



Matao and Shigeeko Koga  
In the

Days of

Japanese  
cinema

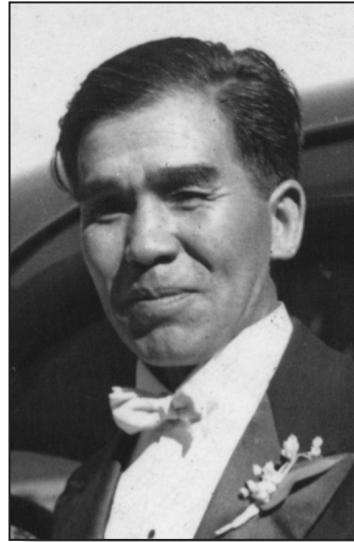
in

Alameda

At left, a young Matao Koga



The lights dimmed, and the Koga's job had begun. The clanking whir of the projector, the cinematic magic of bloody samurai death, the irrational fear of some Japanese ghost's head, floating about on the silver screen, transported the audience to an imaginary and terrifying place. It was their job, after all.



**Matao Koga was a Benshi.** The man who showed movies. Traditional Japanese Benshi did much more than that, for their reputations were built on their ability to emote, to explain, to bring silent films to life. The Benshi was the film's narrator before the movie started. They sometimes narrated *during* the movie. You enjoyed the movie more so because the *Benshi was great*. Some Benshi were so highly regarded, they had their own following.

But by the time Matao began working as a Benshi in 1939, the era of silent movies had ended, and talkies were the norm. He didn't need to narrate, as his predecessors did. He was not a traditional Benshi.

Matao did not work alone. His wife, **Shigeko**, (often known as Cookie) worked the movie circuit, too. They provided a momentary respite from the mundane for the folks in their hometown of Alameda, CA., and elsewhere, too.

Their company, Koga Kogyo-bu, operated until at least 1969. They were one of five Japanese families with ties to Japanese film distributors authorized to show films in America.



1939

1939



**Kazuyoshi Sato was just a kid** when he watched movies at the Buddhist Temple of Alameda, where the Kogas plied their trade in 1939. “He (Matao) went around California, up and down in the valley, it was mostly at churches or community halls where the Japanese all met,” Kaz recalled. “They were for the Isseis and older Niseis, it wasn’t for us kids... but we used to go.”

“We were playing, then the movie started,” he said. It didn’t matter if Kaz didn’t fully understand the Japanese language being spoken in the movie. He figured it out by watching. “All the kids had fun watching.”

**Kaz’s sister, Carol Witt**, remembered the Kogas showing movies at the temple, too. Her experience was quite visceral.

“He would show two movies, they were all Samurai movies or those ghost movies. Japanese ghost movies, oh my gosh!” Carol said with nervous laughter. “Those movies were really scary, the Japanese have a different way, their expressions, the way in which... they were chilling, like the floating head. I remember the *Obake* (“oh-bah-k” • ghost). I think I had nightmares probably for three weeks.”

**A Japanese ghost, depicted in a Japanese woodblock print.**





**Matao and Shigeko** would show films in Alameda about once every three or four months. “They were active in the Japanese community, in that they brought people together,” Carol said.

Everyone who thinks of the Kogas remembers one other thing about them. “It was a Packard Limousine” said Kaz. “That’s how he travelled to go to different churches and places in California to show his movies.” The Koga’s “big black car” made quite an impression, wherever they went.

Where they went was all over California, from Sacramento, to San Francisco, the Central Valley and Los Angeles.

“Shigeko travelled with him,” Carol said. “They had no children. It was just the two of them. She was always really sweet to us.”

The Kogas were friends with Kaz and Carol’s family all the way back to Japan.

“I used to go over there,” Carol said, of going to Shigeko’s house. “And she would have me come over and she used to give me candy, and paper to color on. They were friends of my parents, so they would come over, too.”



**Shigeko  
“Cookie”**

**Matao**

**Misao  
Sato**

**Kiyoko  
Sato**

**Kimiko  
Sato**

**The Koga’s pose with the Sato family in Alameda, CA., circa 1947-1948. Kimiko is Kazuyoshi Sato and Carol Witt’s mother. Carol (not pictured) is Misao and Kiyoko’s sister.**



Matao, at left, poses perhaps with his cousins, in the driveway of his home at 2034 Pacific Ave, with the really big black car that everyone remembers, circa 1948. The house in the background belongs to their next door neighbor. Cookie's niece, Joyce Sue, thought the Kogas were pretty well off.

