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The Fiction of the 'Ninja': Ishikawa Goemon, *Shinobi no mono*, and English-Language Popular History

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In 1579 Ishikawa Goemon 石川五右衛門 (?–?1594) tried to kill the warlord Oda Nobunaga 織田信長 (1534–1582).[1] Sneaking undetected into the space above Nobunaga's bedroom, Goemon let down a length of thread, which he then used as a guidewire to drip liquid poison down into the mouth of the sleeping Nobunaga. Nobunaga survived only because he stirred in his sleep, moving his head at the last second and thereby avoiding a lethal dose. Having failed to kill Nobunaga, Goemon was forced to flee, leaving Nobunaga to meet his end a few years later at the hands of Akechi Mitsuhide 明智光秀 (1528–1582).

Though it may not have killed its intended target, Goemon's poison-thread method is undeniably memorable, and has been the subject of homages in a number of postwar works of film and animation. It appears, for instance, in the 1967 James Bond film *You Only Live Twice*, the 1990 comedy *Grosse Point Blank*, and, more recently, the Japanese anime *Sekai saikō no ansatsusha, isekai kizoku ni tensei suru* 世界最高の暗殺者、異世界貴族に転生する('The World's Finest Assassin Gets Reincarnated in Another World as an Aristocrat,' 2021). Goemon's poison-thread technique is also a staple in English-language histories of the 'ninja,' with numerous popular works identifying Goemon as a 'ninja' and his exploits as an example of historical assassinations carried out by such warriors.[2] One recent popular history even suggests that Goemon's technique was a known method of murder in sixteenth century Japan.[3]

There is just one problem: this celebrated assassination attempt almost certainly never happened. Despite extensive coverage in English-language 'ninja' histories as historical fact, no writer has ever identified a source for the story. Some writers have expressed mild skepticism, noting that the Goemon story is "very likely apocryphal" or "it is difficult to assess its

authenticity," but in more than fifty years of English-language 'ninja' writing the story has not been seriously challenged.[4] In this article I argue that no author has ever cited an historical source for the Goemon poison-thread story because it is entirely fictional, deriving from a misreading of a 1962 Japanese 'ninja' film, *Shinobi no mono* 忍びの者 ('The Shinobi'), as depicting historical events. *Shinobi no mono* was based on a novel by the playwright and artist Murayama Tomoyoshi 村山知義 (1901–1977), but the celebrated poison-thread technique is not in Murayama's work. The film's screenwriter Takaiwa Hajime 高岩肇 (1910–2000) appears to have added the motif during the transition from novel to screenplay, borrowing it from mystery writer Edogawa Ranpo's 江戸川乱歩 (1894–1965) 1925 detective novel *Yaneura no sanposha* 屋根裏の散歩者 (translated as *The Stalker in the Attic,* 2016).[5] Ranpo's own poison-thread technique was itself likely inspired by Arthur Conan Doyle's (1859–1930) 1892 Sherlock Holmes novel *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, in which a snake is slipped into a closed room via a bell-pull hole.[6] If this sequence of events is correct, Goemon's poison-thread is not an historical *shinobi* action but rather fiction all the way down: a scene from a 1962 Japanese film based on a 1925 Japanese novel, which was in turn based on an 1892 novel by an English writer.

This type of error—modern 'ninja' fiction misrepresented as historical fact—is endemic to the field of 'ninja' historiography, as will be seen below, and so this article is intended in part as an intervention into the field of 'ninja studies' as practiced in English. Such errors should concern both general readers and professional academics interested in Japanese literature and history. On the one hand, the unreliability of popular 'ninja' material misleads the public, while on the other, scholars who take this material as reliable are risking embarrassment, if not more serious professional consequences.

The Historiography of the 'Ninja:' The Flawed State of the Field

Before tracing the origin and circulation of the Goemon poison-thread story, some context is needed on how I distinguish between 'ninja' and the related term *shinobi*, as well as on the general state of 'ninja' history.

Most writers who have covered the topic acknowledge that the specific term 'ninja' was probably not used during the Warring States period (1467–1600) or before.[7] Rather, warriors engaged in clandestine warfare are more commonly referred to as *shinobi* or *shinobi no mono*. The techniques of these warriors appear to have been known as *ninjutsu*, a term

that would later be used as the name for a postwar martial art. Mentions of *shinobi* in medieval sources are not common and rarely detailed, though, so it is not clear whether medieval Japanese military thinking saw *shinobi* as a distinct identity, or as a set of tactics and a role any warrior could fill. Recent English-language scholarship on the topic has favored the latter interpretations: Polina Serebriakova and Daniel Orbach suggest that "guerrilla warfare in late medieval Japan was perceived as a tactic within war, not a separate category of warfare," and Constantine Nomikos Vaporis makes much the same point, noting that "*Ninjutsu*…was an activity and did not confer on its practitioners a special identity."[8]

Modern historians have often remarked that the lack of primary source documents makes studying *shinobi* unusually challenging. Karl Friday observes that "[t]he lack of reliable documents to work with makes ninja and *ninjutsu* a very difficult subject to research," while Serebriakova and Orbach note that "[t]he history of these irregular warriors is shrouded in mystery. Few reliable sources remain, with many documents torched during the civil wars." Stephen Turnbull also quotes Japanese historian Sugiyama Hiroshi 杉山博 as saying that "there are very few authentic historical records [relating to *shinobi*]."[9]

The limited presence of *shinobi* in historical sources contrasts with the extensive range of claims in the popular literature concerning the weapons, tools, and practices of the 'ninja.' Readers may have heard, for instance, of an association between *shinobi* and star-shaped throwing blades known as *shuriken* 手裏剣, of the 'ninja master' Hattori Hanzō Masanari 服部半蔵正成 (1542–1596), or of female *shinobi* known as *kunoichi* くノ一, who used their feminine charms to gather intelligence or gain access to targets for assassination. Recent Japanese scholarship has shown, however, that none of the above 'ninja' lore is supported by convincing historical evidence. Instead, these ideas derive mostly from novels, films, and other fictional media published in the late 1950s and early 1960s.[10] Concerning *shuriken*, for instance, Japanese scholars Yamada Yūji and Yoshimaru Katsuya point out that there is no record of an association between *shinobi* and star-shaped throwing weapons, and that the connection emerges through Japanese films and television from around 1957 onward.[11]

With all due respect to Friday, Serebriakova and Orbach, and Turnbull, then, a document-based historical methodology is not the only or even the best way to approach the study of the 'ninja' phenomenon. In the cases mentioned above of *shuriken*, Hattori Hanzō, and *kunoichi*, document-based history has essentially nowhere to go; rather, the claim can only be

traced and understood through the study of literary texts. We might therefore follow Yoshimaru Katsuya in distinguishing the historical *shinobi*, about whom little concrete is known, from the 'ninja,' a voluminous modern construct primarily based in fiction rather than historical fact.[12]

The problem is that modern popular 'ninja' histories tend to represent themselves as reliable history even as their claims often derive from fiction. This has arguably been a defining characteristic of 'ninja' history for much of its existence, and so I suggest that most twentieth century 'ninja' histories be viewed as a form of unacknowledged historical fiction, in that they combine real events and individuals with elements drawn from fictional sources. This is what historical novels do, but 'ninja' history's novelistic methodology is rarely acknowledged as such. A methodology of writing fiction framed as historical fact carries obvious potential to mislead the reader, and this potential is nowhere more apparent than in the English-language popular literature. This is why the focus of this article is on the circulation of the Goemon claim in English-language popular histories rather than Japanese-language sources or scholarly histories, since to the best of my knowledge no Japanese writer has ever claimed Goemon's poison-thread exploits as a real event, nor has any English-language scholarly history mentioned them.

If no scholarly history has ever mentioned the Goemon story, then, why is it worth discussing? The reason is that the English-language popular literature on the 'ninja' is far more extensive and influential than scholars of Japanese history and literature may realize. *Ninja: The Invisible Assassins* (1970), the first book-length study of the 'ninja' in English by the American journalist Andrew Adams (1922–2010), went through thirty-six editions and was still in print as recently as 2008. More recently, British historian Stephen Turnbull's *Ninja: AD 1460–1650* (2003) went through at least six editions, including translations into Italian and Indonesian. Both works contain the Goemon story, which has therefore been circulating in print for more than fifty years, reaching an audience of hundreds of thousands of readers, if not millions. This is a vastly larger readership than most scholarly studies can hope to attain, even without accounting for dissemination of the story in online spaces such as Wikipedia.[13]

Authors such as Adams and Turnbull, then, represent a form of popular Japanology of which many professional academics are unaware and with which they do not engage. The existence of a broad body of popular-facing

books on Japanese history would be a good thing were it not for 'ninja' history's chronic unreliability. Adams and Turnbull both mention the Goemon poison-thread story as if it were documented fact across multiple publications, and as shown below both authors include other demonstrably fictional episodes in their works. General readers, who by definition lack the skills to check Japanese-language sources, are unlikely to realize the fictional nature of this content. The result is a 'ninja'-related epistemological crisis: a non-specialist reading an English-language 'ninja' history cannot know whether what she is reading has a basis in historical evidence or if it is a scene from a 1960s movie.

