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It is difficult to establish the connecting parameter between Spain and Asia in cinematography matter. In fact, Asia has long been a great unknown territory to our country, a precious gem waited to be discovered and a continent where our knowledge restricted to only few initiates.

The normalization process of Asian cinema in Spain probably costs a fortune and still there is a high reticence against it, and that the market and distribution channels in Spain will have to work a lot on those issues. For instance, we are many years away from France, our neighbors, who through the Fonds Sud Cinema has supported financially works of emerging filmmakers, belonged to the outlying movie industries as well as works of already established ones, in terms of co-production and interchange. Probably due to that reason, filmmakers such as Hou Hsiao Hsien or Nobuhiro Suwa have never chosen Spain to be the shooting location for their movies.

Some Spanish filmmakers have decided, nevertheless, to challenge themselves by entering the Asian market or making films about the already existing trail between Spain and Asia, presented from several point of views with different perspective and ways of approaching.

To portray the subject of the Asia-Spanish co-production, the case of Paul Naschy is a very good example. An unquestionable pioneer, this b movie filmmaker whose specialty is in making horror films moved to Japan during the 80's to make movies. The two films produced in that time, "La bestia y la espada mágica" (1983) and "El último kamikaze" (1984) were made with hybrid technical by artistic production teams of people from both countries. It was the first time that a Spanish production company worked with a Japanese production company to make movies, a true unknown collaboration between Spain and Japan.

In spite of the success of Paul Nachy, who explained in his memoirs how Akira Kurosawa had congratulated him and that he met the actor Toshiro Mifune, this cooperative path has hardly ever taken since, due to the fact that the Spanish co-production companies have always aimed towards the Latin-American market. For this reason, up until now the Asian participation o presence in Spanish movies has been quite sporadic and always linked only to themes.

In 1999, Miguel Santesmases' first work, "La fuente amarilla"(1999), was the movie that talked about Chinese mafia within the Spanish society, presenting how they work secretly underground and how they are supported by a strict and inscrutable code of internal rules which kept working their system in an autarkist way. Using thriller's mechanisms, Santesmases built a plot with a detective movie development. Watching the movie, we became absorbed into a practically unknown world trough a vibrant revenge and redemption story which includes some of the usual main evils, habitually presented in any gangster organization environment; violence, extorts, drugs, illegal immigration and labour exploitation. During the filming some members of the Chinese community commented by their

exploitation. During the filming, some members of the Chinese community, supported by their embassy, tried to boycott the film because of an alleged damage to their public image. The consequence of this incident was that all the Chinese actors left the production and theirs roles had to be replaced by actors from other different Asian countries instead.

After the conflict, the Chinese consulate showed also reticence during the filming of Fernando Trueba’s movie “El embrujo de Shanghai” (2002), based on the fantastic Juan Marse’s novel. In this case, the reconstruction of the Chinese city during the 1920’s was a mechanism to create a dreamy atmosphere. The movie, set in the postwar period, was about the adventures of a group of children who used their imagination in forms of exotic tales set in the mysterious oriental land, to get away from oppressive reality. Due to its strong conspiratorial and onirical components, these fragments appear to be too rigid and stiff in the continuous sequential and weight its evocable essence.

Far away from the nostalgic and historical component of Fernando Trueba’s images, we find the humanism look in Isaki Lacuesta’s movie, “La leyenda del tiempo” (2006). Isaki Lacuesta uses the documentary structure to tell us two different stories, linked by the music of Camarón. The film is actually a moving thinking about absence and the lost feeling. The film splits off into two pieces where one of them is about a life of a young Japanese girl who travels from her hometown to Andalucía to learn how to sing flamenco, thinking that through such a noble art she could discover her inner self. The film presented the enormous fascination on Spanish culture expressed in the eyes of the Japanese, especially in everything related to gipsy dancing and singing. This idea had been already put forward in the Japanese filmmaker Shohei Imamura’s movie “La anguila” (Unagi, 1997), where the main character’s sister brings a comical touch to the movie by wearing a flamenco dress.

Unlike Lacuesta, the filmmaker Max Lemcke went the other way around (from Spain to Japan) in a documentary which portrays the activities within 24 hours of a flamenco company during its trip to Japan in “Japón & Olé” (2006). Lastly, recently premiered in the Málaga Spanish Film Festival, the movie “Zhao” (2008), directed by Susi Gonzalvo, goes into a pressing social issue such as the adoption of Chinese children by Spanish couples.

At the end of the day, the multicultural scenery is a fact in our country, and little by little filmmakers are consequently starting to make movies about these tensions we have to bear in the collide with the current changing environment. Possibly this is the beginning of a way of discovery that is just started.

by Beatriz Martinez Gomez

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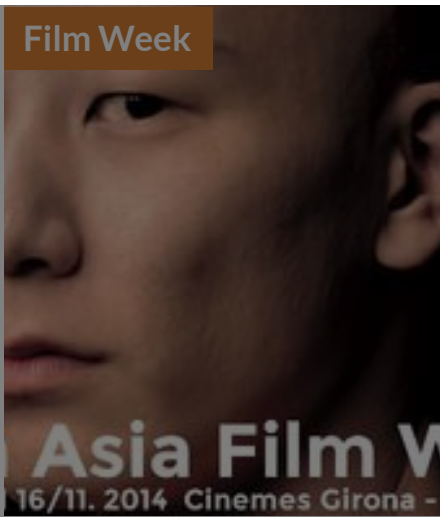
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