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CHAPTER 17

The Pan-Asian ‘Miss Granny’ Phenomenon

Jennifer Coates, Hsin Hsieh, Sung-Ae Lee and Kate Taylor-Jones

Successful film remakes can become truly transnational phenomena, reaching across and beyond East Asia. This chapter explores the diverse and continued remaking of the ‘Miss Granny’ story, from its first iteration in South Korea to the multiple versions across East and Southeast Asia. The ‘Miss Granny’ story began as *Suspicious Girl* (*Susanghan geunyeo*, Hwang Dong-hyuk, 2014), in which a difficult elderly woman struggling with her family relationships finds herself transported by a magic photobooth back into her 20-year-old body, while retaining her knowledge and memories in the contemporary setting. After high box-office earnings of 51.7 million USD and significant critical acclaim, the story was quickly retold for Chinese-speaking audiences as *20 Once Again* (*Chóng fǎn èrshí suì*, Leste Chen, 2015), for Vietnamese audiences as *Sweet 20*, aka *You Are My Grandmother* (*Em là bà nội của anh*, Phan Gia Nhat Linh, 2015) and for Japanese audiences as *Suspicious Girl*, aka *Sing My Life* (*Ayashii Kanojo*, Mizuta Nobuo, 2016). Spreading further, a Thai remake titled *Suddenly Twenty* (*Suddenly 20*, Araya Suriharn, 2016), an Indonesian remake titled *Sweet Twenty* (*Sweet 20*, Ody C. Harahap, 2017), a Philippine remake titled *Miss Granny* (Joyce E. Bernal, 2018) and a Telugu-language Indian version titled *Oh Baby!* (B. V. Nandini Reddy, 2019) are also available. The South Korean version overtook box-office success *Frozen* (Jennifer Lee and Chris Buck, 2013), while the Chinese adaptation grossed \$57.4 million and the Vietnamese version was the highest-grossing domestic film in Vietnam at the time of its release .

An examination of these ‘Miss Granny’ films, which have become a remarkable global phenomenon, is timely for many reasons. First, the director of the original, Hwang Dong-hyuk, has recently achieved global fame via his Netflix show *Squid Game* (*Ojingeo Geim*, 2021–), and audiences who had not previously watched his earlier films such as *My Father* (2007), *Silenced/The Crucible* (2011) and *The Fortress* (2017) are now discovering them. By exploring some of the facets of *Miss Granny* that made it such an exportable, culturally appropriated production in neighbouring or nearby countries throughout the East and Southeast Asian regions, we might gain insight into the reasons for the director’s recent success and *Squid Game*’s “translatability” as a pop culture text rooted in Korean modern history and memories of the past. Second, distribution of the remakes themselves have all been heavily controlled by CJ Entertainment, which has partnered with local companies to ensure the remakes align thematically and stylistically with the original film, thereby engaging wider debates on the circulation of Korean products, a trend that continues apace at the time of writing. Finally, all the films reveal the intricacies of ageing, gender and nationhood that operate in a variety of ways in all the remakes, and this chapter will focus mostly on these elements and introduce a multifaceted debate on the complexities of the ‘Miss Granny’ story.

As the authors of this chapter, each of us have a keen interest in specific aspects of the film and wish to present a diverse but not exhaustive look at the various elements that spark interest in the East and Southeast Asian versions. Our respective expertise in Chinese, Japanese, and South East Asian cinema in addition to South Korean cinema has allowed for a combination of perspectives deeply embedded in the cinema cultures of the ‘remaking’ countries as well as the home of the original film. We believe that this attention to the socio-political and historical backgrounds of the remakes production in their ‘receiving’ countries

as well as the ‘sending’ country can reveal underlying aspirations and anxieties within a broader East Asian viewership that has made the ‘Miss Granny’ story legible and popular beyond its original South Korean context.

All the films maintain the same basic plot introduced in the original film . An elderly, rather cantankerous woman becomes estranged from her wider family. As she laments her loneliness, she is transported back to her youthful body via a magical film studio. She becomes a singer in her grandson’s band and manages a potential new relationship while maintaining her link to an old friend who has long harboured a romantic interest in her. In the end she sacrifices her youth to save her grandson’s life after an accident. This may be an uncommon variant of the body-swap narrative trope, but it follows the expected structures of that script: a temporary change enables the character to reassess problematic aspects of her behaviour and, ironically, ‘come of age’ as someone with a newfound appreciation for things that she had once taken for granted. Her period of metamorphosis is both a chance to live a new life as a young person and also an opportunity for her and her family to learn about what really matters in a family unit.

Introducing ‘Miss Granny’: A Comparative Analysis of the Opening Sequence

Sung-Ae Lee

A crucial aspect of remakes is the handling of a film’s beginning, which positions its audience by making incipient suggestions about genre, mode, setting and likely themes. Thus, how a particular remake engages in an implicit or overt dialogue with its pretext(s), whether an original film or a number of films within a genre, emerges during its opening movement.

The length of the opening sequence of each ‘Miss Granny’ film varies considerably, but always extends until the moment O Mal-soon (the main character in the original film, portrayed by Shim Eun-kyung and Na Moon-hee in her younger and older guises, respectively) or one of her iterations enters the magical photo studio . The remakes omit or shorten some segments, add new material, include more exposition or take longer to establish the deficiency or tension which motivates the action. *Miss Granny*’s beginning of 20:28 minutes becomes, at the extremes, 15 minutes in the Indonesian remake and 27 minutes in the Indian version. For example, the title screen in *Miss Granny* is immediately followed by a seminar on ageism in which university students articulate negative attitudes toward the elderly, but both the Vietnamese and Indonesian remakes omit the scene.

