

## Using Film to Teach Japanese Culture: The Original Japanese *Shall We ダンス?* and Its American Remake, *Shall We Dance?*

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Using film to teach culture has a great advantage. Films appeal visually to students by giving immediate impact, thus offering a glimpse into other cultures, adding color to their understanding of how people of other cultures live their daily lives, and allowing students to experience vicariously their emotions. In this way, film's ability to show other people's lives in a certain time and place has a great advantage beyond just lecturing about them.

However, at the same time, we have to consider how true and accurate films are in regard to actual life in a certain time and place, since films also entertain and can be exaggerated. In this paper, I would like to discuss some of the ways to teach Japanese culture using two versions of *Shall We Dance?* – the Japanese original and the American remake.

Although both films treat the universal themes of family, marriage, music and dance, and the remake stayed close to the source material, these two versions are created by different directors with different cultural backgrounds, and thus naturally there are some differences in presentation. Also, the remake had to consider its target viewers and appeal to their values and tastes.

First, I will discuss the Japanese original "*Shall We Dance?*" (The title of the film is named after the song from Roger's and Hammerstein's *The King*

*and I.*) This film was directed by Masayuki Sudo and released in 1996. It was extremely popular in Japan, and received many awards, including the 1996 Japanese Academy Award for Best Picture. It is a very entertaining contemporary film which can be used to teach something about life in modern Japan. It was distributed by Miramax in 1997, becoming one of the highest grossing foreign movies in American cinema history. In 2004, an American remake of the same title was released.

### Story of the Japanese Original

Shohei Sugiyama is a serious, hard-working accountant with a wife and a daughter. He is an ordinary salaried worker with moderate accomplishments. He bought a house recently for his family, and is leading a seemingly peaceful life but feels something is lacking in his life. As he rides the train each night back home, he sees out of the train window a beautiful woman, Mai, standing alone at a window of a dance school looking out sadly. He was fascinated by her and after a few days, he plucks up enough courage to get off the train, goes to the dance studio and signs up for dance lessons. One night when Mai substitutes for his regular teacher, he invites her to dinner after the lesson, but he is refused by her. She bluntly tells him not to take dance lessons if he is after her. Sugiyama continues his dance lessons, however, because he does not want Mai to think that he signed up for the lessons because of her, and he gradually overcomes his initial awkwardness and finds himself really enjoying dance. He becomes enchanted by dance itself and he practices steps at home, in the office restroom, tapping his feet in the train, and underneath his office desk. Thus, dance becomes for him his outlet for expression of his uninhibited emotion and a metaphor for the excitement of life. He even admits to Mai later that when he is dancing he

really feels he is alive.

All this time, Sugiyama is keeping his dance lessons secret from his family. Sugiyama's wife, Masako, once wanted her husband to get out more and have fun since he does not seem to be so spirited everyday, starts to suspect that her husband is having an affair because he comes back late on certain nights and becomes more alive. So, Masako hires a private investigator to check up on her husband.

Mai, and other dance instructors begin to see Sugiyama is serious about dance, and his dance instructor encourages him to enter the Japan Amateur Dance Competition. Mai, who has been cold and aloof, then agrees to coach him. At the competition in the second dance, Sugiyama was distracted by his daughter's voice calling out "Dad" and stumbles ripping his partner's dress.

At the end, Sugiyama and his wife seem to renew their love. With his wife's encouragement Sugiyama goes to the farewell party for Mai who is going to leave for England again for further study of dance. He dances Mai's last dance with her, and the film ends here. Thus, the ending of Japanese version is somewhat ambivalent.

Before I discuss the American remake, I will talk about the American version of the Japanese original, the version most Americans watch as the Japanese *Shall We Dance?* The Japanese original is 136 minutes long, but the American version of the original Japanese is 118 minutes and 34 seconds long to be exact. According to Suo, the director of the original Japanese version, when Miramax wanted to distribute *Shall We Dance?* they wanted to shorten the movie to less than two hours. Miramax said that American audiences like fast paced movies and do not want to see subtitled foreign movies which will last over two hours. Thus, the film is 18 minutes shorter than the original, and a little short of two hours.

Watching the Japanese original, however, there are several places where

the film was cut and reconnected forcibly and unnaturally, which makes some scenes change abruptly without a natural transition. Thus, there are some places where I understood the abridged version for the first time after watching the original. It is interesting to note that by looking at the scenes that Miramax cut, we can begin to appreciate the American perception of Japanese culture. Now, I will discuss two parts which I think made some difference from the original.

