

BOOK REVIEW

Thirty-two New Takes on Taiwan Cinema

Edited by Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, Darrell William Davis and Wenchi Lin.
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Thirty-two New Takes on Taiwan Cinema is a scholarly anthology featuring a collection of essays focused on Taiwan cinema, with an emphasis on representative films produced after 1950. The editors of this anthology, Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, Darrell William Davis, and Wenchi Lin, are renowned and prolific writers in the field of film studies, particularly for their publications on Asian cinemas, including Taiwan New Cinema (TNC) and beyond. Within this anthology, the contributors are a diverse group, comprising accomplished and internationally esteemed scholars, as well as aspiring young authors who have specialized in producing academic works on Taiwan and/or Sinophone cinemas, including its auteurs.

As suggested by the title of the book, this anthology delves into the elaborate analysis of thirty-two selected films. The editors adopt a curatorial approach in assembling this collection, aiming to “arouse curiosity, surprise, and an appetite for further viewing” (1), a goal that appears to have been successfully achieved. The films chosen for this anthology represent a diverse range within the canon of Taiwan cinema, including underrecognized works, old classics, and those from emerging talents.

The editors have thoughtfully organized these films into a “film program” consisting of seven distinct categories: (1) Taiwanese-dialect films (*taiyu pian*) versus Mandarin Chinese films (*guoyu pian*); (2) hot/cold war and national allegory; (3) gangster/noir; (4) on the road; (5) auteurs; (6) LGBTQ; and (7) homemaking. It is worth noting that these categories are not mutually exclusive, as the editors acknowledge that many of these films “may display multiple traits and can land in more than one box.” (4)

These carefully selected films from significant years offer a comprehensive and dynamic representation of Taiwan cinema, highlighting the remarkable creativity and achievements of emerging filmmakers.

Upon closer examination of the book, it becomes evident that the number of films chosen for discussion in each decade is relatively even, ranging from four to six films, with the exception of the 2010s. In this particular decade, eight films were selected for analysis, six of which were released in 2016 and 2017. The larger representation of films from the second decade of the new millennium can be attributed to one of the selection criteria adopted by the editors, namely “works made since 2000.”

A closer look at the annual output of Taiwan films since the new millennium reveals that the years 2008 and 2017 stand out as “unexpected and inspiring” years for Taiwan cinema. During these years, numerous quality works from new talents emerged, showcasing their abilities in creating films that not only received critical acclaim but also appealed to the audience, as noted by film critics and Golden Horse Film Festival director Wen Tien-hsiang (Wen Tianxiang) (Chen 2018, p. 11; Li 2009, p. 16; Wang 2019, p. 10).

Other criteria for including a film in this anthology are multi-faceted and include the following aspects: (1) works representing different historical settings, genres, auteurs, and formats in the postwar era, (2) works that are less represented in the literature, (3) works that are readily available for viewing with bilingual subtitles and good audiovisual quality, and (4) works preferred by the contributors (2).

By incorporating these comprehensive criteria, the anthology aims to provide a well-rounded and insightful exploration of Taiwan cinema, encompassing a wide range of artistic expressions and social/political perspectives.

The anthology takes a comprehensive approach, encompassing films that showcase different aspects of Taiwan cinema's evolution, even if they do not hold unanimous acclaim or recognition in the cinematic canon. For instance, the Taiwanese-dialect film *The Best Secret Agent* (Tianzi Dihyao 1964) discussed in chapter 3 and the anti-Japanese propaganda film *Victory* (Meihua 1976) analyzed in chapter 9 are indeed influential films from their respective eras, but their overall significance and quality may not be universally agreed upon. (Further elaboration on this point will be provided later in this review.)

