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Film Studies

Screaming Silently:
Haan, Contemporary South Korean Cinema, and Emotional Realism

by

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Abstract

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Through this thesis I examine how popular contemporary South Korean cinema addresses, appeals to, and is shaped by Korea's social, historical, and cultural context, specifically by drawing on the cultural concept of *haan* – a *national* sentiment that draws on notions of accumulated suffering and resentment in the Korean context. Rather than viewing *haan* as an essential component of South Korean cinema – as has often been the critical tendency – I seek to understand the *function* of *haan* within that cinema.

My first chapter establishes a framework for examining *haan,* by understanding cinematic evocation of *haan* in relation to emotional realism – a mode of address that communicates the emotion of reality, if not its factual or aesthetic reality. Seen in respect to emotional realism, I argue, *haan* communicates Korean social and historical realism through emotional address. My second chapter charts Korean cinema's portrayal of the 1980 Gwangju Democratic Uprising and argues how, despite the film-to-film differences in representation, *haan* is a constant in how Korean cinema emotionally frames the events of Gwangju, and thus mediates them within South Korean cultural memory. My third chapter focuses on a recent wave of films set during Korea's 1910 to 1945 colonisation by Japan, drawing on consistencies in how *haan* is evoked during these films' thematic elaboration of various issues relating to national identity. My fourth chapter, focusses on how *haan* manifests in South Korea's blockbuster cinema, arguing that *haan* is frequently structured into cinematic spectacle, often through the creation of emotional spectacle.

Through this structure, and predominantly through textual analysis, my thesis discusses how *haan*'s cinematic evocation appeals to the national by drawing on sentiments of deep cultural resonance within the Korean context. Such appeal, when afforded precedence in the textual assemblage of a film, I argue, is of great significance to some of South Korean cinema's most culturally important and domestically successful films.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Ryan Philip Gardener

Title of thesis: Screaming Silently: *Haan,* Contemporary South Korean Cinema, and Emotional Realism

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signature: Date:

Author's Note

As a general rule, in this thesis I transcribe Korean terms using Revised Romanisation transliteration (RR transliteration). However, in cases where alternative spellings are the norm, commonly accepted transliterations are used – as in the case of *hangul* (the most commonly used writing system in Korea; transcribed *han-geul* in RR).

My spelling of *haan,* throughout this thesis, is a notable deviation to RR transliteration. Denoted '恨' in *hanja* (Korean-Chinese characters), what I denote as *haan* is transliterated as '한' in *hangul.* Yet the *hangul* '한' (transcribed *han* in RR) possesses several other meanings, including meanings associated with other *hanja* characters. To avoid ambiguity, I follow the example of Chang-hee Son and transliterate '恨' as *'haan'*, in a manner perhaps closer to the term's pronunciation; Son notes '*haan* is pronounced with an extended "ä" sound (as if spoken in a long sigh) hence the reason for the double letter'.[1]

Korean names are here presented with family name followed by given name – as is traditional practice in Korea – except for when referring to authors who present their name with family name last. They are also transcribed according to their given, or most frequently used spellings, as in the case of director Park Chan-wook (박찬욱, transcribed Bak Chan-uk in RR).

Throughout, terms such as 'Korean cinema', 'Korean film', and 'the Korean film industry' are used interchangeably with 'South Korean cinema', 'South Korean film', and 'the South Korean film industry', respectively. Given that South Korean cinema provides the context for this thesis, the reason for this is not to dismiss or neglect the existence of North Korean cinema (which is not discussed in this thesis) but simply an attempt at concision.

[1] Chang-hee Son, *Haan of Minjung Theology and Han of Han Philosophy: In the Paradigm of Process Philosophy and Metaphysics of Relatedness* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2000), 4.

Introduction

Through this thesis I examine how popular South Korean cinema addresses, appeals to, and is shaped by a Korean context indicative of not just geographical location but social, political, and cultural history. In doing so, I centre my discussion around the concept of *haan,* a cultural concept often perceived as integral to how Korean people relate to the experience of being Korean, and to notions of Koreanness. Despite its perceived significance to national identity, *haan* has received little in the way of comprehensive critical analysis in the international discourse surrounding Korean cinema. This thesis addresses this tendency and, predominantly through textual analysis, argues that *haan* is frequently used to shape thematic and emotional address, and representation in contemporary South Korean cinema.

As Hye Seung Chung notes, '[*haan*] can be vaguely defined as the deep-rooted sadness, bitterness, and longing sparked by prolonged injustices and oppression.'[2] The key word to this description, is 'vaguely', as short and simple definitions of *haan* invariably prove lacking; often considered an untranslatable or even indefinable term, *haan* is a multi-faceted cultural concept with shifting connotations depending on context, which inevitably complicates any critical discussion of *haan.* Its importance, though, lies not in any precise definition but rather in the colloquial understanding of it as a 'national sentiment',[3] as something of perceived great significance to Korean national identity. For instance, it is often noted that, as David E. James explains, *haan* is 'taken by Koreans to be the essential national experience', and 'constituted from sentiments of loss and rage at the severance of wholeness and continuity between self and history.'[4] While Chang-hee Son suggests that as both an 'ethos' and 'the very pathos' of the Korean people, *haan* is seen as a concept 'intrinsically and intricately connected with the [Korean] people's world view in relation to life, death and the cosmos' and as such '*haan* has left such a mark on the Korean people that the Korean culture is a culture of

[2] Hye Seung Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia: A Transnational *Détournement* of Hollywood Melodrama," in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema,* eds. Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 121.
[3] Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia," 121.
[4] David E. James, "Im Kwon-taek: Korean National Cinema and Buddhism," in *Im Kwon-taek: The Making of a Korean National Cinema,* eds. David E. James and Kyung Hyun Kim (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 55.

haan'.[5] Given that cinema is a cultural product, a natural inference from Son's comments would be that Korean cinema, too, is a cinema of *haan.* However, this is not a conclusion that can – or will – be accepted uncritically; to do so would be to neglect the inherent transnationality of cinema as a medium, as well as to overlook the problematic and essentialist views of Korean national culture and the Korean people which such definitions of *haan* support. As such, rather than viewing *haan* as an essential component of South Korean cinema, my thesis seeks to understand *haan*'s role within that cinema. Specifically, it examines how, when evoked, *haan* contextualises aspects of the filmic text through a lens of *the national,* doing so through both theme and emotional address.

