The textual genealogies of Korean genre cinema

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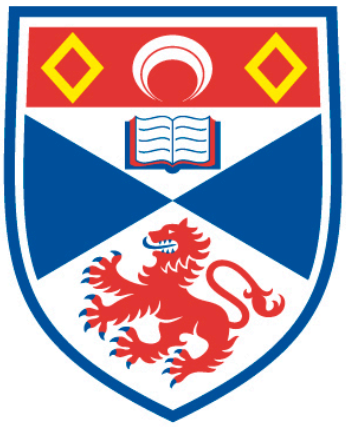

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

With regard to the formatting of names used throughout this study:

Korean names are presented family name first. Hong Kong names are presented with the chosen English name first, followed by the family name, and then the given Cantonese name. Given the relative familiarity of the majority of Japanese names mentioned in this study, Japanese names are presented with given names first, in order to align with how they are commonly mentioned in the West.

In an attempt to prevent accidental misgendering, and in an effort to be inclusive of those who identify as non-binary, this study adopts the uniform use of the gender neutral singular pronoun 'they/them' when referring to authors.

ABSTRACT

South Korean cinema has enjoyed a rise in academic attention since the turn of the twenty-first century. That said, the way in which the vibrant and tumultuous history of the Korean peninsula throughout the twentieth century affected the development and evolution of film genre has yet to be examined in-depth. This thesis therefore seeks to establish histories of Korean film genres by examining the on-screen shifts and transitions of genre. Focusing on three genres – melodrama, action, and horror – this thesis illuminates the complex relationships and interactions occurring within the East Asian region, showing how Korean cinema has interacted with the genre cinema of its geographic neighbours. At the same time this thesis excavates the pre-cinematic histories of these genres in an attempt to establish genealogical evidence of genre form and content as found in folklore, theatre, and other traditional narrative media or performance. In doing so, this thesis attempts to challenge the assumed universality of genre terminology by exploring the degree to which such terms are able to map onto cinemas fuelled by cultural traditions and histories which are largely disparate from the Western films that historically informed the notions and understandings of particular genres. As such, this thesis hopes to discuss Korean cinema through an investigation into genre which places emphasis on Korea's own cinematic and pre-cinematic histories.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

On Korean Cinema and Issues of Genre and Nation

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century there has been a surge in Western academic interest in the cinema of South Korea. This coincides with the ascent of the South Korean film industry to a significant position regionally and internationally, beginning in the mid-1990s, both in terms of art house film festival success and mainstream genre production. South Korean cinema features prominently across countries in the East and South-East Asian regions, its influence found in the significant successes of South Korean film remakes in countries like Vietnam and Japan.[1] Yet despite multiple texts which attempt to analyse the current state of South Korean cinema, examination into its local filmic history has been largely overlooked. The lack of investigation of genre and genre construction is particularly notable, especially given the prominent role genre cinema has played historically in the development of Korean cinema.

There are two reasons for this absence. Firstly, given the tumultuous twentieth century experienced by the Korean peninsula, Korean cinema has lacked archival infrastructure. As such, the vast majority of Korean cinema remains lost, in partial fragments, or is in need of restoration. Kim Mee-hyun, from the Korean film council, highlights the severity of the situation, noting that:

> 'All the films made after 1997 are preserved thanks to the regulation that requires the presentation of a specimen copy to the authorities since 1996. However, not many films from before 1996 have been preserved. From 1919 to 1996, a total of 4,893 feature films

[1] The South Korean production *Miss Granny* / *Susanghan Geunyeo* (2014, Hwang Dong-hyeok) stands out as a significant example of South Korea's prominent regional cultural presence. The films *20 Once Again* / *Chong fan ershi sui* (2015, China, Leste Chen), *Suspicious Girl* / *Ayashii kanojo* (2016, Japan, Nobuo Mizuta), *Suddenly, Twenty* (2016, Thailand, Araya Suriharn), and *Sweet 20* (2017, Indonesia, Ody C. Harahap) are all remakes of the Korean film.

were made (5,573 until 2005). However, only 39.1 per cent, or 1,915 films, are preserved. This preservation rate becomes lower as one tracks back into history'.[2]

Concerning the silent era of Korean film history (1919 until the late-1930s) in particular, film producer Kim So-hee has argued that the lack of surviving films results in the need for 'a history of films that no longer exist'.[3] However, given the statistics of Kim Mee-hyun, it becomes necessary to extend this sentiment beyond the silent era. Of the films which have survived, problems are further compounded with regard to availability and language. The ancillary markets of the South Korean film industry are something of an afterthought, with very little in the way of home video support for anything outside of the most contemporary of releases.[4] At the same time, of those twentieth century films which are lucky enough to be distributed on DVD, only some provide English subtitles, restricting the access of Korean film history to non-Korean speaking scholars even further. Such restrictions have resulted in a significant focus by the West on South Korean film from the late-1990s onwards. Indeed, key periods of interactivity and cultural exchange between Korea and its regional neighbours, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, have been understudied in comparison to the amount of critical attention afforded to the contemporary South Korean filmic landscape. It is for this reason that this study places an emphasis on both these two decades, as well as the Japanese colonial period (1905 – 1945), in an attempt to highlight the important roles these periods played in the overall development of Korean cinema. The way in which national cinemas are compartmentalised is discussed further in **Section 1.1**.

The second issue concerns genre. Korean cinema is largely viewed as an inheritor of genre, either through colonisation or proactive co-operation. Film critic Chung Sung-il encapsulates this

[2] Kim Mee-hyun (2006) *Preface,* pp. x
[3] Kim So-hee (2006) *A History of Films that No Longer Exist,* pp. 47
[4] Even with contemporary film releases, most films only receive a single press on the DVD and Blu-Ray formats. Second presses only occur in the case of particularly fast sell-out of the initial press. This means that, in 2018, it is almost as difficult to buy a film produced in 2008 as it is to obtain a DVD copy of a film produced from before 1997.

viewpoint in their claim that 'Korea merely accepted various film genres from other countries and modified them'.[5] This viewpoint, wherein Korea acts as a receiver of genre, able only to re-contextualise or reconceptualise, essentially modifying foreign genres in order to suit Korean audiences, has resulted in genre retaining a uniform understanding between its uses across different nations. Little consideration has been given to what specific genre terminology actually means when discussed through a primarily Korean context. Given the history of Korean cinema with regard to its regional relationships, the notion that the Western critical understanding of a genre, for example melodrama, can adequately encapsulate and describe the way in which a particular genre in Korea has developed and evolved comes across as somewhat dismissive.

This problem is further exacerbated by the proliferation of texts which assume Western understandings of genre when discussing the cinema of Korea. These foundational or seminal texts were written almost entirely through the lens of Hollywood cinema, and therefore lack awareness of the socio-historic, -political, and traditional influences which are at play in Korean genre cinema. Despite this, genre as understood through a Western consensus is employed in the discussion of Korean film. Without first taking the time to establish a notion of genre which fully takes into account the history of Korean cinema, such studies are unable to break free from the long shadow of Western critical notions of genre and genre history, and thus the presence of Hollywood film. It is therefore imperative that genre be discussed and examined through a lens which strips away these long-held assumptions as much as possible. This discussion informs **Section 1.2**.

This study therefore seeks to construct a genre theory based first and foremost through filmic analysis and socio-historical contexts relevant to Korea and which emphasises the film text (and pre-cinematic precedents) as the central party in the construction of genre. At the same time, this

[5] Chung Sung-il (2006) *Four Variations on Korean Genre Film: Tears, Screams, Violence and Laughter,* pp. 1

study aims to interrogate the applicability of Western generic terminology by providing new genre histories built upon the foundations of Korean cinema and history.

1.1: On National/World Cinema and Historiography

In attempting to navigate the history of a particular nation's cinema, it becomes quickly apparent that the methods commonly employed in order to discuss such histories are lacking. In particular, there is a pressing issue with regard to the categorisation strategies and restrictive implications embedded within the idea of national cinema, to the degree that national cinema loses its apparently obvious meaning.[6] A notable example of such a categorising element is found in the film festival, more specifically the post-World War II European film festivals which retain significant cultural relevance today. Given the lack of texts which interrogate Korean cinema through this angle, it is necessary to look elsewhere. In their analysis of inter-war Japanese cinema, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano has posited that 'national cinemas' are defined through their discovery by the West, stating:

> 'If recognition is the beginning of history, Japanese film history literally started in 1951 outside of Japan, when Kurosawa Akira's *Rashomon* (1950) won first prize at the 1951 Venice film festival'.[7]

Here Wada-Marciano highlights the prominent role film festivals play in the classification of national cinemas, in that the cinema of countries come to be defined by the films which are selected to appear at foreign festivals, rather than the countless films which remain within the nation's own boundaries. [8] At the same time, Wada-Marciano's notion that the cinematic

[6] In this way the term national cinema carries similar issues of clarity that are found in world cinema. Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim (2006) suggest that 'World cinema as a theoretical concept is designed not to definition and closure but to ceaseless problematisation, always a work-in-progress' (pp. 9).

[7] Wada-Marciano (2008) *Nippon Modern*, pp. 1

[8] It is important here to note that this study is not suggesting that film festivals only show and support art house cinema. Julian Stringer (2003) has examined the complex ways in which blockbusters interact with, and perform at, film festivals. While this is largely discussed through the Hollywood blockbuster, Stringer, nevertheless, highlights that for foreign blockbusters to succeed internationally 'it is necessary to for them to

histories of certain countries begin with their introduction to the West, exemplifies the clear Western-dominant biases at play, even at the basic level of structuring timelines and establishing canon directors or films. The pre-history of national cinemas, that is, the films which existed prior to a particular nation's emergence in the Western critical consciousness, thereby become diminished. An example of this historiographic approach can be found in one of the earliest English language texts on Korean cinema, *The History of Korean Cinema* by the film historian Lee Yeong-il. In the introduction to their work, Lee states their reason behind the book's existence, saying;

> "Film critics, film historians, and film students around the world […] not only told me that they desire to know more about Korean films but asked me to tell them about Korean films. Of course, this international interest in Korean films is derived from the fact that Korean films in the 1980s began to be attracted to many international film festivals around the world".[9]

Lee goes on to state at the very end of their introduction that "I would like to share the delight of publishing this book with foreign film men. Their interest and understanding of Korean film were the catalyst of publishing this book".[10] Both of these statements clearly place foreign interest as the central reason behind the publication of the book. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, *The History of Korean Cinema* takes an auteur-led approach, detailing significant works by directors who were at the time making inroads and appearances at festivals, and offering very little discussion of genre cinema throughout Korean film history.[11] Lee even goes so far as to include an appendix detailing the filmographies of directors active during the time of the book's

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utilize the alternative distribution network that the globalized festival circuit represents' (pp. 206). More recently South Korean blockbusters, for example *The Berlin File / Bereulin* (2013, Ryu Seung-wan) have enjoyed representation at major European festivals like Berlin and Edinburgh.There remains, however,a core contingent of South Korean auteur, art house directors who have received long-term support by such festivals, for example Hong Sang-soo, Lee Chang-dong, and Kim Ki-duk.

[9] Lee Yeong-Il (1988) *The History of Korean Cinema*, pp. 15

[10] Ibid. pp. 15

[11] Despite this, Lee's book is still unrivalled in its scope and coverage of Korean cinema, mentioning numerous films and directors who have yet to receive any attention by English language film scholars.

publication. Speaking again on Japanese cinema, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano has argued strongly against the auteur approach to discussions on national cinemas, claiming:

> 'The practice of auteurism has been the norm in studies of national cinemas […] The auteur narrative has configured the rest of Japanese film history as either a preparatory stage for the classical auteur period or a post-auteur residue'.[12]

Similar problems afflict the use of auterism when discussing the history of Korean cinema. The first major example of Lee's auteur approach can be seen in their discussion of Na Woon-gyu, a prominent actor and director during the Japanese colonial period (1905-1945). Lee claims that Na was "an idol to the nation"[13] thanks to his anti-colonial directorial debut *Arirang* (1926), and in doing so Lee maps national identity onto the more classic definition of the auteur. Where the term auteur originally referred to those directors who struggled for artistic integrity against the supposedly oppressive studio system,[14] the auteurs that make up the canon of notable South Korean directors are positioned against colonial and political oppression in their pursuit for artistic freedom. As such, the vast majority of South Korean auteurs are highlighted through either their national or, following independence from Japan, political films.

One further example of prioritising films with foreign audiences in mind can be seen in Lee's summary of South Korean cinema throughout the 1960s. Lee spends eight pages discussing what they term "artistic and literary" films, making sure to highlight specific works and follow the careers of certain notable directors – at one point comparing Lee Man-Hui's *The Road to Sampo /*

[12] Wada-Marciano (2008), pp. 1
[13] Ibid. pp. 43
[14] When Francois Truffaut (2009) spoke out in his seminal text, *A Certain Tendency of French Cinema*, against the Tradition of Quality, suggesting that so-called 'scriptwriters' films' are produced by men of letters, who 'look down on the cinema because they undervalue it', he at the same time praised the auteurs 'who often write their own dialogue and in some cases think up the stories they direct'. In doing so Truffaut constructed a division between the commercial, studio-based film industry, and the auteur who aspires to art over mainstream interests, a division he recognised when he claimed 'I simply cannot bring myself to believe in a peaceful coexistence between the Tradition of Quality and a *cinema d'auteur*'. For Truffaut, such things exist in direct opposition to each other, and thereby exist on a similar 'us and them' way of understanding analogous to the apparent relationship between art cinema and popular cinema.

Sampo Ganeun Gil (1975) to Federico Fellini. By aligning a Korean filmmaker with a festival stalwart like Fellini, Lee attempts to elevate the festival potential of Korean cinema. In doing so, comparisons such as this function on a similar level to the awards presented by these festivals, and indeed their significant contribution to the construction of a canon of auteurs, as observed in Kathleen Hugh's comments that:

> 'the award structure of these festivals designated prize-winning films, by definition, as exceptional products of their respective nations, produced by master auteurs; in Japan by Yasujiro Ozu, Kenji Mizoguchi, and Akira Kurosawa; in India by Satyajit Ray; in Mexico by Luis Bunuel.'[15]

The notion of exceptionality is particularly interesting here, as it aligns with the notions of the 'well-made film', a concept prevalent in early twenty-first century Korean film criticism.[16] By contrast, Lee devotes just two short paragraphs to the arrival of both animated and science-fiction films, noting nothing more than the first animated film, Shin Dong-heon's *A Story of Hong Gil-dong* / *Hong Gil-dong* (1967), stating it 'began in earnest for child audiences' and the first ever science-fiction film Kim Gi-deok's *Great Monster Yonggari* / *Dae Gwisu Yonggari (*1967), which received help from a Japanese technical team during production. [17]

What is interesting about this, beyond the sheer difference in exposure given to 'artistic' films over genre films, is that *Great Monster Yonggari* received little more than passing reference despite being directed by Kim Gi-Deok, a director who is held in high regard today, and who directed

[15] McHugh (2005) *State, Nation, Woman, and the Transnational Familiar*, pp. 21. Note the names mentioned and their respective significance as the initial breakthrough directors for each nation in the West.

[16] The well-made film was a critical construct prevalent during the first decade of the twenty-first century in South Korea, in which critics used the term in an attempt to elevate works they deemed culturally significant. Notably situating discussion through the lens of Western concepts, film scholar Kim Kyoung-wook (2006) has described the well-made film as 'a Korean combination of auteurism and the high-concept films of the New Hollywood era' (pp. 387). Many of the directors and films championed by this critical support – in particular Park Chan-wook, Kim Ji-woon, and Bong Joon-ho – soon became the figureheads of South Korean cinema in the West.

[17] Lee Yeong-il (1988), pp. 181. For the section on artistic cinema see pp. 174 -181

many award-winning or notable works throughout his career.[18] No mention of *Great Monster Yonggari* can be found in director Kim Gi-Deok's "principal films" section in Lee's 'active directors' appendix to the book. Instead the section lists other films by Kim, such as the humanist war drama *Five Marines / Ohineui Haebyeong* (1961) and the youth drama *The Barefoot of Youth / Maenbaleui Cheongchoon* (1964), the latter of which placed 33rd in the Korean Film Archive's (KOFA) list of the top 100 greatest Korean films of all time.[19] By omitting *Great Monster Yonggari* from Kim's "principal films", Lee continues a hierarchy in which art cinema is given precedence over genre.

The overlooking of genre cinema in favour of films which would speak to 'foreign film men' is understandable given Lee Yeong-il's initial reasons for publishing the book. As highlighted above, Lee deduced that South Korean cinema was growing on account of film festivals, and so positioned their writing in order to highlight directors and films which fit within the expectations of the art genre. In doing so, however, Lee overlooks the meshing of popular and art genres throughout Korean cinema history. Rather than celebrate Korean cinema in all of its forms, Lee instead emphasises directors and films which they feel would best integrate into the arthouse, film-festival mould.

It is therefore unsurprising that writings on various national cinemas are initially constructed around the idea of the auteur, canonising specific works and directors in an attempt to compartmentalise a specific country's cinematic output into something manageable and comprehendible. Problems emerge, however, when such filtering is the only way in which the cinema of a particular nation is understood. The foregrounding of art cinema over popular cinema would only continue when Western-based studies into South Korean cinema began to

[18] Though by no means a perfect metric for establishing regard, Kim is, at the time of writing, one of only eight directors to receive a DVD box set of restored films by the Korean Film Archive, positioning him as a significant figure within Korean film history.

[19] Due to a website redesign, the KOFA list is currently unavailable, for a report on the list's initial publication see Lee Seung-ah (2014) http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Culture/view?articleId=117219

emerge at the turn of the twenty-first century. Such an approach can be seen in the essay collection *Im Kwon-taek: The Making of a National Cinema,* which positions itself as 'the first English-language scholarly book on South Korean cinema published outside of Korea'.[20] In the preface, David E. James highlights a problem of the world cinema approach and uses it to emphasise that:

> 'We of course hoped to forestall the construction of an idea of Korean cinema as either a reflection of the Western one or as an exotic, orientalised other; but also, and more fundamentally, we hoped to forestall the construction of any binary that would have Western film theory as its active subject and Korean cinema its passive object'.[21]

It quickly becomes apparent, however, that Western film theory and terminology are heavily entrenched in the writings which follow. James himself argues that 'In his prolificness, the range of genres and themes he mastered, the vitality of his formal innovations […] Im navigated the tidal surges and retreats of the medium more completely than any other artist in the nation'.[22] Such a statement not only works towards constructing Im Kwon-taek as the figurehead of the film industry, in doing so implying a hierarchy within the canon of auteurs – a position only further bolstered by Im's prominent appearances at European film festivals - but it also displays the favour given to directors who have received such international attention. James makes sure to highlight Im Kwon-Taek's highly prolific career, arguing that 'having made his first film in 1962 and almost 100 since then, Im Kwon-taek spans the histories of these modern South Korean cinemas'[23] and yet fails to make any mention of another incredibly productive director, Go Yeong-nam, who had already directed over 100 films by the end of the 1980s.

There are two key reasons for such an omission. The first is to do with availability. Despite also producing films across a wide variety of genres, from literary adaptations such as *The Shower /*

[20] James (2002) *Im Kwon-taek: The Making of a National Cinema,* pp. 9
[21] Ibid. pp. 10
[22] Ibid. pp. 13
[23] Ibid. pp. 13

Sonagi (1978) through to crime films like *44 Myeongdong Street / Myeongdong Sashipsa Beonji* (1965), and horrors like *Suddenly in Dark Night / Gipeun Bam Gabjagi* (1981), Go Yeong-nam never received any international attention. At the same time, of his 100+ films as a director, few have received home video release. As such, he at once became a victim of the reductive national cinema process and its restrictive historiographic method, furthered in part by the aforementioned weak ancillary film markets of South Korea. This ties into the second reason, which finds fault not with Western interests, but rather the adoption of Western approaches by South Korean film critics and scholars.

Go Yeong-nam's director entry on the KOFA website states that 'although he wasn't a giant of Korean cinema who directed many great works, he was respected by many producers for his ability to consistently produce commercially successful movies'[24], a statement which clearly functions on the binary of auteur and filmmaker established by Francois Truffaut in his polemic *A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema*.[25] By firmly placing Go Yeong-nam into the latter category rather than attempt to elevate him alongside Im Kwon-taek, and automatically placing him lower on an implied hierarchy, while denouncing the majority of his work as categorically 'not great', KOFA become complicit in furthering a Western approach to understanding South Korean cinema through the auteur.[26]

Returning to the essay collection regarding Im Kwon-taek, it becomes clear that many of the essays fall into the trap of positioning Im Kwon-taek as an auteur, and as such treat Korean cinema as the passive subject of Western film theory. Kim Kyung-hyun opens their chapter on Im Kwon-taek by first discussing Na Woon-gyu, building upon Lee Yeong-il's initial positioning of Na as a central auteur in Korean film history by claiming first that "Na was quite possibly

[24] Korean Film Archive (2006)
[25] For discussion on Truffaut's piece, see **footnote 14**.
[26] Such diminishing and omission is highlighted here not to undermine the achievements of Im Kwon-taek but rather to highlight the similar achievements of Go Yeong-nam; to highlight and address the imbalance in exposure on account of the popular/art cinema divide.

Korea's first legitimate pop star", and then suggesting that "Na's emaciated and manic image tapped into the fury and frustration that allegorised Korea's grief as a nation deprived of its sovereignty".[27] Kim goes on to suggest that Im Kwon-Taek "presaged and later led a movement" that resulted in "a genre of protest film for the first time in Korean cinema history since Na Woon-gyu's era".[28]

By discussing Na Woon-gyu, Kim is working toward constructing a correlation between Na and Im Kwon-taek, in an attempt to establish them as the key figures of colonial and post-colonial Korean cinema respectively. Such comparisons serve a double function: on one hand Im Kwon-taek is positioned as the herald of South Korean cinema, and on the other Na Woon-gyu's iconic heritage is to be passed onto other notable directors, thereby constructing a lineage built on auterism. While Kim ultimately arrives at the idea that "if there has ever been a director who could not be interpreted through the prism of auteurship, it is Im Kwon-taek"[29], Kim also makes sure to position Im as not only one of the most significant directors in South Korean cinema, arguing 'Im is the only director whose life's work includes both the Golden Age of Korean cinema in the 1960s and the New Korean Cinema of the '80s and '90s'[30], but also discusses the Korean director's film *Mandala* (1981) through references to canon Western directors, arguing that 'the depth generated by the long shots in *Mandala* hardly pales even when compared to some of the most classic scenes in the films of his great contemporaries such as Andrei Tarkovsky, Theo Angelopoulos, and Abbas Kiarostami'.[31] In doing so, Kim seeks to legitimise Im Kwon-Taek in two ways. First, by positioning him as the catalyst via which other South Korean auteurs would arrive, and second, by placing Im alongside established and highly recognised auteur filmmakers, who themselves are largely seen as instigators of new movements in either their own national cinema or film in general, in an attempt to add Im into the global, international canon of

[27] Kim Kyung-Hyun (2002) *Korean Cinema and Im Kwon-Taek: An Overview*, pp. 20
[28] Ibid. pp. 36
[29] Ibid. pp. 39
[30] Ibid. pp. 22. Again, there is an omission of Go Yeong-nam here.
[31] Ibid. pp. 35-36

directors. By invoking the works of Tarkovsky et al. Kim prioritises the mapping of Western approaches to film onto South Korean cinema.

As will be highlighted throughout this study, the discussion of Korean cinema through the lens of Western critical terminologies and Eurocentric cinematic influence is pervasive. In order to establish a new historiographic method through which to understand Korean cinema, one which priorities the domestic genre film, it is necessary to look outside of Korean cinema studies for potential frameworks. In an attempt to grapple with the problems inherent in the term 'world cinema', Lucia Nagib has argued that 'any film criticism becomes instantly richer when patterns of realism, genre, authorship and dramatic construction emerge from the analysed object itself and not from an alien (usually American) paradigm'.[32] It is clear that, in the context of Korea, the Western, European arthouse infrastructure and style exists as one such alien paradigm. Similar sentiments are found in the writings of Savas Arslan, who attempts to provide a new history of Turkish cinema and argues for a new approach to considering a specific national cinema, suggesting;

> 'Once the expectation of non-Western filmmaking is set according to its representation of realities, oftentimes popular domestic films of such countries do not make it to the world scene. Instead, accounts of national cinemas cover only issue films or realistic dramas because of such expectations. Then, whenever one starts to speak of a broader, more popular, and perhaps more inclusive version of truth, one contradicts such norms'.[33]

The ideas posited here work towards understanding a country's cinema not by the notable works and directors of the festival circuit, which more often than not exist within the genre signifiers of arthouse cinema, the 'issue film' and 'realistic dramas' posited by Arslan, but instead by the popular cinema of that country; by the films produced by a particular country primarily for that

[32] Nagib (2006) *Towards a Positive Definition of World Cinema,* pp. 35-36
[33] Arslan (2011) *Cinema in Turkey: A New Critical History,* pp. 1

country's own domestic audience. In historiographic terms, it is therefore important to look beyond the canon directors, and indeed strip away compartmentalising notions such as autership entirely, to instead prioritise the film text as the central site of analysis. This study therefore provides histories of Korean cinema through genre.

1.2: On Genre and Korean Cinema

Given that South Korean cinema does not fit neatly into the usual Western organising structures of studying and understanding a particular nation's cinema, it is necessary, then, to engage in a discussion on Korean cinema which acknowledges and prioritises Korean productions, and diminishes both the notion of the auteur and comparisons with Western cinema. One way in which this is achieved is through the examination of genre, and more specifically, the genre film text. Focusing on genre, however, provides a certain challenge of its own; namely the historical construction of genre theory predominantly through Hollywood and European cinema. The obstacles presented by this critical history of genre are evidenced in Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano's observations on Japanese cinema, in particular the claim that:

> 'The difficulties encountered in genre criticism point to larger problems that are inherent in the study of national cinema itself. In many of the works on Japanese cinema, for instance, any discussion of the cultural specificity of the cinema is often subsumed within the overriding narrative of Hollywood's dominant system.'[34]

For Wada-Marciano, then, it is clear that discussions on genre inherently perpetuate a hierarchical order, wherein genre films are examined through the lens of Hollywood genre. In this way, discussions on genre align with the previously discussed problems found in the concept of national cinema. As a result, the nuances involved in the historical construction of a specific genre are glossed over in favour of an assumed uniform approach dictated by Hollywood. An

[34] Wada-Marciano (2008) , pp. 44

example of such Hollywood bias is found in Barry Keith Grant's assertion, by way of Tom O'Regan, that:

> 'Filmmakers from around the world have responded to the domination of American film by adopting Hollywood genres and 'indigenising' or reworking them according to their own cultural sensibility'.[35]

Grant goes on to suggest that films like 'South Korean melodrama and Japanese *kaiju eiga* (monster movies) all address specific national concerns even as they depend on their generic American predecessors for meaning'.[36] The idea that non-Hollywood cinema is dependent on Hollywood cinema in order to understand or construct genre creates a clear hierarchy in which countries such as South Korea can only react to or receive the creations of Hollywood, rather than exist as creators of genre who adapt or integrate elements of Hollywood as part of an ongoing evolution of genre.

In order to employ genre in a way that enables discussion of Korean cinema without comparison to Hollywood, it is necessary to strip such associations from the terminologies of genre. In this way, this study follows the central notion of Alan Williams' comments on Thomas Schatz's evaluation of genres, found in Williams' assertion that:

> 'The validity of his [Schatz's] enterprise is largely determined by the validity of American genre studies (none of his references are texts in foreign languages: very few are translations). And there's the rub. 'Genre' is not exclusively or even primarily a Hollywood phenomenon.'[37]

Williams' observation provides a sobering starting point through which to begin the reassessment of genre. Expanding on this idea, it is important to note that specific genre terminologies also carry significant Western-critical baggage.

[35] Grant (2007) *Film Genre – From Iconography to Ideology*, pp. 105
[36] Ibid. pp. 105
[37] Williams (1984) *Is a Radical Genre Critcism Possible?*, pp. 121

It is important to address this imbalance. Wada-Marciano therefore attempts to undo such dominance through the positioning of genre as a means of liberating national cinemas from such hierarchies, arguing:

> 'In contrast, approaching Japanese cinema through the historical practice of genre allows us to see how the Japanese cinematic modes actually functioned. Within these modes Hollywood cinema's influence might be dominant but not to the exclusion of all others'.[38]

In doing so, Wada-Marciano suggests that Hollywood should hold a diminished position within the construction of genres. In the context of Korean cinema, it is necessary to intensify this diminution. This is not only because of Korea's complex socio-cultural history, wherein the West only comes to have any real impact during the late 1940s, some 25 years after Korea began to produce films, but also because of the significant critical coalescence between Hollywood and the genres discussed in this research.

The signifying tropes or elements present in the Western-dominant understanding of specific genres prevent it from being mapped wholesale onto the cinema of Korea. At the same time, however, the frameworks through which such genre categorisations are initially understood and constructed can be brought over and adapted to fit into the Korean example. Wada-Marciano's notion of the 'historical practice of genre' provides a solid foundation through which to build a history of genre removed from the West. Further to this, Wada-Marciano's claims align with that of Barbara Klinger, who asserts that:

> 'To historicise enquiries into genre more fully it is necessary to consider how films were labelled in the past and, in the process, to grant that generic definition is a potentially

[38] Wada-Marciano (2008), pp. 44

> volatile or at least contingent phenomenon, conditioned by social, institutional, and historical circumstance'.[39]

A history of Korean genre cinema, freed from the long shadow of Hollywood, allows for Korean cinema, and indeed Korean pre-cinematic narrative traditions, to come to the fore. Korean genres have often imported genre terminology from other countries, and therefore the very names of genres in Korea are imbued with historical and cultural complexities which must be unpacked. In order to properly understand Korean melodrama films, for example, it is necessary to also interrogate the Japanese term *shinpa*: a term which provides far greater insight into the Korean melodrama genre than the Western understanding of melodrama.

Due to the existence of such regional terminology traversing the East Asia region, it is equally important to replace the diminishing of Hollywood influence with the augmenting of influence from other countries. As will be discussed in their respective chapters, current writings on Korean cinema have tended to overlook these local and regional influences, and the resultant evolution of genre form as a result, in favour of positioning the West as a central influencer. By instead tracking these smaller changes and interactions, this study foregrounds the influence of the Korean peninsula's neighbouring countries, in particular Hong Kong and Japan. Acknowledging the interaction between nations is vital to understanding the genealogy of a nation's cinema, as noted by David Bordwell's observations on Hong Kong cinema, when he suggests that:

> 'despite many claims to the contrary in our multicultural milieu, there are more commonalities than differences in human cultures; universal, physical, social, and psychological predispositions and the facial expressions of many emotions will be quickly understood in a film, whatever its country of origin'.[40]

[39] Klinger (1994), pp. 135
[40] Bordwell (2000) *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment*, pp. xi

Bordwell's idea that there can be a universal approach to cinema, through which commonalities can be seen across cinema throughout the world, regardless of national origin, is echoed by Donald Richie's approach to Japanese Cinema, in particular the notion that:

> "Histories of the Japanese film […] have most often chosen a *volksgeist* theory where the culturally specific can be used as a vehicle for historical reorienting and aesthetic enquiry, and where the uniqueness of the Japanese film may be insisted upon. In actuality, however, there are more similarities than differences among the films of Europe and America, and those of Japan. Though each country creates a national cinema (and hence a national cinematic style), this is only through the most common, pragmatic, and universal of means".[41]

Both Bordwell and Richie provide strong frameworks on which to base this research into Korean cinema.[42] While it is possible to see these suggestions as supportive of further comparison between Hollywood and other national cinemas, they also contribute to a neutralising of film genre, upending the West's hierarchical position by suggesting that commonalities are intrinsic in film form across nations. This study therefore assumes a universality of film form; a presentation which consists of the basic narrative and mise-en-scene found in the majority of popular, mainstream cinema. At the same time, though it is possible to argue for the basic anatomies of genre across nations – action films prioritising action sequences; horror films built around shocking the audience – to assume that genre in all its minute signifiers fits across nations, is to imply that genre is dictated by a primary understanding of Western cinema which other nations then conform to. As such, this study also gives priority to the less

[41] Richie (2012) *A Hundred Years of Japanese Film*, pp. 10

[42] It is important to note here that this study is not arguing for a unique cinematic identity which can be called quintessentially South Korean. While it observes and tracks the influences and permutations throughout the history of Korean film in order to better understand Korean cinema largely on its own terms, removed from the hierarchies and categorisations inherent in approaches to understanding or excavating a national cinema, this study does not claim that South Korean cinema's approaches to genre are unique only to South Korea.

obvious shifts in trends or form which have emerged over time as a result of interactions between South Korea and its neighbouring countries. This notion of universal film form allows for the levelling of long-held historical hierarchies. With this in mind, it is therefore a combination content and form which establishes genre first and foremost. The film text therefore becomes the central element through which the development and evolution of genre can be analysed.

In the case of Korean cinema, particularly contemporary South Korean productions, genre hybrids provide a significant obstacle to such methods of categorisation; the ease at which South Korean films switch between genres makes claims of specific genre categorisation subjective at best. Jin Dal-yong has positioned hybridisation within the context of globalisation, remarking that 'Korean cinema has partially hybridized itself in mingling two different cultures, particularly with Hollywood'.[43] Jin's claims emerge through application of cultural hybridisation, rather than genre hybridisation, and therefore employ hybridisation through a cultural lens wherein 'hybridization is about the creation of a new cultural space beyond the simple fusion of two cultures' .[44] Such statements nevertheless maintain a hierarchical focus in which Hollywood is situated as the prominent component through which fusion occurs. While Jin briefly acknowledges the existence of cultural exchange between South Korea and other countries within the region, the vast majority of discussion positions Hollywood as the locus of influence, as shown in Jin's assertion that:

> '…the Korean film industry has hybridized domestic films in terms of structure, including style and special effects, but it is still Westernized in content with its incorporation into globalization. In the *Hallyu 2.0* [45] era, Hollywood's influences could

[43] Jin Dal-yong (2016) *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in the Age of Social Media*, pp. 89
[44] Ibid.
[45] The term *Hallyu 2.0* refers to Jin's own terminology which categorises the movement of *Hallyu* (Korean wave) culture from the East Asian region into a global space.

not be denied in these cases, because domestic producers tried to make another form of Hollywood films, which are homogenized, not authentic.'[46]

Such hybridisation has resulted in numerous attempts to encapsulate the crux of a hybridised approach to genre, leading to an influx of terminologies. One example is found in the notion of 'genre-bending' put forward by the prominent Korean film critic Darcy Paquet to describe "one of the key ways in which filmmakers have tried to create a new image for the industry".[47] Paquet's argument is largely evidenced through a discussion of Lee Myeong-se's *Nowhere to Hide / Injeongsajeong Bul Geot Eobtda* (1999), before concluding, prophetically, with the claim that 'Korean filmmakers' experimentation with genre is likely to continue into the future, as a new generation takes control of the industry and attempts to shape its own identity'.[48] Also of interest here is the very concept of 'genre-bending', a term included by Paquet without any space devoted to properly interrogating their own terminology. While admittedly Paquet's article is a short, online think-piece, the absence of any concrete justification for the term 'genre-bending', combined with the inclusion of other terms for genre hybridisation such as 'twist' or 'blend', suggests an uncertainty about how best to convey the 'new image' of Korean cinema. This uncertainty aside, Paquet's article is correct in championing genre hybrids as something endemic to the emerging popular cinema of South Korea during the mid to late 1990s.

The applicability of Paquet's observations on 'genre-bending' has been filtered down significantly over time, and is shown most obviously in Pablo Utin's concept of the 'Slippery Structure'. Utin addresses genre hybrids through this terminology in order to address the frequent changes of tone in South Korean cinema. For Utin, then, 'a change in tone might bring with it a change in genre, and such a change in genre might also facilitate a change in tone'.[49] Utin's 'Slippery Structure' rests on the idea that 'abrupt shifts in genre and tone' occur in Korean cinema

[46] Ibid. pp. 86
[47] Paquet (2000) *Genrebending in Contemporary Korean Cinema*
[48] Ibid.
[49] Utin (2016) *Sliding Through Genres: The Slippery Structure in South Korean Films*, pp. 54

"without suitable preparation and without preserving the tonal consistency of the film".[50] In doing so, the terminology essentially circumnavigates the genre hybrid problem by becoming applicable only to the most extreme examples of such hybridisation, to the degree that their change in genre is measured as 'abrupt'.[51]

In order to approach Korean genre cinema from a more inclusive starting point, it is therefore necessary to reset the filters used primarily in the pursuit of establishing a terminology. In doing so, it is worth revisiting Paquet's recognition of hybrids as being central to the development of South Korean cinematic identity during the turn of the century, primarily because it encourages an acknowledgement of hybridisation at varying levels, as well as promotes analysis at the intersection of varying genre combinations within South Korean cinema as a whole.

The hybrid element is further problematised by the histories of genre in Korean film. While Paquet is correct to pinpoint the 1990s as a period of rampant genre hybridisation, in fact there are multiple periods of such genre hybrids throughout Korean history. As discussed in their respective chapters, neither action nor horror films were properly defined and categorised until the 1960s. As a result, the histories of these genres are reliant on the existence of genre hybridisation; for example minor scares or moments of action in films which otherwise belong to the drama or comedy.

With this in mind, this study requires a new approach to genre which allows for hybridisation to exist as an inherent element in the construction of genre. This study therefore makes use of a genealogical approach to history, mapping out the shifts and transitions of a particular genre

[50] Ibid. pp. 49

[51] Some of the more abrupt examples of this hybrisation can be seen in Lee Gwon's *My Ordinary Love Story* / *Nae Yeonaeeui Gieok* (2014), in which a romantic comedy turns into a psychological thriller involving a kidnapping, and Jang Jin's *Man on High Heels* / *Haihil* (2014), where the action film becomes an exploration of sexual identity and gender politics. Utin ultimately addresses the shortcomings of their own terminology, claiming that 'It is important to stress that The Slippery Structure is not an inherently Korean aesthetic strategy – it does not even appear in most Korean films. In this paper I chose to highlight the manifestation of this strategy despite its very limited appearance in only a few Korean films. However, to my understanding this strategy is so unique and fascinating that it opens the door to further research and thought, both within Genre and South Korean Cinema studies.' (pp. 55)

through the form and content of the film text, while retaining the central overarching genre as an anchor throughout time. As such, the genealogies discussed throughout this study should be considered first and foremost textual genealogies; that is, a methodology which emphasises the film text as the primary focus of analysis. This approach thereby positions the film text as the main bearer of significance with regard to the histories that are excavated and examined in the following chapters.

The most obvious problem of the textual genealogical approach, however, is the potential to fall into a sense of confirmation-bias or quasi-causal determinism. Influence is a rather hard thing to prove with any real certainty or consistency. This is especially true if we were to factor in the wider scope of industrial practices i.e. the commodification of film genres into a product, and the reinforcement and refinement of genre through marketing, distribution, and exhibition practices. In-depth enquiries into the industrial half of genre construction and maintenance are unfortunately beyond the scope of this study. Instead, and in order to alleviate the problems of what can be a potentially highly-assumptive process, this study combines the genealogical approach with that of genre, mapping out histories in order to construct a more solid foundation for influence based on stylistic approaches and/or narrative themes cultivated through observing a wide range of Korean films, and indeed films from Korea's neighbouring countries.

It is therefore important to acknowledge the foregrounding of genre as a central element within the textual genealogical approach. Not only does it allow for a sense of organisation by providing a framework through which trends can be tracked, but genre can also be seen as malleable and in a state of flux, allowing it to maintain a presence throughout a nation's cinematic history. In doing so, this study provides close textual readings of multiple films from throughout the history of Korean film in order to ascertain how genre is understood through its filmic representation. In other words, this study seeks to establish genre meaning through focusing primarily on the

film text, in order to provide genre terminologies that are simultaneously inclusive of the local filmic histories of Korean film and expressive of the genre film as experienced by the spectator.

The textual genealogical approach to genre therefore aligns itself somewhat with the theories of American genre theorist Rick Altman. More specifically, Altman's notion of 'genrification as process' provides a suitable framework for tackling the messy web of genre hybrids present throughout the history of Korean film. Altman states that:

> 'Just as geology places us only on the latest level, not on the fundamental or final level, so a process-oriented understanding of genrification keeps us from thinking of the kingdom-phylum-order-class-family-genus-species (sic) sequence as complete or closed. Genres are not just *post facto* categories, then, but part of the constant category-splitting/category-creating dialectic that constitutes the history of types and terminology'.[52]

Altman's notions therefore find their foundations in geological and etymological approaches, in which genres are malleable and in a constant cyclical rotation of experimentation and consolidation. This approach allows for genres, or differing elements of genre form, to interact and coalesce, altering the genetic makeup of the genre, whilst further reinforcing specific tropes inherent to that genre. What differentiates the textual genealogical approach to Altman's genrification process is that, in the genealogical approach, generic meiosis does not occur. In Altman's process, genres can separate into distinct categories. Altman describes:

> 'The 'martial' musical […] is a Warners cycle, a well-differentiated product sure to return a good profit to the studio's backers. As such it has the wherewithal to become […] what I have termed an 'adjectival' genre. But as an adjectival genre, the martial musical gains the opportunity to become a broadly practiced substantival genre. Just as musical comedy

[52] Altman (1999) *Film/Genre*, pp. 65

> spawned the musical, so martial musicals might (but not necessarily) give rise to the 'martial' genre'.[53]

For Altman, then, genre is malleable and therefore prone to meiosis, with these divisions allowing for a potentially new genre, or cycle, to emerge. The textual genealogical approach instead assumes generic hybridisation as consistent to the core or dominant genre represented, allowing for the tracking of evolutions and mutations of a specific genre's DNA throughout time. It thereby differs from Altman's approach, arguing not for cycles but instead branches which divert from the central genre but never completely break free. Like the genrification process, however, the genealogical approach does not assume finality, and instead presents genre as a constantly modifying and adaptable construct. Such classification is necessary specifically within the Korean context on account of its rampant genre hybridisation, to the degree that applying the genrification process would result in far too many adjectival genres to be manageable.

With this displacement of genre from its long-held Hollywood association, and given both the long history of Korean cinema and the scope of this research, it is necessary to enforce specific restrictions beyond the previously-discussed emphasis on the film text. It is for this reason that this study will foreground three genres: the melodrama, the action film, and horror. The reasoning behind such restriction emerges through the strong ties between Hollywood and these specific genres. By rending these genres free from their long-held associations, this study attempts to provide new generic frameworks which position Korean melodrama, action, and horror films front and centre.

At the same time it is important to acknowledge the legacy of Western critical approaches to genre. The means of categorising and classifying genre in the West provides suitable methodological frameworks for classifying genre in Korean cinema, that is, adopting the basic apparatus for classification and rejecting the critical theories built upon that apparatus. It is with

[53] Ibid. pp. 64-65

this in mind that this study devotes space in each of its chapters towards delineating the criteria through which each genre is categorised and defined. In order to properly construct a textual genealogy it is important to prioritise the construction, development, and evolution of genre through the analysis of the film text – its form and content –more so than any extra-filmic elements. Industrial cycles, promotion, distribution, and circulation are all thereby reduced to an epiphenomic status within the textual genealogical framework, in order to emphasise film form as the locus around which genre emerges. With the film text as the central creator of genre, through form and content, it is possible to construct a history which prioritises the developments and evolutions of genre through specific reference to the filmic. The genealogical approach thereby allows for branching offshoots, regardless of industrial adoption or implementation, and without sacrificing the overall integrity of the overarching genre. Ultimately, the extra-filmic elements of a film matter little when assessing the film text as it exists. Fundamentally, the textual genealogical approach isn't interested in *why* a genre shifts and develops over time, but rather is only interested that such developments *are* in the first place. Evidenced by their very existence in the film text, these shifts and developments can be traced in order to construct a history of genre which prioritises genre, as signified by the film text, above all else.

1.3: Chapter Breakdown

Chapter one will focus on the genre of melodrama. An often discussed and analysed genre in the West, melodrama has struggled to maintain a sense of consistency throughout history. How, then, can such a volatile term be used so openly when discussing films which existed entirely outside of the term's numerous evaluations and interrogations? It is important to strip away the commonly-held assumptions about the term melodrama and refocus the term within a Korean context which fully accounts for the specific histories embedded in the construction of Korean melodrama throughout the twentieth century.

This chapter also traces the origins of melodrama within South Korean film to a period far earlier than the prominent arrival of Hollywood cinema in the late 1940s, and the so-called Golden Age of melodrama which spawned from it, arguing that melodramatic narratives can be found in both the Korean storytelling tradition of *pansori*, as well as the arrival of *shinpa* following Japan's colonisation of the Korean peninsula during the start of the twentieth century. In doing so, this chapter provides a counterpoint to Western notions of melodrama, and simultaneously highlights the inability for melodrama to maintain a sense of uniformity across nations and cultures.

Chapter two focuses on the action genre, removing the prominent hierarchy often attributed to Hollywood cinema and instead focusing on the interactions between South Korea and its neighbouring countries, in particular Hong Kong. South Korea's co-productions and interactions with Hong Kong marked the first voluntary period of influence and interaction between South Korea and another country, and the majority of these productions concern themselves with formal and thematic interrogations of action cinema.

By tracing this genealogy through to the modern day, chapter two considers the means by which South Korean action films use action scenes in order to discuss notions of masculinity, nationality, and history. Consideration is given to how South Korean action cinema has attempted to construct its action scenes through formal influence from Hong Kong, while simultaneously confronting thematic notions embedded within Hong Kong action films. Inherent in this discussion, therefore, is the acknowledgement that cultural exchange can not only greatly influence, but can even solidify genres by constructing genre tropes into something more concrete, tangible, and definable. This becomes explicit when examining the emergence of action cinema as a definable genre in South Korean film during the 1960s, wherein the influence of Hong Kong is prevalent in determining both visual styles and narrative approaches.

Chapter three focuses on the horror film, and begins by constructing a prehistory of South Korean horror cinema through analysing the horrific, uncanny, and the eerie present within regional folklore. By tracing the genealogy of the horror genre and acknowledging the interactions between South Korea and other countries within the region, most notably Japan, this chapter acknowledges the at-times shared approaches to horror film form. Crucial to discussing the horror genre in Korea, therefore, is the acknowledgement that pre-cinematic folklores were circulated and disseminated between cultures and countries in East Asia at various points in history. Such exchanges have resulted in similar approaches to narrative elements and visual representations of the otherworldly and the supernatural. It is important to highlight these regional similarities, as twenty-first century South Korean horror exists as a genre which is both specifically commenting on Korean culture, while simultaneously invoking elements of Japanese horror cinema, to the degree that Japanese folklore and urban legends are becoming integrated into contemporary Korean horror films.

At the same time, the chapter highlights the ghost as a lynchpin through which the genealogy of the genre can be traced. In particular, the way in which the ghost is able to interact with and modulate space and objects, thereby creating uncanny locations and experiences, is explored throughout the history of genre. The chapter looks at how the ghost is granted a sense of universality, enabling it to interact and intersect across time periods, locations, and narrative themes.

By placing an emphasis on the textual genealogies of genres within South Korea, this study has two central aims. Firstly, to abandon the canon and hierarchies set in place by writings on Korean cinema thus far, in doing so removing previous definitions or classifications given to certain groups of directors or films, time periods, or movements throughout Korean film history. Secondly, this research aims to present instead the idea of Korean cinema as a genealogy, constructing a continuum of influence and change in order to match the constant state of flux

found within the Korean film industry's rapidly evolving cycles and currents. At the same time, the Korean example employed in this study highlights the potential found in examining national cinemas beyond their associative histories with Hollywood and the West. As such, this study of genre also exists as an approach which can be applied to other non-Western cinemas.

This study is therefore an attempt at reconceptualising the concepts of genre and national cinema, stripping both of their inherent historiographic modes of compartmentalising and categorising non-Western cinema. In this way a new history of Korean cinema, free from the constraints of the auteur or the critical histories of genre understanding, is allowed the space to blossom. By championing the film text as the central source of genre construction, this study provides a history which seeks to establish new foundations for further enquiry.

CHAPTER ONE: MELODRAMA

Reading Korean Melodrama as a Political Genre

2.1: Introduction

As scholarship on South Korean cinema has grown, the term melodrama has been applied to films throughout Korea's cinematic history without much interrogation of the term's use and applicability. By constructing a new history of melodramatic form and narrative in Korea which predates the Korean adoption of the word 'melodrama' during the late 1940s, this chapter therefore challenges usage of the term melodrama as it is used in the West when discussing Korean cinema,. In doing so it works towards conceptualising South Korean melodrama as a genre distinct from long-held associations with Western critical theory.

Before discussing the problems inherent in the application of genre terminology, it is worth highlighting the problems already extant in Western understanding of melodrama as a genre. Throughout history, melodrama has proved one of the hardest genres to contain or contextualise through any kind of specific criteria. It is perhaps because of this that Laura Mulvey has referred to the melodrama as a 'critical chameleon', and has argued that it is 'as though the concept 'Hollywood Melodrama' emerged more out of an accumulated body of writing than the production system of the Hollywood studios'.[54] Mulvey's highlighting of the melodrama as a critical construct, rather than an industrial one, is most clearly evidenced in the wave of writings which emerged among film scholars during the 1970s and 80s, noted by John Mercer and Martin Shingler as a period 'when ideology, psychoanalysis and gender were the most hotly debated issues within Film Studies'.[55]

[54] Mulvey (1994) *'It Will be a Magnificent Obsession': The Melodrama's Role in the Development of Contemporary Film Theory,* pp. 121

[55] Mercer and Shingler (2004) *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* pp. 4

Given the number of differing approaches to a genre that had largely previously been excluded from critical analysis, it is unsurprising that a number of formal elements have been prioritised as crucial to the melodrama. Thomas Elsaesser, in their seminal text *Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama,* highlights the heightened emotions present within the melodramatic, focusing particularly on the 'exaggerated rise-and-fall pattern in human actions and emotional responses, a from-the-sublime-to-the-ridiculous movement' which ultimately 'produces a graph of a much greater fluctuation, a quicker swing from one extreme to the other than is considered natural, realistic or in conformity with literary standards of verisimilitude.'[56] Within Elsaesser's observations there is a focus on the body, in particular the movements of the body and the expressions of the face as they are used to exaggerate emotion. The body, as will be highlighted later, also factors heavily into understanding the Korean melodrama, but for different reasons.