Nevertheless, it is inevitable that many significant works have not been included in this anthology, including iconic works from TNC and films by renowned auteurs. These widely appraised films have been extensively covered in existing literature and were intentionally excluded to create space to analyze lesser-known works from both the past and present. Additionally, a few films were regrettably left out due to a lack of interest from contributors, such as Chen Kunhou's *Growing Up* (Xiao Bi de Gushi 1983) (2), a film that foreshadowed the TNC movement. Moreover, films that were not easily accessible outside Taiwan were also omitted from the list, contributing to the exclusion of important films like *The Story of Mother* (Muqin Sanshi Sui 1973) (Lee 2013, p. 324–326), directed by Sung Tsun-Shou (Song Cunshou), a prominent filmmaker of the 1970s. Another notable absence is a film directed by Lin Tuan-Chiu (Lin Tuanqiu): *An Intricate Love Affair*, considered a classic in *taiyu pian* by many scholars (Shen 2017).

Each film discussed in this volume serves as a reflection of the social conditions of its time and the political stance of its creator. By examining them chronologically, one can discern the transformation in social, political, economic, and cultural landscapes from the 1950s, during the height of the White Terror, through the late 1980s when martial law was lifted, and into the new millennium, when Taiwanese society began to experience political, social, and economic freedoms unparalleled in other Chinese-speaking regions.

One of the recurring themes found across several chapters of the anthology is the notion of characters “taking Taiwan as home” or “homecoming.” The authors employ this theme to delve into the complex issue of Taiwan identity or “becoming Taiwanese.” For instance, Lee Hsing's (Li Xing) *Our Neighbors* (Jietou xiangwei 1963) (discussed in chapter 2) and Pai Ching-ji's (Bai Jingrui) *Home, Sweet Home* (Jia zai Taibei 1970) (discussed in chapter 7) were both made during the Nationalist authoritarian era. In Guo-Juin Hong's chapter, he contends that *Our Neighbors* focuses on establishing Taiwan as a potential home, while “the audiovisual apparatus of the cinema... performs [the] unhomeliness in its insistence on realism at *face value*... *The cinema audiovisualizes the space for homemaking*” (27). According to Hong, the neighborhood depicted in the film “can easily be seen as a sort of microcosm of post-1949 Taiwan, and an allegorical reading readily offers itself” (25). However, I would argue that the film primarily reflects the marginalized state of mainland refugees in the 1950s and 1960s, rather than portraying the living conditions of the impoverished Taiwanese community. The latter is more accurately portrayed in Hsin Chi's (Xin Qi) *Dangerous Youth* (Weixian de Qingchun 1969) (discussed in chapter 6), where glimpses of the sex economy are depicted.

The 1960s Taipei's social milieu is more realistically and vividly portrayed in Edward Yang's film, *A Brighter Summer Day* (Gulingjie Shaonian Sharen Shijian 1991) (see chapter 15), as observed by Darrell William Davis (212). Within this transitional setting, a unique blend of rural and urban elements, along with outdated and contemporary machinery, emerges. Despite living in the same neighborhood, there is a clear divide between mainlanders (*waishengren*) and native Taiwanese (*benshengren*). Tensions are further exacerbated by the mainland refugees being assigned to live in Japanese houses, where they are exposed to native Taiwanese's Japanese music – a reminder of

Japanese heritage and products, viewed as “unwanted survival of Japanese colonial leftovers” (213). The film portrays the mainlander family’s predicament, as they find themselves living in the “*Impossible Now*” – suspended in the state of “homelessness at home” and “anywhere but here,” as eloquently described by Guo-Juin Hong in his chapter (27).

According to I-In Chiang, by the 1970s, Taipei was portrayed in *Home, Sweet Home* as a “modernized and developing homeland,” with Taiwan envisioned as “a land of the future” beckoning overseas students to return and contribute to its industrialization and modernization (89, 92). This state-sanctioned propaganda effort reflected the reality forced upon the Nationalist government (led by Chiang Kai-shek) by the U.S. government, which necessitated the abandonment of its counterattack policy to retake mainland China by military means. Subsequently, the Nationalist government redirected its focus, aiming to develop a modernized and industrialized “Free China,” with the hope of eventually regaining mainland China through peaceful means.