Though such examination could fittingly be conducted with respect to any period of South Korean cinematic history, I here limit my scope to contemporary South Korean cinema (i.e. South Korean cinema since 1988) both in order to offer more concentrated analysis, and to consider *haan*'s place in Korean cinema during a period in which that cinema has developed a secure position as an internationally recognisable, artistically renowned, and domestically popular national cinema. I elaborate on this reasoning throughout the following introduction, which begins with a brief history of South Korean cinema and an overview of the landscape of the contemporary South Korean cinema that provides the context for discussion in this thesis. I then detail my thesis's structure and methodology, before laying out, through my literature review, a functional understanding of the cultural concept *haan* upon which analysis in my thesis is based.

[5] Chang-hee Son, *Haan of Minjung Theology and Han of Han Philosophy: In the Paradigm of Process Philosophy and Metaphysics of Relatedness* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2000), 15.

Contemporary South Korean Cinema

Man-su: Every important, educated, successful, rich bastard in Seoul! All of you! Listen up! Let me tell you a little something! While I'm up here, I'm going to tell you a thing or two!
Chil-su: You assholes! Are you listening to what he's saying?
Man-su: My name is Park Man-su!
Chil-su: And, I'm Jang Chil-su!
Man-su: I have nothing to say and I have a lot to say! Is that how you're going to act? Is that how you're really going to be?

Chilsu and Mansu. Park Kwang-su, 1988

Two painters, feeling wronged by society and fate itself, take to venting their anger from atop a billboard in the middle of Seoul. They yell out across the city about everyone and everything that has wronged them, but to no one in particular, while beneath them a crowd gathers of people captivated by the spectacle of the two shouting painters. The crowd hears not of what the two men are yelling. Yet, through the spectacle they pose to the crowd below, the painters are misinterpreted as social activists performing a labour strike or suicide protest by a 'social gaze' consistent with the then social climate[6] – which saw 'more strikes and labor actions [occur] in 1987-88 than at any point in Korean history, or most national histories.'[7] The situation escalates quickly as police, the media, and even the military are brought in for a standoff with two shouting men whom no one can hear, in effect with two men screaming silently.

It was with this moment in 1988 – a moment underlined by sentiments of *haan,* as is detailed in my literature review chapter – that, with Park Kwang-su's *Chilsu and Mansu* and the silent screams of its titular heroes, South Korean cinema marked a beginning to its return to critical significance. Following a Golden Age in the 1950s and 1960s, due to the strict censorship laws in place underneath the authoritarian regimes of Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan, in the 1970s and 1980s the Korean film industry had fallen into a lengthy depression period. Creativity and artistry had waned heavily to

[6] Nancy Abelmann and Jung-ah Choi, "Just Because: Comedy, Melodrama and Youth Violence in *Attack the Gas Station*" in *New Korean Cinema,* eds. Chi-yun Shin and Julian Stringer (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 140.
[7] Bruce Cumings, "Introduction," in *Gwangju Diary: Beyond Death, Beyond the Darkness of the Age,* Lee Jae-eui (Gwangju: May 18 Memorial Foundation, 2017), 30.

the point that 'the majority of films produced in this period were little seen and soon forgotten.'[8] Yet corresponding with the fall of the Chun Doo-hwan regime in 1988, South Korea's democratisation, and the subsequent relaxation of state censorship, the Korean film industry was given new creative life. Filmmakers like Park Kwang-su, Jang Sun-woo and Park Jong-won were granted greater freedom to address the dark realities of South Korea's recent social and political history in ways that previous censorship laws had prohibited. The result was the emergence of a Korean New Wave cinema driven by a desire to depict social truth and reality, a cinema that frequently produced narratives concerned with the (*haan*ful) plight of Korea's *minjung* (a term referential of Korea's socially, politically, and historically oppressed populace, and which is discussed further later in this thesis).

Despite drawing critical acclaim, however, the culture of filmmaking instilled by the Korean New Wave – the unwavering quest for realism at the expense of commercialism – limited the movement's longevity, and by the mid-1990s it had largely tapered out. Between changes in film policy – notably the deregulation of import laws that led to the opening of Hollywood studio branch offices in South Korea[9] – and 'the Korean New Wave's rejection of a Hollywood-influenced style', the movement largely failed 'to attract Korean viewers away from imported Hollywood films'.[10] In order to compete with Hollywood in the domestic marketplace, Korean cinema turned to more blockbuster-centric, Hollywood-inspired styles of filmmaking.

The success of Kang Je-gyu's *Shiri* in 1999 proved the paradigm-changing event often credited with spurring this shift. A spy thriller, following a South Korean special agent as he hunts down a North Korean assassin, *Shiri* was noted for its technical ability to match the spectacle of Hollywood blockbuster cinema, and with its aesthetic sophistication and narrative flare it presented audiences with something they had

[8] Darcy Paquet, *New Korean Cinema: Breaking the Waves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 47.
[9] Paquet, *New Korean Cinema,* 51.
[10] Christina Klein, "Why American Studies Needs to Think about Korean Cinema, or, Transnational Genres in the Films of Bong Joon-ho," *American Quarterly* 60, no.4 (December 2008): 894.

never seen before in a Korean film.[11] The film broke the Korean box office record previously held by James Cameron's *Titanic* (USA, 1997)[12] and provided a model of Korean blockbuster filmmaking which led to a 'resurgence of the local industry'.[13] The scale and speed of this resurgence is easily observed. For example, in 1998 (the year prior to *Shiri*'s release) Korean films received just 25.1% of all box office admissions in the local market.[14] That share leapt to 39.7% a year later, and surpassed 50% for the first time in 2001.[15] In 2006, a year often seen as a high-water mark for the Korean film industry, Korean films received roughly 97.9 million admissions domestically (an almost eightfold increase from the 12.6 million in 1998) and secured a 63.8% share of the overall domestic box office.[16] Despite industry recession between 2007 and 2010, Korean cinema has secured for itself a position of stability and relative prosperity, achieving above 50% shares of domestic admissions in every year since 2011, and over 100 million domestic box office admissions for Korean films in every year since 2012.[17]

While 1988 marked Korean cinema's return to artistic relevance and the symbolic start to Korean New Wave cinema, 1999's release of *Shiri* marked the beginning of Korean cinema's development into a commercially popular and successful cinema. Thus, these two dates prove pivotal to an understanding of a contemporary South Korean cinema. Paquet, for instance, argues that:

> The emergence of New Korean Cinema [read, the post-*Shiri* era] – and its precursor, the Korean New Wave – is the story of what happened when filmmakers finally escaped their confinement, and became free not only to realise a politically and socially informed cinema, but to look beyond this to an era when films were no longer obligated to speak for their nation or people.[18]

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[11] Chi-yun Shin and Julian Stringer, "Storming the Big Screen: The *Shiri* Syndrome," in *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema,* ed. Frances Gateward (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 56.
[12] Shin and Stringer, "Storming the Big Screen," 57.
[13] Chris Berry, ""What's Big About the Big Film?": De-Westernizing" the Blockbuster in Korea and China," in *Movie Blockbusters,* ed. Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2003), 224.
[14] Daniel D.H. Park, ed., *Korean Cinema 2006,* (Seoul: Korean Film Council, 2006), 497.
[15] Park, *Korean Cinema 2006,* 497.
[16] Daniel D.H. Park, ed., *Korean Cinema 2007,* (Seoul: Korean Film Council, 2007), 495.
[17] Kim Hyounsoo, ed., *Status & Insight: Korean Film Industry 2018* (Busan: Korean Film Council, 2019), 13.
[18] Paquet, *New Korean Cinema,* 3.