"They did quite well. I remember when I was little, I used to think they were rich, probably because of the big car."

In the 1950 census, Matao and Shigeo listed their occupations:

Koga, Matao	Head	Jap <sup>4</sup>	M	56	Mar	Japan	VST	ot	no	No	yes	Film Distributing	Motion Pictures
— Shigeo	Spouse	Jap <sup>4</sup>	F	39	Mar	Calif.		ot	no	No	yes	Film Distributing	Motion Pictures
No one at home		See sheet		74		lines 5-16							



Photo courtesy Valerie Turpen, the Alameda Museum





**Matao, at right, with an unknown man at what looks like the Buddhist Temple of Alameda, circa 1920s.**

“So he (Matao) would make these flyers, these movie posters (see next page), and he would have them printed up,” Carol continued. “They would give it to me so I could color on the back. I remember those posters, on the front, they were all in Japanese, and would have pictures of the samurai, whoever was in the movie. And it would be in that magenta or purple, because that’s what they printed in those days.”

Matao must have used those eye-catching posters to advertise his business.



**Satoko Sugiyama was seven** when she returned from her World War II incarceration camp (1945). Sometime after that, she attended movie nights. “After the war, we came out of camp,” Satoko said. “I lived in Alameda behind the temple. When the temple had special service, 3-4 times a year, they hired Mr. and Mrs. Koga to show Japanese movies. It was usually two features, one was a samurai movie, the other was a modern movie, war time or after the war films. We were just kids, we knew it was movie time.”

The Koga’s movies capped off a long day at the temple. “The schedule was 10 to 11 Sunday School, then 2pm adult service. They would have early dinner there, and then the movie started, I would say early evening.”





映倫

カラー作品

ラフレターの間違いから鬼隊長に惚れられ、進退きわまつた秋本与太郎は、野戦病院を逃げるようにして懐しの中隊に帰る。相変わらず得意の落語で戦友達を笑わせたが、ある日突然憲兵隊から出頭命令を受け、おそれおそれ行ってみると、分けもわからぬまま、陸軍中野学校にスパイ訓練生として入学させられてしまふ。間抜けの与太郎に、こんな訓練がつまらぬはずはなく、元々の珍なる事件をひきおこし、ついに元の中隊にもどされる。しかし、それが大変。部隊長の当番兵は抜擢されたものではなかったが、ひょんなことから部隊長の二号夫人と結婚させられたり、例の気味悪いオカマ六兵に追いかけられたりして全く戦争どころではなく、自分は立派な一等兵のくせに新参の二等兵の背中で流されたりして、与太郎の行くところ、必ず珍妙な事件がもたらがり、世の中が全く逆様に動いているかみえるから不思議である。演出を担当する白坂礼次郎監督にとつてフランキー堺は大学時代の先輩に当り、二人が割り出す喜劇は呼吸もぴったり、大いに楽しめるものになるでしょう。撮影は、「燃えつきた地図」あ、海軍」でいつもながら若々しくダイナミックな画面を見せてくれた、上原明が担当します。



映倫

# ZOKU YOTARO SENKI

**キヤスト**

秋本与太郎……………フランキー堺  
 柳川部隊長……………伴淳三郎  
 貞子夫人……………若水ヤエ子  
 すみ江……………長谷川待子  
 千恵子……………南美川洋子  
 小野田安夫……………長沢純  
 柿内上等兵……………三夏伸  
 広瀬上等兵……………飛田喜佐夫  
 並木上等兵……………中原健  
 笠原上等兵……………井上大吾  
 田熊六年兵……………梅津栄  
 矢吹少佐……………早川雄三  
 丸山軍曹……………成田三樹夫

