



水の声を聞く

Mizu no koe o kiku

The Voice of Water

Masashi Yamamoto

Producer Masashi Yamamoto, Shinichiro Muraoka. **Production company** Cinema Impact (Tokyo, Japan). **Director** Masashi Yamamoto. **Screenplay** Masashi Yamamoto. **Director of photography** Futa Takagi. **Production design** Fumiaki Suzaka. **Music** Dr. Tommy. **Sound design** Shintaro Kamijo. **Editor** Kenji Yamashita.

Cast Hyunri (Minjon), Shuri (Nami Sakai), Natsuko Nakamura (Sae), Akihiro Kamataki (Mikio), Kei Oda (Takazawa), Hayate Matsuzaki (Mamoru Komiya), Riku Hagiwara (Shinji), Izumi Minai (Yoshie Komiya), Jun Murakami (Akao).

HDCAM, colour. 129 min. Japanese, Korean.

Premiere 30 August 2014, Tokyo

World sales Geta Films/Spirits Project, Inc.

Cinema Impact was the name of a workshop launched by Masashi Yamamoto in 2012. It produced fifteen short films, including one directed by Yamamoto himself about a Zainichi (a Korean living in Japan) who is exploited by a shady sect and made into their figurehead. The success of other Cinema Impact films encouraged the director to expand this short prologue into a feature-length film.

Mizu no koe o kiku is set in Okubo, Tokyo's Koreatown, where Minjon receives outcasts of all kinds and listens to their stories of woe, responding to them with flowery Korean platitudes they are unable to understand. Her act is so successful that a group of canny businesspeople make use of her standing to found the God's Water sect. Enter Minjon's father, who is being pursued by brutal debt collectors and seeks help from his estranged daughter. Yamamoto doesn't just manage to fuse satire, yakuza trash and a moral message with his trademark sympathy for the underdogs of Japanese society, he also takes his protagonist seriously, ultimately allowing her to rebel against the very system she created, turn toward the shamanism of her ancestors and embrace her Korean roots.

Christoph Terhechte

The search for stability and salvation

Our lives today are shaped by stagnation and helplessness, chaos and confusion, anxiety and distrust. We are unable to see into the future. People go through life not knowing what they can cling to. *Mizu no koe o kiku* depicts the cult group God's Water and its Japanese-Korean leader Minjon. The film shows lives, both sacred and profane, as well as nature, water, wind, and clouds. With its depiction of the vitality that spawns from nature, the film also aims to refresh our parched souls.

Masahi Yamamoto

Are workshops the saviour of independent film?

Workshop films are a fact of life in Japanese independent cinema. Funding is scarce these days, unlike the 1990s and the pre-Lehman Shock 2000s when investors were throwing money at all sorts of projects, and the government would rather invest tax revenues in promoting a narrow bureaucratic definition of pop culture. So what's a hard-up filmmaker to do?

The most successful workshop project to date has probably been *Koi no Uzu (Be My Baby)*, directed by Hitoshi One soon after the success of his late-night TV series and movie spinoff, *Moteki (Love Strikes!)*, of which *Calamity Strikes* is a loose parody). *Koi no Uzu* turned out to be a local box-office success for a film of its scale. It was screened at several overseas festivals, including Hong Kong and Edinburgh, and was selected for competition at the Udine Far East Film Festival.

The film emerged from a workshop called Cinema Impact, which was the brainchild of Masashi Yamamoto, an indie survivor who directed several critical successes such as *Robinson no Niwa (Robinson's Garden)* and *Janku Fudo (Junk Food)* in the 1980s and 1990s. From 2012 to 2013, Cinema Impact facilitated mainly short works from an illustrious assortment of directors including Isao Yukisada, Yuki Tanada, and Junji Sakamoto.

Yamamoto also directed three shorts of his own, one of them being the thirty-one-minute drama *Mizu no koe o kiku, Puroro-gu (The Voice of Water, Prologue)* about a young Zainichi (Japanese-born) Korean woman who reluctantly acts as a medium for a fraudulent religious cult. He hoped to use it as the basis for a full-length film but had no completed script, let alone funding. That was until *Koi no Uzu* started drawing accolades and audiences, and enjoyed a long run in theatres despite featuring a cast of unknowns.

