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**Zhang Yimou's *Blood Simple*: Cannibalism, remaking and translation in world cinema**

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**Abstract**

Zhang Yimou's *A Woman, A Gun and A Noodle Shop* (2009) remakes the Coen brothers' *Blood Simple* (1984) in a way that re-imagines the earlier film in a Chinese setting, adapting and recreating the narrative, but the film cannot be regarded as being aimed solely at a Chinese audience, as it was also released in the United States and United Kingdom. Drawing from translation studies and film studies, this article analyses how Zhang's film adapts its source material, particularly its tendency to make explicit elements that were left implicit in the source text. The idea of cannibalization, from Brazilian modernist theory, helps explain the ambiguous orientation of the remake as both homage to and localization of the source text. This hybridity was not well received by American audiences and shows how the movie's connection to both Zhang and the Coens leads to a dual voice in the film. The analysis demonstrates how translation and cross-cultural adaptation enrich ideas of world cinema.

**Keywords**

film remakes

translation

Zhang Yimou

Coen brothers

cannibalism

explicitation

World cinema is host to multiple definitions and captive to the problems that dog any attempt to address global cultural production, from viewers not having adequate cultural knowledge to fully understand texts from cultures other than their own (Nagib 2006: 36) to a tendency to simplify the field by opposing 'world cinema' to Hollywood cinema (Nagib 2006: 30). There are also questions of power relations between national cinemas that cannot be overlooked (Andrew 2006: 19). Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim recommend rethinking world cinema 'in relation to notions such as hybridity, transculturation, border crossing, transnationalism and translation' (2006: 6) – notions that are also central to the field of translation studies. Translation as a concept, following Emily Apter (2006: 243), encourages viewing texts beyond the confines of belonging to one national tradition. Therefore, world cinema can be regarded as films that travel beyond the place, or indeed places, where they were created, just as David Damrosch (2003: 24) argues that literary texts become world literature by travelling beyond their context of production (through translation or other means).

A film remake across languages is a form of interlingual translation, following Roman Jakobson's (1959) terminology, and can therefore be seen as world cinema in the sense of a cinema that is created and viewed across national boundaries. However, thinking of translation as solely transfer is reductive to the process of translation, which is really a process of transformation. The text is recreated for a new audience and this process will alter it, both in terms of its construction (the translation or remake is made up of different signifiers) but also in its reception, as audiences will approach it with a different set of expectations and associations. In addition, following Lawrence Venuti (2007), translation is a hermeneutic act, whereby the translator's interpretation of the source text is inscribed in the translated text. These transformations are similar to the changes that take place in adaptation and there is much benefit to be gained from using concepts from translation studies to discuss

adaptation (see e.g. Venuti 2007; Milton 2009). By exploring how a text is transformed for new audiences in its remake we can investigate how film cultures relate to one another, from formal or narrative conventions to relative power in the global market, as well as how the source film has been interpreted by the remakers. Remakes are not the only form that translation takes in film, as various forms of distribution (including the addition of subtitles or dubbing tracks, whether in professional or amateur form) also contribute to how films travel around the world, but remakes bring to the surface the sorts of transformations that are a necessary feature of translation. Remakes recreate all the modes of the text, rather than just the verbal code as subtitling does, and so make more visible the transformations of the text as these transformations are apparent in all modes (Evans 2014: 310; for more on remakes as translations, see also Yau 2014: 501–02).

This article analyses how Zhang Yimou's *San qiang pai an jing qi/A Woman, A Gun and A Noodle Shop* (2009) (hereafter *Noodle Shop*), released on DVD in the United Kingdom as *Zhang Yimou's Blood Simple*, remakes the Coen brothers' debut film *Blood Simple* (1984). The theoretical framework draws on the notion of cannibalism from Brazilian translation theory (Gentzler 2008: 77–107) as well as work in film and translation studies in order to situate and explain the various levels of adaptation that take place. I begin by discussing how cross-cultural remakes have been theorized and how this relates to Zhang's remake before analysing how *Noodle Shop* adapts and translates *Blood Simple*.

