NCTA
National Consortium for Teaching about Asia

Professional Development Seminar
Summer 2011
June 13 – June 17

A professional development seminar sponsored by the Freeman Foundation. Presented by the Institute for Asian Studies at Florida International University.

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Table of Contents

Description and Goals 3
Syllabus 4
Lesson Plan Outlines 6
Movie Synopses 8
Florida International University Seminar for Teaching on Asia
Summer 2011
Sponsored by the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA)

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Description and Goals:
This seminar is designed to give Florida K-12 teachers an introduction to the history and contemporary issues and problems of East Asia, a region whose dynamism and vibrancy is sure to make it an even larger part of the state of Florida and our children’s future.

The main goals include:
- Through the use of films we will create an understanding of East Asian culture and the relation between traditional and modern thought in the context of globalized social history.
- Apply this knowledge about Asia to specific and original lesson plans for incorporation into each teacher participants’ curriculum.

Materials:
Course Packet with selected readings; will be provided by Asian Studies.
The following films will be shown in class –
- Why has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East? dir. Bae Yong-kyun
- The Boy Who Plays on the Buddhas of Bamiyan, dir. Phil Grabsky
- Shugendō Now, dirs. Jean-Marc Abela and Mark Patrick McGuire
- Dreams, dir. Akira Kurosawa

Recommended Films
Watch ONE film either produced in Asia or about Asia (see below) and come prepared to discuss it in class. Here is a list of recommended films for you to pick one, but if this is not available, you may select a different one:
- South Pacific, Joshua Logan
- The Bridge on the River Kwai, David Lean
- Rising Sun, Philip Kaufman
- Rashomon, Akira Kurosawa
- Yojimbo, Akira Kurosawa
- The Last Samurai, Edward Zwick
- Mississippi Masala, Mira Nair
**Syllabus for NCTA Summer 2011**

**SESSION 1:** June 13  
9:30  Administration/Welcome  
10:00-12:00 Film Viewing: *Why has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?* dir. Bae Yong-kyun  
12:00  Lunch  
12:30-2:00 Group 1 Presentation/Discussion of Film – See List Below for Assignments

**SESSION 2:** June 14  
9:30  Administration  
9:45-12:00 *The Boy Who Plays on the Buddhas of Bamiyan*, dir. Phil Grabsky  
12:00  Lunch  
12:30-2:00 Group 2 Presentation/Discussion of Film – See List Below for Assignments

**SESSION 3:** June 15  
9:30  Administration  
9:45-12:00 *Shugendō Now*, dirs. Jean-Marc Abela and Mark Patrick McGuire  
12:00  Lunch  
12:30-2:00 Group 2 Presentation/Discussion of Film – See List Below for Assignments

**SESSION 3:** June 16  
9:30  Administration  
9:45-12:00 *Dreams*, dir. Akira Kurosawa  
12:00  Lunch  
12:30-2:00 Group 3 Presentation/Discussion of Film – See List Below for Assignments

**SESSION 5:** June 17  
9:30  Administration  
9:45-12:00 FINAL PRESENTATIONS  
12:00  Lunch  
12:30-2:00 FINAL PRESENTATIONS Continued
Requirements:
Participants are required to participate actively in seminar discussions and to develop and present an original lesson plan that connects seminar material based on state-mandated teaching requirements. The seminars will consist of the following components:

THE MAIN REQUIREMENT IS TO PRESENT A LESSON PLAN ON FRIDAY (JUNE 17) AND TO ATTEND THE FULL CLASS SESSION AND PARTICIPATE IN DISCUSSION REGARDING YOUR COLLEAGUES’/PEERS’ PRESENTATIONS.

1. Preparation for each session
2. One Presentation as part of a Group
3. Final Lesson Plan and Presentation

ATTENDANCE POLICY
1. ATTENDANCE MANDATORY ON EACH OF THE FIVE IN-CLASS DAYS.
2. ANY ABSENCE WILL RESULT IN A DEDUCTION FROM THE STIPEND.

Guidelines for Group Presentations
Participants will be divided into four groups (please see the list below) and each group is responsible for a presentation of **8-10 minutes (7-8 slides)** on the assigned film or reading. Each group member has been assigned a specific topic of discussion on the assignment.

Discussants in Group 1, as well as for the other groups should all try to preview their film in advance or if that is not possible, do some basic internet research so that they will come prepared to discuss the following topics along WITH A 7-8 SLIDE POWER POINT PRESENTATION.

**Group 1** – Why has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?

**Group 2** – The Boy Who Plays on the Buddhas of Bamiyan

**Group 3** – Shugendō Now

**Group 4** – Dreams
Guidelines for Creating Your Lesson Plan for Final Presentation

This page is designed to help you with the format of your lesson plan. The list will assist you in creating your best lesson plans because they are the details that often are easily overlooked.

- Make the topic clear and establish a connection to Asia
- Follow the outline format
- List all of your sources and include one to two sentences explaining about each source
- Include titles of your sources; books, articles, webpages, etc. Even if a webpage has moved, it can often still be found by using a search engine with the title as the item to search for.

Don’t forget to ask for help if you need it.

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Lesson Plan Outline

<table>
<thead>
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<th>I. Subject</th>
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<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
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<td>Grade</td>
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<td>Time</td>
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| II. Goal |  |

| III. Instructional Objectives |  |

| IV. Content Outline |  |

<table>
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<th>V. Instructional Strategies</th>
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<tr>
<td>Set</td>
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<td>Activities</td>
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<td>Closure</td>
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| VI. Assessment |  |

| VII. Materials |  |

| VIII. ESL Strategies |  |

| XI. Home Learning Extension |  |

| X. Sunshine State Standards/ CBC Standards |  |
Lesson Plan Outline

I. **Subject:** The subject in which you are teaching this lesson  
   **Topic:** Name of the topic  
   **Grade:** Grade level  
   **Time:** The amount of time you are planning for the lesson

II. **Goal:** A goal is a learning outcome. It is expressed by a broad statement identifying the general education outcome you want students to display upon completion of the lesson. The goal is a concept, NOT just information.

III. **Instructional Objectives:** Objectives are the concrete measures by which your goal will be realized. Objectives show how students will get to the goal, and are expressed by action verbs.

IV. **Content Outline:** This is literally the content that you are going to use in the lesson. Content usually consists of facts – historical, theoretical, social, etc.

V. **Instructional Strategies:**  
   **Set:** The learning activity that serves as your “springboard to inquiry.” Examples of a set include a key question, a KWL graphic organizer, a small-group discussion, a large-group discussion, simulations, and role play.  
   **Activities:** Make sure that your activities are interactive, and that they relate to your goal and your objectives.  
   **Closure:** Consolidation of your students’ learning. Consider using Bloom’s Taxonomy as the basis of formulating questions.