**スタッフ**

企原……………関幸輔  
 脚本……………春風亭柳昇  
 監督……………白坂礼次郎  
 助監督……………小林正夫  
 撮影……………上原明

村柳……………仲村鉄弥  
 柳好……………春風亭柳好  
 柳匠……………春風亭柳好  
 柳問……………南堂正樹  
 柳島……………河島尚真  
 柳内……………喜多八  
 柳崎……………渡辺鉄弥  
 柳上……………喜多八  
 柳岩……………南堂正樹  
 柳師……………春風亭柳好  
 柳柳……………春風亭柳好  
 柏枝……………春風亭柳好  
 隊長……………春風亭柳好  
 憲兵将校……………春風亭柳好  
 菊池大尉……………三遊亭小円馬

KOGA KOGYO BU

古賀興行部



「尻啖る孫市」は、「月に一本は話題を呼ぶ時代劇を製作する」と発表してその動向が注目されている大映が、「鬼の棲む館」、「人斬り」に続いて放つ、大型娯楽時代劇です。原作は、売れっ子作家司馬遼太郎の同名小説で、戦国時代、織田信長によってようやく終止符を打たれようとしていたとき、この信長の天下布武の大偉業に待ったをかけた男。三千からなる日本最強の鉄砲集団の若大将維賀孫市の富や地位よりも自由と信義を重んじ女と戦争を限りなく愛した型破りに痛快な半生を雄大なスケールで描いたものです。孫市には、大映初出演の中村錦之助、戦国の雄織田信長に勝新太郎、藤吉郎に中村賀津雄、本願寺の僧、法専坊信照に本郷功次郎といった四大スターが扮し、それぞれ初共演にフアイトを燃やせば、孫市の追い求める理想の女小みちに栗原小巻、藤吉郎の妻寧々に梓英子、信長の政略結婚に利用される薄倅の女加乃に南美川洋子らが花を添えているが、内容、顔ぶれともに本年最高作との評判が高い。

## ZOKU YOTARO SENKI

(Private First Class Yotaro)  
 Daiei Color Film with English Subtitles  
 Original Story by Shunputei Ryusho  
 Directed by Usuzaka Reijiro

### CAST

Akimoto Yotaro …………… Frankie Sakai  
 Commander Yanagawa …… Ban Junzaburo  
 Chieko …………… Namikawa Yoko  
 Sumie …………… Hasegawa Machiko  
 Sergeant Maruyama …… Narita Mikio

A sequel to the original Yotaro War Diary which made a big hit at this theater several weeks ago, this new release again stars comedian Frankie Sakai as PFC Yotaro.

The story opens as our hero Yotaro is ordered back to Japan without any explanation. He is taken straight to the Nakano

School, the army's spy training center. And so begins an intensive training schedule embracing every aspects of intelligence work much to the chagrin and confusion of our slow-witted Yotaro.

Finally, when Sergeant Maruyama calls Yotaro in and questions his background the terrible mistake comes to light. Yotaro has written in the special talent column of his army questionnaire "Rakugo" meaning professional story-teller which was mistaken for "Rogo" or Russian language. So, after a harrowing experience Yotaro is sent back to his original unit.

Here he comes across the horse he once cared for and which is now commanding officer Yanagawa's mount. So he is selected to be Commander Yanagawa's groom.

"At last I have found a peaceful life," thinks Yotaro. But has he? Don't miss this hilarious army life of PFC Yotaro!

