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Vivian P.Y. Lee (ed), East Asian Cinemas: Regional Flows and Global Transformations

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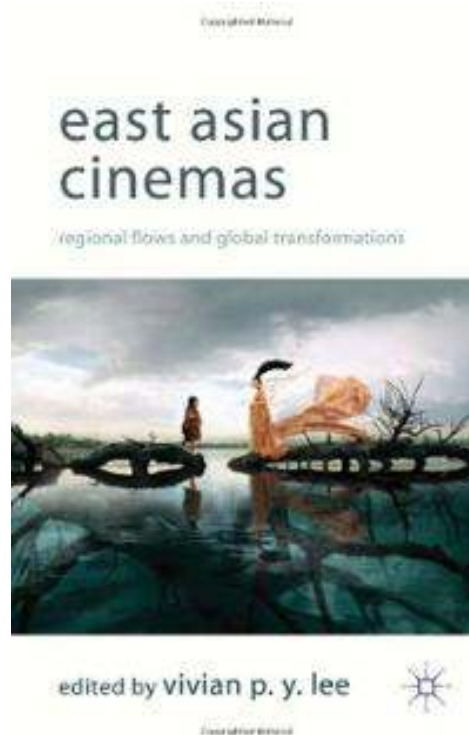
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1 East Asian cinemas have become increasingly visible in the West over the course of the past decade. Successful East Asian blockbusters (and often their American remakes), from Japanese and Korean horror films to Chinese and HongKong martial art films, have emerged on the global scene and have dramatically changed the global cinematic industry. The transnationalisation of East Asian cinemas has also created new dynamics between Hollywood, European, and Asian cinemas. Consequently, cinemas of East Asia have captured the attention of academics, critics, and general audiences. Recent scholarship has emphasised the transnational and transregional aspects of these cinemas, previously studied from a national perspective.



2 *East Asian Cinemas: Regional Flows and Global Transformations*, prefaced by prominent Chinese film scholar Zhang Yingjin, investigates the flow of culture between China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Japan through 11 chapters. The book opens with

an introduction by its editor, Vivian P.Y. Lee, who examines the historical connection between these countries and the way Asia, defined as an idea in progress rather than a fixed entity, has been fractured by racial and political tension. The author points out that this “shared history” albeit tormented, has created, with the input of economic globalisation, a space in which different Asian countries have come together again to coproduce some of the most successful regional blockbusters. She considers Japan as a centrifugal force in the making of an “Asian cinema” and in the “consumption of Asia” through film, a cultural hegemony challenged by South Korea and China over the last two decades.

- 3 The first part of the book explores the relationship between East Asian film industries and Hollywood. While Hong Yin and Zhiwei Xiao set out a rather alarmist statement, seeing the remaking and “Hollywoodisation” of successful Asian films as a one-way transfer for the exclusive profit of the American industry, Song Hwee Lim’s chapter is more nuanced. Song shows that East Asian directors have also actively participated in the transplantation of Asian films for American and global audiences, being invited to Hollywood to produce remakes of their own films, thus opening the door for new types of collaboration and a more balanced relationship. Song’s analysis is arguably the most pertinent in this first section as it replaces this “transpacific traffic” in a wider context and alongside linguistic, cultural, and economic negotiations that also take place within Asia.
- 4 The second section gathers four chapters on film genres and aesthetics in a transnational context. Gina Marchetti draws parallels between Jia Zhangke’s *Xiao Wu*, Patrick Tam’s *After This Our Exile*, and French director Robert Bresson’s work, highlighting their differences and shared features in style and content. Marchetti elaborates on postmodernist theories to interpret Jia and Tam’s realism as a critical means to depict China and the Chinese diaspora. Eric K.W. Yu’s chapter is concerned with Chow Yun Fat’s parody of James Bond in a late British colonial context and at the handover of Hong Kong back to China. Chapters 5 and 6 go back to the issue of transposing East Asian cinemas into trans-regional and transnational models, with a focus on horror films. Nikki J.Y. Lee convincingly develops the argument that Asian horror films are constructed through the domestic national film industry and through regional and trans-regional markets, and represent an alternative to Hollywood and other national horror films. Vivian P.Y. Lee, on the other hand, takes Shimizu Takashi’s US remake of *Ju-on* and Kim Ji-woon’s *The Good, the Bad and the Weird* as case studies to demonstrate how the crossover between the “local” and the “global” produces a “lingua franca” of popular cinema.
- 5 The third part of the book deals with cinematic representations of national history and identity. Kinnia Shuk-ting Yau explores the influence of Neo-conservatism in the Japanese film industry through four well-known Japanese directors, Ishihara Shintarō, Kitano Takeshi, Matsumoto Hitoshi, and Kubozuka Yōsuke. In Chapter 8, Tsung-yi Michelle Huang examines cinematic representations of Hong Kong’s integration with the Pearl River Delta in Peter Chan’s *Comrades, Almost a Love Story* and Fruit Chan’s *Durian Durian*. Chapter 9 questions the definition of “Asianness” in “Asian films.” Ti Wei traces the history of the Asian coproduction and recalls the necessity to consider terms such as “Asian cinema” or “East Asian cinema” with caution. This chapter is somehow redundant with previous chapters and might have been placed earlier in the collection.

- 6 The final segment of the book puts together interviews with major East Asian cinema stakeholders and discusses the “pros” and “cons” of film coproduction. These interviews, as announced by the editor in the introduction, successfully manage to “bridge the gap between academic scholarship and the ‘realpolitik’ of the filmmaking world” (p.8). Stephanie DeBoer’s interviews with three prominent Japanese media and film producers reflect upon conflicting discourses on Asian coproduction. In the last chapter, Vivian P.Y. Lee has a discussion with a veteran Hong Kong filmmaker and a Singaporean producer on the development of China’s film industry in relation to the Asian coproduction network.
- 7 This book adds to the abundant collection of publications on East Asian cinemas in the past few years. *East Asian Cinemas* is not an introduction to East Asian films: it is mainly targeted to a well-informed readership, from Asian film fans to Asian film scholars. The relevance and quality of the 11 chapters that comprise the book are uneven, with some of the arguments being repetitive. Nevertheless, to its credit, the book addresses two critical issues in contemporary East Asian film industries: the trans-nationalisation of Asian cinemas in terms of film aesthetics, style, and construction of genre films; and the development and prospects of film coproduction between (East) Asian countries. Interviews in the last part of the book are particularly interesting as they give new insights on competing discourses on coproduction from the perspective of the filmmaking world.
- 8 *East Asian Cinemas* is perhaps better read along with Kinnia Shuk-ting Yau’s *East Asian Cinema and Cultural Heritage: From China, Hong Kong, Taiwan to Japan and South Korea* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Published the same year, this collection of papers includes chapters by many of the contributors to *East Asian Cinemas* and can complement its third part. A readership less familiar with East Asian cinemas will prefer the clarity and coherence of Leon Hunt and Leung Wing-Fai’s *East Asian Cinemas: Exploring TransnationalConnections on Film* (I.B. Tauris, 2008).

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