These two parts that are cut from the original could reinforce the stereotypical view of Japanese women for the viewers of the American version. First, there is a scene where Sugiyama's wife, Masako, is driving with her daughter presumably on her way to work, dropping her daughter at the station from where she will take a train to go to school. In the car Masako is telling her daughter that she has stayed at home after her daughter was born but now she is working again outside the home to help pay the mortgage and she is happy about it.

Another scene that was cut is Mai's argument with her father. In this scene for the first time, Mai really shows her vehement emotion, and she tries to go against her father's wishes. Mai wants to change her dance partner, but her father does not let her do so. He believes that Mai's problem is not the partner but her own attitude toward dancing that she has to reflect on seriously. By cutting these two scenes, Miramax seems to portray the image of Japanese women as more conventional stay-at-home wives and dancers who obey their fathers' wishes. After viewing the last scene, viewers may understand Mai's situation better when, right after the incident at home, she has to substitute as a teacher for the group lesson. The same night after the lessons, she is quite rude when Sugiyama invites her to dinner. Thus, delicate and subtle changes of emotions are disconnected in the American version of the Japanese original as a result of cutting a little

here and there.

Although it is not a cut, there is a change from the original in the voice-over at the beginning of the movie. The following shows the difference between the two versions.

The voice-over at the beginning of the Japanese original:

What we call “social dance,” Europeans know as “ballroom dancing” which originated from dances at the court of King Louis. Ballroom dancing contains the dances of many other countries incorporated under the banner “English style.” This is what we came to know in Japan. In Europe, ballroom dance is one aspect of their culture and as such, can be enjoyed by young and old as a healthy pleasure. Adam Smith, economist and philosopher, once said that, “Dance and music are at the very basis of human pleasure.”

The voice-over at the beginning of the American version of the original Japanese film is totally different.

In Japan, ballroom dance is regarded with much suspicion. In a country where married couples don't go out arm in arm, much less say, “I love you” out loud, intuitive understanding is everything. The idea that a husband and wife should embrace and dance in front of others is beyond embarrassing. However, to go out dancing with someone else would be misunderstood and prove more shameful. Nonetheless, even for Japanese people, there is a secret wonder about the joys that dance can bring.

It is understandable that in the American version, it is not necessary to

explain the history of ballroom dancing, but the voice-over at the beginning of the US version exaggerates regarding the Japanese attitude toward ballroom dancing. Although it is true that the Japanese people do find it embarrassing to show and to see public displays of affection and prefer to indicate their feelings in a much more subdued manner. This gives the impression that there exists a social stigma on ballroom dancing, but the students should be told that nowadays ballroom dancing is quite popular among the older generation of Japanese people, and the opening monologue is somewhat exaggerated.

## The American Remake

The American remake of *Shall We Dance?* was directed by Peter Chelsom and released in 2004. This is rather a faithful remake of the 1996 Japanese original. John Clark, played by Richard Gere, is a wills and estate lawyer with a wife and two children and is leading a seemingly happy life. Like Sugiyama, however, John feels something is missing in his life. One day as he is returning home in the train he sees out of the train window a beautiful woman standing alone at the window of Miss Mitzi's Dance Studio. A few days later he gets off the train and goes to the dance studio and signs up for lessons.

Thus, the story follows the original version fairly closely. In both versions of the film, the plot follows a similar format: a middle-aged man, John, sees a beautiful woman, Paulina, in the window of a dance studio, and his desire to learn more about this woman leads him to sign up for dance lessons, and as he continues the lessons he begins to enjoy dance for its own sake, but all the time he does not tell his family about his dance lessons. In spite of being a faithful remake, however, we can glimpse cultural differences of the two

countries, in regard to the characters, set-up, and the way they present many incidents. Contrasting the two versions thus gives insight into the difference of the two cultures. Therefore, I would like to show some comparisons.

## I . Form and Structure

### 1 . Running Time:

Japanese original: 136 minutes

American version of the Japanese original: 118 minutes

Remake: 106 minutes

### 2 . Opening monologue

- a . The American version of the original Japanese gives the Japanese view of ballroom dancing.
- b . The American remake talks about John's monotonous, passionless life.