VI. **Assessment:** How do you know if your goal and objectives have been achieved? Think creatively about assessment. Above all, do not give students a lower order test after you have emphasized higher order thought processes in the class. The medium is the message.

VII. **Materials:** Include here both teacher and student resources.

VIII. **Home Learning Extension:** Short and/or long term work.

IX. **Sunshine State Standards/CBC Standards:** List the standards that are most useful for you and your administration.
“Why has the Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?”

Released: 1989
Director: Bae Yong-kyun
Country: South Korea
Duration: 175 minutes

Synopsis: Three people live in a remote Buddhist monastery near Mount Chonan: Hyegok, the old master; Yong Nan, a young man who has left his extended family in the city to seek enlightenment – Hyegok calls him Kibong!; and, an orphan lad Haejin, whom Hyegok has brought to the monastery to raise as a monk. The story is mostly Yong Nan’s, told in flashbacks: how he came to the monastery, his brief return to the city, his vacillation between the turbulence of the world and his hope to overcome passions and escape the idea of self. We also see Hyegok as a teacher, a protector, and a father figure, and we watch Haejin make his way as a curious and nearly self-sufficient child.

The Spread of Buddhism

During the third century B.C., Emperor Ashoka sent missionaries to the northwest of India that is, present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan. The mission achieved great success, as the region soon became a centre of Buddhist learning with many distinguished monks and scholars. When the merchants of Central Asia came into this region for trade, they learnt about Buddhism and accepted it as their religion. With the support of these merchants, many cave monasteries were established along the trade routes across Central Asia. By the second century B.C., some Central Asian cities like Khotan, had already become important centres for Buddhism. The Chinese people had their first contact with Buddhism through the Central Asians who were already Buddhists.
Spread of Buddhism Among the Chinese

When the Han Dynasty of China extended its power to Central Asia in the first century B.C., trade and cultural ties between China and Central Asia also increased. In this way, the Chinese people learnt about Buddhism so that by the middle of the first century CE, a community of Chinese Buddhists was already in existence.

As interest in Buddhism grew, there was a great demand for Buddhist texts to be translated from Indian languages into Chinese. This led to the arrival of translators from Central Asia and India. The first notable one was Anshigao from Central Asia who came to China in the middle of the second century. With a growing collection of Chinese translations of Buddhist texts, Buddhism became more widely known and a Chinese monastic order was also formed. The first known Chinese monk was said to be Anshigao’s disciple. The earliest translators had some difficulty in finding the exact words to explain Buddhist concepts in Chinese, so they made use of Taoist terms in their translations. As a result, people began to relate Buddhism with the existing Taoist tradition. It was only later on that the Chinese came to understand fully the teachings of the Buddha.

After the fall of the Han Dynasty in the early part of the third century, China faced a period of political disunity. Despite the war and unrest, the translation of Buddhist texts continued. During this time, Buddhism gained popularity with the Chinese people. Both foreign and Chinese monks were actively involved in establishing monasteries and lecturing on the Buddhist teachings. Among the Chinese monks, Dao-an who lived in the fourth century was the most outstanding. Though he had to move from place to place because of political strife, he not only wrote and lectured extensively, but also collected copies of the translated scriptures and prepared the first catalogue of them. He invited the famous translator, Kumarajiva, from Kucha. With the help of Dao-an’s disciples, Kumarajiva translated a large number of important texts and revised the earlier Chinese translations. His fine translations were popular and helped to spread Buddhism in China. Many of his translations are still in use to this day. Because of political unrest, Kumarajiva's disciples were later dispersed and this helped to spread Buddhism to other parts of China.

The Establishment of Buddhism in China

From the beginning of the fifth century to around the end of the sixth century, northern and southern China came under separate rulers. The south remained under native dynasties while non-Chinese rulers controlled the north. The Buddhists in southern China continued to translate Buddhist texts and to lecture and write commentaries on the major texts. Their rulers were devoted Buddhists who saw to the construction of numerous temples, participated in Buddhist ceremonies and organized public talks on Buddhism. One of the rulers expanded on the earlier catalogue of Buddhist texts.

In northern China, except for two short periods of persecution, Buddhism flourished under the lavish royal patronage of rulers who favored the religion. By the latter half of the sixth century, monks were even employed in government posts. During this period, Buddhist arts flourished, especially in the caves at Dun-huang, Yun-gang and Long-men. In the thousand caves
at Dun-huang, Buddhist paintings covered the walls and there were thousands of Buddha statues in these caves. At Yungang and Long-men, many Buddha images of varying sizes were carved out of the rocks. All these activities were a sign of the firm establishment of Buddhism in China by the end of this period.

The Development of Chinese Schools of Buddhism

With the rise of the Tang Dynasty at the beginning of the seventh century, Buddhism reached out to more and more people. It soon became an important part of Chinese culture and had great influence on Chinese Art, Literature, Sculpture, Architecture and Philosophy of that time. By then, the number of Chinese translations of Buddhist texts had increased tremendously. The Buddhists were now faced with the problem of how to study this large number of Buddhist texts and how to put their teachings into practice. As a result, a number of schools of Buddhism arose, with each school concentrating on certain texts for their study and practice. The Tian-tai School, for instance, developed a system of teaching and practice based on the Lotus Sutra. It also arranged all the Buddhist texts into graded categories to suit the varying aptitudes of the followers.

Other schools arose which focused on different areas of the Buddhist teachings and practice. The two most prominent schools were the Chan and the Pure Land schools. The Chan School emphasised the practice of meditation as the direct way of gaining insight and experiencing Enlightenment in this very life. The Chan school of Buddhism is said to have been introduced to China by Bodhidharma who came from India at the beginning of the sixth century. He was, like many early missionaries, not only well versed in the Buddhist teachings, but also proficient in meditation. However, during his lifetime, he was not very well known as he secluded himself in a mountain temple. Later, through the efforts of his successors, this school became one of the most important of the Chinese schools of Buddhist practice.

The Pure Land School centers its practice on the recitation of the name of Amitabha Buddha. The practice is based on the sermon, which teaches that people could be reborn in the Western Paradise (Pure Land) of Amitabha Buddha if they recite his name and have sincere faith in him. Once in Pure Land, the Buddhists are said to be able to achieve Enlightenment more easily. Because of the simplicity of its practice, this school became popular especially among the masses throughout China.