However, the diplomatic setbacks faced by the government of the Republic of China (ROC) during the 1970s¹ compelled the Nationalists to devise strategies to strengthen their legitimacy as rulers of Taiwan and the surrounding islands. As part of this effort, a media campaign was launched to foster a strong sense of patriotism and nationalism among the Taiwanese population. Given its complicated history as Taiwan’s former colonizer and the ROC government’s adversary in an eight-year war, Japan – a significant postwar ally of the KMT government – became a particular focus of this campaign.

Between 1974 and 1978, the Nationalist-controlled studios produced more than a dozen anti-Japanese propaganda films. Among these, *Victory* (1976) stood out as one of the most popular, largely due to its unique genre-bending approach, combining propaganda film elements with movie songs. Endorsed by official channels, the film’s theme song became the de facto “national anthem” of late 1970s Taiwan. It was sung passionately by students, citizens of all ages, soldiers, and public servants on various occasions to express patriotism, creating an atmosphere of ecstasy during such rituals. (Lu, 1998, pp. 223–4) However, despite its popularity, the film itself was regarded as poorly made. As noted by James Wicks in his chapter, “the tension between extreme positions presented in *Victory* via film form (both comedic Marx Brothers vaudeville... and tragic heroic sacrifice) and film sense (both the creation of a new imagined community and an outdated Nationalistic ideology during the rise of transnational industry and corporations) ultimately tears the film apart” (117).

Almost a decade later, despite its lack of official diplomatic ties with major countries in the world, Taiwan remained steadfast with its liberalized and internationalized economy. During the 1980s, Taiwan’s economic policy underwent a significant shift, transitioning from heavy industry investment to technology-intensive sectors, such as personal computer production and integrated circuit fabrication. This strategic move not only integrated Taiwan into the global economy but also triggered an economic boom. The profound social changes brought about by this economic development are evident in Chang Yi’s film, *Kuei-mei, a Woman* (Wo Zheyang Guo le Yisheng 1985) discussed in chapter 11. In the movie, Taiwan is personified by the main character, Kuei-mei, who, rather than feeling nostalgic for her past life and loved ones in mainland China, aspires to be integrated into a new family in Taiwan. Ting-Wu Cho points out that Kuei-mei’s break from her previous life in China gives her a sense of openness and adaptability, ultimately driving her determination to achieve economic mobility and autonomy (148).

In Edward Yang’s *Taipei Story* (Qingmei zhuma), created in the same year as Chang Yi’s iconic work *Kuei-mei, a Woman*, Ling Zhang identifies Taipei as “a city that epitomizes the temporalities and geopolitics of global capitalism,” where the neocolonial influence of American and Japanese economic, financial, and cultural hegemony is prominent (159, 171). This global capitalism seemingly “invades” Taiwan and gives rise to a “synchronic tension” between the old local Taiwanese quarters and the cosmopolitan districts of new Taipei in the film (169). Within the context of the movie,

¹The diplomatic crises commenced in 1971 when the ROC government lost its seat to represent China in the United Nations, followed by the withdrawal of official recognition by its long-time allies, beginning with Japan in 1972, and culminating in 1978 when the U.S. government, its most important supporter, established official relationship with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and recognized PRC as the sole representative of China.

Taiwan is no longer considered a home for the young couple (the main characters) who initially plan to emigrate to the United States. Even after their “American dream” falls apart, the couple refuses to return to their original “homes” or to live together in the apartment they initially intended to occupy at the film’s outset. In a way, the concept of “homemaking” in Edward Yang’s Taipei, amid its rapid urbanization and transformation under the forces of global capitalism, can be interpreted as “unhome-ly” – a notion described by Guo-Juin Hong in his chapter as “home *unmaking*, when home is conceptually maintained but spatially dislocated” (27).

