

YESTERDAY IS NOW - THE WAR, 55 YEARS AFTER JAPAN'S SURRENDER

(Canada 2002, documentary, 96 minutes,
English and Japanese with English subtitles)

SYNOPSIS

YESTERDAY IS NOW is a revealing look at the divisions in today's Japanese society on how to view the war and deal with their country's responsibility for the crimes it committed during its occupation of neighbouring Asian countries. These crimes include sexual slavery, slave labour, the use of humans in biological warfare experiments, and the massacres of civilians.

YESTERDAY IS NOW is a rare excursion into the Pandora's box of Japanese contemporary society. Frank and probing interviews with a diverse collection of individuals - a former soldier, families of the Japanese war dead, teacher, labour unionist, A-bomb survivor, artists, students, politician and right-wing nationalists - together with archival footage and images from Japan's modern cityscapes make up a riveting chronicle of Japan's dealings with the unfinished business of its wartime past.

FEATURING MUSIC by Sarah Peebles, Nilan Perera (Canada), Jin Hi Kim (Korea/U.S.), and improvising legends Evan Parker and David Toop (U.K.)

"I was moved by the people who regard the war as their own unsolved matter. I realized for the first time that Japan left issues without probing into what had really happened."

"I was shocked to learn of the emperor's speech that ended the war. We so often hear only a few seconds of it in dramas. I realized that we are trained not to think about its meaning but to just automatically have an image of "a relief", "end of war", and "peace". There was a lot to learn from the film."

"I knew quite a bit from my own father's account but to see how even today there are still some Japanese who feel that Japan had no choice but to take the course (of war) is disturbing. There is deep irony -- in the statements of those who think the war was inevitable."

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CELINE RUMALEAN'S BIOFILMOGRAPHY

Indonesian born, Celine studied psychology in Australia before moving to Canada and studying documentary filmmaking.

Her first documentary, *Crossings*, produced with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, focused on the Southeast Asian Chinese immigrants in Canada and explored the issues of diaspora identity. She has been involved in the production of award-winning documentaries and educational media, co-produced by independent filmmakers and the National Film Board of Canada, such as *Bitter Paradise: the Sellout of East Timor*, *Blockade, A Place Called Chiapas* and *First Nations, the Circle Unbroken*, as videographer, researcher and line producer.

FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

As a young primary school student in Indonesia, a former Japanese colony, I was told in history class that the Japanese history textbooks were censored and that Japanese school children were learning a different version of the history of the war from what we were learning. I came across Professor Saburo Ienaga's story in 1996. This was the first time I had heard of Japanese grassroots activism on war-related issues.

For over a period of more than thirty years, Professor Ienaga had been involved in a series of lawsuits against Japan's Ministry of Education to win the right to mention in his high school history textbooks the atrocities that had occurred during the Japanese colonization of neighbouring Asian countries. Although I was unable to interview Professor Ienaga due to his failing health, his story continued to inspire my research in Japan.

Professor Ienaga's story illustrated how one person's conscience can galvanize others to take a stand. It also speaks of the war on war, its history and its memory, and how consequences of wars and conflicts carry on for a long time after they have officially ceased. Unfortunately, Japan's story is not unique. Many instances in world politics and conflicts re-iterate these themes all too often.

Japan's story was not my first encounter with institutionalized amnesia. When Indonesia occupied East Timor in 1975, our school principal visited each class, stating, "Today we welcome East Timor back to our mother country." It was not until a decade later as a university student in Australia that I came across in Amnesty International reports, the horrific details of the occupation.

What one does after knowing and how one can refuse to know are the questions I wanted to pursue. *Yesterday is Now* is ultimately a tale of both caution and hope.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the West and in Japan, the war in Asia is known mainly as the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Less known is the millions of lives in Asia that were lost under Japanese occupation. For decades, Cold War politics and internal political and economic struggles of developing Asian countries have sidetracked this immense human tragedy from international public discourse.

Japan's post-war governments have not been forthcoming in regards to the country's war crimes: its wartime military sexual slavery, massacres of civilians, the slave labour camps, and Japan's secret wartime bacteriological and chemical experimentation units. These dark legacies stemming from Japan's wartime past and its post-war cover-up are difficult to deal with but there are individual Japanese who persist in doing just that, against the censorship of their own government, the status quo, and the right-wing elements in their society. In their travels to the Asian countries that had been occupied by Japan, they seek the war they were not taught, in effect, becoming their own Truth and Reconciliation Commission. More and more revelations of Japan's war crimes are surfacing in public and fault lines are appearing in Japan's institutionalized amnesia due to their tenacious struggle and also due to lawsuits that have been filed by survivor groups in Japanese courts.

