

Film Remaking and Practices: “Infernal Affairs” Versus “Double Face”
– *Film Repetition Networks, Contexts and Taxonomy*

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Abstract

Scholars usually consider such “repetitions” through the scope of institutional and industrial practices for commercial benefits through previously established and tested titles. Some scholars approached remakes from the contextual perspective, revealing their novelties, thematic value and how remakes attempt to “translate” them. However, with the development of streaming services and further sophistication of the source and remaking titles into more extensive franchises, the borderline between well-defined film “repetition” practices may be elusive. This paper will argue whether the remake of Andrew Lau’s and Alan Mak’s 無間道 / 无间道 [Infernal Affairs] (Lau & Mak, 2002), TV film *Daburu Feisu* [Double Face], consisting of *Daburu Feisu: Gisou Keisatsu-hen* [Double Face Disguise Police Edition] and *Daburu Feisu: Sennyuu Sosa-hen* [Double Face Undercover Investigation Edition] (Nakazawa & Sasaki, 2012), affect the contemporary definition of film remakes as a critical and practical category. Together with Martin Scorsese’s *The Departed* (Scorsese, 2006), *Double Face* is not a part of the broader franchise but may be part of another form of “supersystem” (Kinder, 1991). The paper will test whether the Japanese remake contributes to creating such a system as a “repetition network” and identify what kind of film “repetition” qualities it encapsulates. Furthermore, its minor contextual adjustment compared to the source material significantly reshapes to deliver the themes of higher cultural appropriation and relevance. Thus, the paper will explore these contextual qualities and evaluate whether they are enough to build a context-based remaking taxonomy.

Keywords: Film Repetitions, Film Remakes, Double Face, Infernal Affairs, Departed, Film Networks

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Introduction

Scholarships provided extensive sources of understanding film “repetitions” (Klein & Palmer, 2016) in the form of film remakes, including existing taxonomies, with some authors considering films as sort of texts (Verevis, 2006; Heinze & Krämer, 2015). In this case, remakes are a transition of one textual form to another through semiotic translation, recontextualization (Linell, 1998), cultural appropriation and other methods. Additionally, various authors approached the issues of contextual significance by comparing source films and their remakes (Lim, 2009; Wee, 2014). In general, film “repetitions” in the form of remakes are a complicated category encapsulating various meanings, proving difficulties while building taxonomies.

However, apart from critical and theoretical definitions of remaking, evaluating how franchise building affects its understanding is crucial. A franchise is a legal and industrial category—franchise titles refer to each other and sometimes are connected to the predecessors through transmedia and transtextual storytelling. Japanese horror films *Ju-On* and *Ringu* titles are perfect examples. These original film series crossed their medium boundaries and were adapted into TV series, advertisement campaigns, cosplay shows, video game homage, and adult-related content. Using Marsha Kinder’s definition, they did not create a “supersystem,” because various semiotic repercussions of the mentioned titles were decentralized and had signs of popular culture build-up rather than an industrial attempt to capitalize on the franchise’s popularity. Thus, the mentioned titles created not a vertically integrated system of titles, merchandise and other forms of consumption products but a film “repetition network” of signs, contexts and stories actively borrowing from each other and replicating themselves in various popular non-commercial forms.

In this case, it is relevant to appeal to other film examples of East Asian titles that crossed transnational borders through remakes to test whether they created similar “networks.” One example is *Infernal Affairs*, a Hong Kong police and criminal drama becoming a local success. Later, it was remade in the U.S. as *The Departed* by Martin Scorsese. The remake won various awards, including U.S. Academy Awards. The success brought academic and popular attention to *Infernal Affairs*, which later got a sequel, which from the storytelling standpoint was a prequel, and a triquel. However, later, it was remade in Japan, *Double Face* and South Korea, *New World / 신세계 / Sinsegye* (2013).

