

# Twilight Samurai

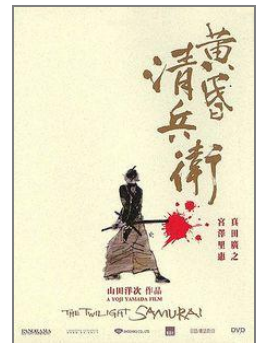
*Tasogare Seibei*, 2002, Japan

## Film Overview



This is an old man's movie in all the good ways: gentle, humanistic, rich with observation, quietly aware of all that can't be solved by the sword. Set in 1860s Japan, in the last years of the Tokugawa Shogunate that ruled the country for two and a half centuries -- and of the samurai class that protected and supported the shoguns -- "Samurai" peers into a sleepy corner of the dying feudal bureaucracy. His wife dead of consumption, Iguchi rushes home each evening to care for his senile mother and two daughters, 10-year-old Kayano (Miki Ito) and 5-year-old Ito (Erina Hashiguchi), the film's grown narrator. His fellow samurai head to the geisha house for drink and sport. To them, Iguchi is a self-absorbed wet blanket they nickname "Twilight," for his gloom or the apparent state of his career. His robe has become tattered and even his lordship has noticed that Iguchi needs to bathe more often. At home, however, Iguchi

is a thoughtful, progressive pacifist delighted that his daughters are learning to read and think for themselves. But the country's political structure begins to unravel and Iguchi is asked to fight again. The final scenes of "The Twilight Samurai" are pitched somewhere between battle and ballet, with contestants who understand that they're already ghosts. –Adapted from a review by Ty Burr, *The Boston Globe*



The director, Yoji Yamada, is extremely famous in Japan. He has directed many films besides *Twilight Samurai*; most notably, he wrote and directed many of the films in the *Otoko wa Tsurai Yo!* (*It's hard for a man!*) Series. This series encompasses 48 feature length films about Tora-san, an itinerant salesman who, though he never "gets the girl," is exuberant about life and the antithesis of the stereotypical Japanese white-collar worker.

## Culture Notes

- **The twilight of the samurai:** *Twilight Samurai* takes place shortly before the Tokugawa Period (1603-1868) was brought to an end with the Meiji Restoration of 1868, when the power of the samurai class was already on the wane. The Tokugawa era was one of military rule (a shogun supported by samurai of varying ranks), but was also largely peaceful. This left samurai with little to do other than become civil servants (Seibei serves as an accountant in the film), though they were still required to follow the strict codes of samurai behavior. The subsequent Meiji government would abolish the samurai class altogether (Meiji Period: 1868-1912). The conversation between Seibei and Yogo in the film reflects the concern that this is about to happen.
- **A different kind of Samurai film:** *Twilight Samurai* won many awards in Japan, including twelve Japanese Academy Awards. The actor who played Seibei, Hiroyuki Sanada, theorized that this was a result of its focus on "human drama" rather than the stylized, unrealistic action of older samurai films. He claimed that modern viewers were drawn to Seibei's desire for peace. –Interview in *Giant Robot* magazine, <http://www.giantrobot.com/transmissions/56twilightsamurai/>