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Mini Dragons II

(Pt.1) Indonesia
(Pt.2) Malaysia
(Pt.3) Thailand

PRODUCED BY
MARYLAND PUBLIC TELEVISION

(MPT) PRODUCTION AND FILM
AUSTRALIA

DISTRIBUTED BY
AMBROSE VIDEO PUBLISHING
NEW YORK 1993.

Three Southeast Asian countries with high rates of economic growth over the last decade, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, are the subjects of this series originally aired on television in one-hour segments. The filmmakers were concerned to show the trade-offs of rapid

development in this region where industrialization, an expanding middle class, and higher incomes for many families have led to environmental deterioration, human displacement, and other social ills.

Most successful at achieving a balanced view of these trade-offs are the films on Thailand and Malaysia. These introduce us to people who represent a cross-section of two variegated societies: a feminist, Islamic labor organizer; a middle-class manager of a rubber plantation and his wife who opens a bakery; a Murut community of slash and burn cultivators in Sabah ravaged by logging; a fabulously wealthy Chinese family in Bangkok that is building a new shopping mall; a confrontational monk who agitates and preaches to save the forest; and a poor couple who leave

their children behind in a rural village and move to a squalid slum in Bangkok near the docks where they labor.

In contrast, the Indonesia film shows mostly the bright side of economic growth and spends a great deal of time following men who are not only wealthy but at the very pinnacle of power in that country. The poor, the transmigrants, the environmental wasteland around the Freeport mine, the depletion of forests, the congestion of Jakarta—none of this enters the glowing picture. The very silences and omissions in this segment, however, hint at another significant cost of economic development in Asia, where the openness of democratic political process has often been sacrificed or postponed in order to give the state the power to engineer economic growth.

This series is useful for teach-

ers of high school or university undergraduate students. Narrated in English, with multiple languages and English subtitles, it is a rich stimulus for classroom discussion. When combined with readings that fill the silences in the Indonesian segment and that contextualize the life stories depicted in the other two segments, these films can also reveal the region's religious and ethnic diversity, suggest how women's roles and work opportunities are changing, and how post-colonial nationalism fuels leaders' keen ambitions to catch up with the West economically.

Rita Smith Kipp

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Japanese History and Literature

PRODUCED BY
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY'S PROJECT
ON ASIA IN THE CORE
CURRICULUM OF
SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

DISTRIBUTED BY
THE ANNENBERG/CPB PROJECT
901 EAST STREET NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20004-2037

1996

Designed as a resource for teachers of world history and literature courses, this group of materials can be used as part of faculty development institutes, in-service workshops, or as a resource for individual instructors. Three video tapes survey premodern Japanese history with special reference to selected works of literature: (1) *Classical Japan and "The Tale of Genji"* (45 minutes), (2) *Medieval Japan and Buddhism in Literature* (45 minutes), (3) *Tokugawa Japan and Puppet Theater, Novels, and the Haiku*

of Bashō (70 minutes).

A printed guide includes a script of the narration, plus materials to be xeroxed for video viewers—study questions and excerpts from literature being discussed. An appendix provides an instructor's overview, map exercises, bibliography, and recommended resources.

The project team has addressed an extremely difficult problem—how, with a limited budget, to use a visual, action-oriented medium to create enthusiasm for the study of texts. The video programs primarily consist of what the TV

generation calls "talking heads," but the speakers are impressive authorities: Donald Keene, Paul Varley, Carol Gluck, Haruo Sirane, and Henry Smith. The narrator is Robert Oxnam, President Emeritus of the Asia Society. Even luminaries can be deadly on camera, and taped lectures hardly engage the potential of the video medium. The best that can be hoped for is that the lecturers will communicate their personal enthusiasm for the topics. These "heads" deliver. Experiencing Sirane's explication of a Bashō haiku is a

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genuine delight. There are a few stiff moments, but the speakers provide us with credible expressions of their excitement and pleasure as they dispense solid background information teachers can use.

These videos are genuine resources, not plug-and-play classroom modules. The information, while basic, is a bit concentrated for the target audience of teachers largely unfamiliar with things Japanese. The printed script will be particularly valuable for such individuals. As recommended by the project editors, those segments useful for high school or college student viewing, such as direct comments about literary selections, need to be carefully extracted by the classroom teacher who has already absorbed the video lectures. Attempts to compare

Japan's historical and literary achievements with those of other cultures are left largely to the viewer.

The video production has some problems. The decision to illustrate several battle scenes by moving the camera around a two-dimensional painting suggests a low budget. The repeated use of a percussion ensemble for the soundtrack becomes irritating. Video strobing during sequences panning calligraphy looks technically unprofessional. Employing slides, several poorly reproduced, to depict Japanese historical sites is disappointing. Video clips of nature scenes, often illustratively weak, are so generic they could well have been taken in rural New England.

Aspects of the printed study guide need improvement also.

The hand-drawn maps teachers are invited to duplicate are aesthetically out of touch with the fact that increasingly, secondary school teachers and their students have sharp, computer-generated materials available to them. The "homemade look" no longer wins points. The one professional looking map, borrowed, but poorly reproduced, from *Japan Today*, has serious pedagogical design flaws for those unfamiliar with Japan's geography. Injecting hand-written Japanese characters into printed English text in this day of multi-lingual word processing looks crude. Missing among the list of resources and much more useful in explaining premodern Japan than *The Pacific Century* Video Series, is the old, but still serviceable, fourteen-part series, *Japan: The Living Tradition* by

the University of Mid-America.

In summary, the content of this video series is strong, and the experts are engaging; however, the general production quality is not up to the usual Annenberg/CPB Collection standard.

James B. Leavell

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