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A double-cross of democracy

Two films by F. Wiseman and Kazuhiro Soda

[In the first part of the article, Wiseman tells that his investor did not give final permission for release]

[...] Soda doesn't have these kinds of problems. A Japanese filmmaker living in New York, Soda made his documentary without any foreign funding. In October 2005, as soon as he found out that a former classmate Yamauchi was running for office as a city council of Kawasaki, Kazuhiro Soda took his camera and flew to Japan. He then followed Yamauchi for 12 days during his election campaign and shot 60 hours of footage, and edited it into a two-hour documentary, a process that took 10 months to complete. The film had its world premier one day before the screening of Wiseman's "*State Legislature*".

Both films attempt to clarify the principles behind Democracy. Soda portrays a candidate's long journey to power and how the challenges he faces along the way influence him, who until not long ago, was no more than an ordinary citizen. Wiseman on the other hand, documents the work performed by officials once they are elected into office. In both films, the protagonists are far from being seasoned politicians. Yamauchi is a stamp and coin dealer who became a candidate after receiving a request by the governing party in Japan, the LDP. An outsider, he was pulled in to give credibility to the party's reform politics. During the entire sitting period in 2004, Wiseman followed a representative of Idaho who received only nominal compensation for his work in the legislature but was extremely proud of it.

It's not surprising that Wiseman shot and edited a brilliant film which takes up time for showing several conferences. What is surprising is that a novice filmmaker such as the 37 year old Soda, an admirer of Wiseman, with directorial experience in television, created a documentary of such calibre. This film was one of the sensations of Berlinale.

During an interview with a newspaper, Soda commented upon his objective. "Observing the struggle of a newcomer in politics from a subjective point of view, and creating a balanced portrait of the individual as well as the political machine that he's part of." In this he succeeded, and much more. "*Campaign*" is also a great introduction to Japanese mentality. It is fabulously funny and disturbing at the same time, it is especially poignant to watch the naïve and eternally optimistic Yamauchi getting scolded and constantly humiliated by the local "sensei" of LDP. And against this, Wiseman's film...

Soda's work is more exciting precisely because of its simplicity. But he also has big plans to produce a series of documentaries, with "*Campaign*" being the first in the series. If he wants it, he will have no problem finding investors for his future projects.

By Andreas Platthaus