

The Book of the Dead

Shisha no sho (死者の書)

Color / Standard / 2005 / 70 min / Sakura Motion Picture



Director: Kawamoto Kihachiro

Script: Kawamoto Kihachiro

Based on the novel by: Origuchi Shinobu

Cinematography: Tamura Minoru

Itami Kunihiko

Art Director: Kudo Mizuki

Music: Hirose Ryohei

Producer: Murayama Hideyo

Cast (Voice):

Fujiwara no Iratsume: Miyazawa Rie

Otsu no miko: Kanze Tetsunojo

Otomo no Yakamochi: Enoki Takaaki

Emi no Oshikatsu: Emori Toru

Taima no kataribe: Kuroyanagi Tetsuko

Narrator: Kishida Kyoko

Setting: Nara in the Nara Period (mid- 8 c.)

Synopsis:

The film starts with a description of the historical background of the Nanke branch of the Fujiwara family. They are nobles and one of the four family branches descended from Fujiwara Kamatari (614-669). There is a family legend surrounding the death of Prince

Otsu and his relationship with Mimino no Toji, a beautiful woman and a mandala that was made. The animation follows the story of one of Mimino no Toji's descendants, Princess Iratsume. Iratsume is also a beautiful young woman and bears a striking resemblance to her ancestor.

Like many other nobles, Iratsume is wrapped up in the new trend of Buddhism. Yet, she has taken it to a level of obsession as she spends most of her time hand-copying sutras in order to gain a deeper understanding of Buddha. Her most recent task is to make a thousand copies of one of the sutras. After finishing her thousandth copy she finds herself at a religious epiphany as she gazes out the window towards the mountains. Between the two mountains she sees a radiant floating image that she believes is the Buddha.

In a trance like state she leaves her home in the middle of a downpour and starts to walk towards the mountains. She reaches the foot of the mountain and finds herself in a temple that women are forbidden to enter. Yet, she refuses to leave as she believes the Buddha is speaking to her. That night as she sleeps in the temple, the figure appears to her again. It is not an apparition of a Buddha but the ghost of Prince Otsu. The ghost had been drawn to her by her zealous devotions and has mistaken her for his long lost love, Mimino no Toji who haunts his sleep. He is unable to rest. Yet, Iratsume in her innocence and purity is only able to see him as a Buddha and a battle of wills between them begins.

Notes:

The Book of the Dead is a stop motion puppet animation film based on the story of anthropologist Origuchi Shinobu. It was a time period when Buddhism was being introduced to Japan and many of the nobles held an interest in this new way of thought. Creator Kawamoto Kihachiro felt very passionate about the film. As he believes that the modern world is in a state of chaos and stated in an interview with *Midnight Eye* that he "...wanted to express my wishes about relieving those dead people's souls from this world chaos using the original Japanese Buddhist teachings of relieving suffering."

Kawamoto Kihachiro became interested in stop motion puppet animation after seeing the works of the famous Czech animator Jiri Trnka. And in the 1950s he began to work with Japan's first stop motion animator Mochinaga Tadahito. In 1963 he traveled to Prague to work with Trnka and was able to enrich his ideas for puppets. Much of Kawamoto's work is influenced by Japanese Noh, Bunraku doll theater and Kabuki. In 1979 he won many international prizes for his work *House of Flame* ("Kataku"). He was also well known for designing the puppets used in the TV series *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* ("Sangokushi," 1982-84) and *The Story of Heike* ("Heike Monogatari," 1993-94).