A million and half people ride the El trains every day. Over 20 years, I've written wills for about 8,000 of them. I sat with them as they combed through their assets, figured out which kid gets the painting over the fireplace, which one gets the antique spoon collection. Last thanks, parting shots, confessions.... People try to fit it all in. And once I've finished, another life has been summed up - assets and debts tallied, then zeroed out. You initial here and there, you sign at the bottom. Then, if you're like most clients, you look up, smile, and you ask the question I've heard for 20 years, "Is that it, then?" "That's it for the paperwork," I tell them. "The rest is up to you."

### 3. Ending

At the end of the Japanese version, Sugiyama goes alone to Mai's farewell party with encouragement from his wife. His wife, Masako, leaves a note that morning that she and their daughter will be gone all day, and come back late so he should go to Mai's party. Masako purposely goes shopping and plans to come back late so that her husband can go to the party without feeling guilty. This is Masako's way of being considerate of her husband. Thus in the Japanese original it is implied that Sugiyama and his wife renewed their love and deep down there is trust and understanding. The ending is still somewhat ambiguous, however, and Sugiyama's feeling for Mai may not be over. Thus in the Japanese version with the wife absent in the final scene, the mood of the last dance seems more like the farewell dance of a romantic couple. Japanese generally like ambiguity, lingering overtones, and images and the film leaves viewers wondering what will happen to the relationship between Sugiyama and Mai and Sugiyama and his wife.

It is interesting to mention at this point, that traditional Japanese literary works often have endings that do not conform to the western point of view. In other words, it is not a clear ending and makes readers wonder what will happen next.

In the American remake, on the other hand, while the story takes place around John and Paulina, enough weight is given to John and his wife Beverly's marriage relationship. John Clark takes his wife to Paulina's farewell party, and although he dances with Paulina, it is more like a dance between parting friends, and the dance with his wife seems more like a celebration of the renewal of love in their marriage. Thus, John rediscovers in his wife both a partner for life and for dance. Thus, the last scene of the American remake is John and his wife dancing, and everybody else dances with his/her partner. It seems that American viewers want to see a happy family,



a happy couple and friends, and some clear and happy ending to the film. When we consider that in America it is not really acceptable to say that one is unhappy, and is embarrassing to admit one is sad, it makes sense that as a general trend American viewers prefer a clear happy ending.

The differences in the last scenes show the differences in the cultures. Before going to the party, John picks up his wife at her work with a rose in his hand, saying that he can't go to the dance without his partner, his wife. Masayuki Sudo, the Japanese director of the Japanese version, said that this is one scene he could never create. A Japanese man would not go to his wife's work place in a tuxedo with a single rose in his hand. It's too embarrassing. The Japanese value lingering overtones in life and they prefer an open-ended ending, leaving the rest to the viewers' imagination.

## II. Characters

### 1. Shohei Sugiyama vs John Clark

#### a) Profession: salaried worker vs lawyer

The main character in the Japanese original is Mr. Sugiyama, a tired salaried worker, with whom many Japanese salaried workers can identify, whereas the American remake's main character, John Clark is a lawyer, who is from a more financially affluent class. It is not easy to speculate on why in the American version the main character is not an average salaried worker. One possible reason may be that the American viewers find it more interesting to see lawyers take dance lessons. American viewers want to see lawyers dance, because the image of a lawyer is that he/she is a proper, uptight, too serious professional person who would not take dance lessons. Is there humor in that this lawyer is taking dance lessons?

b) Reasons for keeping their dance lessons secret:

For Shohei Sugiyama: Although he started dance because he was attracted to Mai, it is more embarrassing, because, the public view of ballroom dancing (*Shakoo dansu* in Japanese) is somewhat suspect. It is not exactly shameful, but because ballroom dancing has a western origin, and since Japanese men and women are not used to dancing embracing each other in public, they feel awkward. Thus, the primary reason seems to be that he was embarrassed by the fact that he was taking lessons rather than by his attraction to Mai.

For John Clark: It is embarrassing for him as well, but for a different reason. He started dancing because he was attracted to Paulina, and he did not want his wife to know. Also, in American culture, men are somewhat embarrassed to dance because for many people ballroom dancing is considered rather a feminine pursuit. John did not tell his wife about his dance lessons because he did not want his wife and family to think that he wanted more than what he already had. Audrey Wells, the scenario/script writer of the American version, says that, "John could not say that he was not really happy when he has almost everything and seemingly lacking nothing, but in fact he was depressed mentally and felt something is missing, but it was embarrassing to admit that." In the film, John admits that he was ashamed for "not being happy when he had the perfect life and a wife whom he treasured." But at the end he found something he can be passionate about - what is missing in life. In the process of searching for it, he seems to rediscover his own family.

