LOOKING FOR THE ZAINICHI: ŌSHIMA NAGISA'S POETICS OF DOCUMENTARY IN *THE FORGOTTEN IMPERIAL ARMY*

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INTRODUCTION

The beginning (0:38–2:12) and ending (24:35–25:20) of Ōshima Nagisa's 大島渚 (1932–2013) television documentary, *Wasurerareta kōgun* 忘れられた皇軍 (*The Forgotten Imperial Army*, 1963) shows a freeze-frame of a blind, maimed veteran named Jo Rakugen (Sŏ Lagwŏn) 徐絡源, a featured member of the Korean-Japanese Disabled Veterans Association of Japanese Military (*moto Nippongun zainichi Kankokujin shōi gunjin kai* 元日本軍在日韓国人傷痍軍人会). [2] The film captures a solid grip not only on Jo's struggle to live in postwar Japan day in day out, but also on postwar Japan's political and social landscape. In the beginning, a voice-over gives viewers, in a subdued tone, a heads up that it is more imperative than ever to pay attention to the existence of Jo in close-up even though "it is unpleasant to see someone like him eighteen years after the end of the [Second World] War in 1945."[3] And in the ending with Jo's sunglasses in extreme close-up, the voice-over, now with an urgent tone, presses viewers and himself for action, saying "But [the veterans] received nothing. We gave them nothing. The people of Japan. You and me. Is this right (*kore de ii no darō ka* これでいいのだろうか)? Is this right?" For "[the veterans] have no jobs, and as foreigners, they can't take welfare. Almost all of their income is from panhandling. In a corner of Japan, they struggle to stay alive."

In crowded public spaces where Jo and his fellow Korean veterans petition, the camera follows them as outsiders or nonentities to the eye of onlookers, which include not just Japanese but a few westerners, epitomizing Japan's societal milieu around 1963 with the famous phrase:

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[2] Ōshima Nagisa 大島渚, *Wasurerareta kōgun* 忘れられた皇軍, *You Tube*, uploaded by Anhar Salem, 25 January 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKP288NC64E. Also see Turim, *The Films of Oshima Nagisa* (219–223) for an insightful analysis of *Wasurerareta kōgun*. The three Sinographs 徐絡源 are indicated in Ōshima, *Ōshima Nagisa 1968*, 36.

[3] The English translations of the narration are provided in the YouTube video unless otherwise noted. Also, in this paper, I consistently use "World War II" to refer to the Pacific War part of it.

"The postwar is already over."[4] But the fact that they "fought our war as Japanese and after the war, they changed their nationality to Korean," complicates their existence, which, in Ōshima's films, often calls for a dialogue between the film director and his viewers.[5] This dialogue points to a lacuna in the narrative of postwar Japan's development of democracy, to which Ōshima's stance is neutral despite his deep involvement as a student at Kyoto University with the leftist movement and his critique of both the left and right in numerous writings and political debates.[6]

This essay argues that a development of the *zainichi* 在日 as a major theme, formulated in Ōshima's early films, culminates in *The Forgotten Imperial Army*, a theme that is underlain by his version of "subjectivity" (*shutaisei* 主体性) against what he calls the "victim mentality" (*higaisha ishiki* 被害者意識) prevalent in Japan's status quo with regard to Japan's postwar democracy (*sengo minshu shugi* 戦後民主主義).[7]

THE POTENTIALS OF EARLY TV MEDIA AS THE TURNING POINT IN ŌSHIMA'S FILM-MAKING OF THE EARLY 1960S

The Forgotten Imperial Army is Ōshima's second documentary after *Kōri no naka no seishun* 氷の中の青春 (*The Youth on the Ice*, 1962). It was Ushiyama Jun'ichi 牛山純一 (1930–1997), a producer of Nippon Television (NTV), who invited Ōshima to direct those documentaries during his hiatus from feature filmmaking between 1962 and 1965. This hiatus can be taken as the first turning point in his career after having left Shōchiku studios in 1961 in protest against the company's cancellation of his 1960 film *Nihon no yoru to kiri* 日本の夜と霧 (*Night and Fog in Japan*). [8] He also established his independent production company Sōzōsha in the same year.[9] Behind this transitional phase in his early career

