

ARTS & BOOKS

Hollywood gets lost in translation

By Christophe JAMOT

American cinema used to influence generations of movie directors round the world. Today Hollywood seeks scripts and ideas from abroad.

East Asian cinema has had huge international success in the last few years. Japanese, Korean and Chinese movies have been awarded countless prizes in European film festivals. It was not long before the Americans realized this new goldmine had to be reckoned with and exploited properly. Something had to be done to satisfy contemporary demand and taste, something radically new like...a remake.

Japanese horror movies have met with international success recently. In the United States, horror movies are close to being a native tradition: whether you are a horror movie freak or not, you must have heard about *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or about *Dawn of the Dead* (these two classics from the seventies were reshot in the last few years). However, the genre was running out of steam in America until these Japanese movies came out. Movies such as *Dark water* by Hideo Nakata (2002) or *The Grudge* by Yakashi Shimizu (2004) put new life into the genre. This "new wave" of Japanese was extremely innovative in many ways. These films really have an aesthetic of their own, never seen before. The main difference with the American horror films is that the Japanese ones are free of violence. Very little blood is being spilled and movies are less gory. The emphasis is put on the understated. What the Americans are usually eager to show, the Japanese will endeavour to hide, thus playing with the audience's imagination.

The Japanese hit *Ringu* directed by Hideo Nakata (1998) is a story about a cursed video that kills everyone who sees it exactly one week after viewing, was among the first of the numerous movies to be "americanized". *The Ring*, its American counterpart came out four years later and used the same plot with minor differences. For most movie freaks and admirers of the Japanese style, Hollywood's "remake" frenzy simply looks as sheer lack of inspiration. Yet, producers claim that this phenomenon is an attempt for some directors to try their hand at a new genre. This is the case for Walter Salles for instance, who directed the remake of *Dark Water* which came out a few weeks ago. Hollywood moguls believe adding special effects, famous directors and actors can produce better movies.

However, what the Americans tend to forget is that these Japanese movies often respond to specific social trends and cultural issues. When americanized, one realizes that these underlying themes disappear in the "remake" version, taking away most of the film's appeal and depth.

Sources: *The Midnight Eye Guide to New Japanese Film*, Hideo Nakata (Foreword), Tom Mes, Jasper Sharp (Stone Bridge Press, 2004).

Japanese Horror Cinema, Jay Mcroy (University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

<http://www.midnighteye.com/>; <http://www.imdb.com>