Scholarly readers should also be aware of the endemic problems in the field of 'ninja' history and treat the literature with an appropriately critical eye. The potential consequences of not doing so are illustrated by Thomas Lockley's *African Samurai: The True Story of Yasuke, a Legendary Black Samurai in Feudal Japan* (2019), which found itself at the center of controversy in the summer of 2024. Lockley's book, which narrates the life of an African man known as Yasuke 弥助 (n.d.) who entered the service of Oda Nobunaga, claims to provide "an alternative view of history which does not place white European males at its center," as against Japanese history "written from an ethnocentric, and predominantly Eurocentric, perspective."[14] Unfortunately *African Samurai* also contains several 'ninja' episodes, including the Goemon poison-thread story, which Lockley appears to have taken from Stephen Turnbull's 2003 book *Ninja: AD 1460-1650*. These are presented as historical events in Lockley's study, but Lockley appears not to have realized that several of Turnbull's episodes are from unreliable sources or are literally fictional. The inclusion of inaccurate 'history' in Lockley's book has proven to be a gift to groups seeking to downplay Yasuke's significance or paint his existence as a "woke" myth, with negative consequences for Japan Studies as a whole.[15]

The article that follows traces the Ishikawa Goemon poison-thread story from both an historical and a literary perspective. In essence it is a reception history of a fictional story, anchored in the 1962 film *Shinobi no mono* and moving both backward and forward in time. This approach allows the primary source evidence for Goemon to be examined, and also allows for exploration of how the key scene in *Shinobi no mono* came to be mis-represented to English-speaking audiences. Even if one takes the position that such mis-representations in popular works are to be expected and are not worth the time to challenge (as some scholars may), one can never predict how and where such unreliable information might surface,

or whose agenda it may be used to serve.

Ishikawa Goemon: The Man, The Myth

A logical place to begin would be to ask what documentary sources can tell us about Ishikawa Goemon. From the limited sources available, it is probable that Goemon existed, that he was a robber active in the Kyoto area during the 1590s, and that he was executed in gruesome fashion by being boiled alive in a large cauldron at some point during 1594. The first source attesting to these points is a diary kept by the Kyoto court noble Yamashina Tokitsune 山科言経 (1543–1611), which records that some unnamed criminals were boiled alive on the twenty-fourth day of the third month of Bunroku 3 (1594).[16] The name Ishikawa Goemon only appears in connection with these executions decades later, in the writings of the scholar Miura Jōshin 三浦浄心 (1565–1644), who records that "during the time of Lord Toyotomi Hideyoshi [1582–1598]" there was "a great robber named Ishikawa Goemon…his deeds at length were brought to light, and Ishikawa Goemon was boiled in a cauldron at Sanjō-gawara in Kyoto."[17]

Roughly contemporary with Jōshin's account, in 1642, Confucian scholar Hayashi Razan 林羅山 (1583–1657) also noted Ishikawa Goemon's activities and demise:

> Around the time of the Bunroku era [1592–1596] there was a man named Ishikawa Goemon, who broke into houses and stole and robbed without end. Per the orders of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the Kyoto Deputy searched high and low for him. At length the Deputy captured Goemon, and also bound Goemon's mother along with some twenty or so of their family, then executed them by boiling at Sanjō-gawara [in Kyoto].[18]

Razan's commentary is the earliest source to suggest a connection between Goemon and the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 (1537–1598), *de facto* ruler of Japan for much of the 1590s. Though Razan's account does not suggest that Goemon and Hideyoshi ever met in person, later literary retellings of the Goemon story often posited a personal connection between the thief and the warlord, usually one of antagonism.[19] Many later Goemon stories would suggest, for instance, that Goemon's capture had occurred while he was sneaking into Hideyoshi's bedchamber either to assassinate him or to steal from him.

A fourth mention of Goemon comes from a commentary by the Jesuit priest Pedro Morejón (1562–?1634) to a diary by the Spanish merchant Bernardino de Ávila Girón (n.d.; in Japan between 1594 and 1619). De

Ávila records the execution of some unnamed criminals in similar terms to Tokitsune, though de Ávila's use of the Spanish verb *freir* ('to fry') suggests that he believed the criminals were cooked in oil rather than water: "By torture they uncovered fifteen robber chiefs…they fried them alive (*frieron vivos*), and as for their wives and children, mothers and fathers, brothers and family, they crucified them, as far as the fifth generation."[20]

Morejón adds his own comment that: "This was in the year of '94, in the summer, and those fried were but Ixicava Goyemon and his family, some nine or ten people […]."[21]

None of the above sources mention a poison thread or any connection between Goemon and Oda Nobunaga, though; in fact, all of them place Goemon's exploits during Hideyoshi's zenith, more than a decade after Nobunaga's 1582 assassination. Documentary historical evidence thus provides no support for Goemon's poison-thread exploits, since there is no mention of the key elements of the story in the above sources, all of which have Goemon active after Nobunaga's death.

A next step would be to consider literary retellings of the Goemon legend across the Edo period. It is conceivable that the poison-thread story originated in the theater, as one of many literary inventions surrounding Goemon, and if so that would at least show that the story had a pre-modern origin. Surveying the range of extant Goemon plays is a vast task, and space does not permit even a limited sampling of such works.[22] To state just the conclusion, I have not found any suggestion of the poison-thread story in theatrical works featuring Goemon between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The closest would be Namiki Gohei I's 並木五瓶初代 (1747–1808) *Sanmon gosan no kiri* 山門五山桐 (*The Temple Gate and the Paulownia Crest*, 1776), which does at least have Goemon try to assassinate a major warlord.[23] In the climactic moment of this work, Goemon tries to kill Hideyoshi (called Mashiba Hisayoshi 真柴久吉 in the play itself) by throwing a knife at him, but Hisayoshi stops the blade with a wooden water-scoop and is unharmed. Here, the main antagonist is Hisayoshi—that is to say, Hideyoshi—not Nobunaga.

Goemon's story was also a popular subject for Edo-era prose fiction, so prose narratives must be considered as a potential source for the poison-thread story. Prose versions of Goemon's story are less varied than their stage counterparts, so I focus on one representative example, an eighteenth century work entitled *Zokkin hiseidan* 賊禁秘誠談 (A tale of a villain's morals, and of sincerity well-concealed). This text is classified as a

jitsuroku 実録 (‘veritable chronicle’), a distinctive yet understudied form of semi-historical fiction popular during the Edo period.[24] *Jitsuroku* took real historical events and figures as their subject, though they also included semi- or wholly fictitious elements for more effective storytelling, and so are best viewed as fictional.

Zokkin hiseidan was written during the mid-to-late eighteenth century by an obscure author named Tōbu Zankō 東武残光 (n.d.), and like many *jitsuroku* it circulated in manuscript form. Its focus is on the life of Ishikawa Goemon, who first appears as a young man learning the arts of stealth (*shinobi no jutsu* 忍の術) from a local notable named Momochi Sandayū 百地三太夫.[25] Goemon then begins an affair with Sandayū’s wife, but when Sandayū’s concubine and one of his servants uncover the affair, Goemon and the wife murder both of them to keep their liaison secret. Goemon prepares to run away with the wife only to have a change of heart, kills her as well, and flees to Kyoto to begin life as a robber.[26]

While in Kyoto Goemon encounters Kimura Shigekore 木村重茲 (?–1595), a powerful vassal of Hideyoshi, to whom he teaches the ways of stealth. After the birth of Hideyoshi’s heir Hideyori 豊臣秀頼 (1593–1615) threatens their position, Kimura and Hideyoshi’s hitherto influential nephew Hidetsugu 豊臣秀次 (1568–1595) ask Goemon to help them steal a magical alarm from Hideyoshi, for said alarm makes their planned assassination of Hideyoshi almost impossible.[27] Goemon’s mastery of stealth techniques allows him to disable the alarm, but he is captured when he treads on the toes of one of Hideyoshi’s guards.[28] When questioned, Goemon lambasts Hideyoshi for his disloyalty to Nobunaga’s surviving family and claims that while he, Goemon, stole to help the poor and lowly, Hideyoshi stole the realm for his own benefit and is therefore “the greatest of all thieves.”[29] Shortly after, Goemon goes to his death in the cauldron at Shichijō-gawara.

Entertaining as it is, *Zokkin hiseidan* cannot be the source for the poison-thread story. Although it does note Goemon’s training in the arts of stealth, Nobunaga is already dead when the story begins, and in fact at the end of the work Goemon criticizes Hideyoshi for disloyalty to Nobunaga. The story is nevertheless notable for two main reasons. The first is that recent scholarship has suggested that *Zokkin hiseidan* was the template for many subsequent Goemon stories on both page and stage, including the play *Sanmon gosan no kiri* and the widely-read semi-fictional *Ehon Taikōki* 絵本太閤記 (Illustrated account of lord Hideyoshi,1797-1802), in which Goemon also attempts to steal the magical alarm.[30] The second

reason to note *Zokkin hiseidan* is its influence on postwar Japanese 'ninja' writers, since the prolific 'ninja' historian Okuse Heishichirō published a modern Japanese translation and adaptation of the text in 1977, while Murayama Tomoyoshi's *Shinobi no mono* acknowledges the work's influence and echoes some of its plot points.[31]

Murayama's Marxist Ninjas: Ishikawa Goemon as Underdog Hero

I cannot, of course, prove a negative and conclusively rule out a pre-modern source for the Goemon poison-thread tale, but the failure of the search is suggestive. Even the fictional works in fact point away from the notion that Goemon tried to kill Nobunaga, since they are consistent in portraying Hideyoshi as Goemon's traditional antagonist, the Sheriff of Nottingham to Goemon's Robin Hood, so to speak.