## 2. Masako Sugiyama vs Beverly Clark

Masako is a stay-at-home wife and mom in the American version of the Japanese original, whereas in the real original, she is working after thirteen

years of staying away from work because she had a child. In the American version, the wife, Beverly, is more visible than in the Japanese version. She is a career woman working at a department store.

It is interesting to point out that Masako apologizes to her husband for hiring a detective. It should be the husband who should apologize rather than the wife, since he is doing something behind her back. Masako does not confront her husband about her concerns, however. On the other hand, Beverly was really angry at her husband after finding out that he was taking dance lessons and keeping it secret. The scene of the argument with her husband, John, in the parking garage shows the assertiveness of American women.

### 3. Mr. Aoki and Link, Latin dancers

They are both very interesting characters and they add a great deal to these films. They both do Latin dance very well, but there is one significant attitude difference I noticed. I found their reactions to their coworkers' behavior after the dance competition demonstrate quite a significant cultural difference. Mr. Aoki in the Japanese version is timid and discouraged by his coworkers' reactions and withdraws from the confrontation, while Link, the American counterpart, confronts his coworkers and makes them realize he is not a feminine man.

## III. Other Elements

### 1. Elements of Comedy

Although both versions have comical characters, especially the main character's office colleagues who dance Latin dances and the students in the dance group, there are some differences. In the Japanese version, although

there are enough comic scenes and humor, it is more romantic as compared to the American remake. Humor is more subtle, and the film has more sad and serious overtones and pathos. The American version is more overtly comic than the Japanese version. For example, the American counterpart of the other dance teacher is a drinker who seems to be an alcoholic, and Beverly's coworker's serious marital problem is communicated rather comically.

## 2. Communication: Verbal and non-Verbal Societies

What is considered as a sign of reconciliation to the Japanese may seem to be only an everyday experience in America. For example, toward the end of the original Japanese, Sugiyama and Masako dance in the yard of their home and Sugiyama says that he was sorry that he made her lonely. For Japanese people this already signals their reconciliation. Intuitive understanding is very important in Japanese culture. However, in America where some couples say to each other "I love you." several time a day, Sugiyama's words may not be enough.

## 3. Romance and Sexuality

In a parallel scene where the main character is instructed by a dance instructor, the difference between the two cultures is clear. In the Japanese version, romantic interest between two people is there but displayed rather subtly, and shows platonic sensuality. On the other hand, the American remake is more sexual rather than romantic. When John and Paulina dance, it is outright physical, and the scene seems to show an American version of sensuality. When Paulina dances the rumba with John, she says:

The rumba is the vertical expression of a horizontal wish. You have

to hold her, like the skin on her thigh is your reason for living. Let her go, like your heart's being ripped from your chest. Throw her back, like you're going to have your way with her right here on the dance floor. And then finish, like she's ruined you for life.

## Conclusion:

The film *Shall We ダンス (dansu)?* is a very entertaining movie to teach something about life in contemporary Japan especially when compared to the American remake of the same title. Although the two versions of the film tell a similar story and there are some common elements, there are many subtle and not so subtle differences. In both versions, a middle-aged man searches to fill a void in his life and dance functions as a transforming force for him, and at the end through dancing he has learned to embrace his life.

There are some important differences, however. The main difference is the one between a culture where clear verbal expression is valued and the other where non-verbal intuitive understanding is valued. On the basis of this difference, one can understand many cultural differences between America and Japan; for example, the expression of love for the beloved.

I could also say, by extension, the endings of traditional Japanese literary works also follow this concept. Rather than giving a clear closure to a certain literary work, Japanese writers often let the readers imagine and use their own intuitive feelings to decide what will happen. In his essay titled "Japanese Aesthetics" Donald Keene talks about four Japanese aesthetic concepts and one of them, suggestion, is illustrated not only in literature and arts, but also in Japanese daily lives as they are displayed in *Shall We Dance?*

In spite of some basic cultural differences, *Shall We Dance?* seems to appeal to people across cultural and language barriers and students really

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seem to enjoy this movie. It is important, however, that when teaching culture courses, instructors make sure not to instill stereotypical ideas about other cultures. Instructors should remind students that the purpose of a movie is to entertain, first of all, and, therefore, unfair cultural stereotypes may be conveyed. Comparisons between the cultures may be discussed, but the reality of life in both cultures is much more complex than any movie can convey.

