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Nagisa Oshima - A Retrospective
Thursday, April 27
5:30

The Forgotten Army (Wasurerareta Kogun). 1963. Direction, scenario, commentary by Nagisa Oshima. Photographed by Sadanori Shibata and Masaaki Suzawa. Edited by Kurahei Tamaro. Produced by Nippon Television Corporation, Tokyo. Shown courtesy Nippon Television Corporation, New York.
30 minutes.

Though merely a half-hour documentary, this TV film is also one of the most important and telling works of Nagisa Oshima. It is typical of his approach to the medium; it presumes the need for social action; its concern is entirely ethical.

During the early postwar period, one saw disabled ex-service men begging in public places. They were usually in pairs, usually wearing the white kimono used in military hospitals, usually wearing military caps: a blind ex-soldier might be playing military songs on an accordion, the other, with an artificial arm or leg, would be sitting, begging.

Originally people felt pity. As the years went on, they came to feel disgust. One heard rumors that these were not really ex-soldiers, that actually they were organized beggars. As a matter of fact, most of the earlier soldiers had been rehabilitated and were working. And, actually, those who continued begging, were, though no frauds, not really Japanese soldiers.

They were Koreans who had been drafted into the Japanese, or had themselves joined it, and become maimed or otherwise injured. Though the Japanese government gave Japanese disabled soldiers pensions, they gave nothing to the Koreans who had fought for the Japanese. After the war, Korea again became an independent state and so these people were all, in the eyes of the government, citizens of another state.

When Oshima and his staff began this film ex-servicemen from Korea were negotiating with the Japanese government. Their petition was not accepted. Representatives were sent to Korea. There, however, the Korean government replied that it was a problem to be solved by the Japanese.

At a loss, they began to make speeches on the street corners of Tokyo but were met with complete indifference. Giving up, the majority disappeared. Some - as those in this film - had parties which began as meetings but turned into drunken random conversations during which they fought each other. Among the many startling images which Oshima captured of their despair is that of the ex-soldier who removes his dark glasses and we watch tears run from his eyeless sockets.

The film is the strongest indictment of the moral defects, the ethical indifferences of the Japanese people. What it did was to call the attention of this public to its own lack.

Tadao Sato

translated from the
Japanese; edited by
Donald Richie

The Pacific War (Daitoa Senso). 1968. Produced by Yunichi Ushiyama. Direction, editing, and commentary by Nagisa Oshima. Commentary spoken (in Japanese) by Hosei Komatsu and Mitsuhiro Toura. (No English titles). Produced by Nippon Television Corporation, New York.
60 minutes.

This is a TV compilage-documentary made of newsreels made between December 8, 1941 and August 15, 1945 - the period of the Pacific War. Those used were almost entirely of Japanese origin - from the U.S. National Film Archives, the Library of Congress, and the Navy Film Center - as well as some from Great Britain and the Soviet Union.

The difference of this documentary is that, ordinarily, a commentary is appended which describes past action, suggests attitudes, etc. Oshima, in this picture, wanted to present the war as it was viewed by those experiencing it. Consequently, he uses the original commentary. One experiences again the position of the Japanese people during these years - one listens to these words, fanatical and pathetic war propaganda, and an immediacy is preserved.

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