

Project Summary  
Peter A. Campbell  
Ramapo College

I am creating a course on Japanese theatre, film, and culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While I came here with some knowledge of Japan's theatrical and performance traditions, especially Noh, Bunraku, and Kabuki, the Japan Studies Institute has greatly expanded my knowledge of Japan since 1868 and provided me with information and perspectives of how Japan relates to ideas of the modern.

This course will examine Japanese culture from the late Meiji period to the present day through the lens of its theatre, performance, and cinema. The course will focus on the ways that these art forms have been used to represent the concerns of a Japanese society in what historian Stefan Tanaka describes as the complicated position of a non-Western place attempting to become modern. In Japan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, art, and especially theater and film, was used to build up the idea of a modern nation, to address and express the trauma of war, and to subvert and critique traditional culture.

The course is intended not just for theater or film students, but as a general education course that fulfills our International Issues requirement. I hope to appeal to students from across the college who are required to take courses outside of their disciplines. By including contemporary anime films like *Barefoot Gen* and *Graves of the Fireflies* and discussions of the genre of J-horror, I hope to attract students who might find those films a way in to the larger explorations that the course entails.

As we experienced first hand through the Taiko drumming, the tea ceremony, the flower arrangement, and the Buddhist meditation, among other activities, the practice and rigor of these cultural activities are important to understanding the larger culture, its values, and its ideology. As Japanese philosopher Nishida Kitaro writes: "To experience means to know facts just as they are, to know them by completely relinquishing one's own mental fabrication." The course will be infused with opportunities to practice the physical, mental, and spiritual techniques of some of these art forms as we study their histories, contexts, and significance. This will help the students learn the connections between practice and culture, and think about how their own practices connect to their own cultures, even in a modern world dominated by technology and disembodiment.