The debate in Japan on how the war should be remembered and taught is about whether to view the war as an aggressive war or as a defensive war. That this debate is still with us today is indicative of how close it strikes at Japan's nationhood and national identity.

Those who view the war as a self-defensive war would like to see the revival of pre-war and wartime legislation and institutions, including the re-instatement of the Emperor as head of state. They view the Peace Constitution as a product of American post-war strategy for the purpose of continuing its domination over Japan. They reject what they perceive to be foreign interference over state visits to Yasukuni Shrine of the War Dead and how the war should be depicted in school textbooks. In the dawn of the new century, the wartime propaganda, that Japan went to war to defend itself and its Asian neighbours from Western colonialism and imperialism, is alive and well. There are those who hold the opinion that the war was a mistake only in that Japan attacked the United States which it knew it could not defeat.

Others who view the war as a crime against their Asian neighbours are haunted by questions of the emperor's war responsibility and of how it was possible for the Japanese society to be mobilized into war. They fight for the memory of the victims as well as for furthering the democratization of Japan. They worry about the resurgent nationalism. Bills that have been recently passed in the Parliament, such as the bills designating relics of Japan's war in Asia, the Hinomaru (Rising Sun) and Kimigayo (Your Sovereignty), as the national flag and anthem, have caused them much consternation.

For many others in Japan, the war is only known from stories of Japan's own wartime hardships and was not unlike a natural catastrophe such as an earthquake or flood. Many view their war dead as the foundation of their country's post-war prosperity.

THE INTERVIEWEES

Japan had started a self-defensive war.

KURABAYASHI KAZUO is a retired Major General with Japan's Air Self Defense Forces. He is also the Secretary General of the Association for Rewarding the Spirits of Dead Soldiers, whose members and supporters include high-ranking government and military officials.

What kind of war they participated in and whom they fought against could not be considered.

FURUKAWA YOSHIKO and KAMISAKA REIKO are homemakers who took their municipal government to court over the reconstruction of a war dead memorial shrine.

Although it is already one half century ago since the crimes were committed, as human beings at least we have to make it clear who was responsible criminally.

MATSUI YAYORI is the organizer of International Women's Tribunal 2000. She began her investigative work on the victims of Japan's wartime military sexual slavery while working as a journalist and the South East Asia bureau chief of Asahi Shimbun, a major newspaper in Japan.

Because of the Kimigayo anthem and the Hinomaru flag, we lost our humanity. It took so long for me to recover mine.

SHINOZUKA YOSHIO is a former member of Unit 731, the bacteriological warfare unit of the Japanese Imperial Army. He was interned in China as a war criminal. He and his fellow internees make up most of the handful of veterans who are willing to talk publicly on war atrocities that were committed in Asian countries under the Japanese occupation.

Locals are, as in a Japanese proverb, silent and do not speak.

YACHITA TSUNEO is a labour unionist in Hanaoka. He has spent 20 years reconstructing the story of Hanaoka Camp, where Chinese men were forcibly recruited as forced labourers.

If facts of the war are clarified among the Japanese, it will become clear that Japan was an aggressor. There is this concern.

TANAKA KOH is a member of the House of Representatives from the opposition Democratic Party of Japan. He chairs a group of Parliament members supporting a proposed bill to investigate the war.

How Japan was made into such a country remains an issue to be solved.

NISHIKAWA SHIGENORI is the Secretary General of the Association of War Bereaved Families for Peace. For him, the emperor held the utmost responsibility for the death of his brother and other young men who were sent to the war.

What about the European countries and the U.S. who controlled Asia for 210 years?

TSUCHIYA TAKAYUKI is a municipal politician in Tokyo and the author of *Stop Biased Peace Memorial*. He believes that Japanese colonization had been good for Asia and is a history that Japan can take pride in.

In the war, we became stupid humans.

NUMATA SUZUKO is a retired school teacher and a survivor of the A-bomb. She reflects on how she was caught up in her country's wartime militarism and post-war victimhood.

We are in the position that we have to put this to conclusion to not just save those poor people... but to save ourselves.

