

FILM REVIEWS

the rather short-sighted constant references to Mao and the Communist Revolution? One Scandinavian restoration architect who viewed the film is puzzled by the focus on destroying the old to develop the new. Aggressive urban reconstruction is nothing new in the European and global context and is certainly not a creation of the Chinese Communist Party. A focus on the 2008 Olympics might be more effective, but that focus soon is replaced by the economic exploration of migrant workers by the big construction companies, and that again is quickly replaced by the youthful uncertainty reflected through the young and handsome intermediary with whom the director quickly identified. In the end, one wonders, who is the character in this documentary—"Twenty-first century China" as Director Guo claims, or the director herself?

That being said, Director Guo should be commended for her insightful and poetic portrayal of an important social phenomenon concerning migrant laborers and their fate in contemporary China. The intimate human touch of this documentary provides a moving representation of Chinese reality. It will be a welcome addition to the university classroom and to the general public to improve our understanding about contemporary China, and especially about peasant migrant laborers and urban reconstruction issues. A guidebook is available on the Choices, Inc. Web site at <https://www.choicesvideo.net/guidebooks/Concreteguidebook.pdf>. ■

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India of the Gandhis

DIRECTED BY FABRICE HOSS

PRINCETON, NJ: FILMS FOR THE HUMANITIES AND SCIENCES

DVD, 52 MINUTES, COLOR, 2004

REVIEWED BY SUMIT GUHA

This documentary seems to have originally been made for French television and shot in 2004, shortly after the victory of the Congress-led coalition in India's general elections of that year.

Its central theme is not easy to extract, but appears to be that India is a Hindu land immersed in deep spiritual values such as renunciation. Its great twentieth century leaders all achieved distinction by acts of renunciation. Mahatma Gandhi renounced a career as a barrister and lived an austere life; Jawaharlal Nehru renounced a comfortable upper-middle class life to lead the independence movement. What his daughter Indira Gandhi renounced is unclear. Her son, Rajiv Gandhi gave up a luxurious private life to become Prime Minister. His widow Sonia Gandhi followed him on the national stage—her renunciation of the post of Prime Minister in favor of Manmohan Singh in 2004 shows her capacity for renunciation. Thus, these characters are knitted together by the theme of renunciation and by association with the sacred site at Prayag near Allahabad where "his majesty the Ganges" (sic!!) meets the Yamuna. They have therefore been "inheritors of a dynasty."

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Beyond this, the film is populated with a number of stock Orientalist tropes. The camera lingers for long shots of long-haired holy men, of the Ganges River and interviews a handful of people congregated on the riverbank at Prayag who speak animatedly about the sacred river. We get a shot of the Sikhs' Golden Temple at Amritsar, but India's 150 million Muslims—whose votes were long central to the Congress' hold on its North Indian heartland—are included only once as part of a multi-faith prayer meeting. Beyond religiosity, there is of course filth and poverty. A slum settlement near Shadipur is visited. The well-fed headman's claim that he supports a family of seven children on one Euro (\$1.25) a month is solemnly reported as fact. The obviously staged theatrics of the Youth Congress are presented as simple expressions of mass feeling. Perhaps the documentary's best moment is when the camera is allowed into the highly guarded precincts of the annual Rajiv Gandhi commemoration, which ends with a young man and woman running around the cenotaph bearing the Indian flag to the strains of Wagner's *Zarathustra*. It would be tedious to recount all the factual errors in this short film.

This documentary manages to be at once shallow and complex. It is of no value to students of any age and exasperating for any moderately well-informed person to watch. ■

SUMIT GUHA is Professor of History and Director of the South Asian Studies Program at Rutgers University.

Preaching from Pictures

A Japanese Mandala

DIRECTED BY DAVID W. PLATH

PRODUCED BY MEDIA PRODUCTION GROUP

DVD, 37 MINUTES, COLOR, 2006

REVIEWED BY MARA MILLER

Preaching from Pictures: A Japanese Mandala is a remarkably dense, recently reissued DVD based on the earlier video of the same name. Extremely useful for undergraduate or high-school classes in history, art history, religion, and gender studies, whether Asian, Japanese, or general, it explores two nearly contemporary but dissimilar paintings in considerable detail, showing viewers what they reveal about the history of the times, the purposes and pleasures of the paintings, and something of the enormous variety of life during the Edo period.

The program is set up in terms of a basic contrast between the paintings, one secular and one religious, comparing and contrasting their subject matter, compositions, audiences, and patrons. This contrast is underscored by the sex of the narrators (male for the secular screens, female for the nuns' hanging scroll). The secular painting is a pair of six-fold *Edo-zu* (*Pictures of Edo*) (much like *Rakuchu/Rakugai*) screens depicting scenes in and out of the capital city of Edo, commissioned by the Tokugawa shogun around 1670 to



Section from one of the six-fold *Edo-zu* (*Pictures of Edo*) panels.

Source: Digital screen capture.

celebrate his capital city and the vitality of his rule. The narrator, historian Ronald P. Toby, helpfully clarifies some of the artistic conventions used, such as the large expanses of gold clouds that obscure parts of the city, and identifies a number of recognizable landmarks and a few of the many types of figures and activities depicted.

The second painting, the *Pure Land Buddhist Mandala of the 10 Worlds* (*Jikkai Mandala*) hanging scroll from earlier in the seventeenth century, receives considerably more attention. Commissioned for the nuns of the Kumano Temple, it was intended as a teaching aid in sermons to primarily female audiences.

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