

Two Essays on Japan's Peace Constitution

Editor's Note: Japan's 1947 Constitution, imposed upon the country by US Occupation authorities, has never been amended. Currently, fierce political debate is occurring over the question of whether to amend *Article 9* of the Constitution, the famous Renunciation of War section of the document. The full text of the article is as follows:

Article 9

1) *Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.* 2) *In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.*

We asked two historians of modern Japan, Richard Minear and Peter Frost, both of whom are EAA editors, to review the recent John Junkerman-directed film, *Japan's Peace Constitution*.

JAPAN'S PEACE CONSTITUTION

JAPANESE TITLE: *EIGA NIHON-KOKU KEMPO*

DIRECTED BY JOHN JUNKERMAN

DVD, 78 MINUTES, 2005

FIRST RUN/ICARUS FILMS

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THE CONSTITUTION OF JAPAN

BY RICHARD H. MINEAR

With *Hellfire: A Journey from Hiroshima*, his eloquent film about the artists Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi, John Junkerman hit a grand slam home run. It was a finalist for the 1988 Academy Award for documentary films. Like *Hellfire*, *Constitution* is a polished production. The photography is good; the transitions are smooth; there is snappy music on the sound track (by the Japanese group Soul Flowers Union). The talking heads are attractive, articulate, on topic; newsreel footage from the archives serves its purpose. There is only one cheap shot: a brief sequence of George W. Bush and a baseball appearing three times in quick succession.

Still, for American classrooms, *Constitution* is not a home run but a single or double. Its primary intended audience is not American—it's Japanese. As a result, the film is less useful in American classrooms than it might have been. Which of us spends a class period—let alone seventy-eight minutes—on the Japanese constitution? And which of us includes in our coverage the present-day views of Syrians and Lebanese?

The dust-jacket notes say (in Japanese) this is "our constitution as viewed by the world," with "world giants of the intellect" commenting on it. "Giants" is a suitable label for Noam Chomsky (two appearances) and Japanese social scientist Hidaka Rokuro (presumably "world" because he lives in Paris), but many of the other talking heads don't qualify. In terms of time on camera, Hidaka (eleven appearances) and John W. Dower (nine) are the stars, with Chalmers

Johnson (six), Beate Sirota Gordon (two), and C. Douglas Lummis (two) in supporting roles. The others identified by name and accomplishments are Syrian writer Michel Kilo, Lebanese journalist Josef Samaha, Chinese documentary filmmaker Ban Zhongyi, and Koreans: activist Shin Heisoo, historian Han Hong Koo, and university president Kang Man-Gil. Okinawans protesting US bases, Syrians criticizing Japan's participation in the occupation of Iraq, and Korean comfort women make eloquent statements, but remain nameless.

The film is really three (or four or five) films in one. One film, the first twenty-eight minutes (after the three-minute intro), is about the circumstances in which the Constitution came to be. Here Dower and Hidaka carry the ball, with one long appearance each for Loomis (over four minutes) and Sirota Gordon (the single longest appearance in the film—over five minutes). Lummis speaks partly in Japanese, and Gordon only in Japanese—clearly a useful lesson for a Japanese audience. Gordon's role raises an issue the film elides. Although she speaks here primarily of SCAP's¹ scramble to write the constitution, she is the author of the constitution's commendable provisions for women's rights, which are far more progressive than anything in, for example, the US constitution. No one proposes today to revise *those* clauses, roll back *that* clock. Yet who argues today that the status of women in Japan is higher than the status of women in the United States? Can there be a disjunction between constitutional text and social reality? And if that is true of women's rights, may it not hold true also of *Article 9*?

The second film, roughly seven minutes, traces Japan's rearmament despite *Article 9*, with Hidaka setting out perhaps the major theme of the entire movie: *Article 9* as international pledge, directed especially to Asia (Johnson in particular develops this theme later). The film makes clear the US role in pushing Japan to rearm.

The third film (or third, fourth, and fifth films, totaling thirty-one minutes) is contemporary: popular protest against US bases in Okinawa (three minutes); Bush, Koizumi, and the dispatch of Japanese troops to Iraq (seven minutes; Johnson describes Koizumi, following Bush's lead in Iraq, and after a shot of George and Laura Bush with their dogs, as a "proper little cocker spaniel"); reactions from Syria and Lebanon (five minutes); and statements of World War II grievances against Japan (fifteen minutes) from the Chinese filmmaker, who speaks of Japanese atrocities, and the three Koreans, with a focus on the comfort women in addition to *Article 9*. Japanese class-

es need to hear articulate views from the Middle East speaking knowledgeably—and in Arabic—of the Japanese constitution and its revision; they need to hear Chinese outrage and Korean animosity. But that message has less relevance for American students.

The film takes a clear stand against the revision of *Article 9*. But the 500-pound gorilla the film leaves unaddressed is that the Self-Defense Forces exist today, despite *Article 9*. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) figures, in 2004 Japan's defense budget (\$42 billion) was the fourth highest in the world, after the US (at \$455 billion, forty-seven percent of total world arms expenditure), the UK (\$47 billion), and France (\$42 billion). This is with *Article 9* as it stands. So revision is largely a symbolic issue: it will give constitutional legitimacy to the Self-Defense Forces but may not affect their existence otherwise. And although the film is right to be suspicious of Koizumi's motives, there are voices in Japan supporting "normalization" who are yet above suspicion of chauvinism. In one of his early appearances, easy to forget by the end, Dower concedes that *some* revision is useful, that "changes have to be made." The Manichean picture the film presents—*Article 9* good, revision bad—is simplistic.

A further concern of mine relates to the use of Japan by non-Japanese to make a point about war and peace, laudable as that point may be. As Dower states, this was surely MacArthur's intent. It echoes here in the statements of Dower and others against "normalization" ("if 'normal' is like the US, I find that terrifying at this moment in history"); Johnson, Kilo, Samaha, Ban ("Defending *Article 9* is not just for the Japanese"); Gordon ("It would be wonderful if Japan could become a leader for peace"); and Chomsky ("Genghis Khan was 'normal,' too"). The film's final scenes of peace demon-

strations in Japan—among its most compelling though nearly lost under the credits—imply that "the people" oppose revision of *Article 9*. But with the exceptions of Hidaka and the Okinawans, everyone speaking in this film is non-Japanese. When do non-Japanese stop using Japan to prove that larger point about war and peace?

Finally, I worry about context. American students will tumble to the fact that Dower and Johnson and Lummis are all outspoken opponents of the Iraq war (Sirota Gordon doesn't voice her opinion); in fact, they can hardly *not* tumble to that fact. But for the non-US talking heads, the film offers few clues to context. What are the politics of speaking out in the Republic of Korea today on the issue of comfort women? What are the politics of talking in the People's Republic of China today about Japan's wartime atrocities? Presumably, the context includes at least the ongoing textbook issue, Koizumi's repeated visits to Yasukuni Shrine, and Japan's push for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Of course, full consideration of context would turn these seventy-eight minutes into 178 minutes, and a film of that length would be that much *less* useful in our classrooms. So we should be grateful for what Junkerman has produced, even if it isn't a grand slam, and tailor our use of it to our own goals. ■

NOTE

1. SCAP is the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers.

RICHARD H. MINEAR, Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, is author of *Dr. Seuss Goes To War* and translator of much literature of the World War II era. He is translating essays by Takeyama Michio (author of *Harp of Burma*) that deal with life on the home front during World War II.

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