

The Asian Educational Media Service: Valuable Resource for Asian Media Information and Reviews

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Editors' note: *An exceptional resource for teachers of Asian studies is the Asian Educational Media Service. In order to spread the word about this resource, we asked Jenny Huang, AEMS Director, if she would be willing to write a brief article about AEMS for ASIANetwork Exchange and permit us to share with our members a couple of sample reviews from AEMS's News and Reviews. Her article and the reviews follow, reprinted here with permission from AEMS.*

You enjoy using media to teach about Asia and you want to stay on top of information about new web and film resources and how they're being used in the classroom. You are interested in showing some documentaries to your students, but you are not sure what materials are available and where to begin the search. A colleague told you about a great television program series that might be useful for your undergraduate class, but it doesn't seem to be available for purchase anywhere.

Do any of these statements describe you? If the answer is yes, then the Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS, pronounced "aims") is here to be of service. Whether you are an instructor, a student, a school librarian, or someone who is simply interested in learning more about Asia, AEMS can help you find information and resources that will further your exploration and study.

Since 1997, AEMS has been promoting education about Asia in K-16 classrooms through the use of media and technology. Funded through the generous support of the Freeman Foundation, AEMS maintains a comprehensive website (www.aems.uiuc.edu) with a searchable media resource database. Three times a year, we publish *News and Reviews*, an eight-page full-colored newsletter with reviews of documentary and feature films as well as essays about teaching with film and technology. Anyone who needs special assistance can take advantage of our free call-in and mail-in reference service. The following descriptions highlight three of our services that are of particular interest to our national audience. We hope that it will encourage you to take advantage of our resources.

Comprehensive website and media resource database

Visitors to the program website (www.aems.uiuc.edu) have many options for navigation. For first time visitors, we recommend that you start with the sectional tabs (located below the page banner.) "About Us" takes you to information regarding our overall mission and activities, the people on our staff and advisory boards, the history of the program, and projects by our affiliate unit, the Media Production Group. "Resources" takes you to an index of helpful teaching materials (particularly for K – 12 classrooms) developed by AEMS and other educational outreach programs. The "Reviews" tab directs you to our online newsletter (see *News and Reviews* information below) archive where the latest and past issues can be viewed and searched. The "Related sites" section contains a comprehensive list of other online resources for further exploration, including the websites of many film distributors and links to image galleries. As new features are added and updates are made, they will be announced in the "New at AEMS" section, accessible by clicking on the phrase that appears near the top of the page.

Those who prefer to conduct quick searches can find information efficiently by using either the Media Database or the Google-powered search tools. A search for the film "To Live" through the Google search option, for example, returns a list of all available resources, the first being a teacher's guide, which includes reproducible handouts for the classroom. Using the Media Database search option, on the other hand, yields a list of four film titles, and users can view detailed information about each film by clicking

on the title link. If you are interested in a particular subject or country but do not have a specific title in mind, the "Advanced Search" option allows you to customize the search using criteria such as country, region, audience, subject, media type, and keyword, among other fields.

AEMS News and Reviews

Another popular AEMS resource is the *News and Reviews* newsletter, which is published three times a year at the beginning of each academic term (including one issue for the summer months). This popular newsletter is sent free of charge to about 4000 individual and organizational subscribers and we would be happy to add you to the mailing list or to send you extra copies for your next workshop.

Since 1998, *News and Reviews* has been helping to inform readers of the latest media materials available for learning about Asia. The film reviews and essays cover a wide range of geographical regions and subjects, and past special issues have focused on themes such as women, religion, and bargain buys for classroom instruction. Topics slated to be covered in the next two issues include: the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge period in Cambodia, 1970's feminist movement in Japan, the Korean War, the Yasukuni Shrine, and Indian adaptations of Jane Austen, etc. AEMS receives regular notifications from distributors about new releases and we are always looking for reviewers to help evaluate these materials for the classroom. Please let us know if you are interested.