### **Cross-cultural remaking and translation**

Remakes do not necessarily take place across linguistic boundaries and there is a growing body of work on what can be called, following Jakobson (1959), intralingual remakes (e.g. Horton and McDougal 1998; Verevis 2006; Zanger 2006). The cross-cultural remakes which have gathered the most attention previously tend to be Hollywood remakes of French movies,

which are the focus of Carolyn Durham's (1998) and Lucy Mazdon's (2000) work, as well as seven of the eleven essays in Jennifer Forrest and Leonard R. Koos's *Dead Ringers* (2002b). One reason for this is the abundance of such remakes – 60 French films were remade in Hollywood between 1930 and 1999 (Mazdon 2000: 152–56). Mazdon points out that this is the highest number of remakes from any country other than the United States in this period (2000: 2). In contrast, the only films from Spain that appear to have been remade in Hollywood are Alejandro Aménabar's 1997 film *Abre los ojos/Open Your Eyes* (see White 2003: 188), which was remade as *Vanilla Sky* (Crowe 2001), and Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza's *[Rec]* (2007), remade as *Quarantine* (Dowdle 2008).

Much of the scholarly work on European language remakes tries to recuperate them from the popular opinion (visible in articles such as Vincendeau 1993 and Pulver 2010) that they are 'a less than respectable Hollywood commercial practice' (Forrest and Koos 2002a: 2), viewing remade films as opportunities for discussing how national identity is depicted in cinema or for discussing issues of adaptation, repetition and rewriting in film. Indeed, as Mazdon's reference to translation theorist Lawrence Venuti's work (Mazdon 2000: 22, see also 2004) suggests, remakes offer just as many possibilities for theoretical and cultural reflection as translations (in the more traditional sense of interlingual translations of written texts) do.

There has been less work on remakes in cinemas that use non-European languages, mirroring the Eurocentrism in film studies that Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) argue against. One of the issues that faces work in world cinema is the availability of films from some nations, as Dudley Andrew (2006: 26) notes, and this has also affected work on film remakes: Iain Robert Smith reports that *Turist Ömer Uzay Yolunda/Tourist Ömer in Star Trek* (Saner, 1974), a Turkish remake of an episode of the American TV show *Star Trek* (1966–1969), was only available through 'gray market DVD-R bootlegging' (2008: 8). Smith's

discussion of this movie highlights how it shows an increasing dialogue between Turkish and American culture (2008: 12). A similar dialogue is present in the Bollywood cinema, as Neelam Seedhar Wright (2009) argues: here remaking American movies is a source of innovation, bringing in new elements to Bollywood films. Mark O'Thomas (2010) finds the remaking of American movies by eastern cinemas (referring to Chinese, Bollywood and Japanese cinemas) less ethnocentric than American remakes of eastern movies, though the films he discusses show similar traits in how they adapt the source text to their target environment. Thomas thus exhibits the tendency to view Hollywood remakes as a form of cultural appropriation. Yet Hollywood production may not be solely appropriative, as Kenneth Chan's (2009) work on the Chinese presence in Hollywood has demonstrated. Using the metaphor of remaking to describe the movement of Chinese directors, actors and plots to the United States, Chan argues that Hollywood becomes part of transnational Chinese cinema. Indeed, remaking is an integral part of Chinese cinemas, as Wang Yiman (2008, 2013) has explored, and is an important part of Hong Kong cinema (Aufderheide 1998). *Noodle Shop* fits into this Chinese tradition.

Wang is less interested in the appropriation inherent in remakes but rather focuses on their hybridity, finding in the Chinese remakes of *The Love Parade* (Lubitsch 1929), especially *Xuangong yanshi/My Kingdom for a Husband* (Zuo 1957), a dual address which combines foreign and local elements (2008: 19). Dual address is also present in written forms of translation. Giuliana Schiavi notes how a translation will 'build up a partly new implied reader' (1996: 7). The 'partly' in her description is telling: there remain traces of the initial implied reader. Equally importantly, a translated text will be double voiced, with both the source author's and the translator's voices (Schiavi 1996: 14). That is to say, the translator's 'subject position' is inscribed in the text (Hermans 2007: 27). This is also true of film remakes, though the diffuse nature of film authorship means that there is often more than one

subject position at play. Despite the fact that, as Leitch argues, some remakes want to ‘annihilate’ their source text, ‘to eliminate any desire or need to see the film they are replacing’ (2002: 50), there still remain traces of that earlier film and its mode of address. However, it is difficult to say if a remade film is supposed to replace its source, especially in cross-cultural contexts. Mazdon points out that some French films were suppressed in the United States once their remake rights were sold (2000: 14–15), making those remakes into replacements for their source texts,<sup>1</sup> but in the case of films like *Tourist Ömer in Star Trek* or the Bollywood films discussed by Wright, the source films are available alongside their remakes.