Taking Elsaesser's point into account, Sue Harper has argued for historical specificity as a major component of the genre, stating that 'stylistic flamboyance and emotional 'excess' may be its [melodrama's] recurring features, but these will be structured in relation to the class of target audiences, production conditions, and the precise historical period'.[57] In their summation of critical approaches to the genre, Caryl Flinn has emphasised the role of music in melodrama, arguing that 'along with other non-referential signs like performance, gesture and rhythm, music indeed *does* take over for melodrama's linguistic deficiencies'.[58] This approach is also found in Thomas Schatz's suggestion that 'in the strictest definition of the term, melodrama refers to those narrative forms which combine music (*melos*) with drama'.[59] In these attempts to widen the scope of melodrama beyond the exaggerated body, there nevertheless remains a focus on

[56] Elsassser (1987) *Tales of Sound and Fury: Observation on the Family Melodrama* pp. 52
[57] Harper (1987) *Historical Pleasures: Gainsborough Costume Melodramas* pp. 167
[58] Flinn (1994) *Music and the Melodramatic Past of New German Cinema* pp. 108
[59] Schatz (1981) *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* pp. 221

exaggeration of other sorts: elaborate sets and stylistic flourishes; the use of music as an emotional fulcrum; the way in which the film is edited.

Following on from its new-found critical appraisal in the 1970s, melodrama is largely considered to refer to family and domestic narratives, and has often been read through feminist frameworks when analysing the notion of the 'woman's film'.[60] Such categorisations, however, largely omit the historical genealogy of melodrama, instead situating the term squarely within the world of 1950s Hollywood directors such as Douglas Sirk or Vincente Minnelli. Christine Gledhill challenges this by pointing out melodrama's existence as a 'cross-cultural form with a complex, international, two-hundred year history'.[61] This history is exhumed and analysed in Peter Brooks' highly influential text *The Melodramatic Imagination,* which focuses on the literary tradition of melodrama, in the works of writers like Honoré de Balzac and Henry James, and the theatrical melodramas of the nineteenth century. Brooks positions the melodrama as a 'form of theatricality which will underlie novelistic efforts at representation – which will provide a model for the making of meaning in fictional dramatizations of existence'.[62] Following this notion, in tracing melodrama back to its theatrical roots, David Grimsted has highlighted the political power of melodrama, claiming that:

> 'By the time [French diplomat] Alexis de Tocqueville and Karl Marx were launching their classic analyses of the new democratic-bourgeois world order, melodrama's political critique had shifted from simply deriding all hierarchy separated from moral worth to

[60] Critical discussions on these generic aspects are too vast to include here. For more on the family or domestic melodrama see Schatz (1991, pp. 221-260), Elsaesser (1987, pp. 43-69), and Rodowick (1987, pp. 268-280). For discussions on the melodrama and the 'women's film', see Doane (1987, pp. 283 – 298), Kuhn (1987, pp. 339-349), Kaplan (1987, pp. 113-137), and LaPlace (1987, pp. 138-166). For a discussion on the family melodrama and how melodrama was marketed during the 1950s, see Klinger (1994, pp. 134-146).

61 Gledhill (1987) The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation pp. 1

[62] Brooks (1976) *The Melodramatic Imagination* pp. 13

attack on clearly specific bourgeois villains tied to land speculation, industrial, banking, and urban sources of power.'[63]

The political element of melodrama is further supported by Daniel Gerould's analysis of melodramas concerning 'revolution and violent social change', wherein he states:

> 'Since the poor and downtrodden are its protagonists of choice, melodrama tends to favour the cause of the dispossessed rather than of those in power […] Thus melodrama's central theme of oppressed innocence has regularly been perceived as an incitement to rebellion against tyranny by audiences suffering similar victimisation.'[64]

The theatrical and literary history of melodrama precludes its categorisation solely within the domestic framings of 1950s Hollywood. Melodrama, as a politically focused genre built on the foundations of the oppressed lower classes of society, provides a significant counter point to the bourgeois and romantic sensibilities of the Sirkian melodrama, which has long been championed as a definitive example of the genre. The political aspirations inherent in pre-cinematic melodrama provide a framework which is better suited to the Korean melodrama, as will be evidenced throughout this chapter.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that melodrama has historically been understood in different ways even in the relatively brief history of the world of film. In their analysis on the transitory states of the term melodrama in film during the silent era, Ben Singer highlights the filmic adoption of turn of the century stage melodramas, known as 10-20-30 melodramas, which considered urban modernity by depicting 'violent action, gripping suspense, startling surprise, and remarkable spectacle'.[65] Singer highlights five traits of melodrama – pathos, emotionalism, moral polarization, non-classical narrative form, and graphic sensationalism – and argues that of these elements 'moral polarization and sensational action and spectacle' meet the

[63] Grimsted (1994) *Vigilante Chronicle: The Politics of Melodrama Brought to Life* pp. 199-200
[64] Gerould (1994) *Melodrama and Revolution* pp. 185
[65] Singer (2001) *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* pp. 149

absolute minimum requirements.[66] Singer's analysis highlights a clear discontinuity between melodrama's industrial and colloquial usage during film's formative years and the employment of the term melodrama during its period of critical popularity later in the century, whilst at the same time answering Christine Gledhill's questions concerning the delineation of the melodramatic, specifically:

> 'What, for instance, is the justification confining melodramatic categorisation to films about domestic situations and 'feminine' conditions? Why are the shoot-out, the lone trek through the wilderness, the rituals of horse and gun, any less excessive than a family conflict about – taking an example from Minnelli's *The Cobweb* – curtains destined for a psycho-therapeutic clinic?'[67]

The answer to Gledhill's question links back to Mulvey: the justification is a critical construction which ignores, or at the very least sidesteps, both the pre-filmic history of melodrama and earlier industrial definitions of cinematic melodrama. If said history was taken into account, Gledhill's examples fit perfectly into the wider definitions of melodrama. The categorisation and fragmentation of the melodrama by critical writings, which emphasise exaggeration above all, has obfuscated melodrama's generic applicability.

The melodramatic conundrum is further complicated by the inclusion of East Asian cinemas into the discussion. The majority of texts which discuss melodrama do so through the framework of Hollywood or otherwise Western theatrical or literary legacies. Melodrama's complex critical construction, its amorphous nature, is generated through readings of products produced by the West during specific periods which affected Western nations. Writing on Chinese cinema, Nick Browne argues that:

[66] Ibid. pp. 58
[67] Gledhill (1987) pp. 12-13

> 'Even with certain ambiguous precedents, the translocation of the critical/aesthetic category of 'melodrama' from its Western inscription to a contemporary Chinese context is hardly unproblematic. On what basis can an aesthetic ideology so embedded in the popular entertainment forms of Western culture – Christian and capitalist – be treated as significant, culturally speaking, to the form and meaning of contemporary Chinese film? Strictly speaking, the Chinese system of genre classification and its categories are incommensurable with the Western system.'[68]

Without meaning to suggest a blanket approach which overlooks the multitude of inherent cultural differences between countries in the East Asian region, Browne's statement provides a significant starting point through which to reappraise notions of melodrama within the Korean context. Melodrama in the Western context is an incredibly loaded term, unable to maintain consistency even when being solely applied to the history of Hollywood cinema. It is therefore necessary to interrogate and reconceptualise the term melodrama in order for it to be applied to Korean film. With this in mind, Wimal Dissanayake makes the significant point that:

> 'Although we may use the term melodrama to characterise some types of Asian cinema, it is well to remind ourselves that none of the Asian languages has a synonym for this word. Such terms as we find in modern usage are recent coinages based on the English word.'[69]

This is true in the case of South Korea, wherein the term 멜로드라마 (mel-ro-deu-ra-ma) is a direct phonetic appropriation of the English word. Despite these claims, just as with notions of national cinema and genre theory, scholars on South Korean cinema often continue to position analyses of South Korean melodramas through the lens of Western critical approaches. One example can be found in Chung Hye-seung's suggestion that:

[68] Browne (1994) *Society and Subjectivity: On the Political Economy of Chinese Cinema* pp. 168
[69] Dissanayake (1993) *Introduction* pp. 3

> 'Golden Age South Korean melodrama diverges from its American equivalent of the Eisenhower era due to the former's focus on ordinary lower-middle and working class citizens (*sosimin*) as opposed to the latter's gravitation toward upper-middle-class bourgeois housewives and widows.'[70]

In highlighting this difference, Chung frames both South Korean and Western melodrama through the Western critical categorisations discussed earlier. In doing so, there is the implication that South Korean cinema should be considered through the same critical frameworks as films from 1950s Hollywood. In the discussion of distinct national cinemas, to compare is to coalesce. In doing so, hierarchies are constructed, and perpetuated: hierarchies which always favour the West as dominant. Chung goes on to claim that 'while many Korean film scholars have emphasised *shinpa* and *han* as two foundational determinants of South Korean melodrama, the third influence, Hollywood melodrama, remains notably understudied'.[71] While Chung is right to highlight the pitfalls in assuming a native-determinist stance when discussing the history of cultural products – Chung subsequently highlights that potential problems of a similar notion can be found in discussions on Japanese cinema and the concept of *mono no aware* – Chung's placement of Hollywood melodrama as a significant influence on South Korean film once again constructs a hierarchy wherein the West is somehow placed in a position of power, to the degree that the West is present in the very 'foundations' of South Korean melodrama. Taken in this way, South Korea becomes an adopter of Western genres, and with them the critical writings which have debated and interrogated them.

This dissection of critical approaches to melodrama highlights the minefield which must be navigated when using the term melodrama. Such issues are further compounded when discussing melodramas found in cinemas outwith Hollywood. If melodrama is, in its very linguistic

[70] Chung Hye-seung (2005) *Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia: A Transnational Detournement of Hollywood Melodrama* pp. 119
[71] Ibid. pp. 123

construction, a foreign element in South Korea, then what is meant by the usage of the term in the context of South Korean cinema? At the same time, it would be incorrect to assume that any Western-based discussion of melodrama is unable to yield potential frameworks for categorising or delineating melodrama in the Korean context. While, as Nancy Abelmann and Kathleen McHugh argue, 'Western critical understandings of gender and genre cannot be lifted whole sale and imposed on other cinemas', when the historical and political elements of Western melodrama studies are taken into consideration it is possible to find influences or examples through which to frame a discussion on Korean melodrama.[72] If the notion of what constitutes melodrama is removed from its critical associations with domesticity and femininity, then its potential applicability is greatly increased. The challenge therefore is to strip melodrama of its Western critical associations, while equally acknowledging that the methods through which melodrama has been examined and discussed provide solid foundations on which to approach the examination of South Korean melodrama.

The goal of this chapter is therefore two-fold. Firstly; it aims to discuss the melodrama genre through an examination of indigenous and regional influences on melodramatic narratives in Korea. Secondly; this chapter works towards undoing the hierarchies of Western approaches to melodrama by providing a counter-narrative which avoids the transposing of such approaches onto Korean cinema. By examining the form and content of pre-cinematic and indigenous narratives in Korea, this chapter aims to not only define the melodrama as a genre within Korean cinema, but also solidify this genre by placing it into a wider cultural and artistic setting.

2.2: Constructing Melodrama Through History

The first task in constructing the melodrama within the Korean context is to analyse its historical formation. This is done first through cinema specifically, and then extended back through theatre

[72] Abelmann and McHugh (2005) *Introduction: Gender, Genre, and Nation,* pp. 3

and performance. After all, if we assume Korean melodrama existed only under the adopted term 'melodrama' then we ignore the history of melodramatic narratives prior to the influx of Hollywood cultural products following Korea's liberation from Japanese colonisation in 1945. By questioning the prominent use of *han* and *shinpa* in Korean studies into melodrama as a means through which to elevate the role of Hollywood, Chung Hye-seung in fact highlights two terms which harbour much longer and more developed histories in Korean society and culture. While neither term can be equated to melodrama, it is worth taking the time to interrogate and understand these concepts as they provide significant insight into the construction and evolution of Korean social understanding and cultural production.

2.2.a: *Shinpa*

Whereas the differing approaches to interpreting and employing the term melodrama within the West has resulted in an amorphous existence, the term *shinpa* carries a far more agreed-upon, though not concrete, meaning. This lack of consensus is due to the fact that *shinpa*, much like the Western notion of melodrama, has shifted meaning in its employment over time. As such, there are two distinct approaches to its usage. First, when used as a historical terminology *shinpa* refers to the adoption by Korean literary and performing artists of the late nineteenth-century Japanese theatrical genre of the same name. Chung Hye-seung highlights this historical legacy and observes that:

> 'Set in a modern milieu, it [*shinpa*] usually features a sentimental plot revolving around family tragedy and heterosexual romance. After Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910, the *sinp'a*[73] drama strongly influenced Korean theatre, film, and literature, injecting Japanese theatrical modes of storytelling into the syntactical core of Korean cultural productions'.[74]

[73] The only difference between *shinpa* and *sinp'a* is the method of romanising the Korean 신파.
[74] Chung Hye-seung (2005) pp. 120

Shinpa, which in Japanese means 'new school', explored contemporary ideas in the contemporary vernacular as a way of reacting against, or distinguishing itself from, the long-held traditional forms of Japanese theatre such as *noh*, *kabuki*, and *bunraku*. *Shinpa* therefore carries with it the implication that the pre-existing forms of Japanese theatre were outdated, or 'old'. Indeed, the term itself was used to refer to theatre which, following the Meiji restoration, was an 'attempt to modernise and westernise Japan's drama'. [75] Such modernisation was done through many challenges to convention, as highlighted in Benito Ortolani's claims that *shinpa*:

> '…introduced new theatre customs such as darkened auditoriums and elaborate stage lighting, added the new dramatic subject of social and political struggle, re-introduced women to the stage, and, above all, showed the possibility of surviving outside the traditional theatre monopoly'.[76]

While Ortolani, speaking through a historical framework, emphasises *shinpa*'s radical challenge to the cultural hierarchies of Japanese theatre tradition, what is most significant in the context of genre is the shift in thematic concerns and interests. The subject matter chosen by *shinpa* productions, social and political struggle, complete with modern day language and colloquialisms, broke free from the ritualism and rhythms of the aforementioned theatrical forms, involving audiences instead through presentations of people talking about the problems of contemporary experience.

Much like cinema, Japanese theatre arrived en masse at a time in which Korea was facing an intense existential crisis; struggling to cement a notion of Korean identity in the wake of mass cultural colonisation and reform, whilst also looking to the advances of its neighbouring countries with trepidatious curiosity. During the colonial period Japanese *shinpa* would come to inform successful independent Korean productions, for example *The Eternal Love of Su-il and Sun-ae* / *Janghanmong* (1926, Lee Gyeong-son) which was adapted from Ozaki Koyo's late nineteenth

[75] Ortolani (1990) *The Japanese Theatre: From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism* pp. 233
[76] Ibid. pp. 235

century text *The Usurer* (*Konjiki Yasha,* also known as *The Golden Demon*). Therefore, when film critic Chung Sung-il suggests that 'melodrama was the genre first adopted in Korea'[77] it is perhaps better to discard such Western terminology entirely and instead argue that it was *shinpa* which was adopted by, or perhaps more accurately exported to, Korea. This replacing of terms is not to equate *shinpa* with melodrama, but rather to further distance the two terms ontologically.

The second usage of the term *shinpa*, which is the more prevalent contemporary understanding, carries a more derogatory undercurrent which positions *shinpa* films as what Lee Soon-jin terms 'second-class or outdated melodramas'.[78] Such sentiment arose during the mid-twentieth century in response to the widespread commercial prominence of the genre throughout a post-colonial, post-civil war South Korea. *Shinpa* used today garners its meaning through reference to the overt sentimentality of late 1960s films, for example *Love Me Once Again / Miweodo Dashi Hanbeon* (1968, Jeong So-yeong), although it can also be found in use by critics to discuss, and more often than not deride, films from the 1950s. In particular, derogatory usage of *shinpa* factors prominently in discussions concerning the 'golden age' of South Korean melodrama. Kim Soyoung, for example, when discussing the films of Shin Sang-ok, states that 'the overdose of sentiment that often related to *sinp'a* melodrama produced during the Japanese colonial period becomes less pronounced in S[h]in's melodramas'.[79] It is with this second usage of *shinpa* that central problems in its terminology, and applicability to South Korean cinema, begin to occur. With this shift towards negative connotation *shinpa* has increasingly been employed as near-synonymous with the Western notion of melodrama. A prime example of this can be found in Oh Young-sook's claim that:

[77] Chung Sung-il (2006) *Four Variations on Korean Genre Film: Tears, Screams, Violence and Laughter*, pp. 3
[78] Lee Soon-jin (2006) *The Genealogy of Shinpa Melodramas in Korean Cinema,* pp. 37
[79] Kim Soyoung (2005) *Question of Woman's Film: The Maid, Madam Freedom, and Women*, pp. 192 This quote also provides another example of the way in which canonical 'auteurs' are removed from otherwise looked-down-upon genres, such as the melodrama.

> 'It may be difficult to draw a clear distinction between modern melodramas and *shinpa-style* ones, which had been made ever since the Japanese colonial period. However, the 1950s melodramas were distinctive in that they keenly reflected the conflicts between liberals and conservatives and successfully showed what social and cultural changes were all about'.[80]

Such an argument not only positions *shinpa* as a style under the wider umbrella of melodrama, which in doing so constructs a hierarchy wherein a Japanese genre is granted *sub*-genre status to a Western genre, but also employs *shinpa* without fully tackling its historical meaning. Instead, *shinpa,* as used by Oh, maintains its contemporary derogatory elements and yet is used to discuss *shinpa*'s historical relevance with regard to Korean film. It therefore ignores the previous understandings of the term, and in doing so works towards an undoing of *shinpa*'s specific relevance to the development of Korean cinema and simultaneously retroactively lessens *shinpa*'s socio-political focus and impact. With comments such as this it is also clear to see how Western genres hold power over critical engagement with non-Western cinemas. In the above quote *shinpa* becomes a style which is incapable of reaching the heights of melodrama, and is unable to adequately discuss social and cultural concerns or events. This understanding is far removed from the prior understanding of *shinpa*, to the degree that the two notions seem antagonistic. Going against this, Lee Soon-jin has sought to link South Korean *shinpa* with films produced during the colonial period, arguing that 'their [late 1960s *shinpa* films] understanding of the world was similar to the *shinpa* of the colonial period'.[81] Taking into account the economic disparity between urban and rural areas under dictator Park Chung-hee [1963 - 1979], Lee argues that:

[80] Oh Young-sook (2006) *Madame Freedom and Melodrama*, pp. 145
[81] Lee Soon-Jin (2006) *The Shinpa Films of the Late 1960s and Love Me Once Again*, pp. 211

> 'The excessive sentimentalism along with the frustration and the sense of defeat prevalent in most Korean films cannot be understood without first speaking about the frustration and despair felt by the people in those times.'[82]

For Lee, then, *shinpa* is defined in direct opposition to its later negative meaning, and instead functions consistently throughout history as a means through which socio-political concerns are discussed, or as Lee states 'the people's sense of despair about the closed world in which there was no possible solution'.[83] *Shinpa*'s focus on modern problems and everyday people is vital to creating a point of distinction between itself and the Western melodrama. Romantic sentimentality may abound in each genre but that alone is not enough to account for the adoption of *shinpa* under the wing of Western generic form. On the Korean side, the metamorphosis of *shinpa* – an imported Japanese colonial construct – into something derogatory, can be seen as a postcolonial distancing from the relevance of the term in Korean film history and as a way to undo the power and influence of the Japanese genre. This is evidenced in Oh Young-sook's above quote, wherein *shinpa* is not granted the same power as Korean melodramas. By suppressing the historical terminology of *shinpa* and imbuing it with a negative resonance, its position within the development of Korean film is lessened. On the Western side *shinpa,* in its pejorative usage, allows for an easy 1:1 comparison with melodrama's own tumultuous history and negative perception. *Shinpa* therefore becomes an easy way to amalgamate the Western notions of melodrama on top of Korean cultural product.

By blending the two terms, *shinpa* comes to carry the Western legacy of melodrama rather than its own specific cultural history as both a socio-political retaliation against prior narrative forms, and as a colonial tool used during Japan's late nineteenth century empire-building conquests. Put simply, to equate melodrama with *shinpa* is to overlook the cultural legacy of the genre and its impact on the development of Korean film. *Shinpa*, as a new narrative form, had a profound and

[82] Ibid. pp. 210
[83] Ibid. pp. 211

lasting influence on Korean filmmakers prior to the mass introduction of Hollywood cinema which followed Korea's liberation in 1945. Therefore by equating *shinpa* with melodrama, and granting melodrama a stake in the overall perception of *shinpa* as a genre, Hollywood is allowed a certain retroactive power over genres of which it had little or no cultural influence during their initial construction.

At the same time, it is important not to give *shinpa* an elevated position of absolute power in the construction of genre in Korean film. Its origins as a Japanese genre exported to foreign lands during the turn of the century must be kept in mind. *Shinpa,* first as a literary and theatrical form, clearly factored as one of the key cultural influences as Korea transitioned both into modernism and a colonised country, but there is a danger of overcorrecting the usage of melodrama and allowing *shinpa* a similarly homogenising hierarchical position which once again places Korea as the receiver of generic form. As such, *shinpa* cannot and should not be seen as synonymous with Korean melodrama, for it carries too much colonial and cultural weight. *Shinpa*'s foreign nature should instead allow for a greater interrogation into exactly how Korean filmmakers interpreted the genre to suit their own needs and discuss Korea's cultural, social, and political identity at various points throughout history. The following section shall analyse how Korean filmmakers interpreted this genre.

2.2.a.i: *Shinpa* and the development of Korean melodrama

Korea did not produce films until 1918, some thirteen years after Japan issued a protectorate over the peninsula, and twenty years after the production of Japan's earliest films, for example the ghost story short film *Jizo the Spook / Bake Jizo* (1898). The earliest screenings of film on the peninsula are up for debate, ranging between 1897 and 1903, but what is important is that Korean people were spectators to foreign films for well over a decade before producing films which could reference and speak directly to their lived experiences. As well as challenges to national identity, the twentieth century had brought swift change to traditional Korean narrative

forms, and the arrival of new forms – *shinpa* among them – resulted in a Korean cinema that was born in a severe cultural and national identity crisis.

It is therefore unsurprising that Korean films during the early-to-mid 1920s looked to adapt pre-existing Korean folklore narratives. This was partly done in response to the Japanese production of such narratives, for example *The Story of Chun-Hyang / Chunhyangjeon* (1923), as a way to maintain Korean cultural product as distinctly Korean. At the same time, the adaptation of such tales shows Korean filmmakers remediating cultural product from Korea's past as a way of representing Korean identity under colonisation.

Shinpa, on the other hand, with its modern colloquialisms and contemporary strife, allowed Korean filmmakers the chance to interpret and redeploy elements from foreign generic frameworks. Unsurprisingly, this was done in pursuit of reaction and retaliation against the colonial government. Prominent film historian Lee Yeong-il, for example, has pointed towards significant *shinpa* films produced during the first decade of Korean cinema which embody a nationalist and anti-colonial spirit. One such film, *Arirang* (1926), is considered the first great Korean film, despite being lost and unwatchable for decades. Lee, discussing the film's original release, claims that 'people knew the film was different even before they saw it'[84] before stating:

> '*Arirang* was shown everywhere throughout the nation and the impact of this film was beyond imagination and description. The title song of the film, *Arirang,* a traditional Korean folk song, was sung by audiences as if it were the national anthem because citizens had lost their country to the Japanese.'[85]

For Lee, *Arirang* 'nutured a fresh, new national spirit in people's minds'[86] and comes to symbolise the beginning of a nationalist tendency in Korean cinema. Lee also highlights the work of director Lee Gyu-hwan, in particular their 1932 film *The Ferryboat without a Ferryman / Imja*

[84] Lee Yeong-il (1988), pp. 41
[85] Ibid. pp. 43
[86] Ibid. pp. 43

Eobneun Narubae, commenting that Lee's films 'contained national consciousness like that of the blade of a knife whereas those of [*Arirang* director] Na Woon-gyu contained it like fire'.[87] Both films highlighted here by Lee contain narratives wherein the Korean populace are punished or suppressed by the Japanese authorities or Korean collaborators.

In *Arirang* a man (played by Na Woon-gyu himself) is driven insane because of his persecution by the colonial state and kills a Korean landowner who works with the government and who attempts to rape the man's love interest. Close similarities to this narrative are found in *The Ferryboat without a Ferryman*. A ferryman (Na Woon-gyu again) finds his career is taken from him by the construction of a railroad across the river on which he works. The ferryman's anger is then manifested in his chasing down and killing of the local Korean landowner, who allowed the colonial government to build the railroad, after he attempts to rape the ferryman's daughter. The two films depart in their conclusions; in *Arirang* the man accepts his punishment as he is taken away by the police, while in *The Ferryboat without a Ferryman* the ferryman is killed by a train as he hacks away at the railroad bridge. Though both films are now lost, the nationalist spirit embodied by these films is nevertheless evident in their relative synopses. Their outward aggression was directed towards not only the Japanese government, but also Korean people who cooperated and thereby furthered the subjugation of colonialism. Brian Yeceis and Shim Ae-gyung have discussed *shinpa* films of the 1920s, arguing that:

> 'Many of these productions, which focused on the misfortunes of the poor, were known as *shinpa* films – excessively sentimental melodramas based on popular novels and romantic stories. Korean scholars have seen these films as embodying a sense of Korean nationalism. While these productions might have been read by some as a subversive metaphor for the struggle against Japanese colonialism, it seems they were non-threatening to the colonial state. Although few if any have survived, we assume that they

[87] Ibid. pp. 61

lacked over socialist and communist references – banned under the 1926 censorship regulations – as otherwise they would not have been exhibited at all.'[88]

Overlooking the previously discussed problematic conflation of melodrama and *shinpa*, an error reinforced by the notion that *Arirang* 'is in fact a simple melodrama'[89], as well as the employment of *shinpa* within its contemporary derogatory trappings, the above quote fails to interrogate the socio-political concerns essential to the *shinpa* genre, and instead predicates depictions of ideology as paramount to discussions of colonial-era retaliation. *Shinpa*, with its staunch challenge to traditional narrative forms and representation, prioritised contemporary identities and societal concerns, and therefore it is unsurprising that Korean filmmakers used the genre primarily to discuss national identity under crisis. The framework of modern people and modern problems afforded by the *shinpa* genre is crucial to its assimilation into Korean films which dealt directly with concerns of colonisation. While the two films discussed above are no longer able to be seen, their narratives describe Korean identity as both volatile and impotent, able to lash out but critically unable to effect any real change. Korean identity is therefore defined through these *shinpa* films by its struggle and opposition to the colonial government.

While the vast majority of Korean films produced under occupation are now lost, thankfully some still survive. This allows concrete examples which display the adoption of *shinpa* by Korean filmmakers and their subversive employment of its generic framework in order to lament the colonial presence. The films which survive today come from Korea's final decade under occupation

Produced between 1936 and 1945, these films were made under increasing colonial control. In Japan, the early-to-mid 1930s were a time of increased tensions between jingoistic militarism and the ruling government. Numerous coup attempts, assassinations, and unsanctioned military operations in mainland Asia had led to disarray and rising tensions and would result in Japan's

[88] Yecies and Shim (2011)) *Korea's Occupied Cinemas, 1893 – 1948*, pp. 97
[89] Ibid. pp. 87

military coercing the country into war with China in 1937. In Korea, Japan's increasing militarism would manifest through attempts to assimilate the Korean people into the wider Japanese empire. During the final decade of the Japanese colonial period the Korean people were subject to a stripping away of their identity through nationwide orders which disallowed the Korean language and enforced the adoption of Japanese names. At the same time, Japanese control over Korean film production became near absolute, with production studios absorbed into a central, government owned institution, the Chosun Film Production Corporation, which produced pro-Japanese propaganda for the war effort and the normalisation of the Korean assimilation processes. Korean filmmakers therefore used the *shinpa* genre under colonialism as a means to discuss issues of national identity in a rapidly changing society.

During the mid-1930s, removed from the national pushes for independence best encapsulated by the March 1st Movement of 1919, and before Japan's militarism would sharply increase following the eruption of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937, *shinpa* films looked at modernisation and the transition of Korean society out of Confucian tradition. Perhaps the most appropriate surviving example of this focus of *shinpa* is *Sweet Dream / Mimong* (1936, Yang Ju-nam), one of the earliest surviving Korean films. The film is largely a morality tale. The narrative follows Ae-soon (Moon Ye-bong), a married woman and mother who has grown tired of the patriarchal, Confuscianist household. In an act of rebellion, she departs from the house and takes in the joys of the city, goes on a shopping spree, and ultimately aims to elope with a male dancer. However, as she is on her way to the train station, the taxi she is in hits her daughter. Ae-soon is overcome with grief, and the film ends as she commits suicide at her daughter's hospital bedside.

Kim Mee-hyun has argued that *Sweet Dream* 'establishes conventional order by condemning personal and selfish desires as foolish and self-destructive'.[90] This notion of self-destructivity should be consiered at both the individual and collective level, but not solely for the

[90] Kim Mee-hyun (2006) *Recently Discovered Films*, pp. 85

embracement of modernity. The film features a woman's attempts to break free from the oppressive Confucian gender hierarchies within the household. Gender hierarchies are brought into question, while at the same time modernisation and urbanisation come to divide mother and child. The allure of the metropolitan space, combined with the oppressive atmosphere within the home environment, causes Ae-soon to reject her roles within the family unit. This causes her to neglect her daughter, resulting in tragedy. The film ends with Ae-Soon taking her own life following her realisation of the damage her actions have caused. In committing suicide, Ae-soon offers little hope of either reconciliation or progress; her inability to bridge the gap between family life and the attraction of the new urban lifestyle, and the sense of liberation it offers, causes the family to fracture. Through this fracturing of the family unit *Sweet Dream* very much presents concerns about modern day Seoul on a wider scale, as a city in a state of transition which is full of ideological contradictions. Ae-soon's suicide is therefore not simply a condemnation of her actions but rather comes to represent trepidation about the rapid transformation of social structures and the potential unbalancing of identity which may occur as a result. Ae-soon and her daughter are victims of both Korea's past and Korea's present, and therefore Korea's future is placed into doubt.

The contradictions between the narrative and its formal representation found in *Sweet Dream* help to realise these contradictions faced by contemporary society. Kim Mee-hyun also notes that 'one can also catch a glimpse of contemporary scenery from the taxi window as the vehicle, carrying Ae-soon, rushes along the city streets of Gyeongseong (today's Seoul)'.[91] Indeed, *Sweet Dream,* though bookended by household oppression and sobering tragedy, actually spends the majority of its running time indulging in the hustle and bustle of Seoul's shopping centres and entertainment venues. In visual terms, *Sweet Dream* deftly contrasts the stuffy and severely limiting familial space, placing Ae-soon in direct comparison with a hanging bird cage against the wide open and free-flowing spaces of Seoul. In doing so, the film presents the spectacle of the

[91] Ibid. pp. 85

modern city space, allowing audiences an interaction with the rapid, contemporary city experience. Comparisons here can be drawn with Ben Singer's analysis of turn of the century newspaper comics, in particular the claim that:

> 'The portrayals of urban modernity in the illustrated press seem to have fluctuated between, on the one hand, an antimodern nostalgia for a more tranquil time, and on the other, a basic fascination with the horrific, the grotesque, and the extreme. The illustrated press's images were, paradoxically, both a form of social critique and, at the same time, a form of commercialized sensationalism, a part of the very phenomenon of modern hyperstimulus the images described."[92]

Singer's observations help elucidate the contradictory struggle found within Korean *shinpa* films of the mid-1930s. At once presenting a condemnation of indulging in the variety of fascinations provided by modernity, whilst simultaneously providing a spectacle of speed and energy through depictions of the modern city, films such as *Sweet Dream* found their formal properties at odds with the moral messages implied by their tragic narratives.

Korea would come to adopt *shinpa* into its filmic representations of the Japanese colonial era as a form of rallying against Japan's increasingly militarism and attempts to assimilate the Korean people into the wider Japanese empire. The increased amount of oppression and restriction placed upon Korean filmmakers during the 1940s caused Korean filmmakers to be more subtle in constructing and presenting their criticisms of the colonial government within films produced by the colonial government. As a result, Korean filmmakers honed their understanding of subtext and symbolism in order to allow Korean audiences to collectively grieve for the vanishing of Korean national identity. This was done largely through subverting the pro-Japanese narrative and dialogue with imagery which depicted a sense of sadness, loss, or helplessness. In doing so, Korean films produced during the tail end of the Japanese colonial era contributed to

[92] Singer (2001), pp. 88-89

the melodrama genre, constructing the representation of these emotions, and creating an impact on Korean melodramatic form which would continue following the liberation of Korea from Japan by the Allied forces in 1945. Though very few of the films produced during the colonial era remain today, there are three examples of films produced during the early 1940s which clearly show Korean filmmakers developing and incorporating subversive emotional responses to Korea's assimilation through the visual language of film.

The first of these is *Angels on the Streets* / *Jibeobneun Cheonsa* (1941, Choi In-gyu).[93] Written by the Japanese screenwriter Motosada Nishikame, the film follows an orphaned brother and sister who run away from their abusive foster father and are separated when the boy is taken to a countryside orphanage. Brian Yecies and Shim Ae-gyung point out that "*Angels on the Streets* was one of the most popular Korean films to be exhibited in Japan, receiving praise as a 'Ministry of Education recommended film'"[94]. In their further analysis of the film, Yecies and Shim conclude that "the strong sense of realism in *Angels on the Streets* undoubtedly reflected the harsh social conditions under which the Koreans were living at the time, although this was not intended as a critique of Japanese rule".[95] The formal construction of the final scene, however, alludes to a subversive quality to the film's finale, which undermines the propagandistic narrative.

At the end of the film, the boy is briefly reunited with his sister, after their initial separation following the boy being taken out of the city to the countryside orphanage. The sister, who now works as a doctor's apprentice, is relieved to see that her brother is okay, but tells him that she will shortly be departing back to Seoul in order to continue her work. The film ends with the sister on a small boat heading back to Seoul, while the children and owners of the orphanage stand on a hill, under a Japanese flag, and wave goodbye to her. Evaluated simply in terms of the film's narrative, it would be easy to classify this film as pro-Japanese, given that its final scene

[93] This film is also known by its direct translation of the Korean *Homeless Angels*
[94] Yecies and Shim (2011), pp. 124-5
[95] Ibid. pp. 126

shows both siblings being cared for and making progress in their lives, moving forward thanks to the opportunities and support networks provided by the Japanese government.

It is through the film's visual construction however, that Choi was able to undermine the propagandistic elements of the narrative and with it Japan's colonial power. The final two shots of the film show the brother and sister in a very different visual state than the narrative suggests. In the case of the sister, though she is moving onto the next stage of her life, her face is masked in shadow as she departs, suggesting that her future is undetermined, intangible, and possibly even dangerous. Much in the same way, the last shot of the brother shows him crying at his current position, being forced, by the owners of the orphanage, to stand under the Japanese flag and wave goodbye to his sister. The brother's visual actions and body language work against the supposedly supportive colonial structure of the orphanage, and the owners become complicit through forcing the boy to conform to his place and role within society, physically making him wave goodbye and thereby participate in a situation that he clearly does not want to be part of.

The shared situations of the brother and sister therefore come together during the film's finale in order to embody the anxieties of the Korean people during the beginning of Japan's aggressive assimilation policies. The bright, happy future of progress under the Japanese flag is called into question, depicting pro-Japanese Koreans forcing the youth to stand in line and participate in the replacing of Korean identity with Japanese identity. The film therefore aggressively, yet covertly, challenges the lack of rebellion among the older generation, quietly falling into line and forcing the younger generation to be unwillingly assimilated into the wider Japanese empire. At the same time, there is a longing by the younger generation to return to Seoul, a desire not only voiced by the brother who wishes to stay with his sister, but also by two other boys from the orphanage who attempt to escape. Seoul is therefore positioned as a safe haven from colonial influence, and as a bastion of Korean identity under oppression.

Another prime example of children being used to undermine the propagandistic elements of 1940s Korean films can be found in *Tuition* / *Sueobryo* (1940). The film follows a young boy whose grandmother is left in debt due to a greedy landlord, and who therefore struggles to pay his school tuition. The boy decides to skip school and instead travel by foot to a neighbouring town in order to alert his aunt to the family's financial problems. During the boy's lonely journey, he sings a pro-Japanese song in order to lift his morale. Interestingly, rather than finding strength and support in the song, as would be expected of a propaganda film, the boy instead begins to cry as he is singing, and soon after stops singing altogether. Much in the same way that director Choi In-gyu depicted the future generation of *Angels on the Streets* as afraid and upset under the Japanese flag, *Tuition* depicts the inclusion of Japanese language and culture into Korea as a cause for concern, to the degree that it offers the boy no solace on his journey but rather only worries him further. The feeling of loss or desperation is therefore embodied within the youth of Korea in both *Angels on the Streets* and *Tuition,* using Korean melodrama in order to actively undermine and work against the pro-Japanese nature of the original scripts.

The use of Korean melodrama as a form of national mourning was not only applied to narratives concerning youth during this period, as the third and final example demonstrates. *Spring of the Korean Peninsula* / *Bandoeui Bom* (1941, Lee Byung-il) follows a Korean filmmaker's struggles to produce an adaptation of the traditional tale *The Story of Chun-hyang*, only to become constantly troubled with various monetary and technical issues. Toward the end of the film, the Japanese step in to help finance the production, and at a meeting they emphasise that they must work to promote the idea that Korea and Japan are one on film. The film ends with the director being sent to Japan to visit the various studios to co-operate with the Japanese.

In the final scene of the film, the director departs for Japan, with his film crew waving him goodbye. The director is clearly smiling, and the support of his colleagues points to a bright future working together with the Japanese to produce films. However, the film then cuts to shots

of people within the crowd, who are visibly unhappy at the situation. Much like *Angels in the Streets*, these shots position the individual refusing to exist within the artifice of happiness surrounding them. This undermines the unifying, happy scene shown moments earlier as the train departed.

With the final shot of the film, the camera slowly pans to the film crew as they watch the train depart. It places the two characters previously shown in close up within the wider collective, and clearly emphasises their unhappiness with the current situation. As the camera gets closer to the group, more of the group members stop waving, and by the time the camera reaches the central character, the entire group has stopped. Throughout this final shot, the slow camera movement and gradual demise of the happy atmosphere seek to undermine the positive narrative conclusion. There is instead a lamentation for the Korean film industry, having to seek out help from the Japanese colonial government.

During the final years of the colonial era Japan attempted to assimilate Korea into the wider Japanese empire and strip Korea of its own national identity. Koreans were forced to adopt Japanese names, speak Japanese, and adopt Japanese traditions. This extended to the film industry, in which Korean cinemas were forced, as Kim Ryeo-sil states, "to show the Pledge of Allegiance to the Japanese Empire, the flag of the rising sun, pro-war slogans before screenings, and propaganda films" following the Joseon Film Decree of 1940.[96] In terms of film production the Joseon Film Decree gave more power to the Japanese colonial government, in which filmmakers "had to seek the permission of the Japanese Government General of Korea to make films, and filmmakers were required to register".[97]Beyond this, "screenplays and completed films underwent censorship",[98] beyond the level introduced during earlier censorship regulations enacted by the colonial government in the 1920s and 1930s. The fear, therefore, on the faces of

[96] Kim Ryeo-Sil (2006) *Imperial Japan's Film Regulations After the Chosun Film Decree*, pp. 76
[97] Ibid. pp. 91
[98] Ibid. pp. 91

the production team at the end of *Spring of the Korean Peninsula* refers not just to worries about the future of Korean film, but can be interpreted as fear for Korea in its entirety.

Within the context of Korean melodrama, by focusing on the real struggles of contemporary people, these films show the direct influence of *shinpa*. *Spring on the Korean Peninsula* depicts a helpless Korean film industry which has to rely on the colonial structures put in place by the Japanese colonial government, and thereby uses the *shinpa* format in order to undermine colonial authority and argue for Korean cinema's autonomy. Both *Angels on the Streets* and *Tuition,* much like *Sweet Dream,* can be seen as melodramas dealing with family problems, and therefore exist as early examples of the family melodrama. Be it the splitting apart of brother and sister during the end of *Angels on the Streets*, or the lonely journey of the boy in *Tuition,* these films highlight the struggles and sacrifices of the younger generation as a direct result of the actions made by older generations, such as their allegiance to the Japanese colonisation, or through their corruption and greed. This precedent allowed Korean melodramas to flourish following Korea's liberation.

The influence of these early family melodramas can be seen in prominent melodramas produced during the 1950s and 1960s, in the so-called 'golden age' of Korean melodrama. *Love Me Once Again* is a film from this period which can be seen as displaying clear influence from colonial-era *shinpa*. The film opens with a happy family having a lakeside picnic, before the father is soon called back to the house due to an important message. The message turns out to be from an old lover of the father during his student days, and so the father plans to sneak out of the house to meet with her again. Upon meeting her, however, it is quickly revealed that the lover has raised a son for the past eight years whom she claims is the father's. The film then follows the lover's attempts to have her son integrated and accepted by the father and his family, to the point that she ultimately abandons her son so that he may live with the father's family. This narrative positions *Love Me Once Again* as primarily a melodrama concerning division, and the film's final act largely consists of both the lover regretting her decision and her son suffering in his new

family life and wishing to be reunited with his mother. As in *Tuition*, the child in *Love Me Once Again* heads out on their own in order to reunite with their mother, and this results in the child making a sacrifice because of the decisions made by elder generations. Lee Soon-Jin has argued that "national division and the Korean war provided further stimulus for *shinpa* production" before going on to claim that "*shinpa* made another comeback in the late 1960s […] *Love Me Once Again* signalled this revival".[99] *Shinpa* by the 1960s had fully transitioned in its meaning; no longer was it used to refer to films which employed theatrical elements and embodied new styles of narrative forms, now *shinpa* was used as a pejorative term as a way of criticising films as out-dated or old fashioned on account of their exaggerated emotional gestures and narratives.

On top of these similarities to previous Korean melodrama, *Love Me Once Again* incorporated into its narrative fears and anxieties of 1960s Korean society. This was done through the central character of the lover, who is shown to be suffering in poverty and unable to provide the 'ideal' life for her son. She is shown earlier in the film to be pressured into marriage with another man by her family, and her father subsequently throws her out of the house following the revelation that she is already pregnant. Even after she has given birth, the only contact she has with her family is through her brother, who continues to pressure her to give up the child and return to a normal life.

The mass industrialisation of the country during the 1960s under Park Chung-hee resulted in a return to the class based society that existed prior to the Japanese colonisation, albeit this time the class was established through capitalist gain and wealth instead of birthright and elitism. The formation of a working class brought with it social inequality and a lack of social mobility, and as such Korean society began its corporate hierarchies which continue to this day. Lee Soon-jin highlights this equality as one of the reasons for the success of *Love Me Once Again,* stating 'with the public fighting poverty and deprivation just like the heroes in the films, *shinpa* took over the

[99] Lee Soon-Jin (2006), pp. 42

mainstream again'.[100] The final decision of the lover in *Love Me Once Again,* to take back her child and live life against the norm mandated by patriarchal and societal values, therefore highlights the oppressive aspects of 1960s Korea, calling into question the 'ideal' life dictated by capitalist values of worth.

The existence of Korean melodrama even during the assimilation of the Korean film industry into the wider Japanese propaganda movement, speaks to the level of clarity and consistency the genre had achieved during the first two decades of Korean film production. By taking initial influence from *shinpa*, Korean filmmakers were able to construct a style of melodrama which spoke to Korean audiences, allowing them to confront the oppression of their country through narratives concerning oppression, corruption, and sacrifice.

2.2.b: *Han*

If *shinpa* is largely considered the generic framework through which Korean melodrama was first produced and explored, then *han* constitutes one of Korean melodrama's most vital thematic elements. Min Eung-jun, Joo Jin-sook and Kwak Han-ju argue that *han* 'must be considered to understand any cultural phenomenon on Korea'.[101] They approximate *han* to the concept of 'blues' in African American cultures, before going on to explain that:

> 'The Sino-Korean word *haan*[102]is an ideograph evoking a picture of a tree whose roots are laid deep under the earth. So *haan* is used to describe the heart of a person or people who has (have) endured or is (are) enduring an affliction, but the pains, wounds, and scars are not always apparent or visible because they are the kind that occurs deep within the essence, core being, or heart of the person. Also the accumulation of *haan* through the repetitive process of experiencing multilayered sufferings in a person's heart tends to

[100] Ibid. pp. 43
[101] Min, Joo, and Kwak (2003) *Korean Film: History, Resistance, and Democratic Imagination* pp. 7
[102] As with the term *shinpa*, there is no difference between *han* and *haan* other than the romanisation of the word 한.

> turn into a lamenting, regretful, or inconsolable state of heart and mind. The physical manifestations of *haan* in a person's heart or people's collective consciousness may eventually become visible and obvious. When it is manifested, *haan* is dynamic energy, which can be directed, either constructively or destructively, to others or oneself. In other words, *haan* is both emotion and energy, which can result in favourable or unfavourable consequences'.[103]

The complex nature of *han* results in a lack of easy translation. What is important is that *han* is not only the lamentation of deep suffering, but also the manifestation of action when *han* becomes visible. It is this multifaceted cultural specificity which helps to distinguish *han* from the domestic focus of Western melodrama. Nancy Abelmann, in their study into the experiences of women during South Korean modernity, argues that:

> 'I am struck that *han* is more a feature of a general cultural imaginary on women and the dispossessed, than it is a feature of the discourse of these people. […] To be more bold, I would argue that although the construct has become a cornerstone of various public cultural nationalisms, it is best appreciated for having been naturalised in a particular cultural history than for stemming "naturally" from women's experience'.[104]

In doing so, Abelmann highlights this very point of departure between Western melodrama, and its strong ties to femininity, by arguing specifically for *han* as cultural 'cornerstone'. *Han* is not solely about the experience of women, but rather concerns any individual or collective. This is evidenced in Kim Kyung-hyun's analysis of *Seopyeonje* (1990, Im Kwon-taek), which focuses on the masculine identities in the film, claiming that:

> 'Tong-ho emerges as the abused child who is now capable of reconnecting the family that had been disfigured by the father. This allows the viewer to concentrate on the

[103] Min, Joo, and Kwak (2003) pp. 8
[104] Abelmann (2003) *The Melodrama of Mobility: Women, Talk, and Class in Contemporary South* Korea pp. 171

> viewpoint of the underdog victim, the key in establishing a melodramatic formula that challenges the codes of domination and exploitation of any given society'.[105]

In doing so, Kim highlights *han* as central to Tong-ho's narrative through both the acknowledgement of his own abuse and his subsequent action to alter his life following his father's death. At the same time Kim is quick to point out that 'it is extremely difficult to label the film as a hallmark of melodrama', doing so on the basis of the 'failure of the family to withdraw from its peregrination and settle down in one place'.[106] Such consideration frames *Seopyeonje* through Western perceptions of the melodrama by once again placing an emphasis on family stability. This critical legacy of the melodrama is further emphasised by Chung Hye-seung's argument that:

> 'Instead of essentialising the uniqueness of Korean melodrama on the grounds of the ontologically uncertain *han* it is useful to examine how similar concepts function in other national cinemas and how they converge with and diverge from it. For example, in exploring the transnational circulation of filmic *han* as it cross-pollinates into neighbouring cultural arenas, attention could be directed to the historical epics and melodramas of Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, and other Chinese Fifth Generation filmmakers who anchor their stories in the imagery of suffering female bodies. Is the *han* expressed by the Korean surrogate childbearers in Im Kwon-taek's *Surrogate Mother* (*Ssibaji,* 1986) fundamentally different from the pain and suffering of the Chinese concubines in Zhang Yimou's equally exoto-ethnographic melodrama *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991)? Or does the difference lie in the cultural and historical crevice separating these two nations?'[107]

[105] Kim Kyung-hyun (2004) *The Remasculinisation of Koresan Cinema* pp. 63
[106] Ibid.
[107] Chung Hye-seung (2005) pp. 122

While Chung ultimately does not provide an answer to these questions, there are multiple points within this statement which highlight the complexity involved when concerning *han*. First, the idea that *han* is something capable of cross-pollination grants *han* a particular specificity which betrays Chung's previous claim of ontological uncertainty. How can similar concepts be foregrounded when the point of comparison is something that director Im Kwon-taek has asserted is 'not a concept that Koreans can agree on'?[108]This idea of cross-pollination is further complicated by E. Taylor Atkins' assertion that:

> 'It is, of course, not uncommon for Koreans to describe themselves as being a peculiarly sad people, by evoking indignant sorrow (*han*) as a national characteristic, but they do not hesitate to assign responsibility for their collective misery to Japan and other outside powers that interfered in their affairs over the course of centuries'.[109]

One other such 'outside power' would of course be China, which performed an active role during the Korean peninsula's 'Three Kingdoms' period (57BC – 668AD) and subsequent unification. Korean historian Bruce Cummings claims that:

> 'the period of the Three Kingdoms thus ended, but not before all three states had come under the long-term sway of Chinese civilisation by introducing Chinese statecraft, Confucian philosophy, Confucian practices of educating the young, and the Chinese written language'.[110]

Korea's relationship with China would continue throughout the Joseon era (1392 – 1897AD), wherein Korea was 'China's little brother, a model tributary state, and in many ways its chief ally'.[111] Throughout history the hierarchical relationship between China and Korea is mirrored in the societal hierarchies of Korea, wherein the lineage of social mobility was hereditary and

[108] Stringer (2002) *Sopyeonje and the inner domain of national culture* pp. 171
[109] Atkins (2010) *Primitive Selves: Koreana in the Japanese Colonial Gaze* pp. 167
[110] Cummings (2005) *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* pp. 33
[111] Ibid. pp. 55

resulted in social strife between the *yangban* (social elites) and the *cheonmin* (peasants). China's history with Korea therefore not only resulted in wars but also in the repression and subordination of the lower classes from which the only way to escape was through the proof of blood lineage. China, along with Japan, is therefore one of the key agents of 'interference' throughout Korean history. Returning to Chung's argument, to position *han* as something possible of cross-pollinating therefore undoes the historical associations of the term, and instead positions it more into the wider and open terminology of suffrage.