By the mid-1990s, Taiwan had emerged as one of the top-twenty economies in the world. Amidst significant shifts in social, political, economic, and cultural environments, Taiwan found itself at a pivotal point in its journey towards becoming a developed nation, while also seeking to establish its unique identity on the global stage. Against this backdrop, Sylvia Chang’s (Zhang Aijia) film, *Tonight Nobody Goes Home* (Jintian bu Huijia 1996) discussed in chapter 19, was released. Mei-Hsuan Chiang argues in her chapter that Chang’s film, from a women’s perspective, delves into the value of home and introduces a new conception of a “nation-home,” representing Taiwan’s changing status within the transnational flow of populations (262). Chiang further suggests that the film, by bringing new family members from other parts of Asia into the Chen family, captures Taiwan’s efforts towards constructing a pan-Chinese identity in the 1990s (270). Through these films produced over nearly half a century, we witness Taiwan’s evolution from being a temporary shelter for one million *waishengren* in the 1950s to becoming a diverse home for people of various cultures – both old and new, domestic and foreign – by the end of the twentieth century.

As Taiwan entered the new millennium, its political landscape underwent a significant shift when candidates from the opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party, were elected as President and Vice President. This marked a turn towards “Taiwan first” and localization/indigenization (*bentuhua*) across all aspects of society, leading to profound changes in Taiwan and its people. A prime example of this transformation can be seen in the unprecedented commercial success of the film *Cape No. 7* (Haijiao Qihao 2008) (see chapter 23). Despite being accused of alleged nostalgia for Japanese colonialism and continued worship of the former colonizer, Chris Berry (316) argues, drawing from Raymond Williams’s concept of a structure of feeling, that the film’s narrative about the band reflects the formation of a structure of feeling as an emergent ideological formation that transcends various social categories such as class, age, gender, and ethnicity.

Berry’s analysis is particularly compelling as he highlights the film’s focus on Japan, allowing the Taiwan audience to temporarily escape from the complex relationship with mainland China by substituting it with a different, less troubling neighbor. Moreover, I am intrigued by Berry’s argument that the characters in the film embrace the *taike* image, originally coined as a derogatory term by mainlanders to refer to “Taiwanese hillbillies.” However, this term has been re-appropriated as a symbol of local resistance and has gained widespread popularity and “commodity value” (320). *Cape No. 7* serves as a captivating reflection of the socio-political changes and evolving collective consciousness in Taiwan during the new millennium, deftly navigating the delicate balance between nostalgia, resistance, and a distinct sense of local identity.

This brings us to the issue of de-Chineseness or desinicization. In his chapter, Hsien-hao Liao accuses director Yang Ya-che (Yang Yazhe) of engaging in China-bashing in his film *The Bold, the Corrupt, and the Beautiful* (Xie Guanyin 2017). Liao (in chapter 30) contends that the film performs a rite to exorcise the stubborn Chinese ghosts from Taiwan’s culture (418). He sees it as a national allegory, where the mother-daughter relationship represents how Chinese culture is perceived as devouring its own people. According to Liao, modernity plays a crucial role in understanding the film, as he believes the decadence of Chinese culture stems from its struggle to cope with modernity.

However, not all film critics readily perceive the film as a national allegory. Many reviewers, as Liao laments, “take the director’s hint² at face value and read the film as thematizing how ‘love’ is (mis)used

²The epigram appeared at the end of the film says: “The most terrible thing in the world is not the punishment at the present moment, but the prospect of not having love in the future.”

to exert control, avoiding any geopolitical implications” (422n4). Yet, it is hard to imagine why Yang would want to avoid such allegorical implications if that was indeed his intent. For many viewers, the film’s references to real-life Taiwan politics, including murders, violence, bribery, land speculation, and power struggles, are quite apparent (Anonymous 2017). Instead of primarily criticizing traditional Chinese culture, most see the film as a critique of political corruption and the prevalent “black gold”³ politics in Taiwan. In my view, the accusations against Yang and his film in Liao’s chapter appear too harsh and exaggerated. The film’s multifaceted nature allows for diverse interpretations, and while it may address aspects of cultural conflict, it also sheds light on broader political and social issues in Taiwan.

