

“Kino-Pravda: A Tribute to Prokino”

IM Heung-soon, Eiji Oguma, James T. Hong & Yin-Ju Chen, Mitsuo Sato & Kyoichi Yamaoka, Prokino (The Proletarian Film League of Japan)

13 May - 28 May, 2017 *Open Sat. Sun. Mon.

Curated by Asakusa with support by Sanya Production and Screening Committee, Rokka Shuppan

ASAKUSA is delighted to announce the opening of “Kino-Pravda: A Tribute to Prokino”: a screening exhibition with a dedicated archive of newsreels and periodicals by the filmmakers’ collective Prokino (1929-1934), and a day-long programme of contemporary documentaries which seeks to explore a subterranean field of non-knowledge about social psychologies, site-specific memories, and historical truths. In the tradition of cinematic realism that inspired Prokino filmmakers, presented works portray the lives of people in distrust, and turn the screen into a site of persecution and protest. With each work pointing to a singular political event, the exhibition considers core subjects of modern politics including class struggle, state crimes, and violence, reflected in today’s post-ideological conditions where real images are subsumed neutralizing rhetoric of the quasi-fictional media space. The title “Kino-Pravda”, or “Film-Truth” in Russian, refers to a pioneering newsreel series in the early 20th century by Dziga Vertov, which constructed fragments of present actuality to reveal a deeper truth, otherwise inconceivable to the naked eye.

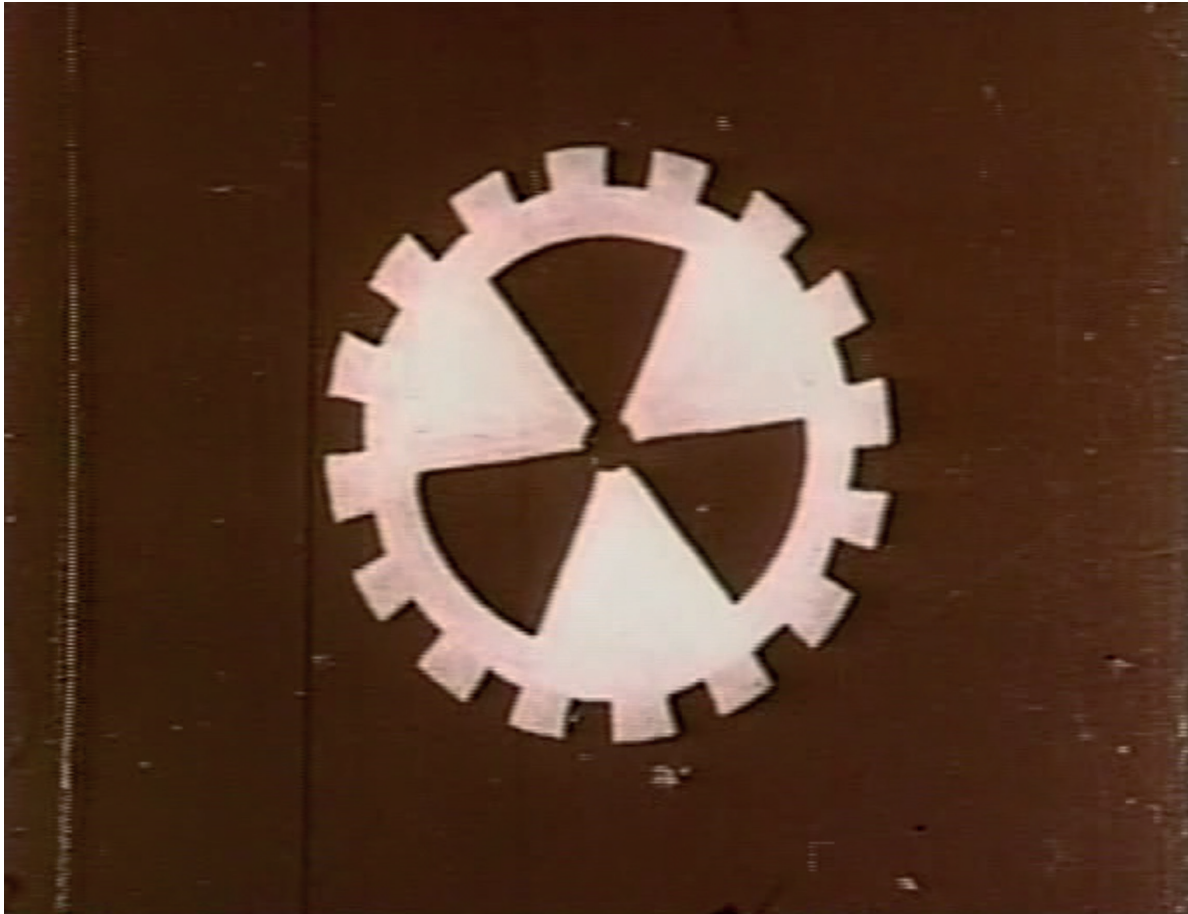
Marked as a historical point of reference will be the short films of **Prokino** (The Proletarian Film League of Japan, 1929-34), a collective body of young leftist filmmakers active only for 5 years. During increased tensions of an anti-communist campaign, leading politician Yamamoto Senji was assassinated by a right-wing activist. The news was followed by the sudden suicide of Communist Party chairman, Watanabe Masanosuke, after being tracked down during his exile in Taiwan. The Worker-Farmer Funeral of Yamamoto Senji (1929), by the Kyoto branch of Prokino, is an 11 minute video footage shot in 16mm that records a combined funeral for both leaders, wherein participant workers and taxis formed a procession line from the Kyoto Station to Yamamoto’s home. The Tokyo branch of Prokino’s The 12th Annual Tokyo May Day (1931) is the only remaining trace of their May Day films from 1927 to 1932, and shows the end of the parade route and a rally in Ueno Park. In other works such as Earth, (1931: dir. Ko Shukichi), and All Lines (1932: Screenplay and dir. Furukawa Ryo), the news film features are mixed with elements of staging and reenactment, where the heightened gestures constitute a critique of labour struggle in the Marxist tradition. Prokino was forced to dissolve in 1934 due to clean-up arrests of its members.

