



The Yakuza, Japan's organised crime syndicates, are a dying breed. Their members are ageing and the government of Japan has launched a large-scale crackdown to eradicate them once and for all. But who are the Yakuza? The cancer of a nation or a necessary evil in a country with one of the lowest crime rates in the industrialised world?

Undoubtedly the Yakuza are involved in crimes including extortion, fraud, murder, drugs & gambling. However, Japan has one of the lowest crime rates in the industrialised world, with crimes related to drugs -officially against the Yakuza code of honour- or street gangs strikingly low, a fact that many contribute to the presence of the Yakuza. Deeply rooted in Japanese society, they are seen as a necessary evil and 'problem solvers'. They have been around since the 1700s and were said to protect the weak from the strong, following a rigorous code of honour. Several clans even contributed aid for the victims of the recent earthquake and Tsunami, all reasons why the public perception of the Yakuza in Japan is not solely a negative one.

Unlike the Mafia, the Yakuza is a legal, public group making them relatively easy to check on. Their offices are public, their members registered with the police and Yakuza members went as far as freely admitting their guilt in cases of criminal investigations, as a part of their code of honour. In reaction to strict government measures against them, the Yakuza has ceased all cooperation with the law. As the police concentrate their resources on the Yakuza, many criminals simply don't register with clans anymore and start operating underground, evading the grasp of police. A clear trend is emerging towards a new structure of organised crime in Japan, resulting in a steep decrease in the numbers of the traditional Yakuza while the underground is soaring - including foreign Russian and Chinese mafia's.

This documentary deals with the struggle of the Yakuza for its survival and the restructuring of the organized crime scene in Japan. Furthermore, through unprecedented access to the secret world of the Yakuza on a very personal level, you will get an authentic picture on who the Yakuza really are: criminals, outcasts, but also family men and a part of Japanese society.



A 2 x 52' or 1 x 104' documentary from Sebastian Stein

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For further information or screeners contact:
Kazz@sidewaysfilm.com
 +44 (0) 788 147 3603
www.sidewaysfilm.com