This is certainly the case in the West with *Noodle Shop*, with its cult and available source film *Blood Simple*. As the source film is available, the remake is something other than a replacement. However, in the Chinese context where *Noodle Shop* was produced, the source film would be unavailable, due to the Chinese quota system for foreign films, which now allows up to twenty films into the country but was limited to fifteen films previously (Anon. 2012). Film viewers in the People’s Republic of China, then, could not watch *Blood Simple* officially, though it is possible that they might have access to illegal copies (of course, it is hard to estimate how widespread such copies would be). There is clearly a dual audience for *Noodle Shop*: a Chinese one, which has not legally had access to the source film, and an international audience for whom the correspondences with the Coen brothers’ *Blood Simple* are a relevant part of the experience of watching the movie.

The promotion of *Noodle Shop* in America explicitly linked it to both Zhang as an international director and the Coens as creators of the source movie. The ways the film was promoted, therefore, drew on the position of Zhang and the Coens as auteur directors. When *Blood Simple* first came out, the Coens were not widely known but the film helped to establish their reputation and stands as the beginning of their *oeuvre*. At the time of the

remake, however, Zhang was an internationally known director and *Noodle Shop* comes late in his work. At the top of the American poster for the film (available on IMDB and elsewhere),<sup>2</sup> it is noted that the film is from the same director as *Yingxiong/Hero* (2002) and *Shimian maifu/House of Flying Daggers* (2004), Zhang's earlier *wuxia* films that were 'phenomenal box office successes, inside and outside China' (Chow 2010: 199). The director's prestige is highlighted by the references to his earlier successful films, which are likely to be recognized by American viewers. Reference to these films would create an expectation among the audience that *Noodle Shop* would be similar to them. The poster is filled on the left side by Yan Ni as Wang's wife looking down pensively at a gun in her hands. The image is black and red, which contrasts strongly to the bright use of colour in the film itself. The title is given in centre of the poster, printed in white. Much smaller underneath is 'A Zhang Yimou Film', once again positing Zhang as an auteur figure. Further down it states that *Noodle Shop* is based on *Blood Simple*, the title of which is printed in red on the black background. At the bottom there are the credits. Also on the poster, in top right quadrant, is a quote from a review by Mike Sargent which states that *Noodle Shop* is a 'remake [...] that completely works'. The movie is presented, therefore, as the reworking by a famous foreign director of a movie by a famous American movie-making partnership.

There is an assumption in this promotional material of directors as auteurs who have control over the final movie, overlooking the more corporate authorship of movies. As Thomas Leitch (2007: 239) points out in relation to film adaptation, directors become auteurs of adaptations when they can overpower other candidates for authorship. In the case of *Noodle Shop*, Zhang is the director but has strong competition for authorship from the creators of the source film, the Coen brothers. This can lead to a feeling of the film as hybrid (as Wang (2008) found in the Chinese remake of *The Love Parade*); a combination of both Zhang and the Coens' authorship.

For viewers who are aware of the source text, remade films offer an ambivalent experience. They both refer back to specific earlier films and try to surpass them. This contradictory facet of remakes has been noted by Leitch, who argues that the key trope for remakes is ‘disavowal – that is, the combination of acknowledgement and repudiation in a single ambivalent gesture’ (2002: 53). Disavowal does not only take place in remakes, however, but in all forms of double-coded cultural production. Hutcheon sees in a parody a combination of ‘conservative and revolutionary forces’ (1985: 26), which both give value to and criticize the parodied (source) text. Double coding and disavowal complicate readings of remakes. A double coded text will always exhibit elements from its source as well as its own elements, including ideological elements. As such, while it is tempting to see remakes out of English as a form of resistance to Hollywood domination of the film market that critically reinterprets the dominant models, as Wright (2009) does, the texts themselves offer a more complex relation to their source films, as Smith (2008: 3) notes. Indeed, remakes undermine the binary opposition of American cinema and cinema from the rest of the world, showing how cinema cultures interact across borders.