## Works Consulted

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…*Shall We ダンス ?*. Tokyo: Aiikusha, 1995

…*Shall We ダンス ? アメリカに行く*. Tokyo: Bungeishunju, 2005

### **Dr. Yonogi's Use of Film to Boost Cross-Cultural Understanding**

Every time that I take Hakuoh students to Indiana University - Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), I have the pleasure of observing and sometimes speaking to several of Dr. Reiko Yonogi's Japanese language and culture classes. Last summer (2007), I was fortunate to attend a fascinating comparative discussion of the original 1996 Japanese film *Shall We ダンス ?* and the 2004 American Richard Gere remake, *Shall We Dance?* The American students were readily able to identify a number of the more salient cultural differences that Dr. Yonogi has mentioned above (and one or two that are not covered).

After class, several of them eagerly asked me about Hakuoh's study abroad program for IUPUI students. As we continued our discussion outside the classroom, I shifted the conversation into Japanese to get a feel for how

well these enthusiastic potential Hakuoh exchange students are able to spontaneously interact in Japanese. Some of them were surprisingly good at thinking-on-their feet in Japanese, often those same individuals who had been the most perceptive in contrasting Japanese and US cultural mores through Dr. Yonogi's comparative *Shall We Dance?* prism. None of them are at Hakuoh as yet, but several may soon come. (A recent email from Yonogisensei, mentioned that as many as five students are interested in coming to study at Hakuoh.) When they come, how successful will they be is a key question. Six months ago, in Hakuoh University's first co-authored paper with an IUPUI faculty member I wrote,

“From April of 2008, the fifth group of IUPUI students arrived at Hakuoh for six months or a year of intensive Japanese studies. These three new students, the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth respectively (two women and a man), will follow the same full-scholarship program of Japanese language, culture, and International Relations that began in April of 2005 with the first three IUPUI students.” (Miller, 2008, 132)

From my somewhat geographically skewed Tochigi and occasional Indiana perspective, I believe that of those wonderful seventeen IUPUI students three have been the most successful, in part, because they have been best able to transcend Japanese language learning as an merely abstract academic experience and actually come to use their linguistic and cultural knowledge to function in Japanese society.

The first of these three, Mr. Kyle McLain, was one of the initial three IUPUI students to come to Hakuoh University. After formally transferring to Hakuoh in 2006, he graduated from our Business Management Faculty on

March 25, 2008 and has been working for a subdivision of Yahoo Japan since his graduation. When we met the other day, he told me that although work was difficult he felt that, “Hakuoh’s Japanese language and culture program, with the essential daily interaction I experienced as a regular student in Oyama, well prepared me to actually live and work in Japan.” (September 15, 2008 informal discussion) Clearly, Kyle had advanced beyond *kanji* Chinese (ideograph) character recognition, grammatical dexterity and didactic use of honorifics to an integrated holistic use of Japanese language (of which cultural awareness is a key element). He now uses his Japanese as a sophisticated communicative tool to achieve his business and social goals.

Another member of the first three IUPUI exchange students was Ms. Laura Woods. After completing her year at Hakuoh, she returned to IUPUI and graduated with a major in Japanese (which only became possible, as a result of her year studying with us). After taking her degree in Indianapolis, she returned to one of the two Hakuoh University affiliated high school campuses as an Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) of English for two years, only leaving Japan a few weeks ago to enter the Japanese studies graduate program in Indiana University, Bloomington. While Laura was teaching at our Ashikaga Tomita high school she was part of the team that received Super English Language High School (SELHi) status from Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). At that time, there were only 102 MEXT designated SELHis in the entire country, and Laura was a key member of the team that attended regional and national conferences to report on their research findings in Japanese. (Each SELHi has had its own unique instructional approach approved by MEXT; the Hakuoh University Ashikaga Tomita High School’s course of studies was centered on an “English language problem-solving” methodology.)

While working at our high school, Laura continued to study Japanese and



successfully passed the second level of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test of 1,000 Chinese *kanji* ideographs and 6,000 Japanese words. Just before she left Ashikaga, Laura was fortunate to be able to share in the excitement when the high school won the Asahi Shimbun's 90<sup>th</sup> Summer High School Baseball regional championship, thus representing Tochigi prefecture for the first time in 29 years in the national playoffs. (The subsequent national games held at Koshien stadium in Osaka are a major annual event in modern Japanese culture, akin to America's "March Madness" but for high school baseball teams rather than college NCAA basketball teams.)