In other words, it is the story of how South Korean cinema responded to the nation's democratisation: first through filmmakers' realisation of their newfound freedom of expression, and then through industrial intervention that substantially developed the cinema's commercial prospects. While it is true that in the post-*Shiri* era filmmakers are less 'obligated' to speak for Korea and its people, South Korean film – even at its most commercially-oriented – frequently exhibits a high degree of social consciousness and national introspection. As expressions of national identity in South Korean cinema are a central concern in my thesis, I thus wish to stress the continuities between these phases in terms of film content. As such, throughout this thesis I refer simply to a contemporary South Korean cinema (dating back to 1988), a term that encompasses the evolution of South Korean cinema over the past thirty-plus years.

In looking at this era, my focus is more specifically – though not exclusively – on what can be considered South Korea's popular cinema: the South Korean films that prove popular at the domestic box office. My reasoning for this comes from recognition that the notion of South Korean cinema has vastly different connotations depending on audience. For example, as Daniel Martin suggests in his work on Asia Extreme cinema:

> While Park Chan-wook may represent Korean cinema to audiences and critics in the UK, that is hardly the case, say, in Japan, where audiences expect and demand that the Korean cinema they see is romantic and melodramatic.[19]

Likewise, in Europe and America audiences are more likely to be familiar with the films of art house directors such as Lee Chang-dong, Hong Sang-soo and Kim Ki-duk than they are of the domestically popular films of directors like Choi Dong-hoon, JK Youn and Kang Je-gyu. This is exemplified by the status of Kim Ki-duk's *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter…and Spring* (2003) as the most successful Korean language film in the North American market from its release until 2014, after receiving 370,000 admissions in US

[19] Daniel Martin, *Extreme Asia: The Rise of Cult Cinema from the Far East* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2015), 166.

cinemas.[20] In Korea, the film took in just 30,000 admissions,[21] which highlights the discrepancy between which Korean films are watched in South Korea and those that are watched by audiences in foreign markets. This encourages us to consider national cinema not as a fixed term with distinct boundaries, but as a term with different connotations depending on audience. The decision to focus here predominantly on South Korean popular cinema lies in the belief that South Korean cinema's domestic popularity is a key reason why the study of South Korean cinema is significant to film studies more generally. South Korea has one of the few national cinemas (besides Hollywood) to consistently be the most popular cinema in its own market.[22] Accordingly, there is significance to studying the manner in which such popular cinema resonates with notions of nation and national identity.

This is particularly the case given that South Korea's popular cinema is often preoccupied with issues, themes, and narratives of (South) Korean society and history, a tendency that has both stemmed from and cultivated what Jinhee Choi refers to as 'consumer nationalism – the idea that consumers' choice should be based on national interests' and which filmmakers appeal to 'through the producing of nation-specific (not necessarily nationalistic) contents'.[23] This production strategy is perhaps most evident amongst the most popular films of South Korea's cinema: the 10 Million Club – a term referring to films that earn at least 10 million admissions at the domestic box office, a number representing roughly a fifth of the country's population.

Table 1 – Korean Films of the 10 Million Club (as of January 2020)

Film (* period films)	**Director(s)**	**Year**	**Admissions**
**The Admiral: Roaring Currents*	Kim Han-min	2014	17,615,658
Along with the Gods: The Last 49 Days	Kim Yong-hwa	2018	12,274,203
Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds	Kim Yong-hwa	2017	14,411,981
**Assassination*	Choi Dong-hoon	2015	12,706,829

[20] Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient, *Movie Migrations: Transnational Genre Flows and South Korean Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 7, 277.
[21] Chung and Diffrient, *Movie Migrations,* 7, 277.
[22] Diana Crane, "Cultural Globalization and the Dominance of the American Film Industry: Cultural Policies, National Film Industries, and Transnational Film," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 20, no.4 (2014): 370.
[23] Jinhee Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 38.

Table 1 – Korean Films of the 10 Million Club (as of January 2020)			
Film (* period films)	**Director(s)**	**Year**	**Admissions**
**The Attorney*	Yang Woo-suk	2013	11,375,123
Extreme Job	Lee Byeong-heon	2019	16,265,673
The Host	Bong Joon-ho	2006	10,917,400
** The King and the Clown*	Lee Joon-ik	2005	10,513,976
**Masquerade*	Choo Chang-min	2012	12,324,062
Miracle in Cell No.7	Lee Hwan-kyung	2013	12,811,714
**Ode to my Father*	JK Youn	2014	14,263,940
Parasite	Bong Joon-ho	2019	10,288,696
**Silmido*	Kang Woo-suk	2003	11,074,000
**Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War*	Kang Je-gyu	2004	11,746,135
**A Taxi Driver*	Jang Hun	2017	12,189,895
The Thieves	Choi Dong-hoon	2012	12,984,692
Tidal Wave	JK Youn	2009	11,324,958
Train to Busan	Yeon Sang-ho	2016	11,567,662
Veteran	Ryoo Seung-wan	2015	13,414,484

statistics cited from koreanfilm.or.kr (26/3/2020)

