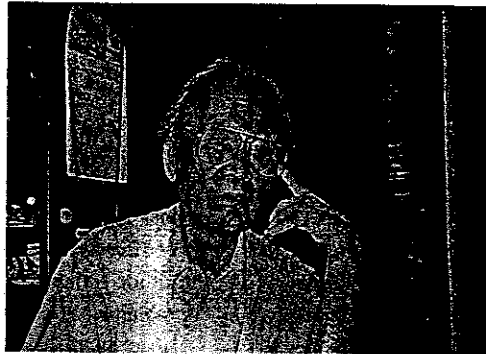


Documentarists of Japan (Fourth in a Series)

An Interview with Yanagisawa Hisao



This issue we are pleased to present an interview with Yanagisawa Hisao, a filmmaker with a long and varied career. He is most notable for his several films that deal with the mentally and physically retarded and handicapped. We were curious as to why he chose to focus on this group of people, and about his views on the Japanese documentary in general, as he is one of the oldest documentarists still active in Japan.

— Interviewed by Abé Mark Nornes

— First, I'd like to ask you about the projects you're currently working on.

— I'm planning a film called *Nurse Cap*— although that's just the working title. When I asked some nurses what they thought about that title, they told me it sounded almost like something military, so they didn't like it.

But when you look at it, a hospital really is like a military organization. I've heard that in some hospitals, you can distinguish the head nurse because she has two stripes on her cap, and the head nurse of a ward has one stripe, and so on. Since everyone seems to have that impression, and they've asked me to change the title, I'm thinking that maybe I will come up with some other title.

— Sounds like something we wouldn't really understand.

— Oh, yes. From what the nurses I've met have told me, they work under some very difficult and tight conditions. It's almost like what you call "3K" work—

kitsui (severe), *kitanai* (dirty), *kiken* (dangerous). They usually have about eight to ten days on night shifts, which means they don't have much of a chance to really get out and have some kind of life outside the hospital. Even if they get married, or have a family, time-wise they can't make things come together smoothly. Well, there's always various circumstances to take into consideration, of course, but...

What everyone I've talked to has told is that it's very difficult for nurses nowadays to do what the Ministry of Education promotes as "self-actualization" or "human development." And then, if you ask "What does 'self-actualization' mean?" or "As your own 'human development,' what are you trying to achieve?" not many people respond. That's something I still don't get, something I'm still trying to figure out. So then I wonder, what are the nurses thinking about? Here you have these women, who have chosen to be nurses— so what does it mean, "self-actualization?" What is "human development?"

Declaration at the Indigenous Peoples' Film & Video Festival

The member directors of the First Nations Film and Video World Alliance taking part in the Indigenous Peoples' Film and Video Festival at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival '93 presented a declaration at a press conference that took place in the First Nations Theater at 4pm on October 6th. The First Nations Film and Video World Alliance is an alliance begun last year composed of indigenous people from 14 countries, including the Ainu of Hokkaido. Including Victor Masayesva (USA., Hopi Tribe), 7 representatives from Australia, Canada, Ecuador, Hawaii, New Zealand (Aotearoa), and Japan (the Ainu) participated in the press conference. The following is the declaration as it was read in English.



1. Ecuador, Hawaii and Brazil joined the First Nations Film and Video World Alliance boosting the total number of member countries to fourteen.

2. The Alliance represents a collective effort by native people to harness modern technology to ensure absolute control over the portrayal of their images and stories.

3. It believes the effective use of film and video is crucial if native languages and culture are to survive beyond the year 2000.

4. The Alliance also intends implementing several innovative initiatives to ensure indigenous people will continue to play a real and meaningful role within film and video by providing training opportunities to enable member countries to benefit from a vast pool of trained experts.

5. The First Nations World Alliance with official representation from the indigenous film alliances of Australia, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, Hawaii, New Zealand, United States, in conjunction with the Ainu, wish to inform members of the press about our concerns at the Yamagata Film Festival.