Ms. Wood's replacement ALT at our Ashikaga high school campuses is Mr. Matthew Ross, who was the leader of the third group of IUPUI students to study at Hakuoh University two years ago. One of the major contributing ways for IUPUI and all exchange students to effectively internalizing Japanese (language and culture) is to actively participate in extra-curricular activities while studying. In Matt's case, it was *Shorinji Kempo* a Chinese-Japanese martial art form (like karate), linked to Zen Buddhism. The club is one of the most demanding on campus with daily practices, and Matt was a well-accepted regular member taking part in tournaments. Furthermore, when all of his fellow IUPUI exchange students had returned to Indiana for the seven-week summer break, Matt elected to stay in Japan to continue to practice and see some of the country outside of Tochigi (where the university is located). Although, Matt only started teaching a few weeks ago at our high school, his Japanese language skills and cultural understanding (learned at Hakuoh) will help him to inspire his Japanese secondary students to try and learn English as a practical interpersonal communicative tool rather than as an abstract academic measure of foreign language, chiefly useful as an evaluation criterion for entering college.

Both Matt Ross and his predecessor Laura Woods were privately hired

ALTs, which have - from 2006 - outnumbered the government sponsored Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (JET) foreign assistant teachers. Japan's ambitious "team-teaching" program pairing ALTs with Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) is now in its 21<sup>st</sup> year and has literally changed the face of English learning in Japan. The JTE-ALT joint teaching idea was originally conceived as a bold step toward teaching English communicatively - stressing speaking and listening. And it seems to be working well, students are now much more accustomed to interacting with non-Japanese and JTEs have significantly improved their verbal English skills because of the considerable interaction with the monolingual ALTs. However, when some of the ALTs view their two years in Japan as a paid vacation and fail to make steady efforts to learn enough Japanese and cultural elements to better relate to their students there are difficulties.

In fact, most of the problems with the ALT program can be traced back to the lack adequate prior ALT training, especially in Japanese proficiency and cultural sensitivity. Therefore, innovative approaches like Dr. Yonogi's clever use of the Japanese and US versions of *Shall We Dance?*, in conjunction with Japanese language acquisition are just the kind of thought provoking creativity that are needed. In this way, culture is used as essential background inseparable from language learning. Furthermore, the visual images of film, in particular, merge with the authentic dialogue to form an easy-to-remember mental template readily accessible for similar social situations.

This semester unusually, there are only two IUPUI exchange students studying at Hakuoh: Keleih Kitano and Chris Hilgenberg both of whom had a chance to view the Japanese version of *Shall We ダンス?* in Dr. Yonogi's class, but not the remake with Richard Gere (as it has been released on DVD just recently). Keleih felt that the plot of the Japanese original was very

believable, easy to follow and the interrelationships between the characters (Mr. and Mrs. Sugiyama, as well as Mr. Sugiyama and Mai) were quite representative of modern Japan and how Japanese adults interact. She felt that she picked up many useful expressions from the movie. Chris also enjoyed the film greatly and felt that he learned much about Japan as it really is nowadays (Keleih had already been to Japan - on Hakuoh's short summer program - but he was coming in blind, so to speak). Both students are very interested in watching the US version to see how it was adapted to American cultural expectations.

However, Keleih, Chris, Kyle, Laura, Matt and the other 12 IUPUI students who had studied at Hakuoh, are not representative of most US overseas exchange students.

Although "the overall numbers of Americans studying abroad - which has risen 150 percent in the past decade - continues to set records, rising 8.5 percent in 2005-2006, according to the Institute of International Education's (IIE) 2007 report on international education exchange.... The National Security Language Initiative... (in) an effort by government agencies to increase dramatically the number of Americans learning critically needed foreign languages... reports in Open Doors 2007 that, while Europe remains the most popular destination for U.S. students, the strongest growth took place in other regions: the Middle East (up 31 percent), Asia (up 26 percent).... (But) most U.S. students studying abroad participated in programs of eight weeks or less, 37 percent in programs lasting an entire semester, and 5.5 percent in programs lasting an entire year or longer, the study said."

