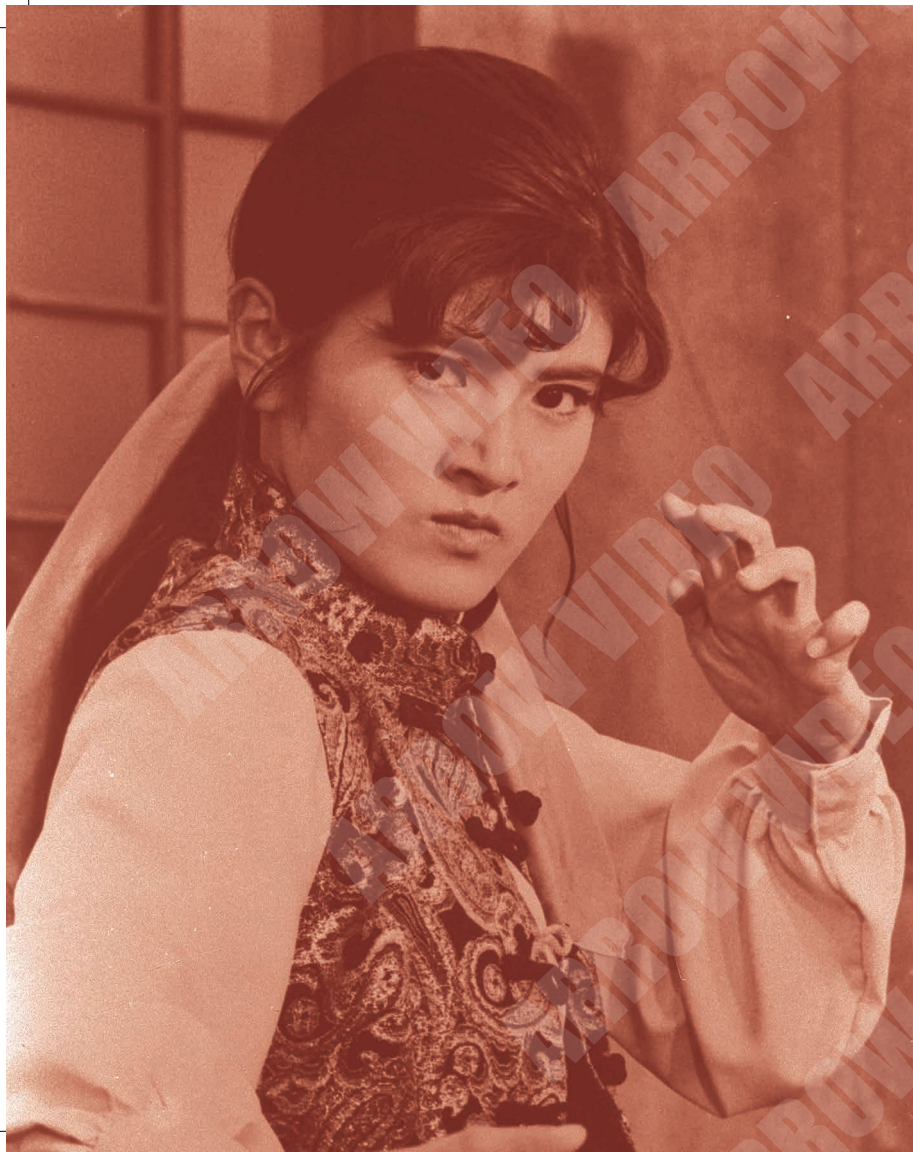
\*STARTS 1/17

followed the same path. *The Bodyguard* came out from Media Home Entertainment in 1981. *The Assassin* was released by CBS Fox in 1983. Independent United Distributors (IUD) issued *Dragon Princess* and *Karate Warriors* around that time. *The Killing Machine* and *Budo: The Art of Killing* came out from Prism Entertainment in 1985. World Northal's cut of *Kowloon Assignment* hit video store shelves in 1986 from Embassy Home Entertainment.

By the early '90s, as video stores closed and licensing agreements expired, these films seemed lost to the ages – that is, until Alabama Whitman (Patricia Arquette) traveled all the way from the highways and byways of Tallahassee, Florida, to Motor City, Detroit, to find her true love, Clarence Worley (Christian Slater), at a showing of the “Sonny Chiba Festival” in a decrepit downtown Detroit grindhouse at the start of *True Romance* (1993). Renewed interest in Sonny Chiba and *The Street Fighter* movies led to New Line Cinema reissuing the films on VHS in 1996, but Etsuko Shihomi fans interested in the *Sister Street Fighter* series, including the unofficial fourth film, *Sister Street Fighter: Fifth Level Fist (Onna hissatsu godan-ken, 1976)*, had to wait a little longer – until DVD and now Blu-ray – to get the full experience. Hopefully the success of this set will make it possible for the *Za Karate* and Mas Oyama trilogies, the *Yakuza Deka* and *Chokugeki* and other Toei films to get their long-awaited high definition release in the U.S., to the delight of new and old fans alike.