Xuan-zang’s Pilgrimage to India

During the sixth and seventh centuries, when the various Chinese schools of Buddhism were being developed, there were more monks than before making pilgrimages to India to study the Buddhist scriptures there. Among the most famous of these pilgrims was Xuan-zang, who travelled overland to India. His journey was extremely difficult, as he had to cross high mountains and deserts and was also confronted by bandits. He studied at the well-known monastic university at Nalanda and later travelled widely throughout India. On his return to China, he brought back a large collection of Buddhist texts, which he translated during the remaining years of his life.
Because of his profound understanding of Buddhism and his excellent skill in languages, his translations marked a new period in Buddhist literature. His travel record gives detailed descriptions of Central Asia and India and provides an eyewitness account of these regions during his time.

**Further Development of Buddhism in China**

In the middle of the ninth century, Buddhism faced persecution by a Taoist emperor. He decreed the demolition of monasteries, confiscation of temple land, return of monks and nuns to secular life and the melting of metal Buddha images. Although the persecution lasted only for a short time, it marked the end of an era for Buddhism in China. Following the demolition of monasteries and the dispersal of scholarly monks, a number of Chinese schools of Buddhism, including the Tian-tai School, ceased to exist as separate movements. They were absorbed into the Chan and Pure Land schools, which survived. The eventual result was the emergence of a new form of Chinese Buddhist practice in the monastery. Besides practicing Chan meditation, Buddhists also recited the name of Amitabha Buddha and studied Buddhist texts. It is this form of Buddhism, which has survived to the present time.

Just as all the Buddhist teachings and practices were combined under one roof in the monasteries, Buddhist lay followers also began to practice Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism simultaneously. Gradually, however, Confucian teachings became dominant in the court, and among the officials who were not in favor of Buddhism.

Buddhism, generally, continued to be a major influence in Chinese religious life. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, there was an attempt to modernize and reform the tradition in order to attract wider support. One of the most well-known reformists was Tai-xu, a monk noted for his Buddhist scholarship. Besides introducing many reforms in the monastic community, he also introduced Western-style education, which included the study of secular subjects and foreign languages for Buddhists. In the nineteen-sixties, under the People's Republic, Buddhism was suppressed. Many monasteries were closed and monks and nuns returned to lay life. In recent years, a more liberal policy regarding religion has led to a growth of interest in the practice of Buddhism.

**Introduction of Buddhism to Korea**

The earliest historical records state that there were three kingdoms in Korea, namely Koguryo in the north, Packche in the southwest and Silla in the southeast. According to tradition, a Chinese monk in the second half of the fourth century C.E first introduced Buddhism to the northern kingdom of Koguryo. A Central Asian monk is said to have brought Buddhism to Packche sometime later. The Silla kingdom was the most isolated region and was at first not ready to accept Buddhism. The people held firmly to their traditional religious beliefs. There was such strong opposition to Buddhism that a monk who went there to spread the Buddha's teachings is said to have been killed. Eventually, by the middle of the sixth century, even the Silla people accepted Buddhism.
Spread of Buddhism in Korea

During the sixth and seventh centuries, many Korean monks went to China to study and brought back with them the teachings of the various Chinese schools of Buddhism. Towards the end of the seventh century, the three kingdoms were unified under the powerful Silla rulers. From then onwards, Buddhism flourished under their royal patronage. Great works of art were created and magnificent monasteries built. Buddhism exerted great influence on the life of the Korean people. In the tenth century, Silla rule ended with the founding of the Koryo Dynasty. Under this new rule, Buddhism reached the height of its importance. With royal support, more monasteries were built and more works of art produced. The whole of the Tripitaka in Chinese translation was also carved on to wooden printing blocks. Thousands of these blocks were made in the thirteenth century and have been carefully preserved to the present day as part of Korea's national treasures.

Period of Suppression of Buddhism in Korea

Under the new rule of the Yi Dynasty from the end of the fourteenth century to the early twentieth century, Buddhism lost the support of the court when Confucianism became the sole official religion of the state. Measures were taken to suppress the activities of the Buddhist community. Buddhist monks were forbidden to enter the capital, their lands were confiscated, monasteries closed and Buddhist ceremonies abolished. Despite all the troubles of this difficult period, there were occasionally some great monks who continued to inspire their followers and kept Buddhism alive.

Revival of Buddhism in Korea

With the collapse of the Yi Dynasty, Korea came under Japanese control. The Japanese who came to Korea introduced their own forms of Buddhism, which included the tradition of the married clergy. As a result, some monks in Korea broke away from their tradition of celibacy. From this period onwards, there was a revival of Buddhism in Korea. Many Buddhists in Korea have since been actively involved in promoting education and missionary activities. They have founded universities, set up schools in many parts of Korea and established youth groups and lay organizations. Buddhist texts, originally in Chinese translation, are now being retranslated into modern Korean. New monasteries are being built and old ones repaired. Today, Buddhism is again playing an important role in the life of the people.

Brief History of Zen (Seon) in Korea:

Seon was gradually transmitted into Korea during the late Silla period (7th – 9th centuries) as Korean monks of predominantly Hwaeom and “Consciousness-only“ background began to travel to China to learn the newly developing tradition. During his lifetime, Mazu (Zen teacher in medieval China) had begun to attract students from Korea; by tradition, the first Korean to study Seon was named Peomnang. Mazu’s successors had numerous Korean students, some of whom returned to Korea and established the nine mountain schools. This was the beginning of Zen (Seon) in Korea.
Seon received its most significant impetus and consolidation from the Goryeo monk Jinul (1158–1210), who established a reform movement and introduced koan practice to Korea. Jinul established the Songgwangsa as a new center of pure practice. It was during the time of Jinul the Jogye Order, a primarily Seon sect, became the predominant form of Korean Buddhism, a status it still holds. Toward the end of the Goryeo and during the Joseon period the Jogye Order would first be combined with the scholarly schools, and then be relegated to lesser influence in ruling class circles by Confucian influenced polity, even as it retained strength outside the cities, among the rural populations and ascetic monks in mountain refuges.

Seon is known for its stress on meditation, monasticism, and asceticism. Many Korean monks have few personal possessions and sometimes cut off all relations with the outside world. Several are near mendicants traveling from temple to temple practicing meditation. The hermit-recluse life is prevalent among monks to whom meditation practice is considered of paramount importance.

Currently, Korean Buddhism is in a state of slow transition. While the reigning theory behind Korean Buddhism was based on Jinul’s “sudden enlightenment, gradual cultivation,” the modern Korean Seon master, Seongcheol’s revival of Hui Neng’s “sudden enlightenment, sudden cultivation” has had a strong impact on Korean Buddhism. Although there is resistance to change within the ranks of the Jogye order, with the last three Supreme Patriarchs’ stance that is in accordance with Seongcheol, there has been a gradual change in the atmosphere of Korean Buddhism.
“The Boy Who Plays on the Buddhas of Bamiyan”

**Released:** 2004  
**Director:** Phil Grabsky  
**Country:** UK, Afghanistan  
**Duration:** 96 minutes

**Synopsis:** In 2001, the Taliban government of Afghanistan destroyed the Buddhas of Bamiyan, the world's tallest stone sculptures. By the summer of 2002, after the fall of the Taliban, more than 250 Afghans, most of them Hazara refugees, were living in caves beside the rubble. This film, organized chronologically over four seasons, follows a refugee family living there, including Mir, a smiling lad of eight. The landscape is stark, the winter is harsh, the refugees’ stories are harrowing, Mir’s school is crowded and ill equipped, helicopters move across the sky, and the roads carry mostly military vehicles, yet Mir’s family hopes for a house and a bright future.