SHIMADA YOSHIKO, an artist, explores through her work the wartime roles of the emperor and of Japanese women.

People want to give meaning to deaths in war, the nation also wants to give meaning to them.

TSUCHIYA YUTAKA, a filmmaker, talks about the country's resurgent nationalism and the attraction of simple and heroic war stories for the young.

People previously devoted themselves to greater things, which were Japan and Asia.

MUROTATSU YASUHIRO and MAJIMA JUN'ICHI are university students and members of the Japanese Patriotic Organization. As far as they and ARAKI MASAHIRO, the organization's political leader, are concerned, the war was a just war and the Tokyo War Crimes Trial was a victory over the defeated.

People who went to war had loyalty. This loyalty should be followed to create a stable nation.

MORITA TADAAKI runs a private school teaching history, poetry, and martial arts. He is also the organizer of the Great Mission ceremony at Yasukuni Shrine that commemorates Japan's 1941 declaration of war against the United States and Great Britain.

Neighbours didn't want to see us in peaceful Japan. We reminded them of the war past.

WATANABE YOSHIJI deals with the burden of being the son of a military man, who was also a convicted class C war criminal who abandoned his own people in Manchuria at the end of the war.

I didn't know about the Nanking Massacre even after I became a teacher. I didn't even think about what Japan did in China. I was the same as the kids today.

MORI MASATAKA is a high school teacher. He has visited China fifty times in the last fifteen years to research and produce his own teaching materials on the war.

YESTERDAY IS NOW's CREDIT LIST

produced, directed, and edited by
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camera
Celine Rumalean

additional footage
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camera: Endo Daisuke

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Bill Kinnon
Scene by Scene

sound re-mix
Andrew Morris
Scene by Scene

assistance from

the National Film Board of Canada-
Filmmaker Assistance Program

Canada Association for Learning and
Preserving the History of World WarII in Asia

music by
Sarah Peebles, Nilan Perera (Canada)
Evan Parker, David Toop (U.K.)
Jin Hi Kim (Korea/U.S.)

Review by Deirdre Tanaka, a former member of the Canadian Coalition for Comfort Women Redress

I grew up in Japan and have worked as a Japanese-English interpreter for about twenty years now, so although I am English Canadian in background, I have a deep relationship with Japan. I have been involved in meetings and press conferences on Japan's responsibility for its war crimes, so am aware of a lot of the issues raised in the film, but I have never seen anything as comprehensive as this.

I found "Yesterday is Now" to be an incisive documentary on what the war means to the Japanese in the present. Celine included interviews from both sides: those who have reflected on the lack of humanity demonstrated by Japan as an invading army and those who see it as a justifiable cause in light of the worldwide colonialism at the time.

The comment on the frustration felt by the man who speaks of the African countries that were colonized by Europeans struck a chord, in that this is something for those of us of European descent to reflect upon. Has there ever been acknowledgement, apology and compensation for the wholesale rape of the African nations, the after-effects of which are still being felt today?

At the same time, two wrongs do not make a right, and ultimately this comment becomes yet another means of deflecting the listener away from the issue that needs to be addressed. The sheer scale of cruelty inflicted by the Japanese army in the name of the Emperor upon other Asian counties defies any kind of justification.

I felt that the beginning of the film, with the maps and dates, was extremely effective, as it clearly indicated that a large part of the aggression took place even before Japan joined forces with Italy and Germany and certainly before Japan declared war on the United States. This negates much of the rationale presented by some of those interviewed, who felt that the war was a reaction to pressure from the West. It also challenges the Eurocentric tendencies in dealing with the Japanese responsibility for its war crimes.

Having been a member of the Canadian Coalition for Comfort Women Redress, the issue of the comfort women and the utter disregard for their suffering not only during, but after the war remains the most powerful image for me. It represents the systematic dehumanization of Asians on a grand scale, the atrocities that were committed once they are no longer "human", the suffocating repression of the truth by Japan and the ultimate victimization of the victim. The biological warfare experiments also carry the same horror and furtive secrecy. In both cases, the United States is implicated in post war complicity in keeping these issues buried in secrecy.

That the last interview is of a teacher and how his students respond positively to the more accurate presentation of the Japanese invasion of Asia, leaves room for hope. I agree with him. Children are not fools and given the room to develop a conscience, they will struggle with the inhumanity of inflicting pain on others, regardless of the public rationale at the time.