

Document Citation

Title	Millennium mambo
Author(s)	Derek Elley
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	2001 May 28
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	19
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Qian xi man po (Millennium mambo), Hou Hsiao-Hsien,, 2001

MILLENNIUM MAMBO

(QIANXI MANBO)

(TAIWAN-FRANCE)

A 3H Prods., SinoMovie.com (Taiwan)/Paradis Films, Orly Films (France) production. (International sales: Fortissimo Film Sales, Amsterdam/H.K.) Produced by Hou Hsiao-hsien, Eric Heumann. Executive producers, Hwang Wern-ying, Gilles Ciment.

Directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien. Screenplay, Chu Tien-wen. Camera (color), Mark Lee; editor, Liao Ching-sung; music, Lim Giong, FISH, Yoshihiro Hanno; art director, Hwang Wern-ying; costumes, Wang Kuan-i; sound, (Dolby Digital/DTS Digital), Tu Duu-chih, Kuo Li-chi. **Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (competing)**, May 19, 2001. Running time: 120 MIN.

Vicky Shu Qi
Jack Jack Gao
Hao-hao Tuan Chun-hao
Jun Jun Takeuchi
Ko Ko Takeuchi
Doze Niu Chen-er

With: Kao Kuo-guang, Chen Yi-hsuan, Jenny Tseng, Tramy Wat, Jo Jo Huang, Huang Hsiu, Pen Kang-yu, Chang Pro, Ting Chien-chung, Hsu Heui-ni.
(Mandarin dialogue)

By DEREK ELLEY

Lustrous lensing by Mark Lee and spirited playing by actress Shu Qi are the only survivors from "Millennium Mambo," an empty, overmannered snoozer that shows Taiwanese helmer Hou Hsiao-hsien asleep at the wheel. Study of a female free spirit who ping-pongs between a jealous young punk and an older gangster is a content-free zone of often beautiful surfaces with nothing going on underneath. Beyond a few festivals, and Hou diehards in territories like France, "Mambo" looks set to dance its way into the dark.

After reversing his gradual career slide of the '90s with the seductive costumer "Flowers of Shanghai" (1998), Hou seems to have bounced even further into the bleachers of no-meaning minimalism typified by his 1996 "Goodbye South, Goodbye." Hou, in his early 50s, seems marooned as a stylist in search of content, with another back-of-a-coaster script by regular collab Chu Tien-wen.

Originally touted as a change of direction, "Mambo" has had an elongated production history that hints at a basic lack of self-confidence. Initial shooting well over a year ago was followed by a long pause (partly due to d.p. Lee also working on Wong Kar-wai's "In the Mood for Love") prior to the principal shoot, which wrapped in March. Pic then had some last-minute re-fixes before its world preem at Cannes, in a final day slot.

Shu Qi plays Vicky, a denizen of a Taipei "disco-pub" who lives with

Hao-hao (Tuan Chun-hao), a kid with dyed blond hair who sometimes works as a disco DJ. First seen in a long, slo-mo traveling shot, walking with happy abandon as the actress's own voice describes the character, Vicky is sketched as a free, generous spirit, a flower briefly in bloom. "She'd just broken up with Hao-hao ... and had NT\$500,000 in the bank. It was 2001, when the world was greeting the 21st century." So far, so good.

With no signal, pic then flashes back to show the breakup of the relationship, as one argument after another takes place in their small apartment. More voiceovers fill in some background between partying scenes in the disco.

Film takes time out when Vicky takes a trip with two half-Japanese brothers (Jun Takeuchi and Ko Takeuchi) to visit their mom back home in Hokkaido. The town, Yubari, is hosting a (real-life) film festival, and its snow-covered streets, decorated with lights and vintage movie posters, is like a winter wonderland, succulently caught by Lee's camera. Throughout, the d.p.'s use of narrow depth of field along with play with candlelight and shadow give Hou's characteristically lengthy takes a visual allure.

Back in Taipei, the squabbles with Hao-hao continue, and Vicky finally ankles to be taken under the wing of Jack (Hou regular Jack Kao), a "businessman" with a more practical attitude toward life.

On camera almost the whole time, the firefly-like Shu Qi is never less than watchable, even though her character is about as shallow as a paddling pool and some sequences are close to musicvideos hymning the young Taiwan-born diva (whose career has been mostly in nearby Hong Kong rather than on home turf). Kao's role hardly gets off the starting block, and the best thing that can be said about Tuan's perf is that he makes Hao-hao a thoroughly annoying little ingrate.

Pic reportedly is the first in a series by Hou centered on life in modern Taipei. French co-producer Paradis Films was also a partner on Wong's "In the Mood for Love."



IN STEP: Shu Qi and Tuan Chun-hao star in "Millennium Mambo," shown at Cannes.