Of these (at the time of writing) 19 films, at least 9 can be considered period films – defined here as films in which historical setting is prominent and directly influences film plot. Through their engagement with their historical settings (in the case of these 10 Million Club films, the Joseon Dynasty, the colonial era, the Korean War, and the 1980s under the Chun Doo-hwan regime), these films are concerned explicitly with the telling of national history and with the exploration of national identity, thus foregrounding extensively a Korean cultural context. Meanwhile, the contemporary era-set films concern themselves with various issues of contemporary South Korean society, albeit to varying degrees of critical engagement. For instance, the family melodrama *Miracle in Cell No.7* (Lee Hwan-kyung, 2013) references issues surrounding mental disability and poverty in Korean society, as it tells a story of the wrongful imprisonment of a cognitively impaired man. Both *Tidal Wave* (JK Youn, 2009) and *Train to Busan* (Yeon Sang-ho, 2016), through the use of ensemble casts, represent cross-sections of Korean society threatened by disaster (by tidal wave and zombie apocalypse, respectively). Both *Train to Busan* and *Veteran* (Ryoo Seung-wan, 2015), through zombie horror and police/action, respectively, critique the corporate structures of South Korean society and corporate corruption. In fact, with perhaps the exceptions of heist film *The Thieves* (Choi Dong-hoon, 2012) and police comedy *Extreme Job* (Lee Byeong-heon, 2019), most 10 Million Club members conspicuously

foreground, or engage with, Korean cultural, social, or historical contexts. The situation is similar of South Korea's domestically popular cinema beyond the 10 Million Club, too, with high-earning films frequently set in period locales or engaging with social issues.[24] This is not to claim any uniformity to the manner in which they engage with Korean society and culture, but their commercial success alludes to the desire of mainstream South Korean audiences to see Korean culture and society represented on screen.

Though it is impossible to deny international and transnational influences on the textual assemblage of South Korea's most popular films, Korea – its society, culture, and history – is often a central thematic or narrative element of these texts and a critical factor to their commercial appeal. This is a key component of what Chris Howard refers to as Korean cinema's 'national conjunction' in his analysis of the early record-breaker phenomenon of the 2000s – a phenomenon referential of the succession of Korean films that, following *Shiri,* set various domestic box office records. He defines this national conjunction as 'an assemblage of film text, industry strategy and mode of consumption principally organised along 'national' lines', and argues that it acts as a ''tool' that helps Korean majors generate these films' enormous box office rewards.'[25] Howard's assessment of the national conjunction still seems accurate in the current landscape of popular Korean cinema – as is discussed further in my fourth chapter. JungBong Choi argues similarly, stating:

> Cultural nationalism is reaching an unparalleled height and *nationalizing* cinema is of paramount concern in Korea. Hence, National Cinema remains a paradigm with great cultural value and analytic utility in the case of Korea.[26]

In this thesis, I interrogate the processes of what can be termed textual nationalisation – or rather, the emphasis of national context through textual construction – in

[24] "Box Office: All Time," KoBiz, accessed January 20, 2020, https://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/boxOffice_AllTime.jsp?mode=BOXOFFICE_ALLTIME&category=ALL&country=K.
[25] Chris Howard, "Contemporary South Korean Cinema: 'National Conjunction' and 'Diversity'," in *East Asian Cinemas: Exploring Transnational Connections on Film,* eds. Leon Hunt and Leung Wing-Fai (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 89-90.
[26] JungBong Choi, "National Cinema: An Anachronistic Delerium?" *Journal of Korean Studies* 16, no.2 (Fall 2011): 177.

contemporary South Korean cinema, specifically by drawing on the prominence of *haan* as a thematic and affective component of contemporary South Korean cinema.

Context, Thesis Structure, and Methodology

With English language scholarship on South Korean cinema 'sparse' until the turn of the millennium, as David Desser and Frances Gateward note, 'the scholarly interest in Korean cinema has been driven by the popular and critical success of [contemporary Korean cinema].'[27] This is perhaps most evident through the release of the Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer's edited volume *New Korean Cinema* (2005), Frances Gateward's edited volume *Seoul Searching* (2007), Darcy Paquet's *New Korean Cinema* (2009), and Jinhee Choi's *The South Korean Film Renaissance* (2010) – each of which, in focussing on contemporary South Korean cinema, have become foundational texts for the scholarly discussion of Korean cinema that has followed. In the time since, as Sangjoon Lee notes, 'interest in South Korean cinema as a serious scholarly subject has been growing exponentially'.[28] This has led more recent publications to cast a wider historical focus in their discussion, while tackling an increasingly diverse range of subject matters (e.g. transnationalism, auteur studies, genre studies, ethics etc.). This is exemplified by the output of the *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* (2009-) and by the recent release of Lee's edited volume *Rediscovering Korean Cinema* (2019), which features chapters from over thirty contributors, rediscovering films from across the history of Korean cinema, and making it the most extensive single-volume study of Korean cinema to date. Yet despite the ever-expanding academic focus on South Korean cinema, the contemporary era has remained a key driving force for the critical discussion of South Korean cinema.

In a sense, my thesis shares a spirit of rediscovery with Lee's edited volume in my approach to contemporary South Korean cinema, by analysing it in relation to a cultural concept that has long-since had meaningful critical discussion devoted to it within film studies. *Haan* was a notable subject of analysis in certain key early texts

[27] David Desser and Frances Gateward, "Editorial," *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 1, no.1 (2009): 5.
[28] Sangjoon Lee, "Introduction: Rediscovering Korean Cinema," in *Rediscovering Korean Cinema,* ed. Sangjoon Lee (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 2-3.

within the western academic discourse of Korean cinema (for example, in Isolde Standish's article 'United in *Han,*' 1992; and throughout David E. James and Kyung Hyun Kim's edited volume *Im Kwon-taek,* 2002). However, as that discourse has developed, critical discussion of *haan* has largely been set aside. Though the significance of *haan* to South Korean cinema is frequently noted, scholarly work in film studies has most often tended not to afford meaningful critical discussion or analysis to *haan*. In large part this is due to critical caution of the essentialist rhetoric that discussion of *haan* often leads to; when *haan* is discussed, there is a tendency towards 'essentializing the uniqueness' of aspects of Korean cinema, or culture more generally, through the notion of *haan*[29]. The main problem this leads to, as Jinhee Choi notes, is one of determinism, where '[*haan*] functions like the Hegelian spirit, sustaining and propelling dominant cultural forms in Korea regardless of whether they are imported or indigenous.'[30] Significantly, throughout my thesis my aim is not to attribute any uniqueness to Korean film or culture by virtue of *haan,* but rather to interrogate the manner of *haan*'s expression within certain films of Korean cinema, and to consider the effect of that expression. In this respect, I do not regard *haan* as an inherent or overarching characteristic of Korean cinema, capable of revealing insight into any supposed *nature* of Korean cinema. Instead, I recognise *haan* as something expressed or evoked by (South) Korean films with notable frequency, and I seek to assess the significance in the act of its cinematic communication by examining certain trends of representation within Korea's popular cinema.

