

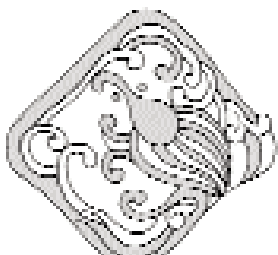
means for increasing farm output are described, including "indoor farming" (hydroponic gardening). This method of "computerized farming" can be used to provide produce suited to the Japanese diet.

This segment brings up an essential issue for the next generation of Japanese citizens, commonly stated in America as "How are you going to keep them down on the farm?" The realization is coming that in Japan, the next generation may not be farmers.

This video series can provide a basis for discussion of Japanese lifestyles and expectations for the future, and most certainly dispels the view that Japanese society is a monolithic entity. At the very least, the differing roles of Japanese society, industry, and government are illustrated. In conjunction with the companion CD-ROM, this series would be an asset to secondary school or college undergraduate courses on modern Japanese culture. ■

Thomas Dolan

TOM DOLAN teaches Global Issues, International Relations, and American Government at Georgia State University in Atlanta. He served as U.S. liaison to government offices in the Republic of Korea (1985–87) and Japan (1992–94).



Interweaving mythic and supernatural elements, writer/director Jacky (Je-kyu) Kang's *The Ginkgo Bed* dramatizes the tale of doomed lovers whose souls have transmigrated to, and remain trapped for over 1,000 years in, the expertly hand-carved wood of a ginkgo bed. The film proper begins in contemporary Seoul as 32-year-old college art instructor Su-hyun takes possession of the antique bed, oblivious to its tragic history even as he reignites its drama. Soon beset with baffling impulses, hallucinatory visions, and terrifying nightmares, Su-hyun struggles to understand his experiences.

As revealed in flashbacks, Su-hyun is, in fact, the reincarnated Jung-mun, a court musician enamored of Mi-Dan a thousand years ago. Jung-mun's transcendent playing of the *kayagum*, music described as "soft as the water and sharp as the sword . . . the sounds of the wind," wins Mi-Dan's affection. But brutal General Hwang, wartime conqueror who has taken Mi-Dan as his prize, longs for and demands passionate devotion, which she repeatedly refuses. A jealous Hwang pursues the secretive pair to a beach rendezvous where he beheads Su-hyun before Mi-Dan's eyes. The thwarted lovers' spirits travel to two ginkgo trees, blossoming side by side on a hillside. Ever vengeful, Hwang, taking the form of a hawk, uses lightning to kill Mi-dan's tree, thereafter sculpted into the exquisite bed where her spirit dwells. Now, 170 years later, Su-hyun unwittingly frees Mi-dan's spirit, reactivating

The Ginkgo Bed

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
JACKY KANG

CINELINE CORPORATION
4688 CHELSEA LANE
LAKE OSWEGO, OR
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1996. 88 MINUTES



Photo courtesy of CineLine Corporation

Hwang's determination to destroy them both once and for all.

Subplots include Su-hyun's girlfriend, a doctor named Sun-Young, whose medical career is threatened by her involvement in a scientifically inexplicable incident. Sun-Young pronounces a young man dead, not knowing Mi-Dan has borrowed the patient's body to warn Su-hyun, who cannot see Mi-Dan (in fact, he walks straight through her) in her ethereal form. By the time Mi-Dan returns her vehicle, the young man's eyes have been

donated to another. After the "dead" man returns, the hospital administrator assumes gross incompetence on Sun-Young's part and forces her to quit. Convinced by Su-Hyun of the truth of the extraordinary situation, Sun-Young offers her own body for Mi-Dan's use in the final confrontation and secures Mi-Dan's promise to return before the lunar eclipse ends.

Grisly horror, flashy special effects, jagged editing, and an energetically moving camera result in awkward juxtapositions of spiritual beliefs with a visceral cinematic style. Fast-paced and emotionally aggressive, technique often overwhelms substance. And despite its effective and harmonious blend of traditional and contemporary music, *The Ginkgo Bed* frequently fails to achieve a thematically satisfying union of violent and mythic content. That is, the story repeatedly foregrounds loud verbal and fierce physical battles, all but eclipsing the fascinating legend and intriguing cultural content, including a brief funeral scene, a group of individuals testifying to transmigration, a "cultural property" monument to the destroyed ginkgo, glimpses of musical training and performing, and superb music.

Unfortunately, the pervasive intrusion of gore limits classroom use. In one scene, only six minutes into the film, we watch an unknown man viciously beating and raping a woman, tearing her clothes off and ferociously kissing her breasts. General Hwang attacks him, not to protect

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the woman, but to reach into the chest cavity of the drunken brute to tear out his heart, an action accompanied by intensifying sound effects. Though partially obscured by shadow, there's no confusion over exactly what unsavory brutality occurs to the woman and then to the rapist. Hwang holds up and admires the pulsing heart he's seized.

In addition, as mentioned above and as shown in an explanatory flashback, Hwang beheads Jung-mun, after which Princess Mi-dan cradles the severed head. Similarly, in one dream, Su-hyun's arm is sliced off, and late in the film, Hwang slashes two doctors' faces and throats and, shortly thereafter, unmercifully attacks Su-hyun. In fairness, *The Ginkgo Bed's* gore and bloodshed is no worse than most, and is even more restrained than some contemporary horror films. Nevertheless, the repetitive violence and its severity must give teachers of any grades below high school serious reservations. Even upper-level instructors should watch and carefully prepare for *The Ginkgo Bed* before showing it to any class.

Though Hwang's unmitigated cruelty and savagery, as he struggles for dominance, are consistent with contemporary standards, the ubiquitous violence all but eclipses the more productive cultural and historical material. Teachers should note the choice of ginkgos (also spelled ginkgo) known as trees of love because they cross pollinate, male to female, to produce edible nuts. Their leaves yield some medicinal benefits. Lovely

trees, ginkgos line boulevards, populate parks and Buddhist temple grounds, and grow as tall as 60 meters.

Three years in production, *The Ginkgo Bed* cost a reported \$3.5 million, a comparatively large Korean budget, amply on display in the beautiful cinematography, atmospheric lighting, and lovely, opening animation. Shot entirely on location in South Korea (copyright 1996), the film won the 1996 Grand Bell Award for Jacky Kang as Best New Director of the Year and also features award winning actors. The film runs 88 minutes, in Korean, with easily read English subtitles. ■

Diane Carson

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