Producer Yamamoto ploughed the profits back into *Mizu no koe o kiku (The Voice of Water)*, his first genuine feature-length movie since 2007's *Kikareta Onna (Man, Woman and the Wall)* (...). He had been running a free class for workshop participants who had not been cast in films by the other Cinema Impact directors, and one of them was a young South Korean woman named Hyunri who was raised in Japan.

She didn't have the right air about her to play one of the many flaky characters in *Koi no Uzu*, but was highly rated by both One and Yamamoto. Working with her on the prologue gave him the inspiration to complete the script for a feature version in which she would also star.

The resulting 129-minute ensemble piece is a testament to Yamamoto's skill at shaping characters to his actors' strengths, and dealing with social issues in a very human rather than abstract way. (...) Hyunri makes for an appealing and sympathetic lead, substantially evoking Minjon's gradual transformation from a directionless

youth to a woman taking control of her own destiny, regardless of the consequences.

The realism extends to the cult's utilitarian premises, constructed on an entire floor of a company office that was loaned to the production for an extended period. As Minjon performs for the needy in front of her makeshift altar in the worship room, administrative staff carry out busywork on the other side of the wall. Occasionally the employees move outside to chat candidly on the balcony or act out ceremonies on the rooftop, with the camera occasionally pulling away to show the building dwarfed by a wall of Shinjuku skyscrapers.

A DJ priest and techno beats

The exploration of the inner workings of the cult concentrates on personal dynamics, and no grand statements are made on religion or the state of modern Japan. Many exterior shots were filmed on the streets of 'Korea Town' in Shinjuku's Shin-Okubo district, but the rising antipathy toward Zainichi Koreans among a certain section of the Japanese populace is never broached. In fact, Minjon frequently addresses her followers in her mother tongue, forcing them to use the automatic translation function of their raised smartphones as if it is completely natural. Yamamoto says he despises the pretentiousness of explicit social commentary and what he sees as the predilection by cinephiles for aesthetic beauty divorced from reality. He focuses on creating believable situations and realistic interactions between everyday people, although as his multicultural and outsider-centric films to date like *Janku Fudo* and *Atlanta Boogie* have shown, his definition of 'everyday' is unusually inclusive.

One other aspect that makes *Mizu no koe o kiku* so enjoyable are its very funny moments, such as Minjon and Mina's visit to one of Akao's side businesses, the Spiritual Wind Church, where a long-haired DJ priest pumps out techno beats and a laser light show for followers getting down in identical T-shirts emblazoned with the cult's logo. Yamamoto's veteran guerrilla-style approach to location photography creates one of the film's best sight gags: a long shot whereby cult members on their way to a meeting with Akao enter his place of work, which turns out to be the headquarters of the all-powerful advertising behemoth Dentsu.

The screening I attended was followed by an on-stage talk in which the guests included Yamamoto and the film's producer, Shinichiro Muraoka. They recounted the story of how they first met in a bar while heavily intoxicated, which led to a brawl in which Muraoka lost teeth and Yamamoto lost consciousness. Many years later, they have collaborated for the first time to make *Mizu no koe o kiku*. Just as well they managed to patch things up.

Don Brown, 26 September 2014

http://ajw.asahi.com/article/cool_japan/movies/AJ201409260008



Masashi Yamamoto was born in 1956 in Oita Prefecture, Japan. He began making Super-8 Films in 1979 and directed his first feature, *Carnival in the Night*, in 1982. During the 1980s, he also produced records and organised music festivals. In 1998, Yamamoto spent a year in New York. In 2012, he opened the Cinema Impact workshop, through which he has produced fifteen films by thirteen directors.

Films

1982: *Yami no kanibaru/Carnival in the Night* (Berlinale Forum 1983, 108 min.). 1987: *Robinson no niwa/Robinson's Garden* (Berlinale Forum 1987 117 min.). 1990: *What's up Connection* (118 min.). 1996: *Atlanta Boogie* (108 min.). 1997: *Junk Food* (Berlinale Forum 1998, 105 min.). 2000: *Limousine Drive* (87 min.). 2005: *Days* (58 min.). 2005: *Cycle* (48 min.). 2006: *Man and Woman and Wall* (87 min.). 2011: *Three Points* (85 min.). 2012: *One Nation Story* (35 min.). 2012: *Night in Tacos* (25 min.). 2014: *Mizu no koe o kiku / The Voice of Water*.