The comparison between Goemon and Robin Hood is an apt one, since as Okuno Kumiko notes, while Edo-era portrayals of Goemon ranged from an heroic rebel to a brutal murderer, by the early Meiji period Goemon was more commonly a "righteous bandit" (*gizoku* 義賊) who championed the poor and downtrodden.[32] By the early twentieth century one could suggest that Goemon was the Japanese Robin Hood, or even that he was a kind of late medieval socialist *avant la lettre*. In 1912, an article in the English-language *Oriental Review* described Goemon's robbing of the rich to help the poor as "a very crude form of the modern socialism," while the preface to a 1926 edition of *Ehon Taikōki* opined that Goemon would have made a "very fine Communist."[33]

It may have been this reputation that inspired Murayama Tomoyoshi to adopt Goemon as the hero for his *Shinobi no mono* novels. These he published between November 1960 and April 1968, first in *Akahata* 赤旗 (The red banner), the official newspaper of the Japanese Communist Party, then in the journal *Bunka hyōron* 文化評論 (Cultural critique), and then in book form in the following years.[34] *Shinobi no mono*'s initial appearance in the pages of *Akahata* was no surprise, since Murayama himself was a prominent playwright and left-wing political activist, as well as a founder of the radical Mavo マヴォ art collective in the 1920s. Though Murayama's politically-engaged theater was targeted by militarist authorities during the 1930s, by the early 1960s Murayama had become a respected literary and cultural figure in Japan.

For all that Murayama's activities in Mavo and theater have received full coverage in both English and Japanese, few studies remark on Murayama's ninja 'novels,' perhaps finding it incongruous that a

distinguished figure should take up such an unserious topic.[35] Murayama himself, though, did not see his ninja novels as frivolous, appearing to view historical fiction in similar terms to the Marxist literary critic György Lukács (1885–1971), as a tool with which to awaken the present-day people of Japan to the historical realities of class struggle.[36] In a 1965 piece entitled "Honpen no dokusha ni" 本編の読者に (To the reader of this volume), for instance, Murayama wrote that on a 1957 trip to the People's Republic of China and North Korea, he had been struck by how calm, pleasant, and self-sacrificing the people of these countries had become after their respective revolutions. This, Murayama noted, had made him "realize just how warped was the national character of which the Japanese are possessed."[37]

The reasons for this 'warping,' Murayama felt, lay in Japan's history, especially from the Warring States period onward, and the figure of the 'ninja' was an excellent one with which to explore this issue. Obliged to steep himself in deception to survive, for Murayama the 'ninja' was a pitiable figure manipulated and exploited by all around him.[38] In another piece the same year, Murayama clarified that he viewed 'ninja' as essentially historical victims of class struggle: "To be a ninja is an action forced on one only in a society of ugly struggle, and the ninja is a human who, in order to live in such a society, has no choice but to train himself to become the diametric opposite of an ideal human being."[39] In that sense, then, Murayama understood the 'ninja' as a political figure, a suffering proletariat through whom might be revealed deeper truths about late medieval Japanese society.

Ishikawa Goemon's reputation as champion of the underdog, therefore, made him a suitable protagonist, a role he plays in Murayama's first two novels. Goemon's time comes to an end at the conclusion of the second novel, as Hideyoshi captures Goemon after an unsuccessful assassination attempt and sentences him to be boiled alive. The climax to the second novel leads the reader to believe that Goemon has indeed been executed, but the third novel reveals that Goemon escaped and has taken on the new name of Kirigakure Saizō 霧隠才蔵 to continue his adventures.

Meaning literally "Saizō, Hidden-By-Mist," Kirigakure Saizō would have been a familiar name to Murayama's readers, since Saizō was one of the stars of a series of popular novels produced by the publisher Tachikawa Bunko 立川文庫 from the early 1910s.[40] Alongside his friend and rival Sarutobi Sasuke 猿飛佐助, Kirigakure Saizō is a magic-using warrior who fights for the real-life warlord Sanada Yukimura 真田幸村 (1567–1615) in

a fictionalized late Warring States Japan. Since the Tachikawa Bunko novels refer to both Saizō and Sasuke as "masters of *ninjutsu*" (*ninjutsu meijin* 忍術名人), some postwar authors incorporated these characters into the newly emergent mythos of the historical 'ninja.'[41] As Stephen Turnbull points out, however, in prewar Japan the term *ninjutsu* commonly denoted literal magic rather than stealth skills or the postwar martial art of *ninjutsu*, so it is arguably anachronistic to term Sasuke and Saizō 'ninja' in the sense that the word is used today.[42]

In 1965, Murayama would explain to his readers why he had chosen the topic of 'ninja': "In these works I have focused on ninja and *ninjutsu*," he wrote, "but my intent was emphatically not to write a novel that would provide entertainment for the masses; rather, I have set out with the intent of writing an authentic historical novel."[43] This "authentic historical novel" used fictional characters to represent the deeper historical reality of 'ninja' as victims of oppression:

> [Hero of the later *Shinobi no mono* novels Kirigakure Saizō], in the same way as [fellow Tachikawa Bunko characters] Sarutobi Sasuke, Lay Priest Miyoshi Seikai, Mōri Kamanosuke, Anayama Kosuke and so on, is a name-bearer, not someone who actually existed in history. However, it is certain that there did exist countless numbers of ninja whose names no longer remain, who were ordered about by military leaders and went to their destruction. Their names are lost, and there is no way to dig them up […] This is the reason why I took these names that are widely known but lack any actual substance behind them, attached them to these ninja, and sent them forth. In so doing, for the first time these names ceased to be simply empty ones, while at the same time the entities who actually existed at last gain a name, so that name and substance can correspond to one another.[44]

In essence, Murayama was practicing what might now be termed subaltern history, using literary works to capture a more abstract social truth one could not "dig up" through conventional history. Importantly, though, Murayama was clear that he was writing fiction; he never maintained that *Shinobi no mono*'s characters had "actually existed in history."

Murayama's full *Shinobi no mono* series covers nearly two thousand pages, so here I will only summarize the events of the first novel, on which the 1962 film is based. The novel is set in the 1570s and 1580s in central Japan, and begins with the conflict between Oda Nobunaga and the warlord Asakura Yoshikage 朝倉義景 (1533–1573). Goemon is part of a

clan of Iga 'ninja' led by Momochi Sandayū, and when Nobunaga defeats Yoshikage in 1573 the Iga 'ninja,' along with their rivals in the Kōka region of Ōmi Province, must reckon with Nobunaga's territorial ambitions. After his junior 'ninja' fail to assassinate Nobunaga, Momochi Sandayū gives the task to the handsome and talented Ishikawa Goemon.

Momochi Sandayū is far from a benevolent leader, though, for he excels in manipulating his star pupil Goemon. Most notably, Momochi steers his wife, named Inone イノネ in the novel, into Goemon's arms by withholding sex for the entire course of their marriage. Once Goemon has begun his affair with the frustrated Inone, Momochi can then control Goemon by blackmailing him. When Momochi makes it clear that he knows about the affair, a panicked Goemon murders Inone by throwing her down a well, then flees to Kyoto, only for Momochi to locate him and demand that Goemon work for him to atone for his misdeeds. These sections parallel the mid-eighteenth century *jitsuroku Zokkin hiseidan* discussed earlier, though with certain alterations. The Momochi Sandayū of *Zokkin hiseidan*, for instance, is an innocent party taken advantage of by the lustful and crafty Goemon, but Murayama's Momochi engineers Goemon's liaison with his wife for his own benefit and is played as a cynical, ruthless puppet master.

The most relevant question, though, would be how Murayama's 1960 novel depicts Goemon's famous poison-thread assassination attempt. Surprisingly, the scene in question does not appear in Murayama's novel. Goemon does try to assassinate Nobunaga, and does use poison to do so, but the novel does not mention the thread technique, and in fact contains several details that rule out its use.

Goemon's poisoning of Nobunaga comes after an initial, unsuccessful attempt to kill Nobunaga by sniping with a rifle.[45] Having returned to Kyoto, Goemon gets into a fight with a fellow 'ninja' named Magodayū 孫大夫, a master poisoner who, under duress, provides Goemon with a purportedly lethal venom named *jakumetsu* 寂滅 ('oblivion-of-death'). This is the same name as the poison that Goemon drips down the thread in the film, but in the novel the *jakumetsu* poison is intended to be mixed into the victim's drink:

> [Goemon] "You have poison on you, don't you?"
> [Magodayū] "W-what kind of poison?"
> "The kind where you mix a couple of drops in *sake* or water, and it kills on the spot."
> "Loosen your grip, and I'll give it to you."

> Magodayū brought forth a small box, decorated with gold leaf.
> "There's a water buffalo horn in this box. Within the horn is a rare poison called *jakumetsu*. I'm the only one who has it."
> "Hmm…how do you use it?"
> "Put a drop into water or the like."[46]

Goemon apparently succeeds in poisoning Nobunaga, who becomes seriously ill. *Shinobi no mono* describes how Nobunaga "developed an abnormally high fever, sweat dripping from his whole body, grasping at thin air, pawing at his bedding, and beginning to writhe in agony."[47] Nobunaga's doctors are baffled, but in the end the *jakumetsu* poison is not as lethal as expected and Nobunaga recovers. This, *Shinobi no mono* ascribes either to the poison losing its potency over time or to its being improperly prepared.[48] Murayama's novel therefore does not seem to have envisioned Goemon using the thread technique to deliver the poison. In fact, an earlier passage has Goemon scouting out Nobunaga's Azuchi Castle only to find that the castle has no underfloor crawl spaces or accessible ceiling vaults.[49]

"What's a *Shinobi no mono* Anyway?": From Novel to Screenplay

The absence of the poison-thread technique from Murayama's novel leaves one remaining hypothesis: that Goemon, Nobunaga, and the poison-thread technique first appeared together in the 1962 film *Shinobi no mono* itself. To explore this hypothesis further, it is helpful to look at *Shinobi no mono*'s adaptation from novel to screenplay.