Presumably, the ageism seminar might be deemed to lack impact as an entry into the narrative in countries with large populations of young people and relatively low participation in tertiary education. Such modifications to the original film result in substantial disparity amongst the lengths of the opening sequence.

Because the beginning of a film is unlikely to coincide with the beginning of the film’s story and a film has several thematic possibilities, a remake has numerous options for the kinds of establishing moves it makes and for the questions it prompts in the minds of viewers. The ‘Miss Granny’ films all make strategic use of a segment preceding the title screen to indicate a thematic direction for the film and to establish the distinctiveness of each film. The original *Miss Granny* begins with a rhetorical transaction between a female voice-over narrator and the viewing audience. This moment introduces the themes of sexism and ageism by drawing an analogy between women as objects of male attention and sports balls, from a basketball to a dodge ball. That no woman appears in the segment reinforces the assertion that a woman’s life course is determined by male desire toward her, which diminishes in each decade of her

adult life. None of the remakes retains this rhetorical gesture but each of them steps away from the Korean pre-text and begins with a realistic establishing scene. The audience's immediate cognitive engagement with the beginning as an overt thematic foregrounding of the themes of women's lives, gender and ageism is thus framed as engagement with a narrative mode from which the theme must be deduced.

In a clear thematic shift, three of the remakes (those from China, Vietnam and Indonesia) include a family portrait within the first two minutes of the film. Embracing three generations, the portrait is a schema of solidarity and continuity. When it first appears in the Chinese remake, the family portrait lacks a context. In contrast, viewers conclude that in the Vietnamese remake the photo is a part of the celebration of Mrs Đại's seventieth birthday. The rest of the family is happy and playful, but she is steeped in misery. Her lack of a sense of well-being is thus indirectly introduced. In a further contrast, the Indonesian remake begins with a medium establishing shot which depicts a man and a woman on a motor scooter who stop to exchange warm greetings with two women, presumably neighbours. The clothing of all four is characteristically Muslim, including hijab and abaya for women and a songkok cap for men, and the *mise-en-scène* indicates that it is the Lebaran festival (end of Eid al-Fitr). The scene then shifts to an extended family as they celebrate the festival. The occasion resembles the family meal that opens the Vietnamese remake – and likewise establishes family as a central theme – but setting, clothing and purpose are very different. The Lebaran custom of asking forgiveness from one's parents and elders is enacted as the family form a line to kneel before Fatma, the grandmother, and say, 'Forgive all my wrongdoings'. An element of instability is introduced when it is the turn of Salmah, the daughter-in-law, as instead of simply granting forgiveness Fatma remarks that she has been forgiving her for a long time already. Fatma's habit of privileging males and acting in a domineering manner

towards females is extended to her grandchildren. This gender bias is evident in the original *Miss Granny* and is sustained across the remakes. Narratively, her bullying of her daughter-in-law (or daughter in the Japanese film) is the catalyst for her metamorphosis; thematically, her bias foregrounds gender inequality within cultures that were modernised during the twentieth century while still sustaining persistent inequalities in most aspects of women's lives. The granny's disruptive effect on the family appears consistently in her unconditional support for her grandson's apparently wayward desire to make a career in pop music. She is expressing her own thwarted desire (most overtly thematised in the opening minute of the Thai remake) and has no idea of how elusive success can be, or of the mediocrity of his band.

Variations within the opening sequences illustrate how the 'same' material can be handled quite differently to produce similar thematic effects. The cognitive principle enabling these variations becomes evident in the seminar about ageism, which is reworked in four of the remakes. The question put to the class – 'Give me one stereotype of elderly people that pops into your heads' – is a formulation of the concepts of schema and scripts, those cognitive structures that describe how knowledge and assumptions about life are organised, activated and modified within any individual human brain. In the original film, the seminar about ageism is a simple explication of an underlying schema for elderly people. In response to the lecturer's question, the students offer six components of a schema which expresses physical unattractiveness, physical incompetence and loss of social usefulness. The significance of the schema for this demographic is summed up by a conventionally beautiful young woman, who says, 'I'm going to kill myself before I hit my 30s. Why live till your 70s and have a sloppy life?' The scene then cuts to the first appearance of Mal-soon, who speaks as if she had heard the remark. This disruption of narrative realism, following the metaphorical opening movement, suggests that the film has a thesis to explore. In the Chinese and Thai versions,

negative comments made by the students are interspersed with incidents in which the behaviour of the elderly protagonist confirms those prejudices, a strategy devised for, but not retained in, the original film. In *Oh Baby!* (the Indian remake), the lecturer mentions his own mother (the film's protagonist, known as 'Baby') as an example, and the scene then cuts to her as she performs the criticism that the elderly have the habit of telling the same stories over and over. The Philippines remake simply juxtaposes the seminar and the protagonist's confirming behaviour. However, none of the three remakes which retain the episode includes the metacinematic segue whereby Mal-soon responds to the final student's comment (which she has not heard). Only retained in the Chinese remake, the female student's declaration that she will not grow old but kill herself before turning thirty may seem comically absurd, but reflects a gender asymmetry embodied in a female obsession with personal beauty as a woman's major asset.

