

# Ari no heitai (蟻の兵隊)



English title: The Ants

Year: 2006

Length: 101min

Filmmaker: Ikeya Kaoru (池谷薫)

Topic: WWII in China, Japanese war veterans, post-war memories



# Why pay attention to this documentary?

1. Rare film in postwar Japanese cinema production (esp. in the document genre)
2. Well received domestically but **UNKOWN** overseas
3. High pedagogical value (excellent teaching tool)

# Japanese documentary film and WWII

- Generally extremely limited
- Atrocities committed by the Imperial Army avoided
- Particularly the Chinese war front is problematic

## Noteworthy documentaries produced in Japan on WWII:

1. (1983) Tokyo Trial (東京裁判)- Kobayashi Masaki
2. (1987) The Naked Army Marches On (ゆきゆきて、神軍) - Hara Kazuo
3. (2001) The Japanese Devils (日本鬼子) - Minoru Matsui
4. (2005) Ari No Heitai (蟻の兵隊) - Ikeya Kaoru
5. (2007) Yasukuni (靖国) – Li Ying
6. (2007) Wings of Defeat (特攻) - Morimoto Lisa
7. (2008) The truth about Nanjing (南京の真実) – Mizushima Satoru
8. (2009) Flower and Troops (花と兵隊) - Matsubayashi Yoju
9. (2018) Shusenjo: The Main Battleground of the Comfort Women Issue – Dezaki Miki
10. (2020) 日本人の忘れもの フィリピンと中国の残留邦人 – Obara Hiroyasu



# RECEPTION: domestic vs. overseas

Reception in Japan:



Overseas:

Prizes:

2006 Humanitarian Award for Outstanding Documentary at the Hong Kong International Film Festival

2007 Center for Documentary Studies Filmmaker Award (Duke University)

# Questions

1. **What was your impression of the movie? What was special or surprising about it?**
2. **What kind of man is Mr. Okumura in your opinion?**
3. **Who or what does Mr. Okumura blame for what happened? Is he trying to absolve himself from guilt? Is he himself responsible?**
4. **What was the conflict between Mr. Onoda and Okumura at the Yasukuni shrine about?**
5. **Mr. Okumura stayed behind in China and fought even after 1945. Can you, explain the situation historically? How is it possible that Japanese soldiers remained in China and got involved in the civil war there? What kind of reception did Mr. Okumura receive once he arrived back to Japan? Why did the film director never ask Mr. Okumura about his time as POW in China?**
6. **There is a scene (47 min.) with Mr. Okumura and a young Chinese TV journalist. How to interpret it?**
7. **Why is the movie called: Ari no heitai? (蟻の兵隊)**