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Tokyo Film Festival: 'Fragments of the Last Will' A True Story of Japanese Soldier Who Suffered Russian Brutality

By: Gautaman Bhaskaran

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Tokyo



Takahisa Zeze's war drama, Fragments of the Last Will, opened the ongoing Tokyo International Film Festival.

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Takahisa Zeze's war drama, Fragments of the Last Will, which opened the ongoing Tokyo International Film Festival, is a tragic story from a chapter that has hardly been written or is being talked about. It is one from the history which Russia and Japan shared once.

Based on the true story of Hatao Yamamoto (played by Kazunari Ninomiya), one of the more than half a million Japanese soldiers taken as prisoners to the then Soviet Union after [World War Two](#), the movie details his sheer grit to stay alive and return home, a promise he had made to his wife (Keiko Kitagawa).

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The soldiers were transported to punishing labour camps in the climatically hostile Siberia and forced to work for years without any regard for international war conventions or treaties. Some of the soldiers could not return home for years, and hundreds died of starvation and from cold.

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In a recent interview, Zeze said: "I was born in 1960, four years after the last groups were repatriated to Japan, so while I was aware that Japanese soldiers had been taken to Siberia, I didn't know that much about it until I read the book that the film is based on". He recalled a song about a mother desperately waiting for her son's return at the port where Japanese soldiers were being deported from Siberia.

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"I visited Okinoshima, the island far off the coast of Shimane, where Hatao Yamamoto grew up. It was once where criminals and others were exiled to. It feels like a place at the end of the earth," explains Zeze. "His life was somehow like that of an immigrant."

The director averred that memories of that horrible times have now faded. "Japanese people now only know times of peace, but we should remember that there are conflicts happening in places all around the world, including the one between Russia and Ukraine," averred Zeze.

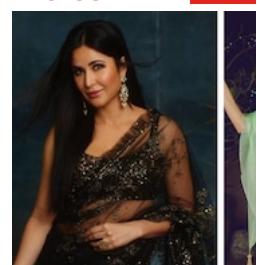
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He also felt that it was interesting that such a political movie had opened the festival. It showed that there was now a conscious effort to not black out those parts of history which were dark and depressing.

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Zeze has always been known to tackle controversial themes, which are not found in mainstream Japanese cinema. He cut his teeth in "pink" cinema or pornography.

(These days, there is very little market for it. Hardly any theatre screens these kinds of pictures. The reason is obvious.)

The director added: "The overarching aim of Japanese films is to be seen by as many people as possible, therefore political topics are difficult because politics divides audiences. And most major movies in Japan are made by production committees which are made up of people from various companies with differing opinions that have to be accommodated, and so you inevitably end up with kind of vanilla products."

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"But Japan is where we live and make a living in the film business, so that is the situation we deal with," Zeze concluded.

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About the Author

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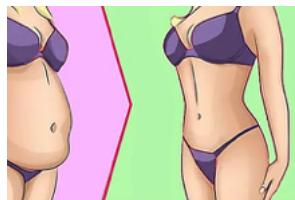
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