Regardless of concerns surrounding socio-historical accuracy, the applicability of *han* to outside influences upon the Korean people is an essential element in understanding its cultural usage. While the systemic repression of lower classes can be universally applied, and clear linguistic comparisons can be found across differing cultures, employing *han* in the pursuit of bridging Chinese and South Korean cinema overlooks historical hierarchies embedded within the term, which are instrumental in specifying its application to Korean history and Korean people.

Second, Chung's comparison to the works of the Chinese Fifth Generation relies heavily on Western approaches to melodrama. This is most evident in the decision to frame a comparison between films concerning female subjugation. Chung is correct to highlight the universality of female oppression among cultures, particularly ones built upon shared Confucian notions of gender and society, but this comparison, in highlighting narratives of female oppression, works towards an amalgamation of *han* and Western melodrama. In Suh Nam-dong's analysis of four prominent *han* in Korean culture, only one is focused specifically on women.[112] To equate *han* entirely to narratives concerning female oppression or suffering therefore diminishes the complexity of the term. At the same time, this comparison downplays the overtly and aggressively political nature of Chinese Fifth Generation cinema. It is important to emphasise

[112] Suh's four *han* concern the invasion of the Korean people by foreign nations, the tyranny of rulers upon the common populace, the Confucian laws and discriminations against women, and the historic social hierarchies of Korea which resulted in hereditary slavery. (Suh (1984) Towards a Theology of Han pp. 58)

that *han*'s socio-historical context prevents it from being applied to the cinema of other nations, as any attempt to do so either sacrifices the multilayered notions embedded within the term, or otherwise reduces and simplifies the term to more universally specific concepts of suffrage. *Han,* by its very construction, cannot be universal. As Suh Nam-dong states:

> '*Han* is an underlying feeling of Korean people. On the one hand, it is a dominant feeling of defeat, resignation, and nothingness. On the other, it is a feeling with a tenacity of will for life which comes to weaker beings. The first aspect can sometimes be sublimated to great artistic expressions and the second aspect could erupt as the energy for a revolution or rebellion.'[113]

Han is central to Korean people and therefore it is also central to the development of melodrama in Korean cinema. Its reference to not only the experienced individual or collective repression over time, but also the cumulative acting out - the conversion of emotion into energy - is instrumental in the construction of Korean melodrama. This is true for the inherent sadness held within the notion of *han,* the potential for narrative structures found in its culmination of both internal and external experience, and the positioning of either the individual or the collective against an opposing source of oppression. This source is often foreign, usually Chinese, Japanese, or American, or otherwise foreign in its origin when compared to the lifestyle of the oppressed, for example governmental or industrial corruption, militaristic force, or gaps in social hierarchies and lack of social mobility. As will be discussed in the next section, *han* becomes of particular importance in the understanding and analysis of Korean melodrama through depictions of the body.

At this time it is also important to stress that in the context of Korean cinema, while *han* in itself is unable to symbolise the totality of Korean melodrama, it is nonetheless one of its essential

[113] Ibid. pp. 58

constituent parts. The following case study highlights how *han* is visually represented within Korean melodrama through the bodies of characters.

2.2.b.i: *Han* and the Melodramatic Body

It is not surprising that *han,* with its amorphous specificity, is commonly overlooked when attempting to wrestle with the fundamental elements of Korean melodrama. After all, how can internal struggle become visually manifest on screen? Surprisingly, Western studies into the pre-cinematic melodrama provide one potential avenue of interest; the body. Peter Brooks, the pre-eminent scholar of the melodrama, provides the observation that:

> 'silent cinema revives a certain semiotics of the body which first made its appearance in melodrama – or proto-melodrama, since the name was not then coined – at the moment of the French Revolution, which itself calls into a being a new valorisation of and attention to meanings inscribed on the individual body'.[114]

While Brooks is discussing theatrical and cinematic forms far removed from the Korean context, this notion of 'semiotics of the body' carries significant interest for the conceptualisation of reading *han* visually within Korean cinema. Simon Shepherd has provided similar observations on the body, claiming that:

> 'Melodrama is typecast as a form interested solely in gut reaction, in emotional thrill which has no social significance. Tragic emotion, by contrast […] is linked to the correctly managed body politic, and it is that contrast with tragedy that has shaped accounts of the emergence of melodrama, which is portrayed as degrading the connection between performance and civic society'.[115]

[114] Brooks (1994) *Melodrama, Body, Revolution*, pp. 11
[115] Shepherd (1994) *Pauses of Mutual Agitation*, pp. 25

Tragic emotion is therefore something inscribed on the body, subtle tensions and agitations buried under the grandiose and excess often ascribed to the melodrama. Carrying a similar sentiment, Peter Brooks has built on his previous argument, stating that:

> 'The melodramatic body is a body seized by meaning. Since melodrama's simple, unadulterated messages must be made absolutely clear, visually present, to the audience, bodies of victims and villains must unambiguously signify their status.'[116]

For Brooks, then, 'it is, of course, in the logic of melodramatic acting out that the body itself must pay the stakes of the dramatic'.[117] Most important to the notion of *han* in Brooks' argument is the victim's body. This is because, as highlighted above, the oppressive element responsible for the manifestation of *han* can take different forms – more obviously in the colonial era you find Japanese authorities and their Korean collaborators, but in contemporary Korean cinema oppression can be structural, financial, political, societal, patriarchal, or cultural, and therefore its visual manifestations prove too varied to be properly analysed here. Instead, the victim, and more specifically the body of the victim, has maintained a stronger, consistent visual representation throughout Korean film history. It is important here not to fall into the trap of transposing the observations of Brooks and Shepherd wholesale onto Korean cinema. Thankfully, there exists a precedent in Korean culture through which correlations can exist. Kim Soyoung has examined the relationship between Hong Kong and South Korean action cinema and has examined the term *hwalguk* as a site of study for understanding the action genre in Korea. Kim describes the term, stating 'its literal meaning of "living theatre" is dependent on an idea of the body, a lived experience, and commensurability between representation and the real.'[118] Though *hwalguk* carries long held association with the action genre, its prioritisation of the body

[116] Brooks (1994), pp. 18
[117] Ibid. pp. 19
[118] Kim Soyoung (2005), pp. 101

as a means through which to represent 'lived experience' can clearly be appropriated into an analysis of *han* in Korean melodrama.

With all this in mind, it is possible to see *han* and the visual representation of the body as intrinsically linked. Actions upon the body, in particular the destruction of the body in Korean melodrama, primarily self-afflicted but also enacted through means of oppression, can therefore be read as manifestations of *han*. When this action is self-afflicted it visualises the overwhelming accumulation of suffering upon the victim. Of course, there are various levels through which this self-destruction can be meted. The most prominent and obvious example can be found in the beating of the fist against the heart, though the body can be damaged to a far greater degree. Of the many horrific events to occur throughout South Korea's twentieth century, by far one of the most atrocious is the government response to the Gwangju Uprising. Following the assassination of dictator Park Chung-hee in 1979 and the subsequent arrival of a second dictator in Chun Doo-hwan, who enacted two coups against the government in December of 1979 and May 1980 respectively, students in the city of Gwangju began to protest Chun's actions, who responded without remorse through the use of aggressive military force against the people. Bruce Cummings has commented on this atrocity, stating:

> 'the touchstone of that disorder [referring to South Korea's political instability prior to democracy], in the recent period, was the Kwangju rebellion in May 1980, Korea's Tiananmen nightmare in which students and young people were slaughtered on a scale the same as or greater than that in "People's" China in June 1989.'[119]

Given this horrific moment in South Korea's history, it is unsurprising that Korean films have sought to interrogate and analyse this tragedy: *May 18 / Hwaryeohan Hyuga* (2007, Kim Ji-hoon) presents a narrative of the events in the lead up to and aftermath of the military attack; *26 Years / 26 Nyeon* (2012, Cho Geun-hyun) hypothesises a collective who wish to seek vengeance against

[119] Cummings (2005), pp. 343

those responsible for the massacre; and *Peppermint Candy / Bakha Satang* (2000, Lee Chang-dong) depicts the massacre from the viewpoint of one of the soldiers who is forced to participate as part of his mandatory military service. In each of these films *han* plays a significant role, albeit at different levels. In *May 18 han* is visualised through the bullet holes and blood of the victims of the massacre, as a form of oppression. In *Peppermint Candy* both the protagonist, as a soldier, and a civilian have their bodies injured through the structures of violence which have forced them into opposition. In *26 Years* there is the manifestation of *han* as a form of rebellion, its accumulation forcing action against the oppressor.

While these representations of *han* speak to its prominence in Korean cinema, they omit the significant self-destruction which comes through the victim's overwhelming feeling of *han*. With this is in mind, *A Petal / Ggotnib* (1996, Jang Seon-woo) provides one of the most fascinating and significant examples of *han* in Korean melodrama. The film follows the tribulations of an unnamed teenage girl (Lee Jeong-hyeon) who has been driven insane by witnessing the slaughter of her mother and numerous others during the Gwangju massacre. The girl drifts around rural Korean landscapes before coming into contact with the poor labourer Jang (Moon Seong-geun), who rapes the girl and has no interest in her apart from sexual needs. As their relationship cycles through sexual and physical aggression, a group of students attempt to look for the girl.

The film's final act consists of two significant events. First, the girl visits a mass grave and is overcome with suffering as she remembers the military action against the protesters and the murder of her own mother as they ran for safety. The girl rocks back and forth, eyes rolled back and mouth agape, as if possessed. *Han* has overtaken her body to the degree that she is overcome and transformed by it, a spectre of death and a stark reminder of the suffering of those killed in the massacre. Jang, watching the girl as this occurs, is himself overcome with grief and is barely able to look at the girl as she gets up and walks away. The girl is next seen on the

streets of an urban area, defiantly refusing the call for attention and salute as the Korean national anthem is broadcast through loudspeakers.

The second notable act is arrival of the students at Jang's home as the film closes. They are of course unsuccessful in their search for the girl – her fate is left unresolved, indicating strong doubts about any hope of significant change in Korea's future despite the shift to democracy – and upon asking Jang as to the whereabouts of the girl, Jang's response is to smash his head against the corrugated iron wall of his makeshift home, yelling at the students to leave as he does so. Jang, last seen weeping at the girl's manifestation of *han*, is himself overcome with self-remorse. Faced with questions to which he has no answer, and no hopes of future progress, he lashes out violently at himself, inflicting damage upon his body.

The most significant depiction of self-inflicted damage upon the body in *A Petal,* however, is found during the rape scenes placed sporadically throughout the film. Each time Jang sexually assaults the girl, her mind returns to the Gwangju massacre. The socio-political subtext of juxtaposing images of political oppression and aggression with the act of raping the homeless and weak girl are obvious, but what is important in these sequences with regard to the visualisation of *han* in Korean melodrama is the girl's scraping at her own skin. The girl's body therefore becomes marked by the rock she rakes across her skin as she relives both a traumatic event from her past and a traumatic event in the present. Her manifestation of *han* upon her own body stems equally from the loss of her mother, the massacre of her community by the government, the continued ravaging of her body, and the absence of agency afforded to her. The girl's clawing of her body therefore carries a duality of meaning through the context of *han*, it is both an attempt to deal with the overwhelming weight of it as she remembers the Gwangju massacre, as well as an attempt to rebel against the assault upon her body through attempting to destroy it. This is further evidenced by the girl's attempt to claw at her own breasts; in her rebellion against oppression she is trying to destroy the sexual aspects of her body as a means

through which to be freed from similar occurrences in the future. Jang is notably disgusted by the girl's actions, yet continues his sexual assault regardless.

The girl's narrative in *A Petal* is therefore one full of visual representations of *han*, clearly depicting the role of the body as the site in which the suffering of the characters is etched and marked. The girl's body is in a constant state of transition and destruction as a result of the numerous horrors inflicted upon her. Though bluntly depicted, *A Petal*'s use of *han* upon the body allows for a thorough condemnation of Korea's political past as well as its contemporary identity. Democracy does not undo the horrors of the past, and its inaction in regard to interacting with this traumatic past, personified by the wandering students who enact no change upon the narrative, only further contributes to Korea's suffering.

The multilayered visual representations of *han* found in *A Petal* provides a significant example in proving *han*'s essential place in the Korean melodrama. Another, more focused, visualisation is found in *A Single Spark* / *Areumdaun Cheongnyeon Jeon Tae-il* (1995). Once again adapting a historical event, *A Single Spark* details the life of Jeon Tae-il (Hong Kyeong-in), a poor tailor who must work in the hazardous and unsafe conditions of a sweatshop in order to make ends meet. Driven to speak up by the lack of ventilation and forced injection of drugs to maintain hard work far beyond the limits of human capabilities, Jeon Tae-il began to protest against the owners of the company he worked for. Faced with staunch opposition from his employers, as well as the ignorance of his plight by the government – at the time under the military dictatorship of Park Chung-hee, who supported business owners over workers' rights – Jeon self-immolated and ran down the streets shouting in protest before succumbing to the flames.

Jeon's suicide was one of the main catalysts of the creation of labour unions throughout South Korea, allowing workers more rights and a system through which to engage in dialogue with business owners and the government. Park's film *A Single Spark* is notable in its framing of Jeon's life through the attempts by an author (Moon Geun-yeong) to write Jeon's biography. The

most significant example of *han* found in *A Single Spark* is obviously the immolation scene, which features at the climax of the film before a brief epilogue. Jeon's body is engulfed in flames as he cries out against the oppression of the workers. Here, *han* becomes manifest through the desire to affect change onto society. The destruction of the body becomes a rebellion which transcends self-worth, as Jeon's accumulation of *han* is enacted upon his own body as means of reaction against the oppression of both himself and his peers.

These visualisations of *han* through extreme damage wrought upon the body created during the first decade following the arrival of democracy to South Korea embody the pent up anger and frustration of oppression, both artistic and societal, experienced throughout successive military dictatorships of South Korea. The blood and destruction of the body depicted in these films are themselves examples of *han*'s integral relationship to the socio-political narratives found in Korean melodrama. Their graphic depiction functions as a way to allow audiences to themselves become overcome by the suffering of the Korean people throughout this period. Looking back through Korean history, though the visual realisation of the body marked by the outpouring of *han* is not nearly as graphic, the body remains the site through which socio-political concerns reach their aggressive conclusions.

As discussed throughout this section, *han* is not only intrinsic to gaining an understanding of Korean melodrama, but its cultural significance allows for visual representation across a multitude of films which deal with the multiple oppressive elements of Korean society and history. The body becomes the site through which *han* is etched, and in its destructive representation it provides a formal element which is at the very heart of Korean melodrama. *Han* alone, however, is unable to properly encapsulate all that is embodied within Korean melodrama, and therefore the next section interrogates another cultural element essential to understanding the genre.

2.2.c: ***Minjung***

This visual element of *han* – etched and enacted upon the bodies of the oppressed - however, can only go so far. *Han* alone is unable to sustain a narrative. Rather *han* is manifest in Korean cinema as a climax of emotion, as a punctuation mark of oppression, used to emphasise the emotional poignancy of the narrative. As discussed, the socio-political focus of *shinpa* alone is equally not enough to properly account for the specifics of narrative melodrama within the Korean context. This is down to the inherent foreign nature of *shinpa* which arrived on the peninsula, just as with melodrama later on, free from the long held societal contexts of Korea. Universal concepts such as injustice and suffrage are of course easily adaptable to most national narrative contexts, but to allow *shinpa* or melodrama to account for more specific concepts with entrenched nation-specific histories works toward the very erasure of such histories. In the case of Korean cinema, it is the concept of *minjung* which has been most overlooked in critical studies thus far. Much like *han, minjung* struggles to find an easy translation in English. Min Eungjun, Joo Jinsook and Kwak Hanju have spoken on the relationship between *han* and *minjung,* claiming:

> 'The word *haan* is peculiar to the Korean people, and is intrinsically connected with *minjoong*'s worldview in relation to life, death, and the cosmos. *Minjoong* are people who live in *haan*. […] In addition, *haan* and *minjoong* are inseparable from each other just as a song is nonexistent apart from the voice which sings it. *Haan* is the heartbeat, the cry, the song, and the longing of the *minjoong'*.[120]

From these statements, it is possible to ascertain that *minjung* refers specifically to people, but there remains a lack of clarity as to which specific types of people are collected under the term *minjung*. James H. Cone provides a similarly indirect encapsulation of the concept when claiming that 'it is the Korean story of suffering and hope that defines the essential nature of minjung theology'.[121] David Suh Kwang-Sun provides a more specific analysis of the term, claiming:

[120] Min, Joo, and Kwak (2003), pp. 7
[121] Cone (1983) Preface, pp. xiv

> 'First, "minjung" is *not* a concept or object which can be easily defined or pointed at, for it is a living reality which is dynamic and changing, and it has to define itself as a subject. The minjung can talk about itself only through its social and political biography.'[122]

Suh elaborates further on this initial analysis through an attempt at in-depth description:

> 'The minjung is present where there is sociocultural alienation, economic exploitation, and political suppression. Therefore, a woman is a minjung when she is dominated by a man, by the family, or by sociocultural structures and factors. An ethnic group is a minjung group when it is politically and economically discriminated against by another ethnic group. A race is minjung when it is dominated by another powerful ruling race as is the case in a colonial situation. When intellectuals are suppressed for using their creative and critical abilities against rulers on behalf of the oppressed, then they too belong to the minjung. Workers and farmers are minjung when they are exploited, their needs and demands are ignored, and they are crushed down by the ruling powers.'[123]

To be collected under the term *minjung,* therefore, is to be one who is oppressed and feels *han*. The *minjung* thus can be read as the most prominent characters found within Korean melodrama, and are essential to its generic construction. A Korean melodrama requires the *minjung* in order to be classified as such. The inclusive element of the terminology allows for multiple types of characters to occur within the narratives of Korean melodrama. What is essential here is that the characters in Korean melodrama experience oppression and are clearly shown to be positioned as lower in the hierarchies inherent in society. Suh further emphasises this hierarchical structure as essential to understanding the concept of minjung, arguing that:

> 'The ruling class, the better-to-do people, are the privileged class. They have vested interests in this world and are anxious to maintain it. They tend to rationalise and

[122] Suh Kwang-Sun (1983) *A Biographical Sketch of an Asian Theological Consultation*, pp. 35
[123] Ibid. pp. 35-36

> manipulate this world. On the other hand, the minjung, the ruled ones, get the worst possible deals in this world. Whenever there are changes such as price hikes or disasters, both natural and human, it is the minjung who suffer first and foremost. They are the ones who are the most vulnerable and sensitive to what happens in the world.'[124]

Class structures and social mobility are therefore of importance to notions of the minjung, but represent only one such avenue for oppression to occur. Oppression within society takes many forms, and the notion of *minjung* allows for the oppressed individual to find common ground in the plight of others who are themselves suffering. It is with this dual applicability to both an individual and a wider collective that *minjung* allows for a certain ease of transition into a cultural term through which to read Korean melodramas. Numerous different characters can be collected as the *minjung* within any one Korean film, while at the same time the protagonist's own oppression can be explored both individually and included as a part of the *minjung*. This allows the Korean melodrama a universality in which depictions of the oppressed can be read about as a specific form of oppression, and equally about a wider cultural relationship wherein oppression holds a prominent position. *Minjung,* therefore, though critically overlooked when compared with *han*, provides one of the most important elements in determining and understanding the Korean melodrama.

2.2.c.i: *Minjung* and Melodramatic Objects or Spaces

While its prominent position in the generic makeup of Korean melodrama is obvious, it is much harder to visually realise the *minjung,* as it lacks the visual manifestation upon the body found in *han*. Oppression is in itself a formal element most obviously represented in the narrative of a film, enacted as an obstacle or, in the tradition of Todorov, a disruption of equilibrium which the character must overcome or endure. How best, then, to discuss the *minjung* through the visual properties of cinema? One potential avenue is found in following observations on the use of

[124] Ibid. pp. 51

objects and spaces in Korean melodramas. The melodramatic object is one of the most significant formal elements within Korean melodrama. In particular, the melodramatic object the birdcage features throughout the history of Korean cinema. The earliest surviving example of the birdcage used in this way is found in the powerful opening sequence early into the previously discussed colonial-era *Sweet Dream*. Chung Chong-hwa has used this scene to discuss the intricate editing of *Sweet Dream*, commenting that;

> 'Once the dialogue indicates a person or a thing is about to appear in a former shot, the shot of the person or the thing follows immediately after the image. For example, at the beginning of Sweet Dream when Ae-Soon says 'I'm not a bird in a cage' during the quarrel with her husband, an insert shot of a bird in a cage appears.'[125]

For Chung, this 'stylistic way of connecting one shot to another shot systematically binds the entire film together'.[126] However, the use of the birdcage as a melodramatic object has been largely overlooked. The use of editing to 'bind' the film together allows direct parallels to be drawn between Ae-soon and the birdcage. Despite the punishment of Ae-soon during the second half of the film, the scene which precedes this cut to the birdcage seeks to make the audience empathise with Ae-soon's frustrations. She is angry at the society which has placed her within the household, and even angrier at her husband for maintaining Confuscianist notions of gender roles during a period of transition on the peninsula. Therefore, Ae-soon's remark that she is not 'a bird in a cage' is actually an apt comparison point. The way the film presents this singular shot of the birdcage immediately following Ae-soon's comment is vital to further symbolising Ae-soon's emotional state. The birdcage is itself suspended from the roof, with no connections visible to the ground below. This shot does not give us any frame of reference for how high up the birdcage actually sits, and therefore it heightens the notion of isolation. On top of this, the birdcage does not fill the screen, and as such there are brief hints to life outside of the

[125] Chung Chong-hwa (2008) *Sweet Dream*, pp. 72
[126] Ibid. pp. 72

cage shown within the frame. At the same time, anything outside of the birdcage is shown to be out of focus, and therefore out of reach. The parallels with Ae-Soon's situation are obvious, and this scene does indeed provide strong evidence for the evolution of film language among Korean filmmakers, positioning *Sweet Dream* as a signifier of the development of Korean melodrama.

The birdcage, as a melodramatic object, carries obvious representational meanings – imprisonment, oppression, and suffering. It is therefore an object imbued with significance tantamount to the notions of *han* and *minjung*. More significant signs of the birdcage's genealogy can be found in two recent productions. *Portrait of a Beauty* / *Miindo* (2008, Jeon Yun-su) presents a *Mulan*-esque story which follows Yoon-bok (Kim Gyu-ri), a woman who dresses up as a man in order to become a painter. The film details her struggles to exist within the gender hierarchies and class structures of neo-Confucianist Korea, as well as her desire to elope with the low class Hong-do (Kim Nam-gil). The birdcage features prominently in two key scenes which show Yoon-bok's acceptance of her female body. Arriving at a reclusive location with Hong-do, Yoon-bok momentarily looks at the various birdcages which adorn one of the walls, before locking eyes with a dove. After a moment of connection, Yoon-Bok frees the bird before making love with Hong-do. Here, *Portrait of a Beauty* creates a one-to-one correlation between Yoon-bok and the dove, presenting the dove and the cage it is housed in as a parallel to Yoon-bok's own feelings of being trapped by societal structures. By freeing the dove from the cage Yoon-bok also commits to rejecting these societal structures, as she removes her masculine clothing and presents her feminine body to Hong-do.

Later in the film, at this same reclusive spot, Hong-do presents Yoon-bok with feminine clothing, and she quickly sheds her masculine clothes in order to embrace her femininity. Shot from behind, the film shows Yoon-Bok remove her clothes and linger naked whilst staring at the birdcages which surround her. Again, *Portrait of a Beauty* is creating a symbolic connection between the birdcage and Yoon-Bok's own societal struggles. Her removal of masculine clothes

and embracement of her feminine body in front of the birdcages is therefore a defiant rejection of the societal pressures placed on Yoon-bok. At the same time, the film is keen to stress that one personal victory is not enough to change society as a whole. While the cage which previously contained the dove remains empty, as the shot continues there is a birdcage which houses two birds shown behind Yoon-bok. This scene therefore contains both Yoon-bok's physical attack against the symbolic object of oppression whilst also suggesting that oppression will continue.

In *Portrait of a Beauty,* then, the birdcage exists as a point of comparison with the oppressed female in a society built upon neo-Confucian principles. It portrays the cage, and the bird within it, as an object worth lamenting, as it restricts and contains that which should be allowed to exist outwith the boundaries dictated by a structure implemented by those alien to the structure's inhabitants. The birdcage therefore demonstrates a melodramatic object being used to highlight the emotional aspects of the film's central themes concerning gender, oppression, and society. This use of birdcages in *Portrait of a Beauty* provides one example of how symbolic objects are used within film.

If melodramatic objects in Korean melodrama provide ways through which characters can interact with symbols of the very oppression they struggle against, then the use of spaces within Korean melodrama also yield interesting discussions concerning the plight of the *minjung*. Of these spaces, one of the most prominent and politically-charged with ideological meaning is the vertical structure. This structure can take many forms – staircases, billboards, scaffolding, and even climbing frames – but what is important is that they feature the potential for characters to ascend and, just as importantly, descend them. Less overtly obvious than the birdcage, the structural frame is uniquely tied to narratives concerning social mobility.

In *The Aimless Bullet* / *Obaltan* (1960, Yu Hyun-mok) war veteran and office worker Cheol-ho meets his old love, Myeong-hui, and escorts her back to her apartment. Commenting on the fact that she lives on the top floor of the apartment block, Myeong-hui laments that she has to climb

the stairs. Cheol-ho questions her as to her reasoning for living on the top floor, and Myeong-hui responds that it is "fun to stand here and look down on everyone else". In the film *A Good Windy Day / Barambuleo Joheun Nal* (1980, Lee Jang-ho), three youths from the countryside attempt to make a living in Seoul. One day, on a date with a girl, Miss Yu, one friend climbs the scaffolding of a hilltop billboard and, from his vantage point, and shouts down at her. In *Chilsu and Mansu / Chilsuwa Mansu* (1988, Park Gwang-su) two struggling artists commissioned to paint a billboard atop a skyscraper in Seoul refuse to come down until their voices and concerns are heard. In *Beat / Biteu* (1997, Kim Seong-su) a school dropout becomes a gangster and begins a relationship with a girl. Throughout the film they meet at a schoolyard climbing frame as a means of retreating from their respective societal pressures. In these films mountable structures – stairs, frames, scaffolding – allow, through their ability to be climbed, an elevated position that contrasts directly with the social realities of the characters in each film. In doing so, these structures provide moments in which characters are given agency to scale upwards and elevate themselves.

This very act, of being able to climb, highlights the clear inability for these characters to elevate themselves within the social hierarchies of South Korea, further enforcing their position among the *minjung*. It is for this reason that the city itself is framed as a significant backdrop during these scenes. In *A Good Windy Day* and *Beat* the city is framed from a hillside perspective and therefore positioned as a mass which is constantly present in the character's mind and at the same time a mass which they are unable to parse or compartmentalise in order to properly manage or understand the 'rules' of social mobility. Conversely, in *The Aimless Bullet* and *Chilsu and Mansu,* the city is much closer and the characters are placed within it in order to highlight their inability to understand the reasoning, rather than the rules, behind social hierarchies. In both films, the elevated perspective the characters are witness to results in concerns or discussions about the psychological effect of perception from such a vantage point, and the way in which it alters understanding about societal structures which seem ever present at the street level.

It is therefore important that in these films the stability of these structures is placed into question. In *The Aimless Bullet,* as Cheol-ho races Myeong-hui up the stairs they come across an ex-lover of Myeong-hui, who passed by them on his way down. Once at the top of the stairs, Cheol-ho and Myeong-hui look down at the street below them, and see Myeong-hui's ex-lover staring upwards at them. Given the structural stability of the stairwell, especially when placed in contrast to the hazardous frames climbed by characters in the other films discussed, the ex-lover therefore functions as a sobering reminder of the transient nature of the upward climb; he is literally being replaced by Cheol-ho and so must return to a lower position in society.

The ex-lover's glare at Cheol-ho as he descends the stairs puts an instantaneous stop to the playful race upwards, and in doing so it calls attention to the immediacy with which one can become ousted, and descending from a place of assumed stability. Cheol-ho's glance downwards, and the ex-lover's returned stare upwards, solidifies this transient nature. Following his descent, the ex-lover's only desire is to once again return to an elevated position.

In *A Good Windy Day*, Gil-nam's attempt to woo Miss Yu, a fellow worker at a hair salon, by climbing a billboard more concretely visualises the transient nature of social mobility, not only through the precarious position in which Gil-nam is placed and the negative space of the scaffold against the sky, but through the criss-cross nature of the scaffolding itself. Shot from Miss Yu's level, looking up towards Gil-nam, the scaffolding heavily fragments the frame, shooting off in various directions without any clear means of ascension. In this way, it mirrors the confusing network of paths which provide opportunity, but not certainty, of an elevated position. Miss Yu's refusal to climb punctuates the lack of security provided by an idea of social mobility constructed on such an unpredictable and dangerous structure. Further, the rejection of Gil-nam's advances by Miss Yu comes from Gil-nam's inability to provide a secure elevated position within society. While Gil-nam's courage is bolstered by his climbing of a structure, Miss Yu's ground level position affords her the opportunity to see the fragility and temporary nature

of Gil-nam's ascent. He is only elevated so long as he stays within the scaffold, and the moment he climbs down he once again becomes her co-worker, on an equal level and without any clearly defined path to rise up through the social hierarchies.

The cultural notion of *minjung* is inseparable from the Korean melodrama; it constitutes perhaps the most significant part of the genre's construction. This is due to its existence in both the characters and narratives featured throughout the genre's history. Though it is much harder to decipher *minjung* as a visual element, this section has argued for the symbolic power embedded within objects and spaces in the Korean melodrama. If *han* is situated within the body, then the objects and spaces that body comes into contact with help to provide context concerning their plight. It is for this reason that these objects and spaces gain a melodramatic significance, highlighting specific truths about the character, most obviously their belonging to the *minjung* through oppression. Just as the cultural concepts of *han* and *minjung* are themselves intrinsic, the melodramatic body and the melodramatic objects and spaces discussed here are innately connected. Together, they form the formal heart of the Korean melodrama, imbuing it with symbolic meaning. The next section shall look at the other prominent aspect of the Korean melodrama which must be analysed –the narrative.

2.3: Traditional Narrative Forms: *Pansori* and *Talchum*

So far, this chapter has focused on thematic and cultural elements, as well as objects and spaces in film form, which have been instrumental in the construction of the Korean melodrama. It is also of utmost importance to acknowledge the narrative of the melodrama, as they likewise differ from the term's strong, suffocating, ties to the familial or romantic narratives and formal depictions of the bourgeoisie. While the strong influence of *shinpa* impacted the setting and characters found within Korean melodramas, it is worth looking at pre-cinematic forms of Korean storytelling in order to better understand potential influences upon the construction of the melodramatic in Korean film.

Lifting from studies into the melodramatic in the West, the pre-narrative forms of significant interest are those based in performance and theatricality. Of these theatrical forms, the two which provide the most insight into the melodramatic are *pansori* and *talchum*. Given their prominent representation in successful Korean films, as will be discussed in **Section 2.3.a**, it is surprising that very little has been done to link these pre-cinematic antecedents with their filmic inheritors.

Talchum is a form of mask dance about which very little has been written in English. Like most performance-based arts in Korea, *talchum* finds its origins in ancient rituals, more specifically harvest festival celebrations. Hyun Young-hak has elaborated on this history, stating:

> "By the 1700s the commercial class began to appear, and cities were coming into existence. With the support of the rising commercial class the mask dance came into its own. […] The satirical content of the mask dance became more audacious. The village ceremonies which were performed in order to appease the gods became instead the play for the suppressed ordinary folks i.e., the minjung's play ridiculing and thus criticising their oppressors.'[127]

Hyun's comments elucidate a clear connection between *talchum* and its function as a means through which the *minjung* are able to participate in a form of cathartic rebellion through performance. James R. Brandon has commented on the oral tradition of *talchum* whilst equally highlighting its social function, stating that:

> 'village performers preserve and orally transmit knowledge of performance and the main action of the play without a written script. Rather than being built around a central plot,

[127] Hyun Young-hak (1983) *A Theological Look at the Mask Dance in Korea*, pp. 47

> the play is made up of independent scenes held together by a common theme – satire of monks guilty of transgression, of corrupt aristocrats and of insensitive local officials'.[128]

The malleability of the formal structure of *talchum* therefore allowed it applicability to the plights and struggles of the local audiences, who could chime in with their own comments and suggestions, altering the play to include contemporary grievances. The examples chosen by Brandon speak to the significant relationship between *talchum* and the *minjung*: the forms of oppression being confronted through the performance were largely religious, societal, or governmental, structures with clearly delineated hierarchies in place. The most prominent performers of *talchum*, local farmers or *cheonmin* (peasants), were people who comprised the lower ranks of any of these social structures, and were thus oppressed and repressed by such structures on a daily basis. *Talchum* therefore carries with it an intense political undercurrent. Hyun Young-hak highlights this political element in their observations that:

> 'The minjung audience participates in the sad story. This is their lot in this world. In a world where the aristocrats rule, it is the minjung who suffer hunger, separation, exploitation, beatings, etc. […] There is no exit! And yet both the performers and the audience participate in the story-telling with jokes and laughter. […] The whole world is laughable. Both the performers and the audience weep and laugh at the same time. […] In the mask dance, these suppressed feelings explode into reality'.[129]

For Hyun, through engaging in such performances the *minung* embody a state of 'critical transcendence'.[130] Talchum, as a performance by the lower classes for the lower classes, therefore functioned as a means through which to collectively cope with the stresses placed upon them by their position in society. It allowed them to release their *han* without lashing out or inflicting damage upon their own bodies. Though its deriding of the upper classes or oppressive elements

[128] Brandon (1993) *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre*, pp. 182
[129] Hyun Young-Hak (1983), pp. 49-51
[130] Ibid.

in society provided comedy, there remained the ever-present reality of the position of the *minjung*, who lacked social mobility and would face further oppression. It is important here to note that *talchum* was political not only in its narrative structure, but also in its formal properties, as Hyun states:

> 'The dance movements are dynamic and bold compared to those of the aristocratic dance, which are graceful and elegant. The mask dance is full of humour, satire, and vulgar expressions with a great deal of sex-related dirty words. It is a play and a festivity with a great deal of improvisation and much disorder'.[131]

With this formal challenge to aristocratic tradition, there is an attempt to claim ownership over an art form, the vast majority of which were restricted to the upper class and performed within the courts. The dynamic, free-flowing movements altered through audience interaction and influence enabled a sense of identity. This, coupled with the specific objects tied to the performance – the most obvious of this being the hand-made masks worn by performers – provided a solid basis for the significance of objects within the Korean melodrama. Thus *talchum,* with its politically charged narratives and function as a means of catharsis for the oppressed lower classes of society, provides a clear example of the influence of indigenous Korean pre-cinematic narrative forms on the Korean cinema, and the Korean melodrama in particular.

The second notable form is the *pansori*. The name refers to the performance venue itself,[132] out in the open, and was most commonly performed by a sole female vocalist accompanied by a *buk* (wooden drum) player. These performances, like *talchum,* were passed down through oral tradition and told various folklore stories. Commenting on this connection, Lee Hyangjin has

[131] Ibid. pp. 47

[132] 판소리: literally 판 (gathering place) and 소리 (sound)

claimed that 'through its source material and all the subsequent variants, *The Story of Chunhyang* is deeply rooted in the folk imagination of the lower-class people'.[133]

Prior to becoming a narrative form, *pansori* also fulfilled a specific function in society, as a performance through which to cleanse spirits. Following its transition to a performance art, *pansori* has remained popular throughout Korean history, and is still performed today.[134] A large part of this popularity can be considered down to the relationship between *pansori* and the suffering of the lower classes. Music scholar Heather Willoughby has observed that 'in terms of expressing emotions in music, *pansori* in an exemplary genre because of the tales of sorrow and woe that are often related'.[135] They go on to examine the formal elements of the *pansori* performance, in particular the distinctive hoarse sounding vocal performance, claiming:

> '*pansori* performers undergo years of intensive training in order to develop a powerful voice capable of dramatic color, and often a singer is said to not reach his/her prime until well into his/her 50s. It is a common practice to sing continuously for hours until the vocal chords begin to bleed and eventually develop calluses; performers have been known to sing in the mountains or under waterfalls, attempting to outdo nature, in order to properly strengthen their voices and obtain the desired timbral qualities.'[136]

In their analysis of *pansori,* Willoughby is keen to link the performance to *han,* a term they correctly identify as 'polysemous and at times elusive in nature'.[137] What is important here is the linking of *han* as an intrinsic element in both the form and function of *pansori,* wherein the tortured vocal performance becomes itself a materialisation of *han* for both performer and audience. While *pansori* lacks the obvious political ambitions of *talchum*, with its collective

[133] Lee Hyangjin (2000) *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Identity, Culture, Politics*, pp. 71
[134] Albeit mostly in indoor theatre venues. The transition from outdoor spaces to indoor venues, as well as the inclusion of additional backing musicians, occurred during the years leading up to Japan's protectorate over Korea in 1905.
[135] Willoughby (2000) *The Sound of Han: P'ansori, Timbre and a Korean Ethos of Pain and Suffering*, pp. 20
[136] Ibid. pp. 21
[137] Ibid. pp. 17

subversive mocking of the oppressive elements of society, the narratives found within *pansori* provide perhaps the strongest example of pre-cinematic melodramatic narratives in Korea. Like narratives found in *shinpa* films, the stories found in *pansori* focus on the plights of the *minjung* who are oppressed through social or governmental hierarchies.

The sorrowful stories found in *pansori,* as well as the strained vocal manifestations which tell those stories – the closest Willoughby comes to being able to capture 'the sound of *han*' – provided an understandably more tragic collective experience than the aggressive mockery found in *talchum*. The *pansori* performance allows grievance through association with the narrative, rather than through interaction and modification. In this way, the *pansori* performance aligns closely with the cinematic Korean melodrama that was to follow, wherein audiences collectively and passively experience the narrative. Today, only five stories remain from the twelve performed during the *Joseon* period – the most famous being *The Story of Shim Cheong* and *The Story of Chunhyang,* both of which have received numerous filmic adaptations throughout the history of Korean cinema.

2.3.a: Representing Traditional Narrative Forms in Melodrama

When considering the depiction of *talchum* and *pansori,* there are two important factors which must be taken into account. Firstly, the function behind the use of the performance within the film, and secondly how the performance itself is presented formally. While *talchum* is featured less frequently than *pansori,* it is unsurprising that, when it is used, *talchum* carries more significant political aspirations. The most obvious, and in-depth, exploration of *talchum* in Korean melodrama can be found in *King and the Clown / Wangeui Namja* (2005, Lee Joon-ik). The film follows two local *talchum* performers (Gam Woo-seong, Lee Joon-gi) who use their performance to mock the king (Jeong Jin-Yeong). Brought to the king after being punished for treason, the king becomes infatuated with the effeminate male performer, Gong-gil (Lee) and keeps the performance troupe as his personal entertainers. As tensions between the group and the king

grow, ultimately the king's obsession with the performer causes the king to react violently against the other performer, Jang-seong (Gam), torturing him and burning his eyes. The film's finale ends in an act of defiance as the now-blind performer successfully walks a tightrope.

King and the Clown is notable for its employment of multiple forms of performance art throughout its narrative. Housed within the king's private quarters, Gong-gil is made to perform puppet theatre (*inhyeonggeuk*), albeit in a modified form: stripped down to a single performer using finger puppets, rather than the more elaborate performances using *ggokdugakshi* (marionettes). Likewise, the troupe is forced to perform the king's history through the medium of Chinese Peking opera during the visit of the king's mother. The most prominent performance art within the film, however, is *talchum* – both in narrative terms, as the catalyst through which the performers and the king are initially brought together, and formally, with multiple performances depicted throughout the film.

What unifies all of the theatrical performances in *King and the Clown* is their function as a way through which to analyse and make meaning of society. The performances work on multiple levels for both performer and audience. The modification of the puppet theatre performances to a single performer and lone audience member highlights the longing for intimacy between the king and Gong-gil, whilst at the same time Gong-gil's decision to frame the narrative of the puppet performance around his friendship with Jang-seong stands in direct defiance to the very intensions behind such modification. The performance itself becomes an act of rebellion enacted in defiance of the restrictions mandated by the state, in this case by the very head of state. The Chinese Peking opera performance functions as one of the central turning points in the character of the king, who uses the performance as a way to grieve his hereditary history, born of a concubine rather than the Queen. The king's *han* becomes visualised during this performance, as he is driven to lash out as the performance reaches its finale, in which the king's biological mother is driven to drink poison by the state. The king murders two of his own concubines as

the performance ends, causing chaos within the court. The king's impotent rage is therefore voiced through the Peking opera performance, and his inability to deal with the death of his biological mother causes him to aggressively attack the very social structure in which he exists. His murder of concubines carries in it the physical manifestation of the impotence of his actions, his anger is misdirected from the woman he previously thought his mother and instead is focused towards those of lower social standing. At the same time, the decision to portray this performance through the Chinese Peking opera style carries significance.

Korea, or Joseon as it was known during this period, had been declared a tributary state to the Chinese Ming dynasty in 1401. Despite the notion of absolute monarchism within the social structures of Korean society, the fact remained that Korea itself was within a larger regional social hierarchy. The employment of the Chinese performance art, then, is itself an act of vocalising aggression without any power to enact change on the structures in place. Just as the king kills those of lower class in anger at those of equal social standing, the king requests Chinese Peking opera in order to provide a conduit through which to levy aggression at the Ming dynasty whilst simultaneously doing nothing to affect real change. The king, through his actions and decisions concerning theatrical performance, is positioned as a tyrant consumed by an ineffective and empty anger towards both his personal history and the tension between local and regional hierarchies.

The most profound political commentary found in *King and the Clown*, and by far the most relevant to contemporary audiences, appear through the film's *talchum* sequences. The early sequences, in which the performances are in front of the *minjung* peasant families collected together in the streets of town, feature the interactions between the audience and the performers. The audience are a prominent backdrop in each shot of the performance, laughing and clapping along as the performers ridicule corrupt officials and the king's court. The grotesque masks and use of common slang and sex jokes, the latter of which are further emphasised by the use of

dried gourds as phallic objects, emphasises the performance's formal challenges to the grace and pretence occluded by the strict social separation between the *yangban* (aristocrats) and *cheonmin* (peasants). *Talchum* is positioned within these performances as by the people and very much for the people, providing a fleeting space of liberation from the oppressive social systems which surround them.

It is with the transition of the theatre troupe from the streets of common people to the court of the king that the politics of *talchum* are fully explored. The function of *talchum,* as a means through which to provide an outlet for the *minjung* to collectively laugh and grieve their social position, is instantly removed by this movement of the performance space. Instead of the clapping and interacting audience, the councils of the king's court sit silently, far removed from the performance and housed behind barriers. When the king, or his concubines, do interact they actively destroy the political strength of the performance, as in the concubine's mocking of the very phallic objects previously used to deride the king, or the king's wild beating of the drum as he laughs manically. With these interactions, the power of *talchum* is removed, its political ambitions reduced to an entertainment spectacle for the king's sporadic desire for entertainment. Made to perform in front of the king, the troupe members are anxious of the potential repercussions of their mockery, evident in the decision by the backing musicians to refuse to play. Their bowed bodies, with faces down but masks placed upon the top of the head, serves as both acquiescence to social hierarchy and simultaneously undermines the power of the mask as a tool through which to ridicule and mock the upper class. This stands in stark contrast to Jang-Seong's performance, mask likewise atop his head, yet his act of performing with an unmasked face in front of the king permeates with rebellious intent.

The function of *talchum* as a medium of brief respite for the suffering lower classes, rather than a tool through which to affect social reformation, is solidified through the drastic differences in representing the *talchum* performance found in *King and the Clown*. With this questioning of the

role of an art form in society and its ability to influence those with the power to alter the status quo of social structures. *Talchum* is therefore employed in *King and the Clown* as a substitute for cinema, equating their social functions as a medium through which people can mourn the injustices of society, as art forms with mass appeal and frequent attacks on the corruptions inherent within the upper classes of society which are nonetheless helpless in providing anything beyond small periods of cathartic simulated aggression against such corruption. The ineffectual theatrical performance of the troupe before the king is therefore applicable to cinema and the contemporary socio-structural problems within South Korea.

While *King and the Clown* embodies one of the most in-depth depictions of *talchum* in Korean cinema, a depiction which fully realises the political function embedded within its form, it unfortunately remains one of very few Korean films which focuses on *talchum*. Therefore, it stands as sign of the potential available in representing and discussing *talchum* through film, rather than a strong exclamation point on a history of examples.

In stark contrast to this, *pansori* has enjoyed a far stronger relationship with cinema. Of the few surviving *pansori,* it is *The Story of Chunhyang* which most closely aligns with the romantic melodrama. It details the love between Chunhyang, the daughter of a courtesan, and Mong-Yong, the hardworking son of a government official, who are engaged. Despite their love, they are torn apart when Mong-Yong's father must relocate to another province. While Mong-Yong studies to become a secret royal inspector[138], or *amhaengeosa,* a corrupt official takes over Chunhyang's province, imprisoning her after she repeatedly rejects his advances. Returning to the village as a royal inspector, Mong-Yong punishes the corrupt official and releases Chunhyang and, as expected, the two live happily ever after. The comparisons to turn of the century South Korean romantic melodrama are clear; the separation of lovers by forces outside of their control, the

[138] This position was appointed by the king during the Joseon period in order to watch over various government officials in each province.

suffering caused by being committed to maintaining hope for reunification, and of course the bringing together of the romantic couple at the end.

Given its generic narrative, which provides a romantic happy end whilst also providing a dual moral story of devoutness to the romantic union as well as confirmation that corruption will be sorted by the will of the king, it is unsurprising that *The Story of Chunhyang* has been a prominent source of inspiration throughout the history of Korean cinema. Of the many cinematic adaptations of the story, the most notable are Goshu Hayakawa's *The Story of Chunhyang / Chunhyangjeon* (1923), Lee Myeong-woo's *The Story of Chunhyang /Chunhyangjeon* (1935), Shin Sang-ok's *Seong Chunhyang* (1961), and Im Kwon-taek's *Chunhyang / Chunhyangdyeon* (2000). This is largely to do with their positions within Korean film history, as Kim Mee-hyun has argued, claiming "there is no other classic piece of literature whose film career can compare to *The Story of Chunhyang,* the material that filmmakers would use whenever a new film technology was introduced".[139] Goshu Hayakawa's production of *The Story of Chunhyang* in 1923 was the first filmic adaptation of a Korean traditional tale, which resulted in Korean filmmakers responding by adapting not just other *pansori*, such as Lee Gyeong-son's independent production of *The Story of Shim Cheong / Shim Cheongjeon* (1924), but also other folklore tales, such as Park Jung-hyeon's adaptation of *The Story of Jang-Hwa and Hong-Ryeon / Jang-hwa Hong-ryeon Jeon* (1924).

Lee Myeong-woo's adaptation of *The Story of Chunhyang* marked the first major Korean sound production, while Shin Sang-ok's adaptation stands as the first majorly successful South Korean colour film. Im Kwon-taek's 2000 adaptation offers no real technical advancements, but its arrival at not only the start of a new millennium but also at the beginning of the rise of the South Korean film industry can be seen as a largely ideological production which situates *The Story of Chunhyang* as a significant aspect of South Korean culture. Expanding on this, *The Story of Chunhyang* provides a lineage from the pre-cinematic to the modern day, and is therefore imbued

[139] Kim Mee-Hyun (2006), pp. 80

with a national specificity which, when remediated outright as film or referenced in cinematic narratives, becomes politically charged. This is best represented in Lee Byeong-il's *Spring of the Korean Peninsula,* which follows a Korean filmmaker's struggles to produce an adaptation of *The Story of Chunhyang*. Throughout the film there are scenes following the production of the film from pre-production and early production shooting, the latter of which depict key scenes from the *pansori* tale. *Spring of the Korean Peninsula* therefore uses *The Story of Chunhyang* as a metaphor for the loss of Korean national identity during the final years of Japanese colonialism. The use of *The Story of Chunhyang* in this film therefore distances the *pansori* from its romantic origins and instead uses it as a symbol of Korean tradition or identity. In doing so, it imbues the tale with a more political focus, using it to discuss Korea's place within the, unbeknownst to the film crew at the time, late stages of the Japanese colonial era. While *The Story of Chunhyang* features narrative themes of corruption and oppression, other *pansori* feature a more significant emphasis on other routes of melodramatic narrative.

