

Takashi MIIKE

A highly prolific and controversial Japanese filmmaker, Takashi MIIKE was born on August 24, 1960 in Yao, Osaka, Japan. Under the guidance of renowned filmmaker Shohei IMAMURA (a two-time Palme d'Or winner at Cannes), Miike graduated from the Yokohama Vocational School of Broadcast and Film.

Miike's first films were television productions, but he also began directing several high-quality direct-to-video releases. His theatrical debut came in 1995 with Shinjuku Triad Society, and its success gave him the freedom to work on more ambitious projects. One of the most successful Japanese directors currently working, he has also garnered a strong cult following in the West that is growing rapidly as more of his films become available in translated form on DVD.

Some of Miike's most popular films include Audition, the Dead or Alive trilogy, Ichi the Killer, Gozu, Izo, and Big Bang Love, Juvenile A (soon to be released by AnimEigo).

Miike has achieved international notoriety for depicting shocking scenes of extreme violence and bizarre sexual perversions. Many of his films contain graphic and lurid bloodshed, often portrayed in an over-the-top, cartoonish manner. Much of his work depicts the activities of criminals, and he is known for his black sense of humor and for pushing the boundaries of censorship as far as they will go.

A talented filmmaker who dabbles in a variety of genres, in 1998, Miike was picked as one of the ten non-English directors most likely to succeed by TIME magazine. He has won almost two dozen awards in his short career, including Best Asian Film at the 2001 Fant-Asia Film Festival for Visitor Q, Best Film at the Sitges-Catalonian International Film Festival in 2003 for Gozu and 2004 for Izo, the Special Jury Prize at the 2004 Gerardmer Film Festival for The Happiness of the Katakuris, and both the FIPRESCI Prize and KNF Award at the 2000 Rotterdam International Film Festival for Audition. Additionally, he was the only Japanese director selected to participate in Showtime's "Masters of Horror" series, although his film, Imprint, could not be shown because the content was too extreme for even cable television's relaxed standards.

Takashi Miike, without his signature sunglasses, has an uncredited appearance in Graveyard of Honor as the assassin who attempts to kill the Godfather. Fortunately for the Boss, Ishimatsu appears and bashes Miike over the head with a chair. Miike has commented in an interview that he does this to save money on casting fees. Rumor has it that Quentin Tarantino uses the same excuse.

Graveyard of Honor

Takashi Miike's Graveyard of Honor ("Shin jingi no hakaba," literally translated as New Graveyard of Honor) is a remake of the 1975 Kinji FUKASAKU-helmed Graveyard of Honor. Based on a real-life yakuza from Fukasaku's own home district of Mito, the 1975 version stars Tetsuya WATARI as the alternately monstrous and bewildered Rikio ISHIKAWA. Fukasaku, who also directed The Yakuza Papers and Battle Royale series, won the Blue Ribbon Award for Best Director in 1976 for this classic film. The talented Fukasaku, who worked in genres ranging from science-fiction to samurai and yakuza to love-comedies, influenced filmmakers worldwide. He is still highly respected today, drawing admiration from such notable directors as Quentin Tarantino and John Woo.

The main character of Graveyard of Honor was Rikio Ishikawa (1926-1956), who received his sakazuki (family bond) from Kaoru WADA, the chief of the Wada-gumi, in 1942. Ishikawa soon took charge of the black market in the South Exit area of Shinjuku Station in Tokyo. In an attempt to deal with complaints from one of his men, in 1946, he tried to negotiate with Wada but was instead ordered to sever his pinkie. Later that year, he severely injured Wada with a short sword, and the Boss took a month to recover from the attack. Ishikawa was imprisoned for eighteen months due to the attack, and upon his release, he was ordered to stay away from the Kanto Plain region (Tokyo area) for ten years.

Ishikawa moved to Osaka, but he returned to Tokyo in 1949 (well in advance of his 10-year ban) and shot fellow Yakuza Kouzaburo IMAI. Upon Ishikawa's surrender, he was sentenced to ten years in Fuchu Prison in Tokyo. On February 2, 1956, he committed suicide by jumping from the roof of Fuchu Prison. In his prison cell was his final correspondence: a poem reading "Oowarai sanjyunen no bakasawagi" (It is so funny, my life of 30 years was a crazy party).

For his rebellion against Yakuza honor, Rikio Ishikawa became a legend in the Yakuza world.

Comparing the two versions of Graveyard of Honor, Fukasaku's is much closer to the real-life Ishikawa situation than Miike's for a variety of reasons. First, Miike changed the main character's name to Rikuo ISHIMATSU. Also, Fukasaku kept to the original setting and facts of the case, while Miike chose to showcase the late 1980s and early 1990s in his version. Miike's reason was to tie the story into the compelling drama behind the bust of Japan's economic bubble in 1989. In Miike's version, Ishimatsu experiences both the economic good times and the bad.