This year has been declared as the Year of the Indigenous People. This occasion has been ignored or generally disregarded by governments around the world. The refusal to accept the indigenous contribution in various countries is a denial of the sovereign rights of the first inhabitants of the land.

Indigenous People have been marginalized in the countries of their birth by colonizers and their economic and intellectual contributions appropriated and passed off as their own. This is not a practice of the past but one that continues today as clearly demonstrated in popular films and television.

Over the next few days we hope the public will have learnt about the importance of the contribution of indigenous people within the media.

The Alliance will also be developing a long term strategy to deal with the issues of distribution of program, copyright and the exchange of film and video in an attempt to highlight the issues and struggles of native people on the international stage.

about their real feelings. Assuming I can do that, I'll try to get them to talk about the current working conditions in the hospital. By doing that, I think I can comment on the current state of affairs. I haven't thought much about it beyond that simple outline, although I have lots of ideas.

By the way, in the Second World War, there were many countries whose land was devastated by the war, like Japan and Germany, right?

— Yes...

— Did you know there's a nurse station in the middle of towns in what used to be West Germany? If a patient calls the nurse station, a nurse goes and examines the patient, and it's set up that if she determines that a doctor is necessary, she can call and a doctor will come soon. Not only that, but the expenses that the nurse incurs, even her transportation fee, is totally covered by the government. There's nothing like that

in Japan. There are some nurses who are trying to do something like that now, but it's an uphill struggle, and they're having trouble getting it set up. Two countries, both devastated by war fifty years ago — why does Germany have this system and we don't? For this film, I'm planning to take five or six nurses to Germany and have them work there for a few months, and then have them tell the camera what they think, what they felt, what they saw there.

Recently, a hospital was built in Japan for terminally ill patients. It's supposed to be a place where, if an old man like me got cancer so bad that I might kick off tomorrow, you can go and rest and spend your last days in peace and comfort. I'd like to have some nurses go there and actually work. If they do, they might have some kind of reaction.

Additionally, there's rural care, something Kobayashi—who I'm planning to use as a cameraman—is filming. There's a place called Minami Saku Hospital, in Nagano Prefecture, where a young doctor named Wakatsuki went right after the war and built a little clinic, and went around to the villages nearby, administering to all the farmers. I'm thinking it would also be good to take some nurses up there and get their reactions to that, to have them tell us what they see and what they found.

In that way, I'd like to get them to have as many experiences as possible. During that time, I'm sure there's going to be people who get married, people who quit... There's likely to be all sorts of people and

events. While I'm following all that, all the nurses who were studying will come back with that they've learned. The problem is what comes after that. After this, what will Nurse A do to try and reform the hospital she works in. Nurse B will say, "I'm quitting hospital work and going to work at a rural clinic." I think that while this is happening, we'll probably — probably, mind you — see what it is that really makes a nurse. Maybe then too we'll see what they mean by "self-actualization."

This is one of those films where I don't know what's going to happen until I do it. Like Ogawa said, if I may paraphrase, "To take something you don't understand and make it understandable is to make a documentary." Ogawa was constantly telling me that.

I became familiar with Ogawa about two or three years before he passed away. He'd say something like, "Carry on. Carry out your will." And I'd

say, "Carry on? I can't do that!" But somehow I get the feeling that if we — we documentarists as a group — if we don't carry on Ogawa's will, the Japanese documentary will never grow, never develop.

— I was going to ask this last, but what do you think about the future of Japanese film and Japanese documentary? Also, what are your hopes, your expectations for the Japanese documentary?

— I know everyone says this, but I guess you could say that the younger documentary directors are going to work and change the shape of documentary, right?