Each of these projects did not ignite franchise building. The remakes reframed their predecessor to fit their cultural landscapes. *The Departed* was portrayed as an original project with little reference to the source. *Double Face* was an example of accurate and acute recontextualization and resembled an industrial attempt to pilot a co-production scheme. Finally, none of the projects had any sequelization, cross-references or any form of transtextual storytelling. Thus, there is an issue in identifying whether these titles attempted to create a “supersystem” or “repetition network.”

To shed light on the mentioned issues, the current paper will provide case studies on *Infernal Affairs* as the source material and *Double Face* with additional appeal to the remaking practices of *The Departed*. The case studies will be analyzed from the formal, contextual and critical lenses. Formal qualities will allow us to clarify the form of the chosen film “repetition” based on the existing scholarship. It will be succeeded by the contextual analysis revealing how minor adjustments can significantly alter the target material and appeal to the target audience through the chosen semantics and thematical relevance. Evaluation of the

balance between contextual novelties and fidelity will additionally allow us to answer the question of whether contextually anchored taxonomy is possible to be identified.

It is crucial to note that the issue of “network” building is further complicated by a video game’s release blurring the definition of film “repetition” in the form of remaking or adaptation. For instance, the video game *Sleeping Dogs* (2012) was a part of a different franchise, *True Crimes*, but was spiritually inspired by *Infernal Affairs* and contains familiar semiotic elements. Simultaneously, it severely deviates from the original story, narrative, setting and themes. These obscure references further complicated the film “repetition network” of *Infernal Affairs*. This paper is focused on films and will not refer to the video game case studies because a separate approach is required to unveil how video games influence film “repetition networks.”



Figure 1a: in their promotional materials *Infernal Affairs* tried to emphasize the main leads only pointing out their crucial confrontation.

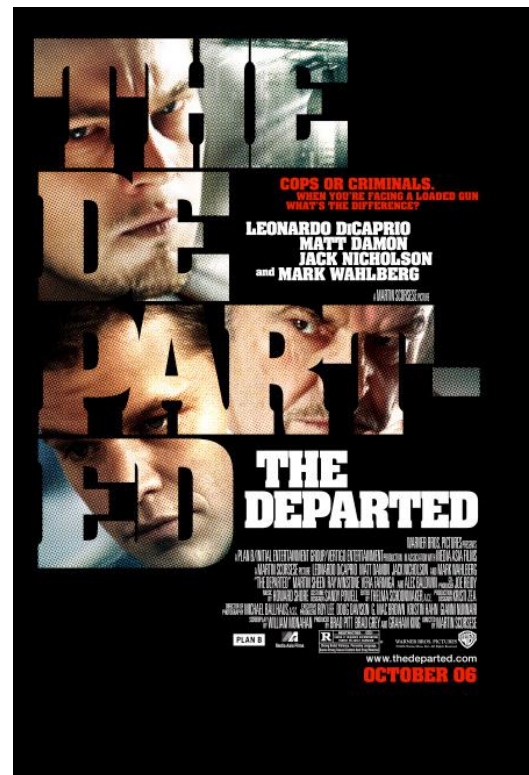


Figure 1b: The poster emphasizes not only the duo of protagonist and antagonist but the local kingpin played by Jack Nicholson.

***Infernal Affairs* and *The Departed*: Implied Remake**

Infernal Affairs is a criminal drama about Lau Kin-ming and Chan Wing-yan. The former successfully finished the police academy in Hong Kong to become a “rat” working for the local triad gang boss. The second, presumably expelled, started his longstanding undercover mission as a “mole” in the same triad gang. Several years later, when the police wanted to put an end to the gang’s operations, the final standoff between the police force and criminals started with Kin-ming and Wing-Yan caught in the crossfire.

In the motion picture, Andrew Lau and Alan Mak utilized the familiar Hong Kong genre of police drama. The film’s linear narrative is complicated by the crosscuts between Kin-ming

and Wing-yan, which pinpoints their significance for the overall story, personal struggle and dilemma of the loyalty. Both were shown as dedicated men pursuing freedom from the web of gradually complicating circumstances. Lau and Mak achieved narrative coherence and introduced enough morale and psychological justification for characters' actions. Hence, the antagonist-protagonist paradox projected their struggle upon the audience, who also should have made their moral choice and picked their sympathies. Furthermore, the struggle could be contextually transitioned to the post-reunification dilemma of Hong Kong's new geopolitical realities, restricted political autonomy and "missing sense of belonging" (Li, 2018).

