

VARIETY

Vertigo spins remake biz

MAY 14, 2005 | 03:28PM PT

South Korea has become a veritable gold mine of must-buy plots

David Chute (<http://variety.com/author/t8looi/>)

In some ways, the U.S. version of the Korean hit “Oldboy,” under way at Universal, is the *ne plus ultra* of the recent trend of American movie studios remaking Asian genre films.

In fact, one film critic noted that “Oldboy,” an extravagantly bloody Park Chan-wook revenge saga, bears an uncanny resemblance to the 1976 Brian De Palma melodrama “Obsession” — itself an all-too reverent homage to Alfred Hitchcock’s 1958 classic “Vertigo.”

In short, the current “Oldboy” revamp — directed by youthful Taiwanese-American helmer Justin Lin (“Better Luck Tomorrow”) — is literally a remake of a remake of a remake.

Perhaps something like this was bound to happen, as the famously limited stock of distinct movie plots make the rounds from one corner of the globe to another.

And it’s almost certainly a coincidence that most (verging upon all) of the current Hollywood remakes of Asian films have been set up — and are

being co-produced — by a company called Vertigo Entertainment.

It's almost certainly not a coincidence that Vertigo was founded by a Korean-American go-getter named Roy Lee — and that the majority of its projects are derived from successful South Korean originals.

Vertigo films that have been most prominent up to now have originated elsewhere in Asia. In fact, horror titles “The Ring” (2002) and “The Grudge” (2004), and the upcoming “Dark Water,” were all first born — to successful B.O. — in Japan.

And perhaps the most anticipated film in the Vertigo pipeline to date is Martin Scorsese's “The Departed,” a complex police procedural of simultaneous efforts within a mob organization and police department to weed out the moles that their opponents have embedded in their respective ranks. Starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Matt Damon, Mark Wahlberg and Jack Nicholson, it's based on Hong Kong's award-winning “Infernal Affairs” trilogy (2002-2003), directed by Alan Mak and Andrew Lau.

Still, by far the most prolific Asian source of remake properties has been Korea.

There are different explanations for this, starting with the fact that — in the absence of a viable homevid business, which can't get off the ground in Korea because of rampant piracy — Korean filmmakers particularly need this revenue stream.

According to Lee, Korean filmmakers have become adept at making films that are universally commercial. They appeal to a very wide audience and are relatively easy to adapt.

A likelier explanation of the Korean trend is that the local film industry —

determined to beat American imports at the their own popcorn-movie game — has become dedicated to hooky high-concept premises of a sort that translate easily from one culture to another.

As a result, South Korea has become a veritable gold mine of must-buy plots. Consider some of the projects that have been working their way through the Hollywood pipeline over the past several years:

Lee Hyun-seung's "Il Mare" (2000). The remake is currently shooting in Chicago, for Warner Bros. and Vertigo, under Argentinian director Alejandro Agresti ("A Less Bad World"). It reunites "Speed" co-stars Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock, and Christopher Plummer plays Reeves' ailing father. The movie could be described as "Somewhere in Time" meets "You've Got Mail," as two occupants of the same house, in different time periods, realize they can communicate with each other, and fall in love.

The U.S. version of Kim Ji-woon's "Tale of Two Sisters" (2003) is in active script development at DreamWorks, with Rowan Joffe at the keyboard for producers Walter Parkes and Laurie McDonald.

Jo Jin-gyu's "My Wife Is a Gangster" (2001) was purchased by Miramax for Queen Latifah, who has been tapped to play the cranky female gang boss, forced into a marriage of inconvenience with an ordinary Joe. A script has been completed, but a director is not likely to be hired until September, when the dust clears from the Weinstein brother's recent departure.

Maverick and Vertigo are actively developing a script based on Kwak Jae-yong's 2001 hit "My Sassy Girl," a bitter-sweet romantic comedy with a third act of pure heartache. DreamWorks has signed on with Gurinder Chadha ("Bride and Prejudice") attached to direct.

U.S. version of Park Young-hoon's intriguing 2003 sci-fi pic "Addicted" is being written and will be directed by Michael Petroni ("Till Human Voices Wake Us") for Spitfire Prods. and Vertigo.

As is to be expected, several remake projects have fallen by the wayside.

These include an MGM redo of Park Cheol-kwan's "Hi, Dharma!" (2001), a comedy about a group of gangsters on the lam who hide out in a Buddhist monastery. Also, Chang Yoon-hyun's grisly 1999 serial-killer thriller "Tell Me Something" is no longer in active development at Fox 2000.

© Copyright 2013 Variety Media, LLC, a subsidiary of Penske Business Media, LLC. Variety and the Flying V logos are trademarks of Variety Media, LLC.