The Story of Shim Cheong follows the life of Shim Cheong, a devoted daughter to a blind father. When her father hears that offering three-hundred *seok* of rice to Buddha would return his eyesight, Shim Cheong offers herself up to the god of the sea as a sacrifice in return for enough money to buy the necessary amount of rice, however her father's sight was not returned. Upon meeting the god of the sea, the god is so touched by Shim Cheong's filial piety that he returned her to land in a lotus blossom. The king, seeing Shim Cheong emerge from the lotus blossom, decided to marry her, and so Shim Cheong became the queen of Korea. The king, upon hearing Shim Cheong's story, hosted a party at the palace for all blind men to attend. Upon seeing her father again, Shim Cheong ran to embrace him, and at their moment of reunification Shim Cheong's father's eyesight returned to him. The *pansori* ends much in the same way as *The Story of Chunhyang*, with Shim Cheong and her father living happily ever after. Marshall R. Pihl's

translations of the transcriptions of surviving *pansori* elucidate on the sorrow found in this narrative, for example this spoken section[140] from *The Story of Shim Cheong:*

'Not one traveller passing by the mooring
Can read this message without tears.
And when thoughts of his daughter come to him,
Blindman Shim embraces the stone and cries.'[141]

The obvious diversion point between these two *pansori* is that the separation in *The Story of Shim Cheong* is familial rather than romantic; Shim Cheong's romance to the king is never placed under threat, and the king does not factor as an obstacle towards Shim Cheong's reunification with her father, but rather aides in bringing the two together. The melodramatic aspects of *The Story of Shim Cheong* therefore emerge through concepts of devotion and generational sacrifice, with the daughter ready to give her life so that her father may regain his eyesight. On top of this there is also the questioning of religion as a source of progress; there is instead an emphasis on the ruler, referring to both the king and the god of the sea, as active participants in the solving of problems. *The Story of Shim Cheong* therefore seems less concerned with romantic melodrama, and instead focuses more on issues of family and society.

Just as *The Story of Chunhyang* received numerous filmic adaptations throughout Korean film history, so, too, did *The Story of Shim Cheong*. The initial adaptation was Lee Gyeong-son's aforementioned 1924 production, which instigated a wave of independent Korean productions under the Japanese colonial government. Ahn Seok-yeong adapted the story for the sound production *The Story of Shim Cheong / Shim Cheongjeon* (1935), and *The Story of Great Shim Cheong /Dae Shim Cheongjeon* (1962) was produced in colour following the success of *Seong Chunhyang* in 1961. Again, while these adaptations speak to a lasting legacy of the *pansori* on South Korean

[140] As opposed to a sung section, *pansori* performances regularly swap back and forth.
[141] Pihl (1994) pp. 195

melodrama, it is the films which use or lift elements from the *pansori* which help show the wider influence of the form on South Korean melodramatic narratives.

The direct uses of *pansori* narratives show the lasting impact that *pansori* has had on Korean melodramatic narratives. The themes of oppression, division, and generational sacrifice all speak to central themes which can be found in multiple South Korean melodramas. If *shinpa* provided new ways of approaching narrative, in particular through its emphasis on the modern setting and modern vernacular, then *pansori* formed the foundations upon which these new ways were constructed. *Pansori,* then, as a form of melodramatic narrative story-telling which existed long before the arrival of cinema to the Korean peninsula, helps in better understanding the Korean approach to such narratives; in particular what themes are emphasised and how such narratives play out.

Pansori, in more recent productions, has been used to discuss more contemporary issues in South Korean society. In 1988, South Korea began its movement into democracy. It came after over three decades of rule under two successive military dictatorships, the second of which saw mass oppression of the people, with martial law being declared and political activists being imprisoned. For the first time since the brief liberation period of 1945 – 1950, Korean filmmakers were able to create films almost entirely free from government interference.

One particularly interesting film to emerge following Korea's movement into democracy in 1988 is Im Kwon-Taek's *Sopyonje* (1993). For Choi Chungmoo *Sopyonje* "was a box office hit and undoubtedly Im Kwon-taek's most commercially successful film […] one indication of its success is the degree to which it elicited a collective outpouring of *han* – and an abundant flow of audiences' tears".[142]

[142] Choi Chungmoo (2002) The Politics of Gender, Aestheticism, and Cultural Nationalism in Sopyonje and The Genealogy, p. 110

Sopyonje is resolute in its attempt to construct a lineage between cinema and Korea's pre-colonial narrative traditions. This is most obvious in its use of *pansori* as the central subject matter. The film follows an elderly man and his adopted daughter over three decades, from the Japanese colonial era through to the Americanisation of the peninsula following the division of the country, as they travel through Korea performing *pansori*. In order for his adopted daughter to be able to perform *pansori* with the necessary sentiment, the old man poisons her so that she becomes blind. With *Sopyonje*, Korean cinema directly references its narrative heritage, going beyond the previous adaptations of *pansori* by instead thematising the act of *pansori* and directly correlating it to the tumultuous decades of colonisation, war, and oppression suffered by the Korean people throughout the twentieth century. Just as Shim Cheong was willing to sacrifice herself for her father in the *pansori* tale *The Story of Shim Cheong*, the adopted daughter in *Sopyonje,* Song-hwa, sacrifices herself for the benefit of her father.

The central, and incredibly important, difference between *The Story of Shim Cheong* and *Sopyonje* is that Shim Cheong's sacrifice is a conscious decision, whereas Song-Hwa's sacrifice is forced upon her through lies and deceit. Song-Hwa's adoptive father therefore consciously contributes to the suffering of the younger generation, and in doing so *Sopyonje* constructs tragedy through using the very narrative traditions that form the foundation of Korean melodrama. *Sopyonje*'s melodrama of oppression and generational sacrifice looks to the past in order to allegorise the suffering of the Korean people under the dictatorship of Chun Du-hwan. The patriarchal enforcement of traditional values upon the adopted daughter by the old man therefore creates a strong parallel with Chun Du-hwan's aggressive retaliations against public activism, which resulted in the use of military force against protesters and the imprisonment and torture of activists against Chun's regime. *Sopyonje*'s focus on history therefore allows it to tell a melodrama narrative of sacrifice and oppression which correlates to the still-recent wounds of the Korean population.

Pansori also serves as a crucial element in *The Sound of a Flower / Dorihwaga* (2015, Lee Jong-pil). The film is a biopic of the *pansori* master Jin Chae-Seon, who is considered the first female master of *pansori*, which was traditionally a male dominated art form. Similar to the previously discussed *Portrait of a Beauty*, *The Sound of a Flower* focuses on the struggles inherent in a patriarchal society which prevents women from engaging with the arts. As such, the film often focuses on gender and identity in Joseon-era Korea. It is the film's use of *pansori* within the film that is of interest. First, *pansori* is depicted as a male-dominated system analogous to patriarchal society; male students learn the tales and movements in a walled off school, are taught by a male master, and then perform to male members of the ruling class. Chae-seon's only interactions with the *pansori* teacher, Shin Jae-ho, prior to adopting the appearance of a man, occur along a path outside of the *pansori* school. Upon being revealed as a woman, Chae-Seon's training is conducted in secret, masked atop hills or in the woods.

Despite Willoughby's observations that the *pansori* singer performs in nature in order to 'outdo' nature, by positioning Chae-seon's training among nature, the film positions *pansori* as an art form inherently linked to Korean identity. Prior to her official training, Chae-seon uses the Korean landscape in order to learn core elements within the *pansori* performance; she balances on rocks in order to perfect her stepping and movement, while using the natural landscape, free from the prying eyes and ears of oppression, in order to practice the projection of her voice. Her official training continues the thematic linking of Chae-seon and *pansori* with nature. One specific scene depicts Chae-seon tied by the abdomen to a tree in order to strengthen her diaphragm, screaming in the rain. This scene further conflates *pansori* and the patriarchal society: Chae-Seon's drive and unwillingness to give up become just as much about breaking through the barriers of an oppressive society as they are about a passion for the perfection of art.

By positioning *pansori* in this way – as something which is both nurtured by interacting with the Korean landscape, and therefore innate in Korean identity, and an art form which enabled an

undoing of patriarchal structures – *The Sound of a Flower* recognises the lasting legacy of *pansori* on Korean melodrama, in particular its ability to discuss and engage with problematic issues of society.

Pansori's narrative content and mass appeal help to position it as a significant influence upon the Korean melodrama. While its more magical elements are largely omitted, most likely due to the rise in popularity of *shinpa* during the colonial era, the *pansori* still retains a prominent place within South Korean melodramatic narratives and as a symbol of Korean tradition or identity. Through combining *pansori* with the outside influence of the more theatrical and filmic form of *shinpa,* as well as the staunch political aggression found in *talchum,* it is clear that the genealogy of Korean melodrama begins not with the arrival of Western melodramatic approaches, but instead can be found in Korea's own history.

2.4 Conclusion

Lee Hyang-Jin has argued that 'the majority of Korean films seem to cluster around two major genres: melodrama and social commentary'.[143] For Lee, 'these two genres have been the most conspicuous trends in the history of the South Korean cinema',[144] and they break down the two genres according to thematic convention. Melodramas 'usually deal with women's private lives, focusing specifically on their love affairs'.[145] Taken further, Lee categorises the melodrama into subgenres; the pornographic film, that 'highlights graphic sex rather than the sufferings of women in a sexually suppressed society'; the historical romance, which 'treat various issues relating to marriage, gender roles and relationships between men and women, with a light comic touch'; and finally 'films concerned with hidden violence in individual's private lives caused by social abuse, moral hypocrisy and sexual repression in a materialistic society'.[146] Lee then contrasts this against what they term the social commentary, claiming that it 'includes a variety of

[143] Lee Hyang-Jin (2000), pp. 57
[144] Ibid. pp. 57
[145] Ibid. pp. 57
[146] Ibid. pp. 58-59

films that approach individuals essentially as victims of political and historical incidents beyond their control, and of the unequal economic structure of the modern Korean society'.[147]

Given the observations present within this chapter, as well as the overlapping themes of plight experienced by people due to repression and oppression within society found in Lee's delineations of genre, it is not a generalisation to claim that the melodrama and social commentary are in fact better amalgamated into one.

As discussed throughout this chapter, the central elements separating the melodramas of the West and the cinematic melodramas of Korea, are the social-political histories and the specific cultural elements found in each. In both his own or in other directors' films, the political struggle embedded in Na Woon-gyu's violent acts against Korean colonial conspirators or structures is symbolic of the Japanese colonial government – another example of *han* manifesting as a lashing out against oppression – which provide, if not the genesis, then the catalyst which exponentially increased Korean melodrama's political manifestations.

Colonial-era melodrama, in order to avoid censorship, found filmmakers making the most of the body, objects, and spaces in order to maintain a rebellion against the increasing Japanese persecution of the Korean people and of Korean identity. By integrating the Japanese genre *shinpa* into its filmmaking practices, Korean cinema appropriated colonial structures in order to maintain a sense of nationalism. The very foundations of the melodrama genre are found in these struggles against oppression. Acts of rebellion become endemic to the generic construction of the Korean melodrama, as evidenced in all of the films discussed throughout this chapter. Whether destructive or self-destructive, the Korean melodrama, therefore, becomes a genre in which politics and nation are intrinsically linked, a volatile genre full of desire for rebellion against the numerous sources of oppression enacted on the Korean people throughout history. The true inheritors of this mindset of Korean melodrama are aggressive, politically focused

[147] Ibid. pp. 59

works such as *National Security / Namyeong-dong 1985* (2012, Jeong Ji-yeong), *Unbowed / Bureojin Hwasal* (2012, Jeong Ji-yeong), *Pluto / Myeongwangseong* (2012, Shin Su-won), and *The Attorney / Byeonhoin* (2013, Yang Woo-suk). In these films, the political element of Korean melodrama comes to the foreground, examining the persecution of the Korean people under dictatorship, judicial corruption, and the incredibly strict and dehumanising school system, among other oppressive elements in South Korean society.

Western approaches to the melodramatic are not equipped to refer to the specific socio-cultural and historical elements embedded within the Korean melodrama film. By employing the term equally in reference to Hollywood and Korean productions, there is both a grave oversimplification of the genre genealogies found in Korean melodrama, and a perpetuation of the long held critical hierarchies wherein Western genre theory holds power over the cinema of nations which exist far removed from the origins of such theories. In an attempt to undo these errors, this chapter has examined the Korean melodrama from multiple angles in order to better understand it as a genre on its own terms.

Going forward, the evidence of politics in Korea's pre-cinematic forms highlights a potential area for further study, interrogating melodrama as an element embedded in the struggle of the lower classes throughout Korea's history. Likewise, more can be done to dismantle melodrama from its Western associations, namely by re-examining the 'golden age' South Korean melodramas of the 1950s. Named as such on account of their romantic, familial narratives, these films sit opposed to the imagery of aggressive resistance against, or tragic participation with, the Japanese colonial government found in films like *The Ferryboat without a Ferryman* or *Angels on the Street*.

Through analysing the manifestation of *han* as an emotional climax which is visually enacted upon the body, and the applicability of *minjung* as a means through which to construct narratives concerning oppression and other social issues, these elements become essential to the

conceptualisation of any melodramatic genre in Korean cinema. Having established this, it is important to emphasise the traditional, pre-cinematic narrative forms found in Korea prior to the introduction of *shinpa*. In *pansori* and *talchum,* there are clear parallels which allow for the genealogy of melodrama in Korea to surpass foreign influence. While *talchum* carries with it the spirit of rebellion which embodies the majority of politically-focused melodrama produced throughout Korean cinema's history, it is the *pansori* which carries the most significant lineage, as shown not only through its constant adaptations but also through its numerous on screen depictions and linkages to narratives of oppression and *han*.

The Korean melodrama, with its strong socio-political focus, constant interrogation of history, and embodiment of cultural notions which are intrinsically tied to the Korean people, occupies a space which is far removed from the melodrama as it is understood in the West. It is a politically-charged and socially-conscious genre wherein depictions of the body, objects, and space are imbued with oppression and defiance in equal measure. The Korean melodrama is a genre intended to allow the Korean people to grieve their tumultuous history, a function it has served since the very inception of the Korean cinema.

CHAPTER TWO: ACTION

Constructing Action through Co-Production with Hong Kong

3.1: Introduction

Action cinema lacks the obfuscations of long-term critical discourse, and the disagreement that comes with such discourse, which permeate discussions on melodrama. Nevertheless, examination of the action genre provides other challenges. For the purposes of this study, these challenges are threefold.

First, there is the issue of the action genre's history in Korean cinema. Commenting on the relative histories between action and other prominent genres in Korean film history Kim Soyoung has observed that 'whereas melodrama and comedy have been staples of South Korean cinema, the appearance of action cinema has been sporadic'.[148] In particular, this idea of genres becoming a 'staple' is built on comparisons of overall historical longevity, rather than any notion of industrial importance or significance. While melodrama has been present since the very beginnings of Korean film production, the action cinema would not become clearly definable until the 1960s, wherein the genre erupted and formed in quick succession. The generic traditions which were solidified during this period are embedded in the South Korean action cinema of today.

At the same time, Kim's suggestion of a 'sporadic' nature points to the ebb and flow of the action genre in popularity throughout history. As will be discussed in greater depth in **Section 3.2**, prior to the 1960s action films were practically non-existent. Instead, these films would use action scenes as a means of emphasising or punctuating character confrontations, or providing brief moments of spectacle. In order to navigate a history of the action genre in Korean cinema,

[148] Kim Soyoung (2005) *Genre as Contact Zone: Hong Kong Action and Korean Hwalkuk*, pp. 103

it is necessary to look towards films which largely exist in other genres and which only employ action in one or two scenes. This allows insight into the way in which action scenes were constructed, choreographed, and edited prior to the arrival of new approaches in the 1960s.

This sporadic nature leads to the second issue: namely, the difficulty inherent in defining 'action' as a genre. This is largely due to the open nature of the term 'action', which allows for a universality which aligns it with 'drama', a similarly difficult term when used in the context of genre.[149] Even with the restriction of the meaning of action, referring to physical violence, explosions, and breathtaking stunts, the existence of such elements within a film do not necessarily secure a film's belonging within the action genre. Action sequences can therefore exist in any kind of setting and can be found embedded in other genres, as in the chase or shootout in a thriller or crime film. Yvonne Tasker acknowledges this prominence in their comments that:

> '[w]ith the notable exceptions of the western and the gangster movie, traditions of action cinema have achieved neither aesthetic nor political credibility within film studies. The kind of critical investigations elaborated around forms such as the western or the gangster movie of the 1930s have been absent in relation to the contemporary action picture'.[150]

Tasker's observations here are important for two reasons. First, they highlight the clear lack of studies into action cinema as a genre unto itself. Tasker highlights the western and the gangster film as 'forms' through which an understanding of action cinema has been constructed. Tasker therefore suggests that contemporary action cinema is understood primarily through its historical precursors. This alone presents an issue when considering South Korean cinema. If studies into Hollywood cinema have failed to properly interrogate and approach the action cinema on its

[149] This comparison is built on the idea that 'action' can be specified through its etymology, and can therefore be read as 'movement' or 'performance', just as 'drama' can be positioned synonymous to 'play' or 'theatrical act'.

[150] Tasker (2000) *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre, and the Action Cinema*, pp. 7-8

own terms, as a genre with its own tropes, approaches in film form, and other delineating elements, then it stands to reason that problems of definition when discussing action cinema in South Korea, a nation with far fewer surviving films from the twentieth century, are greatly exacerbated.

Second, Tasker is quick to distance the western and gangster film from being synonymous with action cinema. Instead, these 'forms' are positioned as related but nevertheless different from action cinema as a specific genre. This again comes back to the proliferation of action scenes in films which otherwise belong to other genres. The western and the gangster film stand as good examples of the way in which action was used primarily as a form of punctuation; a way of emphasising conflict. In westerns, the prolonged stand-offs and rising tensions are often resolved by quick shootouts, positioning the moment of action as a climax. In gangster films, action scenes such as drive-by shootings are structured around immediacy, with the shock of gunfire disrupting the otherwise calm urban spaces.

It is perhaps because of these fleeting moments of action in films which otherwise would not be considered action films, that the action genre has endured, free from intense analysis or interrogation, an assumed generic construction, what Meghan Morris has aptly surmised as 'a generic zone in which cross-cultural logics of contact and connection (audio-visual and social-cultural as well as bodily and technological) are acted and tested out'.[151]

The problem with this lack of critical discussion informs the third and final major issue. Given the relative lack of a body of discourse through which to approach contemporary Hollywood action cinema, when compared with other genres, a reliance on history has resulted in the parsing of a specific genre (action) through others (the western, the gangster film) which only feature tenuous links. In doing so, the generic qualities of action cinema have become diluted. Within the context of Hollywood cinema this is a problem, but when discussing other national

[151] Morris (2005) *Introduction*, pp. 13

cinemas these problems become amplified. Such amplification emerges as a direct result of the way in which national genre cinema is discussed and approached, more specifically when Hollywood is given prominence by default. This results in histories of genres which construct a hierarchy wherein Hollywood is positioned as an originator and influencer. Such sentiments are highlighted in Morris' comments that:

> 'a marked imbalance or asymmetry in the disciplinary organisation of cinema studies makes this kind of discussion difficult. On one hand, most English-language accounts of "action cinema" overwhelmingly focus on Hollywood, limiting Hong Kong's influence at best to the 1970s kung-fu craze focused on Bruce Lee, plus a few famous figures making forays in the US today […]. Unsurprisingly, this norm-setting focus on Hollywood has shaped critical interest in action as a *genre*. On the other hand, the many action films made in Hong Kong, Japan, India, Thailand, Korea, Indonesia or the Philippines tend to be studied, if at all, by specialists in national, or sometimes, regional ("Asian") cinema'.[152]

These interpretations by Morris highlight the clear tension between genre studies and specialist studies. An example can be found in Tasker's statement that:

> 'The 1980s action cinema has retained and embellished the figure of the hero-as-outsider which has for long been a key a feature within the various traditions of 'heroic' narratives, traditions such as the Western and the Epic'.[153]

The observations made here by Tasker position generic tradition entirely through the focus of Hollywood, even when examples from other prominent national producers of action cinema during this period, such as Hong Kong, would provide stronger support for their claim. Though Tasker eventually goes on to analyse Hong Kong cinema through the lens of its female action stars, their omission of the martial arts film from the 'tradition' of action cinema constructs a

[152] Ibid. pp. 5
[153] Tasker (2000), pp. 62

hierarchy in which cinema from outside Hollywood is not taken into consideration when mapping out histories of genre, and instead are employed as a counter-point to Hollywood. Genre, discussed and understood mostly through the lens of Hollywood, therefore does not take into account the histories of countries which themselves feature prominent contributions towards a specific genre. This is especially true for the action genre. It is for this reason that the action cinema becomes the focus of specialist studies, such as this one, into regional areas and the specific history of the genre removed from the assumptive dominance of Hollywood.

As South Korean action films of the late 1990s and early 2000s provided the explosions, chases, and shootouts commonly associated with Hollywood, comparisons between Hollywood and South Korean action cinema were cemented by early Western studies of South Korean film. Following the success of the action film *Shiri* / *Swiri* (1999, Kang Je-gyu), numerous big-budget action films were put into production to capitalise on *Shiri*'s success. These films, now collectively known as Korean Blockbusters, employed heavy use of CGI, special effects, and explosions, and often featured science-fiction scenarios, both elements which had remained almost entirely absent from South Korean cinema until this point.

Shiri and the films which follow it are therefore discussed primarily through comparisons with Hollywood action cinema. Choi Jin-hee, for example, positions an analysis of *Shiri* entirely through comparisons between the film and Hollywood. For Choi, *Shiri* is the 'most faithful [Korean blockbuster] to Hollywood narrative conventions', 'follows Hollywood dual-plot structure', 'borrows three major narrative strategies from Hollywood', and its action sequences conform 'to contemporary Hollywood stylistic conventions'.[154] In a similar fashion, Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer state that *Shiri* 'retains many of the elements typically associated with the international action thriller, particularly the Hollywood action blockbuster of the 1980s and

[154] Choi Jin-hee (2010) *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs* pp. 40-51

1990s'.[155] Shin and Stringer then compare elements of the film with US and Western-produced films such as *Nikita* (1990, France, Luc Besson), *Speed* (1994, US, Jan DeBont), and *Heat* (1995, US, Michael Mann), thereby implying influence from the West, and Hollywood in particular.

The issue is not that these comparisons occur; rather it is that observations such as this often obfuscate alternative approaches to understanding the action genre by perpetuating a hierarchy wherein Hollywood holds a position of power and influence. It would be hard to argue that *Shiri* did not engage in the bombast and spectacle commonly associated with Hollywood blockbusters, but by aligning such elements of cinema, and indeed the term blockbuster, in this manner Hollywood is afforded a continual dominance. An example of an alternative approach would be to look at the development of genre and industry throughout the East Asian region in the build-up to the arrival of South Korean 'blockbusters'. In doing so, it is clear that these attempts at big-budget, explosive action films were not new but rather an inevitable development considering the way in which East Asian action cinema had been trending at the time.

When placed into the context of genre history, films such as *Purple Storm /Chi Yue Fung Biu* (1999, Hong Kong, Teddy Chan Tak Sum), *Skyline Cruisers / Sau Tan Chi Saidoi* (2000, Hong Kong, Wilson Yip Wai Shun), and *Whiteout / Howaitoauto* (2000, Japan, Setsuro Wakamatsu) exist as merely the latest attempts at special effects-heavy action cinema, following on from previous attempts such as *Legend of Eight Samurai / Satomi Hakken-den* (1983, Japan, Kinji Fukasaku) or *Descendant of the Sun / Ri Jie* (1983, Hong Kong, Chor Yuen), rather than as confrontations or imitations of Hollywood. While South Korean cinema lacks the overt big-budget cinematic history of Japan or Hong Kong, there nevertheless exist signs of ambition towards achieving an action film akin to *Shiri*, as seen in *Bioman / Baiomaen* (1989, Jo Myeong-hwa and Kim Cheong-gi), *The Terrorist / Tereoriseuteu* (1995, Kim Yeong-bin), and *Runaway / Reoneowei* (1995, Kim Seong-su).

[155] Shin, Chi-Yun and Stringer, Julian (2007) *Storming the Big Screen: The* Shiri *Syndrome,* pp. 62

As will be discussed in more depth in **Section 3.3**, South Korean action cinema emerged in the 1960s with a clear influence from the developments occurring in Hong Kong cinema at the time. Despite this, there is a lack of recognition from Korean scholars when discussing this period. Instead, the action films of the 1960s and 1970s are belittled and glossed over. A clear example of the dismissal of the Hong Kong-influenced South Korean action cinema by Korean critics and scholars is found in the film critic Chung Sung-il's assertion that Korean films 'lost their national identity' and that the co-production period 'nearly destroyed the genre in Korea'.[156] Similarly, the scholar An Jae-seok has observed that 'critics despised Korean action films of the 1970s because of their "violent" and "deracinated" nature'.[157] Comments such as this, which concern notions of a clear and distinct national identity, only further emphasise the significant influence of Hong Kong cinema. Simultaneously, they position the decline of action cinema as a direct result of the Hong Kong influence and the implied lack of quality in the films being produced. While certainly many of the films produced throughout the 1960s and 1970s lacked budgets and relied on generic tropes, to notion that the films alone are responsible for the near destruction of the genre further highlights the degree to which these productions are belittled.

Throughout the 1980s, South Korean action cinema became almost non-existent, employed mostly as a means of toothless parody, either of Hong Kong action, as in *Crazy Boy / Dolai* (1985, Lee Du-yong), or the more explosive Hollywood action, as in *Bio-Man,* though this is not due to the action cinema of earlier decades.[158] One of the more significant reasons behind this vanishing

[156] Chung, Sung-il (2006) *Four Variations on Korean Genre Film: Tears, Screams, Violence and Laughter* pp. 10-11

[157] An Jae-seok (2006) *Deracinated Martial Arts Action Films* pp. 247

[158] Examples of such parody are found in the over-exaggerated movements and mimicry of Bruce Lee's style in *Crazy Boy,* and the over-the-top gung-ho attempts at aping *First Blood* (1982, US, Ted Kotcheff) in *Bioman. Crazy Boy* therefore provides yet another example of the degree to which Hong Kong action had embedded itself in South Korean culture. Despite the existence of *Bioman* and films like it displaying the acknowledgement of Hollywood action cinema, these films should not be read as influenced by Hollywood, but rather reacting against it. In 1986 the South Korean government revised the motion picture law in order to allow foreign companies the ability to engage in film production, importation, and distribution. This revision went against long-held fundamental and protectionist aspects of the motion picture law, leading to protest and outrage by Korean filmmakers. Gina Yu has argued that 'the fight against direct distribution was very significant, because it laid the foundations of political consciousness in the film world and enabled an

of the South Korean action cinema, right as it began to provide clear and consistent approaches to the genre, is found in the arrival of Chun Doo-hwan's dictatorship in 1980, following the assassination of the previous dictator Park Chung-hee. Despite Chun's harsh authoritarian rule and use of military force against the Korean people, the decline of the action genre was surprisingly not due to censorship. Instead, Chun realised the potential to appease the people, particularly their anger following the Gwangju massacre, through providing distractions. Known as the '3S' policy, the government promoted, and relaxed, certain laws, concerning sex, screen, and sports. For cinema in particular, it would be a combination of sex and screen, as 1982 saw the arrival of late night theatres matched with relaxed laws concerning the production of erotic cinema.[159] Naturally, films promoting violence and aggression against oppressive people and systems wouldn't sit well with a dictator, and so the production, and availability, of erotic cinema was supported as a means of distracting the people, thereby theoretically stemming the tide of protests.

At the same time, this period is also dismissed by omission. In *The History of Korean Cinema,* a seminal English-language text on South Korean cinema by the prominent film critic Lee Yeong-il, action cinema of the 1970s is barely mentioned, given just half a page of discussion (as opposed to the multiple pages afforded to 'literary films' and 'hostess melodramas'), and is introduced with the claim that action cinema aimed to 'pursue just amusement purpose [sic] for audiences'.[160] Relegation such as this contributes to the rejection of the significant role that Hong

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extensive resistance movement' (Yu, 2006, pp. 305). While the notion that political consciousness began with retaliation against foreign interests in the 1980s largely overlooks the overwhelmingly political films produced throughout the twentieth century prior, the reaction against these changes nevertheless established a dichotomy between 'Korean' and foreign (largely meaning US) cinema. As such, films like *Bioman* which lift heavily from Hollywood action films can be seen as an attempt to both mock and challenge the new and increased presence of Hollywood films on South Korean screens.

[159] Lee Yeon-Ho, Adjunct Professor at the School of Film, TV & Multimedia, The Korean National University of Arts, has commented on this change in cinema culture, recalling that: 'being university students at the time we lived a very strange life. We threw rocks in protest against Jeon Doo-hwan's oppressive politics during the day, and at night we giggled watching cheap erotic films that were in tune with Jeon Doo-hwan's policy of liberalization' (Lee Yeon-Ho, 2006, pp. 278-79). It is interesting to see the arrival of erotic films such as *Madame Aema / Aema Buin* (1982) coincides almost perfectly with the sharp decline of action films.

[160] Lee, Yeong-il (1988) *The History of Korean Cinema* pp. 205

Kong cinema has played in the development of South Korean action films. As such, it is rare that studies into contemporary South Korean action cinema are informed by this history, which, as will be evidenced throughout this chapter, is integral to understanding the action genre in South Korea.

This chapter therefore seeks to address these imbalances: on one hand to diminish the influence and dominance of Hollywood, and on the other to raise the profile of the important role played by Hong Kong action cinema of the 1960s and 70s. In order to establish a historical underpinning to the genre, it is necessary to first look at the use of action prior in Korean cinema prior to the 1960s.

3.2: Early Korean Action Cinema

The history of Korean action cinema is less consistent than the history of its melodrama films. Significant to the genre's lack of clarity over time are the free, uncritical application of the action genre to films which employ sporadic action sequences at best, and the dearth of surviving films which supposedly contribute to the development of action cinema in colonial-era Korea. Beyond a few surviving images and brief plot descriptions there is no way to properly integrate films like *The Way of the Iron Man* / *Cheolindo* (1930) or *The Story of Hong Gil-dong* / *Hong Gil-dong Jeon* series (1936) into the history of action cinema with any real certainty.[161] The surviving images, if nothing else, at least show scenes of action being staged. At the same time, static images omit any sense of choreography, pacing, or physical action – all elements integral to understanding action films - and as such these images can only ever hint at the potential of these action scenes.

This lack of surviving works which exist mainly within the framework of the action genre is a severe loss to any studies into Korean action cinema. Thankfully, many instances of action occur

[161] The loss of the *Hong Gil-dong* films in particular is unfortunate with regard to this study. As will be discussed in **Section 3.4.c**, the use of folk martial arts heroes is a common element of Hong Kong action cinema. These Hong Gil-dong films, if they existed today, would therefore have provided a particularly interesting point of comparison with regard to how folk heroes are depicted on screen in action cinema.

in other, surviving films. These action sequences cause problems of their own however, as they lead to the mislabelling of such films as belonging to the action genre, when in fact the films themselves only briefly include action sequences. An early example of an action sequence can be found in *Angels on the Streets* / *Jib Eobneun Cheonsa* (1941). During the film's denouement, a fight occurs at the orphanage between the owners and some criminals. Punches are thrown and tables are tossed over, before the fight spills outside of the building, quickly turning into a chase as the scammers flee. The chase is short-lived, however, as a bridge collapses while the scammers are running across it, bringing an end to the sequence.

Looking at the scene through its construction, there is an obvious attempt to intensify the action, and then build up to a specific moment, namely the collapsing bridge. The dynamics of the action serve to increase tension: a scuffle, a chase, and then finally a moment of spectacle to bring it to its conclusion. Therefore this brief moment of action, in what is otherwise a social drama film, provides a rudimentary understanding of not only the form of the action scene, but also its function as a way to heighten the dramatic tensions and develop themes found throughout the rest of the film. The collapsing of the bridge reinforces the subversive duality at play throughout the closing scenes of *Homeless Angels*. On one hand, the collapsing bridge signals a literal collapsing of infrastructure as a result of infighting among differing ideological groups (the pro-Japanese orphanage and the aggressive and unruly Korean criminals). With the reform of the criminals following the collapse of the bridge, the film allows the pro-Japanese sentiment of the orphanage owners to be positioned as a unifying element in society. On the other hand, however, the collapsing bridge restricts freedom of movement, and in particular a means of escape from the increasing Japanese assimilation of the Korean people. Seen in this way, the collapsing bridge is positioned as a tragic event which signals the end of retaliation against the colonial government and those who support it.

Unfortunately, action scenes in Korean cinema would fail to maintain this amalgamation of action and thematic development. Following Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945, so-called 'liberation films' were prolific throughout the latter half of the 1940s. These films championed Korean freedom fighters and rebels against the colonial Japanese government, celebrating liberation while simultaneously reinforcing a sense of Korean national identity which had been stripped away by Japan's attempt to assimilate the Korean people into the Japanese empire. As such, these films employ action in order to depict Koreans fighting back against Japanese oppression.

The action scenes in films such as *Hurrah for Freedom / Jayu Manse* (1946, Choi In-gyu) therefore revolve around shootouts between the Japanese and the Koreans. Here, the function of the action is quasi-propagandistic, and employed in an attempt to 'rebuild' notions of Korean national identity against the antagonistic Japanese colonial government. By emphasising the struggle against the Japanese, the action in *Hurrah for Freedom* functions primarily as a means of providing tension and excitement for audiences now freely able to enjoy retaliation against their prior oppressors. Even though the film remains today in a damaged and partial state, it is, in this case, still possible to gain a sense of the action from the surviving footage. The central action scene of the film sees a freedom fighter (Jeong Chang-gun) pinned down by Japanese forces. He hides inside a house and fires out at the advancing forces, all the while attempting to convince a woman to flee the house. The action itself is largely dependent on guns, apart from a final scuffle between the freedom fighter and a Japanese captain before the freedom fighter is shot and captured. The woman is also shot during this scene, and so the scene ends with the two Koreans lying injured on the floor. The action here therefore serves the dramatic tension first and foremost, cutting away from discussions within the house to emphasise the growing numbers of Japanese troops outside of it, and including sporadic gunfire to increase the immediate pressure of the situation. The fist fight therefore acts as a climax to the scene, wherein the Japanese must be confronted directly, but even here a gun is used to bring a close to the action. As such, this

action scene, and indeed earlier chase sequences in the film, are focused primarily on increasing narrative tension and thus employ action as a means of spectacle.

It is important to distinguish here that *Hurrah for Freedom* and other liberation films use action scenes to depict conflict primarily as a means of catharsis and retaliation. In this way, the action scenes prioritise an ideological function. It is important that the heroes of these films are shown to be actively fighting against the Japanese, and at the same time they must be positioned in a sense of peril so that their eventual success carries stronger national ideology. The triumph of the hero in these films has more to do with the triumph of the nation over Japanese assimilation, than each film's specific narrative.

Following the reformation of the film industry post-Civil War, the use of action sequences as an exclamation point to verbal conflict or provocation would become prominent in South Korean films. In *The Flower in Hell* / *Jiok Hwa* (1958), a man from the countryside, Dong-shik (Jo Hae-won) journeys to Seoul in order to find his older brother, encountering a city that is both filled with American soldiers and fostering an underground network of Korean prostitutes and criminals. The man finds his brother planning a major supply heist against the Americans. The younger brother's experiences in Seoul are largely defined by his inability to understand the harsh and cruel realities of the post-War, American-occupied urban life. His naivety causes him to interact with numerous Korean men who are angry and bitter at their position in life, and looking to lash out in an effort to reaffirm their masculinity. It is in these scenes, as well as the climactic heist, that *The Flower in Hell* employs action.

One of the film's early action sequences provides a strong example of the use of action as a way to visually emphasise verbal aggression. Attempting to chase down a purse snatcher, the younger brother knocks shoulders with a group of angry youths, and is subsequently berated and attacked. The action of the scene is short, with one punch being thrown and the younger brother falling to the floor. There is an economical and punctual use of violence in order to emphasise the

aggression within the scene. A single punch is all that's necessary in order to fulfil the function of the action: it establishes Seoul as a site of tough, dog-eat-dog masculinity, providing a harsh response to the young brother's attempt at chivalry. The action itself is staged and choreographed in a simple manner; the attacker runs up and punches the younger brother, with the film cutting at the moment of impact and showing Dong-shik falling to the ground. The editing of this brief interaction evidences the perfunctory nature of action prior to its emergence as a definable genre, in that the themes dictate the action, rather than allowing the action itself to develop the themes. This is further emphasised by the truncated nature of these scenes, wherein the action itself is not given time to develop.

South Korean crime films produced throughout the 1950s and 60s also embody a similar use of action, albeit at times more violent and bloody, owing to the subject matter expected of the genre. Both *Black Hair* / *Geomeun Meori* (1964, Lee Man-hui) and *A Bonanza* / *Nodaji* (1961, Jeong Chang-hwa) feature action scenes in order to provide moments of heightened drama. That said, both *A Bonanza* and *Black Hair* feature a moment which goes beyond the common staging or visual representation of action during this period.

During the finale of *A Bonanza* a fistfight is shot using quick cuts to close-ups as punches are thrown; each moment of action is largely contained within its own shot. In other words, every punch is followed by a cut to the next shot, which contains one punch before moving to the next shot, and so on. This makes sense in one scene, in which a gang of thugs attack someone and essentially punch their victim back and forth amongst each other. The action is either masked on screen, with the victim's back being towards the camera before they are spun around by the weight of the punch, or shown to be happening off screen, with an attacker on top of their victim, punching down towards the person outside of the shot.

The same is true of action scenes in *Black Hair*, with violence largely occurring off screen, such as a knife being thrown into the back of someone, which shows the victim facing the camera

first and reacting, before cutting to a shot of their back with the knife now embedded. In *Black Hair,* there is a brief close-up of a bloody body after it has been hit by a passing train during a fight. These brief moments suggest a desire on behalf of the filmmakers in seeing action sequences become better choreographed, or more visceral. Yet, despite these shifts and brief moments of progression towards a more kinetic or visceral employment of action, these films still used action as only a minor element within films which focus far more heavily on other genres, more specifically the crime film and the family drama. As such, the use of action during these periods was too brief to properly formulate a generic approach to such sequences.

With action scenes being used in this way throughout early and mid-century Korean cinema, there is a clear understanding of action as primarily being a provider of spectacle, rather than as a complex thematic vehicle. Such use of action relegated the action sequence to a tool employed by other, more easily definable, as well as already established, genres. For action to become a genre in its own right there needed to be a shift in how it was used by Korean filmmakers. With this shift in mind, undoubtedly the most significant influence on the development of action cinema in South Korea is that of Hong Kong cinema, not Hollywood.

By tracing the history of the action genre in South Korea, there is a clear moment at which the genre blossoms, becomes definable, and becomes a prominent genre in the South Korean film landscape. This moment occurs throughout the 1960s and 70s, and coincides with the interactions between the Hong Kong and South Korean film industries. During this time Hong Kong cinema was itself going through a period of experimentation and challenges to established genres, and the changes which occurred in Hong Kong also had a lasting effect on South Korean cinema. For just over a decade the cinema of the two countries became interlinked, and the action cinema produced by both was transformed. [162] In order to fully understand the development of the action genre in South Korea, it is therefore necessary to first analyse the

[162] The time period covered by this co-operation begins with *The Last Woman of Shang / Da Ji* (1965) and, for the purposes of this study, ends with *Broken Oath / Po Jie* (1977).

shifts occurring within Hong Kong cinema in the lead-up to the period of co-operation between the two countries.

3.3: The Changing Face of Hong Kong Action Cinema

3.3.a: *Wuxia* and its Transition to Violence

In contrast to South Korea, action films had been prevalent in Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese cinema, since films first began to be produced in their respective areas. Grady Hendrix asserts that "between 1928 and 1930, *wuxia*[163] made up more than half of all Chinese films"[164], with film serials such as Zhang Shichuan's 18-part *The Burning of Red Lotus Temple / Huoshao Hongliansi* (1928-1931) or the 13-part *Swordswoman of Huangjiang /Huangjiang Nuxia* (1930).

One of the few surviving films from this period, *Red Heroine / Hongxia* (1929), features a narrative built around vengeance, wherein a slave girl, Yun Mei (Fan Xuepeng) is freed and trained in order to bring her oppressors to justice. These films, beyond providing a precursor example of the female knight errant, which would come to be a prominent figure in Hong Kong martial arts cinema, also feature examples of other essential aspects of the *wuxia* film, namely magical elements and superhuman abilities, notably when characters fly through the air or appear in a cloud of smoke.

During Japan's military advancement into China throughout the 1930s, in the lead up to the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), many directors from Shanghai cinema relocated to Hong Kong. For Zhang Zhen the various tensions during the late 1930s, not only in terms of ideology and conflict, but also in terms of cinema aesthetics and the transition from silent to sound film production "carried over into occupied Shanghai and, later on, into Hong Kong, where segments

[163] *Wuxia* is most often translated as 'chivalrous hero'. The closest Korean language equivalent would be *Muhyeob,* meaning 'heroism'. Rather than confuse the text with multiple foreign terminologies, *wuxia* will be used throughout this chapter. This is also done to emphasise the influence of *wuxia* on the development of the Korean action film. For similar reasons, the Korean term *hwalgeuk,* essentially meaning 'action film', will also be avoided.

[164] Hendrix (2014) *Swordplay, Kung Fu, Gangsters, and Ghosts*, pp. 66

of Shanghai cinema later migrated".[165] Stephen Teo highlights "the infusion of talent, capital, and equipment from Shanghai"[166] as one of the main reasons behind the survival of the Hong Kong film industry during and following the Second World War, before going on to argue that "the influx of the first generation of Shanghai's film-making community into Hong Kong helped to foster the *wuxia* genre in the Cantonese cinema"[167] pointing specifically to the popular series of *Wong Fei-Hung* films produced during the 1950s and directed by the Shanghai filmmaker Hu Peng.

The revival of these Cantonese martial arts productions throughout the 1950s set in motion a new boom period of *wuxia* cinema production, which would continue into the early and mid-1960s with the production of *wuxia* films like the three-part serial *Secret Book / Xian He Shenzhen* (1961-2) or the four-part *The Golden Hairpin / Bixie Jinchai* (1963-4). A representative example of Cantonese *wuxia* productions during this revival is *The Jade Bow / Yunhai Yugong Yuan* (1966, Fu Chi and Cheung Sing-Yim). The film follows a young swordsman who sets out to right a wrong committed by his master twenty years previous by killing a tyrannical leader. Along the way, he encounters two women warriors who also wish to kill the leader, and the three ultimately work together to achieve their collective goal. Naturally, during their interactions a love triangle forms. This romantic narrative is eventually resolved by one woman giving up the man after being mortally wounded. In terms of action, *The Jade Bow* makes heavy use of wires and effects in order to heighten the spectacle of the fight sequences beyond the expected form of the time. One particularly incredible moment sees the villain use his inner *chi* (power) to levitate, thereby increasing the pressure of the hold upon his opponent to the degree that the ground beneath them begins to crack.[168]

[165] Zhang (2005) *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema*, 1896-1937, pp. xxxiii
[166] Teo (2011) *The Hong Kong Cantonese Cinema: Emergence, Development and Decline*, pp. 105
[167] Ibid. pp. 109
[168] *The Jade Bow* is also notable for its action choreography by Lau Kar-Leung, who would go on to be one of the most successful action choreographers in Hong Kong cinema, as well as the director of essential Shaw Brothers productions such as *The Spiritual Boxer/ Shen Da* (1975), *Heroes of the East / Zhong Hua Zhang Fu*

The ending of *The Jade Bow* is important in helping pinpoint the formal changes which would come to define the more masculine- and violence-focused martial arts cinema as the genre evolved. The final fight sequence of *The Jade Bow* is anti-climactic in terms of the potential signalled by the film's earlier fight scenes, in that there is practically no action to speak of. The main villain is blinded, and is quickly dispatched by a sword being flung into his back as he attempts to grab one of the women. At the same time the young swordsman, the protagonist of the film, is locked behind a trap door for the majority of the scene, being freed at the last moment to swiftly dispatch his enemy. The film then focuses on the love triangle between the three main characters, before eventually killing one of them off, to conclude with a bittersweet image of the two survivors, now free to marry, standing at the grave of their fallen comrade. *The Jade Bow* therefore ends by prioritising the conclusion of its romantic story over its action story.

As Teo notes, 'romanticism was a trait which endured into the martial arts film', romanticism here referring in terms of both the narrative, with love stories playing a key role alongside martial arts sequences, as well as the thematic romanticising of the hero and their quest for justice.[169] As will be discussed in **Section 3.3.b**, such an ending, and indeed the inclusion of romantic narrative strands in general, would become rare as Shaw Brothers attempted to break free from such traditions, replacing romance with narratives of brotherhood and bloody vengeance. For Teo these films, which were for the most part based on new stories by emerging martial arts authors such as Jin Tong or Jin Yong, "reintroduced stock fantasy ingredients of the old school, repackaged with higher production values and 'modernised' special effects", which resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on "spectacle".[170]

(1978), *The 36th Chamber of Shaolin / Shaolin San Shin Liu Fang* (1978), and *The Eight Diagram Pole Fighter / Wu Lang Ba Gua Gun* (1984), among others. The prominent emphasis on an action director also helps foreground the prominent role that action would come to take in Hong Kong cinema.

[169] Teo (1997) *Hong Kong Cinema; The Extra Dimensions*, pp. 97

[170] Teo (2016) *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema: The Wuxia Tradition*, p. 85

While the return of Cantonese language *wuxia* productions during the 1950s set in motion a second boom period of *wuxia* cinema production, it is the Mandarin language Shaw Brothers productions which initially had the furthest reach in terms of influence within the East Asia region. During the early days of the revival of *wuxia* in Cantonese language productions, Shaw Brothers continued to produce popular, award-winning, and most importantly non-action films. Instead, Shaw Brothers was active in producing period pieces such as *The Kingdom and the Beauty / Jiang Shan Mei Ren* (1959, Li Han-Hsiang) or *The Love Eterne / Liang Shan Bo Yu Zhu Ying Tai* (1962, Li Han-Hsiang), contemporary dramas like *Rear Entrance / Hou Men* (1959, Li Han-Hsiang) and *Love Without End / Bu Liao Qing* (1961, Doe Ching), and even the occasional ghost story or horror film, with *The Enchanting Shadow / Ching Nu Yu Hun* (1960, Li Han-Hsiang). In 1965, through their official publication *Southern Screen,* Shaw Brothers announced what Needham calls the "new *wuxia* century"[171] and what Hendrix terms a "colour *wuxia* offensive".[172] The idea of 'new *wuxia*' was then simultaneously a reaction against the traditional style of recent Cantonese language *wuxia*, and a way to generate interest in a new style of genre being produced by a studio which had previously not engaged seriously with martial arts cinema, or the action genre in general.[173]

Though King Hu Chin-Chuan's *Come Drink with Me / Da Zui Xia* (1966) is often heralded by academics, fans, and filmmakers as the arrival of Shaw's 'new school *wuxia*', films of this genre were produced and released earlier. Most prominent of these releases is *Temple of the Red Lotus / Jiang Hu Qi Xia* (1965, Hsu Tseng-Hung), whose original release trailer boasted that it was "a swashbuckling adventure-romance, unlike anything you've ever seen". As the first film produced

[171] Needham (2008) *Fashioning Modernity: Hollywood and the Hong Kong Musical 1957-64*, p. 45
[172] Hendrix (2014), p. 68
[173] Of course, depictions of violence occurred in Shaw Brothers productions prior to the arrival of *wuxia* cinema. A prime example can be found in *Beyond the Great Wall / Wang Zhao Jun (*1964), a film which for the most part exists as a tragic romance. During a battle sequence, however, brief close-ups show men suffering from battle wounds, with some of them coughing up blood as they are pierced by arrows. Such shots stand in stark contrast to the rest of the film, which emphasises the longing gazes and choral song sequences expected of the genre. These visceral moments, though minor, at least signal the murmurings of heightened on-screen violence in the lead up to the action genre's transformation in Hong Kong.

by Shaw Brothers that was marketed and committed to the *wuxia* genre, it is unsurprising that *Temple of the Red Lotus* features all the aspects expected of the *wuxia* film: errant male and female knights (and the romanticism associated with such characters), a quest for justice, magical abilities, and even a chamber filled with traps. Beyond *Temple of the Red Lotus,* 1965 would also see the release of *The Twin Swords* / *Yuan Yang Jian Xia* (Hsu Tseng-Hung), and *The Butterfly Chalice* / *Hu Die Bei* (Yuan Qiu-Feng and Chang Cheh), reinforcing the year as a significant moment of arrival for action cinema at Shaw Brothers.

Of these formative productions, *The Butterfly Chalice* exists as an interesting precursor to the transition which martial arts cinema would face at the end of the decade. While the narrative is a romanticised *wuxia* common of the period, the film features action scenes with distinctly different stylistic and formal approaches. The first action sequence in the film occurs as the film's protagonist, Tien Yu-Chuan (Chun Feng), halts a group of thugs from terrorising a local market. Prior to *The Butterfly Chalice*, Chen Feng largely featured in dramatic and comedic roles for Shaw Brothers in films like *Return of the Phoenix* / *Feng Huan Chao* (1963, Li Han-Hsiang and Kao Li) and *The Female Prince* / *Shuan Feng Ji Yuan* (1964, Chow Sze-Luk). As such, there is a notable lack of confidence in the opening action scene's form and construction. While the choreography and movements within the scene are perfectly serviceable, if unremarkable, for the time, the film occludes the fight sequence by cutting to shots of people witnessing the fight. The film cuts away from the fight or cuts to a different angle of the fight after every significant move, removing the potential for any spectacle to arise from the action.[174]

In stark contrast to this, there is an action scene featured later in the film which is built around a minor character, General Shi (Lo Lieh). Unlike Chun Feng, Lo Lieh had received martial arts training prior to his work with Shaw Brothers, and *The Butterfly Chalice* marked his first significant

[174] In this way, the staging of this action scene in *The Butterfly Chalice* carries similarities to the heavily edited, match-on-action approach taken by action scenes in South Korean films previously discussed, for example *A Bonanza*.

appearance in a film. As such, the scene displays more complicated and realistic choreography, and features longer shot lengths, emphasising Lo's ability to fight multiple opponents at once without the need for editing. The scene is also notable for its inclusion of bloody injuries, shot in close-up. In this way, the shift in visual presentation and formal construction of action scenes literally evidences the shifting approaches and reconsiderations of the genre occurring during the mid-decade period. At the same time, by featuring Lo Lieh, an unknown but trained entity in a prominent action sequence, the film recognises the necessity to create new stars which are primed for the demands of this new, more violent form of action cinema.