**The Buddhas of Bamiyan:**

A nine-hour drive from Kabul, at the heart of the Hindu Kush, lies the valley of Bamiyan. Its position and fertility led to the establishment of a trading post on the Silk Road almost 2000 years ago. It subsequently grew to become an important Buddhist center with many monasteries and hundreds of monks. Around the 1st Century CE, a Central Asian nomadic tribe, the Kushans, established themselves in Afghanistan. Their king was a man named Kanishka who adopted Mahayana Buddhism – which revered the Buddha as a man as much as a God. Previously, Buddha had only been represented symbolically, but under Kanishka the first images of Buddha the man appeared. The fusing of an Indian artistic style with that of the Greek-
Bactrians led to the so-called ‘Graeco-Buddhic’ art – and the two great Buddhas of Bamiyan were examples of this.

The two most prominent statues were the giant standing Buddhas Vairocana and Sakyamuni. The main bodies were hewn directly from the sandstone cliffs, but details were modeled in mud mixed with straw, coated with stucco. This coating, practically all of which was worn away long ago, was painted to enhance the expressions of the faces, hands and folds of the robes; the larger one was painted carmine red and the smaller one was painted multiple colors.

The lower parts of the statues’ arms were constructed from the same mud-straw mix while supported on wooden armatures. It is believed that the upper parts of their faces were made from great wooden masks or casts. The rows of holes that can be seen in photographs were spaces that held wooden pegs which served to stabilize the outer stucco.

Upon completion, the two tallest were 55 meters (9m taller than the Statue of Liberty) and 38 meters high – an accomplishment that may have taken two hundred years to achieve. By the time of their first record in 400 CE by a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim they were covered in a mud and straw mixture to model the face, hands and robes. The large Buddha was painted red, the smaller in blue. Both had hands and a face of gold. Alongside the Buddhas were excavated dozens of caves, in which lived monks and other devotees.

**Afghanistan’s Hazara Minority at Bamiyan**

In the 1990s the caves were filled with mostly Shiite refugees fleeing the civil war raging in Kabul and many other places in Afghanistan. The Bamiyan region is predominantly Hazara, an ethnic minority of Shiites, 3 to 4 million of whom have historically stayed autonomous from Afghanistan’s other ethnic groups, especially the Pashtun. Thousands of Hazara were killed by in 1893 by the Pashtun King Abdul Rehman, thousands more reduced to serfdom or outright slavery at Pashtun hands.

Beginning in 1994, the Hazara’s new enemies were the Taliban, whose perverse version of Sunni Islam doesn’t recognize Shiites as Muslims; worse: the Taliban resented the relative freedoms that Shiite Hazaras afforded women, who took part in the Bamiyan Valley’s politics, its militias and social enterprises. The Taliban’s enmity toward the Hazara of Bamiyan was immediately brutal.

**The Taliban vs. the Statues**

In 1998, a Taliban commander fired grenades at the smaller statue, knocking off its upper half. The Taliban bombed the mountain above the statues frequently, cracking the niches that held the statues and damaging the colossi further. By winter 2001, pleas were raining down on the Taliban from around the world to spare the statues. Pleaders included the Buddhist Thai monarchy and Sri Lanka, itself home to a set of giant Buddha statues. “Unesco, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and a leading Islamic scholar in Cairo were also among those begging the Taliban not to carry out their threat to the Bamiyan statues and other Buddha images in museums across the country,” wrote Barbara Crossette in The New York Times.
On Feb. 26, 2001, the Taliban’s supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, declared that “these idols have been gods of the infidels” and ordered them destroyed. By early March, the statues were rubble. Japan and Switzerland, among others, have pledged support for the rebuilding of the statues.

**The Silk Road:**

The Silk Road (image below), a network of trade routes across the Asian continent, connected East, South, and Western Asia with the Mediterranean world, as well as North, East and Northeast Africa and Europe. It began in central China & India and stopped somewhere near the Mediterranean Sea. Today India and the People’s Republic of China share a border, but the mountains created an effective Northern border for India that blocked trade. The main trade routes for India were by sea or through present day Afghanistan. For a considerable portion of history, the Indian markets were as important or more important than China.

Traders exchanged such items as silk, which was especially important to the Romans, ceramics, glass, precious metals, ivory, gems, medical herbs, exotic animals, and livestock on the Silk Road. Inadvertently, the Silk Road transmitted language, disease, and genes. Alliances were forged to fight against common enemies. Buddhism made use of the Silk Road in its spread to Central Asia and China. Manichaeism and Islam also spread along the routes. The road, a series of caravan routes with trading posts and oases, extended almost 7,000 miles from Rome and Syria to the Yellow River, in China, and lasted from about the Han Dynasty in the 2nd century BCE to the 14th CE by which time sea routes were replacing the Silk Roads.

While the Chinese silk trade played a minor role in the Chinese economy, it did increase the number of foreign merchants present in China under the Han Dynasty, exposing both the Chinese and visitors to their country to different cultures and religions. In fact, Buddhism spread from India to China because of trade along the Silk Route, similar to the way Islam spread along trans-Saharan routes in medieval West Africa.
By 760 CE, during the Tang Dynasty, trade along the Silk Road had declined. It revived tremendously under the Sung Dynasty in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when China became largely dependent on its silk trade. In addition, trade to Central and Western Asia as well as Europe recovered for a period of time from 1276-1368 under the Yuan Dynasty when the Mongols controlled China. The Chinese traded silk for medicines, perfumes, and slaves in addition to precious stones. As overland trade became increasingly dangerous, and overseas trade became more popular, trade along the Silk Road declined. While the Chinese did maintain a silk-fur trade with the Russians north of the original Silk Route, by the end of the fourteenth century, trade and travel along the road had decreased.
JUNE 15

“Shugendō Now”

**Released:** 2009  
**Directors:** Jean-Marc Abela and Mark Patrick McGuire  
**Country:** Canada, Japan  
**Duration:** 91 minutes

**Synopsis:** This feature documentary is an experimental journey into the mystical practices of Japanese mountain asceticism. In *Shugendō* (The Way of Acquiring Power), practitioners perform ritual actions from shamanism, “Shintō,” Daoism, and Tantric Buddhism. They seek experiential truth of the teachings during arduous climbs in sacred mountains. Through the peace and beauty of the natural world, practitioners purify the six roots of perception, revitalize their energy and reconnect with their truest nature—all while grasping the fundamental interconnectedness with nature and all sentient beings.

