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## GUEST EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

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The following four essays were all presented by students at the conference called "Aesthetics of Nirvana: Truth, Beauty, and Enlightenment in Japanese Buddhism" held November 7-8, 2004 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This conference featured the annual meeting of the Southern Japan Seminar (SJS), sponsored by the Japan Foundation, as well as several ancillary events sponsored by a variety of academic departments, programs, and institutes at UNC-Chapel Hill as well as the Asian/Pacific Studies Institute at Duke University. One of the purposes of the conference was to honor the careers and contributions of Carolina Professors Emeritus James H. Sanford and Jerome P. (Sandy) Seaton. The conference was co-directed by Professors Inger Sigrun Brodey from the Curriculum of Comparative Literature and Jan Bardsley of the Asian Studies Department, both of UNC-CH.

In addition to the fine panels sponsored by SJS, we also included two student panels entitled "Cross-Cultural Approaches to Buddhist Aesthetics" and "Viewing Kurosawa, Teaching Kurosawa." Each panel included graduate as well as undergraduate presenters recruited from local area universities offering fall semester classes relating to Buddhism or to Japan. Professor Norris Johnson (UNC-Chapel Hill) served as both chair and discussant for the Aesthetics panel. Professor Hiroko Hirakawa (Guilford College) served as chair for the Kurosawa panel, assisted by Professor John Mertz (North Carolina State University)

The Carolina Asia Center generously offered a prize for the best graduate student and undergraduate student paper presented at the conference. The above-mentioned chairs and discussants of the papers served as judges for the prizes, in addition to Professor Dottie Borei (Guilford College). Both the prize-winning papers are included in this volume: Matthew Dale's "Paths Present and Future: *Yojimbo* and the Trail of the Zen Detective" won the prize for the best undergraduate paper, and Jeff Wilson's "Aesthetics of American Zen: Tradition, Adaptation, and Innovation in the Rochester Zen Center Garden" won the prize for the best graduate student paper.

After consulting with the Editor and Jan Bardsley, I invited student panelists to revise and resubmit their papers for this volume. All the papers

included here have been significantly revised since their oral presentation; for some, this has resulted in slight changes in the scope of the subject matter treated and therefore also some modifications to the original titles. Since most of the conference presentations also included visual components, we have attempted to recreate the visual aspect here through selected illustrations.

Matt Dale is an undergraduate Senior at UNC-Chapel Hill, majoring in Comparative Literature; Jeff Wilson is a Ph.D. student taking classes at both Duke and UNC, pursuing a degree in Religious Studies from UNC; Jeff W. Russell is currently pursuing an M.A. in Comparative Literature at UNC; and Paul Worley is pursuing a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature at UNC.

All four of these papers treat a cross-cultural theme in the transmission of Buddhist thought, whether in terms of film, landscape and garden architecture, poetics, or narrative techniques. In addition, all four papers explore the shape and meaning of Zen Buddhist thought when it is transferred to art forms or settings that differ from those more traditionally associated with Japan or China. As such, they offer multidisciplinary responses to the central questions raised in the Aesthetics of Nirvana conference.

Matt Dale's "Path Present and Future: *Yojimbo* and the Trail of the Zen Detective" analyzes Kurosawa's 1961 film, which aesthetically and commercially revitalized the *samurai* swordsman genre by combining Zen religion with Western action. Jeff Wilson's "Aesthetics of American Zen: Tradition, Adaptation, and Innovation in the Rochester Zen Center Garden," investigates the influence of Asian and North American traditions in an emerging American Zen aesthetic at the Rochester Zen Center Garden. Paul Worley's "Taxicab Enlightenment: Zen and the Importance of Performing Kerouac in *Satori in Paris*," examines how Kerouac frames and embeds his frustrating trip to France in search for his European heritage/identity in Zen traditions. Finally, Jeff W. Russell's "Mother Gaia: A Glimpse into the Buddhist Aesthetic of Gary Snyder," discusses the infusion of Tang poetics and Rinzai Zen Buddhism in Snyder's poetry.