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**Book Review Review of *Mapping Taiwanese Cinema, 2008–20: Environments, Poetics, Practice* by Christopher Brown, Edinburgh University Press, 2024, 232 pages. Hardback or Ebook, \$110**

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This is a book review.

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This book offers an extensive exploration of Taiwanese cinema's evolution over the past decade using mapping—literal and metaphorical—to analyze cinematic, aesthetic, and cultural shifts from 2008 to 2020. The author excels in combining detailed film analyses with broader sociocultural contexts, providing a multifaceted understanding of recent transformations in Taiwanese cinema. One major achievement is its in-depth case studies that highlight the diversity of Taiwanese cinema, covering various genres, themes, and stylistic approaches. The book also examines the resurgence of rural settings and the representation of indigenous cultures and critically addresses regionalism and land rights.

Overall, *Mapping Taiwanese Cinema, 2008–20: Environments, Poetics, Practice* is a meticulously researched work that significantly contributes to film studies. It is an invaluable resource for scholars, students, and enthusiasts, offering a compelling vision of its past, present, and future, as demonstrated in the chapter outline below.

The first chapter explores the complex relationship between Taiwanese cinema and mapping. It begins by considering *Amour-Legende* (Wu Mi-Sen, 2006), in which maps symbolize identity and memory on a fictional island. Brown highlights 2008 as a pivotal year, with *Cape No. 7* (Wei Te-Sheng) revitalizing the industry and shifting it toward commercially viable films. He examines how contemporary films use mapping to explore identity, space, and narrative, reflecting on historical uses of maps under colonial rule and the Kuomintang regime. Key themes include environments, poetics, and practice, focusing on aesthetic choices and the creation of cinematic spaces. The chapter describes how *Island Etude* (Chen Hwai-En, 2007) uses maps to depict characters' journeys, while *The Most Distant Course* (Lin Ching-Chieh, 2007) and *Southern Wind* (Kōji Hagiuda, 2014) highlight diverse regional depictions. The author shows how onscreen maps serve as narrative devices in *Zone Pro Site* (Chen Yu-Hsun, 2013) and *Dear Ex* (Hsu Yu-Ting and Hsu Chih-Yen, 2018) that explore regional identity and contrast settings. He emphasizes the relationship between maps and films, setting the stage for deeper explorations of Taiwanese cinema's poetics and practices from 2008 to 2020.

Chapter 2 explores the intricate relationship between geography, mapping, and narrative in Taiwanese cinema. Titled "You Are Here," it begins with a description of a scene from *My Little Honey Moon* (Cheng Yu-Chieh, 2012), wherein the character Chiung-E uses a map of southern Taiwan to symbolize her self-discovery. This sets the stage for analyzing how maps and geographical imagery reflect characters' transformations. Introducing film mapping as a practice of futurity, shaping narrative and emotional spaces, Brown highlights the importance of mapping in post-2008 Taiwanese cinema, using films like *Lokah Laqi* (Laha Mebow, 2016) to show how spatial

orientation connects to characters' past and future. The chapter discusses various cartographic artifacts, including conventional maps and cosmological diagrams, and their role in creating cinematic space. He considers *Island Etude* (Chen Hwai-En, 2007) and *The Most Distant Course* (Lin Ching-Chieh, 2007) in exploring Taiwanese identity through travel, pointing to *Island Etude* as emphasizing the sensory experience of geography. Overall, Chapter 2 is a detailed analysis of how mapping and geography are woven into contemporary Taiwanese cinema.

Chapter 3, titled "Back to the Woods," examines the resurgence of forest settings in post-2008 Taiwanese cinema. It begins with a discussion of *The Tag-Along 2* (Cheng Wei-Hao, 2017), in which the protagonist, Li Shu-Fen, uses maps and technology to search for her missing daughter in Taiwan's forests. This sets the stage for an exploration of how forests have again become significant cinematic environments. According to Brown, forests had largely disappeared from Taiwanese cinema following the 1970s, but after 2008, filmmakers started using them as settings for various narratives. He points to *Starry Starry Night* (Tom Lin Shu-Yu, 2011), *Soul* (Chung Mong-Hong, 2013), *The Tag-Along* (Cheng Wei-Hao, 2015), and *Forêt Debussy* (Kuo Cheng-Chui, 2016) as key examples of how this return to the woods reflects broader cultural and environmental concerns and a shift from urban to rural settings. The ecological subtext in these films addresses environmental degradation and land use ethics. *Forêt Debussy* emphasizes survival and the visceral experience of nature, with the director employing remote forest settings to convey the protagonist's emotional journey. Brown concludes that these films, through their depiction of Taiwan's forests, contribute to constructing a unique Taiwanese identity.

Chapter 4, titled "Indigenous Land and Sea," explores the representation of Taiwan's indigenous peoples and their connection to the land and sea. It begins by considering *Pakeriran* (2017), directed by Amis filmmaker Lekal Sumi Cilangasan. In it, the protagonist, Futing, reconnects with his ancestral roots, symbolized through the tide and maps. Brown examines films depicting returns to rural, tribal villages, including *Wawa No Cidal* (Lekal Sumi and Cheng Yu-Chieh, 2015), *Lokah Laqi*, and *Long Time No Sea* (Heather Tsui, 2018). These often feature urban characters returning home, reflecting a cultural movement toward tribalism, a move encouraged by anthropologist Taiban Sasala. The chapter delves into the historical suppression of indigenous culture under Japanese rule and the Kuomintang, with early films promoting assimilation and stereotypes. Visual and narrative techniques in these films convey a sense of place and indigenous identity, with *Finding Sayun* (2011) emphasizing connections to ancestral land through journeys and maps. Brown points out that these films emphasize moving beyond traditional cartographic representations to adopt a more fluid understanding of geography aligning with indigenous perspectives.