Produced by Daiei Studios, the film *Shinobi no mono* was directed by Yamamoto Satsuo 山本薩夫 (1910–1983). Though Yamamoto would become a distinguished figure in the world of Japanese cinema, he had only just joined Daiei at the time, and *Shinobi no mono* was his first project. The idea to adapt Murayama's novel appears to have been Yamamoto's own, possibly inspired by Yamamoto's sympathy for Murayama's political views, for Yamamoto also had Communist leanings. Yamamoto's political views had complicated his hiring at Daiei, as senior figures at the studio were reluctant to employ a known Communist. Daiei president Nagata Masaichi 永田雅一 (1906–1985), however, had fought Yamamoto's corner, stating that he did not care about Yamamoto's ideology so long as he did his job well.[50]

Shortly afterward, Yamamoto would pitch the idea of adapting the novel *Shinobi no mono* to Nagata. Yamamoto's recollection of the conversation is worth quoting at length:

> [Nagata] "What's a *shinobi no mono* anyway?"
>
> [Yamamoto] "A ninja, it's a story about ninjas."
>
> "A ninja? You mean somebody who makes a symbolic sign with his fingers and then transforms himself into a [rat] or toad? I'm afraid that isn't such a good idea!" Nagata looked unimpressed.
>
> "No, this is different. What you described is the old kind. What I am talking about is the scientific techniques a ninja uses."
>
> I then went on to talk about the role ninjas had played in Japanese history and how their practices were in fact based in science. Nagata began to show some interest.
>
> "Is that so? Is there an original story somewhere? And who is the author?"
>
> "It's a serialized story by Murayama Tomoyoshi."
>
> "Really? By Murayama?" Easily impressed by big names, Nagata's curiosity was further aroused. "Well, well, let's do give it some thought then. By the way, where is the story serialized?"
>
> I was about to say *The Red [Banner]*, but, at that very moment, I restrained myself.
>
> "It's serialized in a regional newspaper."
>
> "A regional newspaper? Well, I'll read it when it is published as a single volume. For the time being, why don't you think about the story line?"[51]

Several points are of interest here. One is that Nagata does not seem to have been familiar with the concept of either the fictional 'ninja' or the historical *shinobi*, consistent with the idea that the modern 'ninja' and accompanying historical claims only emerged in the 1960s in Japan. A second point concerns Nagata's mention of 'ninja' as transforming into a rat or toad, which suggests Nagata understood *ninjutsu* in its earlier sense, as a form of literal magic rather than skills of stealth or physical combat. "Rats" and "toads" also implies Nagata had in mind two Edo-era fictional characters, as "rat" likely refers to the evil sorcerer Nikki Danjō 仁木弾正, arch-villain of the 1777 play *Meiboku Sendai hagi* 伽羅先代萩 (*Precious Incense and Autumn Flowers of Sendai*) who magically transforms himself into a rat and becomes invisible.[52] "Toad" likewise refers to the hero Jiraiya 児雷也, star of multiple prose works and plays from the early nineteenth century onward, whose magical powers allowed him to control or transform into giant toads. Finally, it is significant that Yamamoto stressed that *Shinobi no mono*'s 'ninja' would be "scientific." By this Yamamoto appears to have meant that the film would not feature magical powers, focusing instead on deeds that could plausibly happen in real life.

Despite his ignorance of the 'ninja,' Nagata elected to green-light the

production, and his faith in Yamamoto was amply rewarded. Working with Daiei screenwriter Takaiwa Hajime, Yamamoto simplified the novel's plot and cast the former kabuki actor Ichikawa Raizō VIII 市川雷蔵八代 (1931–1969) in the role of Goemon. The result would be a surprise hit that gave birth to a film franchise in seven further *Shinobi no mono* movies, the series ending with the death of lead actor Ichikawa Raizō in 1969. Screenwriter Takaiwa Hajime is the key figure here, however, as Takaiwa's involvement explains how the poison-thread motif came to be in the film version of *Shinobi no mono.*

The source for the poison-thread motif was almost certainly the 1925 detective novel *Yaneura no sanposha* by Edogawa Ranpo. Set in twentieth century Japan and featuring no 'ninja' of any kind, *Yaneura no sanposha*'s main character is a man named Gōda Saburō 郷田三郎. While living in a boarding house, Gōda takes to exploring the house's attic spaces and spying on the inhabitants below. At length the increasingly alienated Gōda murders one of his fellow boarders, a dentist named Endō 遠藤, by finding a knot-hole in the ceiling above Endō's room, dangling the drawstring from his trousers down into the room as a guide-line, then dripping morphine into the sleeping man's mouth:

> Gōda took the bottle of poison out of his pocket, stilling as he did his hand, which had begun to shake on its own. He took out the stopper, used the drawstring to check that everything was lined up – what an indescribable feeling that moment was! – drip, drip, drip, a dozen or so drops…Gōda had seen the poison drop into Endō's mouth; there could be no mistake about it…[53]

Ranpo's novel is a compelling candidate as the point of origin of the poison-thread technique, and the case is strengthened by the fact that screenwriter Takaiwa Hajime and Ranpo were regular collaborators. Takaiwa and Ranpo worked together on four projects between 1946 and 1959 and were personally acquainted, since Takaiwa had visited Ranpo in person in May 1946 to discuss how to adapt his work.[54]

One might object that perhaps Ranpo himself borrowed the poison-thread technique from an as-yet-unidentified historical source related to *shinobi*. Ranpo's later writings on the development of *Yaneura no sanposha* cast doubt on this, though, suggesting that Ranpo came up with the technique himself. Apparently Ranpo had originally intended to write a locked-room murder mystery in which the victim was killed via a pistol fired through a knothole from above. This idea did not seem quite right,

however, so Ranpo set the idea aside to work on it before coming up with the idea of using dripped poison instead.[55]

Ranpo's inspiration for the use of poison from above may have come partly from an earlier source, though, since *Yaneura no sanposha*'s method of murder is similar to the 1892 Sherlock Holmes mystery *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, in which a victim is killed in an otherwise inaccessible room by a murderer who introduces a poisonous snake via the hole in the ceiling used for the bell-pull. Ranpo would certainly have been aware of *The Speckled Band* when he wrote *Yaneura no sanposha*, since it was available in Japanese translation by 1899.[56] In 1929, four years after *Yaneura no sanposha*, Ranpo also published his own translation of *The Speckled Band* as part of a series of world detective fiction.[57]

Some Stories Are Too Good to Check: Andrew Adams' *Ninja: The Invisible Assassins*

It appears that the Goemon poison-thread story was unknown in Japan until it appeared for the first time in *Shinobi no mono* in 1962, and that its genesis lay in combining Murayama's plot with Ranpo's Sherlock Holmes-inspired method of murder. This adaptation of prior materials is itself nothing untoward; in fact, it is a common part of Japanese literary production. Where matters become problematic is from 1970 onward, with the representation to English-speaking audiences that Goemon's assassination attempt belonged to the realms of historical fact.

As it happens, English-speaking audiences had already seen the poison-thread technique (without Goemon) in the 1967 James Bond film *You Only Live Twice*. In this film, which was the first introduction of the 'ninja' to most Western viewers, a black-clad figure attempts to kill Bond as he sleeps by dripping poison down a thread. The attempt fails, instead killing Bond's sleeping partner, a Japanese secret agent named Aki (Wakabayashi Akiko 若林映子, 1939–).

There is a direct connection between *You Only Live Twice* and *Shinobi no mono* in that the *ninjutsu* master Hatsumi Masaaki served as consultant to both, and the American martial artist and 'ninja' author Donn Draeger (1922–1982) served as stunt double to Bond, played by Sean Connery (1930–2020). *You Only Live Twice* itself cannot be the point of origin for the poison-thread story in English media, though, as the film is set in modern Japan and makes no mention of Goemon or Nobunaga. Instead, the first presentation of the story to English-speaking audiences was in the 1970 book *Ninja: The Invisible Assassins* by the author and journalist

Andrew Adams, where it is mentioned twice.

As Adams' *Invisible Assassins* contains no bibliography or source citations, it is not easy to determine where his account of Goemon's activities came from. Since the only known depiction of Goemon's poison-thread before 1970 was *Shinobi no mono*, though, it is overwhelmingly likely that the film itself was Adams' source. To confirm this, it would be helpful to demonstrate that Adams had seen *Shinobi no mono* or was at least aware of the film. At first this seems improbable, since *Shinobi no mono* did not have a mainstream cinematic release in any Anglophone country and was not commercially available with English subtitles until 1998.[58] Adams himself, however, had spent time in Japan during the 1960s, and in any case would not have needed to be in Japan to see *Shinobi no mono*, since it was screened on a limited basis in California and Hawaii. The New Kokusai Theater in Honolulu, for instance, had shown at least one film in the *Shinobi no mono* franchise as early as 1964, while the first 1962 film was shown on the UC Berkeley campus in July of 1972.[59] Films from the *Shinobi no mono* franchise were also screened at the Kokusai Theater in Los Angeles during the mid-1960s, and this last venue provides clear proof that Adams was aware of the *Shinobi no mono* films.