Apart from the sophisticated narrative, *Infernal Affairs* reflected substantial aesthetic value through cinematography depicting signature city landscapes from the hotel rooftops as the only shelter securing one's communication. The wide aspect ratio allowed experimenting with scenery and also create a contrast between the frame space and the high density of Hong Kong urban planning. Finally, the cast comprises the famous local actors, including Tony Leung Chiu-wai, Andy Lau and Cantopop diva Kelly Chen Wai-lam. It is unsurprising that the film achieved immense success in the local market after its release. Critical and popular reception soon secured its cult status, which, in turn, could not escape the attention of the Hollywood production companies who previously turned their industrial gaze upon East Asian creative industries and released *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000).

Brad Pitt's Plan B Entertainment used substantial funds to buy the rights for the *Infernal Affairs* remake with the help of Roy Lee, the founder of Vertigo Entertainment, a company specializing in remaking East Asian films (Hayes, 2006). The remake was directed by Martin Scorsese and released in 2006. The story retained its former essence of the police and criminal drama. The framing was familiar with two characters retaining contradicting allegiance, causing their struggle. Nevertheless, to fit the new cultural environment, the events took place in Boston, referring to the local gang's crime operations and the FBI was introduced as the force operating behind the scenes.

Martin Scorsese maintained the frame of the film and recontextualized various details adjusting and simplifying the narrative for the global audience. It was impossible to transform the potential anxiety of the Hong Kong reunification and East Asian loyalty struggle directly. Thus, the remake utilized cinematographic appropriation and cultural adjustments to shift the focus from the identity crisis, allegiance and duty issues to the themes of individualism, characters' competition and the premise that "even the gang leader can be a snitch." For the global audience, keeping track of the events and identifying the real villain was simpler this way. The "happy ending" nature further shifted the initial narrative frame.

From the contextual perspective, the remake creates an expanded narrative background to create sufficient information about what environment "created" the main characters (Li, 2018). The theme of individualism is bound with the theme of resistance to such an environment, leading to the pursuit of personal success and competition between the main characters, which grow beyond their professional duties, including similar love interest. Even the film's climax highlights that "justice" can be achieved even by illegal means without any references to the inescapable guilt. Such contextual adjustments sufficiently alienate the remake from its source material regardless of shared general directions of the narrative and overall story framing through the conflict between a gang "mole" and a police "rat." Consequently, formal similarities create an illusion of fidelity which, upon closer inspection and analysis, together with the longer runtime, may reveal distinct meanings and themes,

making it problematic to draw the taxonomy restricted by the context only without criteria generalization.

Simultaneously, the remake repeated the strategy of hiring prominent Hollywood celebrities, which affected even film promotion materials (IMDbPro, 2002; IMDbPro, 2006) (Fig. 1a and 1b). Unsurprisingly, with its renowned director and cast, *The Departed* won numerous awards, including Best Motion Picture of the Year, Best Writing, Adapted Screenplay, and Best Achievement in Directing (IMDbPro, 2006). Nevertheless, upon closer inspection, *The Departed* tried to dodge direct references to *Infernal Affairs*, citing it in the end credits scenes (Scorsese, 2006, 02:27:42). It would be unlikely that the global audience would be able to scrutinize and identify the film being a “remake” through the credits and references to Media Asia Films. Nevertheless, the critics and scholars had. Using Michael Druxman’s terminology (1975, as cited in Hainze & Krämer, 2015), the film is a “direct” remake through its overall narrative frame and end credits links. At the same time, publicly, *The Departed* was promoted as an original project and referred to the source only in the end credits, which are usually skipped by the audience, leaving the film “disguised” remake nature.