More poetic than analytical, this film explores how a group of modern Japanese people integrate the myriad ways mountain learning interacts with urban life. With intimate camera work and sensual sound design the viewer is taken from deep within the Kumano mountains to the floating worlds of Osaka and Tokyo and back again.

**About Shugendo**

Shugendo is an ancient Japanese religion in which enlightenment or oneness with *kami* (gods) is obtained through the understanding of the relationship between Man and Nature, centered on an ascetic, mountain-dwelling practice. The focus or goal of shugendo is the development of spiritual experience and power. Having backgrounds in mountain worship, Shugendo incorporated beliefs or philosophies from Old Shinto as well as folk animism, and
further developed as Taoism and esoteric Buddhism have arrived in Japan. The 7th century ascetic and mystic En no Gyōja is often considered as having first organized shugendo as a doctrine. Shugendo literally means “the path of training and testing” or “the way to spiritual power through discipline.”

**Shugendo the religion and the Yamabushi practitioners**

Shugendo was the religion, Yamabushi the practitioners, and the mountains of Japan are where it all transpired. The word Shugendo directly translated means the ‘way’ of practicing or mastering magico-ascetic powers. Plainly put, Shugendo was a method for developing spiritual powers. The origins of Shugendo can be traced back as far as the 7th century CE, a pivotal time in Japan’s religious history. The ruling government of the time (the Yamato Clan) stringently tried to enforce state sponsored Buddhism as the countries official religion. Due to the inaccessibility of this, the bureaucratic state sponsored religion much of the population was still given to aspects of indigenous religions to fulfill their daily needs. Shugendo eventually evolved as a hybridized religion comprised of ‘indigenous’ Japanese shamanism, Kannabe Shinko, and naturalized attributes of Tantric Buddhism, Religious Taoism, and Confucianism. In essence Shugendo came to be a Japanese religion comprised of all religious influences that had reached Japan, and though it is no longer practiced its influence can still be found today in the Shingon and Tendai sects of Buddhism. Other more subtle aspects of the Shugendo faith, such as its reverence for the mountains, were, prior to its formation, and still remain to be, deeply ingrained aspects of Japanese culture.

**En No Gyoja or En the ‘ascetic’**

One man is given legendary status as the founder of Shugendo. He is known by the name En No Gyoja or En the ‘ascetic’. He is said to have been a master of many magical arts and later is even touted as being a part of the direct transmission of Buddhism. It is known among scholars that a myriad of influences over a substantial period of time were responsible for the resulting formation of Shugendo, yet it is En the Ascetic later referred to as En no ‘Ubasoku’ (the term for an unordained Buddhist ascetic) who is credited as the founder, and was made a model for other practitioners to emulate.
It is believed that En No Gyoja was historically known as En no Ozunu. En no Ozunu appears in official Japanese national log of events or the ‘Shoku Nihongi’ of the year 699 CE. It is in this year that En was banished from society, following the charge that he “misused his magical powers to control people.” In this account, En is described as an extraordinary individual who was a practitioner of magic on Mount Katsuragi. By the 9th century ‘nihon ryöiki’ a full tradition had surrounded him as the ideal mountain ascetic. From this point on our subject was known only as En no Gyoja or En no Ubasoku, and tales and lore give accounts of him imprisoning deities to do his biddings, his ability to fly and his miraculous appearances in nearly all of the Mountain regions in Japan. A collection of tales dated 823 CE contains a story in which En the Ascetic gathered a multitude of gods and demons and exhorted them, saying, “You are to build a bridge reaching all the way from Mount Katsuragi to Mount Kinpu in Yamato.” The deities were distressed at this, and during the reign of the emperor at the Fujiwara Palace, the Great Deity Hitokotonushi of Mount Katsuragi became enraged and slandered him saying: “E no Ubasako is scheming to overthrow the emperor.” The Great Deity Hitokotonushi was bound in a spell cast by En the Ascetic and has not to this day been released from that spell. In this way, En the man was transformed from an outcast mystic into the idealized founder of the Shugendo tradition who embodies the ideals of Buddhist Asceticism and Taoist mysticism.

**En no Gyoja: idealized mountain ascetic**

En no Gyoja as the idealized mountain ascetic was the prototype for the Yamabushi. His image and lore were key influences in the unification of many unorganized wandering ascetics into the new movement of Shugendo. The term Yamabushi directly translates into ‘one who sleeps in mountains’, and was used to describe those ascetics who, like En, chose the mountains exclusively as their ascetic training grounds. These men would withdraw from ordinary society in exchange for the benefits of rigorous mountain life. They would often maintain a special diet, such as pine needles mandated by Religious Taoism, to gain magical powers. They would also subject themselves to physical trials such as standing under cold water falls for extended periods. These Ascetics sought out sacred mountains as a training ground (doba) and a shelter from society where they could freely put to use many different religious techniques.

In Japan, as with many East Asian cultures, mountains themselves are considered sacred regions where deities reside. These unpopulated and unregulated areas of the country were seen as places where man could interact directly with nature and the spirits contained within. Gary Snyder points out in his essay, “Blue Mountains Constantly Walking,” that there were a few highly formalized sacred areas which were modeled after a symbolic mandala. It was thought that to walk within these areas was to enact specific move within a spiritual plane. Hence we can see that these hills were not only sought out as a place of religious and spiritual freedom, but also the strong spirituality that was seen to be within the hills themselves.

Aside from the physical rigors the Yamabushi subjected themselves to, these men often memorized Buddhist Sutras, continually repeating certain phrases from these Sutras or Taoist magical formulas. There are three canonized Sutras which became integral parts of the Shugendo. The Lotus Sutra was adopted by Shugendo and has continued to maintain a special space within much of Japanese Buddhism. The **Avalokitesvara** (a recognized bodhisattva) Sutra was also adopted. I was unable to obtain any significant information about this Sutra at this time.
The Yamabushi recited the Heart Sutra daily as a part of morning prayers. Along with this canonized sutra the Yamabushi would also recite The Sutra on the Unlimited Life of the Three fold Body, an apocryphal text attributed to En no Gyoja.

The contents and messages of these sutras provide insight as to the core beliefs and values of the Yamabushi. The most evident belief present in all of these texts is the ability for each man to obtain and experience enlightenment first hand. It was not until much later that folklore attempted to legitimize the transmission of these teachings by linking En no Gyoja to recognized teachers of Buddhism such as Nagarjuna. It seems as though the original Yamabushi were less concerned with matters of this nature, and more concerned with their own personal religious experience. It is not until the 9th century that scholars begin to take interest in the pedigree of their texts.