The Kokusai Theater connection can be seen in three articles Adams published in the martial arts magazine *Black Belt* in December 1966 and January and February 1967, parts of which later became *Invisible Assassins*. These articles show influence from 'ninja' historian Okuse Heishichirō and martial arts master Hatsumi Masaaki, as Adams mentions Okuse by name and refers to his publications, while Hatsumi appears in several of the photographs accompanying the articles. Of particular interest, though, are stills from films in the *Shinobi no mono* series, credited to the Kokusai Theater in Los Angeles and clearly marked with the graphs *Shinobi no mono.*[60] However, Adams does not mention the film franchise by name in either the captions or the main text. There is also no direct mention of Goemon in Adams' 1966 and 1967 articles, though he does appear in the pages of *Invisible Assassins*:

> After Nobunaga had retired for the night, Goemon made a small hole in the ceiling just above the general's head. Then, noiselessly he lowered a thin thread until it hung suspended just above the lips of his sleeping victim. Taking out a vial of deadly liquid poison, the ninja sent the poison, drop by drop, down along the thread and into the mouth of Nobunaga. The light-sleeping general, ever alert for such attempts on his life, managed to awaken in time to prevent Goemon from succeeding with his diabolical trick.[61]

Adams also refers to *Shinobi no mono* in *Invisible Assassins*, albeit obliquely, describing it as "a low-budget movie a few years ago about the ancient exploits of the ninja, based on a scientific approach to the subject."[62] The key word "scientific," which Yamamoto Satsuo had used in pitching to Daiei president Nagata Masaichi, leaves little doubt that Adams was referring to *Shinobi no mono*.

The most plausible scenario, then, is that Adams' source for the Goemon story was indeed the film *Shinobi no mono* itself. If it seems unlikely that a writer would mistake a fictional film scene for an historical event, it is worth noting that Adam's *Invisible Assassins* contains other examples of fiction presented as apparent fact. The illustration to the opening chapter of the book, for instance, features an Edo-era print of the sorcerer Nikki Danjō from the 1777 play *Meiboku Sendai hagi*. Adams captions the print as "an imposing recreation of ninja Niki Danjo [sic]," but does not include the significant detail that Nikki Danjō is a fictional character.[63] Elsewhere, Adams also presents as apparent fact a story concerning the death of Sarutobi Sasuke and the exploits of supposed master 'ninja' Hattori Hanzō. Since Sarutobi Sasuke is a fictional character, though, this story cannot be an historical event.[64]

Tangled Threads: The Goemon Story After Adams

Part of the reason why Adams could come to take Goemon's poison-thread assassination as a real event has to do with *Shinobi no mono*'s plot and cinematic structure. When pitching his proposed film to Nagata Masaichi, Yamamoto Satsuo had stressed that *Shinobi no mono*'s characters would not be supernatural *ninjutsu*-users like Jiraiya and Nikki Danjō or the prewar heroes Sarutobi Sasuke and Kirigakure Saizō. Rather, *Shinobi no mono* would show "scientific" *shinobi* as Murayama and Yamamoto believed they had existed in history. *Shinobi no mono*'s characters therefore fight in ways that are plausible in the real world; they use explosives, *shuriken*, rifles, and cunning rather than magical powers, and there is nothing in the film that is obviously supernatural in nature.

This transition, from *ninjutsu* as magic to *ninjutsu* as real-world skill, seems to have struck some observers as an important element in the new 'ninja.' Writing in the journal *Eiga hyōron* 映画評論 (Film criticism) in 1963, film critic Ogawa Tōru 小川徹 (1923–1991) observed that *Shinobi no mono* depicted *ninjutsu* not as people "disappearing in a clap of thunder"—in other words, *ninjutsu* as magic—but as "based in science and

psychology." Like other viewers of *Shinobi no mono*, Ogawa was struck by Goemon's poison-thread technique, noting that it was "so realistic and demonstrably practical that one thinks, 'ah yes, of course.'"[65]

The film *Shinobi no mono* is undoubtedly 'realistic' in the limited sense that it contains no supernatural events, and this helps to explain how the Goemon story's misinterpretation as historical fact: since the events of *Shinobi no mono* theoretically *could* happen in real life, viewers assumed that they *had.* The screenwriter for *You Only Live Twice*, British author Roald Dahl (1916–1990), appears to have made this assumption regarding the poison-thread technique in a June 1967 piece for *Playboy* magazine:

> Everyone liked [Wakabayashi] Akiko…we were all sorry when she had to be murdered and sent home. We had her killed in bed, with Bond alongside her, while they were sleeping it off. The manner of the killing was interesting and complex – a sly, silent Japanese method that involves a long length of cotton thread and a tiny little bottle."[66]

The present tense ("involves") suggests Dahl believed the poison-thread technique was an established method of murder that had been employed on multiple occasions.

Like Ogawa and Dahl, Andrew Adams appears to have been impressed by the Goemon poison-thread story as an historical example of *shinobi* ingenuity, since he would mention the story twice more in the pages of *Black Belt* magazine in 1971 and 1976, again with no source given.[67] The first mention of the Goemon story from any author other than Adams, though, comes at the height of the 'ninja' craze in the US in 1980, in the luridly-titled *Ninja: Clan of Death* (1980) by the writers Al Weiss and Tom Philbin. Despite the cover proclaiming that the book tells "The Incredible True Story" of the 'ninja,' *Clan of Death* contains several accounts of historical 'ninja' operations that are almost certainly fantasy, such as the alleged poisoning of an entire platoon of US marines at some point during World War II.[68] Alongside these unsourced and dubious accounts, *Clan of Death* records Goemon's poison-thread story:

> Perhaps the most famous story concerning this use of tools was the one told of the ninja who had bored, from above, through the ceiling of the bedroom of a warlord. He dropped a string through the hole until its end was directly above the mouth of its intended victim. He then poured poison, drop by drop, down the string, but, as the story goes, the warlord closed his mouth just in time to live.[69]

Weiss and Philbin's source was Adams, since Adams was the only writer to mention the story in English to date, and *Invisible Assassins* duly appears in *Clan of Death*'s bibliography.[70]

The next major English-language work to feature the story, Stephen Turnbull's 1991 *Ninja: The True Story of Japan's Secret Warrior Cult*, stands in contrast to *Clan of Death*'s dubious tales, at least on initial appearance. Per *Secret Warrior Cult*'s preface, the "techniques, skills, martial arts, potions and exploits of the ninja are detailed in this book entirely as a matter of historical and cultural record."[71] Unusually among popular English-language 'ninja' histories, *Secret Warrior Cult* is partially transparent in its sources, featuring endnote citations for some of its claims as well as a full bibliography. Turnbull's work therefore appears to place *shinobi* activity and operations on a solid evidentiary footing.

Closer examination, though, reveals a number of serious shortcomings in *Secret Warrior Cult*, and its own author has since partially disavowed it. In a 2015 article, Turnbull writes:

> It is not uncommon to regret the excesses of one's youth, and to have produced a book where enthusiasm overwhelmed common sense is part of my own history. In *Ninja: The True Story of Japan's Secret Warrior Cult* (Turnbull, 1991), I translated the historical sources that were then available and interpreted them as I understood them at the time.[72]

Two years later, in 2017, Turnbull described his 1991 book as "a serious if flawed attempt to discover the reality behind the ninja by using original Japanese sources," and also noted that certain authors "carelessly accept fantasy as reality and retell authentic historical accounts of Japanese undercover warfare as if they were actually performed by these comic book characters, and I must confess that I have written both types of book."[73]

Turnbull deserves credit for having the courage to admit past mistakes, but as uncharitable as it may seem to say so, his *mea culpa* leaves a certain amount unsaid about the endemic problems of both Turnbull's own 'ninja' work and English-language 'ninja' writing in general. In the specific context of *Secret Warrior Cult*, the work's problems do not necessarily derive, as Turnbull writes in 2015, from interpreting "historical sources…as I understood them at the time," since a number of the sources Turnbull uses are not "historical" at all. In common with many English-language 'ninja' writers, Turnbull would, as he puts it, "carelessly accept

fantasy as reality" by presenting fictional 'ninja' stories of modern origin as if they were documented historical events.