Remakes out of English can be interpreted as both a critique of American cinema, providing an alternative to it or highlighting absences from it, and a homage to it, choosing to remake and recreate texts which will show the influence of American cinema. Homage and critique are not mutually exclusive and can be found in the same movie, which can both celebrate its source and explore what that source overlooks (as I shall later show is the case of *Noodle Shop*). They are not, therefore, binary opposites, but rather intimately related. The metaphor of cannibalism is relevant here, drawing from its use by the Brazilian modernists. Haroldo de Campos, one of the key proponents of literary cannibalism according to Else Viera (1999), argues that for creative texts, translation is always ‘*recreation* or parallel creation, autonomous yet reciprocal’ (1992: 35, original emphasis, my translation).

Developing the metaphor further, Edwin Gentzler points out that ‘anthropophagia [cannibalism] accepts aspects of European presence without forgetting native traditions, forms, and meanings’ (2008: 79). Cannibalism is not just taking from the other culture, but absorbing beneficial aspects. According to Gentzler, among the Tupinambá Indians (an indigenous people of Brazil who practised anthropophagy) the eating of an enemy was not an act of mutilation, but rather a form of respect. Enemy soldiers who would be devoured would be taken into the community to live among them ‘so that people could learn virtuous behaviour from the captured soldier’ (Gentzler 2008: 79). In a similar way, it is possible to regard some remakes as the absorption and subsequent recreation of an exemplary text. That said, the violence involved in cannibalism cannot be forgotten: the metaphor is deeply ambivalent. It is also rooted in a Brazilian tradition and makes most sense within that tradition. Just as Chinese vampires (*jiangshi*) differ from European vampires, which have also been analysed as a metaphor for adaptation (Leitch 2011), cannibals are culture specific in their connotations. While the metaphor is relevant, it needs to be applied cautiously.

Cannibalization, in the Brazilian sense, does appear to describe the process undertaken by Zhang Yimou in his remake of *Blood Simple*. The film is not a simple appropriation, as I shall show in the next section. The power relations at play are quite relevant and it is important not to forget that Zhang was a well-known international film director when he made *Noodle Shop*. The remake, then, does not serve just to take an American film and profit from it, as American movies are often accused of taking from movies from elsewhere, but there is something else going on: to follow Gentzler’s reading of cannibalism, the new film can be read as a ‘re-version, a reinvention, of the source-text’ (2008: 97). The question of fidelity, still prevalent in many discussions of adaptations, is less important to my analysis than questioning how productive the infidelities of the remake are. In this sense I am following Leitch’s suggestion of an ‘ethics of infidelity’ (2010) when I ask

how the changes create a new movie and how this relates to its source. The infidelities, I argue, are productive re-imaginings rather than a form of loss or a failure to recreate the source text.

The choice of remaking an American movie is interesting in relation to the reception of Zhang, who has been described as ‘the darling of the Chinese Communist Party’ (Lim and Ward 2011: 1), as witnessed by his selection as director of the 2008 Olympic opening ceremony in Beijing. But he was also ‘accused of selling out to the West’ (Chow 2010: 199) for his films from the late 1980s and the early 1990s which were accused of ‘orientalist tendencies involving ungrounded fantasies’ (Chow 2010: 199). Rey Chow has argued against this reading of Zhang’s films. She positions the criticisms as readings that are grounded in ‘hierarchical criteria of traditional aesthetics’ (Chow 1995: 178), arguing that Zhang challenges these aesthetics (Chow 1995: 154–55). Zhang’s later films, such as *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers*, have been phenomenally popular in the West while using Chinese themes and imagery. The choice of *Blood Simple* as a film to remake also complicates any approach to *Noodle Shop* as an appropriation or act of selling out: the source film is a neo-noir that reverses gender roles in the traditional noir film (Rowell 2007: 31–32) and was created ‘entirely outside of Hollywood’ (Joel Coen cited in Russell 2001: 7) through private finance from independent backers. *Blood Simple* demonstrates that American cinema cannot be reduced to Hollywood and remaking it shows an ambivalence to American cinema conceived of as Hollywood cinema. Equally, *Noodle Shop* problematizes the notion of national cinema, specifically Chinese national cinema: with Zhang’s international status as a film director and his films being viewed across the world, there is an international dimension to its production. It is also intended to be viewed outside of China by people who are already familiar with the source film and able to compare it. The next section analyses how *Noodle Shop* digests and recreates *Blood Simple* in a Chinese setting.