[4] Keizai kikakuchō, "Shōwa sanjūichinen nenji keizai hōkoku."
[5] See *Yunbogi no nikki* ユンボギの日記 (1965) and *Gishiki* 儀式 (1971), both of which develop the theme of *zainichi*.
[6] See Ōshima, "Kyōto daigaku jidai no kaisō" 京都大学時代の回想, and "Seijiteki tenkō ni tsuite" 政治的転向について, in *Ōshima Nagisa chosaku shū* 大島渚著作集, I: 59–86; 87–96.
[7] See Miyoshi, especially 83–84, for other possible English translations for *shutaisei*.
[8] Ōshima's second tuning point begins with *Ai no korīda* 愛のコリーダ (1976), the first feature produced by Anatole Dauman and distributed by Argos film (France) in addition to Tōhō-Tōwa (Japan).
[9] The first production of a feature film from Sōzōsha is *Hakuchū no tōrima* 白昼の通り魔 (1966).

is Ōshima's strong criticism over the filmmaking coming out of a seemingly peaceful postwar Japanese society.

In his 1975 essay "The Advent of TV," Ōshima observes that "film was completely beaten up" by TV, highlighting a sharp decline of viewership in 1973 (126).[10] In that year, film viewership was one-sixth that of 1958, the peak year for the box-office numbers.[11] More importantly, he claims, early TV was firstly a medium for "waking up to reality (*kakusei* 覚醒, 125)" rather than for fantasy as illustrated by an increasing number of postwar Japanese films. Here what he means by "fantasy" (*yume* 夢, 125) includes films whose formulaic storytelling lost touch with filmmakers like Ōshima who look into parts of reality usually treated as unremarkable. Secondly, early TV "offered different kinds of criteria for image than that of film" (126), and thereby captures a pluralistic culture in the visual media with its appeal to mass culture much more effectively than film. Additionally, he points to another feature that early TV could offer: "television broadcast's real-time engagement (*chūkei no dōjisei* 中継の同時性, 132) with current events."

Such an early development of TV generated two major documentary series in Japan: *Nihon no sugao* 日本の素顔 (*Japan as it Really Is*, 1957–1964, NHK, dir. Yoshida Naoya [1931–2008]) and *Nonfikushon gekijō* ノンフィクション劇場 (*Nonfiction Theater*, 1962–1968, NTV) with different approaches to the documentary storytelling of postwar Japanese lives. As Suzuki Tsuneyasu summarizes, the former typically consists of interviews and the various sounds of everyday life through which to delve into all sorts of social phenomenon during the early stage of Japan's period of high economic growth.[12] This approach appealed to viewers because of voices from real people and the hustle and bustle of a city experienced through interviews elicit people's honest feelings. Another key element of *Japan as it Really Is* is to verify a hypothesis formulated for each episode, and accordingly shots are montaged to explain its causality by the so-called "voice-of-God narration" (Suzuki, 14–19). As such, Yoshida's approach became influential enough to become a model for TV documentaries in the 1960s.

Ushiyama launched *Nonfiction Theater* as an alternative to Yoshida's documentary series. If Yoshida's documentary aims at capturing objective facts with an emphasis on a large picture of society, Suzuki writes,

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[10] Ōshima, "Terebi no shutsugen" テレビの出現, in *Ōshima Nagisa chosaku shū*, II: 121–135, translation mine.

[11] According to Miyazawa (34), the box office numbers hit 1,127,450,000.

[12] Suzuki Tsuneyasu, "Terebi dokyumentarī ni okeru hyōgen no seisei to hen'yō ni tsuite no ichi kōsatsu." Translation mine.