Various sources claim that *The Departed* had the potential of starting a franchise similar to the one in Hong Kong. Such events would have inevitably created cross-referential dynamics between the film’s U.S. and Hong Kong branches. For example, Warner Bros. demanded to change the ending because it left little alternative for the franchise building, and when Scorsese refused, Marc Wahlberg and scriptwriter William Monahan proposed a sequel about the last surviving side character (Baker, 2023). The idea of a sequel was circulating earlier in the form of a TV series similar to *Infernal Affairs* (Cabin, 2016). Both projects were put on hold for reasons unknown. Considering the direct involvement of Martin Scorsese, his experience in creating criminal dramas, his direct contribution to the U.S. remake, and its critical and financial recognition, it is hard to imagine the studios would not try to sign him up or at least inquire about these projects. Martin Scorsese would unlikely have taken the lead of a franchise project due to his natural skepticism over franchises (Scorsese, 2019). Nevertheless, the simple film repetition structure between the source film and *The Departed* is insufficient to discuss any form of created “network” but maintains such potential if the TV series is released in the future by Netflix, for example.

By 2023, there is only one TV title related to *Infernal Affairs* – the Japanese TV film *Double Face*, which reflects even more contextual fidelity to the source material, taking its cultural proximity to Hong Kong. Additionally, the narrative and cinematography retain a remarkable resemblance. Thus, the analysis of *Double Face* may reveal additional details and understanding of the nature of the film remaking in other mediums, its contribution to the creation of the film “repetition network,” and taxonomy building.



Fig. 2a. In *Infernal Affairs*, police chief communicates through Morse code (Lau & Mak, 2002, 00:26:22).



Fig. 2b. In the remake, additional tracking movement around the police chief but kept static shot on the hands because identical narrative method of communication between chief and yakuza “mole” was used (Nakazawa & Sasaki, 2012, *Double Face - Giso Keisatsu Hen* [Double Face Disguise Police Edition], 00:24:47). Moreover, the difference of aspect ratio is dictated by the difference of theatrical and TV format.



Fig. 2c. In *Infernal Affairs*, color palate is cool and green, close-up emphasizes Chan Wing-yan's hands, his cast as potential tool to communicate with the police (Lau & Mak, 2002, 00:23:29).



Fig. 2d. In *Double Face* color palate was changed but the shooting style remained the same (Nakazawa & Sasaki, 2012, *Double Face - Giso Keisatsu Hen* [Double Face Disguise Police Edition], 00:16:30).

***Double Face* and its Direct “Repetition” Identity**

Double Face is a TV film, a product of collaboration between two Japanese TV companies, TBS and WOWOW. It was split into two episodes aired by each of them. The course of story events was changed to Japan in the Tokyo area, including Kanagawa and Saitama prefectures with signature Yokohama landscapes. The main narrative frame was retained and adapted for the Japanese social realities: the undercover police officer, Jun, a “mole” in the Yakuza Oda clan, opposed Ryosuke, a model officer and a “rat,” sharing investigation intelligence with the Oda clan leader.

Anchoring storytelling points remained unchanged, but extended runtime allowed the rearrangements and additions. For instance, the introduction of how the main characters started their paths was moved to the second part of the TV film. Jun's meetings with the psychiatrist revealed more details of his dilemma without diving into the vivid love theme. Ryosuke had a separate personal story, with him being ordered to get close to the local politician's daughter. Finally, the ending draws expected infidelity from the source material. These are vivid examples of source film's structure re-enactment and are not limited by them exclusively.



Fig. 3. Unlike the U.S. remake, the main focus of the promotion materials was on two characters (Asianwiki, 2012).