3.3.b: Kung-Fu Cinema: Masculinity and Bloodshed

It is important to acknowledge that *The Butterfly Chalice* was co-directed by Chang Cheh, a prominent figure in the history of Hong Kong cinema who would go on to become synonymous with the masculinisation and violence associated with Shaw Brothers cinema of the late-1960s and 1970s. Hendrix, invoking specific imagery from Chang's *Boxer from Shantung / Ma Yong Zhen* (1972), claims that "Chang Cheh gave audiences young, male, working class heroes stripped to the waist and smeared with blood, dying with an axe in their guts", emphasising the strong emphasis Chang placed on both masculine heroes and bloody violence.[175] Perhaps unsurprisingly, Chang's films sought to make the male warrior the centre piece of *wuxia* cinema, attempting to bring about the remasculinisation of the genre after its long association with the strong female characters, like those performed by Chin Tsi-Ang in Shanghai cinema of the late 1920s, and Cheng Pei-Pei or Connie Chan Po-Chu during the *wuxia* revival of the 1950s and 60s.[176] Chang Cheh is also instrumental in the shift from sword-based martial arts movies towards the more body-focused kung fu as the primary feature of Hong Kong action cinema. Teo highlights that, when compared to the conventions of the *wuxia* genre, kung fu 'emphasised the body and

[175] Hendrix (2014), p. 68

[176] This includes the very films Shaw Brothers was championing at the time, including female-centric action films such as *The Sword and the Lute / Qin Jian En Chou* (1967) or *Swordswomen Three / Jiang Hu San Nu Xia* (1970).

training rather than fantasy or the supernatural', before going to speak of Chang Cheh specifically, stating that:

> 'He [Chang] stripped them [action film protagonists] of their romanticism and simplified them into one-dimensional characters, going to great lengths to make his movies more violent and more homogenous (literally so, by using complete male casts) without diversions into romantic sub-plots.'[177]

In terms of kung fu cinema, its prominence is thematically visualised during the opening of *Men from the Monastery / Shaolin Zi Di* (1974), wherein folk hero Fong Sai Yuk (Alexander Fu Sheng) engages in a trial whereby he faces numerous armed foes with only his fists. Fong handily defeats his opponents, with a confidence and poise that serves as a metaphor for kung fu's usurping of the *wuxia* style as the central mode of action for Hong Kong cinema. In this way, the opening of *Men from the Monastery,* with its thematic 'boasting', cements kung fu's dominance and provides a rather definitive statement concerning the future of Hong Kong action cinema.[178]

Concerning violence and masculinity, Lo Lieh's brief performance in *The Butterfly Chalice,* though clearly significant as a point of transition, was merely a harbinger to the gory, violent battles which would define 1970s Hong Kong action cinema. The maturity of this transition to violence and masculinity is best exemplified in films such as *Boxer from Shantung.*[179]

Ostensibly a rags-to-riches story in which a poor but skilled fighter, the eponymous Ma Yong-Zhen (Chen Kuan-Tai), is hired by gangs and climbs the ladder of social hierarchy, *Boxer from Shantung* follows the narrative framework of a crime film, but undoubtedly thrives on its action sequences. The film's finale, a half hour fight featuring Ma Yong-Zhen taking on an entire gang

[177] Teo (1997), pp. 100

[178] While *wuxia* films continued to be produced by Hong Kong, the point here is not that kung fu films replaced *wuxia,* but that kung fu became the dominant mode of action. This dominance would of course be confirmed, and immortalised, by the arrival of films like *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow / Se Ying Diu Sau* (1978) and *Drunken Master / Zui Quan* (1978) and their star, Jackie Chan Kong-Sang.

[179] *The Boxer from Shantung* is not the only example, with films like *Vengeance / Bao Chou* (1970) and *The Chinese Boxer / Long Hu Dou* (1970) providing similar prioritisation of masculinity and violence.

by himself, remains one of the most violent and masculine conclusions to any Hong Kong film. This finale is foreshadowed earlier in the film by an action scene wherein a gang leader, Tan Si, (David Chiang Da-Wei) is assassinated by a rival gang.

This assassination of Tan Si is exemplary of the new masculinity of Hong Kong action cinema. After being stabbed in the stomach by one of his attackers, Tan removes the knife, adjusts the cigarette holder in his mouth, and then attacks the gang with the very knife used against him; a knife covered in his own blood. Tan successfully dispatches the majority of the gang (though the leaders get away), and sits back in his rickshaw and adjusts his cigarette holder once more, reflective and smiling before finally succumbing to his wound. While the violence in this scene is expectedly bloody, it is instead the display of stoic masculinity in the face of adversaries, and ultimately death, which emphasises the shift in thematic concerns of the new action film. The unyielding intensity embodied in Tan's use of the dagger, the very weapon which has mortally wounded him, to fight against his attackers enforces a heroic defiance against both oppression and, indeed, the natural order of things. By dispatching his opponents and then resting in his rickshaw, Tan is afforded the agency to die on his own terms. This notion is reinforced by shots depicting Tan reflecting on death the moment that the fight is over. He calmly looks out at the landscape, and looks at the face of one of his now-deceased foes, before deciding to climb back into the rickshaw. His death is therefore imbued with a sense of heroism and martyrdom; it is elevated not only by his successful retaliation against his assassins, but by his stoic and unflinching acceptance of his end. In this way, in his death Tan denies his enemies any sense of victory or satisfaction.

Tan's death is therefore largely paralleled by Ma Yong-Zhen's actions in the film's conclusion. Ma, who is shown throughout the film to look up to Tan, as both came from humble beginnings, enters a restaurant in order to confront the gang responsible for Tan's death. The half hour fight scene begins with Ma being stabbed in the gut by a hatchet, and the fight ends with Ma having

killed almost all of the gang members, including its leaders, before being killed himself by a random member of the gang. Throughout the conflict Ma fights against the gang with the hatchet still embedded firmly in his abdomen. He finally removes the hatchet after vanquishing the vast majority of the gang, and uses it to slit the throat of the gang leader, avenging Tan's assassination in the process. Having achieved his quest, Ma begins laughing and is eventually killed by a gang member, who slashes him in the back and chest. Ma continues to laugh until he falls down dead among the dozens of bodies he is responsible for, as Ma's allies rush into the restaurant and kill the sole surviving gang member.

The connections between Ma and Tan's ultimate battles are clear: they both fight against overwhelming numbers and succeed in their attack, despite suffering a significant wound at the beginning of the fight: they both seize the weapon intended for their murder and turn it against their foes, and finally both deny their enemies any victory from their deaths. As such, the deaths of Ma and Tan are bound together through a thematic brotherhood which champions their shared traits of heroic masculinity.

In the space of less than a decade, the action cinema in Hong Kong had transformed immensely. By abandoning its romantic archetypes and magical spectacle in favour of bloody violence enacted by men focused solely on the destruction of their enemies, the new Hong Kong action cinema emphasised action absolutely. Of special interest to this study, however, is exactly how this shift in Hong Kong cinema affected the development, both in terms of film form and themes, of South Korean action cinema.

3.4 South Korean Action Cinema Emerges

3.4.a: Co-operation between South Korea and Hong Kong

Rather than the external shift occurring in the action genre of Hong Kong cinema, there is also a significant change in South Korea that is more concerned with the domestic political situation of the time. On the 16th of May, 1961, Park Chung-hee staged a military coup, overthrowing the democratically elected government. Kim Hyung-a argues that "following the coup, Park immediately sought international legitimacy by adopting a strongly anti-Communist stance and policies focused on economic development and national reconstruction".[180] As part of Park's desire to improve South Korea's economy, the idea of economic nationalism arose as a foundational aspect with regard to South Korean industries. For Moon Chung-in and Jun Byung-joon, Park's economic nationalism "combined import protection, industrial policy, and export promotion to transform infant industries into internationally competitive engines of growth".[181] This sense of economic nationalism also functioned within the Korean film industry. 1962 saw the implementation of Korea's first Motion picture law, and Kim Mee-hyun has argued that despite "many revisions, it retained its basic principle of trying to harness films to nationalist development".[182] Though one priority of the motion picture legislation was to industrialise the film industry, through requiring specific criteria from production companies in order for them to be registered and able to continue producing films, the law also awarded central control to the government, allowing for censorship of not only screenplays but also the completed film.

One company which benefitted from the motion picture law was Shin Films, a production company led by the prominent filmmaker Shin Sang-Ok. Shin had found earlier success prior to Park's coup, with films such as *A College Woman's Confession / Eoneu Yeodaesaengeui Gobaek* (1958), *The Flower in Hell* (1959), *Romantic Papa / Romaenseu Bbabba* (1960), and his status would only grow with the success of *My Mother and the Houseguest / Sarangbang Sonnimgwa Eomeoni* (1961) and *Seong Chunhyang* (1961), both released in the year Park first came to power. Bae Su-kyong highlights the significant position Shin Films played within Park's industrialisation of the industry, claiming that

[180] Kim Hyung-a (2004) *Korea's Development Under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization* 1961-1979, p. 69
[181] Moon Chung-in and Jun Byung-joon (2011) *Modernization Strategy: Ideas and Influences*, p. 115
[182] Kim Mee-hyun (2006) *The Motion Picture Law and the Industrial Structure*, p. 174

"Shin films exercised enormous influence by making more than thirty films a year, succeeding at the box office, winning domestic and international film awards, and exporting many films into the Southeast Asia market".[183] In reality, Shin Films represented the ideal of Park's economic nationalism, but the success of Shin Films differed greatly from many other production companies of the time. Most notably, the restriction on foreign films through an import quota system designed to aid South Korean productions backfired.

Park Ji-yeon argues that "scarcity inflated the value of foreign films", and that a "hierarchy between Korean and foreign films developed, subordinating Korean film production to the import of foreign films".[184] Nevertheless, the success of Shin Films stood as an example of what could be achieved through the industrialisation of the Korean film industry, and therefore it was only natural that Shin Films would eventually begin to look beyond Korea and towards regional co-productions.

If Korean cinema produced during the Japanese colonial period was influenced by various narrative or stylistic approaches by Japanese filmmakers, then it was an influence which was thrust upon Korean filmmakers, rather than something Korean filmmakers consciously aspired to learn from and interrogate. The era of regional co-production between Shin Films and Hong Kong production companies, then, marks the first time that South Korean filmmakers consciously chose to work with other regional industries. Prior to Park's 1961 coup, the earliest co-operation between South Korea and Hong Kong was the Shaw production *Love with an Alien / Inguk Jeongwon* (1958) co-directed by the Korean Jeong Chang-geun and the Chinese Tu Guang-Qi. *Love with an Alien* starred the rising Korean actor Kim Jin-gyu, and his love interest was Yu Ming. Both were stars in their respective countries at the time of production. The narrative itself prioritises romance, aided by its recognition of the nationalities of the two stars, generating a sense of forbidden romance between them.

[183] Bae Su-kyong (2006) *The Industrialisation Policy for Korean Cinema, and the Birth of Shin Films,* p. 181
[184] Park Ji-yeon (2006) *The Enactment and Enforcement of the Motion Picture Law*, p. 179

By the time Shin Film and Shaw Brothers worked together, the revival of *wuxia* was well underway in Hong Kong. The existence of a co-operation, with the movement of directors and actions between countries, like *Love with an Alien* stands as an example of the mutual awareness between the Hong Kong and South Korean film industries, able to work together through an understanding of their respective popular cinemas of the time. Rather than create martial arts cinema, the co-productions between Shin Film and Shaw Brothers covered many other popular genres, including the period drama, as in Choi In-hyeon and Griffin Yueh Feng's *The Last Woman of Shang* (Korean: *Biryeoni Wangbi Dalgi,* Chinese:*Da Ji,* 1964), the spy film, with Shin Sang-ok's *The International Secret Agents* (1967), and war films like Choi Gyeong-ok's *The Partisan Lovers* (1969). Park Ji-Yin points out that most of the co-productions "were shot using Hong Kong studios and locations in Korea", and that "a Korean actor played the male lead, and a Hong Kong actress the female lead"[185], showing faith in the successful casting combination of *Love with an Alien*. While it is clear that the co-productions between Shin Film and Shaw Brothers allowed for two film industries to benefit through working together, the lack of action films is rather surprising, given the recent revival of the genre in Hong Kong and its emergence in South Korea.

Though the Shin Film/Shaw Brothers productions did not produce any action films, Shin Film's eagerness to advance into international markets through co-production, a movement spurred on by Park's ideals for economic development, ultimately opened the door for many Korean filmmakers and actors to transition into working within the Hong Kong film industry. It is at this point, following the success of King Hu's *Come Drink with Me* at the Korean box office in 1967, that Korean filmmakers and actors begin to work on martial arts productions in Hong Kong. At the same time, Korean martial arts productions gain prominence once again during the tail end of the 1960s. The flow of talent into Hong Kong from South Korea would leave a lasting impact on martial arts cinema, and directors such as Jeong Chang-hwa and Jang Il-ho would continue to work in Hong Kong well after the end of the co-productions between Shin Film and Shaw

[185] Park Ji-Yin (2006) *Korean Cinema's Leap into the World: Korean-Hong Kong co-productions,* p. 197

Brothers , producing essential works in the action genre such as *King Boxer / Five Fingers of Death* (1972), *The Skyhawk / Huang Fei Hong Xiao Lin Quan* (1974), and *Thunderbolt Fist / Pi Li Quan* (1972), which shall be discussed in greater detail in **Section 3.4.b**. South Korean martial artists would also come to be heavily featured in Hong Kong productions following the initial co-productions between the two industries, often in films attempting to capitalise on the popularity of Bruce Lee following his passing. A Korean actor who found success beyond the shadow of Bruce Lee was Kim Yong-ho, better known in Hong Kong as Casanova Wong, the star of the martial arts classic *Warriors Two / Zan Xian Sheng Yu Zhao Qian Hua* (1978, Sammo Hung Kam-Bo).

What is immediately obvious from this brief history of co-production and talent migration between the South Korean and Hong Kong film industries is the strong bias towards movement into Hong Kong, rather than a two way exchange of personnel. Indeed, Park Ji-yin claims that "most of the co-productions during this period were just Hong Kong films with Korean participants" and that "Hong Kong films were often imported disguised as co-produced films after being dubbed into Korean, because there was a tacit agreement to exempt such films from the foreign film import quota".[186] It is clear that, despite the initial desire to enter into co-production emerging through the push for economic nationalism and industrialisation on the part of South Korea, it would be Hong Kong that would reap the majority of the benefits from this period of interaction. Not only did they gain the talent of significant filmmakers from South Korea, but they were also able to penetrate into the South Korean film market, which had been previously closed off to them by import quotas.[187]

[186] Ibid. pp. 199

[187] Brian Yecies and Shim Aegyung (2015) provide one of the more detailed examinations of the relationship between South Korean and Hong Kong production companies during this time. Their study focuses largely on the degree to which certain films were in fact 'co-productions' or not, arguing that 'names of these Korean stars and directors were promoted in the credits of Hong Kong films to further the illusion that they were genuine co-productions' (pp. 90). It is for this reason that this study refers to these films as 'co-operations', as the movement of directors and actors undoubtedly occurred and ultimately impacted the production of the films in which they were used. This is evidenced by Yecies and Shim's claim that 'production crews from Hong

3.4.b: Exploring and Questioning Violence: Korean Directors in Hong Kong

Before looking at action films produced by South Korea, it is important to note that Korean directors and actors began to work within Hong Kong precisely during this period of transition for Hong Kong action cinema. Beginning with *The Last Woman of Shang* in 1965, and ending with *Broken Oath* in 1977, the co-operation period between Hong Kong and South Korea finds South Korean film personnel not just present, but actually active in the transformation of Hong Kong action cinema. This section therefore looks at Hong Kong action films directed by Koreans during this period of transition for the action genre.

In international terms, of all the Hong Kong action films directed by a Korean, it is *King Boxer* (1972, also known in the West as *Five Fingers of Death*) which remains the most significant in terms of its impact on the then burgeoning kung fu genre. The successful release of the film in the US paved the way for the release of the Bruce Lee-starring *Fist of Fury / Jing Wu Men* (1972), the success of which would ignite a fever for martial arts cinema throughout multiple countries. In an interview concerning the production of the film, *King Boxer*'s director Jeong Chang-hwa speaks about their approach to the action sequences, recalling that:

> 'At that time, I thought wire work was best for kung fu movies. But wire work was too slow and didn't seem realistic enough for me. So I used trampolines to create powerful and speedy action. I spread powder on the floor so that a dust effect could be created. […] We didn't have martial arts choreographers while preparing for this movie. The talented martial arts choreographers were all working with Chinese directors. I eventually had to hire assistants to martial arts choreographers. […] The martial arts that I wanted was not anything like dancing […] the essence of action movies are "speed," "rhythmic

Kong were exposed to a range of new techniques utilized by their Korean colleagues, including stunts, pyrotechnics, and martial arts skills used in taekwondo' (pp. 89). For the purpose of this study, the veracity of co-production status is much less important than the fact that differing approaches and backgrounds to action cinema came into contact during this period.

> tempo," and "montage". An action film can be seen as a very impressive work when it represents joy, anger, and sorrow instead of just showing action."[188]

There are multiple elements to unpack from this quote. First, it is clear that, although *King Boxer* follows in the tradition of less elaborately choreographed action occurring throughout Hong Kong cinema during the early 1970s, there is an emphasis on using action as a way to foreground the narrative's central themes. This is further emphasised in Jeong's recollection of working with leading man Lo Lieh, claiming that:

> 'When Lo Lieh was fighting against Okada, there is a close-up scene where he accidentally kills Okada and is afraid. He had difficulty expressing his internal feelings.'

Lo, who was championed by Chang Cheh and figures as a central force in the transition between *wuxia* and kung fu in Hong Kong action cinema, and his struggles in performing a more conflicted and nuanced character further emphasise the attempt by *King Boxer* to challenge the singular drive of the action protagonist. Second, Jeong's recollections provide valuable information regarding the development of the action genre's form. By the time of *King Boxer*'s release, wire work was largely removed from kung fu productions, making them literally and figuratively grounded in the process. The use of trampolines as a way through which to achieve verticality, as well as speed, offers another challenge to established conventions of action cinema. Jeong's championing of speed, rhythm, and montage as the central tenets of the action sequence provide a solid foundation through which to establish comparison between Hong Kong and South Korean action cinema of the time.

By combining this formal approach to action with the highly skilled and proficient martial arts choreographers and actors of Hong Kong cinema, *King Boxer* prioritises action scenes which emphasise pacing, building-up to climactic moments wherein Chi-Hao (Lo) makes use of his iron palm technique in order to defeat his opponents.

[188] Jeong Chang-hwa (2007) *Interview*

King Boxer provides a suitable gateway into the co-operation between South Korea and Hong Kong throughout the 1970s, particularly in helping to establish notions of film form which instigate such collaborative ideologies. *King Boxer* also helps provide a central theme which permeates throughout these productions, wherein these films challenged the current trends of the very industry in which they were made. This is most obvious in films which examined notions of masculinity through violence. The rest of this chapter shall therefore examine these co-operative productions, highlighting works which provided significant reactive elements that oppose the open championing of destructive masculinity foregrounded in Hong Kong productions of the time.

The Thunderbolt Fist (1972) stands out as one of the most violent action films of the 1970s, and its indulgence into violence and vengeance marks it as a prime example of the severe shift in martial arts cinema as it abandoned its more romanticised roots. For the most part, the narrative of *The Thunderbolt Fist* follows the same general story as *Fist of Fury* released earlier the same year. Both films involve an invasive Japanese force which seeks to prove the weakness of China by dominating them at martial arts. The point of divergence between the two films is that, where *Fist of Fury* takes place over a short amount of time with Chen Zhen's (Bruce Lee) struggles against the Japanese occurring over a few days, *The Thunderbolt Fist* explores the same struggle across generations. Beginning with the Japanese master challenging the local Chinese martial arts master to a fight and ending with the sons of those combatants fully grown and fighting in the same ring, *The Thunderbolt Fist* allows for violence and national tensions to become an inherited trait, maintained throughout a history of wrongdoings and injustice.

Though the Chinese master is successful in defeating his Japanese opponent during the film's opening clash, the master is ambushed and killed that same night by a gang of angry Japanese fighters looking to reclaim their power over the local populace. The death of the Chinese master is witnessed by his son, who is taken into the mountains to be trained by the leader of a group of

anti-Japanese rebels. The film jumps forward in time and the son, Fang Tie Wa (Chuen Yuen), now grown up, has not relented in his desire for vengeance against the Japanese. In his hometown, the son of the Japanese karate master who lost earlier in the film, Gu Gang (James Nam Gung-Fan), has become an even worse tyrant than his father, casually causing havoc and picking fights with people. Gu Gang's misanthropic tendencies are revealed not only through how he treats the local Chinese, but also in his violent treatment of his own men, often seriously injuring them during martial arts training. Gu Gang and Fang Tie Wa are thereby positioned as the end result of decades of suffering and nationally-charged tensions: they hate each other despite only interacting briefly before, when fighting as children.

With hatred and the lust for vengeance prioritised by the film's narrative, the film is, unsurprisingly, extremely violent, taking every possible chance to engage in bloodletting or bodily damage. Such depictions of violence are hinted at during the film's opening fight between the older Chinese and Japanese fighters. Blood spews from both men's mouths as their fight continues and becomes more frantic, each hit damaging the body more and yet neither man yields. Their staunch devotion to their nation's pride results in significant internal injuries to both men.

While the violence between the two old masters ultimately never extends beyond the usual amount of blood seen in action cinema of the time, it is with the younger generation that the violence escalates exponentially. There are three fight scenes between Gu Gang and Fang Tie Wa, the first signalling the end of the second act, and the other two are situated at the end, and are separated only by a short scene in which an unsuccessful night-time assassination attempt is made on Fang Tie Wa, recalling the way in which Fang's father was murdered. Of these scenes, the first and the third are most important in terms of their depiction of violence and hatred.

The first scene has Fang fighting against a Japanese mob led by Gu Gang. Fang is able to gain the upper hand in the fight before Gu steps in. The two spar briefly before it becomes clear that

Gu is the better fighter. Quickly overpowered and outnumbered, Fang is taken and tortured. He is suspended upside-down, and is beaten, whipped, slashed, and burned, before having his right shoulder stabbed to the degree that his arm becomes unusable. Crippled and disheartened, Fang retreats to the mountains once again.

The film's climactic battle sees Fang, having vigorously trained in order to achieve vengeance, and Gu, fight in front of a crowd, in the very same ring in which their fathers once fought. Fang's training pays off and he controls the fight, easily dealing with Gu despite the loss of function in his right arm. Fang's rage grows throughout the fight, and culminates as Fang traps Gu's left arm and rips it off his body. Gu, in shock, staggers to the edge of the ring as four Japanese fighters enter the ring and attack Fang. Overcome by bloodlust, Fang destroys his attackers, smashing their heads off the steps to the ring and impaling them on the ring posts. Gu re-enters the fight, only to be killed as Fang kicks right through his body, ending both the fight and the film. The bloody imagery stands distinct from the slight moments of blood which peppered the fight between their respective fathers. The film ends with a shot of Gu's lifeless body, lying upon a ring floor covered in limbs and stained with large patches of blood.

The continuous intensification of the depictions of violence found throughout *The Thunderbolt Fist* help tie into the film's thematic observations on generations and inherited hatred. When taken in context with the film's opening fight sequence, and emphasised through the cyclical framing of having both fights occur in the same space, the end result, leaving the hero bloody and crippled and the villain dismembered and brutally murdered,[189] concludes that those raised in hatred are doomed to commit even worse acts of hatred themselves. In this way, and despite the basic narrative similarities, *The Thunderbolt Fist* stands opposed to the nationalist grandstanding found in Chen Zhen's unflinching rebellious last stand against the Japanese found in *Fist of Fury*. While Fang is shown to be a hero of the people, the film's final shot, and indeed its excessive

[189] With this ending, *The Thunderbolt Fist* provides another example of divergence from the romantic conclusion found in films like *The Jade Bow*.

scenes of violence, undermine the very heroism that Fang is applauded for. As such, *The Thunderbolt Fist* indulges in depicting extreme violence as a means of questioning the reason behind such violence in the first place.

The Devil's Treasure / Hei Ye Guai Ke (1973) is one of the few examples of a contemporary action film directed by a Korean in Hong Kong. The film concerns the fight for ownership over sunken gold in a boat off the coast of Hong Kong. Being set in the modern day, the film favours shootouts, explosions and vehicular chase sequences (including boats, cars, and one rather unique scene involving handcars). Despite this, the film is notably bookended by martial arts action scenes. The post-opening credits scene introduces the film's protagonist, Wang Chun (Oh Chun-Hung), as he is attacked by a gang of youths who attempt to extort money from him. Wang easily and confidently defeats his attackers, even placing his arms behind his back whilst fighting the gang leader. He then makes the youths crawl on the floor with their shoes in their mouths. Beaten and embarrassed, the youths comply. Smug about his victory, Wang misses his boat back to the harbour and consequently is forced to swim back. Though this is a minor moment in the film's opening, it suggests that giving in to violent tendencies can ultimately have consequences.

This theme becomes central to the film's final fight scene. Wang and his family are in possession of the gold, and have been pursued for the majority of the film's running time by a gang who want the gold for themselves. Blowing out a tyre on their car, Wang is forced to fight the gang. He kills one by shooting the car's petrol tank as they attempt to open the car boot and retrieve the gold. The car explodes, killing the gang leader and enveloping the gold in the flaming wreck of the vehicle. Rather than attempt to save the gold, the two remaining gang members fight with Wang. The film frames the action of the fight with the burning wreckage of the car in the foreground: the gold has become secondary to the desire to kill.

The film punctuates this theme by having Wang dispatch the final gang member by tossing him into the burning car. The man screams as he burns, ultimately dying next to the very gold he apparently fought so hard to obtain. However, the man's actions belie his apparent intentions. By deciding to fight rather than attempt to save the gold, the man highlights his true intentions: a lust for violence. It is this fondness for violence which results in his demise. Wang also loses the gold, but his intentions throughout the film were to protect his family. As such, he is rewarded through familial security. *The Devil's Treasure* thereby employs the more romantic hero of the early to mid-1960s in order to discuss the destructive nature of violence. His concern is not vengeance or money, but rather safety for his family. Wang therefore exists out of step with the bloodthirsty, vengeance-fuelled heroes of early-1970s action cinema. As such, the film provides a stark look at the consequences of violent pursuits.

The Skyhawk (1974) displays further attempts to innovate the form of the action scene, while at the same time constructing an intriguing meta-narrative which explores the history of the martial arts film, and highlights tensions in the genre which have emerged since the rise of the new school *wuxia* films. The film unites wandering martial artist Leo (Carter Wong Ka-Tat) with the folk hero Wong Fei-Hung (Kwan Tak-Hing) and his apprentice Fei Fei (Sammo Hung Kam-Bo, in a somewhat early role). The group, journeying in Thailand, come across a town enslaved to a ruthless gang leader who runs the town through gambling rackets and who maintains order by killing anyone who crosses him. Naturally, they are drawn into aiding the town and removing the gang from power.

The Skyhawk features numerous action sequences full of consistently strong fight choreography, allowing the film to be more adventurous in its editing and camera movement or placement. Most notable is the use of point-of-view shots and rapid editing, positioning the camera in the very centre of the action. This approach is used multiple times throughout the film, with the clearest example being the fight scene in which Fei Fei is killed by the gang. The series of shots

begins with a relatively long take with Fei Fei facing away from the camera, fighting and being struck by the gang leader. This causes Fei Fei to spin around and stagger towards the camera. As Fei Fei reaches the camera, there is a quick cut to Fei Fei's point-of-view, as a gang member runs towards him and attacks with a pole. At the point of impact the film cuts once more back to the view of Fei Fei, who now backs away from the camera, reeling from the strike.

Through the camera placement and editing of the scene, Fei Fei's struggle against multiple opponents is realised as an almost incomprehensibly fast sequence of events. The long take as Fei Fei fights the gang leader emphasises the relative stability of one-on-one combat. As the point-of-view sequence announces the introduction of the other gang members into the fight, the stability is stripped away by the fast editing. Fei Fei is knocked about by his attackers, only seeing them in close proximity for mere milliseconds before they attack, and is therefore unable to mount any kind of defence before another blow is struck. The point-of-view shots used within the climax of the battle are essential to the desperate urgency of Fei Fei's predicament, and signal his inability to overcome the gang, leading to his death.

Though numerous other stylish examples of editing and camerawork are used throughout *The Skyhawk,* including a series of slow-motion shots of bodies flying through the air used as a way to emphasise the power of Wong Fei-Hung's abilities, it is the film's thematic meta-narrative which carries greater significance. Of course, the film is immediately notable for not only including the popular folk hero character of Wong Fei-Hung, but for casting Kwan Tak-Hing in the role.

Kwan had become synonymous with the character of Wong Fei-Hung after starring in dozens of Wong Fei-Hung films for various Cantonese language production studios throughout the 1950s.[190] The inclusion of a traditional folk hero, and the aging actor famous for his previous on-

[190] *The Skyhawk* marks one of only four post-1960s films in which Kwan Tak-Hing performed as Wong Fei-Hung. The other three are *The Magnificent Butcher / Lin Shi Rong* (1979), *The Magnificent Kick / Wong Fei Hung Yue Gwai Geuk Chat* (1980), and *Dreadnought / Yong Zhe Wu Ju* (1981). The character of Wong Fei-Hung would

screen manifestations, in *The Skyhawk* allows the film to discuss the history of the martial arts genre and reflect on the transformations which had, at the time, recently occurred. By the time of *The Skyhawk's* release, director Jeong Chang-hwa had been working in Hong Kong cinema for roughly eight years, and had not only witnessed, but had also been actively involved in, the changing face of the martial arts film in Hong Kong. It is therefore understandable that Jeong would be in a position to reflect upon the state of martial arts cinema as it progressed ever further from its roots.

The Wong Fei-Hung found in *The Skyhawk* is therefore rather unsurprisingly a man steeped in traditional values. He berates his students, both Fei Fei and, later on, Leo, disappointed in their desire to seek out fights and engage in violence. To Wong Fei-Hung, kung fu is a means of internal balance and should only be used to fight in absolutely unavoidable circumstances. As such, he is reluctant to fight against the gang without absolute certainty that they are indeed responsible for the evil deeds spoken of by the town residents. Even when Fei Fei is murdered, Wong Fei-Hung refuses to act until there is proof of the gang's involvement. Through Wong Fei-Hung, *The Skyhawk* attempts to depict the struggle of staying resolute and righteous in a world in which people will take full advantage of any situation to engage in greedy and selfish acts.

An example of such an act can be found in the motivations of Leo, who stands ideologically opposed to Wong Fei-Hung's staunch traditionalism. The film opens with Leo fighting against members of the gang, and though he defeats them handily, the film offers no reason behind their initial quarrel. As the film progresses, it becomes clear that, though he fights for justice, Leo's very desire to fight is a vice in and of itself. Leo chastises Wong Fei-Hung for his apparent lack of desire to proactively retaliate against the gang despite numerous deaths and injustices. At Fei

become popular again during the 1990s,most notably performed by Jet Li Lian-Jie and Vincent Zhao Wen-Zhuo in the *Once Upon a Time in China / Wong Fei Hung* films (1991-97).

Fei's funeral, Leo confronts Wong and states that he is too weak to fight, and too afraid of the gang and their violent tendencies. Leo then storms off to confront the gang by himself.

These tensions culminate in the film's climactic battle, wherein Leo and Wong fight against the gang. The fight begins with the two protagonists splitting off and dealing with different sections of the gang. Wong's fight choreography emphasises his defensive, passive nature; he waits to be attacked before countering, using the kinetic energy of his attackers against them. This is clearly emphasised in the previously mentioned slow-motion shots, as gang members fly through the air in response to a leg sweep or slight kick from Wong. As the fight continues, the gang members make use of weapons, and Wong's opposition to violence is once again prioritised. Attacked by swords and daggers, Wong defends himself with a pole and a fan, objects which are largely non-lethal by design. The objects and choreography used within Wong's action scene encapsulate his mantra of kung-fu as a non-destructive force used to generate internal harmony.

In sharp contrast to this, Leo's fight sequence shows him aggressively confronting his foes, attacking them violently and making sure he finishes the fight as quickly as possible by attacking his opponents when they fall to the ground. This film gives prominence to this fact through the emphasis placed on Leo's jumping knee strikes which land on his opponent's sternum, rending them incapacitated at best, and dead at worst. Leo's use of this attack during the climactic fight scene is important as it recalls his wanton use of the move during the film's opening sequence. Leo's use of the highly damaging knee strike at the both the beginning and end of the film reinforces his stubborn ideology; that injustice must be destroyed, not halted, through violence. Leo learns nothing from his tutelage under Wong Fei-Hung, his thirst for bloodshed and violence as a sole driving force positioning him firmly as a bloodthirsty male of Hong Kong's new action cinema, delineating a clear divergence between the old and the new.

These generational, and generic, tensions come to a head as Leo and Wong Fei-Hung work together to fight the remaining the gang members. Wong is surrounded by weapon-wielding

attackers, and Leo enters the fight full of force and anger, quickly dispatching one of the gang members by using his leaping knee strike. Leo fights with the other, knife-wielding attackers, catching a knife being thrown and throwing it back at the gang member, hitting him in the chest. Leo rushes forward and kicks the knife further into the man's chest while Wong cries out, in vain, to not kill the man. Leo, overcome with a desire to bring an end to the torment of the town, strikes without thinking, and kills his enemy.

The death of this gang member in particular is important to the film's thematic tensions. In mirroring the death of Fei Fei, with a knife being thrown into the chest, there is a sense of retribution generated through Leo's violence. He enacts vengeance on the people who killed his friend by killing them in a similar manner. Wong Fei-Hung's protest at this crucial moment is therefore central to the film's examination of heroes and the action genre. Wong's reluctance to engage in deadly combat makes his defensive actions justifiable without sacrificing his moral values. His traditional stance on kung-fu as a means of aiding rather than destroying remains constant in his actions. By killing his attackers, Leo essentially loses any moral high ground. He exists as a destructive force which can only counter, but never improve, the evil actions of others.

The new action hero of 1970s Hong Kong cinema, and his insatiable thirst for destructive vengeance, positions him as an entity entirely incompatible with earlier heroes of the genre. Having vanquished the gang, the film ends with Wong Fei-Hung and Leo sharing a tense moment of reflection, their silence acknowledging the chasm that exists between their two ideological stances. It is therefore fundamentally important to the film's thematic observations that Wong and Leo do not come to blows at the film's end. Instead, they are shown walking off together into the sunset. The tension between young and old is left unresolved, as ultimately there is no solution to their predicament. Wong Fei-Hung, the aging hero, is unable to sway the new action star from their visceral and violent actions. To the new martial arts hero, and the

action film in general, it was no longer enough to merely teach a lesson. Blood must be spilled, and vengeance must be wrought.

As is clear from this breakdown of Korean-directed Hong Kong action films, rather than use this co-operation solely as a way to gain insight into the production of action cinema, Korean filmmakers instead also attempted to innovate their action scenes and challenge the championing of heroic violence. Films like *The Thunderbolt Fist* and *The Skyhawk* specifically question the pursuit of vengeance and actively work to undermine the heroic martyrdom and focus on brotherhood found in films like *Boxer from Shantung*. In having access to actors trained specifically to work in martial arts films, as well as action choreographers eager to provide new and exciting depictions of action, these films allowed Korean directors such as Jang Il-ho and Jeong Chang-hwa to openly and freely interrogate and question the motivations, consequences, and ultimately the heroism of the very action found within their films.[191]

[191] It is important to note here that the films discussed here are not the only Korean directed Hong Kong productions. Jeong Chang-hwa produced films in the *wuxia* tradition throughout the early 1970s, with films like *Heads for Sale / Nu Xia Mai Ren Tou* (1970), *Valley of the Fangs / E Lang Gu* (1970), *Six Assassins / Leu Ci Ke* (1971), and *The Swift Knight / Lei Ru Fung* (1971) showcasing an obvious affinity and comfort working within the genre. These films, produced by Shaw Brothers, largely follow the style established by late 1960s *wuxia* films, relying heavily on swordplay and rag-tag groups who fight for justice, usually against an enemy gifted with magical abilities.

The Deadly Knives / *Luo Ye Fei Dao* (1972, also released as *Fists of Vengeance*), makes use of Japanese antagonists, albeit ones far less bloodthirsty than those found in *The Thunderbolt Fist.* Given this strong Japanese element, the film notably constructs its action choreography around samurai swords, embracing the influence of Japanese *chanbara* productions. *Broken Oath* (1977), the last significant Hong Kong film helmed by a Korean director, is often compared to the Japanese production *Lady Snowblood / Shurayuki-hime* (1973) due to the fact that both films tell the story of a baby who is born in prison and tasked with enacting vengeance for her parents once she has grown up. *Broken Oath* continues to examine the notion of vengeance, albeit through a female character. Had the film been released a few years prior, the focus on a female protagonist could itself be seen as a challenge to the overt male focus of Hong Kong action cinema, however female-centric action films and even *wuxia* productions had begun to emerge again following the arrival of rival production company Golden Harvest in 1970 (the company responsible for producing *Broken Oath*). The Japanese influence here is of interest. Given South Korea's ban on Japanese cultural product following the country's liberation in 1945, South Korean directors working in Hong Kong were afforded a place to engage with, and assimilate elements of, the popular mid-century Japanese samurai films. The Japanese featured prominently as villains in Hong Kong cinema, on account of Japan also occupying Hong Kong from 1941 to 1945, and so Korean filmmakers can be seen as vicariously reacting against the Korean colonial era through narratives concerning Hong Kong's own struggles against Japan.

While this awareness and morally complex approach to the action genre would ultimately come to define the action genre as it matured in South Korea, it is nevertheless important to emphasise the clear leap in the quality regarding the form and construction of action scenes in this Hong Kong works. Their choreography, thematic resonance, and visual spectacle stand far in advance of anything Korean cinema had produced prior to the co-production period. With even a cursory comparison between the action found in *King Boxer* or *Broken Oath* and earlier films by Jeong such as *A Bonanza*, a significant increase in the legibility and energy of the action is immediately apparent. In this way, while previous writings on this co-operation period tend to emphasise the one-way benefit system whereby Hong Kong gained at the expense of South Korea, in analysing the films themselves rather than the industry surrounding them, it becomes clear that Korean filmmakers benefitted two-fold from being able to work in Hong Kong.

Firstly, these films allowed Korean filmmakers firsthand experience in terms of choreography, shooting, and editing action scenes so that the action itself is prioritised as the central element to the scene. Second, and more importantly, by directing films in a genre that was itself going through a period of rapid change and reconsideration, Korean filmmakers were able to use action both more thematically and in terms of meta-commentary on the genre itself. Taking these two elements as the central points of observation, the next section shall analyse the South Korean action film as it developed throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

3.4.c: South Korean Action Begins to Blossom

During the revival of *wuxia* in Hong Kong cinema, action films had also started to once again be produced by Korea, with the box office success of *Iljimae the Chivalrous Robber / Euijeok Iljimae* (1961, Jang Il-ho) resulting in a short burst of martial arts films like *Swordsman and Love / Geompung Yeonpung* (1962, Gang Chan-woo), *The Eight Swordsmen / Pal Geomgaek* (1963, Lee Gang-cheon), *Ruffian / Bulhandang* (1963, Jang Il-ho), and *Twin Sword Dance / Ssanggeommu* (1963, Choi

In-hyeon). Unfortunately, issues regarding accessibility plague even films from this period of South Korean film history, and as such for the most part these early attempts at a more consistent and definable action cinema can only be glimpsed through available marketing materials such as production still and posters. As with the no-longer-surviving films of the 1930s, still images can only inform so much with regard to the editing and choreography of the action in these films. At the same time, it is clear from such posters that these films prioritised the presence of the swordsmen. In doing so, these posters contributed to establishing an action cinema through the very imagery chosen to represent the films.

In the late 1960s, with the revival of *wuxia* in full swing in Hong Kong, South Korean action cinema was beginning to form into a concrete and definable genre.[192] In *Swordsman in the Twilight / Hwanghoneui Geokgaek* (1967, Jeong Chang-hwa) and *A Wandering Swordsman and 108 Bars of Gold / Nageune Geomgaek Hwanggeum 108Gwan* (1968, Jeong Chang-hwa), action scenes make notable use of speed, rhythm, and montage. Both films make use of quick cutting in order to compensate for rather static choreography, constructing a sense of speed through rapid editing at pivotal moments within the action scene. Examples of such moments include leaping over walls or dispatching multiple foes at once, and in both films such actions are visualised in the same manner. These brief, though vital, action sequences begin with a shot commencing or instigating the action, followed by a close-up to the action occurring, and then a return to the wider shot with the action now over.

[192] Perhaps the most successful action scene, in terms of execution, prior to the arrival of these action films is found during the immediate post-war period of Korean cinema in the film *The Night Before Independence / Deokrib Jeonya* (1948). The film, which survives in a partial state, features an extended boxing match between two people attempting to win the affections of a woman. This scene largely places the camera far from the action, essentially situated as a spectator, and allows the two fighters to duck and weave in long takes. While the choreography is lacking, there remains a confidence in the staging, and indeed the length, of the scene which distinguishes it from the vast majority of action scenes throughout the first half-century of Korean film.

From these examples, it is possible to see a development in the action scenes of late-1960s South Korean cinema. By cutting to close-up shots precisely at the moment of action, and cutting away from the close-up during the middle of the action, the action scenes in these films provide a rapid, yet legible, experience. The use of editing and rhythm thereby allows action scenes to embody a sense of speed without the need for wires, adept martial artists, and elaborate choreography. At the same time, scenes such as this illustrate an effort to provide more engaging and exciting choreography, breaking free from the more static and momentary fight sequences of earlier decades.

While South Korean action films during the 1960s and 70s never reached the gore and bloodshed of *The Thunderbolt Fist,* the stripping away of romanticism and reinforced emphasis on masculinity in Hong Kong action cinema would be taken to extremes by South Korean film, which had long championed a stoic masculinity. With no consistent action genre to react against, the emergent action cinema of South Korea merely dialled its masculinity excessively high and extended the length of its action sequences.

Such changes resulted in films full of posturing and fights, found in films like *Break Up the Chain / Swisaseuleul Ggeunheora* (1971, Lee Man-hui). Set in 1930s Japanese-occupied Manchuria, it follows a rag-tag Korean trio of allies-through-circumstance as they attempt to track down a Buddha statue containing information vital to the Japanese military.[193] The masculine posturing found in *Break Up the Chain* is so prominent that the film reduces tension through the nonplussed, stoic attitudes of its three central characters. On top of this, the film makes heavy

[193] In their discussion of the 'Manchurian western' David Scott Diffrient and Chung Hye-seung (2015) suggest that *Break Up the Chain* and other films of the period are '[r]eminiscent of contemporaneous variations of the Western genre produced in the United States and throughout Europe' (pp. 97). They argue that the 'Korean Western' is distinguished through its 'nationalism' and that 'the Manchurian Western is revealed to be a hybrid genre mixing characteristics of the war film, the espionage film, the martial arts film, and the family melodrama' (Ibid.). Despite acknowledging the martial arts film, no further discussion of its influence, or indeed any recognition of the South Korea-Hong Kong interactions occurring during this period, occurs. Instead, *Break Up the Chain* and similar films are positioned through Western scholarship, and are discussed through reference to American Westerns such as *Shane* (1953, US, George Stevens) or Spaghetti Westerns. In doing so, it perpetuates the idea of genre as something inherited and merely recontextualised by South Korea.

use of dialogue concerning character types and narrative tropes, emphasising a meta-narrative which prioritises the fictional. Characters discuss their roles as heroes and villains, comment on how long 'the drama' will take, and even refer to the film's climactic action scene as the 'final battle'. As such, the deeds and actions of the trio are directed entirely by their maintenance of masculinity.

One of the trio, Mu Gung-hwa (Jang Dong-hwi), begins the film chained to a wooden cart and frees himself not by breaking the chains, but instead by snapping off the wooden log his chains are attached to. He then carries the wood around with it, using it to beat people in order to get his way. Other examples of masculinity see the protagonists beat up a hostage they just saved for being 'too cowardly', engage in collective urination on the walls of the Japanese camp the trio end up being held captive in, and maintain an unflinching stoicism, even disinterest, in being threatened at gunpoint. Finally, the trio are rewarded at the end of the film by the only female character telling them that they are 'great men', before they ride off into the sunset together.

While it is possible to see the masculinity in *Break Up the Chain* as either the result of influence from the new masculinity championed by Hong Kong or an exaggeration of the masculinities already present in South Korean cinema outside of the genre, the influence of Hong Kong is felt far more in the staging of action scenes found within the film. Though the majority of the action sequences focus on vehicle chases and shootouts, the more physical action – whereby fights occur with fists and swords – show a clear attempt to enhance the action scene through its construction and form.

These changes are best depicted in two action scenes: one featuring Mu against a group of attacks, and the other with the trio against a group of Japanese soldiers. In both scenes, there is an attempt to make use of longer shot lengths, as well as having the camera linger further back in order to give the action space to move and develop. Most importantly, these action scenes refrain from cutting at the point of impact, and thereby rely on choreography in order to carry

the momentum and dynamics of the fight. These changes in the film form and construction of the action sequence display a noticeable shift, taking influence from the popular action films of Hong Kong and applying their staging, editing, and cinematography in order to enhance the action genre experience in South Korean cinema. While lacking any actors with martial arts prowess, or any overly complex choreography, the action featured in *Break Up the Chain* showcases a clear development in the genre as it emerged as something more tangible and definable.

At the same time, the more classic romantic hero of the early 1960s would also find a place within the South Korean action cinema of the 1970s. *Devil! Take the Train to Hell / Akiniyeo Jieokhaeng Geubhaengyeolchareul Tara* (1977) provides an interesting mix of approaches to the action film, while simultaneously building its narrative around the romance of the two protagonists, Dongshik (director Park Noh-shik) and Yeji (Ahn Bo-yeong). Working together to avenge the death of their fathers at the hands of the Japanese in Manchuria, Dongshik and Yeji each provide separate references to regional action cinema. Dongshik, being blinded as a child at the same time his father was killed, embodies a clear allusion towards the popular blind Japanese swordsman Zatoichi, who featured in countless Japanese action films between the 1960s and 1980s. Though he is dressed in contemporary clothing and sunglasses, a far cry from the monk robes of Zatoichi, Dongshik's use of a cane weapon and ability to fight with an enhanced sense of hearing nevertheless stand as a prominent reference to the Japanese swordsman. At the same time, Yeji assumes the guise of a geisha in order to get close to her Japanese enemy. Yeji also provides an interesting and rare example of the magical female protagonist in South Korean action cinema, albeit in a stripped down and less overt manner. During her quest for vengeance, she makes use of snakes, which she is able to control through having trained her abilities while locked in a food cellar. Yeji therefore is evidence of the influence of Hong Kong action beyond the more masculine traits discussed throughout this chapter. *Devil! Take the Train to Hell* therefore sees its protagonists, and the film itself, employ Japanese cultural signifiers, both visually and

intertextually, in order to fight back against the injustices committed by the Japanese upon the Korean people. The film therefore develops its themes, and indeed its meta-commentary on action cinema, through its action scenes rather than indulging in them as moments of spectacle.

Beyond this, the film also makes significant use of martial arts narrative tropes, including a lengthy training montage wherein Dongshik hones his hearing abilities in order to pluck arrows out of the air as they are fired. Thematically, there is a limitation and internal anguish in the two protagonists as they enact their vengeance. They notably avoid fighting back against anyone not actively involved in their respective fathers' murders. This is established in the film's opening assassination wherein Dongshik repeatedly informs the Japanese guards that he has no quarrel with them and will happily leave them alone, and is cemented during the film's final action scene, as Dongshik and Yeji flee from the son of the man they have killed, reluctant to commit any further violence. As penance for her actions, Yeji donates her corneas to Dongshik without his knowledge, and dies in Dongshik's arms shortly after they meet following the operation. Dongshik himself laments the inability for a normal life, the film visually emphasising this by overlaying a pair of handcuffs over the two lovers as they embrace for the final time. As in the Korean directed Hong Kong films, the very act of vengeance is itself called into question: the film ends not with a defiant stoicism in the face of death, but rather the tragic image of Dongshik carrying Yeji in his arms as he walks off into the sunset.[194]

Beyond these influences in film form, South Korean action cinema would come to adopt the essence of Hong Kong action cinema in its entirety. South Korea had produced films which imitated the *wuxia* tradition throughout the 1960s, so it is unsurprising that South Korean action films of the 1970s would switch to a stronger focus on martial arts films, albeit films centred on Korean martial arts like taekwondo or hapkido, rather than kung-fu, which originated in Hong

[194] Such a focus on the romantic fate of the two protagonists during the film's conclusion also shows that the romantic hero cast out by1970s Hong Kong action still featured in South Korean action, owing to the multiplicity of influence which blossomed during South Korean action films of the time.

Kong. In particular, the films of Kim Shi-hyeon help to show the strong influence of Hong Kong martial arts films on South Korean action cinema during this time.[195]

The history of both South Korea and Hong Kong allowed for similarities to occur in their generic narratives, namely their respective colonisations by Japan during the first half of the twentieth century. *Black Cat/ Heukmo* (1974)[196] features a martial artist (Hwang In-shik) who aids the Japanese in capturing rebels, before finally deciding to rebel himself after it is revealed his female partner is a freedom fighter. In stark contrast to the numerous Hong Kong films which were shot in a South Korea that was masquerading as China, *Black Cat* features South Korea in all its cultural specificity, language, and costume. It therefore stands as a South Korean action film which retains its national identity while embodying significant developments in its action scenes, displaying a maturity and mastery of form.

The choreography, flow, and thematic underpinning of the action scenes in *Black Cat* evidence significant advancements in the form. There is a speed and kinetic energy in the action previously unseen in Korean action films until this point. In particular the choreography and shot lengths featured in *Black Cat* work above all else towards achieving this sense of speed.