In recent Taiwanese cinema, gangsters have become a popular subject matter. Within this anthology, at least six films directly or indirectly reference gangsters. These films include *Daughter of the Nile* (Niluohe Nüer 1987) (chapter 13), *A Brighter Summer Day* (chapter 15), *Goodbye South, Goodbye* (Nanguo Zaijian, Nanguo 1996) (chapter 17), *Monga* (Mengjia 2010) (chapter 26), *Godspeed* (Yilu Shunfeng 2016) (chapter 28), and *True Emotion behind the Wall* (Xianshuiji de Ziwei 2017) (chapter 29). Interestingly, the majority of these films are associated with filmmakers from TNC or the Post-TNC movement. Some of these gangster films can be interpreted as national allegories, adding a layer of depth and significance to their storytelling.

As an example, consider Edward Yang’s *A Brighter Summer Day*. According to Darrell William Davis, the murders of gangsters and classmates in Yang’s film serve as a commentary or allegory on the White Terror of Taipei (207). However, from my perspective, the violent duels between the mainlander and native Taiwanese gangs in both *A Brighter Summer Day* and *Monga* can also be interpreted as representing the political struggle between the two ethnic groups in postwar Taiwan. Similarly, Earl Jackson observes that *Monga* exposes the interplay of personal, social, and political forces that give rise to the contradictions of the “gangster” subject while also presenting a cinematic discourse that gestures toward a “national” allegory, challenging the very notion of the nation (360).

Similarly, Victor Fan delves into Chung Mong-hong’s (Zhong Menghong) film *Godspeed* as an allegory for the establishment of Taiwanese identity. According to Fan, the film “scrutinizes the question of what becoming Taiwanese means by focusing on the lived experiences of characters from different sociopolitical positions” (385). I find Fan’s effort to depict how those thriving on the island negotiate their mutually dependent relationships in their state of exception to be fascinating.

In Fan’s analysis, Taiwan is depicted as being in a state of exception, and its people are portrayed as “a bare life”⁴ and “being extraterritorial,”⁵ and are “allowed to die as dispensable body” under neoliberalism (387). Despite acknowledging Taiwan as “a polity of diverse social, cultural, and political lives,” Fan argues that the Nationalist (ROC) government on the island is nothing more than “a simulacrum that conceals the fact that the core of its authority is in fact empty.” This leads those who inhabit this land to “live under an extraterritorial state power that has already disappeared,” thus are “by default *outsiders*” (389). Fan contends that this sense of anxiety about belonging is “shared by many Taiwanese spectators [of *Godspeed*] regardless of their political positions, especially those who are descendants of mainland settlers or immigrants” (ibid).

It is intriguing to observe that many authors in this volume utilize the concept of “the state of liminality” to elucidate the films and their respective makers under discussion. For instance, Victor Fan employs this concept to analyze *Godspeed*. Michael Berry applies it to his chapter on King Hu’s *Legend of the Mountain* (Shanzhong Chuanqi 1979), asserting that the film operates within a liminal space, encompassing elements of a travelogue/road film, thriller, ghost story, wuxia, and even comedy. (135). Corrado Neri employs a similar concept, as defined by Stéphane Corcuff, to argue that Wang Tong, as a *waishengren*, utilized his peripheral status to create the “Taiwanese” story *Strawman* (Daocao Ren

³“Black gold” refers to obtain money through illicit, corrupt method. KMT has been frequently criticized for its connection to gangsters and engaging in “black gold” politics.

⁴Giorgio Agamben refers ‘bare lives’ to a conception of life in which the sheer biological fact of life is given priority over the way a life is lived. (Oxford Reference n.d.)