Ushiyama aims at capturing subjective facts with emphasis on a filmmaker's personal perspective on an individual. It may well be that a voice-over in this approach focuses on revealing the individual's interiority by montaging shots not to explain the causality between a series of events but to let viewers face that interiority. Thus, the series invited multiple filmmakers' perspectives unlike *Japan As It Really Is*. In fact, filmmakers for *Nonfiction Theater* included Nishio Zensuke, Tsuchimoto Noriaki, Hani Susumu, Higashi Yōichi, and Shindō Kaneto, in addition to Ōshima and Ushiyama (Suzuki, 19–22).

In a way, Ōshima's 1960 essay "What is a Shot?" anticipates his collaboration with Ushiyama.[13] In the essay he reveals the first rule of his filmmaking method:

> This method attaches importance to and respects real time. It is designed to avoid interrupting the filmmaker's stream of consciousness. One of my basic rules is to make a shot last as long as possible with the camera moving freely. (This is also related to the complete construction of one scene. Long ago, stopping in the middle of a scene was held to be the proper method. Now it is necessary to finish constructing a scene once you have begun it.) (50)

Also called "continuity of shots," the first rule is complemented by the second rule: the "instability of shots" (50).

The second rule is facilitated by the use of a "telephoto-type lens" with which "the characters you are shooting are enlarged so that the screen soon becomes unstable with even the slightest move by a character" (50). Such an "instability of shots" is clearly illustrated by the aforementioned opening scene (0:38–2:11) of *The Forgotten Imperial Army*, where the life of Japanese passengers looks normal in contrast to Jo, who still has to ask for charity to tackle his dire situation incurred by his service in the Imperial Army during World War II. Notably montages in this scene capture the passengers' mixed feelings: some ignore Jo, others are unsettled by his presence in conjunction with a voice-over narration: "We may say he has nothing to do with us as we know nothing about him. We don't even know he's a Korean." Here, at the outset, the documentary underscores the unknowability of a veteran like Jo, but at the same time unknowability can often lead one to attempt to know what is behind it. Such an

[13] Ōshima, "What is a Shot?" in *Cinema, Censorship, and the State: The Writings of Nagisa Oshima, 1956–1978* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 49–51.

epistemological motive, as a central theme of the documentary, allows a filmmaker's "artistic consciousness" to engage in his "perception of reality" and then engage in dialogue with viewers. Thus, "the filmmaker's stream of consciousness and subjectivity flows through these two rules. Their role is critical" (50).

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL QUEST FOR THE ZAINICHI AND ŌSHIMA'S NOTION OF SUBJECTIVITY

How then does the epistemological motive posited in *The Forgotten Imperial Army* lead the filmmaker's "stream of consciousness" and "subjectivity" to flow through the "continuity of shot" and the "instability of shot"? According to Ōshima, the aforementioned "unstable screen" is "remedied by the camera's movement, and the character moves again—with the repetition of that process, the filmmaker's unsettled stream of consciousness becomes settled in the stream of the scenes" ("What is a Shot?" 50). This creative process enables him to "crush the established stereotyped images contained in each shot" (50), implying that the "instability of shot" reflects a filmmaker's "perception of reality" which is also first unsettled and then settled in the "streams of scenes" that shows a new strategy for reality.

Through this strategy we should understand the "march of the forgotten Imperial Army" which takes place in three scenes of the documentary. For instance, the portrayal of the first marching scene (3:10–5:16) is in contrast to that of the second one (6:02–6:45) to show the two-fold nature of the veterans' march in response to the epistemological quest for their existence in Japan's pre- and post-war history. Right after the title appears, the first marching scene begins. In this scene, there is nothing innovative about the images of the veterans, which are familiar as they would have been seen in newsreels. However, a war song titled "Roei no uta" 露営の歌 (Camping Song) gives the scene a distinctive tone as one hears part of the lyrics: "Will I forget the cries of my friends, 'Hail to His Majesty!' when they died in action? You risk your life in a war. I'm ready to die. No need to buzz for me, insects in the grass. For the peace of [Asia], any life can be sacrificed." [14] Needless to say, this patriotic song is a powerful embodiment of the wartime militarism; nevertheless, the song is used to double down ironically on the Korean veterans' march in the streets

[14] A video of *Roei no uta* 露営の歌 is viewable at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MG3sli-5JJs.

of postwar Japan. Unsettling enough, the scene aims to wake idle spectators to the reality with the veterans in sight.