Hwang In-shik, an accomplished practitioner of hapkido, prioritises the use of kicks in order to emphasise the fast-paced action featured throughout the film. One scene sees Hwang fight

[195] It is worth noting here that viewing copies of many of Kim Shi-hyeon's films as they were originally released is a rather hard task. Most of Kim's films, produced entirely in South Korea and shot with a Korean cast, were bought up by the enterprising Hong Kong director Godfrey Ho Chi-Keung, who spliced in scenes from other films and released these edited works under entirely different names. As it was these versions which secured distribution outside of Korea, Kim's films are often only viewable in these edited forms, and for the most part it is these edited versions of the films which are discussed and analysed here. In an attempt to maintain some notion of purity, no scenes which are clearly lifted from another production are analysed or discussed throughout this chapter. Nevertheless, the example of Kim and Ho provides a worthy counterpoint to the previous tactic of importing Hong Kong films as 'fake productions' employed by South Korea discussed by Yecies and Shim (2016, pp. 87-90). Ho's use of Korean martial arts films, while undoubtedly linked to the relatively cheap means of acquiring the films, points to a Korean action cinema which had successfully adopted many of the stylistic and generic elements of Hong Kong's action cinema.

[196] For some undeterminable reason, this film is often referred to as *Black Leopard / Heukpyo*. This is despite the film's opening title reading *Heukmyo.* Given the film's lack of information, even from Korean sources, this chapter uses the title of the film as given at the start of the film itself. This is mentioned purely in an effort to reduce confusion about the film being discussed.

multiple opponents at once, with the choreography built around fast kicks and leg sweeps. As such the action is constantly moving; by the time one opponent hits the floor Hwang has already dealt with another foe. This speed is further emphasised by choice shots presented in slow motion, a prime example being a shot which shows Hwang kick his opponent in the chest and again in the head before they begin to fall down. The shot remains in slow motion as Hwang engages his next foe, hitting them with a jump kick at the same moment the previous opponent hits the ground. Scenes such as this promote a confidence in the construction and understanding of action sequences and their function within the genre.

Beyond the spectacle of the choreography in *Black Cat,* the film helps build its central themes through the action scenes. By having Hwang engage in fights against Korean rebels and martial artists throughout the film, there is a continual reinforcement of his betrayal of his own people; he uses the martial arts of Korea against the Korean people. Of course, as a traitor to his own kind, it is natural that Hwang ultimately dies while fighting against the Japanese. Hwang's death is the most bloody in the film, stabbed through the chest by a samurai sword, yet in the tradition of the martyred hero he continues to fight against the Japanese until eventually succumbing to his wounds. *Black Cat* therefore contains numerous elements which establish a prominent connection between Hong Kong and South Korean cinema during this time.

While *Black Cat* exists as a rare example of a South Korean martial arts film which remains untouched by re-cutting, splicing, and dubbing, the same cannot be said for similar productions. Films like *Great Escape / Daetalchul* (1975, re-released as *Close Kung Fu Encounter*) are rendered virtually unwatchable due to awkward, jumpy editing and dubbing which conceals any original direction or intention.[197] One of the least touched, and therefore most consistent, films to

[197] Set in China during the Second Sino-Japanese War, the only indication that the film is South Korean (outside of actor recognition) comes from a brief break in the dubbing, wherein a bar singer performs a Korean song. Dubbing therefore works towards a removal of national identity on a par with the re-cutting of the film.

survive this period of action cinema is *Secret Bandit of Black Leopard* / *Heugpyo Bigaek* (1981, re-released as *Enter the Invincible Hero*).

Starring the martial artist Geo Ryong, better known outside of South Korea as Dragon Lee, *Secret Bandit of Black Leopard* and similar films are largely defined by their attempts to mimic the style of Bruce Lee films following his untimely death in 1973, collected under the umbrella term of Bruceploitation.[198] These films show remarkable action choreography and performance, especially in scenes which feature 'the human tornado' Kim Yong-ho (known in Hong Kong as Casanova Wong).[199] Even before the original films were chopped up and spliced together by foreign interests, the influence of Bruce Lee can be found in the costume, mannerisms, and fight choreography of Dragon Lee. Regardless of regional attempts to make money by attempting to fill the significant space left by Bruce Lee, the production of these South Korean films helps reinforce the strong influence Hong Kong cinema had over the development of the action genre in South Korea. At the same time, that these South Korean productions were used to emulate Bruce Lee in the first place highlights the adept nature of the action scenes featured in these films. Despite their altered and mutilated existence, the action sequences of these films shine through, showcasing the notable advances in the construction and form of the South Korean action genre.

In examining the South Korean action cinema of the 1970s, it is clear that the influence of Hong Kong cinema, and indeed the Korean directed Hong Kong films of this period, allowed the action film to grow and flourish, to the degree that action became a definable genre in the process. Park Ji-yin highlights that these films were criticised as 'films of 'unknown nationality',

[198] These films tended to include actors with stage names reminiscent of Bruce Lee, the most famous (and successful) being Bruce Le, Bruce Li, and Dragon Lee. South Korean film productions repurposed as Bruceploitation films include: *The Five Great Disciples / Oh Dae Jeja* (1977, released as *Dragon Lee vs. The Five Brothers*), *Jung-Mu Ji-Bo Martial Arts / Jungmu Jibo* (1979, released as *Kung Fu Fever)* and *A Monk Disciple of Yongmun / Yongmun Pagye Jeja* (1981, released as *The Dragon's Snake Fist*), among numerous others.

[199] Kim's proficiency and speed allowed him to provide moments of martial arts spectacle similar to that of Hwang In-shik, though the most prominent examples of this are ultimately found in Hong Kong in films like *Warriors Two* (1978) and *The Master Strikes / Tong Tian Liao Hu* (1980).

because the stories were mainly based on Chinese folk tales and legends'.[200] Comments such as this align with the observations made by Chung Sung-il earlier in this chapter, specifically the notion that South Korean action films lost 'their national identity' when engaging with Hong Kong cinema.[201]

This idea of 'unknown nationality' or loss of 'national identity' is worth investigating. Undoubtedly, the re-editing and redubbing of Hong Kong films sold as South Korean productions, or vice versa, carries an implicit erasure of certain national identities, while equally attempting to masquerade as indicative or evocative of another nation.

The idea that national identity was lost carries with it an implicit negative reading of the martial arts genre, suggesting that these films were consumed by a foreign influence. Instead of assuming negativity on account of the hierarchical relationship between the South Korean and Hong Kong film industries, it is instead more productive, and conducive, to any history of the action genre to acknowledge this historical interaction as a major development in the history of action in South Korean film.

3.5: Tracing the Influence – South Korean Action Cinema at the Turn of the Century

While the *wuxia* film would eventually return to stand alongside the martial arts film as one of the central styles of action cinema produced by Hong Kong,[202] in South Korea the action cinema,

[200] Park Ji-yin (2006), pp. 197
[201] Chung Sung-il (2006), pp. 10
[202] These two approaches to action were of course eventually joined by the urban, contemporary-set 'heroic bloodshed' films. These 'heroic bloodshed' films in particular have been extensively covered and therefore require no further analysis or exploration, particularly as this study is focusing primarily on *wuxia* and martial arts cinema. It is worth pointing out, however, that these films essentially embody the same focus on brotherhood and masculinity prioritised by the era of 'new *wuxia*' and kung fu films. The significant change is

as discussed above, would become more resistant against Hollywood during the 1980s. The most notable development in the genre as South Korea transitioned into democracy during the early 1990s was that action films moved into the modern and urban space. This time in particular saw South Korean films diversify and explore new avenues, with tales of vengeance and bloodshed existing alongside the growth of romantic comedies, slice-of-life dramas, and a politically conscious group of directors looking to capitalise on their new found artistic freedom by attacking and interrogating life under authoritarian rule. As a result, to some degree action cinema struggled to maintain its genre specificity, with action sequences once again being diminished in films otherwise belonging to other genres. Crime films such as *Rules of the Game / Gaeimeui Beobchik* (1994, Jang Hyeon-su) and youth dramas like *City of the Rising Sun / Taeyangeun Eobtda* (1999, Kim Seong-su) featured violence and chase sequences as moments of spectacle and mask their choreography through the use of handheld cameras and step-printing in order to provide more realistic and less flashy fight scenes.

For this reason, the heralding of *Shiri* as the return of South Korean action cinema by critics and scholars is largely as much to do with its emphasis on reinforcing the very existence of an action genre as it is the film's incredible box office success.[203] Again, however, such heralding reinforces a dominance of Hollywood, as it acknowledges the Hollywood approach to action cinema as representative of the definable elements of action cinema. In truth, the true "return" of action cinema in South Korea is signalled not by *Shiri*, but by films such as *Bicheonmu* (2000, Kim Young-jun), *Die Bad / Jukgeona Hokeun Nabbeugeona* (2000, Ryu Seung-wan), and *Musa: The Warrior / Musa* (2001, Kim Seong-su) which continued and developed upon the characteristic

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that, in order to match the contemporary urban setting, swords, magic, feet, and fists were replaced by guns. It is also important to note that these 'heroic bloodshed' films, for example *A Better Tomorrow / Ying Hung Boon Sik* (1986), *City on Fire / Lung Foo Fung Wan* (1987), or *The Big Heat / Seng Fat Dak King* (1988), would influence the contemporary action films of South Korea which began to emerge during the 1990s. In this way, Hong Kong's influence continued thanks to the evolution and widening of stylistic approach being applied to the same thematic tendencies embedded in the cinema which first reached South Korea.

traditions of the 1960s and 70s.[204] The arrival of these films was presaged by the *wuxia*-inspired films produced during the mid-1990s, which allowed the genre to linger, albeit it in an altered state. Both the *The Gingko Bed* / *Eunhaengnamu Chimdae* (1996, Kang Je-gyu) and *The Gate of Destiny* / *Gwicheon-do* (1996, Lee Gyeong-yeong) featured fantastical romances set during Korea's Joseon era (1392-1897). As such, these films feature the magical and romantic elements of the 1960s *wuxia* revival, but largely eschewed action in favour of narratives concerning star-crossed lovers and reincarnated lives. What few action scenes occurred in these films existed as primarily chase scenes. Nevertheless, *The Gingko Bed* and *The Gate of Destiny* provided imagery of heroic warriors, sword fighting, and historic Korean settings.

By including these elements in films which deal with time travel between Korean history and the contemporary urban Korean cities, these films construct an intrinsic link between past and present, and in doing so they imbue the historic, romanticised heroes with a Korean national identity. As such, these films reposition Korean identity within the cinematic depiction of such heroes, in an attempt to remove the long derogatory connections between South Korean period action and the cinema of Hong Kong. By stripping away the action, these films allow for the characters to prioritise their Korean identity, which is only reinforced by the use of reincarnation to literally present the same character in both the past and present.

This recontextualising of the Korean period space as a potential for romanticised heroes would allow for action cinema to re-enter a dialogue with its Hong Kong past in the films *Bicheonmu* and *Musa: the Warrior*. *Bicheonmu* commits heavily to the superhuman abilities found within the *wuxia* tradition, featuring a particular style of sword fighting which makes use of

[204] The obvious black sheep here is *Die Bad*, a contemporary-set, urban action film. The film's director, Ryu Seung-wan, is an avid and outspoken fan of Hong Kong action cinema, and this is evidenced in the film's use of clear and legible, though un-romanticised, action choreography. The film is most notable for its violence and aggression which question the very notion of violence as entertainment, with the majority of the central characters killed at the film's conclusion. The influence of *Die Bad* on the twenty-first century South Korean urban action film is immense, and unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis. At the same time, it is necessary to mention it here, as the film continues the interrogations of masculinity and violence found in early South Korean action films.

shockwaves that tear opponents apart and cause the ground to erupt in plumes of smoke, highly reminiscent of the powerful sword skills found in the now heavily established rapid fire approach to action of Hong Kong productions such as *Swordsman / Xiao Ao Jiang Hu* (1990). Through its excessive use of the supernatural *wuxia* elements, and especially in its use of special effects, *Bicheonmu* can be seen as a 'safe' attempt at reintegrating the martial arts genre back into the foreground of South Korean action cinema, placing an emphasis on the visuals, characters, narrative, and supernatural style of martial arts which recalls the popular cinema of the 1960s and 70s.

Action director Shin Jae-Myung has commented that "in Korean cinema, action has been, in fact, pure violence disguised as martial art"[205], and it is with this idea of pure violence, or "sheer violence" as Shin goes on to claim, that the Korean martial arts film re-established itself as a means through which to examine violence. From these early attempts at reconfiguring the martial arts film, it is *Musa: the Warrior* which would come to be the prototype for this new approach to action cinema in South Korea, as it embraced brutality and violence over stylish choreography and the display of supernatural abilities.[206]

Musa: the Warrior follows a retinue of Korean soldiers who are on a mission of peace-keeping in China, but are betrayed and left for dead in a northern desert of China by the Chinese. On their journey home they come across a Chinese princess who has been captured by Mongols and they attempt to rescue the princess so that they can rebuild favour with Chinese officials and return home safely. Hunted by the Mongols, the Koreans ultimately give their lives in order to protect the Chinese princess and, following the defeat of the Mongols, only one Korean remains. The

[205] Shin Jae-Myung (2015) *Who's Who: Shin Jae-myung*

[206] This is of course not to say that the more magical approach to martial arts cinema vanished from South Korean cinema: films such as *Arahan / Arahan Jangpung Daejakjeon* (2004), *The Restless / Joongcheon* (2006) and *Memories of the Sword / Hyeobnyeo, Kaleui Gieok* (2015) embrace the influence of *wuxia* tradition, focusing on spectacle through choreography and supernatural ability.

Chinese princess is left distraught at the chaos and death that has occurred in order to protect her, and the end of the film sees the sole surviving Korean head back to Korea on a small raft.

The action scenes prioritise realistic violence, with severed limbs and heavy bloodshed taking precedence over acrobatic skills or feats of superhuman ability. The central characters of the film are killed with relative ease throughout the film, with both main stars (Jeong Woo-seong and Ju Jin-mo) sacrificing their lives during the climactic battle after one or two significant strikes from their enemies. Minor characters also suffer from rather bloody deaths, with Yu Hae-jin's character suffering the loss of both of his eyes before he is killed in battle. The sole Korean survivor of the film is the character played by veteran actor Ahn Seong-gi, an old archer who functions as a unifying force among the Koreans on their journey.

This narrative choice helps emphasise the more sentimental aspects of *Musa: the Warrior*, with the younger generation dying while the older generation lives on. At the same time, *Musa: the Warrior* is clearly discussing the historical relationship between China and Korea, depicting the sacrifices made by the Korean people, who were long seen as a tributary state to the China. The film's finale therefore gains an additional level of national identity, having Ahn Seong-gi's survivor lament the sacrifice of the Korean people and literally turn his back on Chinese royalty in order to return to his home country.

With this in mind, Korean martial arts films can be defined not only through their use of sheer violence, but also by their use of such violence in order to highlight periods of Korean history and discuss ideas of Korean national identity. Following *Musa: the Warrior* and its strong foregrounding of violence as a vehicle for thematic exploration, the South Korean action film became more definable and concrete. Yet, Korean national identity is not just constructed through historical interactions with Korea's neighbouring countries, but also through a rejection of the corruption by the elite ruling classes (*yangban*) throughout Korea's history.

Korea's long-held hierarchical society was eliminated following the colonisation of the peninsula by Japan, but as period South Korean action films are set within the Joseon period or earlier, there is ripe narrative material to discuss the oppression of the lower classes and corruption and nepotism among the elite. Such narratives also serve as a suitable analogy for the corruption among the capitalist elite in contemporary Korean society, and as such these narratives contribute to a sense of Korean national identity by highlighting social inequalities through parable.

An example of this can be seen in *Sword in the Moon* / *Cheongpung Myeongwol* (2003, Kim Ui-seok), which follows a soldier of the elite guard for the king who is used to subjugate and oppress the lower classes to stop them from revolting. The soldier comes across an old friend who he thought was dead, and he slowly begins to realise he is a cog within the machine of oppression. This causes him to fight back against the other elite soldiers and ultimately attempt to assassinate the king. The film ends with the soldier and his old friend dying together, unable to complete the assassination, and in doing so the film highlights revolution as something which can only succeed through mass involvement. Much like *Musa: the Warrior*, *Sword in the Moon* features bloody action sequences, and the two central protagonists are killed during the climactic battle of the film. As such, despite its difference in narrative, focusing within Korea rather than on Korea and its neighbours, the film contributes to the solidification of South Korean period action cinema as a site through which approaches to action are informed by thematic concerns.

The 'sheer violence' which is propagated throughout these early twenty-first century South Korean period action films contrasts the championing of masculinity and brotherhood which permeated the action cinema of the 1970s. Whereas the vengeful protagonists of Hong Kong cinema, and indeed the South Korean productions influenced by it, would fight through significant wounds, axes embedded in abdomens, and excessive blood loss, the protagonists of South Korean action cinema would ultimately succumb to wounds in a far more realistic manner.

In this way, the theme of sacrifice would come to define violence every bit as much as the film's form would realise violence through exaggerated blood spatter and close-ups of gruesome wounds. Such action cinema therefore defined itself in much the same way as the earlier Korean-directed Hong Kong productions, wherein vengeance and violence are questioned and challenged rather than openly celebrated and championed.

3.6 Conclusion

The opening to the nostalgic teen drama/martial arts hybrid film *The Spirit of Jeet Kune Do / Maljukgeroi Janhoksa* (2004, Yu Ha)[207] has its protagonist, Hyeon-su (Kwon Sang-woo), narrate the memory of watching *Fist of Fury* in a cinema with his friends. Accompanying this narration, footage of children watching the film is shown. As the iconic yelps and shouts of Bruce Lee echo throughout the cinema hall, the camera focuses on the faces of children who are watching in amazement, even jumping out of their seats to mimic the actions of Lee as the film progresses.

Throughout *The Spirit of Jeet Kune Do*, Hyeon-su is shown to idolise Bruce Lee, mimicking his movements and mannerisms, and even training with nunchaku in an effort to emulate his hero. During the film ending, Hyeon-su engages in a rooftop fight against a rival gang, and at the decisive moment he unleashes his nunchaku, swinging them with proficiency equal to that of Lee. His attackers are momentarily stunned, overwhelmed by the physical manifestation of an iconic martial arts hero. The film ends with Hyeon-su being dragged by his friends to see the Jackie Chan-starring *Drunken Master*, all the while claiming that nobody could ever be better than Bruce Lee.

[207] Though the Korean title of the film translates to '*The Cruel History of Maljuk Street'*, the film is also known by another international title, '*Once Upon a Time in High School'*. For the purpose of this thesis, *The Spirit of Jeet Kune Do* was chosen as the English language title in order to emphasise the Hong Kong influence (Jeet Kune Do being Bruce Lee's own form of martial art), rather than the vague allusions to Western cinema conjured up by the other title, of which the film makes no reference whatsoever.

In *The Duel: Final Round / Daegyeol* (2016)[208] a young arrogant teen who is good at fighting, Pung-ho (Lee Ju-seung), is forced to study under a drunken martial arts master (Shin Jeong-geun) in order to fight the man responsible for putting his brother in hospital. While cocky, Pung-ho ultimately comes to respect the drunken man, and through him learns the secrets of drunken martial arts. The film features an extensive training session involving alcohol, and culminates in Pung-ho displaying his abilities in the styles of all eight of the immortal gods (even, reluctantly, the female god). Pung-ho then manages to avenge his brother by employing the skills learned from the drunken master.[209]

In these two examples, the martial arts action cinema of Hong Kong is either directly referenced or heavily lifted from in terms of narrative. These films don't simply make use of intertextual reference as a means of cinephilic boasting, but rather openly embrace the influence of Hong Kong cinema, and acknowledge the significant impact that martial arts films have had on the development of South Korean action films. At the end of *The Spirit of Jeet Kune Do,* the billboard image of Jackie Chan announces not only the arrival of a new star of action cinema, but more specifically the continuing influence of Hong Kong cinema over South Korea.

This legacy of influence is realised by *The Duel: Final Round's* unabashed love for *Drunken Master*, evidenced in its consistent desire to reference both the film and the potential of martial arts cinema as a whole. Pung-ho's dismissal of martial arts as old and outdated therefore makes explicit acknowledgement of a point in history where martial arts cinema was seen as new and exciting. That Pung-ho comes to rectify his wayward path and avenge his brother through using those exact old and outdated martial arts is therefore a tacit championing of the potential that can be achieved by engaging with the tenets of the action cinema, namely its choreography and its ability to imbue action scenes with thematic depth.

[208] The film's Korean title quite literally translates to *Fight* or *Showdown*.
[209] For clarity, this plot largely follows that of *Drunken Master* (1978), albeit in a contemporary setting.

The history of South Korean action cinema is hard to trace, obfuscated by sporadic action scenes resulting in erroneous genre classifications, and the dearth of interest in South Korean action films prior to their resurgence towards the end of the 1990s.

Observed across the entirety of the history of Korean film production, there are two periods of peak activity which easily stand out. The second of these periods is the contemporary South Korean action cinema, which continues to be a successful and highly produced genre. The first period is found in the 1960s and 70s, as a direct result of the interactions between Hong Kong and South Korea. For Korean scholars, the martial arts films which erupted during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s signalled a loss of national specificity wherein South Korea merely copied the formal approaches of another nation's product. For Western scholars, the Hong Kong influence – when discussed at all – equally positions the relationship as a one-sided interaction in which Hong Kong reaped all of the rewards. Such negative approaches, embedded in notions of nationalism and industrial benefit, overlook the genre transformations at play during this period, which provided a formal consistency on which to build an action genre within South Korea. This evolution of the action genre resulted in action cinema gaining a socio-political element, allowing it to comment on Korea's tumultuous history, whilst simultaneously interrogating Korea's then social struggle under a military dictatorship.

In many ways, the inception of the action genre as a definable genre with clear and consistent elements concerning narrative, character archetypes, and film form, is found during this period of co-operation. South Korean filmmakers took influence from multiple elements heavily featured throughout the transformation of the action genre in Hong Kong: romantic and hyper-masculine heroes, a greater emphasis on violence, choreography, and framing that provided spectacle, and the rooting of action scenes to thematic and character development. At the same time, Korean filmmakers employed these elements from Hong Kong cinema in an attempt to

question and challenge the very same excessively violent masculine cinema which generated such influence.

South Korean action cinema is indebted to the films of Hong Kong, and the interactions between the two countries would result in South Korean films which employed action in a more stylish, more spectacular, more violent, and ultimately a more emotionally and thematically resonant manner. As evidenced throughout this chapter, the relationship between South Korea and Hong Kong and the impact such a relationship had on the development of the action genre, namely allowing action to become prominent enough so as to be classifiable as a genre, has received a good amount of attention relative to the other genres discussed in this study. At the same time, however, the very films produced during this period are largely forgotten and overlooked, and if such films are even discussed they figure as little more than a side note within wider examinations of the South Korean action film. This chapter has therefore attempted to prioritise the significant shifts evident in the form and content of films from this period, as a way to construct an understanding of the action genre which acknowledges this vital period of the genre's history.

CHAPTER THREE: HORROR

Examining Regional Influences: from Folklore to the Horror of Modern Technologies

4.1: Introduction

Much like the action genre, the horror genre did not become definable in South Korean cinema until the 1960s. At the same time, the genealogy of the horror genre in South Korea becomes somewhat distorted and blurred as a result of the co-operation period between South Korea and Hong Kong. Hong Kong productions with South Korean actors or crew were often imported into South Korea and sold as South Korean film productions.

The most obvious example of the way in which such industrial actions blur the historical focus on the genre's development is found in the Hong Kong production *The Ghost Lovers / Yan Nu Huan Hun* (1974). Directed by the famed Korean director Shin Sang-ok, and featuring Korean actors such as Kim Mu-yeong and Ju Yeong, the film was nevertheless a Shaw Brothers production built around the Hong Kong stars Li Ching and Lam Wai-tiu. Despite the production background, the film would be released in South Korea almost four months prior to the film's release in Hong Kong, albeit under an entirely different name: *The Woman with Half a Soul / Banhonnyeo* (1973). Naturally, the duality of existence granted to films such as this work against an easy chronology of horror films produced within South Korea, but such films also help emphasise the strong regional currents at play during the genre's development.[210]

[210] Hong Kong's horror cinema was also burgeoning during this period, equally eager to establish a consistent approach to the genre. While South Korean ghosts were realised through the use of editing, the ghosts of Hong Kong horror during this time relied on wire-heavy theatrics, as seen in films such as *The Bride from Hell / Gui Xin Niang* (1972) and *The Enchanting Ghost* (1970).

Rather than the industrial problems of South Korean horror's past, obstacles more recently occur with regard to criticism and distribution. When discussing contemporary horror in the East Asia region, it is impossible not to mention the significant impact that turn of the century Japanese horror (also referred to as J-Horror) had upon the horror genre. So significant was the influence of Japanese horror that it even found cultural relevance in the West, wherein Hollywood soon took influence from the Japanese approach and quickly optioned numerous remakes of prominent Japanese horror films.

The arrival of the DVD market allowed for Japanese cinema to become a prominent fixture in the West, with horror films being imported and distributed *en masse*. These films ranged from highly influential works such as *Ring / Ringu* (1998, Japan, Hideo Nakata) or the *Ju-On* series (2000- , Japan, Various), to more obscure productions such as *The Booth / Busu* (2005, Japan, Yoshihiro Nakamura) and *Pray / Purei* (2005, Japan, Yuichi Sato). In the West, these films were released under the branding of 'Asia Extreme' by the distributor Tartan and were uniformly marketed primarily at underground, cult audiences, regardless of the film's actual content.

The success of Tartan led to numerous other companies buying up any Japanese horror that was available, leading to the Western distribution of films such as *Kirei? The Terror of Beauty / Ki-re-i?* (2004, Japan, Katsuya Matsumura) or *The Suicide Manual / Jisatsu Manyuaru* films (2003, Japan, Various), which are low budget, often direct-to-video productions. The proliferation of Japanese 'extreme' cinema throughout the West eventually resulted in the construction of Sushi Typhoon in 2010, a production studio aimed at producing extreme genre films specifically for international audiences. Often sacrificing plot in favour of gore and cheap special effects, films such as *Mutant Girls Squad / Sento Shojo: Chi no Tekkamen Densetsu* (2010, Japan, Various) and *Helldriver / Herudoraiba* (2010, Japan, Yoshihiro Nishimura) were aimed specifically at cult, trashy sensibilities and premiered at Western film festivals, making explicit their focus on international audiences.

The Japanese example is interesting as it provides a significant moment wherein Hollywood is forced to assimilate and accept a distinctly foreign approach to genre. At the same time, however, the 'Asia Extreme' branding and its effect on subsequent importations of East Asian cinema to the West have left a lingering negative effect in regard to the way in which these films are discussed. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, as Tartan released numerous East Asian films under the 'extreme' label, two significant, and interconnected, problems emerged. First, the national origin of each film was essentially nullified. Despite releasing films from Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Thailand the 'Asia Extreme' brand prioritised shock and awe over establishing national specificity. Chi-Yun Shin has examined the Tartan Asia example in depth, commenting that:

> 'such genrification of certain East Asian films should be understood as an integral part of providing illusions of discovery, that is, a way of knowing and classifying East Asian cinema. It should also be considered as a marketing strategy that fronts certain films to sell all other titles'.[211]

In this way, nation is positioned below content and instead films are largely known through branded distribution in the West. As such, films become known for an apparent universal 'extreme' nature and not for their specific national approaches to genre. Such homogeneity has a major impact on the second problem, namely the way in which genre becomes dissolved in favour of branding. Not all films released under this sub-label were horror films, and therefore 'Asia Extreme' came to be just as synonymous with crime and thriller films, emphasising the brand through conflating genres under a new terminology; a terminology which lacked the required criteria in order to properly define itself. This approach would extend to other distribution companies, and would eventually become embedded in the very foundational principles of Sushi Typhoon, as evidenced by producer Yoshinori Chiba's claim that 'even if the

[211] Shin, Chi-Yun (2009) *The Art of Branding: Tartan "Asia Extreme" Films* pp. 99

films we make don't become very popular here in Japan, as long as we have fans around the world we should be able to keep making these films'.[212] By indulging in a 'cult' hybrid genre constituting action, horror, and exploitation the films produced by Sushi Typhoon negate belonging to a specific genre in favour of providing gore and effects-heavy experiences through the filter of a kitsch stylistic approach.

As a result of the 'Asia Extreme' branding, therefore, the horror genre has become amalgamated with other genres. This has caused the generic markers of what constitutes horror to become muddied. This is true of Japanese horror, and it is only further exacerbated when discussing horror films from other regions in East Asia. The South Korean example is particularly troublesome. Clear evidence of such dilution of the criteria of the South Korean horror film can be found in the inclusion of an essay concerning *Oldboy / Oldeuboi* (2003, Park Chan-wook) in the essay collection *Korean Horror Cinema*, to-date the only English language book available on the genre.

Released under the 'Asia Extreme' label by Tartan both in the UK and the United States, *Oldboy* is by no metric a horror film, but rather exists as a prime example of the thriller film. Yet the justification for *Oldboy* as a horror film goes no further than its inclusion of 'violent' and 'transgressive elements'. Such justification falls short of convincing categorisation, especially when the South Korean thriller genre is notorious for its employment of 'violent and transgressive material'.[213] Even ignoring the incredibly violent post-*Oldboy* thrillers such as *The Chaser / Chugyeokja* (2008, Na Hong-jin), and *I Saw the Devil / Akmareul Boatda* (2010, Kim Ji-woon), there are clear precedents to the violence of *Oldboy* which firmly position the film as belonging to the thriller.

One of the most obvious examples of this is *Tell Me Something / Tel Mi Sseomding* (1999, Chang Yoon-hyun), a murder mystery which features numerous images of mangled or dissected bodies,

[212] Gay, E. (2010) *Interview: Sushi Typhoon Founder Yoshinori Chiba* http://www.scifijapan.com/articles/2010/11/18/interview-sushi-typhoon-founder-yoshinori-chiba/

[213] Smith (2013), *Oldboy goes to Bollywood: Zinda and the transnational appropriation of South Korean 'extreme' cinema*, pp. 193

dingy and oppressive spaces of urban decay, and most notably, during the film's conclusion, a Frankenstein's Monster-esque creation of sewn together body parts suspended in an aquarium. Other examples of violent imagery can be found in *Truth or Dare / Jinshil Geim* (2000, Kim Ji-yeong), the images of corpses among garbage dumps in *H* (2002, Lee Jong-hyeok), or the floating corpse of a child and the river stabbing scene in *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance / Boksuneun Naeui Geot* (2002, Park Chan-wook).

Further problematising the issues here are comparisons to Hollywood and, again, the implied dominance of Hollywood style over regional approaches. In comparison to the example of action cinema discussed in the previous chapter, however, it is important to acknowledge that Hollywood and East Asian horror have had traceable influence upon each other. This is particularly true during the late 1990s and early 2000s, where East and West were interacting on an unprecedented level. The influence of Hollywood upon South Korean horror is not found in films such as *A Tale of Two Sisters / Janghwa, Hongryeon* (2003, Kim Ji-woon) and *Whispering Corridors / Yeogo Gwidam* (1998, Park Gi-hyeong), which Darrel William Davis and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh suggest 'resemble American horror'[214], but instead is found in the brief appearance of films which attempt the slasher sub-genre of Hollywood horror.[215] In these films – *Bloody Beach / Haebyeoneuro Gada* (2000, Kim In-su), *The Record / Jjikhimyeon Jukneunda* (2000, Park Il-seo), and to a lesser extent *Nightmare / Gawi* (2000, Ahn Byeong-gi) – there is an emphasis on a group of friends being hunted by a killer, resulting in the violent stabbings and deaths associated with

[214] Davis, D.W. and Yeh, Emilie Yueh-yu (2008) *East Asian Screen Industries* pp. 122

[215] The films chosen for comparison with Hollywood here seem rather counterproductive to the point being argued. *A Tale of Two Sisters* is an adaptation of an old Korean folktale and, as will be discussed throughout this chapter, Korean folklore is instrumental in the construction of South Korean horror films. *Whispering Corridors*, on the other hand, will be discussed later on as part of the Japanese influence on late-1990s South Korean horror. The Japanese films highlighted in this comparison to Hollywood also struggle to convince. *Tomie* (1998, Japan, Ataru Oikawa) and *Uzumaki* (2000, Japan, Higuchinsky) are based on the popular horror manga of Junji Ito and rely absolutely on Davis and Yeh's prior categorising notion that the threats in Japanese horror films are not 'concentrated within a single malevolent being' and are 'ambient, seemingly random, and not completely disembodied, but resembling hazards pestilential, environmental, electronic, and social – even fuelled by rumour' (Ibid. pp, 120). The other film mentioned, *Shikoku* (1999, Japan, Shunichi Nagasaki), is a ghost story heavily embedded in the tradition of films like *Kuroneko* (1968, Japan, Kaneto Shindo) and *The Ghost of Yostsuya / Yotsuya Kaidan* (1959, Japan, Nobuo Nakagawa).

slasher films. Nevertheless, these films largely vanished following this initial wave, and so the Hollywood influence remains mostly contained to a brief flash of influence. While Choi Jin-hee is right to point out that 'the attention given to the horror genre and its revival in general occurred in tandem with a growing popularity in horror cinema both within the region and worldwide', it is important to acknowledge the relative levels at which nations influenced and interacted with one another, lest Hollywood assumes a *de facto* hierarchical authority over the genre.[216] As this chapter will discuss, the contemporary South Korean horror cinema has far more in common with that of Japan than that of Hollywood.

In an attempt to reposition the meaning of horror when discussing films produced by South Korea, it is necessary, then, to take a moment to highlight specifically what is meant by the term 'horror' within the context of this writing.

The horror genre is a diverse beast, an umbrella term for multiple approaches to narrative content and film form which aspire to depict the dark, the sinister, the otherworldly, and the supernatural. Owing to the etymology of the word horror, films aligned with the horror genre seek to make audiences shudder, tremble, and feel a sense of disgust. The wide range of approaches to the genre in the West has resulted in the creation of sub-genres which are so ubiquitous and definable they are often employed without the need to include horror, the very genre to which they are positioned sub-, as a signifying generic term. Slasher films, *giallo,* zombie films, possession films, home invasion films, body horror, found footage, and even that much maligned terminology torture porn, all commit to their own set of internal rules within the already pre-existing wider generic trappings of the horror genre.

Due to its existence as a catch-all genre for what are, even with cursory analysis, wildly divergent approaches to film, the horror genre struggles to maintain a generic consistency, thereby preventing easy tracings of lineage and influence. Indeed, in the West, horror cinema has never

[216] Choi Jin-hee (2010) pp. 125

enjoyed a clear and concrete definition. Even when the monsters of Universal cinema emerged in Hollywood during the 1930s, they entered a genre already replete with mad scientists, murder mysteries, Haitian zombies, and 'man against nature' allegories. Instead, a history of horror, from the perspective of the West, becomes a mapping of the arrival of significant sub-genres, and with them further dilution of the generic clarity of horror.

With regard to South Korean horror, as previously established, the inclusion of mutilated bodies, violent imagery, or even the presence of murder, does not fit within the criteria of the South Korean horror film, but rather such elements position a film more in line with the thriller. At the most basic level, in terms of narrative content it is instead the inclusion of threatening supernatural elements into a film which signifies it as belonging to the horror genre within South Korea. While the most obvious example of the supernatural would be the ghost, and as will soon become apparent the ghost is intrinsic to South Korean horror, the existence of any non-human entity within a film helps towards the classification of it as a horror film. This division between the non-human entity and the human murderer helps to delineate between the horror and the thriller on purely narrative terms, allowing for the film's forms and themes to be further explored. While the 'Asia Extreme' branding ultimately led to an understanding of East Asian horror cinema which overlooked nation and genre, in truth there are homogenous elements in horror films from East Asia, albeit not in the way that these films were marketed to the West. The horror cinema of Japan and South Korea are not linked by their attempts at providing 'extreme' cinema, but rather by centuries of narrative frameworks and devices. Looking at horror produced throughout the East Asia region, there is the potential for horror to maintain a far greater consistency than that of Hollywood and its ever increasing sub-genres.

East Asian horror is currently in danger of suffering the same fate as horror in the West, stretched to fit in order to accommodate films which can, and should, be placed into other genres. By stripping down the horror genre so that it refers specifically to supernatural threats,

this chapter is able to take fully into account the long regional history shared by countries across the East Asian region, especially in terms of folklore and the horror tradition. At the same time, the horror films produced by South Korea also make use of the indigenous shamanist religion of the peninsula. In an attempt to define its significant elements and prioritise the historical connections at play in its formation and realisation, this chapter therefore focuses on the development of the horror genre throughout the twentieth century.

4.2: Folklore and Literary Tradition

4.2.a: Examining the Pre-History of Cinematic Horror Narratives

Like with *pansori* and the development of Korean melodrama, any construction of the horror genre must begin with its non-filmic precedents. In the case of horror specifically, these precedents are found in folklore tales. It is in this emphasis on in the influence of folklore that we find similar generic genealogies in the East Asia region.

In Japan, folklore tales play a significant part in the form and narratives found throughout Japanese horror cinema. One of the most significant texts in the history of horror is *Kwaidan*[217]*: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* by Lafcadio Hearn.[218] A Greek/Irish immigrant to Japan, Hearn collected and documented numerous tales recounted to them by various Japanese people he met during their travels. Writing in 1904, Hearn comments that:

> 'Most of the following *Kwaidan,* or Weird Tales, have been taken from old books […]. Some of the stories may have had a Chinese origin: the very remarkable "Dream of Akinosuke," for example, is certainly from a Chinese source. But the Japanese story-teller, in every case, has so recolored and shaped his borrowing as to naturalise it…[219] One

[217] *Kwaidan* is an older form of romanising *kaidan* (essentially: weird tales), and is today largely used only in reference to Hearn's book.
[218] Of course, Hearn's *Kwaidan* is not the only text to heavily influence the development of Japanese horror cinema. The play *Ghost Story of Yotsuya in Tokaido / Tokaido Yotsuya Kaidan,* written in 1825 by Tsuruya Nanboku IV, has been adapted multiple times throughout Japanese cinema history.
[219] This ellipsis is present in the original text and does not signal a 'cutting away' of the quote.

> queer tale, , "Yuki-Onna," was told to me by a farmer of Chofu, Nishitama-gori, in Musashi province, as a legend of his native village.'[220]

There are of course multiple elements to unpick in Hearn's introduction to their collection of tales. Notably, there is an acknowledgement of regional influence, allowing folklore tradition to emerge across geographic neighbours, becoming adopted and 'naturalised' in the process. For now, this quote forms the basis of a regional approach to horror which will be argued throughout this chapter.

Hearn's observations on specific village tales having a sense of applicability to notions of the strange and eerie in any region or locale within Japan also helps signal the way in which folklore permeated throughout culture, thanks to oral tradition and cultural superstitions. Though perhaps not known by the same name, or even the same narrative, over time the essential elements of such tales became embedded across the country, and even across the wider East Asian region.

In China a similar influential text is found in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio / Liaozhai Zhiyi*, written by Pu Songling. Published in 1766, the book includes over a hundred short tales featuring all manner of supernatural creatures and occurrences. The book's translator, John Minford, comments on the collection in their introduction, claiming that:

> 'Often these tales are referred to as 'Tales of the Supernatural', and in a sense they are, in that they deal with the entire range of the Strange, stretching right across the spectrum of nature and supernature. In traditional Chinese thinking the boundary between 'this' world and the world 'beyond' is far more elastic than it is for Western readers today.'[221]

Minford also takes the time to properly establish the traditional elements found within these tales, emphasising that:

[220] Hearn (1971), pp. xv-xvi
[221] Minford (2006), pp. xxv

> 'Pu Songling was enormously well read […] and deeply conscious of writing in two long literary traditions of storytelling, two distinct genres, that of *zhiguai*, which we may call the Weird Account, and that of the *chuanqi*, the Strange Story. […] A Weird Account might be best described as a pithy narrative of some strange event, a laconic record of some grotesque creature, of a haunting, a bizarre person, a peculiar phenomenon or coincidence. […] The Strange Stories are more artistically polished than the Weird Accounts. They are short works of fiction with fully developed plots and characterisation. Some are romantic, some fantastical, some semi-historical, others are concerned with the exploits of magicians and martial artists.'[222]

For Minford, there is a thread which remains evident today, noting that:

> 'This sort of thing has fascinated Chinese readers since the dawn of literature, and still does. The Chinese press, both in the Mainland and in Hong Kong, regularly carries accounts of odd phenomena, sometimes human, sometimes not.'[223]

With this in mind, the Weird Account provides an obvious point of influence upon the horror cinema, and provides a point of comparison with the *kwaidan* published by Lafcadio Hearn.[224]

Although no specific collective text stands out as culturally central in Korean folklore, as in the texts by Pu and Hearn, especially in regards to specific citation and direct adaptation, collections of Korean folklore nevertheless still exist. Jeong In-seob's *Folk Tales from Korea* collects a wide range of tales and narratives from throughout Korean history. Jeong highlights folkloric tradition in their author's foreword to the collection, observing that:

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[222] Ibid. pp. xxii-xxiii

[223] Ibid. pp. xxiii

[224] This connection is further reinforced by author Zach Davisson, who has written extensively on the Japanese ghost, or *Yurei*, and has translated many Japanese ghost stories, in their attempt to translate the term *kaidan.* According to Davisson:

> 'The first kanji in *kaidan,* 怪 (*kai*), means *weird, strange* or *mysterious*. […] The second kanji in *kaidan* 談 (*dan),* means to *discuss* or *talk.* The kanji carries the nuance of transference of information, of passing from one mouth to another […] The most literal possible interpretation of kaidan would be something like *a discussion or passing down of tales of the weird, strange, or mysterious.'* (Davisson)

> 'My mother and my five sisters […] and their friends told me many fairy tales while I was still a child. I heard more from my classmates at the '*sodang*', the old type of Korean school, which I attended at the age of seven. When I was eight I went to a primary school of the Western type, but even there I heard tales of old Korea from boys from other villages. My father was a scholar of the classics […] he arranged a special […] study room in our house where schoolboys used to come and visit […] and where we used to exchange stories. The next room was allotted to the farm workers, and there my elder brother and myself sometimes went at night to listen to their stories by the dim light of the oil-lamp'.[225]

In Jeong's quote it is clear to see the prevalence and function of folklore, and indeed its allure to, and prominent role within, the foundational and developing minds of children. Equally important here is how the setting contributes towards the atmosphere of the narrative being told. The dark, lamp-lit congregations only add to the suspense and tension of the narrative. At the same time, folklore also bridged across communities and even countries, as Jeong highlights:

> 'The geographical location of Korea and its political situation have greatly influenced the literary taste of her inhabitants. […] So in her folk tales we can trace several intermingling currents from the surrounding countries of China, Japan, India, Mongolia, Tibet, Manchuria, and Sibera'.[226]

Jeong is also quick to point out that in Korean folk tales:

> 'Many supernatural beings appear, but they do not behave in the same way as those in Japanese stories. This is due […] to the historical background of religion in Korea and its changing social status through the ages. Korean fairies, elves, goblins, ghosts, giants, monsters, and other such creatures all have their own peculiarly Korean characteristics.

[225] Jeong In-seob (1952), pp. vii
[226] Ibid. pp. xx

> Dragons, animals, and plants behave in many cases in a Korean manner, and certain kinds figure in our stories more often than in those of other countries.'[227]

Unfortunately, Jeong does not elaborate on exactly what is meant by behaving in a 'Korean manner'. Nevertheless, it is true that, despite the similarities in narrative structure across regions, the creatures found in the narratives are easier to delineate by country. Snakes, for example, figure far more often in Chinese folklore, while tigers are common in Korean folklore. When it comes to magical creatures, it becomes important to acknowledge both the similarities and differences. The Japanese *kappa* (a river dwelling humanoid with a carapace and a notable depression at the top of the head) is seemingly unique, where as the Japanese *kitsune,* Korean *gumiho,* and Chinese *jiuweihu* (a multi-tailed fox with the ability to transform into a human) share numerous characteristics and are considered to be the same creature. In order to fully understand the horror genre of Korea, it is necessary to not only look at the construction of Korean folk tales, but also folklore from its geographic neighbours. In these weird tales are the very foundations of horror cinema.

One of the more immediately noticeable elements of such folklore tales is, of course, their form, especially in how they frame and introduce their narratives. An example of such framing can be found in *The Centipede Girl* from *Folk Tales of Korea:*

> 'There was once a poor man who lived on the outskirts of Seoul. He was so poor that he could neither provide food for his family, nor keep a roof over their heads. His dire poverty reduced him to the uttermost depths of despair, and at last in the extremity of his misery he resolved to end his life.'[228]

Similar introductions are found in Japanese and Chinese folklore, as seen in this example from *Kwaidan, The Story of O-Tei:*

[227] Ibid. pp. xix
[228] Jeong In-seob (1952), pp. 97

> 'A long time ago, in the town of Niigata, in the province of Echizen, there lived a man called Nagao Chosei. Nagao was the son of a physician, and was educated for his father's profession. At an early age he had been betrothed to a girl called O-Tei: the daughter of one of his father's friends; and both families had agreed that the wedding should take place as soon as Nagao had finished his studies.'[229]

And this example from *Strange Tales of a Chinese Studio, Friendship Beyond the Grave*:

> 'There was a gentleman of Huaiyang by the name of Ye. (His other names I cannot recall.) He was acknowledged by his contemporaries to be a master of prose and verse composition but had been unlucky and had never yet succeeded in his first-degree examination.'[230]

These introductions not only establish place, time, character, and predicament, but more importantly they position the narrative as a tale being told, emphasising the 'passing down' of the tale through its introduction. In doing so, the medium reinforces its existence as a vehicle for narrative first and foremost. This self-creating fortification of narrative structure is carried over to the written word, evidenced by allusions to an 'origin' of the tales featured in the collected by Hearn and Jeong. Hearn, as previously mentioned, cites 'a tale told me by a farmer of Chofu, Nishitama-gori, in Musashi province', highlighting the specific locality of certain tales. [231] In *Folk Tales of Korea,* most tales feature the date, place, and name in which the specific tale was recounted to Jeong, thereby emphasising the oral tradition and with it the very act of telling stories.

Continuing on, in terms of horror it is important to focus on the way in which horror is both created and maintained throughout these folklore narratives. In *The Centipede Girl* the poor man

[229] Hearn (1971), pp. 29
[230] Pu (2006), pp. 112
[231] Hearn (1972), pp. xv. Of course, the vast amount of folklore produced and disseminated across time and space makes any notion of a definitive origin near impossible to define.

flings himself off a bridge into the Han river, but, after coming to, is startled to find himself not only alive but in the presence of a beautiful woman. The woman invites him back to her luxurious house, and the man follows. After this:

> 'The man stayed on as a guest and fell in love with the girl. He forgot his family completely. In any case he was sure he must be dead, for had he not thrown himself in the river to put an end to his life? Never in his wildest dreams had he imagined that any such delights could exist in the world as the life he was now leading with this girl. She was of the most ethereal beauty, and gave him the finest clothes to wear, and the richest food to eat.'[232]

The narrative, which began in the realities of normal life, very quickly becomes a tale of otherworldly tension. The mysterious woman who lavishes gifts upon a stranger, and allows him to live at her home, brings mystery into the story: her intentions are unclear, and her hold over the man, to the degree that he forgets his own family, hints at potentially supernatural occurrences.

As the narrative continues, the man remembers his family and desires to return to them. The woman allows but warns that the man should avoid anyone who might attempt to deter him if he ever decides to return to the woman. After spending some time with his family, the man desires to see the woman again, and heads back to the luxurious house. On his return journey, the man

> 'had to pass by a big hollow tree. Just as he came to it he was surprised to hear a voice calling him by name. 'My dear grandson,' it said, 'I am the spirit of your grandfather.

[232] Jeong In-seob (1952), pp. 98

> Listen to me. You must not visit that woman again. I give you this warning for your own good. She is no woman, but a centipede a thousand years old'.'[233]

In this section, the narrative reveals its first big shock moment. The woman's actions are given nefarious undertones, and the existence of a ghost firmly establishes the supernatural elements within the narrative. Despite these warnings, the man stubbornly desires to see the woman again, and so is given instructions about how to be rid of the centipede woman. He is to chew tobacco in his mouth and spit it on her face when he sees her. The man complies and heads to the house with tobacco firmly embedded in his clenched teeth. The woman greets him but begins to sob upon realising the man's intentions. The man, overcome with pity for the woman, spits the tobacco out of the window instead. The woman is overjoyed, and tells the man:

> 'Thank you for sparing me,' she said. 'The voice that you heard is not your grandfather's. It was the accursed snake that lives in the hollow tree. I am a daughter of the Heavenly King, and the snake was one of the servants in the palace. He fell in love with me and tried to seduce me.'[234]

The woman goes on to explain that both she and the snake were banished for a period of time and, had the man spat in her face, she would have been banished for three years more. Here the narrative essentially reaches its climax, and finally reveals to its audience the true nature of the woman. At the same time, it fools the audience by exchanging the apparently helpful ghost with a jealous and vengeful snake, replacing one supernatural entity with another. The story, however, ultimately ends on a more ambiguous note:

[233] Ibid. pp. 99
[234] Ibid. pp. 100

> 'So they had just one more day of happiness together, and that night they dreamed the sweetest of dreams. When the man awoke in the morning he found himself lying on a rock. There was no sign of the house, and he was quite alone.'[235]

With the story's final sentence, there is an undoing of the build up of the tale's supernatural elements, in order to make things less concrete and ultimately shroud the whole story in a mist of ambiguity and unresolved mystery. The spectre of the narrative's events haunt the final moments of the narrative without the need for any confirmation of its actual existence. Questions linger as to the ultimate fate of the man and indeed the veracity of his experiences. Ambiguity is essential to the lingering tensions felt by the narratives final statement. No position is given as to where the man awakens other than he is upon a rock. Is this a rock beside the Han River, meaning that the man has merely awoken from a strange dream after jumping from the bridge? Or is this rock where the house once stood, meaning that the woman has returned to her Heavenly father? Is the man, in fact, dead and forced to wander as a ghost, as implied by the final remark that he was 'quite alone'? The inability to provide a concrete answer embeds the narrative with a sense of unease and tension which simultaneously stimulates the mind and haunts any further dwelling upon the story itself.