Screened alongside and in a separate room will be four full-length – and relatively recent - documentaries. **Mitsuo Sato & Kyoichi Yamaoka**’s Sanya - Attack to Attack (1985) shows the abysmal conditions of day laborers in the impoverished Sanya district at the high time of Japan’s economic growth. Illustrating violent conflicts of the labourers against local Yakuza exploiters and eventually costing the lives of both film directors, the film ends with a remark about their fellow workers who fled from the Korean Peninsula. **IM Heung-soon**’s Jeju Prayer (2012) reflects on this causality through the silence of Mrs. Kang Sang-hee, who lost her husband in the Jeju Uprising (An attempted insurgency followed by an anti-communist suppression in 1948). It sheds light on the intersection of a personal family history and collective trauma systematically obliterated in modern Korean history, while suggesting the concurrent rise of eco-tourism and militarisation through the recent controversy about the construction of a naval base in the island.

Uncovering the manipulation of state media, Taiwanese American filmmaker duo **James T. Hong & Yin-Ju Chen** confront Japanese historical revisionism with their documentary, Lessons of the Blood (2010). Consisting of archival materials, film clips, and interviews with survivors, the film exposes Japan’s use of biological weapons and human experimentation during the Second World War outside Harbin, China, and reveals the open wounds of elderly victims, who have suffered for years and still harbor hatred for their Japanese perpetrators. Sociologist known for radical demystification of official histories by testimonial records, **Eiji Oguma** presents his new and only film production Tell The Prime Minister (2015), the 109 minute film documenting an anti-nuclear demonstration, which gathered over 200,000 people, otherwise unreported by existing media coverage. Bringing together found videos from the internet, and the interviews with individuals including ex-Prime Minister Naoto Kan, it projects compound viewpoints through multiple lenses converged on the issues around the Fukushima catastrophe and the nuclear state apparatus.

The end of the 20th century faced the closure of an epoch marked by ideological confrontation. Although the subsequent era blurred the distinction between political opponents and neutralised the relevance of the ideological struggle, the contemporary media demonstrates that it is developing again with renewed vigour. As the society fails to cope with a new challenge of the post-ideological world, the documentary screen may well serve as a catalysis for historical contradictions. What is an ideology in the cinema of testimony? What constitutes the bias of the medium? How is it possible to conceive a visio-historical dialogue through reconstruction of cinematic truth?

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1F NEWSREELS

Prokino (The Proletariat Film League of Japan)

Kyoto Branch of Prokino: The Worker-Farmer Funeral of Yamamoto Senji (1929), 12mins., b&w.

Tokyo Prokino: The 12th Annual Tokyo May Day (1931), 7 mins., b&w.

Prokino: Earth (1931), 8 mins., b&w.

Prokino: All Lines (1932), 9 mins., b&w.

*All Prokino newsreels will be played in loop.

2F CINEMAS

12:00 - 13:50 Mitsuo Sato & Kyoichi Okayama: Sanya - Attack to Attack (1985), 110 min., 16mm (color, sound)

14:00 - 15:30 IM Heung-soon: Jeju Prayer (2012), 93 min., HD video (color, 5.1 sound)

16:00 - 16:55 James T. Hong & Yin-Ju Chen: Lessons of The Blood (2010), 52 min., HD video (color, sound)

17:10 - 19:00 Eiji Oguma: Tell The Prime Minister (2015), 104 min., HD video (color, sound)

Related events will be announced at later days.