姫をだせ！ゼニをだせ！  
 天下が欲しくば俺を買え！

**スタッフ**

製作……………水田雅一  
 原作……………司馬遼太郎  
 脚本……………関幸輔  
 監督……………白坂礼次郎  
 撮影……………上原明

**キヤスト**

維賀孫市……………フランキー堺  
 小みち……………南美川洋子  
 法専坊信照……………本郷功次郎  
 木下藤吉郎……………中村錦之助  
 織田信長……………藤吉郎  
 藤吉郎の妻寧々……………梓英子  
 加乃……………南美川洋子  
 孫市の父左大夫……………志村喬  
 朝倉の女謀者お美和……………しめぎ村  
 辻君の明美……………小島三枝  
 牧田三右エ門……………五木ひろし  
 半井驢庵……………内田信  
 柴田五郎……………尾形十三郎  
 維賀五人衆の螢……………中村錦之助  
 維賀五人衆の若者……………水谷八重子  
 維賀の町人風の若者……………水谷八重子  
 町奉行和田伊賀守……………伊藤雄之助  
 孫市の部下……………伊藤雄之助  
 維賀五人衆の但中……………夏川静江  
 織田の鉄砲隊の組頭……………山田五十鈴  
 維賀五人衆の発中……………黒川彌太郎  
 流しの老巫女……………本間百合子  
 鉄砲商今井の番頭……………南原新太郎  
 分銅屋の亭主……………玉置信子  
 本願寺家老下間刑部……………原保美  
 朝倉方の騎馬武者……………堀内真直  
 維賀五人衆の下針……………上原謙  
 織田の物見頭……………鈴木美子  
 孫市の旗持ちの従者……………橋本忍  
 鉄砲商下村仙吉の番頭……………若原雅夫  
 半井家の取り次ぎの男……………若原雅夫  
 織田の足軽……………伊藤雄之助  
 維賀五人衆の鶴首……………伊藤雄之助  
 孫市の荷物持の従者……………伊藤雄之助  
 織田の足軽……………伊藤雄之助

村田東……………村田東  
 村田義……………村田義  
 村田昌……………村田昌  
 村田正……………村田正  
 村田三……………村田三  
 村田雄……………村田雄  
 村田也……………村田也  
 村田夫……………村田夫  
 村田四……………村田四  
 村田五……………村田五  
 村田六……………村田六  
 村田七……………村田七  
 村田八……………村田八  
 村田九……………村田九  
 村田十……………村田十

One of the many Japanese movie posters made by the Kogas.

Note their moniker, Koga Kogyo Bu at the bottom.

Original size: 13x17"

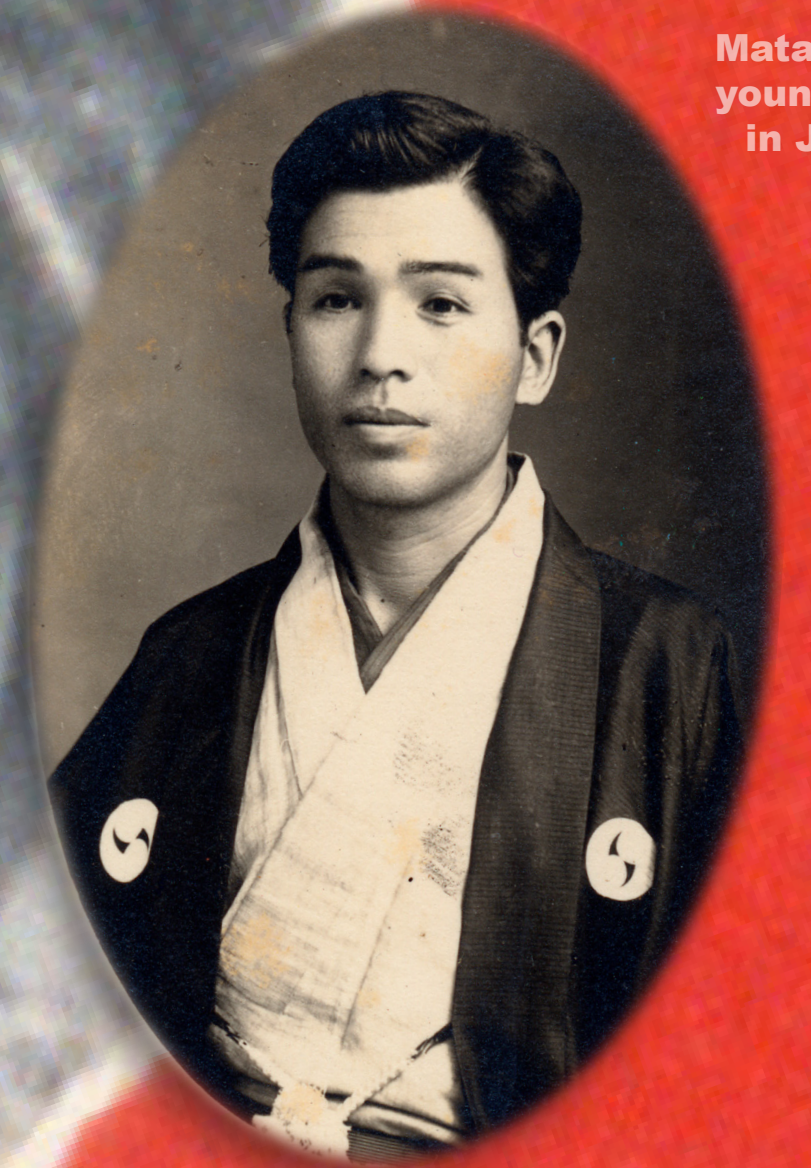


The now distant memories of a dark temple room, of samurai heroes and frightening floating heads, still resonate with the few people still alive who actually witnessed those films.