Chapter 5, titled “Love in a Designer City,” explores contemporary Taipei through design and aesthetics. The chapter opens with *Design 7 Love* (Chen Hung-I, 2014), set in a Taipei design agency, which uses modern settings to create an alternative cityscape. The narrative is structured around design philosophies impacting characters’ lives. Other films, including *Love* (Niu Cheng-Tse, 2012), *The Mad King of Taipei* (Yeh Tien-Lun, 2017), *52Hz I Love You* (Wei Te-Sheng, 2017), and *The Story of the Stone* (Wu Hsing-Hsiang, 2018), further depict Taipei as a designer city. These films often use ensemble casts to reflect collective urban experiences shaped by design environments, mirroring Taiwan’s design sector growth from 2010 to 2015.

Brown also examines the use of color schemes, lighting, and production design to create striking representations of Taipei. For example, *Love* uses bold colors in depicting Songshou Square Park, while *The Mad King of Taipei* incorporates street art to evoke a whimsical atmosphere. *Design 7 Love* features carefully designed spaces with complementary colors. The chapter connects these trends to Taipei’s designation as the 2016 World Design Capital, showing how filmmakers speculate on the city’s future. Overall, Chapter 5 provides an in-depth analysis of how design and aesthetics shape the visual and thematic elements of contemporary Taiwanese films.

Chapter 6, “House Style,” examines the depiction of domestic interiors in Taiwanese films and their cultural and social significance. It opens with a discussion of *Sen Sen* (Bon An, 2018), in which a map in the character Lili’s home symbolizes her transient life and work. From there, Brown explores the importance of interior spaces in the films *Exit* (Chienn Hsiang, 2014), *Black Sheep* (Bon An, 2016), *More than Blue* (Lin Hsiao-Chien, 2018), and *Dear Ex*. These films often focus on characters challenging conventional family stereotypes within confined living quarters. For instance, *Exit* portrays a woman dealing with menopause and family pressures, while *Black Sheep* delves into a toxic father-son relationship. Brown argues that these indoor settings underscore the intimate domesticity of these dramas, addressing gender and sexuality and offering alternative views of domesticity. *More than Blue* uses lighting and design to create a dreamlike atmosphere, highlighting characters’ emotional journeys. Brown suggests that these films reflect changing cultural attitudes toward family life in Taiwan in their offering of more inclusive representations.

Chapter 7, “Quiet Places,” examines the portrayal of male characters in rural or semi-rural Taiwanese films. Brown begins with *A Time in Quchi* (Chang Tso-Chi, 2013), which follows a schoolboy named Pao moving from Taipei to the rural area of Quchi. Similarly, *Secrets in the Hot Spring* (Lin Kuan-Hui, 2018) features a teenager staying with his grandparents in a mountain hotel, and *The Great Buddha+* (Huang Hsin-Yao, 2017) portrays a security guard in a small town who escapes his monotonous life by

secretly watching his employer's dashcam footage. According to the author, these films represent a trend in Taiwanese cinema since 2008 that focuses on characters' journeys from urban centers to rural areas. In *Father to Son* (Hsiao Ya-Chuan, 2018), Pao-Te feels distant from Taipei despite living in Chiayi, reflecting themes of exclusion and marginalization. The chapter explores masculinity in these settings, where rural environments reveal characters' repressed fears and vulnerabilities. Brown finds that water serves as a recurring motif, symbolizing death and renewal and shaping characters' emotional landscapes.

In the conclusion, Brown synthesizes the book's exploration of the influence of mapping on recent Taiwanese films. Post-2008 filmmakers shifted from traditional art cinema to experimentation with themes and styles intended to appeal to broader audiences. While there is no single "national style," the unique cinematic landscape arises from combining multiple tropes specific to Taiwan. The decline in onscreen maps seen since 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic marks significant changes with two trends emerging: increased online distribution, exemplified by the release of *Dear Ex* on Netflix and a rise in genre filmmaking, especially horror, thriller, and science fiction. Brown highlights the emergence of science fiction with *As We Like It* (Chen Hung-I and Wei Ying-Chuan, 2021), which blends past and future in a futuristic Taipei. Brown's conclusion reinforces that mapping has played a crucial role in shaping post-2008 Taiwanese cinema's aesthetics and narratives, urging further exploration of these trends.

*Mapping Taiwanese Cinema, 2008–20: Environments, Poetics, Practice* is a meticulously researched and insightful analysis of contemporary Taiwanese cinema. By examining the dynamic interplay of mapping, geography, and narrative, the author provides a fresh perspective on the evolution of Taiwanese films, highlighting their cultural and aesthetic significance in a global context.

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**Competing Interests**

The author declares no competing interests. He previously served as an editor of *ASIANetwork Exchange*.

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