It is important to note that not until the 9th century time that formal religious adepts take interest in Shugendo as an organized religion. The original Yamabushi practitioners of the 7th and 8th centuries were of a more eclectic nature seeking out first hand religious experience. In the process obtaining this experience the they would appropriate fragments of the many different religious influences of the time and apply them to situations as needed. It is in this fashion that they adopted their own form of dress, with many attributes being drawn from Buddhist influences. The outfits of the Yamabushi often consisted of a Buddhist hood (tokin) and surplice (kesa), and a white robe (signifying purity). They also carried with them a Buddhist staff (shakujo) and a (oi), which is a portable alter in the form of a backpack filled with scriptures and other religious needs. Two other distinctly mountainous tools adopted and worn were an ax (ono) and a conch shell (hora). It is said that often times these Yamabushi would even borrow the rosary of the lay Buddhist monks. Unlike the lay monks the many of the Yamabushi did not practice celibacy nor did they wear the ritual shaved head. Our eclectic mountain men often took wives, and wore their hair long or untrimmed.

**Shugendo Vision**

At this point we can observe the interesting scope of the formation and progression of Shugendo. Initially we have the practices of a single individual, En no Gyoja who became the embodiment of an idea that's time had come. These actions were enough to interest many wandering ascetics who were in search of a new personally attainable truth in the rigorous training and eclectic practices. Also unregulated personal and religious freedom of the mountains is a large draw. Soon these practices begin to evolve, slowly developing a distinct quality unique among the new mountain men. This unique assembly of thought and practice begins to attract the attention of the court and nobility, presumably the only ones aside from the wanderers, with sufficient leisure time to consider such matters. The interest of these educated nobility spawns the organized canons of the Shingon and Tendai sects which eventually make the Shugendo religion and the mountain retreats accessible to the general populace. This shift to a canonized and analytically smoothed-over doctrine eventually outmodes the original frontiersman of the Shugendo faith causing them to be seen as primitives or even dim caricatures of themselves. This learned and ritualized form of Shugendo flourishes for many years until much later (the 19th century), when a government sponsored religious reform makes Shinto Japan's official religion. In this shift Shugendo along with many other religions are forced to die out or remain in small
secretive pockets. This outlines an archetypal progression from direct, unconscious or semiconscious experience of wonderment, to thought and analysis, to death or reabsorption, leaving Shugendo essentially dead to experience and alive only as a shell or a fossil.

Shugendo was at one time a religion of true life and vitality. Beat poet Gary Snyder is a modern figure who fancied that he could still feel that vitality of the Yamabushi in their writings and in their ways. In his book of collected works entitled The Practice of the Wild he includes an entire piece on the Yamabushi which he hinges around Dogen Kigen's essay Sansuikyo, “Mountains and Waters Sutra” written in the year 1240. Snyder discusses Dogen’s interest in the mountains saying” Dogen is not concerned with “sacred mountains” or pilgrimages, or spirit allies, or wilderness as some special quality. His mountains and streams are the process of the earth, all of existence... They are what they are, we are what they are. For those who would see directly into essential nature, the idea of the sacred is a delusion and an obstruction: it diverts us from seeing what is before our eyes: plain thusness. Snyder provides us with some excerpts from Sansuikyo beginning with the opening paragraph. If we can strive to understand Dogen's sentiments the Shugendo vision may not be dead. In fact this very understanding can serve us as building block in all of our spiritual constructs, present, and future.
“Dreams”

Released: 1990
Director: Akira Kurosawa
Country: Japan
Duration: 120 minutes

Synopsis: Following up on his critically acclaimed, blood-splattered epic Ran, master director Akira Kurosawa looks inward with this collection of eight brightly colored dreams. The first section centers on a young boy, who witnesses a forest wedding procession of fox spirits in spite of his mother’s warning. The second section concerns the same lad who converses with peach-tree spirits after the trees have been cruelly cut down. This is followed by a party of mountain climbers struggling to make it back to base camp in the midst of a terrible blizzard. The fourth dream deals with a man – a Kurosawa stand-in complete with the director's trademark floppy white hat – who encounters ghosts of Japan’s militaristic past in a forlorn tunnel. In the following dream, the same man ventures into a Van Gogh painting called The Crows and meets the artist himself. The sixth and seventh dreams venture into nightmare territory – one deals with a nuclear meltdown that threatens Japan while the other concerns post-nuclear mutants. In the final dream, Kurosawa meets a 103-year-old man in a utopian rural village.

Akira Kurosawa:

The most well-known of all Japanese directors, the great irony about Akira Kurosawa’s career is that he is far more popular outside of Japan than he is in Japan. The son of an army officer, Kurosawa studied art before gravitating to film as a means of supporting himself. He served seven years as an assistant to director Kajiro Yamamoto before he began his own directorial career with Sanshiro Sugata (1943), a film about the 19th-century struggle for supremacy...
between adherents of judo and ju-jitsu that so impressed the military government, he was prevailed upon to make a sequel (Sanshiro Sugata Part II).

Following the end of World War II, Kurosawa’s career gathered speed with a series of films that cut across all genres, from crime thrillers to period dramas – among the latter, his *Rashomon* (1951) became the first postwar Japanese film to find wide favor with Western audiences, and simultaneously introduced leading man Toshiro Mifune to Western viewers. It was Kurosawa’s *The Seven Samurai* (1954), however, that made the largest impact of any of his movies outside of Japan. Although heavily cut on its original release, this three-hour-plus medieval action drama, shot with painstaking attention to both dramatic and period detail, became one of the most popular of Japanese films of all time in the West, and every subsequent Kurosawa film has been released in the U.S. in some form, even if many – most notably *The Hidden Fortress* (1958) – were cut down in length.

At the same time, American and European filmmakers began taking a serious look at Kurosawa’s movies as a source of plot material for their own work – Rashomon was remade as The Outrage, in a western setting, while Yojimbo was remade by Sergio Leone as *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964). *The Seven Samurai* (1954) fared best of all, serving as the basis for John Sturges’ *The Magnificent Seven* (which had been the original title of Kurosawa’s movie), in 1960; the remake actually did better business in Japan than the original film did. In the early 1980s, an unfilmed screenplay of Kurosawa’s also served as the basis for *Runaway Train* (1985), a popular action thriller.

