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East Asian Film Remakes, edited by David Scott Diffrient and Kenneth Chan. Edinburgh University Press, 2023, 326 pp.

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The remake is a central notion in East Asian culture and applies to most of its cultural heritage with only limited changes. The kimono's sleeves may vary but the idea of the dress itself remains unchanged, and the ceramics may feature a new type of glaze, but the inherent form tends to remain the same. A quick look at *Chûshingura* [*The Loyal 47 Ronin*] on IMDB resulted in thirty matches, the earliest production dating from 1910, with remakes in different iterations running up to 2022.

Hence, putting together an anthology on remakes of East Asian film productions seems like the logical thing to do, but I was not prepared for the continuously interesting and somehow joyful read David Scott Diffrient and Kenneth Chan's book offers. Starting with Irene González-López's chapter on the machinations of the remake as a media franchise seems entirely appropriate because she uses Constantine Ververis's original template as her starting point for a textual analysis of the habitual remake by looking at its industrial category (for example, authors or stars), its textual category (such as plot or narrative), and, finally, its critical category (reception). Applying it to the Japanese *Gate of Flesh* (*Nikutai no mon*) franchise, based on Tamura Taijiro's 1947 novel, she works through all eight interpretations made between 1947 and 2008. Emphasising the importance of emerging paratexts, González-López concludes that it was in fact Suzuki Seijun's 1964 film adaptation, and not the original novel, that initiated the four following remakes, all screen productions.

Another interesting chapter in the section "highlighting the sensual and corporeal appeals of the medium", as Scott Diffrient writes in the Introduction (5), is Andrew Grossman's comparative analysis of Chor Yuen's *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* (*Ai nu*) from 1972 and his remake of the same narrative in 1984, now titled *Lust for Love of a Chinese Courtesan* (*Ai nu xin zhuan*). Grossman offers a most interesting exposé on the discursive trajectory of the figure of the courtesan in the films based on a feminist reading, beginning with the classical swordswoman as she is presented in many wuxia and martial arts films in the former, and her re-manifestation as a new femme fatale in the remake. Grossman's conclusion is even more realistic: the predominantly male audiences would not have agreed with women riding off into the sunset as revolutionary agents, "retaining their active nonheteronormative sexuality"—therefore they must die (80).

On a discursive note, some chapters engage with the interesting concept of 'seriality' in relation to remade films. Steve Choe offers a very workable concept called "serial vitality" which can be used to reflect on the variations of themes, images, characters, and actors in any group of films, regardless of genre (146–47). Choe applies it to Yamada Yoji's remake of Ozu

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Yasujirô's *Tokyo Story* (*Tôkyô Monogatari*, 1953), and how, in both cases, their films are not so much about original and remake, but about the directors' own creative work processes. Gary Bettinson discusses how Benny Chan achieves visual excess by applying seriality to his filmmaking style through "discontinuity devices such as overlapping editing and serial repetition" (208). Elsewhere, discussing transmedia forms of remaking and serialising, Kenneth Chan's extends the notion "Hollywood meme" to "meme-rhizome-remake" in order to "draw out notions of cultural-political play and playfulness of which the remake is capable of effecting, including irony, parody and subversive mimicry" (295).

Furthermore, film directors remaking or reiterating their own films is not unusual, even among the art house directors, which explains the chapters on Ozu Yasujirô's fondness for both. Alastair Phillips's study of Ozu's development of the "Noriko" character (played by Hara Setsuko) in the trilogy of films titled *Late Spring* (*Banshun*, 1949), *Early Summer* (*Bakushû*, 1951) and *Tokyo Story* (1953) revolves around the aesthetic and contextual consequences of such an ontological reiteration. Not least because Hara was Japan's foremost female film star at the time, projecting "an idealized contemporary image of femininity" and "the recurring presentation of her star features on the cover of popular print publication […] had a profound resonance with the female filmgoing public" (114). Defying any definite conclusions, Phillips points out the possibility of reading each of the films as narratives about female becoming, although they remain open-ended when it comes to both direction and desire. Noriko's refusal to adhere to society's general expectations of how an unmarried woman should act, runs through all three films, leaving them open-ended. Her dissent inevitably brings up the questions "about the [true] nature of Noriko's subjectivity" given her preference for interaction with other women through the entire "Noriko trilogy". As a member of the female audience who has seen these films, I personally do not see these films as telling stories about Noriko's proto-lesbianism. They reflect variations on the theme of imposed feminist self-definition, made all the more necessary because the Japanese demographics at the time reflected a significant lack of suitable men to marry due to the many war causalities.