⁵According to Victor Fan, ‘being extraterritorial’ means that biopolitical lives are “doubly occupied by contesting juridical, sociopolitical, cultural, linguistic, and ethical forces,” and are ostracized outside the terrains of these constituting forces. (387)

1987) (see chapter 14), thereby representing Taiwan's own liminal position (192). Neri further comments that this liminality extends to Taiwanese filmmakers themselves, particularly those like Wang, who occupy the margins between auteur status and the commercial sector (ibid). Beth Tsai also discusses the liminality of Tsai Ming-liang, asserting that his distinctive oeuvre is a form of protest against the business-driven film industry and not solely regarded as artists' cinema (347).

The most intriguing exploration of liminality can be found in Helen Grace's chapter on Zero Chou's (Zhou Meiling) *Drifting Flowers* (Piaolang qingchun, 2008). Grace applies the concept of "wangliang 罔兩," meaning "shadow of the shadow," to analyze the film's portrayal of transgender themes. She argues that *Drifting Flowers* formally rises to the challenge of evoking life "in the margin of shadow" by leading its audience into a virtual world through the clever use of structural linkages between its sections (335).

Three LGBTQ films are discussed in this book. Unlike Zero Chou's fiction film *Drifting Flowers*, the other two are documentaries. The intimate role of the filmmaker is easy to detect in both films: from the personal voice and physical presence, as well as the use of the interview format. To Shi-yan Chao, *Boys for Beauty* (Meili Shaonian 1999) (see chapter 20) "is characterized by a strong sense and ethics of intersubjectivity," (272) which is achieved through camp aesthetic and humor and "is further endowed with a particular sense of community, reflecting the agency enlivened by [the filmmaker] Chen and his filmed gay subjects, echoing the urgency of the local *tongzhi*/queer community taking shape on the eve of the new millennium" (273).

In contrast, Tze-lan Deborah Sang finds in her chapter that Huang Hui-chen wields her camera in *Small Talk* (Richang Duihua 2017) as a therapeutic tool to exorcise the demon of self-hatred. Sang further contends in her chapter that, "[i]n true cinema vérité style, the camera acts as a provocateur besides being a witness. In addition, the camera proffers Huang moral support" (443). I concur with Sang's assessment that Huang's contribution elevates *Small Talk* from a personal to a political film. The documentary not only "sharply critiques heteronormativity but also resists homonormativity," as praised by Sang (449).

The last chapter of this book is about a feature animated film *On Happiness Road* (Xingfu lu Shang 2017). According to Laura Jo-Han Wen, director Sun Hsing-yin (Song Xinying) "explores the relationships between self, home, and identity, and eventually approaches the theme of collective Taiwanese memories through the medium of animation" (451). In other words, the film has touched upon many issues discussed in other chapters of the book. To Wen, the issues of identity, culture, and politics are at the center of the film. She concludes her chapter saying that "*On Happiness Road* creates a negotiable and epistemologically multiracial Taiwanese identity – an identity shaped from broken dreams, frustrations, and aspirations of future happiness. It was born from the recognition of the traumatic past and makes a departure from the romanticized notion of collective memories" (459). Interestingly, her conclusion is very much in line with the social, political, and cultural reality revealed in *Tonight Nobody Goes Home*, *God Man Dog*, *Cape No. 7*, *Godspeed*, and *The Bold, the Corrupt, and the Beautiful*.

I am intrigued by the fact that, except for *Tonight Nobody Goes Home*, all these filmmakers belong to the post-post-TNC generation, which began making feature films in the new millennium. This observation reveals that a new generation of filmmakers (and film scholars) holds a particularly strong Taiwanese identity. This phenomenon aligns with the findings of a 2022 poll conducted by the Election Study Center at National Chengchi University, wherein 61% of respondents identified themselves as Taiwanese, 2.7% as Chinese, and 32.9% as having a dual identity. These statistics contrast sharply with a similar poll in 1992, where only 17.6% of respondents identified as Taiwanese, with 25.5% as Chinese, and 46.4% as having a dual identity. An article in *The Economist* thus concludes that "[y]ounger generations born after the lifting of martial law hold especially strong Taiwanese identity. Yet a minority of Taiwan's older generation still identifies with China and hopes one day to be part of the mother country" (Frontline Formosa 2023).