During the opening credits of the Chinese remake, the family portrait schema is followed by a schematic life narrative which, extending for a mere two minutes and twenty seconds, expands the portrait as if to summarise the male life trajectory of Xiang Guo Bin (Zhao Lixin) from boyhood to middle age. As he walks between visually interconnected spaces, he leaves his mother, meets a girlfriend, marries, becomes a father and, then, becomes the professor conducting the ageism seminar that comprises the next scene. The film's title appears on the screen as he enters the classroom. The curious insertion of this male script as an establishing scene reverses the thematic implications of the beginning of *Miss Granny* by suggesting that this is a family story with a male focus. The less obviously articulated female script about the granny protagonist does not emerge in any of the remakes until the film's beginning gives way to its middle section with her magical transformation.

In contrast, a recurrent theme of the Japanese *Sing My Life* is the challenge faced by women to lead an agentic life in the contemporary world. The film's title is preceded by a vignette from the blood transfusion scene near the close of the film so that in retrospect the temporariness of the protagonist's return to youth always overshadows the film. The substitution of a daughter, Yukie (Satomi Kobayashi), for the son of the original (and all other remakes) imparts a strong female focus, and a model script built into the beginning becomes a rendition of a common experience of female office workers in Japan, with its story of Yukie's demotion and her replacement by a younger, prettier woman. Yukie's change of circumstance also highlights one of the obvious failings of her mother, Katsu (Baisho Mitsuko), the 'granny' protagonist: because of her domineering personality and self-regard, Katsu does not engage in conversational turn-taking, and Yukie's attempt to explain her situation is swept aside by Katsu's inability to listen. The same situation occurs when Yukie's attempt to exert authority over her son, Tsubasa (Takumi Kitamura), is dismissed by Katsu. The human and familial consequences of the grandmother's overbearing personality is a feature of the beginning sequence of the original film and all the remakes, and in all except the Japanese it is the primary cause of her daughter-in-law's stress-related collapse. In combination with her extreme preference for men, her oppressive behaviour further disrupts family harmony by provoking resentment and dislike from her granddaughter. This motif finds its epitome in *Oh Baby!*: following the collapse of Baby's daughter-in-law Madhavi (Pragathi Mahavadi), Divya (Aneesha Dama), Baby's granddaughter, assaults Baby verbally with a sharp analysis of her self-centredness and disregard for what others say or think.

As mentioned above, the Thai remake most overtly foregrounds the granny's unfulfilled desire for a singing career. This emphasis underlies the unique beginning to this film: for one

minute preceding the title screen, the film, in perhaps a self-conscious contrast to the Chinese remake, presents a black-and-white and sepia flashback with voice-over narrative which relates the story of the early years of granny protagonist Parn (Davika Hoorne as young Parn; Neeranuch Pattamasoot as old Parn). It depicts her passion for singing, her father's violent opposition and finally her foolish decision to elope in quest of a career. Following the title screen and transition to colour, the film depicts Parn working in a senior citizens' cafeteria, with her quality of life defined by moments interwoven with the seminar on ageing. The juxtaposition of past and present contrasts a youth oscillating between hope and lost opportunity with a present characterised by declining physical and social functions, by resentment and by ill temper. A sense of loss is more directly expressed in the Philippine version of *Miss Granny*. The film begins in a shopping complex, first with a children's party in a private room and then in the food hall as people affectionately greet one another. As a waiter leaves the children's party, a voice-over poses the question, 'How do you measure sadness? Is it being surrounded by happy people?' The voice over is soon identified as the thoughts of granny protagonist Fely (Nova Villa) as she muses that love is seldom extended to an elderly woman like her. In this way, the film offers 'love' as its theme, but this love is not (only) romantic love – it encompasses love shared between parents and children and love between friends. Fely's moment of self-pity exposes a flaw in what will soon be identified as her self-centred conception of relationships.

Older women have long been depicted in films in stereotyped ways: objects of sexism and ageism, they sacrifice for families, are rarely attributed with desires and ambitions of their own, and are resentful about the lives they have led. The 'Miss Granny' films first affirm that such stereotypes endure across Asian cinema and then go some way toward challenging them by opening a space for a more transgressive representation of ageing Asian women. The

carnavalesque time out enabled by the body swap trope – an older life experience within a young body – envisages different possibilities, even though persistent entrenched attitudes toward women require a sacrificial outcome and return to the status quo.

Mothering and Family Relationships in *Miss Granny*

Kate Taylor-Jones

All the versions of *Miss Granny* surf the waves of what Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels have dubbed the ideology of ‘new momism’ that has swelled since the 1980s (2004). ‘New Momism’ is an almost cult-like focus on motherhood as not just a woman’s highest vocation but also the key to her own personal happiness. This section explores three main aspects of the film and its remakes: first, the focus the film has on the self-sacrificial mother; second, the tension between the ideas of mothering and intergenerational conflict; and, last, the literal transformation of the elderly body and the narratives around a pre-maternal body that the film presents.

