



Man, John, *Ninja, 1,000 years of the shadow warriors*. London, Bantam Press, 2012. ISBN 9780593068120

Man's usual area of expertise would appear to be China and environs as he has written books on the terracotta army, the Great Wall, Genghis Khan and so on, and it shows in this books. He has little knowledge of Japan and its history, explaining the "bleeding obvious" in places and totally missing it in others.

We get a taste of his rather haphazard and unacademic approach in the introduction where he meets a restaurant owner who is a descendant of the Momochi and who offered to show him armour and other items inherited from his grandmother but all Man can think about is missing an appointment.

What follows is a more or less chronological history of the ninja beginning with the usual questionable suspects in T'ang China, then wandering off to talk about Yamato no Takeru's trickery in disguising himself as a woman. There are endless sidetracks into related (possibly) fields such as Shugendo, the SAS and people who

seemed to be performing ninja-like tricks without actually being ninja.

Interspersed with these are translations of chapters and extracts form the Shoninki (attributed to Natori Masatake and available in three different English translations).

The real meat is in the middle, starting with the chapter "Building the Ninja Heartland" which is actually about ninja, those of Iga and Koga, though padded with reference *ikki* and what was happening in Europe at the time. Yes, it could be argued that this helps set the ninja in context but it still feels like padding.

The rest is definitely padding with chapters on the Nakano School and on Onoda Hiroo included, I suppose, through some perceived resemblance to ninja and ninjutsu.

In looking at ninja in popular culture, Man spends an awful lot of time and space on Fleming's *You Only Live twice*, the film as well as the book. It's skewed view because just as important is the ninja in Japanese popular culture because everything flows from that. He should at least have looked at how ninja were portrayed in kabuki and films up to the early 1950s (magical, supernatural beings) and then the move towards realism with the *Shinobi no mono* films (which in turn influenced TV series throughout the 1960s, especially *Onmitsu kenshi*, marketed as *The Samurai* in Australia and Southeast Asia), before considering *Shinobi* which he does discuss, Yamada Futaro (briefly) but he also needs to consider the comic book series *Ninja bugeicho* by Shirato Sanpei of around 1960 and the student protests against the US-Japan Security Pact (it was very popular with left-wing students). Also popular with students was *Iga no Kagemaru* a comic strip serialised in *Shonen Sunday*. Novels like *Shinobi no mono* by Maruyama Kazuyoshi (on which the first film of that name was based) or novels by Shibata Renzaburo and Shiba Ryotaro on ninja. This is all far more interesting than a lengthy rehash of the Bond film or a brief look at *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

This is certainly not an academic work – the research seems superficial and from secondary sources for the main part. There aren't any Japanese studies cited. Instead the bibliography is a mishmash of books on Buddhism, travel, Japanese history, manga, novels and anime. Even as a popular work it seems too light and superficial with too much extraneous matter. The topic has been better covered by others even golden oldies like Andrew Adams' *Ninja, the Invisible Assassins* or Draeger's *Ninjutsu, the Art of invisibility*. Even Yoda Hiroko's *Ninja Attack* (aimed at young people) has far more solid information in it.