In the climactic death scene, Miike used much more blood than Fukasaku's original, comparing his as using a bathtub in relation to Fukasaku's bucket. Miike's version also put more emphasis on the love story between Ishimatsu and Chieko.

According to Miike, his intention with this film was not to rival Fukasaku's version. That was one of the reasons he chose a modern setting for the story. He refers to his movie as a very violent younger brother of the original.

Both versions' leading men garnered remarkable acclaim for their performances. Fukasaku's version was the first film for Tetsuya WATARI after a long hospitalization following a near-death experience, and after shooting, he returned to the hospital. Fukasaku insisted that Watari star in his film, commenting that only Watari could have played the part. A former delinquent, Goro KISHITANI (Miike version) stepped away from his typically "nice guy" roles to explore the darker side of a man's psyche. Kishitani grew a Yakuza-style punch perm, shaved his eyebrows, lost weight, and reportedly terrified the entire crew by keeping in character all the time (too much?). He has regularly appeared in Miike films since Graveyard of Honor.

Yakuza

Yakuza are members of traditional organized crime groups in Japan, a.k.a "The Japanese Mafia." Outside of Japan, the term also refers to traditional Japanese organized crime in general. Today, the yakuza are one of the largest organized crime cultures in the world.

The term "Yakuza" comes from a Japanese card game, Oicho-Kabu, and means "good for nothing." Similar to baccarat, it originates from the worst hand in the game, a set of eight (or "Ya" in the traditional Japanese form of counting), nine ("Ku"), and three ("Sa"). The Ya-Ku-Sa hand requires the most skill at judging opponents and the least luck to win. The name was also used because it signified bad fortune, presumably for anyone who went up against the group.

There is no single origin for all Japanese yakuza organizations; rather, they developed from different elements of traditional Japanese society. Most modern yakuza organizations trace their origin to two groups which emerged in 18th century Japan: tekiya (peddlers) and bakuto (gamblers). As Japan began to industrialize and urbanization became more prevalent, a third group, called gurentai, began to form. Their status as a traditional yakuza group has been debated, but they were the origin of the violent gangs that peddle their brutality for profit.

The Yakuza follow the traditional Japanese hierarchial structure of oyabun-kobun, where the kobun (foster child) owes their allegiance to the oyabun (foster parent; the boss, or "Godfather"). The oyabun-kobun relationship is formalized by the ceremonial sharing of sake from a single cup. Members of yakuza gangs cut their family ties and transfer their loyalty to the gang boss. They refer to each other as family members - fathers and elder and younger brothers. The Yakuza is populated entirely by men, and there are usually no women involved except for the Oyabun's wife (called "o-neh-san" or "ane-san," older sister).

Yubitsume, or finger cutting, is a form of penance or apology. Upon a first offense, the transgressor must cut off the tip of his left pinky finger and hand the severed portion to his boss. Its origin stems from the traditional way of holding a Japanese sword. The bottom three fingers of each hand are used to grip the sword tightly, with the thumb and index fingers slightly loose. The removal of digits starting with the little finger moving up the hand to the index finger progressively weakens a person's sword grip. The idea is that a person with a weak sword grip then has to rely more on the group for protection, reducing individual action.

Until recently, the majority of yakuza income came from protection rackets in shopping, entertainment and red-light districts within their territory. However, they have expanded to various other criminal activities, including

blackmail, money laundering, drug trafficking, arms smuggling, Internet SNS fraud, and international crime.

“Boss:”

In prison slang, guards are referred to as “Boss.” A great compendium of prison slang can be found at <http://dictionary.prisonwall.org/>.

Newspaper: “1989 Proclaimed First Year of Heisei Era”

Heisei is the current era name in Japan. The Heisei era started in January 8, 1989, when Akihito, the current Emperor of Japan, succeeded to the throne after the death of his father, Hirohito, the Showa Emperor.

The name “Heisei” is taken from two Chinese history and philosophy books, Records of the Grand Historian and Classic of History. In Records of the Grand Historian, a sentence translating to “peace inside and prosperity outward” appears in the part honoring the wise rule of the legendary Chinese Emperor Shun. In Classic of History, a sentence translating to “land is peaceful and sky is clear” appears. By combining both meanings, “Heisei” is said to mean “peace everywhere.”

As the Heisei era dawned in 1989, Japan had reached the apex of one of the most rapid economic spurts in its history, but by 1991, the economy plummeted and Japan saw the end of its famed “bubble economy.” Subsequently, Japan experienced “The Great Slump in Heisei,” which consisted of more than a decade of price deflation and a largely stagnant GDP as Japan’s banks struggled to resolve their bad debts and companies in other sectors struggled to restructure. This recession had a dramatic effect on the lives of the Yakuza.