Such structure is found throughout numerous Korean folk tales, and also in the folk tales of the region. In *Jikininki,* from *Kwaidan*, a priest becomes lost travelling through the mountains and seeks shelter at the dwellings of another priest in the mountain, only to be turned away and directed to a nearby village. At the village the priest helps in the burial rites of a recently deceased man, sitting beside the body alone for one night. The supernatural elements are embedded in the following quote:

> 'But, when the hush of the night was at its deepest, there noiselessly entered a Shape, vague and vast; and in the same moment Muso [the priest] found himself without power

[235] Ibid. pp. 100

> to move or speak. He saw that Shape lift the corpse, as with hands, and devour it, more quickly than a cat devours a rat, beginning at the head, and eating everything, the hair and the bones and even the shroud. And the monstrous Thing, having thus consumed the body, turned to the offerings, and ate them also. Then it went away, mysteriously as it had come.'[236]

The following day the priest tells the villagers of the priest he had met in the mountains, only to find that they know of no such person. He travels back to the priest's house, wherein the priest confesses his existence as the same Thing which had eaten the corpse the night previous. As the Shape asks for help, both it and the house vanish. The story ends thus:

> 'And Mosu Kokushi found himself kneeling alone in the high grass, beside an ancient and moss-grown tomb, of the form called *go-rin-ishi* [A funeral monument consisting of five stones in a circle], which seemed to be the tomb of a priest.' [237]

In *Jikininki* then, as in *The Centipede Girl,* there is a foregrounding of the supernatural, while at the same time an overhanging ambiguity present. Interactions between the protagonist and the supernatural element are isolated incidents, witnessed only by the protagonist. The ending of such tales only further emphasises this ambiguity, as the supernatural veil is lifted to reveal something more real and yet equally inexplicable. It is in these folklore narratives that we find the basis for comparative approaches to horror across the East Asian region. Otherworldly encounters with shape-shifting creatures, lingering ghosts in haunted spaces, and equivocal intentions and resolutions all provide the foundations upon which East Asian horror cinema is constructed. At the same time, specific folkloric narrative approaches from the basis for numerous horror films produced throughout the region.

[236] Hearn (1972), pp. 69
[237] Ibid. pp. 73

4.2.b: The Folklore Influence on Screen

By looking at how these 'weird tales' are transposed to the medium of film, their significance to the development of a horror genre becomes clear. Of course, the most obvious examples of such influence are found in direct adaptations of specific tales from such folklore, for example *Kwaidan / Kaidan* (1964, Japan), numerous *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* adaptations,[238] *The Enchanting Shadow / Ching Nu Yu Hun* (1960, Hong Kong), and numerous Korean adaptations of *The Story of Jang-hwa and Hong-ryeon.*[239]

What's more interesting is how these tales, and indeed their tradition of being 'passed down', feature prominently in East Asian horror cinema throughout history. The similarities between this oral tradition of folklore – listening intently to tales which frighten and excite – and the very act of watching a horror film, are essential to the latter's complete remediation of the former. Not only does horror take narrative inspiration from these tales, but the genre actively adopts and incorporates the oral tradition into its form. This means of disseminating folklore features heavily throughout East Asian horror cinema.

While, as is discussed in **section 4.4,** Japanese cinema often attempts to reframe the oral tradition through technology, in South Korean horror cinema the influence of folklore is embedded more traditionally, and as such the oral element is at times foregrounded. One of the most well known, and often remade, South Korean horror films, *The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha / Wolhaeui Gongdongmyoji* (1967, also known as *A Public Cemetery Under the Moon* and *Public Cemetery*), begins with a disfigured creature standing in a graveyard. Speaking directly to the camera, the creature begins to provide narration, setting the scene and detailing the frights that the film's viewers are about to witness:

[238] To date, *The Ghost Story of Yotsuya* has been the subject of around thirty film adaptations.

[239] Such adaptations range across the history of Korean cinema, from *The Story of Jang-hwa and Hong-ryeon / Janghwa Hongryeon Jeon* (1924) right up to the internationally well-known *A Tale of Two Sisters* (2003). While this places horror films right at the very start of Korean film production, *The Story of Jang-hwa and Hong-ryeon,* in all its incarnations, would be almost exclusively the only horror narrative produced until the genre expanded throughout the 1960s.

> 'Now, now, don't be alarmed. Forty years ago, I, Ha Tae-bong, used to narrate silent films. This is what I have become now. [...] And now, I will serve as narrator for this film. [...] Witness! In each of these graves are all the sorrows and joys of one's life! Tonight I shall tell you about one of these stories.'[240]

In this opening quote, there are multiple elements worth examining. First, this opening scene goes to great lengths to position the film as a narrative being told. This comes not only from the direct address of the creature to the camera, but in the narrator's choice of words, and even the presence of the narrator at all. As such, the film foregrounds its very narrativity, and in doing so it embeds itself within the folkloric tradition.

Second, this opening monologue makes specific reference to the *byeonsa*. A prominent aspect of the Korean silent cinema era, the *byeonsa* would provide oral narration of the film as it played, as well as add information and voice the on-screen characters.[241] *Byeonsa* were stars in their own right, becoming as much an attraction to the cinema as the actors and films themselves. Naturally, the *byeonsa*'s popularity faded during Korean cinema's transition to sound, though *byeonsa* narrated films exist well into the 1940s.[242] It is therefore interesting that *The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha* decides to feature the *byeonsa* in such a manner, allowing a continuity of not just Korean film history, but also a continuity of folklore trappings. As such, there is an attempt by the film to use a filmic tradition of oration in order to link into a larger history with regard to tales of the strange and eerie. In doing so, a literal spectre of Korean cinema's past is employed in order to perpetuate the act of passing down narratives. Thus, during the South Korean horror genre's formative years there is an emphasis on establishing the genre through the very tenets of Korea's folklore traditions.

[240] Opening monologue, *The Public Cemeteryof Wol-ha* (1967).
[241] In this way, the *byeonsa* is similar to the Japanese *benshi*.
[242] *Byeonsa* narration survives in the films *The Night Before Independence* (1948) and *A Public Prosecutor and A Teacher / Geomsawa Yeoseosaeng* (1948), for example.

At the same time, *The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha* does not rely solely on its folkloric representation of narrative in order to generate feelings of unease. Following the film's opening monologue, there is an extended montage of frightful images, a kind of overture of terror which seeks to establish mood before the film's story begins.

These images function in a manner similar to the act of sitting by a 'dim light' while waiting for the story to be told. They present a distinct otherworldly and uncanny presence, intriguing and frightening in equal measure. These visuals can therefore be seen to construct a visual atmosphere equal to that of the haunting tale about to be told. They seek to establish the generic specificity implied in the film's opening monologue, and as such work towards a greater unification between horror cinema and folklore tales from Korea's past.

One of the most significant examples of folklore's influence on South Korean horror cinema, in terms of both its narrative and its form, can be found in *The Evil Twin / Jeonseoleui Gohyang* (2007, Kim Ji-hwan), although its immediate significance is confused by the English language title. The film's Korean title translates to *Hometown Legend*, and is a title shared by a popular South Korean television show which has been produced at numerous points since the 1970s.[243] The film opens with a trio of men conversing late at night, introducing the main strand of the narrative while also foregrounding the focus on hearsay and local tales which remain thematically central throughout. The men discuss the apparent existence of a ghost, particularly the ghost of a daughter from a wealthy family who drowned while her mother saved her twin sister. Discussing how to deal with coming into contact with a ghost, one of the men becomes visibly scared and leaves the group. On his way back home through a moonlit forest, the man recalls their

[243] These television productions featured a different folk tale each episode, and provided a consistent thread for horror productions between the genre's initial boom period during the late 1960s and the genre's revival in the late 1990s. While the existence of a long-running, well-regarded television show based on folklore only further supports the strong influence of such tales over the form and content of horror in South Korea, the focus of this thesis is strictly to do with South Korean films, and as such these television productions are highlighted only for an example of wider influence and will not feature in any further analysis.

conversation as he becomes increasingly paranoid of a presence following him. In particular the man thinks about the way to deal with a ghost:

> "If you see a ghost, your eyes will of course reach theirs. At that time, just pretend that you haven't seen anything, and they will be unable to see you."[244]

Overcome with stomach aches, the man seeks shelter in a nearby house to relieve himself, and happens upon the ghost. As the ghost stalks the room, the man once again recalls his friends' conversation, but fails to follow their 'rules'. As a result, the man is seen by the ghost and assumedly killed as the screen cuts to white.

The opening scene of *The Evil Twin* therefore serves not only to indicate the prevalence of tales being told throughout the local community, but also uses folklore as way to establish the generic rules of the film. In this way, *The Evil Twin* opens with a small, eerie tale – not unlike many found throughout the regional folklore – in order to prioritise both the supernatural and the rules surrounding the supernatural entity itself. As such, this opening scene functions in a way similar to that of *The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha's* opening montage: such scenes attempt to visually establish an ambience necessary for the story that will follow. It is for this reason that this opening focuses on the man's growing tension and fear rather than the ghost itself: the opening serves to only suggest what the ghost is capable of, leaving the true horrors for later. Again, such framing harkens back to the folkloric tradition, wherein the supernatural would be suggested and hinted at, left to linger until finally emerging prominently later in the tale's progression.

Beyond this more specific example, *The Evil Twin* largely uses the dissemination of information among the local populace as an aspect of horror in and of itself. Throughout the film, rumours abound as to whether or not the twin that the mother saved was in fact her favourite of the two daughters. The daughter who survived suffered amnesia from the drowning incident, and so she has no recollection as to who she really is. As such, her apparently out-of-character actions result

[244] *The Evil Twin* (2007)

in rumours occurring throughout the locals as to her true identity. Again, the film emphasises these rumours through numerous shots which reinforce the passing around of the tale. Eventually, these rumours lead to tensions among the populace, and perpetuate the ambiguity concerning the daughter's true identity.

These shots help maintain the prominent influence of local tales throughout the film's development. The film's finale ultimately cements this folkloric influence. It is revealed that the mother had in fact saved the wrong daughter, and the ghost haunting the locals is the ghost of the other daughter, spurned by the fact that her mother had saved her sister instead of her. This is compounded by the fact that the ghost had always been her mother's favourite of the twins. The film thus ends with the ghost replaying the scene of her death, asking for her mother's help while the other daughter also struggles in the water. This time, the mother chooses her favourite, and is dragged down to the bottom of the lake in the embrace of the ghost, now placated. The surviving daughter is helped out of the lake, and the film ends with the shot of her and her rescuer standing on the pier, looking out over a still and tranquil scene at dawn.

With this final shot of the film, there is a tacit realisation of the ambiguity which permeates folklore tradition. There is no dialogue nor epilogue, the film ends with a shot of normalcy and peace, and yet the serenity of the scene is betrayed by its juxtaposition to the events depicted prior. In this way, the final shot of *The Evil Twin* functions in the same way as the final sentences found in folklore tales such as *The Centipede Girl* and *Jikininki*. In their depiction of relative normalcy and no mention of the supernatural, these final scenes shroud the narrative in an ambiguity which further adds to the tensions surrounding the narrative: there is an uneasy simultaneity of conclusion and perpetuation found in the narrative's lack of concrete and specific resolution. In this way, the tale essentially lingers in a state of limbo, complete in terms of form and yet open-ended with regard to the story. It is with this final moment that *The Evil Twin* fully realises the influence of folklore, by fully embedding itself in such narrative traditions. In this

way, *The Evil Twin* constructs its own folklore legend through making visual the previously oral or written foundations of such tales.

Folklore tales are at once exciting and terrifying, allowing a space to engage with and encounter the unknown or otherworldly but without being put in a position of danger. With this in mind, the adoption of folkloric tradition by the Korean cinema, and indeed other regional countries' cinemas, seems only natural. To use Jeong In-seob's words, sitting at night and listening to 'tales by the dim light of the oil-lamp' provides a near perfect precursory image to that of experiencing horror narratives through film; sitting in a darkened yet safe space, listening to a tale being told of the frightening, eerie, and weird. The narrative tradition of folklore, too, lives on through the narrative frameworks often employed by horror films: rules, ambiguity, and suggestive glimpses into the realm of the supernatural permeate throughout the South Korean horror film.

Though the section of this chapter has focused primarily on films which specifically feature folklore as a central theme within, or framing device of, the film, in truth these same folkloric tendencies can be applied to the vast majority of films mentioned elsewhere in this chapter and indeed to the vast majority of South Korean horror cinema in general. Having established this core link between the horror film and folklore, in particular the narrative frameworks found in both, the chapter will now focus more on the horror film's form.

4.3: Ghosts and South Korean Film

4.3.a: Anatomy of a Haunting: The Horror Genre Develops

Throughout the past fifty years of the horror genre in South Korea, stretching right back to the emergence of the genre's definable specificity, no supernatural entity has been portrayed more commonly, and consistently, than that of the ghost.[245] While both Chinese-language and Japanese

[245] Within the South Korean context, this vengeful ghost can be referred to as *wonhon*. As Lee Hyang-jin has highlighted, through Baek Moon-im and Park Seong-gyu, that:

horror film productions have often veered off into sub-genre through featuring other supernatural threats,[246] South Korean horror has largely stuck to the ghost as a means of producing terror. As such, these horror films often emphasise their haunting sequences.

In the analysis of *The Evil Twin* in the previous section, the haunt was looked at as a way through which internal consistency was maintained with regard to the rules established by the local legends present within the film. However, the haunting found in *The Evil Twin* finds itself largely opposed to the majority of haunt sequences which feature throughout South Korean horror cinema. More specifically, there is a presence of logic to the haunt which allows its progression to be understood and mapped onto the folklore framework, thereby allowing it to maintain a continuity of understanding, a through-line of sense.

Such logic is largely absent from hauntings found in other South Korean horror films, in fact there is instead an attempt by such films to emphasise fear through the very fracturing of logic. This section therefore analyses numerous depictions of hauntings, paying specific attention to their construction, and how their form works against notions of logic and reason in order to evoke horror and prioritise a sense of supernatural threat.

> "The *wonhon* is not the personification of a demon, god or monster; it is a human spirit, typically a young innocent woman for whom family conflict and sexual violation are the common cause for an early death. […] The lingering bad memories can be described as *han* (deep resentments at injustice), but in this case, the human spirit's intentions, even after being separated from its body by death, are manifested by *hon*". (Lee Hyang-jin, 2013, pp. 23)

Typified by their white clothing and long black hair, these spirits have been present in Korean cinema largely since Korea began producing films during the Japanese colonial period. They have remained a constant visual appearance throughout filmic history, and as such a genealogy can be constructed charting the use of the *wonhon* archetype from the colonial period right up to the modern day. Therefore, if the archetype features little sign of evolution or change throughout history, then perhaps the genealogy of the framing through which the archetype is presented can be analysed instead. Lee has highlighted the role of the *wonhon* in 1960s South Korean cinema, arguing that "Korean horror cinema during this period is equally informed by traditional views about socially acceptable sexual and familial behaviour" before going on to claim that "teaching patriarchal norms is a function of the ghost in Korean horror" (Ibid. pp. 24). Lee suggests this is a key difference between Japanese and Korean horror, stating "in Japanese cinema the motif of reproduction is not explicitly expressed, but in Korean cinema horror emerges from the home and reproduction" (Ibid. pp. 24).

[246] Hong Kong horror films in particular have relied heavily on the *jiangshi* (a hopping vampire who can be stopped by placing shamanistic paper talismans on the forehead), while Japanese films invoke a plethora of supernatural entities, particularly when adapting horror *manga* from the likes of Kazuo Umezu, Junji Ito, and Masaaki Nakayama.

Though *The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha* is often positioned as a watershed moment of South Korean horror cinema, there are clear precedents which provide insight into the emergence of the genre. *Madam White Snake* / *Baeksa Buin* (1960, Shin Sang-ok), which itself is based on the traditional Chinese folk tale *The Legend of the White Snake* / *Bai She Zhuan*, tells the story of a man who falls in love with a snake in the guise of a woman, and their fight to remain together. While the narrative largely follows the folklore tradition, steadily increasing supernatural occurrences and events over time, the film notably provides a somewhat precursory example of a haunt sequence.

After meeting the snake woman (Choi Eun-Hui) and becoming enamoured with her, the man, Heo-seon (Gang San Seong-il), is kidnapped and forced to lead his captors to the place where he met the woman. Upon arriving they are shocked to find that the house is in a severe state of disrepair. Enquiring with an old man walking by, it becomes apparent that nobody has lived in the house for three years. Despite this information, Heo-seon is adamant that he is at the correct location, leading the man to lament his seduction 'by a ghost'. Heo-seon and his captors then enter the house, with numerous shots of them moving ever closer into the grounds: through the garden, at the front door, and moving through the rooms. Before entering the chamber wherein Heo-seon conversed with the snake woman, a piece of roofing crashes to the ground. Continuing on, the men finally come across the snake woman sitting upon a bed. Challenged by the men, a cloud of smoke suddenly appears, enveloping the snake woman and knocking the men unconscious. Coming to, the men are shocked to find that both the snake woman and the bed she was sitting on have vanished completely. The scene ends with them checking the room and commenting on the weirdness of the event that had just transpired.

Though the supernatural entity featured in *Madam White Snake* is in fact not a ghost, it is interesting that this scene, wherein there is an implied ghostly presence, notably differs in its formal construction from the other supernatural sequences found throughout the film. In these other scenes, there is the frequent use of overlays in order to depict the transformation of the

snake woman into the white snake, with close-up shots of the snake juxtaposed against faces of fear from those being attacked. In stark comparison, the 'ghost' sequence instead relies heavily on a steady build of tension, complete with a false scare (the roof collapsing into the room), before the final payoff as the snake woman appears and then quickly disappears in a puff of smoke.

The dilapidated environment is used to emphasise the dark and otherworldly ambience of the scene, as Heo-seon and his captors move slowly throughout the grounds, creeping through the densely overgrown gardens and quietly shuffling across the cracked and creaky wooden floors. The film only cuts away from the men and their journey to further emphasise the decaying house which surrounds them, focusing on paintings now faded and scratched to the point of illegibility. This prominent foregrounding of a dark, dingy, and decaying space, and the tension which arrives through traversing it, is punctuated by the false scare of the roof panel clattering to the ground, at once reinforcing the deteriorated nature of the building and disrupting the disconcerting quiet which had otherwise enveloped the scene.

Compared to the journey throughout the house, the interaction with the snake woman is a relatively short ordeal. Sitting upright on a bed, brightly lit and framed by cascading white curtains, the snake woman is juxtaposed with the decaying and dark house in which she resides. She remains silent throughout the brief interaction, even when challenged by the man, and vanishes in a plume of smoke when they attempt to advance further towards her. This smoke also appears to knock the men unconscious, leaving them confused when they wake to find both the snake woman and her bed gone, replaced by the same decay which permeates throughout the rest of the house.

Central to this scene is the snake woman's actions. Through her inactivity and brief appearance, she becomes imbued with an apparition-esque quality which works towards confirming the tale told by the old man prior to the group entering the house. The snake woman therefore embodies

the very expectations of a ghost through this scene, participating in a scene of ghost performativity: engaging in the supernatural display of a ghost, and the tales which surround them, in order to hide her true identity.

With this scene, then, the film itself also provides a moment of ghost performativity through its formal construction, disparate from the other supernatural sequences featured throughout the film. As such, *Madam White Snake* uses this scene in an attempt to delineate between different origins of horror. Rather than the sudden shift into a large, white snake, which provides a near-immediate shock, the ghost sequence relies on tension and atmosphere in order to build to a specific moment. The unknown is prioritised over the otherworldly, and the brief appearance of the 'ghost', combined with the confused response of the men, helps emphasise the scene's ambiguous nature: the men are left certain that they have witnessed something, but they are left unsure as to what exactly has occurred.

This sequence in *Madam White Snake* therefore provides an interesting precursor to the prominence of ghosts and hauntings in the South Korean horror film, employing a significant shift in film form in order to isolate and establish the ghost as being distinctly different from the snake, while at the same time attempting to foreground a stylistic approach to visualising ghostly interactions. As South Korean horror films progressed throughout the 1960s, the formal aspects of depicting a haunting would largely follow, and build upon, the scene found in *Madam White Snake.*

A Devilish Homicide / Salinma (1965, Lee Yong-min)[247] notably attempts a modern day ghost story, transposing the folklore narrative in order to fit within the hustle and bustle of the urban city space. Aside from the shift in time period, the film largely follows the basic ghost narrative, wherein a vengeful ghost seeks to harm those who had wronged her. In terms of supernatural occurrences, the film's opening is of particular interest. The film opens as a man (Lee Ye-chun)

[247] Also known as *A Devilish Murder* and *A Bloodthirsty Killer.*

walks down a rainy street, his face obscured by an umbrella. As the man walks off camera, another somewhat deranged-looking man comes in from the opposite side, and hides behind a tree. Arriving at a local art show the man enters the building only to find an empty gallery and bare walls. Confused by the situation, he asks a security guard for information, only to be told that the show is over. The security guard walks off before the man can ask any further questions, and as the man turns to leave he hears the sound of a woman laughing. He turns to the apparent source of the laughter and is surprised to find a painting of his ex-wife hanging on the wall. As he pinches himself in an attempt to confirm that he is not in fact dreaming, the painting suddenly begins to melt and decompose, morphing the face of his ex-wife. The scene ends with the man fleeing from the gallery.

The opening sequence to *A Devilish Homicide* provides a strong example of a ghostly occurrence, an eerie interaction devoid of any physical manifestation of the ghost itself. Instead, there are elements in the scene which point to the supernatural without fully confirming it through the actual presence of a ghost in the scene. By opening the film in this way, the film, in narrative terms, suggests a supernatural presence. In the wider context of the developing horror genre at the time, however, the film's formal aspects reveal a far more concrete confirmation of not only a supernatural entity, but in fact points specifically to that entity being a ghost.

The film's opening shot emphasises the solitude of the man: he is shown in long shot, simultaneously on display, by being the only subject of the shot, and obscured, both by the umbrella covering his face, and the trees which fracture the mis-en-scene. As such, there is a distancing present right from the very opening of the film, which makes ambiguous the nature of the protagonist. The film exacerbates this mystery the moment the man walks out of the shot, with the arrival of another man, running towards the tree and staring wildly, accompanied by a strike of lighting and a clap of thunder. In direct opposition to the previous subject of the shot, this man can be clearly seen, and yet remains disconcerting, his actions and his mannerisms

evoking a sense of tension and unease. Such feelings are only compounded by the fact that this man does not appear again during the rest of the opening scene. With this there is, as in *Madam White Snake,* an attempt at diversion, a false scare.

The scene continues by following the umbrella-shielded man walking along the path, shot in close-up with his feet as subject. The camera pans up as the man closes his umbrella, finally revealing his face. While this action resolves the tension built up through his prior distancing by the film form, the appearance of a normal man in a suit allows for a moment of normalcy. It is this normalcy which becomes the central conduit through which the supernatural interacts. This becomes immediately apparent as the man enters the art gallery. He walks towards the camera, and the film displays his reaction to the empty space before cutting to show the scene itself. The structure of the scene therefore resolves one ambiguous tension in order to provide a normal anchor, before reinforcing that sense of normalcy by contrasting it with a new source of tension.

This editing of the scene, particularly here, is important to the incremental intensification which occurs throughout. The first shot of the gallery instantly recalls the opening shot of the film, distancing and obscuring the man by dwarfing him within the space. This time however, thanks to previous close-up shots, the man serves as a point of identification, and it is the space itself which becomes ambiguous and threatening. Just as the haunted space exists in a different state from the assumption of the protagonist in *Madam White Snake,* here, too, there is an undoing of logical expectation in order to amplify a sense of the eerie and foreboding.[248] It is for this reason that it is important that the film keeps cutting back to the man and his reactions as the scene continues, each time commenting on the bizarre nature of the scenario. By doing so, the scene

[248] It is interesting to note that, prior to the man entering the gallery in *A Devilish Homicide,* the camera lingers on the sign announcing the art show. The sign, and the poster plastered upon it, are both heavily damaged: the sign sits at an angle, indicating a broken stand, and the poster has large sections torn away. The condition of the sign thereby contributes to the overall build-up of tension throughout the scene, and alludes to something not being quite right. At the same time, this use of a damaged object as a means through which to signal potential supernatural occurrences helps tie the film into the wider construction of the horror genre as it was emerging. Despite the shift in time period, the visual language of horror cinema results in a continuity through which ghostly goings on are presaged by the film's form.

provides a consistent recognition of its logical inconsistencies, using such recognition as a way through which to build tension.

The film continues to defy expectation by having a security guard present following two shots of the absent and empty art gallery. Again, however, the apparent normalcy is immediately disrupted by the film's form. As the film cuts from the man walking through the empty gallery, the next shot shows the security guard at the far right of the screen, walking to the left against the far wall of the room. The man enters the scene and asks the guard about the show. In response, the guard briefly stops, tells the man the show is over, and, assuming that the man is one of the participants in the show, tells the man he can collect his artwork from the office. Before the man can respond, the guard once again resumes walking and leaves the shot by leaving through a door on the left.

While the description of this moment in the scene seems fairly normal, the film's form presents it as an uneasy, almost otherworldly encounter, one that is confirmed as the scene continues following the guard's exit from the shot. The shot opens out of focus with the guard walking against a darker section of the wall. As such, his dark tone uniform blends into the wall behind him. As a result, the guard begins the scene in a highly ambiguous nature, only recognisable by the fact that they are the only moving object within the frame. Only once the guard walks past a lighter shaded part of the wall does their existence become more concrete with the scene. The guard's curt answer and immediate exit following the man's questions only further add to the mysterious nature of the shot.

The guard is therefore presented through the film's form as something initially unknowable, and the man's interaction with the guard only further emphasises a sense of ambiguity. Thus, while the presence of another person in the otherwise empty art gallery may have signalled a sense of relief, an undoing of the eerie atmosphere which had existed until this point, the film actively

undoes any sense of respite which could be gleaned from this interaction. Instead, the guard only adds another element of tension as the scene builds to its climax.

While the guard's formal depiction adds to the overall tension of the scene, it is the guard's actions which ultimately signal a shift into the territory of the supernatural. When responding to the man's question, the guard notably points towards the walls situated to the extreme right of the frame. Apart from walking left out of the shot, this is the only action the guard performs. Combined with his statement that the man may collect his work from the office, the action initially comes off as rather benign, simply pointing in the direction of the office. As the scene continues, however, this action garners a more sinister meaning. As the man, confounded by his experience, turns to leave the gallery he hears the laugh of woman, seemingly from inside the gallery. At the exact moment this laugher occurs, an illuminated painting appears at the extreme right of the frame, in the exact direction that the security guard had pointed just seconds before.

The linking of the security guard's sole significant action to the arrival of the supernatural object within the scene thereby makes the guard complicit in the supernatural occurrence. The guard's actions, and on-screen representation, therefore signal the presence of the supernatural prior to the beginning of the haunting.

The haunting itself serves as the climax of the scene, and features heavy use of cutbacks to the man in order to juxtapose his thoughts with the supernatural events as they occur. After turning to look in the direction of the newly-appeared painting, the man is shown in close-up, stunned to find that the painting is in fact a portrait of his ex-wife, whom he has not seen for a roughly a decade. Following a close-up shot of the painting, the film again cuts back to the man who begins to question the reality of the situation. The man asks himself if he is in fact dreaming, and even goes as far as to pinch his cheek in an effort to attain a grasp on reality. This action by the man serves as the climactic motion of his attempts to maintain a sense of normalcy in the presence of mounting tension and fear, and occurs right before the climax of the haunting,

wherein the painting begins to melt and distort, contorting the portrait into a disfigured and repulsive image.

The opening sequence of *A Devilish Homicide* therefore prioritises the supernatural through rising tension, making use of empty and unfamiliar spaces and the distortion of reality through cinematography (shooting out of focus) and mise-en-scene (obfuscation by objects). While this scene bears similarities to the 'ghost' scene found in *Madam White Snake,* the significant lack of any obvious supernatural entity is important to note. Rather than the outright featuring of a ghost, the opening scene relies on the suggestive and the uncanny to create a feeling of unease.

By looking at these scenes in *Madam White Snake* and *A Devilish Homicide,* it becomes clear that, even during its formative years, South Korean horror cinema had begun to establish a consistent formal approach to the genre, one which, through its emphasis on tension and build-up, allowed for the easy integration of folkloric narratives and events. Yet despite such clarity in terms of the use of space and editing to elevate fear throughout the scene, the actual haunting events themselves are relatively rudimentary: relying on a singular heightened action to punctuate the terror of the scene before quickly coming to an end. These brief moments only hint at the ability for hauntings to construct fear and tension through an active undoing of logic.

The 'ghost' of *Madam White Snake* therefore stands as a perfect example of the potential encapsulated within the genre, rather than a full realisation of the genre's capabilities. Through the lack of movement within the scene, the 'ghost' is static and is only able to disappear by obscuring and temporarily disabling the sight of the other people in the room. That the men must be seemingly knocked unconscious in order to facilitate the supernatural occurrence, the disappearance of the 'ghost', only further reinforces the static nature of the scene itself.

Clear progress can be seen in the development of depicting the supernatural in *A Devilish Homicide*, wherein the painting suddenly appears within the scene: absent in one frame of film, and present in the very next. Through this use of splicing and overlaying, the supernatural is

thereby allowed the freedom to occur without the need to first obscure either the protagonist or the viewer's view of the scene. This is further emphasised through the shot of the painting, shown deforming in one shot, only cutting back to the man to signal his exit from the gallery, and the end of the scene. Yet, while the shot length allows the painting to hauntingly dissolve right before the man's eyes, and there is no cutting away from this climactic moment, nevertheless the haunted object itself is undoubtedly a static one. As such, it is only able to haunt in one such manner, providing a singular scare before being discarded, literally in the case of the man's response, as he tosses it to the ground while leaving the gallery.

Returning to *The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha*, there are marked developments in not just the intensity of the haunting sequences, but also in terms of the length and intricate construction of such scenes. The film again tells the tale of the vengeful ghost of a woman, Myeong-seon (Gang Mi-ae), who was driven to suicide by her husband's family. The majority of the film's final act consists of three hauntings occurring within quick succession of one another, over the course of one night. Each haunting targets the ghost's previous mother-in-law (Jeong Ae-ran), a shady doctor (Heo Jang-gang), and Nan-ju (Do Geum-bong), the new wife of the ghost's ex-husband, all of whom conspired together to be rid of Myeong-seon.

The first haunting attacks the mother-in-law, who is at the family home with Nan-ju. Already on edge due to stormy weather outside, the mother-in-law heads out to poison Myeong-seon's baby, having agreed with Nan-ju that upon returning the two will take sleeping pills to make it appear as if they were also poisoned by Myeong-seon's brother in an act of vengeance. Walking out into the corridor, the mother-in-law is alarmed when her skirt is tugged by something. Looking down, she shrieks upon seeing two hands grasping at her skirt. Nan-ju rushes to her aid, only to then point out that the skirt is in fact caught on a nail. Nan-ju then berates the mother-in-law for being so tense.

The initial haunting therefore begins with a false scare, providing a moment of shock but immediately dispelling it through providing an explanation. Yet, the film form itself importantly uses this moment as a way to anticipate the very disruption of logic that will soon manifest throughout each of the hauntings. When the mother-in-law first looks down at her skirt, the film clearly shows two black hands grasping at the white material. The film cuts to a shot of the mother-in-law screaming, followed by Nan-ju coming to her aid. Upon arriving Nan-ju inquires as to the problem, and the mother-in-law asks Nan-ju to look 'down there', pointing out of shot in the direction of the hands. Nan-ju then looks, but significantly looks behind the mother-in-law's back, viewing the caught skirt from the opposite side from where the mother-in-law had just signalled. What Nan-ju sees, therefore, is not occurring in the same point-of-view as that of her mother-in-law. The film reinforces this, shooting the hands grasping the skirt with the camera positioned on the left and shooting right, and the shot of the skirt caught on the nail with the camera placed right and shooting left. This discontinuity in point-of-view between the two characters as they look at the caught skirt thereby confirms both shots which follow their respective gazes as being true: the mother-in-law did indeed witness two hands grasping her skirt, and Nan-ju only sees the nail. As such, the reason for the skirt becoming caught exists in a dual state of truth, allowing tension to increase as reality begins to shift into the illogical and uncanny.

This fragmentation of reality also serves to mark the mother-in-law as the subject of the haunting, as the ghost makes their hands visible only to her. The mother-in-law journeys through the home garden in order to reach the baby's room, all the while visibly shaken and tense, to the degree that she jumps in fright when coming into contact with leaves and branches of a nearby tree. Reaching the baby's room, the film shifts its lighting away from the realistic palette featured previously, and instead makes use of a heavy focus on shades of blue. With this shift the film uses its form to further increase tension, tacitly confirming that, despite the apparent narrative dismissal of the ghostly hands just seconds ago, there is still a supernatural presence lingering in the house.

The mother-in-law begins to poison the baby, looking around the room in fear as she does so. Looking back at the baby she is shocked to find that she is in fact poisoning the body of another man responsible for Myeong-seon's death. She cries out and begins to head to the door, only to find Myeong-seon standing in the doorway, dressed in burial robes and holding her baby in her arms. Turning back to flee into the room, the man sits upright, with arms outstretched and eyes rolled back. The film then features numerous quick shots of the mother-in-law flailing around the room looking for an exit, each time being shocked by another apparition of Myeong-seon blocking the way. As the mother-in-law falls backwards during this barrage of apparitions, she falls into the bed where moments ago the man had been lying. The man is notably nowhere to be found within the room, and indeed does not factor into the rest of this haunting or any of the two haunt sequences which follow.

With the inclusion of this man, there is again an attempt to break down any sense of logical progression and continuity within the scene in order to emphasise the disorientating terror of the haunting. On top of this, the disparate nature of the man is emphasised through the way he is lit, presented in a sickly turquoise colour which contrasts heavily with the dark blues which permeate the rest of the scene. This use of lighting thereby further reinforces the shifting realities occurring throughout the haunting, allowing the empty bed, which is shot in blue as the mother-in-law falls upon it, to punctuate the meshing of supernatural events occurring at a rapid pace.

The mother-in-law eventually manages to break free from the room and flees back into the garden, only to be met by a flying lantern, which flies off in the direction of Nan-ju's room. The ghost then proceeds to continually shock the mother-in-law no matter which direction she turns, until finally she collapses onto the garden paving. At this point, the lantern dances around her in a taunting manner. Coming to her senses, the mother-in-law has become deranged, almost smiling from the traumatic experience, and calls out for Nan-ju before rushing off back into the house.

The sheer number of shots which occur as the ghost toys with the mother-in-law by constantly appearing in front of her, ten over a roughly twenty-five second period, further reinforces the intensification of the haunting. Rapid flashes of the ghost, shot in an unnatural dark blue light, with unkempt hair, fangs, and a blood-covered mouth, serve as a series of staccato scares which emphasise the supernatural ability of the ghost. Disappearing and reappearing in the blink of an eye, the ghost's movement is facilitated by the quick cutting of the scene. As such, the film's formal construction displays clear progress, building upon the ghostly movements found in *Madam White Snake*. The fact that both clouds of smoke, and the temporary blinding of the ghost's victim, are omitted from the haunting in *The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha* cements a confidence in the formal representation of ghosts on-screen. At the same time, these omissions allow for the haunting to remain unchallenged by introspection from the victim(s). There is no time to ponder on the true nature of the supernatural occurrence, as the ghost remains a constant and freely moving threat.

Also present in this scene is the depiction of haunted objects, namely the lantern which floats around the garden in a chaotic, though decidedly directed, manner. The lantern is introduced by flying directly towards the camera, heading towards Nan-ju's room, and is next seen flying towards the camera from the opposite direction, this time towards the mother-in-law. The lantern is seen one last time, floating around the fainted mother-in-law. Throughout these shots the lantern maintains a sense of ambiguity, largely due to the film featuring no shot in which both the ghost and the lantern are present. The lantern is marked as supernatural through its movement and actions, but there is no confirmation as to exactly how the ghost interacts with the lantern.

With this in mind, there is a continuity at play between *The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha* and *A Devilish Homicide*, wherein ghosts are seemingly able to exert influence over objects as a way to haunt their victims. In doing so, these films effectively open up the horror genre to allow for hauntings

which go beyond the need for a ghost to be present. The manipulation of objects therefore contributes to the strong focus on dismantling logic, which comes to dominate the main mode through which scares originate in South Korean horror cinema.

The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha surprisingly halts the haunting of the mother-in-law following her fainting, and instead changes location entirely. There is a shot of a door swinging back and forth, banging shut again and again.[249] It is revealed that the ghost is now haunting the doctor who played a major role in the family's schemes, as the doctor is shown being awakened from his sleep and inspecting the source of the banging noise. As he goes to close the door, suddenly Nan-ju runs into the room. Before the doctor can ask any questions, Nan-ju claims that her mother-in-law has lost her mind, and she begs the doctor to come with her back to the house. The scene cuts to Nan-ju and the doctor walking through a forest en route Nan-ju's household. Nan-ju is hurrying ahead, walking at a much brisker pace than the doctor, who comments on her speed and jogs to catch up with her. Placing his hand on her shoulder, the doctor is horrified when it is revealed that he has been walking with the ghost the entire time, and not Nan-ju. The film cuts at the moment the doctor turns Nan-ju around, zooming in on the ghost's face as it is revealed. This is followed by a short shot of the doctor recognising the ghost and turning to flee, and another cut to a close-up of the ghost's face. These brief shots instantly signal the arrival of the second haunting sequence following a brief respite through false direction. The scene then continues by having the doctor be haunted by the ghost in much the same manner as the mother-in-law, preventing him from fleeing the forest by appearing in front of him every direction he turns.

This scene is obviously important in the development of the horror genre, as it introduces an element previously unexplored within South Korean horror films: the ability for the ghost to mimic the appearance and voice of other people. As with the ability to manipulate objects, the

[249] The slamming of the door provides another example of the ghostly manipulation of objects, formally reinforcing the ability of the ghost after first introducing it through the lantern.

ghost's mimicry of other people as a means through which to lure victims to their doom provides another level through which reality and logic are challenged and disrupted by the haunting. The editing of the reveal and the shots immediately following it is integral to the film's formal thematising of the disorientating experience. At the moment the doctor realises that he is with the ghost and subsequently begins to turn to flee, it is clearly visible behind the doctor that the ghost is not behind him. Yet, as the man turns, the film cuts to a close-up of the ghost's face, and then back to the man once again reacting and pulling away from the apparition. The doctor, therefore, witnesses the movement of the ghost at the same speed as the viewer of the film experiences the editing of the footage. As such, *The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha* foregrounds the haunting through aligning the ghosts abilities through the formal properties of the film itself.

As the haunting of the doctor becomes more intensified, the doctor eventually runs into a tree while attempting to flee the ghost. At the moment the doctor hits the tree the film cuts to a shot of the ghost with blood dribbling out of their mouth. The film then cuts to a close-up of a bloody tree branch, before revealing that the doctor has been stabbed through the eye by the branch. This moment serves as the climax of the doctor's haunting, and therefore the film uses the shedding of blood as a way to reinforce the vengeance at the very heart of the haunting: the ghost spews forth blood from her mouth, recalling her own death, at the same moment that she is able to bring harm to her victim. The ending of this haunting thereby reprioritises vengeance as central to the ghost's movements and intentions, providing a specific outcome to the ghost's sporadic and rapid actions.

Again leaving the haunting without actually killing the victim, the ghost then returns to Nan-ju's house in order to haunt her. Of the three hauntings featured during the finale of *The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha,* it is the final haunting of Nan-ju which provides the most prescient construction of a horror sequence, featuring formal approaches and techniques which remain consistently used in modern day productions. The film returns to Nan-ju hiding within the

apparent safe space of the home. Such assumptions are immediately undone, however, as the lights begin to flicker and dim, making Nan-ju visibly tense. As she collects herself, a cat suddenly falls through the ceiling, and runs off into the house. Nan-ju, now unnerved, leans against a wall, only for the ghost's hand to reach in through the window and grab her head. Nan-ju screams and breaks free from the grasp, turning around to see the ghost float up in front of the window. Nan-ju then grabs a nearby box to throw at the ghost, but upon picking it up, finds that she had instead picked up a severed head by its hair. She attempts to flee the room, pulling the rope handle out of the door, only for it to manifest into a severed human arm. Overcome with shock, Nan-ju collapses onto the floor as her haunt ends.

With Nan-ju's haunting, there is a consistent undoing of logic and reason in order to construct a sense of terror and madness. Just as *A Devilish Homicide* relied on the response of the protagonist in order to anchor a sense of normalcy to the otherwise otherworldly atmosphere permeating its opening scene, the haunting of Nan-ju in *The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha* features numerous shots wherein Nan-ju attempts to collect herself in the face of the complete fragmentation of reality being thrust upon her by the ghost. In this way, this crescendo of the illogical builds upon Nan-ju's initial experience at the start of the triptych of hauntings, wherein she experiences a different reality from that of the mother-in-law. Nan-ju's haunting thereby begins with the slightly disconcerting act of the witnessing of her mother-in-law's reaction to an inexplicable occurrence. As such, by the time the ghost focuses on Nan-ju, this fragmentation of reality is aggravated tenfold.

The film's use of quick cuts in order to realise the sudden transformation of objects at the moment Nan-ju interacts with them is therefore central to the scene's construction. Occurring twice in quick succession, the formal approach to depicting these morphing objects is consistent, featuring a shot of the object being touched by Nan-ju, a cut to Nan-ju reacting to the now

changed object and throwing it away in terror, a shot of the object returned to its original state, and finally, a shot of Nan-ju attempting to make sense of the situation.

The use of space is also significant throughout Nan-ju's haunting. Sheltered within her bed chamber, Nan-ju attempts to regain a sense of normalcy by inhabiting a safe space. As the lights begin to flicker and the cat crashes through the ceiling, Nan-ju suddenly views the room in a very different light. Again, there is a shot of Nan-ju now looking at the room with a face full of tension, as she attempts to wrestle some understanding of the events occurring around her. This shot is followed by a point-of-view shot, panning across the room, now undulating in the dimming and brightening of the light. With this point-of-view shot, the film converts the safe space into a haunted space by distorting its normalcy to the point that it becomes an eerie and foreboding place. With this, the symbiotic connection between an uncanny space and the ghost is reinforced, with the ghost actively transforming a space before inhabiting it.

This transformation of space is solidified with the conclusion of the haunting, which unites all three of the disparate hauntings into a final climactic moment. Returning to the mother-in-law, the ghost lures the now-deranged woman to jump into the well and end her life, thereby enacting vengeance by driving the mother-in-law to suicide. The ghost, having achieved this vengeance, lingers in the garden, and in doing so transforms the family space into a foreboding and otherworldly area. This is emphasised not only through the presence of the ghost, now confidently inhabiting the space, but through the mist and shadows which now permeate throughout the garden, morphing it into an uncanny representation of the garden as previously shown throughout the film.

The film concludes with the doctor and Nan-ju, both driven to madness by their respective encounters, killing each other within this garden space, the ghost now having returned to her grave following the arrival of dawn. That the ghost relies solely on the warping of reality in order to inflict mental, rather than physical, damage to her victims is important to the film's overall

aligning of the supernatural with the breakdown of logic and reason as a vehicle through which horror and fear manifests.

In analysing these three films, it is apparent that the horror genre, despite its relative infrequency in Korean film prior to the 1960s, quickly established a consistency with regard to visual representation and formal construction. In particular, the use of space in order to build and maintain tension is especially prominent. Empty and decaying spaces become defined by their very lack of life, and as such evoke an unnerving, even threatening, atmosphere. Such usage of space therefore tends to presage supernatural events occurring within a film: they effectively work as a portal into the uncanny and eerie.

With this in mind, it is possible to trace the influence of these haunt scenes right through to the contemporary horror landscape by returning to *The Evil Twin*. The film's first significant haunting occurs half an hour into the film, at the beginning of the film's second act. Having established the rules during the film's prologue (the only way to escape a ghost is not to acknowledge their presence), this scene is now free to further emphasise the ghost, and the horror that it creates. The scene begins with a man checking a food storage room, only to happen upon the ghost crouching in the corner. The man visibly and audibly reacts to the ghost, shrieking and falling to his knees in fear. The ghost, acknowledging the man's recognition, rises up from the corner. The film cuts back to the man, who is overcome with dread. Cutting back to the ghost, the man's intense fear is fully understood: the ghost has risen beyond normal human height, and stands with its head angled against the roof of the storage room. The ghost slowly approaches the man, floating with no discernible limb movement, before wildly flailing round in an unnatural manner to cross under a roof beam. The man, terrified by the movement, attempts to flee to safety, but can only hide behind some hessian sacks. Looking through a hole between the sacks, the man witnesses the ghost lurching towards him. The man becomes desperate, but upon looking again it seems as though the ghost has vanished. Taking a moment to catch his breath, the man seems

relieved, before a shadow obscures his face. The scene ends with the man looking up, and screaming as he finally sees the ghost's face.

With this sequence, then, there is both a reconfirmation, and intensification, of the horror experience first established during the film's opening. As such, the folklore present within the film's own narrative is central to understanding the haunt as it progresses throughout the scene. It is for this reason that the scene features multiple cuts back to the man, showing him witness and react to the ghost with every movement the ghost makes. With each cut back to the man during this haunting, there is a continual reinforcing of the rules established earlier: it is the man's successive acknowledgements of the ghost which allow the haunting to progress. Of the man's actions, the most significant is his desire to peek between the hessian sacks, and this is emphasised by the film's form through the use of extreme close-up. Hiding behind the sacks, the man becomes essentially invisible to the ghost and, no longer able to witness the ghost's movements, effectively has a chance to avoid any further incident. His desire to look through the hole in the sacks ultimately results in the ghost acknowledging his resumed observation, and as such the haunting continues.

This haunting therefore carries an internal consistency which links it back to the film's opening, and in doing so it punctuates the prominent role that folklore occupies both within the logic of the characters within the film, and in the development of the film's narrative. Folklore is thus positioned through this haunting as a foundational element firstly within the context of the film's narrative, as paying attention to the tales being told results in a chance to survive an interaction with the ghost, and secondly to the development of the horror genre, providing a framework through which narratives can introduce and escalate their horrific elements.

Housed primarily within such spaces, the ghost is able to move freely, with a speed that defies logic. As such, the ghost and the space work together to construct an overwhelming experience which disrupts reason, driving the ghost's victims to terror and madness as they attempt to flee

from the haunting. With this combination, the basic visual and formal language of the horror genre in South Korea is revealed, and these conventions have only been further cemented as the genre has progressed and developed over time. The following section will therefore focus on how the relationship between haunted spaces and the ghost has remained a central focus of the horror film despite shifts in setting, time period, or subject matter.

4.3.b: Haunted Spaces and Domains

The influence of formative works such as *The Public Cemetery of Wol-ha* can clearly be seen in the haunting scenes found in films such as *Suddenly in Dark Night / Gipeun Bam Gabjagi* (1981), wherein a shaman's daughter is brought into a family home, creating tensions between the husband and wife.[250] The wife, driven by jealousy and paranoia, eventually kills the houseguest, and becomes haunted not only by visions of the shaman's daughter but also a strange doll which the daughter owned.

The film relies heavily on the fragmentation of reality in order to construct horror, at times using a kaleidoscopic lens in order to literally fragment the mise-en-scene, but it more notably features a transformation of the family house over time in order to allow the ghostly presence to inhabit and interact with the space. The film's concluding haunting leaves the house in disarray, with apparitions of not only the shaman's daughter but also her doll, now life-size. The film ultimately ends on a bizarre and ambiguous note, with the wife seemingly possessed by the shaman daughter's spirit. The final shot of the film features the wife sitting on the floor, unkempt and dishevelled, brandishing a knife in a pose similar to that of the doll which sits beside her, surrounded by the family home now transformed into a haunting and oppressive space.

[250] Largely unexplored in English language texts on South Korean horror, *Suddenly in Dark Night* only receives passing mention in Alison Peirse and Daniel Martin's introduction to the essay collection *Korean Horror Cinema,* wherein the narrative similarities between the film and *The Housemaid / Hanyeo* (1960) are highlighted. Beyond this, the only other significant comment suggests that the film imitates "the Hollywood slasher film in many ways" (Peirse and Martin, 2013, pp. 8). Such comments ignore the continuity of form which signals a lineage between *Suddenly in Dark Night* and South Korean horror of the 1960s, as evidenced in this chapter.

With the resurgence of the horror genre in South Korean film during the late 1990s, new locations would become similarly transformed by ghostly occurrences. The most obvious example of this is the school space. The focus on school as a site of horror also displays influence from the burgeoning Japanese horror films of the 1990s. Constructed through short film analogies such as the *Scary True Stories / Honto Ni Atta Kowai Hanashi* series (1991 – 92) and feature productions such as *Don't Look Up / Joyu-rei* (1996, Hideo Nakata, Japan), the Japanese horror cinema was rapidly approaching its time in the spotlight of the cultural zeitgeist by the time South Korean horror was revived.

Early signs of a shift to the school setting are found in short films such as *My Friend at the Stairwell* from *New Scary True Stories: Realm of Spectres* (1992), wherein a black stain on the stairwell at a school reveals the presence of a young boy who is unable to leave the school grounds. This change in setting would become fully cemented with the arrival of two horror franchises, the *Hanako / Toire no Hanako-san* films (1995-2016) and the *Haunted School / Gakkou no Kaidan* series (1995 – 1999).

These films tended to focus on younger children, usually pre-teen, and relied on atmosphere and eerie spaces over outright horror. In the case of *Hanako of the Toilet / Toire no Hanako-san* (1995, Joji Matsuoka, Japan), the eponymous ghost is never visualised within the film, but rather is hinted at both visually, through the swinging door of the girls' toilet stall, and aurally, through the childish laughter which permeates throughout the school's halls. Both formal aspects ultimately work toward a similar shifting of normal spaces into realms of the uncanny.

