

FEATURE

Excerpt

'Unbroken' Strikes a Nerve in Japan Over WWII Past

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Associated Press

<http://www.apnewsarchive.com/2014/Even-before-its-release-Jolie-s-Unbroken-strikes-a-nerve-in-Japan-over-wartime-past/idea7889067d584ef7b04bc3394b6e4505>

TOKYO

--- Angelina Jolie's new movie "Unbroken" has not been released in Japan yet, but it has already struck a nerve in a country still fighting over its wartime past.

And the buzz on social networks and in online chatter is decidedly negative over the film that depicts a U.S. Olympic runner who endures torture at a Japanese World War II prisoner-of-war camp.

Some people are calling for a boycott of the movie, although there is no release date in Japan yet. It hits theaters in the U.S. on Dec. 25.

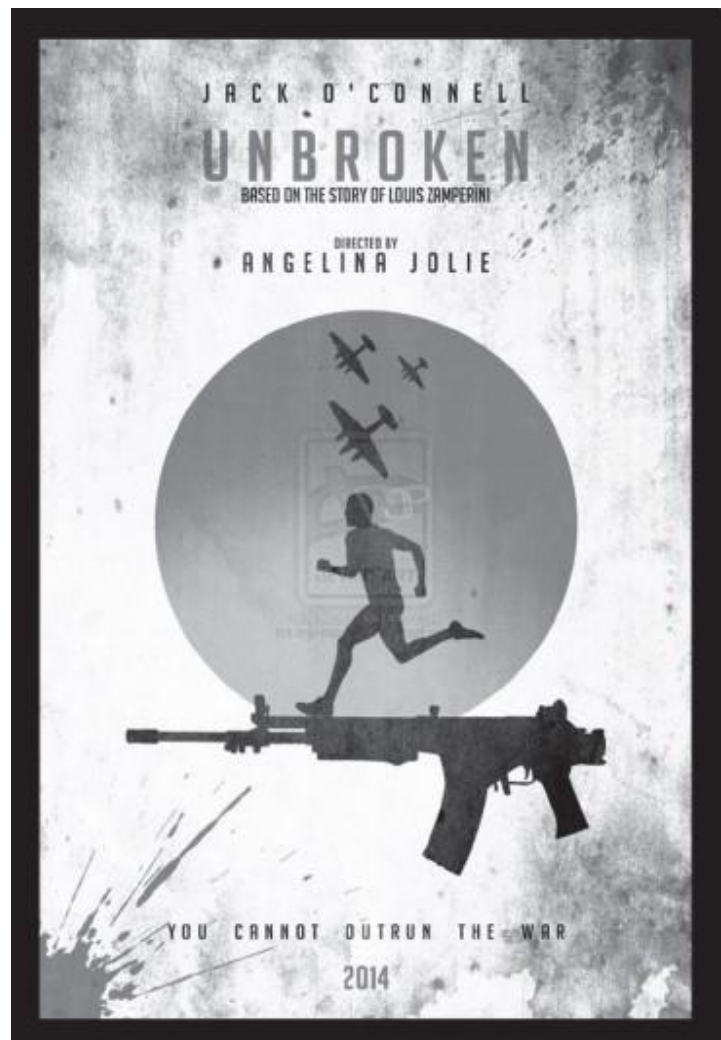
Others want that ban extended to Jolie, the director — unusual in a nation enamored with Hollywood, especially Jolie and her partner Brad Pitt, who both have reputations as Japan-lovers.

The movie follows the real-life story of Louis Zamperini as told in a 2010 book by Laura Hillenbrand. The book has not been translated into Japanese, but online trailers have provoked outrage. Zamperini, played by Jack O'Connell, survived in a raft for 47 days with two other crewmen after a plane crash, only to be caught by the Japanese and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp.

Especially provocative is a passage in the book that refers to cannibalism among the troops. It is not clear how much of that

will be in the movie, but that is too much for some.

"But there was absolutely no cannibalism," said Mutsuhiro Takeuchi, a nationalist-leaning educator and a priest in the traditional Shinto religion. "That is not our custom."



Takeuchi acknowledged Jolie is free to make whatever movie she wants, stressing that Shinto believes in forgive-and-forget.

But he urged Jolie to study history, saying executed war criminals were charged with political crimes, not torture.

“Even Japanese don’t know their own history so misunderstandings arise,” said Takeuchi, who heads his research organization, the Japan Culture Intelligence Association.

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Jolie said recently on a promotion tour in Australia that she wanted to depict a human story, one that gives hope, noting that war “brings out the extremes,” both the good and the bad, in people.

Japan has not always been averse to Hollywood portrayals of World War II.

Clint Eastwood’s 2006 “Letters From Iwo Jima,” which focused sympathetically on a gentle commander, played by Ken Watanabe, was favorably received here.

Japanese directors have made their share of movies critical of war. Akira Kurosawa made “No Regrets for Our Youth,” as well as “Ran” and “Seven Samurai.” Kihachi Okamoto’s “The Human Bullet” and Kon Ichikawa’s “The Burmese Harp” relay powerful anti-war messages.