### **Remaking *Blood Simple***

As might be expected of a remake, *Noodle Shop* repeats many of the narrative elements of *Blood Simple*. As such, a quick plot summary is necessary. In the Coen brothers' film, Abby (Frances McDormand) begins having an affair with Ray (John Getz), who works in her husband Marty's (Dan Hedaya) bar. Marty finds out from the private detective Visser (M. Emmet Walsh) about the affair. After an abortive attempt to take Abby back, where she breaks his finger, Marty arranges for Visser to kill Abby and Ray. Visser betrays Marty, taking the payment of \$10,000 without killing Abby and Ray and then shoots Marty. Ray finds the apparently dead Marty in his office and thinks Abby has killed him with her gun. He drags Marty into the car and takes him away to bury him. However, Marty is not dead and escapes. He tries to shoot Ray with Abby's gun, but it jams. Ray buries Marty alive. He returns to Abby, who has no idea what has happened. Ray receives a message from Meurice (Samm-Art Williams), his colleague at the bar, that the safe has been emptied: Meurice thinks that Ray is responsible, but this would appear to be the means by which Marty has explained the 'disappearance' of \$10,000, which went to pay Visser. After visiting the bar, Abby is visited by Marty in her flat, though it turns out to be just a dream. She goes to visit Ray who tells her he buried Marty alive. Ray goes to Marty's office and looks in the safe, finding the photo of him and Abby 'dead'. He is tailed back to Abby's flat by Visser. Ray tries to warn Abby of the impending danger, but she is scared of him. Visser shoots Ray through the window. Abby scrambles to hide in the bathroom. When Visser enters, she has escaped via the window into the room next door. When he reaches round, Abby stabs him through the hand. Visser shoots holes in the wall to be able to punch through and free his hand. Abby waits outside the bathroom and as Visser approaches the door, she shoots him through it. The film ends with Abby saying 'I'm not afraid of you Marty'. Visser, dying on the floor, laughs

and says ‘Well ma’am, if I see him I’ll give him the message’.

The story is one of betrayal on all sides and none of the characters can be considered innocent. R. Barton Palmer places the movie into the context of neo-noir films (2004: 21) as it revisits tropes from the noir films and detective novels (especially, following Barton Palmer (2004: 16), those by James M. Cain) of the first half of the twentieth century. *Blood Simple*, then, can be considered a rewriting of noir films, entering into an intertextual dialogue with the genre that is similar to *Noodle Shop*’s dialogue with it. As Rowell (2007: 31) notes, the *femme fatale* of noir is not present in *Blood Simple* – the trouble is caused by men. There is also a formal play with genre in the film, which draws not only from noir but also horror (Russell 2001: 25). Such a play with genre may have attracted Zhang to the film: as a film that enters into an overt dialogue with other movies, remaking *Blood Simple* would offer Zhang the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the genre of noir and blend it with other, more local traditions of Chinese cinema. In addition, Zhang’s films are full of situations of betrayal or duplicity, from the betrayals in *House of Flying Daggers* and the way Wu Ming/Nameless in *Hero* refuses the assassination, to the fake hotel constructed in *Xingfu shiguang/Happy Times* (2000) in order for the blind Wu Ying to be employed as a masseuse. There are, therefore, thematic links between *Blood Simple* and the rest of Zhang’s *oeuvre*.