This idealisation of the ‘image’ of the perfect mother over the realities of actual mothering practices has been well established in scholarship (see Thurer 1994; Hays 1996; Miller 2005; O’Reilly 2008), and popular culture and the media are instrumental in propagating images of selfless mothers who sacrifice their time, energy, careers and even their individuality in the name of raising the next generation of ‘good citizens’. Feasey underlines the old-fashioned ideologies at play in these ‘romanticised, idealised and indeed conservative images of selfless and satisfied “good” mothers who conform to the ideology of intensive mothering’ (2012: 3). In all the nations where *Miss Granny* has been remade, this focus on motherhood as a key part of female identity has been emphasised across historical, political and cultural narratives (see Molony and Ochiai 2008; Song 2021; Liamputtong et al. 2004; Jolivent 1997; Francisco-

Menchavez 2019; Uno 1999). From the Philippine Duterte Government's simultaneous promotion of motherhood as traditionally defined whilst heavily legislating against any motherhood seen as problematic, to the Vietnamese 'Heroic Mother award' (*Bà mẹ Việt Nam anh hùng*) that recognises any mother who makes a 'sacrifice' to the nation state, and the Mother's Day tributes given by the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP) celebrating stars such as Lily Monteverde, Anitra Linda and Many Ichui Maceda, a sense of motherhood as a heroic and vital force persists in cinematic ideas of nationhood.

The end scenes of the 'Miss Granny' films all conform to the same narrative, in which the repentant sons (and one daughter) confront their mother in hospital as she leaves to give blood to her grandson. They apologise for their actions, atone for their lack of filial piety and request her to enjoy her new youth. Without hesitation, the Granny protagonists respond that being a mother has been the foundational point in their lives and they would never choose to change that despite the hardships that it has brought. This idealised maternal self-sacrifice is enhanced by the various flashback sequences seen during her songs that show her becoming widowed and caring for a sick child while working long hours in poor conditions. These songs vary in position in the films but all of them remain a core element. All the Miss Granny figures, except the Japanese version, are widowed and have never remarried, instead choosing to focus on her child. In all the films, this focus has been repaid by a child who is both socially and financially successful.

Each remake has its own specific engagement with the idea of motherhood as positioned in the national narrative. In the Vietnamese version, after her physical transformation, the protagonist Mrs. Dai (Minh Duc) takes on the name of Thanh Nga (Miu Le), a singer who died alongside her husband in 1978 ostensibly protecting her child from a kidnapping attempt

– in short, the ultimate self-sacrificial mother. The Filipino version of *Miss Granny* was directed by Joyce E Bernal, whose frequent work for President Rodrigo Duterte (she has directed three of his five State of the Nation Addresses) speaks to a political position in keeping with the sense of ‘traditional’ values that her film heavily stresses. The film stars Sara Geronimo, who gained fame in a television singing competition but has since gone on to become one of the most notable and successful modern Filipino singers. Her own public image is one that is wholesome, family-orientated and defined by traditional values; and the film ensures that this image is never disrupted. Recalled in the old OPM [Original Pilipino Music] hits from the 1970s such as ‘Rain’, ‘Forbidden’ and ‘Kiss Me, Kiss Me’, the 1970s was a highly turbulent decade for the Philippines for both man-made and natural disasters. The protagonist’s sonic link to this period emphasises her ability to protect and nurture her child in highly complex circumstances.

Sharon Hays has focused on the concept of the ‘intensive mother’, which no other mother or woman can ever live up to, in her book *Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. The protagonist of the ‘Miss Granny’ story is the living embodiment of this role. She is expert at all matters related to the home, food and care, but she is also hard working, self-sacrificing and child focused (even if that child or grandchild is an adult). As Douglas and Michaels (2004: 24) point out, this focus has not actually made any material or social gains for those undertaking the role of mother, but it certainly operates as a very powerful regulatory myth; and, as Valerie Heffernan and Gay Wilgus note, the ‘homogenized, sanitized, media-fuelled images of motherhood bear little resemblance to the lived experiences of the majority of mothers’ (2018:5). Wider media discourses may ‘idealize and glamorize motherhood as the one path to fulfilment for women’ (Kinnick 2009: 3), but this idea of fulfilment is a curious one in the context of the pan-Asian ‘Miss Granny’ phenomenon. Parenthood for the most part

is seen as a relentlessly negative experience. For the daughter-in-law, her child's refusal to listen or engage with her is echoed in the rejection of Granny by her wider family as she becomes more overbearing in her old age. As the narrative develops, and in every context, motherhood is marked in a negative way. In all the films, Granny in her younger format accosts a young woman and ends up directly, and publicly, insulting her parenting. Whilst initially, these scenes open with a sense of comradery, she aims to help the young mother by holding and admiring the child, she quickly reverts to the manner that we had seen her treat her daughter-in-law - critical, harsh and whilst possibly motivated by care, ultimately undermines and deeply hurts the younger woman. Her father in law is triggered towards a breakdown and with these younger women, the mode of insult is very focused on the physical ability of the respective young woman to raise and care for her baby.

In the Korean version, directed by Hwang Dong-hyuk, the protagonist goes into detail about watery breast milk leading to diarrhoea and whilst holding the baby she loudly accuses the mother for substituting cow's milk for human breast milk to feed the child. In all the films, the admonishment is conducted publicly with no regard for the mothers privacy of feelings. In the Thai version, initially after admiring the baby, she criticises the woman for having breast implants leading to an inability to produce proper milk. In the Vietnamese version, young Miss Granny notes that the mother needs to wash her breasts – but also suggests that the mother is refusing to breastfeed due to the concern that her breasts will sag. The Telugu version has her criticise the mother for buying formula in a shop. In the Japanese version, the young mother gives in to tears and kneels wailing at the young Miss Granny's feet, as though she has become a child herself. In all the versions, the mothers are critiqued for dressing their children inappropriately and thus putting them at risk of illness. When compared to the protagonist and her generation, the maternal body of the modern woman is seen as lacking.