Kurosawa’s movies subsequent to his period thriller *Sanjuro* (1962) abandoned the action format in favor of more esoteric and serious drama, including his epic length medical melodrama *Red Beard* (1965). In recent years, despite ill-health and the problems getting financing for his more ambitious films, Kurosawa has remained the most prominent of Japanese filmmakers. With his Westernized style, Kurosawa has always found a wider audience and more financing opportunities in Europe and America than he has in his own country. A sensitive romantic at heart, with a sentimental streak that occasionally rises forcefully to the surface of his movies, his work probably resembles that of John Ford more closely than it does any of his fellow Japanese filmmakers.

**Working methods, style and themes**

**Working methods**

All biographical sources, as well as the filmmaker’s own comments, confirm that Kurosawa was a completely “hands-on” director, passionately involved in every aspect of the filmmaking process. As one interviewer summarized, “he (co-)writes his scripts, oversees the design, rehearses the actors, sets up all the shots and then does the editing.” His active participation extended from the initial concept to the editing and scoring of the final product.
Script

Kurosawa emphasized time and again that the screenplay was the absolute foundation of a successful film and that, though a mediocre director can sometimes make a passable film out of a *good* script, even an excellent director can never make a good film out of a *bad* script. During the postwar period, he began the practice of collaborating with a rotating group of five screenwriters: Eijirō Hisaita, Ryuzo Kikushima, Shinobu Hashimoto, Hideo Oguni, and Masato Ide. Whichever members of this group happened to be working on a particular film would gather around a table, often at a hot-springs resort, where they would not be distracted by the outside world. (*Seven Samurai*, for example, was written in this fashion). Often they all (except Oguni, who acted as “referee”) would work on exactly the same pages of the script, and Kurosawa would choose the best-written version from the different drafts of each particular scene. This method was adopted “so that each contributor might function as a kind of foil, checking the dominance of any one person’s point-of-view.”

In addition to the actual script, Kurosawa at this stage often produced extensive, fantastically detailed notes to elaborate his vision. For example, for *Seven Samurai*, he created six notebooks in which he created (among many other things) detailed biographies of the samurai, including what they wore and ate, how they walked, talked and behaved when greeted, and even how each tied his shoes. For the 101 peasant characters in the film, he created a registry consisting of 23 families and instructed the performers playing these roles to live and work as these “families” for the duration of shooting.

Shooting

For his early films, although they were consistently well photographed, Kurosawa generally used standard lenses and deep-focus photography. Beginning with *Seven Samurai* (1954), however, Kurosawa's cinematic technique changed drastically, through his extensive use in that film of long lens and multiple cameras. The director claimed that he used these lenses and several cameras rolling at once to help the actors – allowing them to be photographed at some distance from the lens, and without any knowledge of which particular camera’s image would be utilized in the final cut – making their performances much more natural (in fact, Tatsuya Nakadai agreed that the multiple cameras greatly helped his performances with the director). But these changes had a powerful effect as well on the look of the action scenes in that film, particularly the final battle in the rain. Says Stephen Prince: “He can use the telephoto lenses to get under the horses, in between their hooves, to plunge us into the chaos of that battle in a visual way that is really quite unprecedented, both in Kurosawa’s own work and in the samurai genre as a whole.”

With *The Hidden Fortress*, Kurosawa began to utilize the widescreen (anamorphic) process for the first time in his work. These three techniques – long lenses, multiple cameras and widescreen – were in later works fully exploited, even in sequences with little or no overt action, such as the early scenes of *High and Low* that take place in the central character's home, in which they are employed to dramatize tensions and power relationships between the characters within a highly confined space. For all his films, but particularly for his *jidaigeki*, Kurosawa insisted on absolute authenticity of sets, costumes and props.
Editing

Kurosawa often remarked that he shot a film simply in order to have material to edit, because the editing of a picture was the most important and creatively interesting part of the process for him. Kurosawa’s creative team believed that the director’s skill with editing was his greatest talent. Said Hiroshi Nezu, a longtime production supervisor on his films, “Among ourselves, we think that he is Toho’s best director, that he is Japan’s best scenarist, and that he is the best editor in the world. He is most concerned with the flowing quality which a film must have... The Kurosawa film flows over the cut, as it were.”

The director’s frequent crew member Teruyo Nogami confirms this view. “Akira Kurosawa’s editing was exceptional, the inimitable work of a genius... No one was a match for him.” She claimed that Kurosawa carried in his head all the information about all shots filmed, and if, in the editing room, he asked for a piece of film and she handed him the wrong one, he would immediately recognize the error, though she had taken detailed notes on each shot and he had not. She compared his mind to a computer, which could do with edited segments of film what computers do today.

Kurosawa’s habitual method – at variance with the standard Hollywood practice of editing a film only after all footage has been shot – was to edit a film daily, bit by bit, during production. This helped particularly when he started using multiple cameras, which resulted in a large amount of film to assemble. “I always edit in the evening if we have a fair amount of footage in the can. After watching the rushes, I usually go to the editing room and work.” Because of this practice of editing as he went along, the post-production period for a Kurosawa film could be startlingly brief: Yojimbo had its Japanese premiere on April 20, 1961, four days after shooting concluded on April 16.

Style

Virtually all commentators have noted Kurosawa’s bold, dynamic style, which many have compared to the traditional Hollywood style of narrative moviemaking, one that emphasizes, in the words of one such scholar, “chronological, causal, linear and historical thinking.”[180] But it has also been claimed that, from his very first film, the director displayed a technique quite distinct from the seamless style of classic Hollywood. This technique involved a disruptive depiction of screen space through the use of numerous unrepeated camera setups, a disregard for the traditional 180-degree axis of action around which Hollywood scenes have usually been constructed, and an approach in which “narrative time becomes spatialized,” with fluid camera movement often replacing conventional editing. The following are some idiosyncratic aspects of the artist’s style.

The axial cut

In his films of the 1940s and 1950s, Kurosawa frequently employs the “axial cut,” in which the camera moves closer to, or further away from, the subject, not through the use of tracking shots or dissolves, but through a series of matched jump cuts. For example, in Sanshiro Sugata II, the hero takes leave of the woman he loves, but then, after walking away a short
distance, turns and bows to her, and then, after walking further, turns and bows once more. This sequence of shots is illustrated on film scholar David Bordwell’s blog. The three shots are not connected in the film by camera movements or dissolves, but by a series of two jump cuts. The effect is to stress the duration of Sanshiro’s departure.

**Cutting on motion**

A number of scholars have pointed out Kurosawa’s tendency to “cut on motion”: that is, to edit a sequence of a character or characters in motion so that an action is depicted in two or more separate shots, rather than one uninterrupted shot. One scholar, as an example, describes a tense scene in *Seven Samurai* in which the samurai Shichiroji, who is standing, wishes to console the peasant Manzo, who is sitting on the ground, and he gets down on one knee to talk to him. Kurosawa chooses to film this simple action in two shots rather than one (cutting between the two only after the action of kneeling has begun) to fully convey Shichiroji’s humility. Numerous other instances of this device are evident in the movie. “Kurosawa [frequently] breaks up the action, fragments it, in order to create an emotional effect.”

