

Stateless: War displaced Filipino Japanese

From the beginning of the 20th century until the end of the War in Pacific in 1945, Japanese companies were running a large scale Manila hemp industry in Mindanao and the Japanese community was formed there. Thousands of Japanese workers moved to Mindanao and many of them were married to local women, resulting the births of thousand of Japanese children. Before the war, the Japanese community in Mindanao enjoyed prosperity of booming industry. There were a Japanese school, shops and even the latest cinema. This project portrays the Japanese descendants who were born during or right after the war, who never knew of such blessing, but had to grow up in poverty and anti-Japan sentiment.

On the March 10th 1945, by the landing of the US Army, the Battle of Mindanao started. Many Japanese had to collaborate to Japanese army or had to escape to the jungles with their families. Many died in battles or were killed by the guerrillas or by the tropical diseases. Many became missing. Even if they survived the war, they had to repatriate to Japan after the capitulation, leaving their wives and children behind. The Japanese children had to hide their Japanese identity when growing up in harsh anti-Japan sentiment. Many were trapped in poverty preventing them from going to school. They did not even have a very basic human right, nationality. Since 2004, Philippine Nikkei-Jin Legal Support Center (Shinjuku, Tokyo) has been supporting them with searching for their Japanese families and application for Japanese nationality. Yet, still many Japanese descendants are living in difficult conditions.

Miyuki Okuyama, 2019