Even as early as 1991, though, there is evidence that Turnbull knew—or should have known—that his sources were unreliable. One example is an anecdote in *Secret Warrior Cult* concerning an alleged attempt to assassinate Toyotomi Hideyoshi:

> Other examples [of ninja assassinations] include Tokugawa Ieyasu's sending of a ninja called Kirigakure Saizō to murder his rival Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Saizō hid beneath the floor of Hideyoshi's dwelling, and a guard managed to pin him through the arm with the blade of his spear which he had thrust at random through the floorboards. Another ninja, presumably in the service of Hideyoshi, then smoked him out using a primitive flamethrower.[74]

Turnbull's citation shows that this story comes from Hatsumi Masaaki's children's book *Shōnen no tame no ninja, ninpō gahō* 少年のための忍者・忍法画報 (Ninja and ninja skills illustrated: for kids; first published 1964).[75] The use of this source in what purports to be a study of the historical 'ninja' is dismaying. For one, the cited work is not an "historical source"; it is a 1964 children's book which opens by addressing its readers, "When your mommies and daddies were children…"[76] For another, Kirigakure Saizō is a fictional character, and Turnbull should have known this, since elsewhere his own source clearly states: "The ninja Sarutobi Sasuke is in fact a fictional creation (*tsukuribanashi*), and **in the same way Kirigakure Saizō was not someone who actually existed** (*jitsuzai no jinbutsu de wa nakatta;* emphasis mine)."[77] Turnbull seemingly missed this critical passage in Hatsumi's book, and would compound the error by repeating Saizō's fictional exploits in his 2003 *Ninja: AD 1460–1650*, his 2005 *Warriors of Medieval Japan,* and his 2008 children's book *Real Ninja* with no indication that the story was anything other than historical fact.[78]

Secret Warrior Cult also includes the Goemon poison-thread story:

> The American author Andrew Adams claims that Nobunaga survived an assassination attempt at the hands of the semi-legendary ninja Ishikawa Goemon. As so much of the Goemon story is pure fiction it is difficult to assess its authenticity, and Adams gives no source for the anecdote, but it is interesting to note that the method he is credited with using is the one made famous by its use in the 1967 James Bond film *You Only Live Twice*, which for many people was their first introduction to ninja. The ninja hides in the ceiling above the victim's bedroom and drips poison down a thread into the

sleeper's mouth.[79]

The above suggests that Turnbull was aware in 1991 that the Goemon story was unsourced and potentially dubious. This was not a case of interpreting "historical sources," since the passage above indicates that Turnbull knew the story from Adams' secondary work and had not identified a primary source for the anecdote. But while the Goemon story appears here in 1991 with reasonable qualification, in three subsequent 'ninja' publications Turnbull elides his doubts about the story's provenance. Turnbull's 2003 *Ninja: AD 1460–1650* and his 2005 *Warriors of Medieval Japan*, for instance, relay the story as: "The semi-legendary ninja Ishikawa Goemon is credited with another attempt on Nobunaga's life. He hid in the ceiling above the victim's bedroom and tried to drop poison down a thread into Nobunaga's mouth."[80]

The passive construction "is credited with" is carrying a great deal of weight here; a general reader would probably be surprised to learn that the first person to credit Goemon with this assassination attempt was Andrew Adams in 1970. The Goemon story also appears in Turnbull's 2008 children's book, *Real Ninja*, which informs its readers that "[a]nother ninja gained access to the ceiling above Nobunaga's bedroom and tried to drop poison down a string into Nobunaga's mouth!"[81]

Both Turnbull's and Adams' books exemplify a damaging tendency to include fictional individuals in what is, to outward appearances, a discussion of historical events. Unfortunately, almost all subsequent popular writers appear to have viewed Turnbull's and Adams' claims as reliable. In 2008, for instance, the writer Joel Levy's *Ninja: The Shadow Warrior* includes Goemon's attempted assassination of Nobunaga: "Among the exploits attributed to Goemon, apart from his generous habit of robbing the rich to give to the poor, was his attempt to assassinate Oda Nobunaga by sneaking into the ceiling space and trying to drip poison down a thread into his target's mouth."[82] Levy's bibliography features four English-language texts that contain the Goemon story: *Invisible Assassins*, Weiss and Philbin's *Clan of Death*, and Turnbull's two books *Secret Warrior Cult* and *Ninja: AD 1460–1650*. It is not surprising that Levy should be under the impression that the Goemon story was historical fact.

Five years later in 2013, Hiroko Yoda and Matt Alt's *Ninja Attack: True Tales of Assassins, Samurai, and Outlaws* (2013) also includes the Goemon poison-thread story:

> **1580?** After hiding in the ceiling above Nobunaga's bedroom, ninja-turned thief Ishikawa Goemon unsuccessfully tried to poison Oda Nobunaga by dripping poison down a thread. Almost too good to be true, this story is very likely apocryphal.[83]

Yoda and Alt's sources were Adams and Turnbull, since both feature in *Ninja Attack*'s bibliography.[84] Yoda and Alt do at least signal to the reader that the Goemon story is potentially dubious, but the majority of Adams' and Turnbull's readers have apparently taken the Goemon story at face value. Alan Axelrod's military-historical study *Mercenaries: A Guide to Private Armies and Private Military Companies* (2014), for instance: "Acting against the great shogun [sic] Oda Nobunaga, the ninja Ishikawa Goemon is said to have attempted to drip poison down a thread he lowered from the ceiling into the snoring shogun's [sic] mouth. The attempt was inventive, though unsuccessful."[85] Axelrod's bibliography shows that in this case, the source was Turnbull's 2003 *Ninja: AD 1460–1650*.[86]

A more recent example is Thomas Lockley's 2019 *African Samurai*, where Goemon's poison-thread episode is one of a series of supposed assassination attempts against Nobunaga:

> The third attack was by an infamous ninja-cum-thief, somewhat reminiscent of Robin Hood in contemporary folklore, named Ishikawa Goemon, also said to be from Iga, and took place in 1580 directly before Yasuke met his new lord. He'd hidden in the ceiling above Nobunaga's bed and used a thread to target drops of poison into the sleeping warlord's mouth. That he did not succeed was self-evident, but how he escaped and why he wasn't successful in his attempt is lost to history.[87]

Like Roald Dahl in 1967, Lockley appears to have assumed that the poison-thread technique was a known method of murder in Japan, since elsewhere in the book he suggests that Yasuke and his Jesuit companions would have needed to be on guard against "poison administered to the open mouth of a sleeping victim by thread in the dead of night."[88] Lockley's source appears to be Turnbull's *Ninja: AD 1460–1650*, which appears in *African Samurai*'s bibliography, and Lockley includes as fact several other dubious 'ninja' episodes from Turnbull's 2003 book, such as the alleged murder of the warlord Uesugi Kenshin 上杉謙信 (1530–1578) on his toilet and a rifle ambush targeting Nobunaga in Iga Province.[89]

Last of all is a sighting of the Goemon poison-thread myth in *The Elite*,

a 2019 book on military special forces by the British arctic explorer and soldier Sir Ranulph Fiennes (1944–):

> Navigating his way across the roof of the Azuchi castle fortress, keeping low to avoid any silhouette, [Goemon] entered the royal [sic] apartment complex. Making a small hole in the ceiling, above where Nobunaga was sleeping, Goemon took out a long piece of string, gently threaded it through the hole, and left it hovering just above his target's open mouth. Taking out his bottle of poison, he applied a few drops to the top of the rope and watched as the deadly liquid trickled downwards. But at the very last moment, just as it was about to drop into Nobunaga's open mouth, he turned his head, leaving the poison to splash against his cheek. Waking with a start, Nobunaga saw the piece of string, as well as Goemon above him.[90]

Fiennes' account contains a number of details, such as Goemon's use of caltrops, *shuriken*, and smoke bombs to make his escape, that are not in other English-language accounts of Goemon's exploits and for which I cannot identify a Japanese-language primary source. As so often in English-language 'ninja' history, we can only speculate as the source for this breathless account of daring 'ninja' deeds.

Conclusion: Murder Most Fictional

This article is intended to serve both as a warning and as a call to action. It is a warning in the sense that readers interested in Japanese history at both the popular and academic level need to be aware of the critical flaws in English-language 'ninja' writing over the last fifty years. With few exceptions, the body of literature that constitutes the field of English-language 'ninja' studies is useless as a source of reliable historical information, because its foremost writers do not reliably distinguish between history and fiction. There is enormous interest in the topic of the historical *shinobi*, yet currently it is almost impossible for a general reader to find reliable information on the topic.

This warning applies to scholarly readers as well, since Thomas Lockley's inclusion of dubious 'ninja' anecdotes in *African Samurai* is not the only example of scholars treating the English-language literature with less scrutiny than is warranted. In the otherwise excellent English translation of Yamamoto Satsuo's autobiography, Chia-ning Chang summarizes the climactic scene of *Shinobi no mono* in a footnote for the reader, but does not indicate that Goemon's assassination attempt is almost certainly fictional.[91] More recent editions of Mikiso Hane's (1922–2003)

textbook *Premodern Japan: An Historical Survey* include a section on "The Ninja" for which the sole source is Stephen Turnbull's *Ninja: AD 1460–1650*, a work that mixes fictional characters and events with historical claims.[92] If academic scholarship is to avoid the same ripple effect of unreliable information that happened between 1970 and the present with the Goemon story, scholars dealing with claims concerning historical *shinobi* must double-check primary sources assiduously and treat claims in works such as Turnbull's *Ninja: AD 1460–1650* as unreliable unless proven otherwise.[93]

To conclude on a more positive note, the Goemon story shows that there are also opportunities here. If, as I have argued above, the best way to approach the 'ninja' is through literary rather than historical sources, it follows that 'ninja studies' is a potentially valuable subfield for scholars of Japanese literature. It is significant that several of the Japanese scholars working on the 'ninja' whose work I have cited above, such as Yoshimaru Katsuya, are trained in Edo-period literature rather than being historians in the conventional sense. Much of the textual basis for supposedly historical 'ninja' lore lies in Edo-era plays and prose fiction as well as modern films and novels, all of which are standard objects of literary study.

The call to action lies in the fact that 'ninja studies' is one of the rare points of intersection between popular interest and the texts that literary scholars are trained to deal with. As the participants in a 2005 H-Japan discussion on the 'ninja' observed almost twenty years ago, 'ninja' studies is a field that professional academics *should* have explored before now.[94] Whatever its cause, academic reluctance to take the 'ninja' seriously has left a void that has been filled with an inflow of "junk," as Karl Friday bluntly puts it.[95] As cartoonish or unserious as the 'ninja' might once have seemed, the time has come to give the topic the attention it deserves.