I was just talking about Ogawa's "will." I should have asked Ogawa what he really meant, what he really wanted to say, but when I did, he'd say something like "Oh, you know what I'm talking about," so I never really asked him... But one of the things I think he meant to say was "always stand on the side of the oppressed." And, "always look for the true nature of the individual or group," and to look at them with a "large eye" and a "small eye," that is to say, take a wide view of them and a narrow view at the same time. Another piece of advice he gave was "Always manage the production funds yourself," and "Time. It all takes time." "Think of a new kind of documentary" "Don't get caught up by convention. Always look for a fresh style." "Unite yourself with the world's, especially Asia's, documentarists." I think he wanted to tell me something like that. Of course, I don't think that people will be able to make films like Ogawa, or do the things he did or even the things he wanted to do, but



From *Night and Morning Inside Myself*

(to borrow their phrases). I thought I'd take some time, about three years, and try to find out.

I have some kind of vague hunch that by choosing a wide variety of subjects — new nurses, nurses who've been working for a few years, old nurses, and people who have quit nursing for other professions — I'd be able to find out what "human development" is to them by talking to them.

Then there's one other thing, something kind of personal. Until now, I've made films putting on all sorts of different faces — sometimes like I'm championing some cause, or sometimes like a holy man, or sometimes a priest, saying "This is my philosophy" or "This is my personal idea," or something like that. But when I'm making these films, I'm always running around helter-skelter. "No that's wrong!" "Something's not right!" Or even, "I blew it!" There are all these different circumstances. I don't think it's very honest of me to show the viewer only the subject and not the actual conditions surrounding the shooting itself. So that's why this time, even while I'm filming the nurses, I'm thinking about giving every member of the crew an 8mm video camera. That way, whenever I'm running around screaming, or arguing with the cameraman, or the cameraman or any of us are talking with the subjects, no matter what's happening, it'll be filmed. Then, when that's organized and edited, I think you'll get to see all the different situations in filming — the "We did it!" as well as the "Something's not right!" I'm looking forward to seeing something like the relationship between the filmer and the filmed come out. I also think that maybe it will change the documentary form itself a little.

— Why did you pick this particular topic?

— I've been filming orphanages and other hospitals for a long time, and so I had the opportunity to get to know a lot of nurses well. Plus, I have always wanted to make a film about nurses, but I didn't think I'd be able to pull it off. For the past few years, I've been talking with an acquaintance of mine, and I'd ask her, "How are things? Are you working nights?" And she'd say, "Ten days a month — same as it ever was." "No kidding. What kind of a bonus or overtime do you get for working nights?" She told me their night shift bonus is ¥3,500 (about U.S. \$33). The first time I began working with nurses — and that was about 25 years ago — their night shift adjustment was ¥800. When you think about the increase in cost of living and



From *Night and Morning Inside Myself*

everything, it hasn't changed much. When I started thinking about that, I realized that working conditions for nurses haven't really improved over the years, so I thought, "Well, why not do nurses?" That was one reason.

Another reason is that — let's face it — Japan is a male-dominated society, and nurses are naturally discriminated against. They are discriminated against especially by

doctors. Most doctors just say something like, "Just do what I tell you to." Of course, there are some doctors who aren't like that. But I get the feeling that really most of them have an attitude like that. But they are not discriminated against simply because of the sexist attitude in Japan. There's another issue that causes problems. You see, in Japan there are two kinds of nurses: qualified nurses, and nursing assistants. Qualified nurses are those nurses who have graduated from a three- or four-year accredited nursing school. Nursing assistants are those who have gone through a nursing school that is operated by a local or rural medical association. However, it's very, very difficult to become a full nurse if you are only a "nursing assistant." And, even though they do a lot of work, nursing assistants are not allowed to care for patients directly without orders or permission from a qualified nurse. Most of the nurses at any "big" hospital are going to be qualified nurses, but when you go out into the countryside, to a rural hospital, most are nursing assistants. Unfortunately, most nurses in big hospitals don't seem to be concerned at all with what goes on in small or rural hospitals, nor with the nurses who work there. So the discrimination becomes layered, doubled, even tripled. When I realized this, I started thinking about making a film about nurses.