Another chapter offering a very interesting meta discussion on the remake franchise and seriality, is represented by "The Pan-Asian 'Miss Granny' Phenomenon". Cowritten by four scholars, Jennifer Oates, Hsin Hsieh, Sung-Ae Lee, and Kate Taylor-Jones, it thoroughly expands the scholarly remits of remake studies by looking at the "Miss Granny" franchise by adding the unexpected parameter of ageism and gender, to the more established perspectives of nationhood, translatability, and distribution. Initially launched as a Korean drama comedy (*Soo-sang-han geun-heo*, Hwang Dong-hyuk. 2014), the narrative was quickly adapted by the Japanese and Chinese film industries, as well as by most of those situated in Southeast Asia. Dissecting and comparing the handling of the overbearing Granny character, the authors find that she is characterised as a dominating and oppressive elderly woman with an extreme interest in men in all the remakes. The situation deteriorates further once she seizes the magic opportunity of body-swapping her physically unattractive elderly body for that of a twenty-something, while still retaining her unbearable attitude towards family members and general society. The point is that although all film industries involved generally display a rather disparaging treatment of the ageing woman by holding on to this representation of Granny character, they still "go some way toward challenging [it] by opening a space for a more transgressive representation of ageing Asian women" (278).

The authors advance their study of the franchise's gender representation by applying the concept "New Momism" to three different, recurring phenomena in the remakes: the "thematic focus on the self-sacrificial mother", followed by "the tension between the ideas of

mothering and intergenerational conflict" (with "Granny", of course), and finally, "the literal transformation of the elderly body to a pre-maternal body" that all remakes evince (278). The outcome of such a study is again unexpected, because the authors conclude that all the locally remade "Miss Granny" narratives in East and Southeast Asia present "[p]arenthood […] as a relentlessly negative experience" (280). This point of view goes a long way to explain why the ageing woman is framed as "passive, undesirable or out-of-control", and why all the films "return Miss Granny to a clearly per-maternal body": "[w]ith this new body, the marks and trials of childbirth and rearing have been removed" (281–82). The logic of the narrative is thus somewhat confusing, because while being a mother is not deemed to be physically desirable, all the films laud the idealised sacrificial mother figure (278–81).

In coming back to Constantine Ververis's general matrix when studying the conceptualisation of a remake, Ting-Ying Lin's chapter focuses on the importance of imbuing the entire film project of the remake with local flavour to guarantee a successful reception among cinemagoers. Beside a preview trailer, an important first impression of the film is communicated through the film poster. My own study of western posters for Japanese films between 1950 and 1975 evinced one common creative characteristic in their designs, regardless of country: Japonisme. Seeing as costume drama quickly became the most popular Japanese film genre in the west, the posters most often displayed either a geisha or a samurai. It was enough to communicate the cultural identity of the film in question and extend an invitation to imaginary travel to the passerby in the street.

Creating an entirely new national film production based on an inter-regional forerunner is obviously so much more demanding today, especially since the decision to produce a local film is often based on the original having already been a success in the country behind the remake. Adopting a sociocultural perspective, Ting-Ying Lin's study of transnational Korean-Taiwanese film remakes is thus based on the assumption that the local remake per se has potential for success at both a domestic and regional level because it is based on a high quality and well-liked Korean original. Teaming up with the Korean film industry to plot a new wave for Taiwanese cinema and its domestic audiences, was a rational decision based on the global success of the Korean Hallyu phenomenon since the Millennium. Offering two distinct apparitions of local flavour, known as "little freshness" and featuring *Taike* culture, the new wave of Taiwanese cinema was aimed to be articulated and circulated as iterations of twenty-first century soft power (260). This localisation process involved components such as composing original music and having a well-known Taiwanese artist sing the lead score. Other alterations adding a "little freshness" includes the use of recent local buzz words unique to Taiwanese subcultures and modifying the narrative so that it is less dramatic and more comic. Changes like these turned the South Korean melodrama *More Than Blue* (*Seulpeumboda deo seulpeun iyagi*, Won Tae-yeon, 2018) into a Taiwanese youth romance film with the same title, (*More than Blue,* [*Bi bei shang geng bei shang de gu shi*], Gavin Lin, 2018) catching the eye of young cinemagoers in China and Hong Kong as well.

The localisation strategy of the original version of Korean film *Man in Love* (*Nam jaga sa rang hal dae*, Dong-wook Han, 2014) for the Taiwanese film market involved imbuing its narrative with *Taike* culture (such as visual aesthetics, rock music and performances) to further its local identity and create a robust case of collective memory. Lin identifies *Taike* as a grassroots Taiwanese culture exhibiting "the unsophisticated mannerism of the Taiwanese countryside" (266). In the case of the remake of *Man in Love* (*Dang nan ren lian ai shi*, Yin Chen-hao, 2018), the strategy involved the protagonists' screen costumes, references to

Taiwanese youth culture, as well as the combination of *Taike* recreational culture of karaoke and bowling games (267).

Tapping in to Netflix's ambition goal of producing original TV series in cooperation with local producers, the Taiwanese version of *More Than Blue* was released on the streaming platform in 2021. By representing an alternative exhibition channel for Taiwanese cinema, the local industry obtains additional opportunities to distribute and circulate its film product, as well as reaching new audiences.

Ting-Ying Lin's study thus touches on the one area which needs to be brought more to the fore in future edited collections; that of platform streaming and the rampant popularity of serialised entertainment in relation to film remakes. I have no doubt new scholarship related to current exhibition practices, viewer preferences, and production strategies customised to suit the current streaming era will soon manifest itself. Until then, the invigorating and well-informed polyphony of scholarly thinking around the conceptual challenges framing remake studies so far, makes this book worth reading.

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