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Sample Review from *News and Reviews*—AEMS

COURTESY OF WOMEN MAKE MOVIES

Indonesia: The New Order and Beyond

>> *Shadow Play: Indonesia's Years of Living Dangerously*. A film by Chris Hillton. 2002. 55 minutes.

>> *Children of the Crocodile*. A film by Marsha Emerman. 2001. 52 minutes.

>> *A Trial in East Kalimantan: The Benoaq Dayak Resistance*. A film by Sandeep Ray. 2000. 50 minutes.

Indonesia's 30-year New Order began in 1966 with the overthrow of the country's first president, Sukarno, and his replacement by General Suharto who served as president until forced to resign in 1998. He was succeeded by then Vice President B.J. Habibie. The New Order was characterized by considerable economic and educational development, but also by military rule, ecological damage, human rights violations, and corruption in business and government. These films illuminate three violent points in the New Order's history: its beginning in mass killings following an alleged communist coup attempt; the occupation in 1975 of East Timor (after its decolonization by the Portuguese in 1974) which lasted until 1999; and conflicts which have arisen as new democracy is expressed following the end of the New Order regime and exploitative development projects are challenged. All three films would be suitable for high school grades 11 and 12, college, or adult audiences.

Shadow Play takes its title from popular puppet plays of Java and Bali, which portray the machinations and wars of kings in tales from India's *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and from Javanese history. Its subtitle is a play on the

successful Australian movie, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, which portrayed the chaos in Indonesia immediately before the fall of Sukarno. *Shadow Play* focuses on events surrounding September 30, 1965, when six Indonesian generals were murdered on one night, allegedly by supporters of the Indonesian Communist Party as part of a coup, which was put down within 24 hours by General Suharto. This led to a nationwide purge of suspected communists and brutal killings in villages and towns, mainly in Java and Bali, but also other areas. Hundreds of thousands of people died and were buried in mass graves. Local scores were often settled following Indonesia's chaotic political and economic situation in the early 1960s. Many persons were imprisoned for the next several decades, and others were classified as communist sympathizers, and their job and educational possibilities were restricted.

The film's title, *Shadow Play*, also relates to its central argument that before 1965, Australian, British, and American government representatives and agents were manipulating Indonesians through propaganda, misrepresentations, monetary support, and intelligence information as part of the Cold War fear that Communism was spreading

throughout Southeast Asia and that Indonesia, with a large communist party, was a prime target. The thesis is supported through interviews with a variety of governmental and private persons, including survivors of prisons and torture, as well as consideration of recently released documents of several governments. The film would be useful in classes concerned with Southeast Asia, the wider implications of the Vietnam conflict, and the history of the Cold War.

Children of the Crocodile concerns the aftermath of Portugal's withdrawal from Portuguese Timor in 1974. This event heightened anti-Communist fears in Indonesia's military elite, with the rise of a revolutionary and allegedly leftist political party in East Timor, Fretlin, and led Indonesia to invade and occupy East Timor in 1975, with tacit support from the United States and Australia. Timorese fought the Indonesians during a violent two decades in which as many as 200,000 Timorese may have died from fighting, displacement from farming areas, hunger and disease. Many East Timorese fled to Australia. After the fall of President Suharto, President Habibie offered the East Timorese a choice: become an autonomous region in Indonesia or become independent. In a referendum managed by the United Nations in East Timor and among overseas refugees, a resounding 78% chose independence to the surprise of the often misinformed Indonesians and the chagrin of the military. Violence by Indonesian-sponsored militia drove many people to flee or be driven from the area. A U.N. military force came to help protect East Timorese from the militia and, after a period of U.N. trusteeship, East Timor became a nation on May 20, 2002.