NOTES

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[1] This article refers to both fictional and historical individuals. For historical individuals, dates of death and birth are provided following the name graphs. For individuals who are believed to have existed but whose dates of birth and death are unknown, (n.d.) follows the name graphs. For fictional individuals, name graphs are provided but no dates given.

[2] A non-exhaustive list of mentions of the Goemon story in English-language 'ninja' histories: Andrew Adams, *Ninja: The Invisible Assassins* (Burbank, CA: Ohara Publications, 1970), 160; Andrew Adams, "Ninja: The Vanishing Breed" *Black Belt Magazine* September 1971, 13; Andrew Adams, "Ninja: Vanishing Breed of Knights Without Armor" *Black Belt Magazine* July 1976, 23-25; Al Weiss and Tom Philbin, *Clan of Death: Ninja* (New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1980), 76; Stephen Turnbull, *Ninja: The True Story of Japan's Secret Warrior Cult* (Poole, UK: Firebird Books, 1992), 54; Jerry Craven, *Ninja* (Vero Beach, FL: Rourke Corporation, 1994), 17; Stephen Turnbull, *Ninja: AD 1460–1650* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Books, 2003), 31; Stephen Turnbull, *Warriors of Medieval Japan* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Books, 2007), 180; Stephen Turnbull, *Real Ninja: Over 20 True Stories of Japan's Secret Assassins* (New York: Enchanted Lion Books, 2008), 35; Joel Levy, *Ninja: The Shadow Warriors* (New York: Sterling Books, 2008), 172–174; Hiroko Yoda and Matt Alt, *Ninja Attack: True Tales of Assassins, Samurai, and Outlaws* (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle, 2012), 93–94; Alan Axelrod, *Mercenaries: A Guide to Private Armies and Private Military Companies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press, 2014), 40; Matthew Moss, "The Secret World of the Ninja" in *All About History* 34 (2016), 52; Thomas Lockley and Geoffrey Girard, *African Samurai: The True Story of Yasuke, A Legendary Black Warrior in Feudal Japan* (Hanover Square Press, 2019), 224–225; and Ranulph Fiennes, *The Elite: The Story of Special Forces – from Ancient Sparta to the War on Terror* (Simon and Schuster, 2019), 163–164.

[3] Lockley and Girard, *African Samurai*, 92.

[4] Yoda and Alt, *Ninja Attack,* 93; Turnbull, *Secret Warrior Cult*, 54.

[5] *Yaneura no sanposha* is available in English translation as *The Stalker in the Attic* in Seth Jacobowitz, trans., *The Edogawa Ranpo Reader* (Fukuoka: Kurodahan Press, 2016).

[6] I thank the anonymous reviewer of this article for pointing out this connection.

[7] See e.g. Turnbull, *Secret Warrior Cult*, 11, and *Ninja: Unmasking the Myth* (Barnsley, UK: Frontline Books, 2017), 7; Polina Serebriakova and Daniel Orbach, "Irregular Warfare in Late Medieval Japan: Towards a Historical Understanding of the "Ninja" *Journal of Military History* 84 (October 2020), 999; Lockley, *African Samurai*, n.p. (bibliography to Chs. 15 and 16).

[8] Serebriakova and Orbach, "Irregular Warfare," 1000; Constantine Nomikos Vaporis, *The Samurai Encyclopedia: A Comprehensive Guide to Japan's Elite Warrior Class* (Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2022), 222.

[9] Karl Friday, post on H-Japan, December 5, 2005 (https://lists.h-net.org/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-japan&month=0512&week=a&msg=ZhXdKaGm6rahsHPMKlk1pw&user=&pw=, accessed 10/30/2024); Serebriakova and Orbach, "Irregular Warfare," 998; Turnbull, *Unmasking the Myth*, 20 (translation Turnbull's).

[10] On *shuriken*, see Yoshimaru Katsuya, "Ninja no hyōshō" in Yoshimaru, *Ninja to wa nani ka* (Kadokawa Sensho, 2023), 331–340; on Hattori Hanzō, see Tamura Risa, 'Ninja Hattori Hanzō' no tanjō: Shōwa 39-nen made no sakuhin o taishō ni" *Ninja kenkyū* 3 (August 2020); and on *kunoichi*, Yoshimaru, "Kunoichi to wa nani ka" in Yoshimaru and Yamada Yūji, eds., *Ninja no tanjō* (Bensei Shuppan, 2017), 167–190.

[11] Yoshimaru Katsuya, "Ninja no hyōshō," 330–331.

[12] Yoshimaru Katsuya, "Kinsei ni okeru 'ninja' no seiritsu to keifu" *Kyoto gobun* 19 (November 2012), 108.

[13] The poison-thread story is mentioned in Goemon's English-language Wikipedia article, sourced to Turnbull and Levy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishikawa_Goemon (accessed 1/9/2025).

[14] Lockley, *African Samurai*, 397–98.

[15] A scholarly introduction to the controversy can be found on the Premodern Japanese Studies (PMJS) listserv at https://groups.google.com/g/pmjs/c/mrXyZacOqdY (accessed 1/9/2025).

[16] Yamashina Tokitsune, *Tokitsune-kyō ki* (Iwanami Shoten, 1959–1991), 6:134.

[17] Miura Jōshin, *Kenmonshū* in Kondō Heijō, ed., *Kaitei shiseki shūran* vol. 10 (Kondō Kappanjo, 1901), 192.

[18] Hayashi Razan, *Toyotomi Hideyoshi fu* [Publisher Unknown] 3:[50a]

[19] In some cases the connection is more amicable. In the 1789 play *Konoshita kage Hazama gassen* 木下蔭狭間合戦 (The battle of Hazama: the shade of trees) for instance, Goemon and Toyotomi Hideyoshi grow up as friends under the tutelage of a thief named Raisaku 来作.

[20] Bernardino de Ávila, *Relación del Reino de Nipón que Llaman Corruptamente Japón,* Crónicas Europeas de Extremo Oriente, ed. Noemi Martin Santo (Madrid: Clasicós Hispanicos, 2020), 118.

[21] Martin Santo, ed., *Relación del Reino de Nipón*, 385.

[22] A survey of works featuring Goemon is available in Yoshimaru Katsuya, "Kinsei ninja no seiritsu to hensen" in *Ninja to wa nani ka*, 132-158.

[23] The "temple gate" scene of *Sanmon gosan no kiri* has been translated in James R. Brandon and Samuel L. Leiter, eds., *Kabuki Plays on Stage: Villainy and Vengeance, 1773–1799* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 74–80.

[24] For an overview of *jitsuroku*, see Nakamura Yukihiko, "Jitsuroku, kōdan ni tsuite" in *Nakamura Yukihiko chojutsushū* (Chūō kōronsha, 1982).

[25] *Zokkin hiseidan*, 269. The term *shinobi no jutsu* does not imply an identity here; as Yoshimaru points out, Ishikawa Goemon "was not a *shinobi no mono*; he was simply a prominent thief." Yoshimaru, "Kinsei ni okeru 'ninja' no seiritsu to keifu," 113.

[26] Tōbu Zankō, *Zokkin hiseidan* in Kikuchi Yōsuke, *Kinsei jitsuroku no kenkyū*: *seichō to tenkai* (Kyūko Shoin, 2008), 271–278.

[27] *Zokkin hiseidan*, 298.

[28] *Zokkin hiseidan*, 304.

[29] *Zokkin hiseidan*, 312.

[30] See e.g. Okuno Kumiko, "Ishikawa Goemon-mono no Meiji Taishōki ni okeru tenkai," *Bungaku* 16.4 (July and August 2015), 210–212.

[31] Okuse, trans., *Zokkin hiseidan, taiyōji, Ishikawa Goemon* (Ueno-shi, Mie Prefecture: Ueno-shi kankō kyōkai, 1977); Murayama, *Shinobi no mono* (Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 2:533.

[32] Okuno, "Ishikawa Goemon-mono no Meiji Taishōki ni okeru tenkai," 212-18.

[33] Honda Masujirō, "The Kyokaku: Knights of the Bourgeoisie" *The Oriental Review* 2.6 (March 1912), 271; Okuno, "Ishikawa Goemon-mono no Meiji Taishō ni okeru tenkai," 214.

[34] Murayama wrote five 'ninja' novels between November 1960 and April 1968. The first three, *Jo no maki* 序の巻 (The opening chapter, serialized 11.1960 to 5.1962), *Goemon kama-iri* 五右衛門釜煎り(Goemon boiled in a cauldron, serialized 1.1963 to 12.1964) and *Sanada ninja-gun* 真田忍者群 (Sanada's team of ninjas, serialized 12.1964 to 11.1966) were serialized on a weekly basis in *Akahata*'s Sunday edition. Murayama's fourth novel, *Shinobi no jin* 忍びの陣 (The shinobi squad) appeared in *Bunka hyōron* from 1.1967 to 4.1968. The final novel, *Shinobi toride no tatakai* 忍び砦のたたかい (Battle of the shinobi fortress), was published in standalone form by Rironsha in 1971.

