

HANEZU

A film by Naomi Kawase



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HANEZU

HANEZU NO TSUKI

Japan / 2011 / 91 min. / 16mm shooting

PRODUCTION CONTACTS

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The Asuka region is the birthplace of Japan. Here, in ancient times, there were those who fulfilled their lives in the midst of waiting. Modern people, apparently having lost this sense of waiting, seem unable to feel grateful for the present, and cling to the illusion that all things will move constantly forward according to one's own plan.

In ancient times, there were three small mountains that people believed were inhabited by gods. They were Mt. Unebi, Mt. Miminashi, and Mt. Kagu, and they still stand. In that time, a powerful official used the mountains as a metaphor for a struggle inside his own heart. The mountains were an expression of human karma.

Time has passed into the present. Takumi and Kayoko, inheriting the unfulfilled hopes of their grandparents, live out their lives. Their tale continues a story of the ages, representing the uncountable souls that have accumulated in this land.

“Hanezu” means...

“Hanezu” is a shade of red, an ancient word that appears in the 8th century poetry collection, the Man yoshu. It has been said that red is the first color that humans recognized, and its meaning comes from its association with blood, the sun, and flame. Those three elements are, in turn, symbolic of life itself. At the same time, red is a fragile color that fades easily. Both of these aspects are incorporated in the title.



INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

Nature plays a central role in your films. Can you tell us more about the relation you have with Nature and her elements?

- I live with the idea that I myself am a part of nature. In modern times, under the illusion that we are greater than all things, humans have destroyed nature, isolated themselves from nature, and failed to live in coexistence. I think the suffering that people experience in modern society stems from a failure to recognize ourselves as part of nature. You could say that humans actually play supporting roles in my films. I portray nature in a central role because I want to reawaken in the characters the sense of the blessings of nature and awe toward nature that people felt in the past; I want them to coexist with nature, in the truest sense. This is because I consider it something important that should be passed on to my child and to children of the future.

What is your relationship to the Nara Region? ...

- Nara is my birthplace and it is where I live today. It is the place where Japan's oldest capital once stood. It was the center of Japanese culture.

Knowing that there are festivals that continue today just as they were more than 1,000 years ago gives me comfort, a sense that grand things sustained in this way nurture me. There are traditions and culture that I want the children of the next generation to inherit. However, these things are forever changing, and disappear in the flow of time. To pass the treasures of our predecessors, tangible and intangible, to the next generation, and in so doing, to build links not just in Japan but with the treasures of the people of the world (humanity) who love their homeland—I am making films that give expression to this.

What is the significance of the title, HANEZU? What do its multiple meaning mean to you and to the making of your newest work?

- In the poems of the Manyoshu, the ancients who lived without cars or airplanes had to wait for their loved ones to visit, no matter how much they longed to see them. And they wrote these feelings of futility into their poems. They expressed their feelings by transferring them to the flowers and fruits of the season. Ours is an era when things circulate even when they are out of season. Under the illusion that this (anything anytime) is richness and living their lives surrounded by

all this, contemporary people seem to have banished “waiting” and live their lives centered on activity.

If someone doesn't respond, prod them.

In all aspects of work, speed is given priority.

But didn't those ancients, in the sensibility of “waiting,” actually have a larger sense of scale than we have today?

It was from this perspective that I put a sense of “waiting” into the film.



About the Manyoshu...

Compiled between the late 7th and late 8th centuries, the Manyoshu is Japan's oldest existing collection of poetry. It has some 4,500 poems. They were written by people from a wide range of social strata, from Japan's emperors to nameless farmers, living throughout Japan from the Northeast down to Kyushu. Many of the poems concern love between men and women. Also, in ancient times, people were in awe of nature and revered it, believing that gods inhabited the mountains and rivers. It was an era when people lived in tandem with nature, and nature's presence is rich in the poems of the Manyoshu. “Manyoshu” literally means “collection of 10,000 leaves,” but it is thought that the title was chosen to suggest “10,000 ages,” or a collection that would be passed down for eternity.

You are able to evoke performances that are as natural as the environments that you capture. This has remained true throughout your career. What is, in your opinion, the relationship between the actor and the environment?

- When I make a film set in Nara, I have actors who live in Tokyo come to live in Nara for a month before shooting starts. I ask them to become a person from that area, to eat the local food and become friends with the local people. I ask them to learn how to live as if they were born there and had lived there all their lives. As actors begin to settle into lives in that environment, their expressions become more natural. They no longer just read the words of the script, memorize them, and use their bodies to express them; they forget the words, experience and internalize them, and their bodies begin to move naturally. The environment shapes and creates the actor.

Continuing on with the discussion on actors, could you elaborate on your directorial process of working with actors? Do you extensively rehearse them?