Following formal analysis of the remake, these distinctions may seem to result from the medium change or strictly the reflection of the “cultural narrative” (Li, 2018). However, comparing the cinematography between the source and the TV remake, it becomes evident that the director, Eiichirô Hasumi, consistently followed Lau's and Mak's cinematographic patterns. For example, the scenes of the drug deal and police headquarters reveal almost identical choices of shots but distinctions in the chosen color palate of the source film (Fig. 2a, 2c) and the remake (Fig. 2b, 2d). Rooftop scenes also reveal a strong resemblance between the source and the remake. Poster esthetics, unlike *The Departed*, follow the original film (Fig. 1a and 3). There are even more similarities in how scenes were shot and how the narrative progresses with the predictable adjustments of location, acting, and costume design.

This formal similitude allows the framing of *Double Face* as a remake. Additionally, each episode directly refers to the source film using subtitles at the bottom of the screen at the beginning of each episode (Fig. 4a and 4b). Thus, the production companies do not try to conceal the origin of the remake; in Druxman's definition, it has more “direct” qualities than *The Departed*. The change of exhibition mode adds particular hybridity to the remaking nature. However, it is insignificant in this case: *Double Face* is still a motion picture. The only difference is that it is divided into two narratively connected featured films aired on two separate TV channels. In film databases, two “episodes” are listed and rated separately,

referring to each other through “related” projects (Asianwiki, 2012; IMDbPRO, 2012; MyDramaList, 2012).



Fig. 4a. The beginning of *Double Face - Giso Keisatsu Hen* [Double Face Disguise Police Edition] (Nakazawa & Sasaki, 2012, 00:02:49). The reference is made together with the cast introduction.



Fig. 4b. The beginning of *Double Face - Sennyuu Sosa Hen* [Double Face Undercover Investigation Edition] (Nakazawa & Sasaki, 2012, 00:01:51).

Apart from its formal qualities, the hybridity of the project can be traced through the circumstances of its release. Based on the interviews with the *Double Face* director Eiichiro Hasumi (Kuromame, 2020) and WOWOW producer Yoshitaka Takeda (Kuromame, 2019), WOWOW and TBS maintained an extensive cooperative relationship, including film

production, because previously WOWOW liquidated its production company and lacked qualifications, resources and professionals. The production of the *Double Face* was followed by the 2014 release of the *MOZU* TV series (IMDbPro, 2014), both co-produced by WOWOW and TBS. The projects shared the director and even the main leads, Hidetoshi Nishijima and Teruyuki Kagawa. The two had known each other for over a decade but were cast in the same projects for the first time (Yuki, 2012). This cooperation also went beyond TBS and WOWOW films.

Hence, *Double Face* is not just a stand-alone remake but can be considered a pilot project as part of an industrial attempt to establish long-term cooperation in producing TV dramas. It is possible to imply that the real goal of *Double Face*'s release was to test whether TBS and WOWOW can organize a large-scale production through a smaller one with a relatively constant team. Given the direct remaking nature and its hybrid exhibition mode, its presumably industrially-driven role rather than the commercial desire of franchise building, limited references and homage to any other projects apart from the source material, it is unlikely it creates a film "repetition network."

Additional proof that *Double Face* implied contextual fidelity with minimum alterations is proved through the interviews. Eiichiro Hasumi claimed that during the pre-production stage, the team tried to "reconstruct" the script and adjust the parts that looked "broken" for the Japanese audience (Kuromame, 2020). Further contextual analysis reveals that the script underwent meticulous recontextualization through minor thematic adjustments, including subordination, family and socio-political order (Shen & Yin, 2021). After slight refocusing, the TV film reflected significant relevance for the Japanese cultural environment. For example, the source film took place in Hong Kong, a city of cultural proximity to Japan, especially regarding the Confucius value of filial piety. A delicate balance between police-triad opposition and "yin-yang equilibrium" was preserved (Davis & Yeh, 2008). However, the notions of "unity" in the police force and triad clan were tangible but secondary after the theme of self-identification. In *Double Face*, just due to the change of the location, the theme of being part of a social unit became prevalent. The theme is manifested through scenes with the Oda clan leader. The remake added depth to his character through the multitude of scenes, where he appeals to Jun and Ryosuke as his "sons" and the clan as a "family" (Nakazawa & Sasaki, 2012, *Double Face - Sennyuu Sosa Hen* [Double Face Undercover Investigation Edition], 00:04:48, 00:06:03; 00:08:10; 00:58:22). The complexity of his explanations, vision and belief system partially elevate him from a status of criminal and implied additional empathy.