While the first marching scene brings the origin of the veteran's harsh reality to viewers' attention, the second marching scene highlights their future despite their grim prospect. Unlike the first scene, however, modern jazz music featuring Art Blakey's drum starts the second scene, which first captures the veterans in a long take, then they come closer to the camera one by one from out of the frame against the backdrop of the towering Parliament Building.[15] The scene ends when they reach the Foreign Ministry building with a close-up of the Japanese flag on top of it. Standing face to face with the power symbolized by the buildings and flag, the scene points to their resilience. It enabled them to endure their history of oppression during and after the war, and even the Korean government's rejection of their request of pension because, they said, the veterans fought for Japan (even though some of them also fought for Korea during the Korean War as seen in the third marching scene). In this context, striking is the uplifting tone of the second marching scene. Ōshima reveals that the choice of Art Blakey's jazz drum was his conscious, artistic choice, used to portray the veterans not just as victims of the systems but as potential agents of social change that share a somewhat chaotic unpredictability and "bodily experience" (*nikutaiteki na kyōkan* 肉体的な共感) with modern jazz.[16]

A potential agent like Jo, a featured veteran in the Imperial Army, stems from Ōshima's sense of being with the Korean veterans as "agitators": "They agitate Japanese people, so do I… Standing with the veterans of the Imperial Army is my own action, whether it's a drama or documentary."[17] Ōshima even uses terms such as the "sense of original sin" (*genzai ishiki* 原罪意識) to express the gravity of his concern and sense of responsibility for people called *zainichi* that includes the veterans.[18] At Ōshima's death in 2013, Oh Deok-Soo 呉徳洙 (1941–2015) gets to the point of Ōshima's quest for the *zainichi*: "In my opinion, what Ōshima exactly wanted to be a theme was Japan's national polity built on the Emperor system, an antithesis to the *zainichi*."[19] Oh further points out that this antithetical relationship between the Emperor system and the *zainichi* led Ōshima to question "Japaneseness," (*Nihonsei* 日本性) that tends to

[15] See Atkins, especially 209, for the impact of the 1961 tour of Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers to Japan on the audience.
[16] Ōshima, *Ōshima Nagisa 1968*, 39–49. Translation mine.
[17] Ibid., 35. Translation mine.
[18] Ibid., 44. Translation mine.
[19] Oh Deok-Soo, "Naze zainichi ni kodawattanoka," 69. Translation mine.

alienate minorities including the *zainichi* as depicted in *The Forgotten Imperial Army*.[20] Further, he put this question by Ōshima into a larger context: "After all, the question of the *zainichi* amounts to the question of Japanese society itself."[21]

In this context, Chae Kyeonghoon's notion of "zainichiness as relationship" is useful for the epistemological quest for the *zainichi*: "[The zainichi chōsenjin] have otherness as 'in-between beings' who don't belong anywhere. I look at the possibilities of an 'in-between zone' where zainichi chōsenjin and Japanese meet, and I study 'the coexistence with zainichiness' in the Japanese films of the 1950s and 1960s, through the viewpoint of 'zainichiness as relationship.'"[22] After all of these years of Korean existence in Japanese society, its unknowability still persists while "Japaneseness" had led even independent filmmakers to turn to the "naturalistic realism" and the "socialistic appeal"[23] in a formulaic manner by the early 1960s after their failure to resist the status quo. In this sense, Chae's rationale behind his notion "the zainichiness as relationship" resonates with Ōshima's challenges against "Japaneseness." Thus, the *zainichi*'s "otherness as 'in-between beings'" could overcome "Japaneseness" at the core of the status quo, from an independent perspective as long as *zainichi* people and Japanese meet in the "in-between zone." Here such "in-betweenness" is not a negative thing to a filmmaker. Rather, to remain in this creative process without any form of closure is necessary for his subjectivity, or *shutaisei*, to work as a "synthesis" of a filmmaker's "artistic consciousness" and "perception of reality."