Analyzing the ethnicity of the filmmakers discussed in this volume reveals that two-thirds of them are mainland settlers or immigrants. If we focus solely on films made in the second half of the 20th

century, the percentage is even higher: 87% – thirteen out of fifteen filmmakers are not native Taiwanese. This disproportionately high percentage of *waishengren* (mainlanders) is consistent with the reality in the Taiwan film industry between the years 1950 and 2000. Even in the Taiwanese-dialect films made in the 1950s and 1960s, many of the filmmakers were mainlanders, such as Chang Ying (Zhang Ying), who directed *The Best Secret Agent*. This phenomenon can be attributed to the large number of personnel from mainland film studios who retreated with the Nationalist government to Taiwan in 1949. During the 1950s, there were very few films made in Taiwan by the Nationalist-controlled studios. Consequently, when the first wave of *taiyu pian* surged in the mid-1950s, the biggest obstacles local filmmakers encountered – such as the lack of sufficient talent, technology, and equipment, the latter tightly controlled by the Nationalist government – were partially supplied by the *waishengren* filmmakers and the studios controlled by the KMT. In the 1960s, when the Nationalist government began to encourage making Mandarin Chinese films and suppress Taiwanese-language films, the majority of the directors, cast, and crew of *guoyu pian* (Mandarin films) were mainlanders and their offspring. This trend continued until the end of the twentieth century.

Chang Ying came to Taiwan to produce a film titled *Storm over Alishan Mountain* (Alishan Fengyun) in 1949 and was stranded there after the Nationalists lost the civil war, forcing him to settle in Taiwan. Thus, *Storm over Alishan Mountain* became the first postwar Taiwanese narrative film. Chang established his own company and began making Taiwanese-dialect films when the *taiyu pian* production frenzy surged in the mid-1950s. *The Best Secret Agent*, like Chang's previous film *Storm over Alishan Mountain*, signifies the strong tie of Taiwan cinema with the Shanghai film industry of the 1930s and 1940s. The fact that *The Best Secret Agent* is actually a remake of a 1946 Shanghai film with the same Chinese title (*Code Name Heaven No. 1*), which was a cinematic adaptation of an anti-Japanese stage play called *Wild Rose*, further testifies to this filmic linkage.

However, the production quality of *The Best Secret Agent* is undeniably poor, incomparable to the best Chinese films made in Shanghai in the 1940s. Wenchi Lin (Lin Wenqi) comments that “due to the lower budget, in addition to the production level of *taiyu pian* being in the exploring and developing stage, the anti-Japanese spy films were rather crude in terms of their script, cinematography or props and settings” (my translation) (Lin 2013). Despite Chun-chi Wang's (Wang Junqi) argument that the female superhero in *The Best Secret Agent*, who “negotiates with the patriarchal order,” sets the film apart from those spy films catering to the male gaze, and in spite her characterizing the film's employment of melodramatic devices as the “syncretic nature of *taiyu pian*,” (48) the poor quality of the props, sets and costumes used in the film have actually weakened the rationale of her argument.

All in all, *Thirty-two New Takes on Taiwan Cinema* is a book that many cinephiles and scholars of Taiwan cinema have eagerly anticipated. I am confident that it will be invaluable to researchers and educators in the fields of Taiwan studies and cinema studies. By delving into the representative films studied in this anthology, readers should gain a profound understanding of the trajectory of Taiwan's sociopolitical transition over the past 70 years and its corresponding impact on the development of its cinema.

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