The film's title refers to a myth in which a Timorese man befriends a crocodile which eventually repays him by turning into the island of Timor where he and his descendants can live. The film, made by Australians, tells the story of two women, Cidalia Pires and Elizabeth Exposto, whose parents and many relatives were among thousands of refugees who fled East Timor to Australia in 1975. The film portrays events in the lives of these two young women as they grow up in close and highly political refugee families in Melbourne, become

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Sample Review from *News and Reviews*—AEMS

Shinto on Film

>> *Nature, Gods, and Man in Japan*. Produced by Peter Grilli. Directed by David Westphal. 1977. 50 minutes.

>> *Japan Past and Present: Buddha in the Land of the Kami*. 1989. 53 minutes.

>> *Religions of the World: Shinto*. Produced by Schlessinger Media and Greenstar Television. 1998. 50 minutes.

Three popular videos used in courses to help students gain a deeper understanding of Japanese religions in general and Shinto in particular are *Nature, Gods, and Man in Japan*; *Buddha in the Land of the Kami*; and *Religions of the World: Shinto*. The three films were produced in different decades (the 1970s, '80s, and '90s) and provide a glimpse into how the study and perception of Shinto and Japanese religion have developed and changed over the years. But perhaps the best indicator of how effective these videos are in the 21st century in introducing classes to Japanese religion and culture is to ask the students themselves for their evaluations. What follows is a brief description of each film accompanied by the comments and insights of students in Japanese Religion and World Religions classes.

Nature, Gods, and Man in Japan was produced in 1977 by the Japan Society Film Center and, although it is the oldest of the three films under review, it provides the most visually arresting cinematography. The film utilizes serene and mystical images of Shinto with footage that lingers on the beauty of Japan's natural landscape to help convey some of the basic traits and themes, such as permanence and renewal, which characterize Shinto. Two of the most important and sacred sites in Shinto—the Ise and Izumo shrines—are shown, as well as ceremonies, local festivals, and seasonal celebrations. Shinto images and works of art are also depicted to help explain how Shinto evolved through interaction with other Japanese religions, especially Buddhism. Most of the students' comments, however, focused on two aspects of the film: the cinematography and the film's emphasis on nature and harmony.

For the most part, students thought *Nature, Gods, and Man in Japan* was informative and stunningly beautiful.

The emphasis on the mystical nature of Shinto and the aesthetically pleasing cinematography affected students in a number of ways. Some said they could feel the serenity and peacefulness of Shinto through the video. They found it especially helpful to see the Ise and Izumo shrines and how their architectures express Shinto themes. Other students, however, felt that the pace of the video, the lingering footage of scenery, and the resonant tone of the narrator made it difficult to maintain concentration. One student said that the scenery footage was pleasant and beautiful but excessive and slow-paced and made her “want to cuddle up with a blanket and sleep.” Indeed, some students in class fell asleep!

In the view of some students, the emphasis on Shinto as a religious tradition in harmony with nature resulted in an unbalanced view of the religion. A number of students commented that they would have liked to learn more how Shinto affected the lives of ordinary individuals and their communities as Shinto is as much a dynamic tradition of communal festivals as it is a religion of tranquil beauty. The focus on Shinto as a harmonious religion also meant that State Shinto was not discussed in the video, much to the dismay of some students.

For the most part, students thought *Nature, Gods, and Man in Japan* was an informative and stunningly beautiful film. The video rightly points out that Shinto is an amalgamation of various influences yet also preserves essential characteristics such as the emphasis on purity, the affirmation of nature, and the closeness between nature and the divine.



The second video, *Buddha in the Land of the Kami*, was produced in 1989 and highlights the role of Buddhism and Chinese culture on the development of Shinto and Japanese culture from the 7th to 12th centuries. It is actually part of the *Japan Past and Present* film series that spans Japanese history from the 7th century to the 20th century. As such, the video provides a good historical framework from which to view Japanese religion and culture and offers insight into the evolution of various Japanese traditions, including sumo, rice paper making, calligraphy, and the creation of Japanese gardens.

Students responded positively to the ritual performances of the Shinto creation myths at the opening of the film. They
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