— Do you already have an idea about the shape, or style, of the film?

— No, just rough ideas, an outline, so far. I don't want to say anything like doctors are rude or improper or anything like that. But again, nothing's going to work if the viewer doesn't *feel* anything.

In large hospitals, they have something that's called a mixed ward. That's a place where patients who have different diseases are put together. I'm planning on filming one of those for about a month. Then — I know I've said this before — I'll get about five, or six, about ten nurses together, and talk to them, like on a panel discussion, one on one, or one on ten, or sometimes one on five, or whatever, and try to get them to talk

I also feel that if documentarists don't do things in the same *spirit* that he did, then the Japanese documentary has no future.

— You've made a number of films dealing with handicapped and disabled people. I want to ask you why you chose that as a subject for your films.

— A lot of people ask me that. I always tell them, "It just happened that way." Of course, that doesn't really satisfy the questioner much, because they don't really get it. So, I've tried thinking of a way to make people see what I mean, and I slowly came up with an answer to that question, "Why did I start making these movies?"

One reason is, after the war, we realized that there were people in Japan who had been opposed to the war. There were so many people who were against it, and I was a little ashamed, because I hadn't thought about anything. That was one reason. Another is that I spent about half a year at the Mitsui Mining Co. Kamioka Factory filming PR movies. I didn't know it until we finished filming, but that's the source of the Jintsugawa disease (caused by industrial cadmium spillage). I didn't know anything about that. I felt very bad afterwards, thinking about how I had worked for this company, making a PR film for a company that was the cause of pollution like that. I had felt bad about the war, and now felt even worse having been like a cat's-paw for this big company, so I resolved never to do PR films again.

I'm influenced a lot by Ogawa and Tsuchimoto. I always say there were three teachers who taught me film. One is Kamei Fumio, another is Tsuchimoto Noriaki, and one is Ogawa Shinsuke. Even though Ogawa and Tsuchimoto are younger than me, I look up to them as teachers, Tsuchimoto with his works on Minamata, and Owaga with Sanrizuka (Narita). Those two are very brave people—they never flinch, even in front of riot police. I'm a coward—if the police show up, I run with the rest of 'em. I don't want to get beat up or hurt with one of those sticks, you know. So, when I thought about what I should do, by chance, just occasionally, I was asked to go down and help out at an institute in Shiga Prefecture called Omi Gakuen that was for mentally handicapped children. After being asked several times, I finally went, and when I got there, I was surprised at how interesting it was. It

was a world that I had never seen before. It was so interesting, I stayed there for about two weeks. Then, after I had been there so many times I'd lost count, someone said something about making a documentary about severely handicapped and retarded children, and so I started thinking about it. When I started work, filming these children in their everyday life, I realized, like a warning, that if I did this, I'd end up making nothing else but movies about the handi-

capped. I thought that if I just made this one, other venues would open up again. Of course, as you can notice, it didn't really work out so smoothly as that.

— Have you changed yourself while making those films?

— To put it simply, I've gotten very patient. I don't get angry. Something else: I've become very attentive to what people say. I think that, yes, all that is a result of the time I've spent with handicapped people.

— I've seen *Kaze to Yukikishi* ("Going with the Wind") and *Night and Morning Inside Myself*, and I

thought the ending of those films was especially interesting. In *Night and Morning*, the children were upset with the fact that they were becoming the objects of the film, saying "Please don't do this to us." In *Kaze to Yukikishi*, at the end, the one girl gets upset because she has no place to go. The end of both movies is very important. I really think that *Night and Morning* is closest to the true nature, the true value of your work.