Within the existing discourse, tentativeness towards critical discussion of *haan* may also be attributable to the conceptual vagueness of *haan*; there is a tendency amongst some scholars to avoid critical engagement with the term by reducing discussion of it to vague assertions of its significance, drawing upon the supposed indefinability of the term as reason for not exploring it further. Keumsil Kim Yoon and Bruce Williams' 2015 book *Two Lenses on the Korean Ethos* to a degree confronts this tendency as they use *haan* and other key Korean cultural concepts in order to 'explore film as a gateway

[29] Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia," 122.
[30] Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance,* 10.

toward [Korean] culture'.[31] However, in doing so they largely fail to recognise film as anything besides a narrative medium (i.e. not as a *cinematic* medium); their analysis is confined exclusively to *haan*'s thematic manifestation within film plot. While other texts have engaged with *haan* with regards to its manifestation in more specifically cinematic forms of representation (such as 'United in *Han*' and *Im Kwon-taek*), meaningful analysis of *haan* within Korean cinema has been predominantly confined to the consideration of *haan* as a purely thematic or idiomatic convention of Korean cinema. The consideration of *haan* as such invariably limits the critical value of such discussion.

In particular, consideration of *haan* solely in terms of theme diverts attention within the discourse away from the implications of *haan*'s other manifestations and functions, and notably in the role of *haan* as affect – I elaborate on these manifestations in my Literature Review, where I review development of the English language discourse on *haan* with a purpose of developing a functional understanding of the concept *haan* on which analysis in this thesis is based. With *haan* by definition an affect, I argue that discussion of *haan*'s significance within Korean cinema should not be limited to just its representation within Korean film (i.e. its manifestation as theme), but should be inclusive of its intended affect on audiences. Such approach necessitates consideration of the process of spectatorship within Korean cinema. It is precisely this that I address in my first chapter.

Titled 'Emotional Realism in the Korean Cinematic Context', my first core chapter draws on the work in affect theory of Teresa Brennan and Sara Ahmed as it introduces the concept of emotional realism – a mode of address that seeks to communicate the emotion of reality, if not its factual or aesthetic reality – as a means of linking theme with affect. This concept offers a useful framework through which to understand *haan*'s function in Korean cinema in relation to different modes of cinematic representation. Through application of this concept to analysis of documentary film *My Love, Don't Cross that River* (Jin Mo-young, 2013) and *Chilsu and Mansu* (Park Kwang-

[31] Keumsil Kim Yoon and Bruce Williams, *Two Lenses on the Korean Ethos: Key Cultural Concepts and Their Appearance in Cinema* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2015), 14.

su, 1988) I argue that, in understanding the cinematic evocation of *haan* as a process of emotional realism, we can see *haan*'s cinematic function to be its accentuation of a Korean national context, as it communicates Korean social realism through affect.

I then turn to look more specifically at how *haan,* in engaging audiences through a process of emotional realism, is used within South Korean cinema to address Korean history and South Korean national identity. Entitled 'Remembering Gwangju: *Haan,* Cinema, and the Cultural Memory of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising', my second chapter considers how contemporary Korean cinema engages in this process of cultural memory, specifically with regards to the cinematic representation of the 1980 Gwangju Democratic Uprising and massacre. This chapter charts the development in Korean cinema's narrativisation of the historical event – from its early representation through the Korean New Wave, to more recent mainstream depictions such as *May 18* (Kim Ji-hoon, 2007) and *A Taxi Driver* (Jang Hun, 2017) which by virtue of their mainstream popularity help to visualise the uprising within South Korean cultural memory. It surveys the changing ways in which the uprising and massacre have been cinematically represented, while arguing *haan* to be a constant in how these representations both emotionally frame the memory of Gwangju, and help embed the memory of Gwangju within the cultural vernacular of *haan.*

My third chapter, 'Constructing Nation: Colonial Era Korea in the Popular Cinematic Imaginary' follows a similar vein as it focuses on a recent wave of popular films set during the era of Korea's occupation by Japan. In doing so, I look more specifically at how these films engage with *haan* while addressing certain issues tied to Korean national identity. Looking at such films as *Assassination* (Choi Dong-hoon, 2015), *Spirits' Homecoming* (Cho Jung-rae, 2016) and *The Age of Shadows* (Kim Jee-woon, 2016), I consider how issues of Korean collaboration (with the Japanese empire), historical narratives of failure, and representation of gender are, through the evocation of *haan*, tied to how these films navigate national identity. I also draw on consistencies in how *haan* is evoked across such a broad range of theme and subject matters, consistencies that comprise part of cinema's contribution to the cultural vernacular of *haan.*

For my final chapter, ''Wow, Korean Firefighters Should Join the Avengers': A Cinema of Cultural Attractions in Korea's Mainstream Cinema', I turn my focus from subject matter to film mode, looking at how *haan* manifests in South Korean blockbuster cinema. Through analysis of 10 Million Club members *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds* (Kim Yong-hwa, 2017), *Along with the Gods: The Last 49 Days* (Kim Yong-hwa, 2018) and *Ode to my Father* (JK Youn, 2014), I explore how *haan* is frequently sutured into the construction of cinematic spectacle. Frequently, this involves the creation of emotional spectacle, which this chapter argues to be a key element of the attraction of South Korean blockbusters to, at least, South Korean audiences.

Finally, in my conclusion, I readdress the importance of *haan* to the discussion of Korean cinema. Its significance lies not as an essential component of the national cinema, but as a prominent and frequently used tool of both thematic and emotional address within contemporary South Korean cinema. I argue that the emotional evocation of *haan* in film has the capacity to appeal to the national by drawing on sentiments of deep cultural resonance within the Korean cultural context. Such appeal, when afforded precedence in the textual assemblage of a film, I argue has proven itself to be of great significance to some of South Korean cinema's most culturally important and domestically successful films. In the process, *haan* becomes instrumental to the structuring of notions of Korean self, Korean history and Korean experience on-screen.

In structuring my thesis as such, I have intended to be inclusive of a range of subject matters, genres, and film styles through which *haan* has been evoked and used to address notions of *the Korean*. In doing so, as previously noted, I have chosen a selection of predominantly popular films for the reason that there is significance in how these films address *the Korean* in a manner directed to and resonant with Korean audiences. As such, popularity and box office success have proved more important criteria for film selection in this thesis than have other criteria, such as artistic merit, for instance. Meanwhile, the observation of trends and consistencies in the manner in which *haan* manifests in South Korea's popular cinema has proved key to film selection, also.