The references to the "family" are not intended for Oda's character only. It reflects the Japanese concept of 家 / *ie* [family], which some scholars and critics consider a Japanese social foundation (Kuwayama, 2001) and used for Japanese films' contextual analysis (Wee, 2014), or a canon of the yakuza-related films (Kubota, 2020). *Ie* is not restricted to the household but is scaled higher from the community level to the corporations and state. Following this logic, the police force and yakuza clan are "family" units with their leaders and codes of behavior implying vertically integrated human connections. In the case of yakuza, their reciprocity lies within unwritten rules given their Edo period genesis (Minami, 1954).

Furthermore, comparisons between the clan and police "families" link the latter to the state, which failed to provide the young generation with a suitable place in society and pushed them to the yakuza. The clan compensates for the lack of state care and secures the future of the

youth. Thus, yakuza fills the niche, taking over the overlooked or deliberately neglected individuals and economic operations. Consequently, Oda's claims and desire to obtain more influence on politicians reveal that the yakuza's status tends to expand at the state's expense. Through this lens, the main characters' dilemma is further complicated by the choice between two "families" and two "fathers," Oda or police chief Onodera.

Consequently, such a choice requires fulfilling duties or 義理 / *giri* [duty principle]. Duty is the principal element of conduct between the master and subordinate – fulfilment of one's duty benefits the group, "family," and honors it. *Giri* is usually put into opposition with 人情 / *ninjo* [feelings]. A popular theme in Japan, including animation (Greenberg, 2012), depicts the character struggling between his feelings and affection and duty with the designated group. However, *giri* and *ninjo* do not necessarily contradict one another. In the case of *Double Face*, the characters are in the principal crisis of identifying which group is their "family" and whether they should follow duty or feelings. If the person fails to honor *giri*, *ie* is being neglected, endangering social balance.

This contextual dilemma is familiar to the local audience from the genre and ideological perspectives. However, the adjustments are made through extended characters' lines, additional characters, and, in the case of Ryosuke's character, – a re-imagination of his background, marital status and choices up to the end of the film. The changes may seem minor, but given the already culturally suitable source material's narrative and contextual frame, they are sufficient to deliver enough clarity and familiarity for the local audience to comprehend implied meanings. Together with *The Departed*, the case of *Double Face* raises similar questions of how to evaluate these "slight" adjustments to build contextually-based taxonomy. The answer stays the same – it is unlikely to draw such a taxonomy, or contextual meanings should be generalized and deliberately evaluated.

Conclusion

The formal analysis allowed distinguishing *Double Face* as a direct remake of *Infernal Affairs*, which fully utilized the capabilities offered by the source film through its mise-en-scene, narrative frame and contextual themes. It has a few elements of hybridity through the medium change and production intentions, making it instead a one-time project, even one of the "pilots," aiming to extend and facilitate cooperation between WOWOW and TBS.

Contextual analysis revealed its principal qualities by utilizing existing themes from the source film and slightly recontextualizing them to fulfill the target audience's expectations. The nature of these adjustments, the mixture of fidelity and minor appropriations, allowed us to define the multifaceted meanings, taking a new cultural landscape. Altogether, it is hardly possible to use *Double Face* as an example of drawing contextually anchored taxonomy.

Finally, the paper illustrated that the Japanese remake does not create any film "repetition networks," as it happened with 呪怨 / *Ju-On* [Grudge] (Kusaiko, 2023), because it only recycles *Infernal Affairs*. There are no signs of franchise-building and transmedia storytelling from the source film and *The Departed*. The production companies focused on the separate original title *MOZU* and other projects.

Regardless of the outcomes, the case studies and comparative analysis of the source material and remakes allow scholars to better understand film "repetitions" and remaking practices in film and TV mediums better.

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