As opposed to the creative role subjectivity plays, its antithetical notion is what Ōshima calls the "victim mentality," a stance from which the mediocre storytelling "resorts to 'war and the feudal system [among others]'" in a formulaic manner whether a filmmaker is for or against them.[24] Moreover, the "victim mentality" is criticized by Ōshima because of its viewpoint from the position of an "onlooker" (*bōkansha* 傍観者) that

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[20] Ibid., 70. Translation mine.
[21] Oh, "Hyūman dokyumentarī eigasai abeno: 'zainichi' butai aisatsu." Also, see 22:22–24:35 of *The Forgotten Imperial Army* for a scene of Jo's family life. Here a harsh reality is shared by a blind, maimed Korean veteran and a blind Japanese wife with her younger sister as a helper.
[22] Chae Kyeonghoon, *1950/1960 nendai no nihon eiga ni okeru zainichi chōsenjin to heterotopia teki kūkan*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Tokyo Geijutsu daigaku daigakuin eizō kenkyūka, 2015.
[23] Ōshima, "Sengo Nihon eiga no jōkyō to shutai" 戦後日本映画の状況と主体, *Ōshima Nagisa chosaku shū* 1:159.
[24] Ibid., 158. Translation mine.

is not willing to "grapple with" (*kakutō* 格闘) the status quo.[25] Acknowledging an enormous challenge to achieve subjectivity, though, Ōshima calls filmmakers who are motivated to confront the status quo with an innovative method ones with a quasi-subjectivity (*giji shutaisei* 擬似主体性).[26] At the same time, he observed that such filmmakers could potentially reach a true subjectivity vis-à-vis his belief in "postwar Japanese democracy": "Democracy, in which I make a distinction between the short-lived prewar democracy and the postwar Japanese democracy, has always been a theme of my films."[27]

ŌSHIMA'S POETICS OF DOCUMENTARY: THE TRANSCENDED LOGIC AS POETRY

The playwright and critic Miyazawa Akio 宮沢章夫 (1956–2022) indicates two crucial points of Ōshima's early filmmaking. First, Ōshima was one of those who endorsed a view that "Japanese people were not just victims, but 'offenders' (*kagaisha* 加害者) as Japan invaded other countries in World War II. Thus, he stood with the weak/oppressed, renouncing a sentiment that Japanese people are victims as self-indulgent" (35).[28] Second, he understands that "a new expression requires a new body (*shintai* 身体)."[29] Additionally, Miyazawa indicates the possible impact of Nakahira Kō's 中平康 (1926–1978) 1956 film *Kurutta kajitsu* 狂った果実 (*Crazed Fruit*) on an *auteur* like Jean-Luc Godard (1930–2022), whose 1960 film *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*), Miyazawa claims, introduced Jean-Paul Belmondo (1933–2021) as a new icon with a kind of "body and face"[30] that no other actor had possessed in French cinema. This may well resonate with what Ōshima observes in some Japanese films of the 1950s, where directors possessing a "quasi-subjectivity in his view employed young actors' body as a vehicle to depict a "human desire" often even with the outdated storytelling.[31] Thus, along with the aforementioned "bodily experience" that Ōshima finds in modern jazz used in the second marching scene in *The Forgotten Imperial Army*, the role of the body becomes crucial as a driving force behind a new kind of storytelling filmmakers sought around 1960 in both the West and East.

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[25] Ibid., 158. Translation mine.
[26] Ōshima, "Sengo Nihon eiga no jōkyō to shutai," 161. My translation.
[27] Ōshima, "Kōen: Nyū Yōku 1972 naze amerika ni korarenakatta no ka," 3.
[28] Miyazawa Akio, *NHK Nippon sengo sabukaruchā shi*, 35–38. Translation mine.
[29] Ibid., 36–37. Translation mine.
[30] Miyazawa, 36.
[31] *Ōshima Nagisa chosaku shū* 2:161.