Thanks to Marco Joachim, Terry Levene, and Jack Sholder.

*Chris Poggiali edited the fanzine Temple of Schlock from 1987 to 1991, and then brought it back as a blog in 2008. He has written for Turner Classic Movies, Cinema Retro, Fangoria, Rue Morgue, Shock Cinema, Deep Red, Filmfax, HorrorHound, The Phantom of the Movies' VideoScope, Exploitation Retrospect, European Trash Cinema, The Journal of Interstitial Cinema, and numerous other magazines and websites.*



# ETSUKO SHIHOMI BIOGRAPHY

by PATRICK MACIAS

"I want to be the first all-around female action star in Japan," Etsuko Shihomi told "Karate Movie Special" magazine in 1983. She has accomplished her task only too well. To date, Shihomi has been the *only* all-around female action star to emerge from Japan.

Sure, there have been lots of pretty faces that have posed in fighting stances or clutched samurai swords for the camera. Yet none of them except Shihomi has been able to carry an entire film franchise like *Sister Street Fighter* on their shoulders, let alone match her unique mix of tenderness, vulnerability, and ferocity.

Shihomi was born on October 29, 1955, in Okayama City in the Okayama Prefecture and was a tomboy for most of her childhood. In the late '60s, Shihomi became transfixed by actor Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba and the dangerous stunts he performed on his "Mission: Impossible"-styled TV show "Key Hunter." In 1969, Chiba formed the Japan Action Club, an organization designed to train actors in martial arts and stunt work, initially at no charge. Shihomi quickly sent a volley of letters to JAC asking to be admitted as a student. In the fall of 1972, while still in high school, she finally visited the JAC in person and, after passing an entry test, was admitted to its ranks.

Following training in gymnastics and martial arts, JAC soon found work for Shihomi as a body double for stunt scenes on television. Her first big break was in December of 1973 when, at the age of 18, she became a regular member of Toei's superhero program "Kikaider 01" (*Kikaider 01*, 1973-74). On the show, Shihomi played Mari, a girl who transformed into a female android with a heart-shaped head named "Bijinda."

Although the part was unbilled, Shihomi made her big screen debut alongside her idol and mentor Chiba in what is generally considered to be the first modern Japanese karate movie, *The Bodyguard* (aka *Bodyguard Kiba*). Also in 1973, she gained even more exposure by appearing in the opening sequence of *The Street Fighter*.

After *The Street Fighter* and its sequel proved solid at the box office, Toei studios wanted to create a spin-off series designed for a female lead. Their first choice for the part was established Hong Kong-based actress Angela Mao, but when Mao's participation proved impossible due to immigration problems, Chiba personally recommended his protégé

Shihomi. Initially, *Sister Street Fighter's* director Kazuhiko Yamaguchi was skeptical. As he told "Movie Treasures" magazine in a 2006 interview, "She had skills, no question about it. At the time though, she had a round baby face and looked like she'd come in straight out of the boondocks, and to tell you the truth, my first thoughts were 'she's no Angela Mao ...' but she had a fresh look."

Constant comparisons to Mao must not have been easy to endure. As late as 1983, well after Shihomi had established her own career, she was quoted as saying, "I want to be Angela Mao's competition. By the time I get to be her age, I want to be better than she is."

Shihomi began to prepare in earnest for the role of "lady dragon" Koryu Lee, and began to practice Shorinji Kempo, the fighting style showcased in the film. Yamaguchi remembered, "(she) did all sorts of dangerous stuff without a single special effect or stand-in. She'd get injured all the time but never made one peep. She was totally bruised up during all of the films."

*Sister Street Fighter* debuted in the summer of 1974. Toei wasted no time in producing a sequel, *Hanging By a Thread*. The studio was then dedicated to grinding out exploitation films, designed in assembly line fashion to play in double features. They, along with their casts, were not expected to attract an audience beyond a predominately adult male one.

But it was soon discovered that Etsuko Shihomi had a wide appeal. As Japan's first-ever female action star, both men and women, young and old alike, admired her strength and high-kicking abilities. Shihomi blossomed into stardom during the age of the Japanese "idol," when fresh-faced young women were in demand by the media and the public more than voluptuous sexpots. In addition to snapping up movie tickets, Shihomi's fans loaded up on magazines where she appeared smiling demurely on the cover and made her the best-selling idol in the collectable picture market for years.

Toei responded to Shihomi's popularity by increasing her output. From 1974-1977, the core years of the karate boom, Shihomi headlined not only the *Sister Street Fighter* films, but also *The 13 Steps of Maki*, *The Great Chase*, and *Dragon Princess*. She was also featured prominently in other Chiba / JAC films like *The Executioner 2*, *The Power of Aikido*, and *Golgo 13: Assignment Kowloon*.