The notion of popular, though, I believe here should be considered in a relative sense. To this it is worth noting that box office success in South Korea is more often publicised in terms of box office admissions than revenue – the metric more commonly favoured globally, and most notably by Hollywood, South Korean film's biggest competitor in the local market. To a large degree, use of this different metric allows the local industry greater control of the narratives of domestic success and box office dominance. Meanwhile, the metric itself has distinct advantages for analysis of popularity by being more directly comparable, than revenue, to population size. For instance, the existence of the so-called 10 Million Club offers an easy and useful way of understanding popularity in the current context of South Korean cinema. With 10 million admissions representing approximately one in five South Koreans purchasing a ticket to a given film, the membership to the 10 million club affords a film the status of 'pop culture phenomenon'[32] that currently just 19 Korean films have earned (as of March 2020).[33] The fact that just six of those films were released prior to 2012 should be taken, at least, to be as much indicative of the development of Korean cinematic infrastructure as it is of any apparent relative popularity of recent cinema. For instance, in the ten years from 2002 to 2012, the number of cinema screens in South Korea increased from 977 to 2081,[34] while annual cinema admissions rose from roughly 105 million to 195 million – having risen by over 35 million between just 2011 and 2012. Between this increase in overall audience size and number of screens, more recent popular films have an easier route to larger admissions hauls than did films made a decade or more ago. For this reason, popularity has to be seen in relation to time of release, and accordingly the majority of films selected for discussion in this thesis can be found high within the top-tens of domestic box office admissions in the years of their respective releases.

Similarly, a blockbuster film released by one of Korea's major studios has an easier route to reach larger audiences than do independent, art-house, or documentary films,

[32] Pierce Conran, "Korea, The Final Frontier for Original Cinema," KoBiz, August 22, 2017, http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/features.jsp?mode=FEATURES_VIEW&seq=376&blbdComCd=601013.
[33] KoBiz, "Box Office: All Time."
[34] Daniel D.H. Park, ed., *Korean Cinema 2013* (Busan: Korean Film Council, 2013), 22; and, Park, *Korean Cinema 2007,* 497.

largely due to marketing budgets and distribution infrastructure. As such, the popularity of documentary film *My Love, Don't Cross that River* (4,802,416 admissions[35]) and of indie film *Spirits' Homecoming* (3,587,252 admissions[36]) should be seen to have comparable critical significance to some of the more high-performing studio blockbusters, and greater critical significance than studio blockbusters with similar admissions hauls. In this respect, there is no perfect metric for ascertaining the popularity of films, but in my selection of *popular* films for analysis I accordingly take into consideration overall domestic box office admissions, time of release, and genre and mode of film.

It is important also to clarify here that while terms like 'the national', 'the Korean' and 'Koreanness' are used frequently throughout my thesis, in using such language it is never my intention to essentialise Korean nationhood, to promote any fixed ideas of what these terms mean, or to imply that all Korean people share the same ideas as to what these terms mean. Invariably, the connotations of these terms differ person-to-person. Yet what is important is less the specific meanings of these terms and more the collective perception that these terms have meaning – a notion I elaborate on in my discussion of cultural resonance in my fourth chapter. For example, when I say that the evocation of *haan* draws on the Korean, I do not mean it draws on a fixed idea of the Korean but rather that it likely resonates with individuals' own understandings of the Korean. It is in this sense that I refer to these terms throughout my thesis.

In conducting my analysis, while I employ textual analysis as my primary methodology, I stress the importance of recognising the films of Korean cinema not just as texts with self-contained meanings, but rather as cultural artefacts that depend on conveyance to, and reception by, audiences for their cultural value to be determined. For this reason, affect and spectatorship prove key to my approach as I explore how the examined Korean films are structured in order to connect with audiences not just through themes of *haan* but through the emotion of *haan.*

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[35] KoBiz, "Film Directory: My Love, Don't Cross that River (2019)," accessed January 21, 2020, https://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/films/index/filmsView.jsp?movieCd=20141111.
[36] KoBiz, "Film Directory: Spirits' Homecoming (2016)," accessed January 21, 2020, https://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/films/index/filmsView.jsp?movieCd=20161364.

Beyond simply the thematic, through this thesis I argue *haan* to be a prominent affective device deployed to connect audiences with the perceived emotional realities of Korean experience. As a form of emotional address, when evoked *haan* does not require knowledge of its cultural context to prove affective. Yet like the anger of Chil-su and Man-su – as stood atop their billboard they scream out over Seoul, too far away for anyone to hear – without detection or comprehension of said context by audiences (or scholars, even), the themes, emotions, and intended affects provoked by *haan* are but the silent screams of Korean cinema. It is my intention through this thesis to give a culturally contextualised voice to those screams.

Literature Review

As Sung Kil-min notes:

> Korean poets, critics, social scientists, anthropologists, theologians, and even economists refer to Korea as a nation of *haan*, Korean national history as a history *of haan*, and Korean culture as a culture of *haan*. In fact, the association between *haan* and Korean society and culture is so strong that it can be considered a keyword for understanding the history of Korea and Korean culture[37]

It is also a concept that, as director Im Kwon-taek observes, 'is not a concept that Koreans can agree on'; he adds 'I can't even count the number of books that have been written about [*haan*].'[38] In this literature review I examine specifically the English language writing on *haan* – for which the quantity of literature is considerably more countable than the Korean language discourse – in order to develop a functional understanding of *haan* upon which analysis in this thesis is based. In the process, my intentions are to draw on key contexts against which *haan* has gained significance as a cultural concept, to elaborate on the various facets of *haan* as a concept, and to discuss its manifestation and expression through the cultural vernacular of South Korea, while drawing also on some of the key issues and criticisms within the discourse of *haan*. I begin first by drawing on field of Minjung Theology, which though somewhat problematic in its application of *haan,* provided some of the earliest and most useful English language discussion of *haan*, and in a manner consistent with its broader usage at a key time in the term's rise to social and cultural significance (the 1970s and 1980s). I contextualise the discussion on Minjung Theology against South Korean nationalist discourses of the time, and discuss its role in the act national historiography. I then turn from context to examine the specific facets and affective dimensions of the concept – notably, the process of accumulation of *haan, haan*-puri (dissolving of *haan*), and *hwa-puri* (release of anger). I then briefly discuss the term *haan*'s supposed origins in the writings of Japanese art critic Yanagi Muneyoshi, as I turn to discuss *haan*'s

[37] Sung Kil Min, "The Politics of *Haan*: Affect and the Domestication of Anger in South Korea," in *The Political Economy of Affect in East Asia,* ed. Jie Yang (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 202.

[38] Im Kwon-taek, cited by Chung, Hye Seung Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia: A Transnational *Détournement* of Hollywood Melodrama," in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema,* eds. Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 121.

aesthetic and thematic significance to various South Korean cultural forms, before considering how the notion of *haan* fits in with existing discourse on Korean film. In the process, I draw also on theoretical frameworks that provide comparisons useful to understanding how *haan* manifests and is regarded in (South) Korea.