“Eh... Mori’s in it up to his neck.”

Yoshiro Mori is a Japanese politician who served as the 85th and 86th Prime Minister of Japan from April 5, 2000 April 26, 2001. His position in Office was marred with a long list of faux-pas, unpopular decisions, PR mistakes, and gaffes.

“Who knows? Visiting the hot springs, maybe?”

A hot spring (or “onsen,” in Japanese) is a spring that is produced by the emergence of geothermally-heated groundwater from the earth’s crust. Being located in the “Pacific Ring of Fire,” Japan is in a volcanic region and is home to many hot springs. Visiting an onsen is a quintessential Japanese experience and is a popular tourist attraction.

“Mr. Yukawa’s in critical condition with a fractured skull.”

A skull fracture is a break in one or more of the bones in the skull caused by a head injury. Isolated skull fractures are not very serious injuries, but usually the presence of a skull fracture indicates that significant enough impact occurred to cause brain trauma, which is quite serious. Broken fragments of skull can lacerate or bruise the brain or damage blood vessels.

“Whiskey! This is my best Brother!”

Whiskey refers to a broad category of alcoholic beverages that are distilled from fermented grain mash and aged in wooden casks. Different grains are used for different varieties, including barley, malted barley, rye, malted rye, wheat, and maize.

“Vitals? --- 80 over 50, pulse 95.”

The vital signs taken here are blood pressure and heart rate (or pulse). The Godfather’s blood pressure is low (a healthy human adult has a blood pressure of 120 over 80), and his heart rate is high (a sleeping adult’s pulse ranges from 40-60 beats per minute).

“You know damn well that we run Baccarat House and that white-girls club.”

Baccarat is a gambling card game similar to Faro and to Basset. There are three accepted variants of the

game, one of which relies strictly on chance and the other two which also incorporate skill. Baccarat is a simple game with only three possible results - "Player," "Banker," and "Tie."

In Baccarat, cards 2-9 are worth face value, 10s and face cards are worth zero, and Aces are worth 1 point. The card values are added together, and if the total equals or exceeds 10, the tens digit is dropped and the new value is the score. For example, a hand consisting of 5 and 8 is worth 3 ($5+8=13$, then the tens digit is dropped for the score of 3). A hand consisting of 2 and 4 is worth 6 ($2+4=6$, no tens digit to drop). A hand consisting of 4 and 6 is worth zero, or Baccarat. The name "Baccarat" is unusual in that the game is named after the worst hand, worth 0 (or "Baccarat"). The highest score that can be achieved is 9.

As played in Las Vegas, Baccarat is a pure game of chance, since all decisions are made for the players. Its sole purpose seems to be to allow the players to pretend they are James Bond. James Bond is obviously disgusted, since in the most recent Bond film, *Casino Royale*, he dyed his hair blonde and started playing Texas Hold-Em (a real man's game).

"And from the looks of it, it's not speed, either. It's 'H.'"

Heroin is an endorphin that creates a sense of well-being upon entering the bloodstream (usually through intravenous injection, though it can also be injected in the oral or visual cavities, or smoked). It is used both as a pain-killer and a recreational drug. Its high potential for causing addiction may quickly lead to tolerance. It is illegal to manufacture, possess, or sell heroin in the United States and Japan. Popular street names for heroin include smack, Bobby, black tar, horse, boy, and H.

Croquettes.

A croquette (also spelled croquet) is a parcel of food such as minced meat or vegetables, shaped into a cylinder or circle, encased in breadcrumbs and deep fried. Known in Japan as "korokke," it is a very popular item that is sold at every supermarket and butcher shop. It is made of mainly potatoes with some other ingredients such as vegetables, and maybe less than 5% meat.

"We've got something called 'circumstantial evidence.'"

Circumstantial evidence is unrelated facts that, when considered together, can be used to infer a conclusion about something unknown. Circumstantial evidence is usually a theory, supported by a significant quantity of corroborating evidence. It is used to establish guilt or innocence through reasoning.

"Not bad, eh? Prosecution delayed..."

In the Japanese legal system, delaying the prosecution is sort of a pretrial suspended sentence. Essentially this is a verdict of "be good and we won't file the charges."

"Slow down! Limos need to be driven slowly!"

A limousine (shortened to "limo") is an unusually long luxury car, traditionally black or white in color. Limousines are most commonly driven by chauffeurs and have a partition between the driver compartment and the passenger compartment. The word "limousine" is derived from the name of the French region Limousin, where the inhabitants wore a hood perceived to be similar to the profile of the car.