[35] In English, see e.g. Gennifer Weisenfeld, "Mavo's Conscious Constructivism: Art, Individualism, and Daily Life in Interwar Japan" *Art Journal* 55.3 (Autumn, 1996), 64–73, and Diane Wei Lewis, "Intimacy and Alienation: Murayama Tomoyoshi, Modern Media Celebrity, and Film" in Diane Wei Lewis, *Powers of the Real: Cinema, Gender, and Emotion in Interwar Japan* (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Asia Center, 2019), 133–167. Two recent Japanese-language studies on Murayama's theatrical activities are Inoue Rie, *Murayama Tomoyoshi no engekishi* (Shakai hyōronsha, 2022) and Iwamoto Kenji, ed., *Murayama Tomoyoshi, gekiteki sentan* (Shinwasha, 2012).

[36] As Lukács writes, "Thus in this mass experience of history the national element is linked on the one hand with problems of social transformation; and on the other, more and more people become aware of the connection between national and world history. This increasing consciousness of the historical character of development begins to influence judgments on economic conditions and class struggle." György Lukács, *The Historical Novel,* trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (New York, NY: Humanities Press, 1967), 27-8.

[37] Murayama, *Honpen no dokusha ni* in *Shinobi no mono* (Iwanami Shoten, 2003) 2:54.

[38] Murayama, *Honpen no dokusha ni*, 541.

[39] Murayama, "*Shinobi no mono* no rensaku ni tsuite" *Bunka hyōron* 44 (June 1965), 94.

[40] The name 'Kirigakure Saizō' was probably not original to Tachikawa Bunko, as it appears in fictional works as early as the 1820s and seems to have been used by *kōdan* oral storytellers in Osaka during the late nineteenth century. The Tachikawa series was, however, the venue in which Saizō first emerged as a fully-developed character; prior to this, Saizō had been limited to brief, one-off appearances. See Takahashi Keiichi, "Edo no Sarutobi Sasuke" *Chiiki sōsei kenkyū nenpō* 5 (2010), 3-5.

[41] E.g. Sekka Sanjin, *Kirigakure Saizō: Sanada-ke ninjutsu meijin* (Tachikawa Bunko, 1914). For examples of claims that the Tachikawa bunko characters were modelled on real people, see Hatsumi Masaaki, *Shōnen no tame no ninja, ninpō gahō* (Akita Shoten, 1970), 37 and Okuse, *Ninpō: sono hiden to jitsurei*, 23.

[42] Turnbull, *Unmasking the Myth*, 152.

[43] Murayama, "*Shinobi no mono* no rensaku ni tsuite" *Bunka hyōron* 44 (June 1964), 94.

[44] Murayama, "Honpen no dokusha ni," 543.

[45] Murayama, *Shinobi no mono* 1:433.

[46] Murayama, *Shinobi no mono* 1:457–8.

[47] Murayama, *Shinobi no mono* 1:457–8.

[48] Murayama, *Shinobi no mono* 1:457–8.

[49] Murayama, *Shinobi no mono* 1:411–12.

[50] Yamamoto Satsuo, *Yamamoto Satsuo: My Life as a Filmmaker,* trans. Chia-ning Chang (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 194. The original is Yamamoto Satsuo, *Watakushi no eiga jinsei* (Tokyo: Shin Nippon Shuppansha, 1984), 212.

[51] Translation from Chang, trans., *My Life as a Filmmake*r, 195; Yamamoto, *Watakushi no eiga jinsei,* 213–214. I have slightly amended Chang's translation, as marked in parentheses.

[52] An English translation of *Meiboku Sendai hagi* is available in Brandon and Leiter, trans., *Kabuki Plays on Stage*, 51–71.

[53] Edogawa Ranpo, *Yaneura no sanposha* in *Edogawa Ranpo kessakusen* Shinchō bunko 1459 (Shinchōsha, 1989), 196.

[54] Takaiwa worked on two film adaptations of Ranpo works: *Paretto naifu no satsujin* パレットナイフの殺人 (The palette knife murder, 1946; adaptation of Ranpo's 1925 *Shinri shiken* 心理試験 (A psychology experiment) and *Hyōchū no bijo* 氷柱の美女 (The beauty in the ice, 1950; adaptation of Ranpo's *Kyūketsuki* 吸血鬼 (The vampire, 1925). Takaiwa was also the screenwriter for the 1959 period drama *Shura zakura* 修羅桜 (Blossoms of carnage, 1959) based on a novel of the same name co-authored by Ranpo. Ranpo also consulted on the 1947 *Chōchō shissō jiken* 蝶々失踪事件 (The case of the missing butterfly), on which Takaiwa was screenwriter.

For Takaiwa's visit to Ranpo, see Edogawa Ranpo, *Tantei shōsetsu yonjū-nen (ge)* Edogawa Ranpo zenshū 29 (Kōbunsha Bunko, 2015), 221.

[55] Edogawa Ranpo, "Ranpo danshō" in *Edogawa Ranpo zenshū* (2003), 24:605–606.

[56] Translated by Mizuta Nan'yō 水田南陽 (1869–1958), *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* appeared in the *Chūō Shinbun* from July 12th to 22nd 1899 as *Dokuja no himitsu* 毒蛇の秘密 (translated as The secret of the poisonous snake).

[57] Arthur Conan Doyle, trans. Edogawa Ranpo, *Sekai tantei shōsetsu zenshū* no. 2 (Heibonsha, 1929). *Speckled Band* is translated as *Tobimoyō no himo* 飛模様の紐 (The speckled string), 281-326.

[58] *Shinobi no mono* was released on VHS and Laserdisc in 1998; see "JC," "Ninja: Band of Assassins" and "Sleepy Eyes of Death: Full Circle Killing," *Video Watchdog* 44 (1998), 16. A DVD version was released by Animeigo in 2007.

[59] "Japanese Soft-Pedalling Sex Themes in Movies," *Honolulu Advertiser* December 10, 1964, 18; "Movies" *The Daily Californian* July 20, 1972, 14.

[60] See Adams, "A Leap into the Supernatural" *Black Belt* December 1966, 13. Credited to "Kokusai Theater Los Angeles," the graphs "Shinobi no mono" are visible in several of Adams' images. Similar images appear in his January 1967 and February 1967 articles.

[61] Adams, *Invisible Assassins*, 160.

[62] Adams, *Invisible Assassins*, 29.

[63] Adams, *Invisible Assassins*, 22.

[64] Adams, *Invisible Assassins,* 165-66.

[65] Ogawa Tōru, "Ninja wa teikōsha tarienu ka" *Eiga hyōron* 20.2 (January 1963), 19.

[66] Roald Dahl, "007's Oriental Eyefuls" *Playboy* June 1967, 86-91.

[67] Andrew Adams, "Ninja: The Vanishing Breed," 13, and "Ninja: Vanishing Breed of Knights Without Armor," 23-25.

[68] Weiss and Philbin, *Clan of Death*, 17-18.

[69] Weiss and Philbin, *Clan of Death*, 76.

[70] Weiss and Philbin, *Clan of Death*, 205.

[71] Turnbull, *Secret Warrior Cult*, 8.

[72] Turnbull, "The Ninja: An Invented Tradition" *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective* 9.1 (2015), 11.

[73] Turnbull, *Unmasking the Myth*, vii-viii.

[74] Turnbull, *Secret Warrior Cult*, 54.

[75] Hatsumi, *Shōnen no tame no ninja, ninpō gahō*, 143.

[76] Hatsumi, *Shōnen no tame no ninja, ninpō gahō*, 10.

[77] Hatsumi, *Shōnen no tame no ninja, ninpō gahō*, 37.

[78] Turnbull, *Ninja: AD 1460–1650*, 32; *Warriors of Medieval Japan*, 180; *Real Ninja,* 33-34.

[79] Turnbull, *Secret Warrior Cult*, 54.

[80] Turnbull, *Ninja: AD 1460–1650*, 31, and *Warriors of Medieval Japan*, 180. The text is the same in both.

[81] Turnbull, *Real Ninja*, 35.

[82] Levy, *Ninja: The Shadow Warrior*, 146 and 172–3.

[83] Yoda and Alt, *Ninja Attack*, 93–94.

[84] Yoda and Alt, *Ninja Attack*, 201–202.

[85] Axelrod, *Mercenaries*, 40. Nobunaga never held the office of Shogun.

[86] Axelrod, *Mercenaries*, 380.

[87] Lockley, *African Samurai*, 224–25.

[88] Lockley, *African Samurai*, 92.

[89] Lockley, *African Samurai*, 163 (Kenshin) and 232–233 (rifle ambush).

[90] Fiennes, *The Elite*, 163-164.

[91] Chang, trans., *My Life as a Filmmaker*, 197.

[92] Mikiso Hane and Louis G. Perez, *Premodern Japan: An Historical Survey* (Boulder, CO: Routledge, 2014; Ebook). The section in question is entitled "The Ninja" and appears in Ch. 6, "The Restoration of Order." It appears to be a new addition for the second edition, as it is not in Hane's 1991 edition of the same title.

[93] See also Phoebe Pua and Mie Hiramoto, "White Hot Heroes: Semiotics of Race and Sexuality in Hollywood Ninja Films" *Language and Communication* 72 (2020), 58 and 67, which cites Turnbull's 2003 work as a source of information. Thanks to Judit Kroo for bringing this article to my attention.

[94] Sharon Domier in 2005: "I, for one, look forward to some academic research on ninja/ninjutsu being published in English…The interest among the young is genuine and should be addressed." H-Japan, December 7, 2005 (https://lists.h-net.org/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=h-japan&month=0512&week=a&msg=VoFemfytHiLxMGuyN0YvQg&user=&pw=), accessed 1/9/2025.

[95] Karl Friday, H-Japan, December 5th 2005.

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