

The Hidden Blade
A Weekly Film Report

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Many aspects of Japanese culture were depicted throughout this film. Warfare techniques were especially obvious due to the comparison with Western warfare. The scenes where the samurai were being educated on Western weaponry and techniques by a young man from Edo always provided the most contrast. For example, the clothes; the teacher from Edo wore the clothes of a proper Englishman, with the collared shirt, suit jacket, slacks, and shoes, while the samurai all wore a more traditional Japanese-style clothing with family crest, sandals, et cetera. Secondly, the running styles; the scene where the Edo teacher is trying to introduce the "Western run" with high knees rather than skimming the ground with the traditional-style run shows the difference in that the Japanese run was more suited for short swiftness in sword battle, as also seen when Katagiri practices sword technique and his feet swiftly lunged him forward while barely leaving the ground. My favorite of the many contrasting examples though was the scene where the samurai were learning how to load and fire a cannon. The natural Japanese response to giving one another an object was to bow, which the samurai did to each other as the cannonball transferred from person to person as well as before entering the cannon. When the Edo teacher yelled "Stop bowing!" it really highlighted how integral the act of bowing is to Japanese culture, that even when integrating to a new culture, that element remained strong. Various other aspects of Japanese culture included the movement of coals with chopsticks; many Western people only believe chopsticks are used for eating and don't know other uses such as cooking or moving the coal, as in this example. Also, the idea of "killing yourself according to law" really struck me because, even though I was aware that ritual suicide was an honorable act in Japanese culture, the idea that it was also part of the law never fully sank in, and I think that is a very unique aspect of Japanese culture that killing oneself was once a part of legislature. Another scene that really struck me as Japanese was the journey along the road, where little

shrines are set up along the path and people pray to them. Stopping to pray while on a journey is a reoccurring image in Japanese culture, which was also depicted in this film.

The story of this film also highlighted a very important era in Japanese history when Western and Japanese culture were clashing in the field of warfare. This film really displays this changing aspect well in that many different sides to the clash were included throughout the film. For example, the language barrier between the samurai and the Edo teacher when he was introducing all the new materials; calling them by their Western terms was confusing for the traditional samurai. The weaponry was a very obvious clash, but the subtext behind that of *death* by gun was depicted in the scene Hazama was killed; the sword hand cut off by the bullet could symbolize the fall of swords in battle against guns, and when Katagiri cried over his friend saying that he wouldn't have wanted to die by a gun also highlighted the significance behind the use of firearms in Japan in contrast to past ideals, such as dying by the sword. The storyline throughout the film incorporated these important aspects to Japanese history in addition to the classic story of love, honor, and comedy.

Watching "The Hidden Blade" and the "Sword of Desperation" at the same time was very difficult for me because the people and the stories were very similar, yet very different, and I found myself confused on the second day when we would start the latter half of the movie. In hindsight, I am not able to piece together the main defining characteristics to distinguish the two apart from one another, but in the midst of it all, I was quite lost. What I did find interesting though is that both of these stories were titled after a sword technique that was vital to the plot of the story. For example, "The Hidden Blade" is titled as such because the technique Katagiri used to avenge Hazama and his wife, who were both unjustly hurt by the head retainer, was a small, swift stab-style assassination technique with a blade that is literally hidden in the hilt of a sword.

Similarly, the “Sword of Desperation” is called such because the bird-spear technique can only be used when the user is below the opponent; when they are already so far gone that they are “half dead” and desperate to kill the opponent. I found this connection very interesting and it is the main reason that I am now able to distinguish both films in my memory—because the title and the sword technique are the link to the rest of the story.

I would give this film a five out of five. I would definitely watch it again, I would definitely recommend it to others, and the plot as well as the cinematography were nice, so I can do nothing but give it a five. While I felt that it was long, that is probably more due to the fact that I am overlapping the film with the “Sword of Desperation” in my mind. I also liked this film more than the “Sword of Desperation” because of the overall positive ending, with the protagonist enforcing justice and beginning a new life with the love-interest—happily ever after (Hidden Blade), rather than the sad ending of the woman waiting endlessly with her child for a man that will never return because he was betrayed and manipulated to be killed (Sword of Desperation).