But the release of “Unbroken” comes at a time some in Japan are downplaying the country’s colonization of its Asian neighbors and the aggressive acts carried out by the Imperial Army during World War II.

For example, some politicians dispute the role of Japanese soldiers in the Rape of Nanjing, which began in 1937, in which an estimated 300,000 Chinese were killed. They say that is a vast over count.

Similarly, they reject historical studies that show women from several Asian countries, especially Korea, were forced into prostitution by the Japanese military. Some oppose the term “sex slave,” which the U.N. uses, preferring the euphemistic “comfort women.”

Excerpted from the Washington Post Opinions

Will Japan's Habit of Rewriting Its History Affect Its Future?

By Richard Cohen

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/richard-cohen-how-will-japans-habit-of-rewriting-its-history-affect-its-future/2014/12/08/54093bcc-7f0d-11e4-8882-03cf08410beb_story.html

Japan is working hard at forgetting. Its prime minister, Shinzo Abe, suggests in code-talk that Japan was the victim of World War II — no war criminals at all, thank you — and its influential conservative press, with a wink from the government, is determined to whitewash the country's use of sex slaves during the war. This sort of thing can be catching. Maybe others will forget why they consider Japan a friend.

Certainly the task will be harder when the film "Unbroken," directed by Angelina Jolie, hits theaters on Christmas Day. The movie, like the book by Laura Hillenbrand, is the story of Louis Zamperini, a former Olympic runner whose plane crashed in the Pacific during World War II and who wound up spending two and half years as a prisoner of the Japanese. He was horribly brutalized by his captors — starved, tortured physically and psychologically, worked nearly to death, and so often beaten viciously and capriciously that the sickening thud of a kendo stick on a human skull will trail you for days.

...

The country has much to atone for. Japan mistreated prisoners of war and even established a medical research team — the infamous Unit 731 — that conducted experiments on captured enemy soldiers, most of them Chinese. Among other atrocities, the unit performed hideous vivisections without anesthetic on living men, removing organs or limbs for some concocted medical purpose. Dr. Mengele might have turned away in horror.

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One of the most startling parts of Hillenbrand's book is her recounting of what happened to the POWs once Japan surrendered. Some were executed, but the liberated ones were allowed to amble out of their camps and into nearby towns and cities. The Japanese police who,

just moments earlier, might have shot a POW on sight, were soon engaged in the hunt for U.S.-designated war criminals. Japan did an instant 180; Emperor Hirohito had ordered surrender and cooperation. Japan surrendered and cooperated.

These sudden reversals have been a feature of Japanese culture ever since Commodore Matthew Perry forcibly opened the country to U.S. trade in 1854...

Now, though, a more ominous reversal may be underway. With Japan's economy once again showing weakness — it has recently fallen into recession — the mythologizing of the past may well accelerate. This would only aggravate the insult to Japan's victims and further unsettle its neighbors, China and South Korea in particular. Japan's revisionists have their eye on the past. Others wonder what this means for the future.

A Letter on “Unbroken”

Sent: Sunday, December 14, 2014 9:56 AM
Subject: “Unbroken”

Dear Friends:

I wrote the following to my Taida classmates, I want to share with you too.

It is a movie directed by Angelina Jolie adapted from a book of the same name written by Laura Hillengrand. The movie is the story of Louis Zamperini, a former Olympic runner whose plane crashed in the Pacific during WWII and who wound up spending two and half years as prisoner of the Japanese. He was worked nearly to death and so often beaten viciously and capriciously that the sickening thud of a kendo stick on a human skull will trail for days. It will start shown at your local movie house starting on Christmas Day.

Upon the release of this movie, Richard Cohen, a Washington Post columnist, wrote an Op-Ad article entitled: “Japan Seems to be Intent on Revising its WWII Past.” In the article, he wrote: “... Japan mistreated prisoners of war and even established a medical research team - the infamous Unit 731 which conducted experiments on captured enemy soldiers, most of them Chinese (including thousands of civilians).

Among other atrocities, the unit performed hideous vivisections without anesthetic on living men, removing organs or limbs for some concocted medical purpose.

But certain important Japanese seem intent on reviving the past by revising it. With an implied nod from Abe, they have put enormous pressure on Asahi Shimbun newspaper to retract stories exposing Japans conscription of thousands of women to serve as sex slaves for the military during the war. Increasingly, this historic fact is being denounced as a fiction. Too many witnesses insist otherwise.”

They intended to white-wash their image as the originator of WWII, the worst man-made catastrophe. Can they cover up their sins of slaughtering tens even hundreds millions of innocent civilians? Evil!

Lie, lie, lie! As a race, Japanese are perceived as honest, clean, nice and law-abiding. How can such a “superior race” be so dishonest? Can they whitewash such a monstrous atrocity? Conversely, the Germans admitted their guilt,

and accepted their punishment in history. What can we say about the Japanese? Hypocrites! I urge you to see the picture. Having the courage of admitting and accepting the punishments towards ones’ evil deeds is noble. Trying to cover them all up and pretending to be honest and nice is evil. That is the nature’s definition of good and bad.

Yours truly,
A Concerned Chinese American
Posted by Ignatius Ding
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