Zhang’s film relocates the action of *Blood Simple* from the present day of the early 1980s Texas to an undefined but pre-Qing period China (i.e. pre-1644). There are many elements to this cultural transposition, not least of which is the interlingual change from English to Mandarin Chinese. The difference in setting is striking and alerts the viewer to the fact that *Noodle Shop* is not just a simple copy of *Blood Simple* but a re-imagining of the movie to fit the Chinese environment. The location changes from the suburban situation of Marty’s bar to the much more remote outpost of Wang’s noodle shop. This is in a compound of its own, out in the Chinese Gobi desert. The location makes literal the isolation of the

characters in *Blood Simple*, who cannot trust anyone. In Wang's (Ni Dahong) compound there are several buildings. One is Wang's office, another is where his wife (Yan Ni) – who is never named, even in the credits – sleeps. The employees, Li (Xiao Shenyang), Zhao (Cheng Ye) and Chen (Mao Mao) all sleep in another building. These five characters and the detective Zhang (Sun Honglei) are the central characters in the film.

*Noodle Shop* begins with the noodle shop being visited by Persian traders, from whom Wang's wife buys a primitive revolver. The weapon can fire three bullets, which is the number of bullets in Abby's gun when Visser looks in *Blood Simple*. This is one of a number of precise details that are transferred from the source film; yet the number of bullets would not appear to be significant for the plot (at no point does it seem like the number of bullets in the gun will be counted or might run out). The detail appears to be a fragment of the source text that has become decontextualized. There is a relationship here that is similar to the fragmentary nature of what Victor Burgin calls the 'sequence-image' (2004: 14–17), which he argues is the form of film when remembered. The incidence of the correspondences with *Blood Simple* in Zhang's film, then, can be interpreted as setting up the Coens' film as a memory, rather than a model to be copied. An allegorical reading of this scene, where the film is saying that it is possible to take some things from the West (the revolver) but not everything (the cannon), would also reinforce the impression of a self-reflexive approach to film remaking in *Noodle Shop*.

The beginning sequence of *Noodle Shop* also sets the tone of the film: it appears to be comic, with physical, theatrical comedy such as the Persian trader's face being covered in black soot after he fires a cannon. Another joke in this scene is based around a translation problem: the Chinese do not understand the English expression 'Must die', so translate it homophonically into Chinese to some confusion. Also in this trading scene, haggling takes place in a comical fashion: the trader offers the gun for ten yuan, to which Wang's wife

replies that she will pay one yuan. They then each adjust their price by one yuan, but Wang's wife stops as three as the trader continues to drop his price to meet hers. This opening sequence exaggerates the comic elements that were present in *Blood Simple*, bringing them to the surface of *Noodle Shop*.

Yet the film is not comic throughout. When the police arrive in order to investigate the cannon shot, they bring with them two adulterous couples who will be tried at court, giving Li and Wang's wife a foreshadowing of their possible fate. The arrival of the police introduces Zhang, who takes the role that Visser had in *Blood Simple*. He is asked by Wang to find out if his wife is having an affair. Zhang discovers that Wang's wife and Li are taking the carriage out in the afternoons to make love. He tells Wang and takes him to see for himself. Wang is chased away by his wife with gun, in an echo of the scene in *Blood Simple* where Abby fights off Marty's attempts to take her away from Ray's house.

Wang's treatment of his wife is much more obviously abusive than Marty's of Abby. In *Noodle Shop*, Wang is shown abusing his wife. After he has asked Zhang to investigate her possible infidelity, there is a scene where he berates her for not being able to have a child before burning her with his pipe. Abby in *Blood Simple* may not be physically abused, but Marty may be considered an abusive husband. His attempt to kidnap her from Ray's house suggests the sort of power he wields over her. However, where *Blood Simple* hints, *Noodle Shop* makes visible: Wang is clearly abusive. Abby is also more capable of resistance to Marty than Wang's wife is to Wang: Abby physically damages Marty, but Wang's wife only threatens Wang. Wang's wife's motivation for taking Li as a lover, then, appears to be her plan of escape from Wang: Abby's choice of Ray as a lover is less motivated by a need for escape and her relationship with him throughout *Blood Simple* is more ambivalent than Wang's wife and Li. Wang's wife cannot be independent in the same way that Abby can – she cannot run off on her own, she needs help. There is a shift in characterization here that

makes it more appropriate to the time period in which the remake is set, but which also highlights Abby's relative freedom through the contrast with Wang's wife.

