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The Kamloops Kid: Taking the stage at the Toronto Fringe Festival 2015

Controversial historical
figure at center of play
that explores identity

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TORONTO – Convicted of high treason and war crimes committed in Asia, Kanao Inouye (1916 – 1947) was the only Japanese Canadian to face prosecution during the Second World War.

An interpreter in the Imperial Japanese Army, Kanao was tried by two separate military tribunals before being sentenced to death by hanging in Canada, which would be carried out in August 1947.

Kanao grew up in Kamloops, British Columbia and his ties there earned him his nickname ‘The Kamloops Kid’.

Artistic director Karri Yano, his great-niece, and playwright Evan Mackay are trying to bring his story to the stage at Toronto Fringe, a theatre festival.

“It’s an exploration about how much we choose our own identity and how much is imposed on us,” Yano told Nikkei Voice.

“I think he was caught in between Canada and trying to prove his loyalty to Japan, and that’s the personal take we’re taking with the play,” Yano said.

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Starring Benaldo Yeung, who will be portraying Kanao Inouye, and Loretta Yu, who will portray his older sister Martha, the two-person show focuses on Kanao's interactions with his family.

Martha, who is living in an internment camp, provides another side of the story that's often overlooked in discussions about The Kamloops Kid.

Being Canadian and suddenly being cast aside as an "Enemy Alien" is something that both Kanao and Martha experienced. The racism they faced becomes a shared experience for the brother and sister.

And ironically, says Yano, this Canadian connection is ultimately what leads to his death at the hands of Canada's military.

"I think that's really the heart of this story is both politically and personally," Yano said.

"I hope that people will appreciate their identity and that it can be a very precious thing however you define it whether it's a national, sexual, or political view. It can also be a fragile thing that can be taken away from you, especially if you're on the wrong side of a war," she said.

On the other side of this story is the anger that still exists at the mention of his name and the war crimes he committed.

Thomas Smith Forsyth, an army veteran who spoke in a video about Kanao with veterans.gc.ca, recalled an incident where one of his captains had been beaten by Kanao after his superior officer urged a Red Cross observer to enter into their POW camp.

"Norris lived to come back, but he'd been struck so often in the head that, that he was never right, he was never right. He nev-

er got back to normal."

Kanao's story becomes thus push and pull of what factually happened during the war, and how history looks back upon the actions taken during war times.

Yano draws parallels between Kanao's story and the story of Omar Khadr who was detained by United States authorities in Afghanistan as a child.

While Canadian, Khadr's repatriation to the country has been mired with controversy.

Where does the Canadian identity begin and end? How much protection does being Canadian give to you in war times? Can your Canadian status be taken away from you?

These are the questions Yano hopes that the play can illuminate for audiences.

Mackay, the playwright who created the original script for the play, has also previously worked on another script called *Father Hero Traitor Son* that examined Kanao's relationship with his father.

Tadashi "Tow" Inouye fought for Canada in the First World War and received a medal for bravery in the field. A medal for the father and a noose for the son - was an aspect of the story was one of the motivating factors behind writing a script about *The Kamloops Kid*, he wrote in a piece for the Vancouver Bulletin that this contrast - a.

Why isn't there a dialogue about him and his actions, it's a question Yano and Mackay ask.

Currently, Yano and Mackay are reworking the script to work it into the 15-minute format for Toronto Fringe.

The play is set to appear on stage at the Factory Theatre at the corner of Bathurst and Adelaide from July 1 to 12.