Unable to manage as her forebears did with a child strapped to her back as she worked long hours, these women are shown as selfish and incapable. The modern woman seems unable to perform any role as expected.

The role that youth plays is highlighted in all the versions as old age is defined by a loss of dignity, a loss of purpose and a lack of social value and space. The various old age centres are shown as sites of petty grievances and poor entertainment, neither a productive nor desirable space. As Jo Elfving Hwang notes, 'Existing research on the ageing female body in South Korea has primarily focused on the so-called *noin munjae* ('the elderly issue') discourse' (2016: 6). Within this discourse, the ageing body is framed as passive, undesirable or out-of-control. While this is perhaps most notable in the Korean context and very much reflected in the film, it is hardly out of keeping with global narratives about the ageing female body.

Indeed, as Imelda Whelehan and Joel Gwynne describe, the place of post-menopausal women is usually 'on the scrapheap' (2014: 5). Furman's (1997) ethnography of a New York beauty salon gave prominence to the relationship that older women have with their self-image and argued that they are 'twice-objectified' when they look in the mirror as 'a woman and as old woman' (1997: 109). In *Miss Granny* this is a literal experience of double objectification as both her gender and her age are reflected via screens in all the films. She initially desires a good photo for her funeral display – a moment that acknowledges her lack of place in her family unit. However, it is via the camera screen that the radical anti-ageing processes take place and it is also by literal reflection (windows and mirrored sunglasses) that she discovers her newly desirable image. All the films return Miss Granny to a clearly pre-maternal body. Nova Villa becomes Sarah Geronimo, Na Moon-hee becomes Shim Eun-kyung, Niniek L. Karim becomes Tatjana Saphira, and Neeranuch Patamasood morphs into Davika Hoorne. With this new body, the marks and trials of childbirth and rearing have been removed. All the

versions stress that the maternal cannot be desirable. In the Korean original, the protagonist's ability to literally utilise this new body is far more highly emphasised than in the other versions. She faces down another woman in the bathhouse with impressive gymnastic feats and manages to humiliate her, once again stressing the power and the desirability of the youthful body. In the Thai, Indonesian and Vietnamese versions, the protagonist dances and does cartwheels behind older people doing their more sedate workouts, as she realises the capacity of her new body. In the Telugu version, she dances around an elderly rehabilitation centre including jumping past a man struggling to learn to walk again after a stroke. Motherhood is not valued as a bodily mode of experience; however, at the same time, the films laud the idealised sacrificial mother figure.

Miss Granny Transforms ... into Audrey Hepburn?

Jennifer Coates

Mizuta Nobuo's Japanese language remake *Sing My Life* is perhaps the most faithful reworking of the South Korean original in terms of visual style. However, as noted above, the protagonist's son is replaced with a daughter, and a new focus on office life for ageing women is introduced. While the Chinese language version largely abandons the references to Audrey Hepburn and classic Hollywood which inform the transformation scenes, the Japanese version emphasises this connection. Indeed, the Japanese and South Korean versions of the story are linked through a shared experience of exposure to North American film culture against the historical background of US military activities in the Occupation of Japan (1945–1952) and the Korean War, respectively (the Philippine and Thai remakes also feature Hepburn-style visuals and references to the star in dialogue). This section of the

chapter will focus on the use of the image of Audrey Hepburn and references to the film *Roman Holiday* (William Wyler, 1953) in the Japanese remake in order to draw out the similarities and differences between the East Asian versions of the story and their approach to gender and ageing.

As alluded to in an earlier section of this chapter, the ‘Miss Grannies’ of the South Korean, Chinese and Japanese iterations are in their 70s in the contemporary settings of the films’ release years (2014–2016), suggesting that the characters were born around the end of the Second World War, and more pertinently, the end of the Fifteen Years Asia-Pacific War which ended Japan’s colonisation and occupation of East Asia. The postwar popular culture boom in Hollywood imports is referenced in the Japanese and South Korean versions in the main characters’ passion for Audrey Hepburn and *Roman Holiday*. Both women style their hair like the Hollywood star, adopt a similar mode of dress (despite the mid-2010s setting) and take new names that echo ‘Audrey’ – O Doo-ri for the South Korean ‘Miss Granny’ and Ōtori for the Japanese iteration.

Resonating with Hepburn’s own star persona, singing and dancing are core plot points and aesthetic elements in all remakes of the ‘Miss Granny’ story, with karaoke playing a key role in the East Asian films, where ‘Miss Granny’ is discovered singing in public and is propelled to pop music stardom. The Japanese Ōtori Setsuko (the name chosen by protagonist Setayama Katsu for her youthful persona after transformation) even compares the full narrative arc of the film to Hepburn’s *Roman Holiday* at peak moments of drama and resolution, aspiring to the life of a ‘princess’ and noting sadly at the conclusion of the story that even Hepburn’s character had to leave her carefree ‘holiday’ as an everyday girl and return to her more restrictive life as a royal at the end of that movie. Setsuko/Katsu compares

her own choice to undergo a medical procedure, risking a return to her aged body, to the ultimatum faced by Hepburn's character.