**The wipe**

A form of cinematic punctuation very strongly identified with Kurosawa is the wipe. This is an effect created through an optical printer, in which, when a scene ends, a line or bar appears to move across the screen, “wiping” away the image while simultaneously revealing the first image of the subsequent scene. As a transitional device, it is used as a substitute for the straight cut or the dissolve (though Kurosawa, of course, often used both of those devices as well). In his mature work, Kurosawa employed the wipe so frequently that it became a kind of signature. For example, one blogger has counted no less than 12 instances of the wipe in *Drunken Angel*.

There are a number of theories concerning the purpose of this device, which, as James Goodwin notes, was common in silent cinema but became considerably rarer in the more “realistic” sound cinema. Goodwin claims that the wipes in *Rashomon*, for instance, fulfill one of three purposes: emphasizing motion in traveling shots, marking narrative shifts in the courtyard scenes and marking temporal ellipses between actions (e.g., between the end of one character’s testimony and the beginning of another’s). He also points out that in *The Lower Depths*, in which Kurosawa completely avoided the use of wipes, the director cleverly manipulated people and props “in order to slide new visual images in and out of view much as a wipe cut does.”

An instance of the wipe used as a satirical device can be seen in *Ikiru*. A group of women visit the local government office to petition the bureaucrats to turn a waste area into a children’s playground. The viewer is then shown a series of point of view shots of various bureaucrats, connected by wipe transitions, each of whom refers the group to another department. Nora Tennessen comments in her blog (which shows one example) that “the wipe technique makes [the sequence] funnier—images of bureaucrats are stacked like cards, each more punctilious than the last.”
Image-sound counterpoint

Kurosawa by all accounts always gave great attention to the soundtracks of his films (Teruyo Nogami’s memoir gives many such examples). In the late 1940s, he began to employ music for what he called “counterpoint” to the emotional content of a scene, rather than merely to reinforce the emotion, as Hollywood traditionally did (and still does). The inspiration for this innovation came from a family tragedy. When news reached Kurosawa of his father’s death in 1948, he wandered aimlessly through the streets of Tokyo. His sorrow was magnified rather than diminished when he suddenly heard the cheerful, vapid song “The Cuckoo Waltz”, and he hurried to escape from this “awful music.” He then told his composer, Fumio Hayasaka, with whom he was working on Drunken Angel, to use “The Cuckoo Waltz” as ironic accompaniment to the scene in which the dying gangster, Matsunaga, sinks to his lowest point in the narrative.

This ironic approach to music can also be found in Stray Dog, a film released a year after Drunken Angel. In the climactic scene, the detective Murakami is fighting furiously with the murderer Yusa in a muddy field. The sound of a Mozart piece is suddenly heard, played on the piano by a woman in a nearby house. As one commentator notes, “In contrast to this scene of primitive violence, the serenity of the Mozart is, literally, other-worldly” and “the power of this elemental encounter is heightened by the music.” Nor was Kurosawa’s “ironic” use of the soundtrack limited to music. One critic observes that, in Seven Samurai, “During episodes of murder and mayhem, birds chirp in the background, as they do in the first scene when the farmers lament their seemingly hopeless fate.”

Recurring Themes

The master-disciple relationship

Many commentators have noted the frequent occurrence in Kurosawa’s work of the complex relationship between an older and a younger man, who serve each other as master and disciple, respectively. This theme was clearly an expression of the director's life experience. “Kurosawa revered his teachers, in particular Kajiro Yamamoto, his mentor at Toho,” according to Joan Mellen. “The salutary image of an older person instructing the young evokes always in Kurosawa’s films high moments of pathos.” The critic Tadao Sato considers the recurring character of the “master” to be a type of surrogate father, whose role it is to witness the young protagonist’s moral growth and approve of it.

In his very first film, Sanshiro Sugata, after the Judo master Yano becomes the title character’s teacher and spiritual guide, “the narrative [is] cast in the form of a chronicle studying the stages of the hero’s growing mastery and maturity.” The master-pupil relationship in the films of the postwar era—as depicted in such works as Drunken Angel, Stray Dog, Seven Samurai, Red Beard and Dersu Uzala—involves very little direct instruction, but much learning through experience and example; Stephen Prince relates this tendency to the private and nonverbal nature of the concept of Zen enlightenment.

By the time of Kagemusha, however, according to Prince, the meaning of this relationship has changed. A thief chosen to act as the double of a great lord continues his
impersonation even after his master’s death: “the relationship has become spectral and is generated from beyond the grave with the master maintaining a ghostly presence. Its end is death, not the renewal of commitment to the living that typified its outcome in earlier films.” However, according to the director’s biographer, in his final film, *Madadayo* – which deals with a teacher and his relationship with an entire group of ex-pupils – a sunnier vision of the theme emerges. “The students hold an annual party for their professor, attended by dozens of former students, now adults of varying age... This extended sequence... expresses, as only Kurosawa can, the simple joys of student-teacher relationships, of kinship, of being alive.”

**The heroic champion**

Kurosawa’s is a *heroic* cinema, a series of dramas (mostly) concerned with the deeds and fates of larger-than-life heroes. Stephen Prince has identified the emergence of the unique Kurosawa protagonist with the immediate post-World War II period. The goal of the American Occupation to replace Japanese feudalism with individualism coincided with the director’s artistic and social agenda: “Kurosawa welcomed the changed political climate and sought to fashion his own mature cinematic voice.” The Japanese critic Tadao Sato concurs: “With defeat in World War II, many Japanese... were dumbfounded to find that the government had lied to them and was neither just nor dependable. During this uncertain time Akira Kurosawa, in a series of first-rate films, sustained the people by his consistent assertion that the meaning of life is not dictated by the nation but something each individual should discover for himself through suffering.” The filmmaker himself remarked that, during this period, “I felt that without the establishment of the self as a positive value there could be no freedom and no democracy.”

The first such postwar hero was, atypically for the artist, a heroine – Yukie, played by Setsuko Hara, in *No Regrets for Our Youth*. According to Prince, her “desertion of family and class background to assist a poor village, her perseverance in the face of enormous obstacles, her assumption of responsibility for her own life and for the well-being of others, and her existential loneliness... are essential to Kurosawan heroism and make of Yukie the first coherent... example.” This “existential loneliness” is also exemplified by Dr. Sanada (Takashi Shimura) in *Drunken Angel*: “Kurosawa insists that his heroes take their stand, alone, against tradition and battle for a better world, even if the path there is not clear. Separation from a corrupt social system in order to alleviate human suffering, as Sanada does, is the only honorable course.”