When asked if he enjoyed Koga's movies, Kaz, now in his 70s, smiled. "Yea, if you liked fighting."

There was another reason why the movies were popular gatherings for the Japanese in Alameda. "The temple was their way of socializing," Satoko said. "Their way of staying in contact with their friends."

Japanese ghosts, anyone?



**Matao as a young man in Japan**





**Matao Koga** was 40 when he married Shigeko “Cookie” Iwaihara, 27, on March 8, 1939. He lived at 1665 Geary Street in San Francisco, she at 2317 Bank Street in Alameda, CA. Rev. Joshin Motoyoshi performed the ceremony.

“The story I heard from Cookie was that he didn’t know much English and needed a Japanese-speaking wife,” recalled Valerie Turpen, the President of the Alameda Museum, and a friend of Cookie’s. “People at church thought she would be a good match. Cookie’s father had died pretty early\* and she was the oldest child and felt she had to take care of her mother. She presented that to him and Mr. Koga said if she was that kind, he would be happy to have her as a wife.”

Cookie was all of 4 feet and perhaps 7 inches tall. Her height didn’t keep her from engaging with the community. “Very outgoing and bossy. She was a sharp cookie,” Cookie’s niece, Joyce Sue, laughed. “He was very stoic, very quiet, didn’t have too much to say. She did all the talking, she was a live wire.”

\* **Katsutaro Iwaihara died in 1935 and is buried in Oakland.**

### **Shigeko Iwaihara Betrothed to M. Koga, Told**

ALAMEDA, Jan. 25—The engagement of Miss Shigeko Iwaihara, eldest daughter of Mrs. Yaye Iwaihara to Mr. M. Koga of San Francisco was announced recently at a attended by the relatives and bai-shakunins at the Iwaihara home on Bank Street. Miss Iwaihara is a graduate of the Alameda High school and is an active member of the Buddhist young people’s set. Her fiancé is the successor to Namiemon the benshi.



## **'Chonmage Namisan' Steals Show; Takes Movie of Matsuoka**

Namiemon, he of the chonmage (topknot to you) had a busy evening at the Dreamland auditorium Monday evening. In fact, he stole the whole show during the early part of the evening, until Yosuke Matsuoka arrived on the scene.

Conspicuous by his bulk, by his black derby hat, by his chonmage, and by the fact that he is a professional BEN-SHI (which is no relation to BEN-HUR), Namiemon was the cynosure of all eyes as he pattered around the speaker's platform.

What he was trying to do was to film a movie of the highlights of the evening, the stage auditorium, the flags-draped back curtain, the audience, and Matsuoka's forceful gestures. When finished, the silent picture will probably be shown in all parts of California with "Explanation by benshi, Namiemon."

Matao's job showing movies began when a man who had reigned supremely as one of the Benshi, "Chonmage\*\*" Tochuken Namiemon, decided to call it quits in February 1939. He picked his friend, Matao, to take over. Films shown by Benshi were silent, but by 1937, Nami-san's (see story at left) were mostly talkies. Maybe that's why he quit.

Matao, born in Japan in 1892, died in 1970. Shigeko was born in America in 1911. She died in 2006.

**This 1933 article extols the astounding power of Benshi Namiemon, the man that Matao succeeded in 1939. See article at left.**

**Shin Sekai Shinbun (The New World)**

**\*\* Tochuken Namiemon's real name was Minekichi Hieda. Chonmage must have been the moniker he went by. Those familiar with him sometimes referred to him as Nami-san. He returned to America not long after his 1939 trip to Japan and worked as an art dealer.**

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ALAMEDA  
**Japanese**  
**American**  
 HISTORY PROJECT

