Daisuke, Ito (October 12, 1898–July 19, 1981)

Ito Daisuke was a Japanese film director and screenwriter whose kinetic camera style and politically critical narratives helped shape the Japanese period film. Starting as a scriptwriter of contemporary dramas at Shochiku in 1920, Ito directed his first film in 1924 and switched to Nikkatsu in 1925. There he specialized in period films that came to be seen as “tendency films,” leftwing narratives that in his case were projected onto the past in part to evade censorship. Films like *Chuji tabi nikki* (*The Diary of Chuji’s Travels*, 1927) or *Zanjin zanbaken* (*Man-Slashing, Horse-Piercing Sword*, 1929) featured outlaws or rebel samurai in conflict with medieval authorities. The most famous of these nihilistic heroes was Tange Sazen, first played by Okochi Denjiro in *Shinban Ooka seidan* (*Ooka’s Trial*, 1928). Ito’s film style could at times verge on the avant-garde, as fight scenes could feature frenetic camera movements, swish pans, disjunctive and fast editing, quite unlike anything in Hollywood cinema. It could also be poetic, as in *Oatsurae Jirokichi koshi* (*Jirokichi the Rat*, 1931). Ito’s style and his politics did not fare well with the coming of sound and Japan’s march to war, but he continued directing films until 1970, still depicting rebel heroes in such highly regarded postwar works as *Osho* (*The Chess Master*, 1948) and *Hangyakuji* (*The Conspirator*, 1961). Unfortunately, few of his silent films survive.

Further reading:

Ito, D. (1976) *Jidaigeki eiga no shi to shinjitsu*, Tokyo: Kinema Junpōsha

Saeki, T. (1996) *Itō Daisuke: hangyaku no passhon, jidaigeki no modanizumu*, Tokyo: Firumu Ātosha.

List of works:

Chuji tabi nikki (The Diary of Chuji’s Travels, 1927)

Zanjin zanbaken (Man-Slashing, Horse-Piercing Sword, 1929)

Shinban Ooka seidan (Ooka’s Trial, 1928)

Oatsurae Jirokichi koshi (Jirokichi the Rat, 1931)

Osho (The Chess Master, 1948)

Hangyakuji (The Conspirator, 1961).

Paratextual material:

Clip from

Traveling With a Joshu Accent (Tabisugata Joshū namari, 1930) (Film should be public domain in Japan, but clip taken from VHS tape by Matsuda Eigasha)

Ito photo: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ItoDaisuke.JPG>

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