

MAEDA Tetsu



Genre: Drama
Format: 35mm
Estimated Running Time: 95 min.

Budget:
US\$2,300,000
(HK\$17,800,000)

Producers:
YAMAGAMI Tetsujiro

Writing Credits:
MAEDA Tetsu

Production Company:
Siglo., Ltd.

HAF Goals:
Funds, Co-producers, Sales agents,
Pre-sales

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INTRODUCTION

Japanese children are materially well off, they have access to a lot of information, but their environment seems harsher than ever. Every day we hear about parents who kill their children, children who murder their parents, hospitals that refuse to treat sick children, the list goes on. This movie will not depict such major and shocking incidents. It will not dig out the "truth" behind these events, but instead, I believe the tragic situation here is something universal that the rest of the world is also facing. I'm not turning a blind eye to the questions I can't answer, but instead I believe that by focusing on today we can see a reflection of the future.

SYNOPSIS

7-year-old Taiyo is in second grade, living alone with his mother because his parents are getting a divorce. She usually works late, which is good because when she comes home early she gets upset easily and beats Taiyo. He's also bullied at school, and so for him the only fun in his life is picking up "treasures" on his way between home and school and hiding them in a secret place.

One day, on his way home, Taiyo meets Himawari, a first grade girl wearing the same school uniform as him. She is looking for good soil in which to plant seeds, but these days that is almost impossible to find in the city. Taiyo is fascinated by her mysterious behavior and decides to follow her.

Himawari knows she's being followed and so she leads Taiyo on a merry chase: hiding, ducking around corners, suddenly running at full speed. They haven't exchanged a word, but they're both loving this game of "hide and chase." For Taiyo, playing with Himawari has become the best part of his day. That night his mother accuses him of stealing her money and beats him up. At Himawari's home, her grandparents have come to celebrate her baby sister's birthday. Her parents are excited about the party, but there's a distance between Himawari and her family and she seems out of place in her own home.

The next morning, Taiyo misses his usual bus, and Himawari gets on the bus he manages to catch. They sit far apart but they both hesitate to get off when it approaches their school and, as if by silent accord, they skip school altogether. They decide to go downtown to find Himawari's "real" mother since Himawari thinks that her dad's second wife is a "fake" mother. They get a bit lost on the way but ultimately they reach where she was working only to find that she's remarried and moved out of town.

In spite of Taiyo's objections, Himawari insists on pursuing her mother. Taiyo has no choice but stay with her. A train maniac, he figures out a way for them to hitch a ride on a sleeper train to the town where her mother lives. Himawari has a dream. She dreams about being a "flower terrorist," attacking the world with a whole field of blossoming flowers. Taiyo is a big fan of her dream and together they imagine using flowers as weapons, with flowers blossoming on every corner, shocking people as they cover the entire earth.

They arrive at the town and Taiyo is amazed at the gorgeous countryside, which he has never seen before. Unfortunately, he also experiences the dark side of nature when he almost drowns in a river. Fortunately, he is saved by Ten, a kid living nearby. Ten is mentally handicapped but has amazing powers: he can talk to animals and predict the weather. Together, Ten, Taiyo and Himawari go to find Himawari's mother.

They arrive at the inn where she's living and are warmly welcomed. Himawari meets her stepfather, the inn's owner, who tells her about her mother, but the exhausted little girl has a fever and drops off to sleep. When her fever breaks, her stepfather drives them to meet Himawari's mother. They stop to pick some flowers and Himawari places the small bunch of flowers on her mother's grave, then she puts her hands together and prays. Back in the city, the seeds she planted suddenly start to sprout.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The way children are treated is a good reflection of the problems that we're facing as a society. Japan is one of the luckiest places on earth, enjoying over 60 years of peace since the end of World War II, but things are harsh for Japanese children. They are materially well off, but every day comes news of more children abused, beaten, starved and killed.

I know that there are worse tragedies afflicting children elsewhere in the world. In some countries children are being forced to be child soldiers. But I live in Japan. I use Japanese in my daily life. I am Japanese. The deeper and darker the abyss is, the brighter the light shines. These glimmers are not visible in daylight. Children are like this glimmer of light and they shape our future.

DIRECTOR

MAEDA Tetsu was born and raised in Osaka and entered the film industry as an assistant art director and then an assistant director for renowned auteurs like JUZO Itami, KIYOSHI Kurosawa and JUNJI Sakamoto. He made his feature film debut in 1998 with *Kawaiihito Episode 3*. Since then, he has directed numerous features like *Swing Man* (2000) and *Pakodate-Jin* (2002) both starring AOI Miyazaki. He has also directed TV dramas, music videos and commercials. His most recent film is *School Days with a Pig* (2008), which won the Audience Award at the Tokyo International Film Festival.

PRODUCER

YAMAGAMI Tetsujiro was born in 1954 and founded Siglo Ltd. in 1986. He has produced over 40 documentaries and he produced his first feature film, *The River with no Bridge*, in 1992. He produced *Village of Dreams* (1996) which won a Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival and *Hush!* (2001) which was invited to Director's Fortnight at Cannes. His recent film *The Matsugane Potshot Affair* (2006) was invited to the Rotterdam, Toronto and Pusan film festivals. His most recent film is *All Around Us* (2008).

PRODUCTION COMPANY

Siglo Ltd. was established in 1986 by YAMAGAMI Tetsujiro to be an independent film production company. It produces two to three films each year, both features and documentaries, including *Hush!*, *Power and Terror: Noam Chomsky in Our Times* and *Village of Dreams*.