(<http://www.america.gov/st/washfile-english/2007/November/>

200711131630101CJsamohT0.3882868.html, accessed 9/21/2008)

This tendency by American (non-IUPUI) students to go abroad for brief terms, take a few classes (usually in English, Korea for example is aggressively increasing the number of university courses taught in English - to help Korean students, many of whom go abroad to study), learn a few colorful phrases in the target language, and then return to the US “internationalized” is somewhat counterproductive. This cultural and linguistic dabbling may actually be reinforcing stereotypical views of foreign nations, their inhabitants, and cultures as the short-term students are constantly (usually unfavorably) comparing their temporary surroundings to their home country. Successful students significantly deepen their experience in the foreign country with authentic interaction and understanding well beyond that of a short-term cultural tourist.

Fortunately, this is not at all the case with the excellent IUPUI students studying at Hakuoh. Obviously, the cross-cultural sensitivity and language instruction received in Indianapolis under Dr. Yonogi prior to their arrival in Tochigi is key. To have three of the seventeen IUPUI students (17.64 percent) master Japanese to a degree that they are comfortable working in Japan for a prolonged period, speaks volumes for the strength of the program and the dedication of the students. Possibly other year-at-Hakuoh “graduates” will also rise to the fore, Joe Sanders recently emailed me about how to get a teaching position in Tochigi after he receives his degree. Ultimately, we would like to see many of the graduates work at Japanese firms in Indiana where their Japanese language and cultural understanding would make them ideal candidates to bridge any corporate misunderstandings. The cultural comparison and contrast of this Japanese original film and it’s subsequent Hollywood version is amazingly good preparation for such a role.

In terms of the two versions of *Shall We Dance?*, historically this is only the most recent example of an American remake of a successful Japanese film. Horror films are the most contemporary examples of Hollywood remakes of Japanese films. First there was the 2002 film *The Ring*, directed by Gore Verbinski and starring Naomi Watts as an inferior (heavily computer graphic-oriented) remake of the 1998 *The Ringu* directed by Hideo Nakata with Nanako Matsushima. Somewhat better was the 2005 US adaptation of *Dark Water* starring Jennifer Connelly and directed by Walter Salles, which was originally called *Honogurai mizu no soko kara* and also directed by Hideo Nakata with Hitomi Koroki. Another Japanese horror film, the 2003 *Ju-on* directed by Takeshi Shimizu with Megumi Okina was less successfully remade in 2004 as *The Grudge* by the same director, with the American version starring Sarah Gellar.

Going back several decades to the so-called Golden Age of Japanese film, there were a number of excellent US and European remakes of Japanese masterpieces; for example John Surges' 1960 *The Magnificent Seven* from Akira Kurosawa's 1954 *The Seven Samurai* and Sergio Leone's 1967 *A Fistful of Dollars* with Clint Eastwood from Kurosawa's 1961 *Yojimbo* with Toshio Mifune. However, it seems that one of the main reasons that Hollywood remakes foreign films is that, "American audiences generally don't want to go to the movies to read subtitles," the unnamed President of Exhibitor Relations Co. warns in a new MIT Press book, *Subtitles-on the Foreignness of Film*. ([http://www. \(geraldpeary.com/essays/stuv/subtitles.html](http://www.geraldpeary.com/essays/stuv/subtitles.html), accessed 9/22/2008)

As the United States becomes more open to the world's languages and cultures this trend could be changing as Kim Voynar's April 11, 2008 piece illustrates. (<http://www.cinematical.com/2008/04/11/fan-rant-for-those-who-cant-orwont-read-subtitles-persep/>, accessed 9/22/2008)

“Probably releasing an English-language (*Persepolis*) version will ensure this excellent film is seen by many people who would otherwise be turned off by the need to read subtitles. I get that, really I do. But still, a part of me cringes at the notion that a dubbed version of the film is coming out. I hate dubs, even of anime films (case in point: the charming *Kiki's Delivery Service*, which I absolutely loved in the original Japanese version, wasn't nearly as delightful in the English-dubbed version with Kirsten Dunst and Phil Hartman).

If this turns out to be the case, and younger Americans find that they are willing to go to the extra trouble of reading subtitles to better access other cultures, then Hollywood remakes will become a thing of the past. Clearly, the willingness to accept subtitled films bodes well for foreign language learning and better cultural awareness. Dr. Yonogi has skillfully promoted this using the currently available films (the subtitled Japanese original and US English remake) to encourage cross-cultural interaction and assimilation so successfully among her IUPUI students, that three of them have gone on to live and work in Japan using Japanese for most daily communication.

## Reference

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