My approach here is not necessarily reflective of the entire extent of the English language discourse on *haan,* but to a large degree the term discourse itself is not a fitting term to describe the English language writings on *haan*. *Haan* is seldom the central focus of any given English language text. Instead, discussion of *haan* is more typically reduced to brief references during discussions of a multitude of different subject matters (e.g. politics, economics, folk culture, sociology). As such, it would be unrealistic – and unhelpful, even – to cover the extent of that referencing in a study such as this, with a primary focus on film. There are, however, key consistencies and important points of contrast throughout the diverse and sporadic English language literature on *haan,* and it is these key consistencies and contrasts that I elaborate on in the following.

The Minjung, Minjung Theology, and Cultural Trauma

To the English language writings on *haan*, the field of Minjung Theology represents an important, if problematic, starting point; their work (most notably the 1983 edited volume *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History*) offers some of the earliest, and most in-depth English language discussions of the term *haan*. The field developed during the 1970s and 1980s against a socio-political backdrop in which the term *minjung* was prominent in national and nationalist discourses. The term *minjung* itself – though difficult to precisely translate – broadly refers to Korea's historically suffering and oppressed masses, and it came to prominence as a term during the colonial era (1910-1945). Its usage developed from *minjok* nationalist discourses of the time, which promoted belief in the historical ethnic homogeneity of the Korean people, in part, as a means of protecting notions of Koreanness and Korean culture from the threat posed by Japanese colonialism. Key to *minjok* nationalism was the displacement of 'traditional [dynastic] forms of Confucian historiography – *p'yŏnnyŏnch'e* (chronicles) and *kijŏnch'e* (annal-biographies) – with the (tragic) epic form' centring around the idea of the Korean *minjok* (the belief that ethnic Koreans constitute a homogenous historical

constant).[39] In other words, *minjok* nationalism presented a revisionist Korean historiography told through the perspective of the broader Korean people, of the *minjok* – a term that, as Henry H. Em explains, is 'inclusive of every Korean without regard to age, gender or status distinction'.[40] The term *minjung* represented a narrower division of the *minjok*: 'a class confederation composed of anti-Japanese and anticolonialist intellectuals, peasants, factory workers, and petite bourgeoisie',[41] and who formed 'the wretched majority – exploited, beaten, starved, lulled into subservience and obedience.'[42] In contrast to the *minjok,* then, the notion *minjung* differentiated Korea's historically oppressed from their historical oppressors, a distinction which granted the notion greater political potency amongst anti-colonial activists. Following the end of colonialism and the division of Korea into North and South, *minjung* then returned to prominence within national discourse during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, with the term utilised in response to the authoritarian regimes of Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan. During this time, *minjung* in effect became a banner term under which various people's movements mobilised – most notably the *minjung* democratic movements, and the *minjung* culture movement ('the cultural practice of minjung nationalism', which sought to '[reconstruct] a popular culture common to all').[43] Though less explicitly political, the field of Minjung Theology fell also under this banner.

Developing also at a time when Christianity was gaining prominence in South Korea, the field of Minjung Theology sought to interpret Christianity through the historiographical lens of the *minjung*, with James H. Cone describing the field as 'an affirmation of Korean culture and history as the context in which Koreans must do

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[39] Henry H. Em, "Minjok as a Modern and Democratic Construct: Sin Ch'aeho's Historiography," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea,* eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 341.
[40] Em, "Minjok," 339.
[41] Kang Man'gil, 'Contemporary Nationalist Movements and the Minjung', in Kenneth M. Wells, ed., *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press, 1995), pp.31-38 (pp.37-38)
[42] Em, "Minjok," 360.
[43] Choi Chungmoo, "The Minjung Culture Movement and the Construction of Popular Culture in Korea," in *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence,* ed. Kenneth M. Wells (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 107-108.

theology.'[44] Key to this was the attempt to draw parallels between the stories told by the Bible and *the Korean experience* as told through the national historiographies promoted through the broader *minjung* political and cultural discourses of the twentieth century. Cone elaborates, drawing on Han Wan-Sang's definition of *minjung*:

> "the minjung are those who are oppressed politically, exploited economically, alienated sociologically, and kept uneducated in cultural and intellectual matters." With this definition of the minjung, a theology born of that reality must be inseparably connected with the "underdogs" of Korea.[45]

The use here of the word reality alludes to one of several problems that run through the writings of Minjung Theology: that *minjung* historiography is accepted wholly as historical fact, the issue with this being that *minjung* historiography is essentially thematic. In telling of the historical plight of the Korean people, Korean history is organised into themes of suffering, oppression, grief and perseverance, which in effect collapses Korean history into the overarching theme of *haan*; Suh Kwang-sun David, paraphrasing fellow Minjung theologian Suh Nam-dong, states 'the most important element in the political consciousness of the minjung which appears in the social biography of the oppressed people of Korea is [*haan*].'[46] In turn, the writings of Minjung Theology tend to essentialise Korean experience and the experiences of Koreans in terms of *haan*, while indulging frequently in hyperbolic and absolutist rhetoric. Moreover, the application of cultural concepts like *minjung* and *haan* to the discussion of Christian theology throughout writings in the field often seems appropriative. Nevertheless, the initial attempts to define and conceptualise both *haan* and *minjung* remain arguably some of the most useful and thorough English language descriptions of both terms. As such, in attempt to provide a functional understanding of *haan* I draw on this work purely for its initial explanations of the terms, explanations which seem consistent with how the terms are typically colloquially understood, and

[44] James Cone, "Preface," in *Minjung Theology: People as Subjects of History,* eds. the Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), x.
[45] Cone,"Preface," xvii.
[46] Suh Kwang-sun David, "A Biographical Sketch of an Asian Theological Consultation," in *Minjung Theology: People as Subjects of History,* eds. the Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 24.

explanations which have since offered an important basis to English language writing on *haan* beyond just the field of Minjung theology.