Following in the footsteps of this trend, the arrival of high school horror in South Korean cinema has been heralded as a something of a resetting of the horror genre after a protracted absence of productions. As such, the *Whispering Corridors / Yeogo Goedam* series (1998 – 2009) has been discussed at length with regard to the affiliation between horror cinema and the high school

setting.[251]In terms of film form, however, the *Whispering Corridors* series continues the traditional approaches to realising ghosts and supernatural occurrences on-screen. As with the empty galley in *A Devilish Homicide,* these films transform the school primarily through the use of absence, imbuing the clean hallways and rooms with a sense of tension through their very lack of activity. As such, the school space becomes uncanny as the ghost's presence grows stronger and more threatening.

This formal transformation is continually reinforced throughout the many school-based horror films produced by South Korea throughout the 21st century. *Death Bell / Gosa* (2008, Chang) and its sequel, *Death Bell 2: Bloody Camp / Gosa Dubeonjjae Iyagi: Gyosaeng Silseub* (2010, Yu Seon-dong), incorporate a more bloodthirsty approach, in doing so signalling a more obvious transformation of the school space into something confining and oppressive, with students being trapped inside the school and forced to solve puzzles in order to survive.[252]

More traditional examples are found in the short film anthology *Be With Me / Gwi* (2009), particularly *The Unseen* wherein a group decide to investigate an out of commission section of their school, which has fallen into disrepair. Aligning with now long held tropes of the genre, this section of the school, familiar and yet unsettling in its decay, is inhabited by a ghost. In *Roommates / Eoneunal Gabjagi Sebeonjjae Iyagi – D-Day* (2006, Kim Eun-gyeong) the school itself is already a decaying space which has been redecorated by the faculty in an attempt to cover-up a horrible murder which had previously occurred there. Consequently, as the stress of the students builds up, the school begins to decay, occasionally removing the clean façade and becoming a blood-splattered space littered with dead bodies.

[251] The five films which make up the *Whispering Corridors* series are *Whispering Corridors / Yeogo Goedam* (1998), *Memento Mori / Yeogo Goedam Dubeonjjae Iyagi* (1999), *Wishing Stairs / Yeogo Goedam 3: Yeowoo Gyedan* (2003), *Voice / Yeogo Goedam 4: Moksori* (2005), and *A Blood Pledge / Yeogo Goedam5: Dongban Jasal* (2009). Owing to the Korean title of these films, with *yeogo goedam* literally meaning 'girl's school ghost story', the majority of writing on the series thus far has focused on readings surrounding femininity, for examples Choi Jinhee (2010, Ch. 5).

[252] Despite this premise, ghosts still feature in the *Death Bell* films, albeit in a less prominent role. They are nevertheless included as an example here to further emphasise how the transformation of normal spaces into the uncanny permeates throughout South Korean horror on a wider level.

Outside of the popular high school setting, the contemporary South Korean horror film also makes significant use of space. *Sorum* /*Soreum* (2001, Yun Jong-chan) constituted a major examination of the horror genre on a level which has yet to be repeated by South Korean horror films. The film follows a taxi driver who moves into an apartment block only to discover that not only did the previous tenant die under mysterious circumstances, but that everyone on the same floor of the apartment block seems to carry some connection to the man. In their analysis of the film Nikki J.Y. Lee positions *Sorum* as part of a wider trend in apartment horror, including films such as *Uninvited* / *4 Inyong Shiktak* (2003, Lee Soo-youn), *Apartment* /*APT* (2006), *The Pot* / *Dok* (2008, Kim Tae-gon), and *Possessed* / *Bulshinjieok* (2009,) into a wider international genealogy of apartment horror such as *Rear Window* (1954, US) and Roman Polanski's apartment trilogy – *Repulsion* (1965, UK), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968, US), and *The Tenant* (1976, France).[253]

Lee's analysis concludes that, in *Sorum,* the apartment itself is the horrific entity within the film, and ties this into the wider 'horror' of South Korea's economic situation. For Lee "*Sorum* cinematically envisages the horrifying lived experiences (and deaths) hidden beneath the myth of Korean economic development".[254] In positioning *Sorum* primarily through its use of the apartment complex, Lee emphasises the film's interrogation of the horror genre by focusing primarily on its use of empty spaces, a trope common within the South Korean horror as discussed above, and emphasised through Lee's grouping of *Sorum* into the wider sub-genre of 'apartment horror'.

Sorum's examination of horror cinema is structured around the notable absence of a ghostly presence within the film itself. Instead, the film relies on both emphasising absence, whilst simultaneously suggesting the idea of horror in order to create tension throughout the film. Given that the Korean word *Soreum* literally translates to 'gooseflesh' or 'goose bumps', it is perhaps of no surprise that *Sorum* focuses on the construction of fear or a feeling of unease over

[253] Lee, Nikki J.Y. (2013) *Apartment Horror: Sorum and Possessed*, pp. 101
[254] Ibid. pp. 107

the adrenaline conjured by a jump scare or the thrill or disgust generated through the use of gory violence. *Sorum*'s primary means of establishing and maintaining this sense of unease is through the use of absence. Lee notes that:

> "throughout the film, what is horrifying is not clearly identified and remains invisible. Vis-à-vis such obscurity, my contention is that – in terms of cinematic space as well as narrative – in *Sorum* the apartment building itself materially and cinematically embodies the origin of horror".[255]

This approach both acknowledges the absence of the horrific within the film, and yet at the same time argues for the apartment building as a manifestation of the horrific. In doing so, it opts to embody the horrific in a filmic element which is perceptible to both characters within the film and the audience, but overlooks the importance of the role performed by absence in constructing this horror. Lee continues to simultaneously acknowledge and downplay absence in *Sorum* during their examination of the film's ending. Lee observes:

> "When Yong-hyun tries to leave the building, all of its lights begin flickering. Horrified, he stops in front of the building, and then instead of revealing the source of the horror – the ghost – the film depicts an empty corner of the building in a flickering light. *Sorum* thus ends exactly as it begins, by showing Yong-hyun's back as he turns around and looks up at the (now flickering) building. What precisely is he looking at? What horrifies him? Unlike in the first scene, however, viewers are now in a position to be able to recognise that the building itself is the object of horror and he is staring at it".[256]

Lee's assertion that the apartment is the object of horror goes against the observation made moments earlier that *Sorum* does not reveal the source of the horror – 'the ghost'. Rather than repositioning something to fill in the absence of the reveal, as Lee does with the apartment,

[255] Ibid. pp. 103
[256] Ibid. pp. 106

asserting that "the only palpable sign of the ghost is the flickering light of the building itself […] leading to the conclusion that the whole building materially embodies the ghost", another potential strand of analysis is to conclude that the reveal at the conclusion of *Sorum* is not the apartment but is in fact absence itself.

The taxi driver, Yong-hyun, is told stories about the previous tenant of his apartment, and this influences his approach to his own living space. As such, Yong-hyun is rarely shown inhabiting his own apartment and is instead depicted roaming the floor. Yong-hyun's conversations, and the stories told within those conversations, come to inform the atmosphere embodied by the apartment complex, ultimately contorting the living space into something uncanny and frightful. In this way, *Sorum* navigates and explores the construction of a horror story throughout its own narrative. In effect, *Sorum* is a horror story specifically about horror stories[257] and their ability to influence the minds of people, altering their perception of reality.

With this in mind, the use of absence within *Sorum*, especially during the film's climax, is of the utmost importance in positioning *Sorum* as an examination of the horror genre. In *Sorum*'s finale, absence works to conjure up a feeling of severe dread without the need to rely on ghostly apparitions or occurrences. In revealing an absence of something at the defining moment of the film, Yong-hyun is confronted by the very absence which has been haunting him throughout the film. Yong-hyun's elongated gaze into the flickering light of the stairwell entrance comes as a result of his desire to finally confront, or even witness, the haunting presence within the apartment complex. That the film offers instead an absence of such presence, allows *Sorum* to highlight the malleability of reality, highlighting the ease with which spaces can lose their familiarity, thus becoming uncanny and threatening. *Sorum* therefore uses absence in order to interrogate the way in which dwelling upon hearsay can alter aspects of reality which are often taken for granted. The space therefore becomes uncanny through ambiguity and absence. In this

[257] In this way, the film provides yet another example of the legacy of folklore on horror cinema.

way, *Sorum* goes against the horrific – ghosts, apparitions, haunting – and instead presents an alternative that is equally, if not more, horrific – absence, nothingness, emptiness. *Sorum* therefore replaces the horror of interacting with the dead with the horror of existentialism generated through the decaying space of the apartment complex.

In analysing these films it is clear that space, and in particular the transformation of space, is a formal aspect that is essential to the South Korean horror genre. In their transformation from the familiar to the uncanny through lighting and set design, these spaces perpetuate the same undoing of logic centralised during the formative years of the horror genre's development. In doing so, the relationship between such spaces and ghosts has only strengthened throughout the genre's history.

4.4.: Modern Folklore: Technology and Urban Legends

4.4.a: The Japanese Influence

While the representation of ghosts and the spaces they inhabit remain largely unaltered, the world itself has changed drastically since the 1960s, bringing with it new potential sites for hauntings to occur. This is most evident in terms of technology. Again, as with the school setting, formal approaches to realising technological horror is found in Japan, through films such as *Ring* and *Pulse /Kairo* (2001, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Japan). *Ring* successfully combined a ghost story with the growing sense of anxiety surrounding technology as the year 2000 drew near. *Ring* posits that, in order to survive the threat of new technology, we must become accustomed to working within the laws dictated by that technology.

This is made explicit through the film's narrative, in which a journalist, Reiko (Nanako Matsushima), and a University lecturer, Ryuji (Hiroyuki Sanada), attempt to uncover the truth behind a cursed video tape, which apparently kills people seven days after they first watch it. Ultimately, Reiko is saved from the curse entirely by accident, through making a copy of the tape

and having someone else (in this case, her son) watch it. Despite her belief that uncovering Sadako's troubled past will lift the curse, an investigation which involves the use of archival materials, face-to-face interviews, and physically visiting locations of interest, it is her interactions with new technology, and not the investigative rituals of the past, which provide her with salvation.

However, this salvation is removed from the safety provided by the climax of previous horror films. Reiko is only freed because she interacts with technology and becomes implicit in continuing the curse. As such, the curse is not defeated, nor lifted, but rather it is simply passed along to another potential victim.

In the closing moments of *Ring,* Reiko is shown with her son and a VHS recorder, driving towards her parent's house; the idea being that Reiko will make her son copy the tape and then show it to her parents so that the curse is passed along. With this unnerving final scene, *Ring* points to an inexorable techno-centric future. In this future, horror is no longer about overcoming the killer, surviving through the night, or understanding the tragic past to a vengeful ghost. Now it is about traversing an entire world in which we are no longer free, and no longer in control. Instead, we are forced to confront and understand rules dictated by new technologies and, as Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano highlighted, "the more these everyday technologies are diffused, the more the horrific spreads along with them". [258]

During the turn of the century, similar narratives concerning other then-proliferating technologies, in particular the mobile phone, emerged in Japan following *Ring*'s success, however most of these films failed to understand exactly why the technological aspect of *Ring* proved so terrifying. Instead of examining the growing presence of, and reliance on, technology, films such as *Ju-On: The Grudge* and *One Missed Call / Chakushin Ari* (2003, Takashi Miike, Japan) used technology as little more than another conduit through which vengeful ghosts could haunt their

[258] Wada-Marciano (2009) *J-Horror: New Media's Impact on Contemporary Japanese Horror Cinema*, pp. 20

victims. Thankfully, however, *Pulse* not just continued the analysis of technological horror found in *Ring,* but ultimately built upon it by centring technology as the focal point and origin of horror within contemporary society. In this way *Pulse* can be seen as rather prophetic, as it features an examination of the potential detrimental effect the internet could have on society, in which people are more connected but actually spend less time interacting physically and socially.

Heavily included in the canon of Japanese horror cinema, *Pulse* makes good use of the formal and stylistic elements of the genre – dark, oppressive and decaying buildings, dreamlike moments, and a haunting minimalist soundtrack – but largely neglects the conventional Japanese horror narrative. While ghosts do feature in the film, they exist more as visual representations of a dystopian future, rather than as vengeful and malevolent entities. In *Pulse*, the internet itself serves as the catalyst for humanity's demise, and the act of connecting to the internet begins a downward spiral into isolation and increasing disconnection from society and reality, until people literally fade away into nothing more than black shadows upon the wall.

Throughout the film multiple characters, each with varying amounts of interest and investment in the internet, are brought together as the overall population begins to vanish. Ultimately, only Ryosuke and Michi are left traversing an abandoned Tokyo in search for other people. *Pulse*'s use of the internet, in particular a website which asks "Would you like to meet a ghost?" before showing low-quality, webcam-esque images of people languishing alone in their apartments, aims to show the inherent hypocrisy of the internet; in which people are connected but actually spend less time together. The horror therefore comes not from the ghosts, but from the willing abandonment of social interaction in favour of the computer screen and the fictional, digital interactions the internet provides. In this way, *Pulse* takes the horrific conclusion of *Ring* to an even greater level; instead of being implicit in copying and sharing the curse, now people are willingly choosing to 'curse' themselves by submitting to technology.

Pulse, much like *Ring*, also contrasted the worlds of old and new media. Yet, where *Ring* suggested that interacting with and understanding new media has the potential to save us from the dangers that new media present, *Pulse* argues instead for the abandonment of new media. As *Pulse* continues, the characters come to rely more and more on old media and technology in order to remove themselves from the threat of the internet. Despite being something of a slacker, Ryosuke finds himself looking for answers in his university library, and at the end of the film Michi finds some sense of salvation on a cruise ship alongside other survivors, all of whom have abandoned the internet in favour of working together and using the radio to search for other survivors. In the film's closing moments Michi is told by the ship's apparent captain that she "did the right thing". Therefore, despite there being no sense of a tangible future for the people aboard the ship, the fact that they are together and interacting seems to suggest a possible happy ending for those who rejected new technology.

Formally, *Pulse* also makes great use of the urban metropolis to highlight the shift between old technology, and the threat of new technology. In doing so, it highlights the fundamental difference between the internet and previous technological advances; namely, that the internet removes us from human interaction. Browsing the internet, especially during the early 2000s through the hub of the desktop computer, was an isolated activity, in which interactions were done digitally through forums and hyperlinks. *Pulse* argues, through its visuals, that previous technology still allowed for some degree of social interaction, even in locations such as the arcade, which required people to be in the presence of one another and thereby interacting on some level.

With *Pulse,* Kurosawa positions the desktop computer as an invasive entity within the home setting, causing people to become increasingly invested in the computer screen and waste away in isolation. To contrast this, Ryosuke often finds himself completely alone in places which were built to house multiple people interacting with one another, such as the aforementioned arcade,

or university workshops. The depiction of these abandoned spaces further emphasises the loss of human social connectivity, highlighting the very fact that nobody is present within spaces constructed for interaction, and as the film continues, the abandonment of social space extends to the entire city. The inability for humans to pull themselves away from new technology renders all old technology useless, and as such humanity dooms itself to fade into nothingness.

Japan in particular has continued to amalgamate folklore into the connected world of online forums and text messages. This framing of a horror film, through hearsay and whispered rumours, vocal or digital, is far too prevalent in the horror genre to list examples[259] and can instead be evidenced by films which thematise the very act of 'passing down' tales as the central conduit of horror. Taking a brief look at contemporary Japanese cinema, it is clear to see this emphasis time and time again, whether done visually, as in the montage of phone screens and forums found in *The Suicide Song / Densen no Uta* (2007, Masato Harada, Japan), or through the narrative, as in *I'm Sorry / Gomenasai* (2011, Mari Asato, Japan) or *The Inerasable / Zange: Sunde Wa Ikenai Heya* (2015, Yoshihiro Nakamura, Japan).

Essentially, a vehicle for the pop-idol group *Buono!, I'm Sorry* opens with the group detailing their desire to adapt the popular story into a film, and urging viewers to watch the film through to the end. The film narrative itself tells of a bullied schoolgirl who is able to kill people through cursing her writing and forcing or tricking others into reading it. The film opens with a string of distorted screen captures with text that reads primarily as gibberish. At the film's conclusion, the idol group once again appears and apologises to the audience, announcing that the screen captures at the start of the film were in fact the same cursed texts sent by the bullied schoolgirl in the film, and that to avoid being cursed by reading them, the audience members must show the

[259] Even a cursory glance through the canonised work of the genre (for the most part Japanese) will produce numerous examples of narratives framed by folklore: *Ring,* the *Ju-On series* (2000 – 2015), *Pulse, One Missed Call,* and *Marebito* (2004) immediately coming to mind.

film to their friends. As such, the film itself functions as a 'passing down' of the tale to unsuspecting viewers.

The Inerasable instead focuses on the role such folklore tales play in the construction of local history and legend. The film's narrative follows a mystery novel writer who received a letter from someone complaining of a strange noise in their room. The two work together in an attempt to track down the history of the house, and happen upon multiple overlapping and intertwined narratives of wrongdoings and haunting over history. Such is the amount of folklore and local rumours centred on one plot of land, the investigators ultimately decide to abandon their search for the origins, and truth, behind the strange sounds, stating that they no longer 'know what they're even looking for'. Folklore, through its vast dissemination, is therefore presented as simultaneously varied and ubiquitous that anyone who attempts to uncover their origin becomes, in a sense, 'cursed'. [260]

4.4.b: Haunted Technologies in Contemporary South Korean Horror

In recent years, South Korean horror has combined these two approaches to technology – as a remediation of folklore and as a source of horror itself - whilst simultaneously attempting to incorporate the ghost archetype into films which prioritise technology. In *The Haunted House Project / Pyega* (2010, also known as *Deserted House*) a prototypical found footage narrative is played out. A group of strangers are invited to participate in a ghost hunting show and spend the night in an abandoned, run down location. The film hits all of the expected tropes of the sub-genre, even going so far as to include a scene visually referencing the now iconic scene in *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, US) in which a teary-eyed character speaks very personally to the camera from a low-angle shot, with their face taking up the majority of the frame.

[260] Quite literally so in the case of *The Inerasable*: the film leaves its protagonists cursed and, with no knowledge of the curse's origin, unable to save themselves from it.

At the same time, however, the film challenges the conventions of the sub genre in order to further examine the technological focus of the film. The opening of the film sees the show host and her main cameraman visit the location prior to the recording of the episode, in order to capture basic B-roll footage to be used for editing later on. During his run-through of the building, the cameraman suffers a seizure after cleaning the lens. As the film later reveals, this is not a seizure but actually a possession by the spirit. This is briefly indicated through the brief glimpse of the ghost as the cameraman is wiping the lens of the camera. In the short appearance of the ghost, it noticeably looks directly into the camera, acknowledging its existence.

As the film continues and the episode is being recorded, the film cuts to lengthy sequences in which the cameraman is walking around the location by himself, seemingly without purpose. In order to further highlight the possession of the cameraman, the camera itself acknowledges this shift through use of chromatic aberration. At one point in the film the cameraman seems to regain a state of self-control, only to question what is wrong with the camera as the chromatic aberration occurs and become possessed again by looking into the camera lens.

With this recognition of the camera, and combined with the in-camera effect of chromatic aberration, the film positions the camera as the site through which horror occurs. This is further emphasised through the use of the camera as a murder weapon, as the cameraman uses it to kill the host of the television show by repeatedly smashing the camera against her head, and through the ghost's final possession of the camera during the final moments of the film, lifting the camera into the sky as the cameraman, now free from his possession as a result of no longer being in contact with the camera, looks on in terror.

With these scenes *The Haunted House Project* builds upon the original uses of technology found during the early 2000s by incorporating the vengeful ghost archetype into the narrative. What is interesting, however, is that rather than have the ghost be a central aspect of the film, in *The Haunted House Project* it is the camera itself which functions as the ghost, and therefore the

primary antagonist of the film. The ghost is only briefly seen during the initial possession of the cameraman; after that, the film makes use of technology in order to attack the members of the television show. By incorporating elements from multiple sources, both Korean and foreign, *The Haunted House Project* allowed technology to once again be foregrounded within the South Korean horror genre.

Further evidence of the interaction between ghost stories and technology can be seen in *Invisible 2: Chasing the Ghost Sound / Inbijyebeul 2; Gwishin Sori Chatgi* (2011). The film's basic plot is largely similar to that of *The Haunted House Project*, as it follows a television crew who go to an apparently haunted house in order to examine the strange sounds which had been occurring at a family home. Given the title of the film and the film's narrative, it is unsurprising that *Chasing the Ghost Sound* prioritises sound, and sound technology, as its primary form of both constructing tension and interacting with the dead.

During the initial sweep through the home, the show host makes sure to interact with things which create noise – the creak of a furnace door, the pressing down of piano keys in order to differentiate them from whatever ghostly sounds may be heard later on. Following this, the wireless microphone is introduced and discussed during the preparations for shooting. Both these moments position sound as a prominent aspect of the film, and this is further emphasised through the use of silence during the television crew's attempts to confirm the existence of supernatural voices. An almost two minute sequence occurs in which the sound recorder is shown in various places, recording sound while the rest of the crew huddle in anticipation in the background. Tension is created through the technology of the sound recording equipment; the audience is placed in the same position of anticipation, unable to hear what the sound tech is doing. This is repeated again in a longer section, during a second attempt at recording the voice. These moments of silence allow technology to dictate the means through which the film constructs its fear. By establishing sound as the haunted medium wherein ghostly

communications occur, *Chasing the Ghost Sound* positions audio rather than video as the means through which potential scares may manifest.

If the anticipation of sound comes to inform the first half of the film, then it is the analysis of sound which forms the film's second half. Crowded around a computer, the sound recordist shares his findings with the group, playing short clips of potential ghostly voices over and over again in an attempt to decipher their meaning. Having parsed rough syllables with no real cohesion, the group leaves the sound samples with the owner of the house. The film ends with the house owner attempting to contact the ghost, who she believes to be her sister. Returning to the laptop, the owner rearranges the syllables in order to discern some meaning and, upon doing so, she is attacked by the ghost. In *Chasing the Ghost Sound*, then, the ghost is unable to manifest until the recorded sounds have been placed into a specific order; the ghost is therefore intrinsically linked to the audio technology present within the film, requiring manipulation by both humans and the ghost in order for the haunting to even occur. Technology is therefore complicit in the act of haunting, and becomes an antagonising force similar to the camera in *The Haunted House Project*.

Both audio and visual technologies play an increasingly important role in daily life, and as such it is not surprising that South Korean horror films have adopted such technologies in order to expand the horror genre. Perhaps the technology with the greatest impact on contemporary life, however, is the internet, a technology of connectivity.

Recent South Korean thrillers have explored the dangers of the internet, as in *Don't Click / Mihwakin Dongyeongsang: Jeoldae Keulrik Geumji* (2012) in which the very act of interaction itself carries a potential for danger. In terms of horror, the internet comes to play a central role in Lee Doo-Hwan's *Hide and Never Seek / Honsum* (2016), wherein the host of an online show live streams a ritual that he read about on the internet. The entirety of the film is presented as if part of the live stream, complete with a scrolling chat and other programs open on the GUI (graphic

user interface). The film's Korean title, *Honsum,* is a portmanteau of the words *honja* (alone) and *sumbaggokjil* (hide and seek), and is often translated directly as 'one man hide and seek' or 'one man tag', an urban legend considered to be of Japanese origin, known in Japanese as *hitori kakurenbo*.

Most commonly referred to as a game, 'one man hide and seek' carries similarities to a ritual, in which people imbue a spirit into the body of a doll and then hide from the spirit. In *Hide and Never Seek* the stream host, Ya-gwang, receives an e-mail linking him to a video of the game being performed by two school girls, and is intrigued enough to investigate further. In a conversation, shot through the screens of mobile phones in order to continue the found footage aspect of the film, with the tech support for his show the two discuss the game as being specifically of Japanese origin. While the rest of the film, in narrative terms, is very typical – they set up a stream with multiple cameras at an abandoned location and play the game, causing things to go wrong when they come into contact with the supernatural – *Hide and Never Seek* provides an interesting examination of the intersection between the internet, as a technology of connectivity, and folklore or urban legends.

In presenting the entire film's narrative through the various screens and technologies which allow for interactions across space, *Hide and Never Seek* positions the internet, and the technologies which support it, as the primary mode of communication in contemporary South Korea. Therefore, by making Ya-Gwang's introduction to the game arrive through e-mail links to videos, the film posits that the internet is also where urban legends and folklore are now primarily proliferated.

Korea, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, has its own pre-cinematic history of folklore and ghost stories, but in the internet world folklore is able to reach far wider audiences than before. A cursory search for 'one man hide and seek' online will result in numerous blog sites or forums which detail and discuss the instructions for playing the game or supposedly reporting

back on experiences of playing the game. *Hide and Never Seek* therefore emphasises the ability for folklore to easily cross borders thanks to the internet, while at the same time Ya-gwang's positioning of the game as being of Japanese origin helps to imbue the game itself with a foreign exoticism, turning it into something not fully tangible, something which remains partially unknowable. This is further emphasised by Ya-gwang's dismissal of shamanism videos and his visible boredom when discussing tales set within South Korea. The internet therefore facilitates an interest in exploring the unfamiliar, and in doing so can be seen as a catalyst for potential hauntings.

While parallels can easily be made between *Hide and Never Seek* and a number of United States productions from recent years – namely *The Sick Thing That Happened to Emily When She Was Younger* (2012, Joe Swanberg, US), *The Den* (2013, Zachary Donohue, US), and *Unfriended* (2014, Levan Gabriadze, US) – all of which are presented entirely through the computer screen and also make reference to not only the immediacy of connective technologies but also the potential for folklore to emerge through such technologies, a more interesting parallel can be formed by looking back to Japan in the mid-2000s.

Noroi: The Curse / *Noroi* (2005, Koji Shiraishi, Japan) differs from other found footage films of the time on account of its patchwork construction. Rather than being presented as footage taken from a camera that has been found somewhere, *Noroi: The Curse* instead presents itself as a finished documentary sent to a TV station following the disappearance of the documentary's host. Rather than continuously following the documentary crew during production, the film instead provides a range of different narratives – footage from a television search for psychics, unused footage from a variety show – all of which contribute small pieces of information, allowing the narrative to form through the slow accumulation of minor details. In *Noroi: The Curse* this information is presented as a collection of disparate things, because it is, but in *Hide and Never Seek* the film switches between different programs, videos, text, and of course the

stream itself, and in doing so not only highlights the shift in technology but shows how, despite the means of reception or the interconnectedness of technology, horror stories are always prominently told through folklore traditions of observation and reporting.[261]

By looking at these three films it is clear that contemporary South Korean horror cinema has sought to integrate technology into the pre-established conventions of haunted spaces. In this way, the technology itself becomes a site for the supernatural to inhabit, and technology becomes warped and altered as it comes into contact with ghosts. With this in mind, it is notable that visual manifestations of the ghost are largely absent in these more techno-centric horror films. In *The Haunted House Project,* for instance, the ghost is only shown on screen for a split second; in *Chasing the Ghost Sound* the ghost only appears following the construction of disparate sounds into a coherent sentence; and in *Hide and Never Seek*, once again, the ghost remains largely absent from the film, only arriving at the film's conclusion. These films therefore amalgamate the ghost and technology, imbuing the technology featured within each film with a sense of the uncanny, and allowing these technologies to alter reality. In doing so, these films expand the potentiality for horror cinema to transpose horror narratives across cultural, technological, and societal chronologies.

4.5 Conclusion

The history of the horror film is undoubtedly undulant in South Korean cinema, yet, as evidenced throughout this chapter, the central approaches to form and content have remained largely consistent. Unlike action and melodrama, the horror genre has never suffered the same appropriation of the English terminology as representative of the Korean genre.[262] At the same time however, the malleable nature of the English notion of horror has found Western scholars applying the horror term to a number of Korean films which align far closer to the thriller genre,

[261] A connecting point between *Noroi: The Curse* and *Hide and Never Seek* can be found in Hong Seok-Jae's *Socialphobia* / *Sosyeolpobia* (2014), which also features a prominent presentation through the computer screen and a multitude of disparate materials in the piecing together of its narrative.
[262] The Korean word for horror, *gongpo,* has remained resolute as a genre term.

and in some cases even the crime film. The initial aim of this chapter, therefore, was to attempt a more specific analysis of the horror genre by positioning Korean horror centrally, removing the ambiguous nature of the genre, and focusing specifically on foregrounding the relationship between the supernatural and the Korean horror film.

Only in the mid-1990s does horror become solidified as a prominent genre within the South Korean film industry, and as such it is a relatively young film genre. By looking at the use of space and the fracturing of logic within contemporary works, it is possible to trace a history of the genre not only back to formative filmic works, but back centuries to the ambiguities and eeriness of folklore tradition. At the same time, this very tradition helps provide a framework through which regional connections and influences are taken into account, providing foundations through which the influences and interactions between Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong can be explored. The assumed hegemony of Western brandings such as 'Asia Extreme' ignore the clear historical cross-cultural similarities at play, and as such the actual similarities extant in folklore are overlooked in favour of collective terms which diminish generic tradition. Looking at tales of the eerie and uncanny from Korea, Japan, and China, it is possible to see the evidence of formative frameworks which would come to define South Korean horror cinema. Additionally, the analysis of folklore unearths a specific approach to narrative which resonates throughout the vast majority of horror films, namely the essential act of 'passing down' tales. South Korean horror films thereby narratively frame their supernatural events through dialogue and rumour. Looking at these films through the lens of folklore also highlights the role that ambiguity plays, both in establishing and concluding a horror narrative.

Of particular importance to contemporary horror films when regarding folklore is how such tales have been reworked and recontextualised in order to maintain relevance through technology and urban spaces. In these films the very migration and circulation of urban legends and rumours through the internet and text messaging is emphasised, and in doing so horror cinema prioritises

its own pre-filmic traditions. Further evidence for the prominence of folklore in contemporary South Korean horror can be seen in the meshing of folklore and religion as a locus for the horrific. The supernatural focus in recent horror seems eager to discuss the otherworldly terrors present in both indigenous (shamanism) and foreign (Christianity) religions, as seen in films such as *The Priests* / *Geomeun Sajedeul* (2015, Jang Jae-hyun), *The Chosen: Forbidden Cave* / *Toima; Munyeogul* (2015, Kim Whee), and *The Wailing* / *Gokseong* (2016, Na Hong-jin).

Central to the South Korean horror film is the ghost. Embodying a haunting nature, often masked by long hair, and clothed in white burial robes, ghosts have featured consistently throughout the genre's history, with very little change in regards to their visual representation. The ghost's ability to interact with and manipulate objects results in the prioritising of haunted spaces, which are altered and stripped of their familiar nature. This uniformity allows for films such as *Sorum* to omit the ghost entirely, and instead provide only the idea of a ghostly presence in order to create tension and fear. In doing so a flickering light becomes every bit as terrifying as the floating lanterns found in South Korean horror films of the 1960s.

As the spaces and technologies around them have changed, not just within the film as a result of ghostly interaction, but also outside of the film due to urbanisation, globalisation, an increasing reliance on technology, and shifts in socio-cultural attitudes, the ghost has remained a lingering spectre. It has thus beenable to inhabit new territories, both structural and digital, and scare over and over again.

CONCLUSION

On The Textual Genealogies of Korean Genre Cinema

There are multiple strands embedded within the foundations of this study. First, there is an attempt to undo the hierarchies and compartmentalisations embedded in 'national cinema' approaches by instead focusing on domestic productions which largely subsist within South Korea's borders, that is, films produced primarily for domestic consumption, rather than for foreign markets or festivals. Second, there is an attempt to position the film text itself as the primary point of meaning with regard to constructing and perpetuating genre. As such, the influence of extra-filmic elements within the film industry – marketing, industrial production, distribution – is greatly diminished. For the purposes of this study, it is first and foremost a combination of film form and content which constructs genre. Finally, there is an attempt to interrogate the assumptive universality of genre terminology. Through an examination of the histories of genre terminologies as they emerged and developed in the West, it is clear that these terms already contained tensions prior to their application to cinemas of non-Western nations.

Taken together, then, these strands point towards the conclusion that studies into Korean cinema have, for the most part, jumped the gun. The cinema of Korea must be spoken about on its own terms and through its own genre histories in order to define and understand exactly what we mean when we use adopted Western terminologies like 'melodrama' and 'action'. This is true of all cinemas which developed and evolved largely outside of Western influence. By continuing to frame discussions of contemporary South Korean cinema through reference to Western cinema, we perpetuate hierarchies which position the West as innovator and originator, and the Other as inheritor and adopter. As such, the films of countries like Korea lose their agency to implications of mimesis or pastiche.

With this in mind, this study is an attempt to rectify such issues. This is done not through the argument of national specificity, or indeed of any notion that genre should be read primarily through national allegory, but instead through establishing histories of genre construction within Korea which take into account the pre-cinematic. The formation of narrative and theme through oral tradition, folklore, tradition, and theatrical performance provide a bedrock of formal elements which greatly influenced the cinema that would develop throughout Korea's tumultuous twentieth century. In highlighting these histories, which pre-date significant contact with the West, this study constructs a historical through-line which connects genre elements found in Korean cinema with these pre-cinematic forms and traditions.

Concerning the idea of national specificity, the arguments being made throughout are not in the pursuit of a claim that such elements are specific to Korea or signify something uniquely Korean, rather they attempt to define how genre should be discussed and defined within the Korean context. The conclusions drawn concerning the socio-political emphasis within Korean melodrama, for example, should not be read as suggesting that such emphasis is uniquely Korean, but should instead be read as arguing for the understanding that melodrama as a term, when used in reference to Korean cinema, takes into account, and indeed prioritises, this emphasis.

As such, the genre historical focus employed by this study is an attempt to simultaneously disrupt the West/Other relationship and the historiographic methods and hierarchies present within the national cinema approach. The history of Korean cinema therefore becomes far greater, extended back by centuries, and more free flowing, reliant only on genre as a categorising element within the historiographic process, rather than vague and compartmentalising notions such as 'New Wave' or 'well-made film'.

Concerning this focus on genre specifically, perhaps the most contentious element within this study is its resolute championing of the film text itself as the primary constructor and developer of genre. While the extra-filmic elements of cinema undoubtedly contribute to the idea of a

particular genre, and indeed a film industry has a vested capital interest in establishing these ideas of genre, through a combination of marketing and association through a particular production cycle, the reality is that such elements have little impact on the claims being made within this study. The genre histories explored throughout this study show the establishment of formal elements and their development on-screen into signifying aspects of a particular genre. In the example of melodrama, the socio-political emphasis of pre-cinematic narratives is integrated and maintained into the melodrama as a cinematic genre. Likewise, the destruction of the body is read specifically through the sacrificial, and fundamentally political, connotations found in pre-cinematic works. In the example of horror, the establishing elements of ambiguity and the formal construction of hauntings found in folklore narratives are then explored through cinematic works which remediate the oral into the visual.

Of the three examples looked at throughout this study, the action genre featured the largest amount of industrial acknowledgement, on account of the genre's solidification through interactions between the South Korean and Hong Kong film industries. Even with this strong industrial element, what is most important to this study is how the action genre's form itself evolved and became defined. The formal properties of the action genre – the body in action, examinations of masculinity through violence – and how these properties are more crystalised following the industrial interaction is of greater importance to this study than the movement of people, the critical responses claiming loss of national identity, and the hierarchies of industrial manipulation between two nations, precisely because these changes can be read concretely in the film text itself. By examining the brief flashes of action in the early films of Jeong Chang-hwa or Shin Sang-ok through their formal construction, and contrasting that with the form found in the post-Hong Kong films by Hwang In-shik, the action genre becomes defined through the very development of on-screen action. In doing so, the film form sheds light on the development of the action genre far more than any examination into industrial production cycles or relationships.

The point of this study, therefore, is an analysis that is not concerned with how the industry can manipulate, distribute, produce, or market the extra-filmic elements of a genre, but instead explores how the film text itself contains genre properties which can be read as the central signifiers of a particular genre. The commodification of genre into a marketable source of capital by film industries is of no interest here. Instead, this study explores how the histories of Korean narrative and performance have been implemented and developed throughout cinematic representation.

The historical method undertaken by this study, prioritising the film text above all else, is therefore reliant on access to a wide range of films from throughout Korea's history. As discussed in the introduction to this study, Korea has only archived a small percentage of its films produced prior to the mid-1990s, and as such, examinations into Korea's filmic history must be prepared to build a history upon a body of films which no longer exist. Nevertheless, this should not stop conclusions from being drawn by those films which still remain. After all, conclusions drawn from analysis of a surviving film are more concrete than those reliant on secondary accounts or surviving fragments, images, or synopses. That which has been lost to time is unfortunate, but that which remains provides invaluable insight into the formal elements of genre, and as such provides specific, and more importantly primary, evidence.

That said, even with this limited percentage of remaining films, only a small fraction have been made available on ancillary markets, even within South Korea. Naturally, the films selected to be restored and re-released by institutions such as the Korean Film Archive trend towards ascribing to 'cinephilic' notions of auteur or vague ideas of historical importance. With this in mind, this study has endeavoured to go beyond such institutional releases, and includes films which have been preserved by systems outside of such markets, recordings of television broadcasts for example, in order to widen the scope of available film texts, both in terms of genres available for

study, and in order to expand beyond the canon of auteurs present within the ideological underpinning of institutions.

This study thereby attempts to align itself with the examinations into genre that concern Hong Kong cinema. These analyses remain refreshingly free of capitulation to Western hierarchies and discuss genre through a lens which prioritises Hong Kong cinematic history. However, in order to reach the comfort and conviction of writings on Hong Kong cinema, it is necessary to first re-evaluate the use of genre terminologies and dismantle the hierarchies present within the comparisons between Korean cinema and the West. This step is necessary when considering Korean cinema, and less so when considering Hong Kong cinema, due to the global acknowledgement and association of Hong Kong's cinematic connections, proficiency, and innovative status within specific genres, most obviously the action genre. This leads to examinations into Hong Kong's filmic genre histories which are freely able to excavate the country's own domestic cinematic and pre-cinematic examples, without the need to incorporate an overwhelming Western influence or presence. The cinema of South Korea unfortunately lacks such international associations and so it is necessary to first establish domestic agency as a counterpoint in order to eliminate such comparative tendencies.

In this manner, this study should be seen as simultaneously an attempt to challenge the current methodological approaches employed in the study of Korean film, and an attempt at establishing a wider framework for examining national cinemas which prioritise the film text as the producer of 'significance', be that historic, genre-specific, or otherwise.

Looking ahead, then, this study provides a foundation upon which future examinations into both Korean and non-Western national cinemas can build. Most obvious is the examination of just three genres within the scope of this study. It is therefore possible to see the application of genre-historical genealogies to other genres within the contemporary South Korean film landscape. A particular example would be the establishing of comedy as a genre, taking into

account the parodic emphasis of pre-cinematic performances like *talchum* and incorporating that into a wider understanding of parody as a central element in the comedy as a film genre, both in terms of socio-political parody, as well as more explicit parody through cinematic reference as found in the likes of *Fun Movie / Jaemitneun Yeonghwa* (2002, Jang Gyu-seong), *My Boss, My Hero / Dusabuilche* (2001, Yoon Jae-gyun), and *Dachimawa Lee / Dachimawa Lee – Akiniyeo Jiokhaeng Geubhaengyeolchareul Tara!* (2008, Ryu Seung-wan). As shown with the examination into the action genre, however, not every genre requires historical framing through a pre-cinematic significant, and as such it is possible to consider other genres, for example the crime or science-fiction genres, primarily through their domestic cinematic histories.

Naturally, having established a foundation of meaning through examining the film texts, the conclusions drawn from this study can undoubtedly be enhanced by being integrated into a wider study which takes these genre examinations and discusses them within the wider framework of industrial practices. In defining genre through film form, this study provides a point of comparison through which to anchor a study into the paratextual elements which contribute to the recognition and solidification of genres through public awareness and discourse. This reification of genre can be observed through marketing, distribution, and exhibition practices, all of which provide valuable insight into how South Korea has successfully commodified genre through the reinforcement of genre tropes at multiple levels of the filmic process.

In adding these paratextual aspects, it also becomes possible to examine South Korean cinema beyond its borders. In particular, through looking at the industrial side of genre, the very movement of genre can be examined in close detail. Having defined how genre is understood, and subsequently commercialised, it then becomes possible to discuss which genres are given a priority of movement, and how these priorities change according to foreign perceptions of South Korean genre cinema in different geographic areas. In order to do these enquiries justice,

however, it is necessary to be clear about not only the meaning of genre terminologies within the Korean context, but also the local histories which are embedded, and continually present, within these genres.

The end result, therefore, is to speak about a specific national cinema with the all-encompassing respect that it deserves. By taking into account the films produced by a nation which rarely, if ever, leave the borders of that nation, it is possible to perceive and examine the cinematic history of that nation with a greater clarity than that of previous methodological approaches. At the same time, by stripping away the extra-filmic elements of the film industry, it is possible to let the film texts essentially speak for themselves, providing concrete primary sources through which to examine the development of film form, style, and ultimately genre over time. In doing so, instead of having to lay claim to ideas of national specificity, identity, or agency, the cinema of Korea becomes defined by its own histories and productions, as evidenced by the very content present in the film texts themselves. Therefore, not only does this study's approach allow the challenging of the West's long-held dominance with regard to both cultural influence and the construction of genre, but it also opens up the multitude of fascinating intricacies embedded within the histories of genre throughout Korean film history.

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The Deadly Knives / *Luo Ye Fei Dao*. Directed by Jang Il-ho. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1972.

The Den. Directed by Zachary Donohue. Hollywood: Cliffbrook Films. 2013.

Descendant of the Sun / *Ri Jie*. Directed by Chor Yuen. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1983.

The Devil's Treasure / *Hei Ye Guai Ke*. Directed by Jeong Chang-hwa. Hong Kong: Golden Harvest, 1973.

Don't Look Up / *Joyu-rei*. Directed by Hideo Nakata. Tokyo: WOWOW, 1996.

Dreadnought / *Yong Zhe Wu Ju*. Directed by Yuen Woo-Ping. Hong Kong: Golden Harvest, 1980.

Drunken Master / *Zui Quan*. Directed by Yuen Woo-Ping. Hong Kong: Seasonal Film Corporation, 1978.

The Enchanting Shadow / *Ching Nu Yu Hun*. Directed by Li Han-Hsiang. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1960.

Eye in the Sky / *Gun Chung*. Directed Yau Nai-Hoi. Hong Kong: Milkyway Image (HK) Ltd, 2007.

The Female Prince / Shuan Feng Ji Yuan. Directed by Chow Sze-Luk. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1964.

The Final Option / Fei Foo Hung Sam. Directed by Gordon Chan Ka-Seung. Hong Kong: Harvest Crown Ltd, 1994.

Fist of Fury / Jing Wu Men. Directed by Lo Wei. Hong Kong: Golden Harvest, 1972.

The Ghost Lovers / Yan Nu Huan Hun. Directed by Shin Sang-ok. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1974.

The Ghost of Yostsuya / Yotsuya Kaidan. Directed by Nobuo Nakagawa. Tokyo: Shintoho, 1959.

Hanako of the Toilet / Toire no Hanako-san. Directed byJoji Matsuoka. 1995.

Heads for Sale / Nu Xia Mai Ren Tou. Directed by Jeong Chang-hwa. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1970.

Heat. Directed by Michael Mann. Hollywood: Regency, 1995.

Helldriver / Herudoraiba. Directed by Yoshihiro Nishimura. Tokyo: Nikkatsu, 2010.

The International Secret Agents. Directed by Shin Sang-ok. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1967.

I'm Sorry / Gomenasai. Directed by Mari Asato. Tokyo: Ark Entertainment, 2011.

The Inerasable / Zange: Sunde Wa Ikenai Heya. Directed by Yoshihiro Nakamura. Tokyo: Shochiku, 2015.

Jizo the Spook / Bake Jizo. Japan. 1898.

Ju-On: The Grudge / Ju-On. Directed by Takashi Shimizu. Tokyo: Nikkatsu, 2002.

King Boxer / Five Fingers of Death. Directed by Jeong Chang-hwa. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1972.

The Kingdom and the Beauty / Jiang Shan Mei Ren. Directed by Li Han-Hsiang. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1959.

Kirei? The Terror of Beauty / Ki-re-i? Directed by Katsuya Matsumura. Tokyo: GP Museum Soft, 2004.

Kuroneko. Directed by Kaneto Shindo. Tokyo: Toho, 1968.

Lady Snowblood / Shurayuki-hime. Directed by Toshiya Fujita. Tokyo: Toho, 1973.

Legend of Eight Samurai / Satomi Hakken-den. Directed by Kinji Fukasaku. Tokyo: Toei, 1983.

The Love Eterne / Liang Shan Bo Yu Zhu Ying Tai. Directed by Li Han-Hsiang. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1962.

Love with an Alien / Inguk Jeongwon. Directed by Jeong Chang-geun and Tu Guang-Qi. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1958.

Love Without End / Bu Liao Qing. Directed by Doe Ching. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1961.

The Magnificent Butcher / Lin Shi Rong. Directed by Yuen Woo-Ping. Hong Kong: Golden Harvest, 1979.

The Magnificent Kick / Wong Fei Hung Yue Gwai Geuk Chat. Directed by Daniel Lau Dan-Ching. Hong Kong: Friendship Films, 1979.

Marebito. Directed by Takashi Shimizu. Tokyo: Adness K.K., 2004.

The Master Strikes / Tong Tian Liao Hu. Directed by Kao Pao-Shu and Im Won-shik. Hong Kong: Park Films, 1980.

Men from the Monastery / Shaolin Zi Di. Directed by Chang Cheh. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1974.

Mutant Girls Squad / Sento Shojo: Chi no Tekkamen Densetsu. Directed by Noboru Iguchi, Yoshihiro Nishimura, and Tak Sakaguchi. Tokyo: Nikkatsu, 2010.

Nikita / La Femme Nikita. Directed by Luc Besson. Paris: Gaumont, 1990.

Noroi: The Curse / Noroi. Directed by Koji Shiraishi. Tokyo: Xanadeux, 2005.

Once Upon a Time in China / Wong Fei Hung. Series. Directed by Tsui Hark, Yuen Bun, Sammo Hung Kam-bo, and Lau Kar-Wing. Hong Kong: Various, 1991 – 1997.

One Missed Call / Chakushin Ari. Directed by Takashi Miike. Tokyo: Kadakawa, 2003.

The Partisan Lovers. Directed by Choi Gyeong-ok. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1969.

Pray / Purei. Directed by Yuichi Saito. 2005.

Pulse /Kairo. Directed by Kiyoshi Kurosawa. Tokyo: Toho, 2001.

Purple Storm /Chi Yue Fung Biu. Directed by Teddy Chan Tak Sum. Hong Kong: Media Asia Film Company Limited, 1999.

Rear Entrance / Hou Men. Directed by Li Han-Hsiang. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1959.

Rear Window. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 1954.

Repulsion. Directed by Roman Polanski. London: Royal Films International, 1965.

Return of the Phoenix / Feng Huan Chao. Directed by Li Han-Hsiang and Kao Li. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1963.

Ring / Ringu. Directed by Hideo Nakata. Tokyo: Asmik Ace Entertainment, 1999.

Rosemary's Baby. Directed by Roman Polanski. Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures, 1968.

Shikoku. Directed by Shunichi Nagasaki. Tokyo: Toho, 1999.

The Sick Thing That Happened to Emily When She Was Younger. Directed by Joe Swanberg. Hollywood: Bloody Disgusting, 2012.

Six Assassins / Leu Ci Ke. Directed by Jeong Chang-hwa. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1971.

The Skyhawk / Huang Fei Hong Xiao Lin Quan. Directed by Jeong Chang-hwa. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1974.

Skyline Cruisers / Sau Tan Chi Saidoi. Directed by Wilson Yip Wai Shun. Hong Kong: United Filmmakers Organisation (UFO), 2000.

Snake in the Eagle's Shadow / Se Ying Diu Sau. Directed by Yuen Woo-Ping. Hong Kong: Seasonal Film Corporation, 1978.

Speed. Directed by Jan de Bont. Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 1994.

The Suicide Manual / Jisatsu Manyuaru. Directed by Osamu Fukutani. Tokyo: Amumo K.K., 2003.

The Suicide Song / Densen no Uta. Directed by Masato Harada. Tokyo: AKS Co., 2007.

Suddenly, Twenty. Directed by Araya Suriharn. Seoul: CJ Entertainment, 2016.

Suspicious Girl / Ayashii kanojo. Directed by Nobuo Mizuta. C&I Entetainment, Tokyo: 2016.

Sweet 20. Directed by Ody C. Harahap. Seoul: CJ Entertainment and Jakarta: Starvision Plus, 2017

The Swift Knight / Lei Ru Fung. Directed by Jeong Chang-hwa. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1971.

Swordsman / Xiao Ao Jiang Hu. Various directors. Hong Kong: Film Workshop, 1990.

Temple of the Red Lotus / Jiang Hu Qi Xia. Directed by Hsu Tseng-Hung. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1965.

The Tenant. Directed by Roman Polanski. Paris: Marianne Productions, 1976.

Thunderbolt Fist / Pi Li Quan. Directed by Jang Il-ho. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1972.

Tomie. Directed by Ataru Oikawa. 1998.

The Twin Swords / Yuan Yang Jian Xia. Directed by Hsu Tseng-Hung. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1965.

Unfriended. Directed by Levan Gabriadze. Hollywood: Blumhouse Productiom 2014.

Uzumaki. Directed by Higuchinsky. Tokyo: Omega Micott, 2000.

Valley of the Fangs / E Lang Gu. Directed by Jeong Chang-hwa. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1970.

Vengeance / Bao Chou. Directed by Chang Cheh. Hong Kong: Shaw Brothers, 1970.

Warriors Two / Zan Xian Sheng Yu Zhao Qian Hua. Directed by Sammo Hung Kam-Bo. Hong Kong: Golden Harvest, 1978.

Whiteout / Howaitoauto. Directed by Setsuro Wakamatsu. Tokyo: Toho, 2000.