- We do not rehearse. Rather, I try to film with just one take. The actors have created their characters in that environment, so it's not possible for me, as director, to tell them to be something different. That would be like changing the life of a person who has lived in reality. Rather, while creating the environment, I have long and frequent discussions with the actors, and establish the environment that way.

What is the significance of the title, HANEZU? What do its multiple meaning mean to you and to the making of your newest work? (we already have the answer about Hanezu and red, but in case you would like to expand - if not we're happy with the explanation we have)

- By resurrecting an ancient word in the present, I wanted Japanese - who aren't familiar with this word—to savor its meaning. No one can know the reality that lies in the ground, but my role as one who lives in the present is perhaps to turn an ear to the voices of the dead and to weave a tale. What does it mean to live as a person within the unavoidable transience of life - the flux of the waxing and waning moon, people's hearts, the era, time? I believe there is a deeper truth in the tales of nameless people who are hidden in the shadows of major events and neglected by the trivial riches of the daily media.

After the tragedy of the tsunami that recently hit Japan, the Western world was impressed by the apparent wisdom and calm of the Japanese people. Observers commented it had to do with the relation between Japanese culture and Nature. What is your take on this?

- That makes me proud, as a Japanese. The sense of morality that was nurtured by our predecessors placed priority on the community, embodied in the family, over personal desire. Lives have been lost, land has been lost, but these are parts of the providence that gives us life. We do grieve, but just as we are given blessings, lives are also lost through disaster. Because nature is this way, it is treated in ordinary times with reverence and awe.



DIRECTOR'S PROFILE



Naomi Kawase was born in Nara. She graduated from the Osaka School of Photography (currently the Visual Arts College Osaka) in 1989 and began making films in 16mm and 8mm during her college days. Her work soon caught the spotlight both domestically and internationally. In 1993, she made “Embracing”, which put on film her search for the father who abandoned her in her youth. At the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival 1995, “Embracing” was given a Special Mention FIPRESCI Prize and “Katatsumori”, her portrait of the grandmother who raised her, won an Award for Excellence in the New Asian Currents program. In 1997, Kawase became the youngest winner of the Camera d’Or Award in the history of Cannes Film Festival for her first feature “Suzaku”. In 2000, she garnered both of the FIPRESCI Prize and the CICAIE Prize at Locarno International Film Festival for the film “Hotaru”. Since then, Kawase’s work has drawn greater attention from cineaste circles. Retrospectives of her work have been organized in many places in Europe.

Kawase is also highly recognized for her accomplishments in documentary filmmaking. Recent work includes “KyaKaRaBaA”. a co-production with the French TV station Arte, and “Tarachime - Birth/Mother”, a documentary that featured her own childbirth. This film won awards at the Locarno, Taiwan, Copenhagen, and Yamagata international film festivals. In 2007, Kawase won the Grand Prix of the Cannes Film Festival for “The Mourning Forest”, and she continued to take up challenging subjects in her 2008 film “Seven Nights”. Her latest documentary film “Genpin” was released in 2010 and won the FIPRESCI Prize at the San Sebastian International Film Festival. Kawase received the Carrosse d’Or from the Directors’ Fortnight in 2009. In 2010, she served as the executive durector of the first Nara International Film Festival.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

2011 **Hanezu**
2010 **Genpin**
2008 **Seven Nights** (Nanayomachi)
2007 **The Mourning Forest** (Mogari No Mori)
2006 **Tarachime - Birth/Mother**
2003 **Shara**
2002 **Letter From A Yellow Cherry Blossom**
2001 **Kyakarabaa**
2000 **Hotaru**
1999 **Manguekyo**
1997 **The Weald**
1997 **Suzaku**
1994 **Katatsumori**
1992 **Embracing**

CAST:

Takumi **Tohta KOMIZU**
Kayoko **Hako OSHIMA**
Tetsuya **Tetsuya AKIKAWA**
Yo-chan (archaeologist) **Akaji MARO**
Hisao (Takumi’s grandfather) **Taiga KOMIZU**
Takumi’s mother **Kirin KIKI**
Takumi’s father **Norio NISHIKAWA**
Kayoko’s mother **Miyako YAMAGUCHI**
Yo-chan (child) **Sen-nosuke TANAKA**

CREW:

Director & Screenplay: **Naomi KAWASE**
Photography: **Naomi KAWASE**
Gaffer: **Koji YAMAMOTO**
Sound: **Hiroki ITO**
Art Designer: **Kenji INOUE**
Music: **HASIKEN**
Editors: **Naomi KAWASE, KANEKO Yusuke, Tina BAZ**
Original story: **Masako BANDO**
Production: **Kumie, Inc.**
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