While Hepburn was twenty-four years old at the time of *Roman Holiday*'s production, it is clear that the protagonists of the Japanese and South Korean 'Miss Granny' stories are not attempting to channel the young adult Hepburn but rather a more youthful iteration of their own lives and experiences. Both protagonists are returned to a body visually similar to their twenty-year-old selves, but historical timelines suggest that these seventy-something women would have been closer to childhood when *Roman Holiday* introduced Hepburn to audiences in East Asia from 1954. The childlike glee with which the protagonists embark on the shopping trips that create their Hepburn makeovers recall the behaviour of younger teens or children, while the fusion of the language and behaviours the protagonists have used as older ladies with their now-youthful appearance creates an impression of childlike frankness and uninhibited expression.

Zen Yipu connects the image of Hepburn herself with an exuberant attitude to consumerism in Japan in an argument that suggests how the shopping spree of the transformation scene in the Japanese remake reflects the historical memory and aspirations of the protagonist. While Kanako Terasawa has noted the boom in women attempting to dress and style their hair like Hepburn in the wake of the distribution of *Roman Holiday* in Japan (2010: 250), Zen argues that Hepburn's impact on consumerism in Japan was reinvigorated in the 1990s in a series of advertisements and magazine articles featuring the 1950s-era image of the star. In 1998 Kirin Beverages Co. broadcast a television commercial featuring Audrey Hepburn drinking tea, while *Asahi Graph* (Asahi Graph Extra 1999) published a special issue on Audrey Hepburn in the following year in which twelve Japanese stars discussed their own fandom of Audrey

Hepburn (Zen 2004: 78). Such uses of the star's image brought her back into the popular consciousness in Japan in the late 1990s and, as Zen argues, 'provide an example of how imagery and its "aura" can be effectively commodified, and then either attached to goods or sold as a form of media content' (2004: 80).

Channelling Hepburn certainly fuels a consumer spending spree by the protagonist of the Japanese remake, who puzzles store owners in the slightly dingy covered market she frequents when she takes her newly youthful figure through a series of stores offering dated styles targeted at older customers. Waving the crisp 10,000 yen notes she has just accessed from her pension fund, she charms store owners into letting her walk out of their shops in her new items, dancing down the street in her 1950s style ballet pumps. The commodification of the Hepburn aura does not stop there, as her new look attracts the attention of a series of record producers and musicians, who find her retro styling fresh and new in the contemporary pop music landscape. Teaming up with her own grandson, the protagonist turns his previously unsuccessful visual kei-style band into a hit, not only with her pleasant singing voice and sassy older lady dance moves, which become cute when performed by a young woman, but also by her unusual retro dress style. It is notable that when Ōtori Setsuko returns to her elderly body and life as Setsuyama Katsu, the replacement female singer in her grandson's band is newly costumed in retro dresses, suggesting the lasting commercial power of the Hepburn style.

Hepburn's image not only channelled a fantasy of grown-up Hollywood glamour for the generations born during the Second World War in Japan, but it also fit smoothly into a gendered understanding of the beauty ideals achievable for Japanese women, and those considered desirable within a Japanese imagination of femininity. Articles on Hepburn in the

Japanese media, both in the 1950s and in the 1990s, noted her physical similarity to the ideal Japanese woman, with her dark hair, small stature and slim figure (*Dime* 1992). Several articles argue that this gave Hepburn's appearance 'a feeling of familiarity with that of the Japanese female' (Zen 2004: 81), as well as channelling both feminine elegance and a 'child-like' impression (Zen 2004: 83). These elements come together in the 'Miss Granny' narrative's use of the Hepburn image to lend both the Japanese and South Korean protagonists a presence that is not only aspirational but also speaks to their desire to recover their lost childhoods and young adult years, which the viewer implicitly understands to have been blighted by the aftermath of various wars, and which the films explicitly demonstrate to have been periods of heavy family responsibility and poverty. In this respect the narrative arc of the protagonist's backstory also mirrors Hepburn's, in that the star experienced the danger, poverty and restrictions of wartime and suffered the loss of her aspiration to a career as a ballet dancer due to this hardship.

In Japan, Hepburn lives on into the 2000s in a series of television narratives that may have shaped the representation of the Hepburn impersonation in the Japanese remake of the 'Miss Granny' story. From October 2000 to March 2001, NHK broadcast a morning drama titled *Audrey (Ōtori)* set in 1953, the year that *Roman Holiday* was filmed but one year before it arrived in Japan. The story follows a Japanese translator in Kyoto, the 'Hollywood of Japan' (Lewis 2019), with a daughter named Audrey. In 2019 Hepburn's aura appeared again in the Japan edition of Netflix's popular makeover show *Queer Eye: Japanese Holiday* (S1E1), when the five American presenters intervened in the life of divorced 57-year-old hospice nurse Yoko Sakuma. Yoko is introduced as having 'given up on being a woman' (*onna o suteru*) due to her commitment to her work and lack of attention to her physical appearance. As Eguchi and Kimura argue, this discourse suggests 'the logic of Japan's cisheteropatriarchy