As the era of the karate quickie wore down, Toei began to employ Shihomi, Chiba, and other popular Japan Action Club talents in large-scale productions like *Shogun's Samurai* and *Message from Space (Uchu kara no messeji, 1978)*. Shihomi also appeared with Chiba regularly in the "Yagyu Clan" TV series (*Yagyu ichizoku no inbo, 1978-79*) and

"Shadow Warriors" (*Kage no gundan, 1980-85*), where she played a lady ninja named "O-Ren," (who Quentin Tarantino has acknowledged as one of the inspirations for "O-Ren Ishii" in *Kill Bill*).

Being one of the most in-demand members of the Japan Action Club required more than just steady television and film work. Shihomi also appeared in JAC stage shows and musicals like *Big Adventure of the Fantastic Pirates (Yukaina kaizoku daiboken, 1982)*, athletic exhibitions, and the occasional dangerous publicity stunt, like the time she jumped from the roof of a building in Tokyo to plug 1981's *Samurai Reincarnation*.

By the mid-80s, Shihomi moved even further away from being a mere "action star." She became a spokesmodel for Esso oil and was regularly releasing pop records adorned with glossy glamour shots. Many of her films and programs from the period, such as *The Audition (Za odishon, 1984)* and "Parent and Child Game" (*Oyako gemu, 1986* TV series) ignored fight scenes and instead showcased her dramatic side. 1986's family-friendly *Tora-san's Bluebird Fantasy (Otoko wa tsurai yo – kofuku no aoi tori)* was a long way from the rough and tumble *Sister Street Fighter* flicks. It would also be her final screen appearance to date.

In 1987, Shihomi married musician Tsuyoshi Nagabuchi and retired altogether from show business. She has literally been "missing in action" ever since, refusing to step back in the spotlight for any occasion, or even grant interviews about her glory days. Her daughter Ayane Nagabuchi, born in 1988, has picked up the torch, however, and is currently a popular actress in film and television, although in non-action roles.

Perhaps another "all-around female action star" will someday emerge from Japanese cinema and begin the cycle anew. But until then, Etsuko Shihomi leaves behind a rich legacy for us to rediscover, beginning with *Sister Street Fighter*.



## ABOUT THE TRANSFERS

The four films in the *Sister Street Fighter* series are presented in their original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 and with their original mono sound. All four films were remastered in high definition and supplied for this release by Toei Company, Ltd.

## A NOTE ABOUT THE “SWASTIKAS”

Throughout the *Sister Street Fighter* series, a seemingly familiar symbol appears on flags, standards, and various characters' costumes or uniforms. While that symbol might appear to Western viewers at first to be a swastika — or more precisely the *Hakenkreuz* or “hooked cross” perverted by the German Nazi Party in 1920 into a universally known sign for Fascism and hatred — the symbol actually predates that usage by many centuries. In Japanese culture, the symbol — drawn in the reverse of the German swastika — is known as a *manji* and has been used alternatively as a secular symbol for certain family emblems and as a motif in certain types of artwork, or as part of Buddhist symbology. In the latter usage throughout East Asia, the swastika or *manji* symbolizes the footprints of the Buddha and is intended to connote the eternal cycle, homologous with the wheel of *dharma*. In contemporary Japan, the *manji* is used on maps to denote the location of a Buddhist temple.

## FURTHER VIEWING

Director Kazuhiko Yamaguchi's *Wolf Guy*, starring Shinichi “Sonny” Chiba, is available on Blu-ray and DVD from Arrow Video. Chiba also appears in the Arrow Video releases of *Doberman Cop*, *Battles Without Honor and Humanity: Hiroshima Death Match*, and *New Battles Without Honor and Humanity: The Boss's Head*. Screenwriter Masahiro Kakufuda wrote *Horrors of Malformed Men* and *Orgies of Edo*, both also available on Blu-ray from Arrow Video.

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and booklet produced by: **Marc Walkow**

Associate producer: **James Flower**

Executive Producers: **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer: **James White**

QC and Proofing: **Nora Mehenni, Alan Simmons, Marc Walkow**

Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling: **The Engine House Media Services**

Artist: **R.P. “Kung Fu Bob” O’Brien**

Design: **Obviously Creative**

## SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Shinichi “Sonny” Chiba, S Hayashi, Yoshiki Hayashi, Masaaki Hirota, Bruce Holecheck, Kosaku Horiwaki, Masahiro Kakufuda, Sigrid Larsen & Eamonn Lee/The Engine House Media Services, Jennifer Lui, Patrick Macias, Chris Poggiali, Naoki Shinozaki/Toei, Edwin Samuelson, Ivo Scheloske, Jack Sholder, Tadahito Sugiyama, Kazuhiko Yamaguchi.



FCD1864/AV191