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Image: League Logo of Prokino (1929-1934)

Artists:

Prokino (Proletarian Film League of Japan 1929-34) was a left-wing film organization associated with the Proletarian Arts movement in Japan. Primarily using small gauge films such as 16mm film and 9.5mm, it recorded demonstrations and workers' lives and showed them in organized events at factories and mines, using mobile projection devices. It also published its own journals "Proletarian Film". Its production varies from documentaries and newsreels to fiction and animated films. Prokino was eventually suppressed by the police under the Peace Preservation Law, but many former members became prominent figures in the Japanese documentary and fiction film industries. Members include: Akira Iwasaki, Taka Atsugi, Kan Inoue, Genju Sasaki, Tetsuo Kitagawa, Shinsaku Namiki, Keiji Matsuzaki, Sotoji Kimura, Setsuo Noto, Katsuzo Shino, Satsuo Yamamoto, Mitsuo Seo, Yoshitsugu Tanaka, Hikaru Yamanouchi (Sozo Okada), Kozo Ueno, Koto Kon, amongst others.

Masato Sato (1947, Niigata - 1984, Tokyo) was a documentary filmmaker and an activist involved in Zenkyoto (All-Campus Joint Struggle League) and arrested in the 1969 Yasuda Hall incident at the University of Tokyo. Sato soon entered the movie circle under the influence by Saito Ryuho. In 1983, Sato met the members of Sanya Laborers' support group at the rally of the East Asia Anti-Japan Armed Front. From 1983 to 84, he fought with Sanya community and formed "Manifesto Film" in 1984 to start shooting a film. In December that year, Sato was assassinated at the age of 37 by Eiki Tsutsui, a right-wing member of the Nishido group.

Kyoichi Yamaoka (Hokkaido, 1940 - 1985, Tokyo) was a filmmaker and a labor union activist. Grown up in the Showa Coal Mine in Northern Japan, he moved to Sanya, Tokyo in 1968 and joined the Tokyo Day-labor Union (Toho Labor). Following the "6.9 Struggle Society", he played a leading role in forming Hiyatoi-Zenkyo (The National Day-labor Union Association) in 1982. He took over the production of a documentary film after the assassination of filmmaker Masato Sato and completed the film in December, 1985. After the film's premier in January, 1986, Yamaoka was shot to death by the Yakuza member of the Koncho family at the age of Year 45.

IM Heung-soon (1969, South Korea) is a visual artist and cinema director based in Seoul. Since his early works on his working-class family, he has explored the lives of people who are marginalized in social, political, capitalist, and national contexts. His political yet emotional works are embodied through different visual mediums such as photography, installations, cinema and public art and community art. His second feature film, *Factory Complex* (2014), was awarded the Silver Lion at the 56th Venice Biennale 2015. His works have been exhibited, among others, at the Pompidou Centre, Paris, 2016; Lincoln Center, New York, 2016; angels barcelona, 2015; Tate Modern, London, 2015; The National Art Center, Tokyo, 2015; Sharjah Biennale, 2015; and MoMA PS1, New York, 2015.

James T. Hong is a filmmaker and artist based in Taiwan. He has produced works about Heidegger, Spinoza, Japanese biological warfare, the Opium Wars, and racism. His latest documentary about disputed territory in East Asia screened at the 2016 Berlin International Film Festival and the Guggenheim Museum in New York. He is currently researching the concept of morality in East Asia and recently presented a new experimental work about Nietzsche and metempsychosis, *Nietzsche Reincarnated as a Chinese Woman*, at the 2016 Taipei Biennial.

Yin-Ju Chen's primary medium is video, but her works also includes photos, installations and drawings. In the past few years she has focused on the function of power in human society, nationalism, racism, totalitarianism, collective thinking or collective (un)conscious. Her recent projects also engage in the relations between cosmos and human behavior. She has participated in many important international exhibitions and film festivals, such as Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool, 2016; 66th Berlin Film Festival, Berlin, 2016; 20th Biennial of Sydney, Sydney, 2016; Shanghai Biennial, Shanghai, 2014; "A Journal of the Plague Year", Para/Site Hong Kong, 2013; Taipei Biennial, Taipei, 2012; International Film Festival Rotterdam, Rotterdam, 2011.

Eiji Oguma (1962, Tokyo) is a documentary filmmaker, a guitarist, a Japanese historical sociologist and Professor at Keio University. Oguma received his PhD from Tokyo University in 1998 after working for Iwanami Shuppan, a giant publishing company in Japan. Since 1997, he has been on the faculty at Keio University, where he was named a full professor in 2007. Oguma has written extensively on postwar social and political histories, and issues of Japanese nationalism. In 2015, Oguma directed *Tell the Prime Minister*, a documentary on anti-nuclear protests in the aftermath of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

Exhibition Facts:

Title: "Kino-Pravda: A Tribute to Prokino"
Artists: IM Heung-soon, Eiji Oguma, James T. Hong & Yin-Ju Chen, Mitsuo Sato & Kyoichi Yamaoka, Prokino
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