

“Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles” starring Ken Takakura, Kiichi Nakai, Shinobu Terajima, 2005, PG, 107 minutes

Major themes:

- Father-son relationships
- Music
- Journey
- Shame
- Regret
- Courage
- Forgiveness
- Redemption
- Emotions
- Protocol
- Prison
- Embrace

Major characters:

- Mr. Gou-ichi Takata
- Ken-ichi Takata (son)
- Rie Takata (daughter-in-law)
- Jasmine (professional interpreter)
- Lingo
- Li Jiamin (singer)
- Film director Li
- Warden Chen
- Village Chief
- Yang Yang

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

Background info:

- The title of the film is a direct translation of a well-known song in a literary classic, the 14th century historical novel, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, which tells the story of a 3rd century general (Guan Yu / Lord Guan) who selflessly went on a long journey to help a friend. Guan Yu became a popular paradigm of loyalty and righteousness and is still worshipped by many Chinese people today all over the world, in Chinese folk religion, Confucianism, Taoism, and Chinese Buddhism.
- In China, Opera masks were used in a basic "common" form of opera performed without a stage or backdrops. These led to colorful facial patterns that we see in today's Peking, or Beijing, opera, the most dominant form of Chinese opera which combines music, vocal performance, mime, dance and acrobatics. The various paint colors are used to symbolize a character's role, fate, and illustrate the character's emotional state and general character. White symbolizes evil, craftiness, treachery, or suspicion. Green denotes impulsive behavior, violence, or lack of self-restraint / self-control. Red stands for bravery or loyalty. Black denotes boldness, fierceness, impartiality, or roughness. Yellow symbolizes ambition, fierceness, or intelligence. Blue stands for loyalty or steadfastness. Pink symbolizes sophistication or cool-headedness.
- This film was directed by Zhang Yimou, who also directed "*The Road Home*."
- Aside from the Japanese actors (Mr. Takata, Rie, and Ken-ichi), all of the Chinese actors use their real names in the movie, and probably play their real-life roles: tour company translator, local tour guide, government officials, village elders, prisoners.
- Lijiang is a large city (current population is over 1.2 million) in Yunnan Province in southwest China.

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Scriptures:

Proverbs 14:17 (The Message) – *“The hotheaded do things they’ll later regret; the coldhearted get the cold shoulder.”*

Luke 15:20 (The Message) – *“When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him.”*

Psalms 40:1-3 (NLT) – *“I waited patiently for the LORD to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along. He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see what he has done and be amazed. They will put their trust in the LORD.”*

Luke 11:4 (NIV) – *“Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.”*

Luke 6:35-36 (The Message) – *“I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You’ll never—I promise—regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we’re at our worst. Our Father is kind; you be kind.”*

Philippians 4:6-7 (GWT) – *“Never worry about anything. But in every situation let God know what you need in prayers and requests while giving thanks. Then God’s peace, which goes beyond anything we can imagine, will guard your thoughts and emotions through Christ Jesus.”*

Romans 8:37-39 (The Message) – *“None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I’m absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God’s love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.”*

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Discussion points:

1. Discuss the prisoners' chant: *"Repent of our sins, Reform our ways, Redeem ourselves, Become new people."*
2. One character says, *"In a foreign language environment you can feel very isolated."* What factors cause people to feel isolated in our community today?
3. Why do you think Mr. Takata didn't tell Li what had happened before his performance?
4. How does this film encourage us to notice the masks we wear with one another?
5. What emotions did you expect to see inside the prison? What did you notice?
6. What touched you the most about this film?
7. How does Mr. Takata's physical journey reflect the journey in his heart?
8. Where in this film do you see second chances?