In *The Forgotten Imperial Army*, however, the body of a Korean veteran like Jo is again "forgotten" and thereby unknowable in the scope of "Japaneseness" particularly that of postwar Japan. But with the epistemological quest of the *zainichi*, Ōshima brings our attention to Jo's body as an "in-between other," an agent of the synthesis of a filmmaker's "artistic consciousness" and "perception of reality," and thereby of a dialogue with viewers. Herein also lies Ōshima's poetics of documentary.

In his 1966 essay titled "A Letter to Filmmakers of the Day After Tomorrow," Ōshima stresses that "a coherent logic is the first thing to be achieved in television. If you do that, the work is impressive. As a creator for film and TV, I wish to discover in both media a transcended logic as poetry (*chō-ronri = shi* 超論理＝詩) that could emerge from an accumulation of coherent logics" (37).[32] Notably, he uses "logic" here instead of "story" which he often uses to criticize a formulaic story as I mentioned above. But story (*monogatari* 物語) is not necessarily a negative term to Ōshima. Rather, what he calls "logic" can be taken to be a precondition for the new kind of story he seeks. Actually, in his 1978 essay "What Documenting Means to Me," he states that "Ushiyama [in his documentary] tells a story about documented objects through an individual's intensely personal interest, attempting to arouse viewers' personal interests of equal intensity… Then the story reveals updated facts" (87).[33] This comment highlights the vital role of a filmmaker's "artistic consciousness" in a new kind of story, and accordingly his "perception of reality" aims to share "updated facts" with the viewers. In the process toward such facts, Ōshima "feels his prior philosophy destroyed through his facing (*taiketsu* 対決) with the [documented objects like Jo and his fellow veterans]" (89).

A moment of "destruction" (*hakai* 破壊) and "transformation" (*henkaku* 変革, 89) on a filmmaker's personal level, a lesson he learned in the production of *The Forgotten Imperial Army*, shows that his subjectivity could be changeable and transformative to the viewers as well. In this context, a climactic scene (19:58–20:59) at a local restaurant where Jo's eyes without sunglasses in extreme close-up powerfully convey his unspeakable suffering, and one hears a voice-over again: "Jo Rakugen. Tears come out from where the eyes were." According to Ōshima, words in this narration is intentionally not for explanation but for agitation, or

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[32] Ōshima, "Asatte no sakka e no tegami" 明後日の作家への手紙, *Ōshima Nagisa chosaku shū* 3:37.

[33] Ōshima, "Watashi ni totte kiroku to wa nanika" 私にとって記録とは何か, *Ōshima Nagisa chosaku shū* 2. Translation mine.

"agitating word" (*nageru kotoba* 投げる言葉), which he comes up with out of his lifelong affinity to Dada poetry.[34] The "bodily experience" shared by a filmmaker and viewers at the climactic scene is juxtaposed with Jo and his fellow veterans' background that is presented with coherent logic. Hence it follows that "poetry" emerges in Jo's burst into tears which agitates viewers beyond his background information, as a transcended logic in a new kind of storytelling.

CONCLUSION

On Oh Deok-Soo's 1997 documentary *Zainichi*, Ōshima comments that "there is a minority called *zainichi* in Japan. There are so many of them. Ultimately, they would change the world (*yo no naka* 世の中). Such minority exists in any country."[35] The existence of Jo represents not only the empirical facts about his life, but also his unspeakable sufferings. In other words, what Jo symbolizes is the ubiquity of the *zainichi* in postwar Japan, and yet it is still unknowable in the narrative of "Japaneseness" particularly from a perspective of the status quo.

In *The Forgotten Imperial Army*, Ōshima puts his notion of the "transcended logic as poetry" into practice, where a filmmaker's "aesthetic consciousness" engages in his "perception of reality" to create an in-between, independent space for a dialogue between him and viewers. Ōshima points to such a dialogue that needs to be incorporated into the narrative of postwar Japanese democracy.

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[34] Ōshima, *Ōshima Nagisa 1968*, 41.

[35] Ōshima, *Ōshima Nagisa 1968*, 44–45. My Translation. Also, note that Oh was an assistant director for Ōshima's feature film *Hakuchū no tōrima* (1966).

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