that assumes single women who are over 30 years old are no longer attractive and desirable’ (2021: 228). Yoko channels the image of Audrey Hepburn as she goes through the makeover section, and Eguchi and Kimura argue that ‘Yoko’s admiration of Hepburn illustrates an embodied product of Japaneseness aspiring toward the U.S.’ in an ‘imbalanced power relation’ (2021: 228). At the same time, however, we can see how the invocation of Audrey Hepburn’s ‘aura’ is not only a mode of engaging with consumer culture and an identification considered particularly appropriate for Japanese or East Asian women, but also a common trope in the stereotyping of ageing as a loss of femininity. Perhaps the childlike and non-sexual aspects of Hepburn’s physique and style discussed above mean that it is considered more appropriate for an elderly or ageing woman to mimic Hepburn than, for example, Marilyn Monroe. Hepburn’s youthful star persona holds an aspirational place in the popular culture imaginary across much of East Asia even today, in tension with the issues of aging and motherhood explored in the early parts of this chapter. In the next section, we will explore the replacement of Hepburn with the image of Teresa Teng in the Chinese language remake of the ‘Miss Granny’ story.

***Miss Granny* in the Chinese-Speaking Context**

Hsin Hsieh

While the shared or comparative historical experiences of Japan and South Korea are visible in the style and beauty ideals described above, the Chinese language remake of the Miss Granny story requires some adaptation and localisation. The 2015 production of *20 Once Again* (2015), directed by Taiwanese filmmaker Leste Chen (Chén Zhèngdào), is a collaboration between South Korea’s CJ Entertainment, China’s Tianjin Century Media and

Catchplay Taiwan to remake the original *Miss Granny* for the Chinese film market. It stars Gua Ah-leh as granny Mengjun, Yang Zi-shan as her younger self, Lu Han as her grandson and Chen Bolin as the TV producer who becomes a love interest. Being a remake and produced by the same company as the original, the film tries to find a balance between how it connects with the original while finding its new identity within the Chinese-language film market. Lee Hyung-Sook argues that transnational remakes are simultaneously ‘decontextualised’ and ‘recontextualised in the course of interpretation’ and, therefore, meanings are ‘constantly destabilized’, creating ‘multiple possibilities’ (2019: 56). As such, *20 Once Again* demonstrates a tension between its status as a remake of a Korean box-office hit and its need to recontextualise the narrative’s nostalgic themes to resonate with far-reaching Chinese-language audiences that include Mainland China, the wider East Asian Sinosphere and the Chinese-speaking diasporas. It does this, first, by making direct reference to the original film and, second, by including pop-culture references that span various Chinese-speaking regions. This section of the chapter analyses the Chinese remake of *Miss Granny* to examine the tension whereby the multiple possibilities of interpretation are produced, with a special focus on two references: the iconic Chinese-language singer Teresa Teng (Teng Li-chun) as the image for the younger granny (replacing Audrey Hepburn), and the popular Chinese TV drama *My Fair Princess* (1998–1999) as another level of metatextual reference (replacing the fictional Korean drama show in the original). As *Miss Granny* is a film that conveniently provides opportunities for nostalgic displays, what do these culturally specific adaptations mean to audiences of the Chinese language remake? The Chinese remake adapts cultural references and history, which creates a mixed and imagined collective memory to accommodate the broader Chinese-language market.

As a collaboration between multiple regions, *20 Once Again* chooses to have a more ambiguous location-setting in the story. Most of the film is shot on location in Tianjin City, but the narrative itself does not specify the specific setting of the story. The remake drops the Hollywood icon Audrey Hepburn, but inserts another American pop-culture reference. When the grandson Xiang Qian-jin rides away from the concert, he encounters a scene that evokes Woodstock, as he passes a long queue of music festival participants, waving iconic anti-war slogans from 1960s America. However, this evocation is dropped when the camera cuts to a traditional-looking Chinese village with a herd of sheep occupying the main road. This blending of locations allows Chinese-language audiences from different regions to partake in a mediated form of collective nostalgia, as the references to American pop-culture would work for a certain generation or region.

In a sequence leading up to the transformation scene in the photo studio, grandma Mengjun insists on going to Uncle Li's (Deshun Wang) place by herself after dining out with her family. The dinner provides an opportunity for Mengjun to reflect on her imposition on her family after her daughter-in-law Yang Qin (Yijuan Li) is hospitalised due to stress. Concluding that she must leave, Mengjun arrives at the bus stop. In the Korean version, the ageing granny is shown in profile next to a sunscreen ad featuring a smiling young woman, which is installed on the side panel of the bus stop. In this shot, granny looks relatively smaller than the young woman as the advertisement takes up half of the frame, with its reflection on the glass panel of the bus stop occupying the rest. The slogan of the advertisement reads 'strong against the sun, soft on your skin': a visual reminder of granny's ageing. However, in the Chinese-language version, the film cuts to Mengjun sitting at the bus stop, with the poster of the original *Miss Granny* shown prominently behind her, featuring actress Shim Eun-kyung as her Audrey Hepburn-inspired O Doo-ri. Juxtaposing Mengjun

with the young O Doo-ri, this scene not only highlights the age discrimination issue that the film tries to explore, but is both an intertextual reference to the original film and a self-reflexive nod to its status as a remake. However, when Mengjun receives a call from her grandson and walks away from O Doo-ri, the remake announces a rejection of the same nostalgic icon as used in the original film. On her way to meet her grandson, a depressed Mengjun enters the photo studio and decides to take a photo for her own funeral. Instead of referring to Audrey Hepburn as in the Korean and Japanese versions, she asks the photographer to make her look like Teresa Teng (or Teng Li-chun, hence the alias ‘Meng Lijun’, which Mengjun assumes for her younger self). The choice to use Teresa Teng over Hepburn is one of the ways to answer the question ‘whose memory is being recreated?’