— Well, in my pictures, there's always a scene that looks like one in another of my films. The co-produced scenes are in all of them. What I mean by "co-produced" are those scenes that somehow expand the environment or give greater freedom to children with handicaps. We think, incorrectly, that people with handicaps cannot think, that they are incapable of doing anything. But they are actually going beyond what we think, beyond what we think they can do, and doing much more interesting things than we think we are. To do a co-production is troublesome and takes much time, but I know that they will show me what they can do. That's why it's frustrating, makes you angry, when somebody says, "Don't do that," or "Do this." All I've done these last thirty years is just that,



From *Night and Morning Inside Myself*

the same thing over and over again.

— I was very impressed by the use of the intertitles in *Night and Morning*. Their words, their pleas, had an awesome power.

— When I set out to make *Night and Morning*, I didn't intend to make that kind of movie. Recently, I got a letter from Ichikawa Jun, who did *Byōin de shinu to iu koto* (1993

[An impressive film contrasting formal, stylized scenes in a hospital with documentary montage sequences shot around Japan]), wrote me a letter saying that if you're going to film children who are dying in their 20's, wouldn't it be good to look at death a little more closely. However, when I first met those children, they were very cheerful, and the last thing you were thinking about was that they were going to die. I wondered, "Where does their cheerfulness come from?" Even though at the latest they're going to die at 22, they're still so cheerful and bright. I began filming because I wanted to know why. But while I was filming, they slowly lost their brightness and cheer. Then, when I was thinking about how to get what the children were thinking across without a microphone, I hit upon the idea of using the poems that they had written, so that's how the movie got to be the way it is. Actually, I took that idea from Kamei Fumio's *Kobayashi Issa*. The poem I like most in that one is the one that goes "Why don't you go down this road/The one where the white flower's blooming." I think, in some vague way, this poem is connected somehow to the source of the children's brightness. That's what I felt; that's why I like that poem the best.

— 37,662 people are listed in the credits for *Night and Morning*. That's quite a lot of people. Could you explain how all these people became involved?

— Sure. We took all sorts of member lists from church groups, schools, universities, community groups, even the phone book. We blindfolded a member of the staff and used what's called an eyeleteer, which is a fancy name for an industrial hole punch, to drill a hole in all these lists. Then, we looked up the names that had been marked by the hole — these are people that none of us had met — and sent them a letter saying, "Well, we're making this movie, and we were wondering if you could make a donation to help support production. Please tell your neighbors and acquaintances about the production as well." I have pretty bad handwriting, but I wrote all these letters and sent them out. I think we mailed around 55,000,



From *Kaze to Yukikishi*

maybe more, and got 12- or 13,000 replies. There were some people who sent ¥100, some who sent a few thousand yen, and even some who sent fifty or even one hundred thousand yen. We probably ended up with around ¥32 million. What was interesting about the whole thing was that the poorer people sent more in their donation than people who are well-off. I

guess the rich don't share their wealth. I've been raising funds that way ever since, but I don't think I can get away with it for my "Nurse Cap" project. The biggest problem is always raising money.

— Last question. You've been in the film business since the 1940's. How do you regard the Japanese documentary as you've seen it in that period?

— Well, of course I regard Ogawa and Tsuchimoto as the mainstream. Besides their works, there are other excellent works, like Hara Kazuo's *The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On*. I think we need to make more documentaries. I sincerely hope that more are made.

In Japan, quality aside, documentaries are, let's face it, minor. Drama, no matter how bad it is, is treated as a major form. I'd like that to change. There are good documentaries out there, and I wish the film production companies, and those that distribute film, would look at documentaries as films in their own right.

PROFILE

Yanagisawa Toshio was born 1916 in Gunma, Japan. He first joined Shochiku Studio and worked on feature films. In 1944, he switched to documentary when he saw and was inspired by Kamei Fumio's *Kobayashi Issa* ('41). He worked on many industry publicity films until 1968, when he decided to move into independent production. Since then, Yanagisawa has made several films on the disabled, questioning what human freedom really means. After releasing *Kaze to Yukikishi* ('89), he is now preparing for the shooting of *Nurse Cap*, his next film. He was jury chair for the Asian Program of Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival '93.