Once the infidelity is uncovered, Wang asks Zhang to kill his wife and Li, just as Marty orders Ray and Abby's death in *Blood Simple*. As in *Blood Simple*, Zhang betrays Wang: he pretends to have killed Li and Wang's wife and then shoots Wang with his wife's gun. However, his motive is not just the payment, but he plans to steal the contents of Wang's safe. This subplot highlights the tendencies of *Noodle Shop* to be farcical and to make literal the figurative in *Blood Simple*. In the earlier movie, it is only reported that the safe has been broken into. This becomes Zhao and Chen's goal, separate from Zhang's attempts. The two employees are initially only out after their back pay, which the more moral Chen still questions as being the right course of action. Their various attempts to go to the office and open the safe act as a comic counterpoint to the main plot. Zhao knows the combination for the lock, allowing them to take their wages, once they overcome their nervousness. When Zhao goes back for the rest of the money, he is discovered opening the safe by Zhang, who brutally strangles him with a chain. The subplot, therefore, translates the story of the robbery told within the diegesis of *Blood Simple* into part of the diegesis of *Noodle Shop*. Traces of the source film remain, but are adapted and recontextualized in the remake.

*Noodle Shop* continues its repetition of *Blood Simple*'s plot with Li finding Wang and assuming that his wife has killed him as her gun is there. Li takes Wang out to bury him, only to find out Wang is not dead – he has only been knocked out as the bullet was stopped by coins in his pocket. Once again, *Noodle Shop* gives clearer causation than *Blood Simple*, as there is no reason given why Marty is not dead. However, when Wang tries to shoot Li, the same jamming of the gun takes place and it clicks twice, just as it did in the source movie. Where *Noodle Shop* differs is Li's clearing of the hammer, which then allows the gun to shoot Wang and kill him. Li appears less of an agent in Wang's death as he accidentally

shoots him rather than intentionally burying him alive as Ray does Marty.

The finale of *Noodle Shop* offers a similar narrative pattern to *Blood Simple*, although differences occur which stem from the cultural location of the remake. The same sequence of events takes place, but now Li is shot with an arrow rather than a bullet. When Zhang is pinned with his hand through a window, he uses his sword to make holes in the wall where Visser uses his gun. The ending differs as it is made clear that after shooting him, Wang's wife asks Zhang to tell Wang that he can't bully her anymore. In *Blood Simple*, Visser volunteers to pass on Abby's greeting to Marty. Wang's wife exhibits more agency here, whereas through the rest of the film she has been reliant on Li to be able to achieve her goals.

*Noodle Shop* offers both repetition and novelty in relation to *Blood Simple*. There is a creative reworking in order to make the narrative plausible within the film's setting, which leads to differences in characterization. There is, moreover, a general tendency to make the film more comic, ranging from the use of physical comedy to the cartoonish haggling. But this comic quality never dispels the bleak current of betrayal that is apparent throughout the movie: with the exception of Chen, all of the characters betray someone in their own way. This bleakness is also a key feature of *Blood Simple* and shows the double coding in *Noodle Shop*: it adds to and revises elements of *Blood Simple*, but those elements remain even if modified.

A more subtle, though perhaps more significant, shift occurs on the level of explicitness: *Noodle Shop* makes causality clearer, for example, showing Wang's physical and verbal abuse of his wife or explaining why he did not die from the first gunshot. This explicitation – to use the translation studies term (see Blum-Kulka 1986) in a way that is adapted to narrative – goes against the idea that American cinema tends towards such clear causality (Vincendeau 1993: 23). *Blood Simple* as an independent movie does not follow Hollywood tendencies. *Noodle Shop* mirrors the tendencies of Hollywood remakes, which

also make causality more explicit. The shift towards clarity and amplification that Michael Harney (2002: 73–75) as well as Ginette Vincendeau (1993) see in American remakes can be seen in *Noodle Shop*. I would argue that it is not a shift from a national cinema to Hollywood cinema, but rather towards a more mainstream audience. *Noodle Shop*'s target audience may appear culturally distinct, given the use of Chinese language and setting, but the film also aims for a more widespread, commercial audience than the Coens' first film, shown by its more explicit causality, which should also appeal to an American mainstream audience and a global mainstream audience that is used to the tropes of American cinema. Zhang's international reputation and status as an auteur director would also contribute to a wider awareness of his movie at the time of release compared to the relatively unknown Coens' debut film.