Historical events vary in different Chinese-language regions as the 1960s was the world of post-World War II and post-Chinese Civil War (1927–1949), and Hong Kong was under British colonial rule (1841–1997). Since the late Qing dynasty, Chinese/Mandarin speakers also have a long history of migration and diaspora, which ‘serve as major subjects in Chinese modernity’ (Yao 2020: 520). The pop-culture references, including Teng and *My Fair Princess*, connect these disparate histories. Teresa Teng began performing in Taiwan in 1967 and had albums released in Hong Kong by 1968, venturing into the Japanese market by 1973. Teng’s pan-Asian fame demonstrates that her ‘sociopolitical identity’ is ‘not static but fluid’ and ‘goes beyond that of [any other] Chinese popular singer’ (Lee 2019: 521). While Teng’s songs were officially banned in Mainland China during the early 1980s, people still found ways to hear them. As such, the popularity of Teng unveils ‘a complex intercultural process of (re)production, exchange and circulation’ (Yao 2020: 520) across the Sinosphere. Therefore, Teng’s songs in *20 Once Again* are also a form of ‘remake’ as she often covered songs previously popularised by other artists. For example, ‘Give Me a Kiss’ (1954), the first

song performed by the young Lijun in the film, was originally by Shanghai singer Chang Loo and later became one of Teng's biggest hits. After Teng's death in 1995, covers of her songs continue to thrive, and *20 Once Again* also contributes to the maintenance of Teng's legacy.

Replacing Audrey Hepburn with Teresa Teng is one of the strategies the Chinese-language version uses both to differentiate itself from the original and to localise it for the Chinese-speaking audience. The other significant cultural insertion in *20 Once Again* is its reference to the Chinese TV drama *My Fair Princess*, echoing Hepburn's princess character in *Roman Holiday*. In the original *Miss Granny*, O Mal-soon and Mr. Park (Park In-hwan) have been watching a long Korean drama together and the way young Mal-soon reacts to the show leads Mr. Park to suspect her real identity. The show used in this version is a fictional K-drama whose plotlines parody the conventions of TV melodramas. Its plot mirrors the central story of the film itself, which is to find out the identity of the main character (a princess). In *20 Once Again*, instead of creating a fictionalised Chinese TV show, clips from *My Fair Princess* are used to mirror the narrative of the film. Set in the Qing dynasty, one scene used from *My Fair Princess* involves the emperor trying to find out the identity of the princess, which plays on a TV in the background while other characters momentarily find Lijun suspicious. In addition to using the TV show to emphasise the theme of secret identities, another scene from *My Fair Princess*, with two women arguing, appears again in the background when Yumei (Qing Yang) from the senior centre is jealous of Uncle Li and Lijun's relationship. The use of this popular show demonstrates how the remake tries to maintain its relationship with the original version by undertaking a similar narrative strategy. But from a metatextual perspective, the show also recontextualises the film in relation to the original. *My Fair Princess* was written by Qiong Yao, a popular and prolific Taiwanese writer known for her romance novels and the numerous film adaptations of her work

throughout the 1970s. Like *20 Once Again*, *My Fair Princess* was also a co-production between Taiwan (Yi Ren Communications Co.) and China (Hunan Broadcasting System). The popularity of *My Fair Princess* has also resulted in multiple pan-Asian remakes. These two major strategies – Teresa Teng and *My Fair Princess* – demonstrate ‘multiple possibilities’ for the production of the remake, as its intended market spans multiple Chinese-speaking regions. The ‘constantly destabilised’ meaning that Lee Hyung-Sook discusses in her reading of the Korean Manchurian Western *The Good, the Bad, the Weird* (*Jo-eunnom nappeunnom isanghannom*, 2008) (2019: 56) applies here, with Meng Lijun’s embodiment of Teresa Teng becoming a means for the Chinese remake to reach beyond the mainland and into the wider Sinosphere, as well as various Chinese-speaking diasporas. Therefore, through intertextual references between the Korean and the Chinese versions, *20 Once Again* embraces its identity as a remake and creates a new meaning by incorporating contemporary cultural references for Chinese audiences around the world.

Conclusion

Whilst this chapter has explored some of the thematic and structural resonances across the “Miss Granny” films, it is by no means exhaustive because we do not have the space to deal with the various film remakes in the depth that they deserve as individual and interlinked texts. In particular, the various star bodies that are utilised inside the respective films; the use of physical violence as a mode of gendered communication; the role of diverse masculinities; and the use of musical genres tropes, are also topics that are worthy of further analysis. Charting a through-line from the complexities of ageism and gender bias, to the question of motherhood and the notion of female embodiment (as it especially relates to age), this chapter then analysed the use of the image of Audrey Hepburn as a youthful star persona, and finally

considered the star persona and performance of Teresa Teng, the Chinese replacement of the Hepburn icon. This chapter has largely focused on the East Asian remakes that even in the relatively geographically close areas of South Korea, China and Japan still require significant amendments to storylines, dialogues and performance style to make this ‘universal’ story intelligible to local audiences. Nonetheless, themes of family and questions of appropriate gendered and aged behaviour remain culturally relevant across the wide field of remakes.

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