

Cowboys in Pan-Asian Forms: Swordplay, Assassins, Wandering Ronin

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Abstract

This paper begins with a brief introduction to Japanese judo and/or *jidaigeki chambara* [sword fighting period films] with a focus on different martial aesthetics. A few clips can illustrate basic Samurai cinematic concepts and practices, such as *seppuku* and *junshi* (following one's lord in death), a shifting *bushido* code of honor, as well as a variety of archetypes that can include the masterless *ronin*, the humble yet highly skilled warrior, and the solitary or reluctant martial hero. A clip from Akira Kurosawa's post-war 1943 *Sanshiro Sugato* can also provide a glimpse at alternative forms of martial unarmed combat (ju-jitsu vs. judo) and a more pacifist direction in Japanese martial arts. The paper then focuses on the Kurosawa samurai film where he intermingled Western and Japanese inspirations with his innovations in narrative, camera work, composing movements, framing, and editing. Film critics noted the interplay and adaptations between Japanese, Italian and United States films in different genres or compared scenes from Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961) or *Seven Samurai* (1954). The paper emphasizes the undercurrent message of the American geopolitical hegemony or the critique of its hegemony in the reception of Kurosawa samurai film as well as American Western film shown to the Asian audiences.

Biography



Jean Amato is Professor of comparative literature in the English and Communication Department, teaches and develops curricula in the Film and Media Department; and is the coordinator of the Liberal Arts Asian Minor at the Fashion Institute of Technology, State University of New York. Working in Chinese and English, Professor Amato conducts research on ancestral home/homeland in twentieth-century Chinese, Diasporic, and Chinese American Literature and Film. Currently Professor Amato is co-editing four interdisciplinary anthologies on homeland and diaspora studies including *Multidisciplinary Representations of Home and Homeland in Diaspora* (Routledge, 2025) and *Home and Homeland in Asian Diaspora: Transnational Reflections in Art, Literature, and Film* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024). She received her PhD in comparative literature from the University of Oregon.