Interestingly, however, the film did not receive that strong a reception in anglophone markets. The movie went straight to DVD in the United Kingdom after little impact in the United States (Rose 2011). The film is rated 5.7 on IMDB (IMDB n.d.a) and only 32 per cent on the review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes (Rotten Tomatoes n.d.a), compared to 7.7 and 94 per cent on the same sites for *Blood Simple* (IMDB n.d.b; Rotten Tomatoes n.d.b). Some reviewers saw the remake as something entirely negative: Stephanie Merry began by stating that *Noodle Shop* was 'a cautionary tale' of what can go wrong when remaking a Coen brothers' film (2010). J. R. Jones called it an 'uneasy mix' of Zhang's style and the Coens' style (2010). The criticism comes, in these reviews and others on Rotten Tomatoes, from the hybridity of the film, the mixing of styles and approaches that I have been discussing above, which is criticized by many of the reviewers. One reviewer interpreted these same features positively, however. Simon Miraudó, writing in the online publication Quick Flix, wrote that *Noodle Shop* 'is exactly the kind of remake we should celebrate' (2010). Yet even Miraudó complains that *Noodle Shop* 'never surpasses' *Blood Simple*. Regarding the remake as a

cannibalistic revision of the source film asks different questions of the movie and sidesteps the question of fidelity that is implicit in these reviewers' work. Equally, as I have shown above, there is a correlation between *Noodle Shop* and the rest of Zhang's work on a thematic level, especially the use of betrayal and duplicity as a motif. This positions it within the canon of Zhang's films and encourages it to be read through those films, rather than solely as a remake of *Blood Simple*.

I began by positing that cross-cultural remakes can be used to discuss translation in cinema. My analysis of *Noodle Shop* as a remake of *Blood Simple* demonstrated how two films can have the same narrative but offer very different viewing experiences. I argued that the metaphor of cannibalization, following the use of it by Brazilian translation theorists, offers a good way of discussing what happens when Zhang Yimou remade a movie by the Coen brothers. This case, where the remake's director is well known in both the source and target cultures, may be unique, but it helps to avoid the hierarchical viewpoint that is often attached to remaking, where the remade film is viewed as an appropriation of the source film. Indeed, the auteur status of both Zhang and the Coens means that the movie is strongly dual voiced, full of traces of its source film as well as Zhang's authorial signature. This may, in fact, have contributed to the negative reception of the film in anglophone contexts: the source film retains its cultural capital and authority, so the remake is compared negatively to it.

Avoiding the concept of fidelity, which presupposes the importance of the source film or text, my discussion has focused on the differences that *Noodle Shop* produces.<sup>3</sup> The Chinese movie is a re-imagining of the source material, with some clear points of correspondence, even to seemingly trivial details. However, there is also clearer motivation for many of the characters' actions, making the film more mainstream. Beyond the remaking of the film, the presentation and reception of *Noodle Shop* also show acts of translation, where the text is (re)presented to a new target audience. The result is that both *Blood Simple*

and *Noodle Shop* are no longer confined to national boundaries, but regarded from trans- and international perspectives. Remakes and their reception in source and target cultures offer a way of using translation as a productive concept to analyse films. Translation is not solely about the adaptations that take place when localizing a text (either through remaking or other means), but also the question of cultural specificity and how this is negotiated by audiences, film-makers and distributors when texts move across boundaries. To refer to translation in world cinema, then, highlights how film watching and production are conditioned by their cultural contexts and need mediation in order to travel beyond those contexts. Remakes are one (very visible) form of such mediation.

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Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Mazdon was writing before the growth in availability of films over the Internet, so the replacement function of remakes is more limited now: texts in the source language are much easier to obtain than previously.

<sup>2</sup> Accessible here ([http://www.imdb.com/media/rm360480768/tt1428556?ref\\_=tt\\_ov\\_i](http://www.imdb.com/media/rm360480768/tt1428556?ref_=tt_ov_i)).

<sup>3</sup> My analysis has been somewhat auteurist, with its focus on the director, but by paying attention to textual elements I hope to have shown that a translational analysis that does not focus on fidelity is equally relevant for remakes that are not made by directors who are regarded as auteurs.