Referencing the attempts made by the Minjung Theologians to translate *haan* into English, Suh Kwang-sun David notes how *haan* was varyingly rendered as 'righteous indignation', 'a feeling of unresolved resentment against unjustifiable suffering,' 'a deep feeling that rises out of the unjust experience of the people,' and as 'just indignation.'[47] These semantic variations reflect the difficulties inherent in translating a cultural concept into a single English language phrase. Accordingly, instead of attempting to reduce *haan* as such to a brief English language definition, it is important here to elaborate on the consistencies across attempts to explain the concept. For instance, in his own words Suh describes *haan* as:

> a deep awareness of the contradictions in a situation and of the unjust treatment meted out to the people or a person by the powerful. And this feeling of [*haan*] is not a one-time psychological response to a situation but is an accumulation of such feelings.[48]

Key to this description is the notion that *haan* arises in both a collective and an individual sense. This notion is essential to understanding *haan,* with Chang-hee Son, for instance, commenting 'my personal *haan* is merely one irremovable part of the greater, collective *haan* of the entire people called Korean.'[49] Yet discourses within *haan* have tended to diverge in their discussions of *haan* considering the concept either predominantly in a collective sense, or as an individual psychological affect, while rarely in terms of both the individual and the collective. For the Minjung Theologians, the emphasis lay in the collective as they stressed Korean 'social biography' in their discussions of *haan*. For instance, Suh Nam-dong writes of what he terms 'the fourfold [*haan*] of Korean people':

> (1) Koreans have suffered numerous invasions by surrounding powerful nations so that the very existence of the Korean nation has come to be understood as [*haan*]. (2) Koreans have continually suffered the tyranny of the rulers so that they think of their existence as *baeksong* [('individually or collectively, those under the rule and control of a sovereign. This term is

[47] Suh, "Biographical Sketch," 25.
[48] Suh, "Biographical Sketch," 25.
[49] Chang-hee Son, *Haan of Minjung Theology and Han of Han Philosophy: In the Paradigm of Process Philosophy and Metaphysics of Relatedness* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2000), xii.

> nowadays used to mean "common people."')]. (3) Also, under Confucianism's strict imposition of laws and customs discriminating against women, the existence of women was [*haan*] itself. (4) At a certain point in Korean history, about half of the population were registered as hereditary slaves and were treated as property rather than as people of the nation. These thought of their lives as [*haan*].[50]

Suh's categorisations of the fourfold *haan* are not widely referred to – the categorisation of *haan* as fourfold, perhaps, too restrictive for a concept often seen as multivalent – but they reflect important aspects of Korean social biography. In particular, the first two categorisations[51] (i.e. the historical and repeated invasions of Korea, and the subjugation of Korean people to tyranny) are at the heart of *minjung* historiography, and notably prominent throughout the twentieth century, the backdrop against which *minjung* discourse developed. During the twentieth century alone, the *minjung* were subject to Japanese colonisation, the Korean War – a conflict which has left the Korean peninsula divided in two and locked in the stalemate of a post-armistice civil war – and then for South Korea a string of oppressive authoritarian regimes, before their eventual democratisation in 1988. More historically, the Korean peninsula 'has been invaded over four hundred times in its history, and it has never once invaded any other nation, unless you count its participation in the Vietnam War.'[52] It is from such a history that:

> According to Suh [Nam-dong], such a feeling of helpless suffering and oppression is at the heart of the biography of the individual Korean person. And this feeling of [*haan*], the suffering and hopelessness of the oppressed, is a collective feeling in the collective social biography of the oppressed minjung of Korea.[53]

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[50] Suh Nam-dong, "Towards a *Theology* of Han," in *Minjung Theology: People as Subjects of History,* eds. the Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 58.
[51] It should be noted that Suh's third categorisation of *haan* (pertaining to systemic discrimination against women) has considerable relevance to contemporary society, as well. However, discussion of gender is largely missing from English language writings that take *haan* as their central focus. Accordingly, while I explore the issue of gender and *haan* in my third core chapter, I do not explore it further in this Literature Review.
[52] Euny Hong, *The Birth of Korean Cool: How One Nation is Conquering the World Through Pop Culture* (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2014), 51.
[53] Suh, "Biographical Sketch," 24-25.

In the manner in which *haan* is tied intricately to a social historiography of suffering and oppression, *haan* – as conceptualised within *minjung* discourse – bears distinct relation to notions of cultural trauma, which as Jeffrey C. Alexander explains 'occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.'[54] It is not just the initial traumatic event that is of importance, but significantly also the telling and retelling of that act: its cultural echo through the telling of history. Through such social and cultural mediation, as Neil J. Smelser describes:

> Over time the repeated and relived cultural activity yields a reservoir of hundreds of different renditions of the memory – some dead, some latent, some still active, some "hot," but in all events many that are available for resuscitation. This produces a fascinating type of cultural accumulation – a nonending, always-expanding repository consisting of multiple precipitates (both negative and positive) of a continuous and pulsating process of remembering, coping, negotiating, and engaging in conflict.[55]

Smelser here suggests that, through the mediation of varied cultural renditions of the traumatic event, the memory and manifestation of that initial trauma adopts a certain fluid quality, an ability to shift, adapt and maintain continued relevance over time. This, Smelser adds, 'lends strength to the assertion of indelibility: cultural traumas can never be solved and never go away.'[56] Both this indelibility, and Smelser's reference to cultural accumulation, are integral to the way that *haan* is conceptualised. However, a distinction should be made in that sentiments of *haan* stem not just from a single historical trauma, nor from trauma alone. Rather the causes of *haan* occupy a broader spectrum encompassing trauma, oppression, discrimination, lesser slights, and a general moral indignation from injustice. The repeated occurrence and accumulation of such events only further adds to the perception of *haan* as indelible. Another important shared facet of both cultural trauma and *haan* is their role in 'the formation

[54] Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity,* eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1.
[55] Neil J. Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity,* eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 54.
[56] Smelser, "Psychological Trauma," 54.

of collective identity and the construction of collective memory.'[57] In exploring this with regards to cultural trauma, Ron Eyerman analyses the cultural trauma of slavery's significance to African American identity, a discussion which offers a useful comparison to *haan*'s significance to Korean identity. Eyerman explains:

> The trauma of forced servitude and of nearly complete subordination to the will and whims of another was thus not necessarily something directly experienced by many of the subjects of this study, but came to be central to their attempts to forge a collective identity out of its remembrance. In this sense, slavery was traumatic in retrospect, and formed a "primal scene" that could, potentially, unite all "African Americans" in the United States, whether or not they had themselves been slaves or had any knowledge of or feeling for Africa.[58]

Similar can be said of *haan* to Korean collective and national identity – for instance, Suh Nam-dong notes that 'at a certain point in Korean history, about half of the population were registered as hereditary slaves', and he attributes such slavery as a key source of *haan*.[59] Yet, contrary to the African American community, the enslavement of the Korean people cannot be seen as a 'primal scene' for *haan*. In fact, so long is the historical narrative of affliction for the Korean people that tracing the historiography of *haan* to a primal scene is practically impossible. There is instead in essence a belief perpetuated that the simple act of being born Korean is a primal scene in itself for *haan*, as is characterised by poet Ko Un who writes "we Koreans were born from the womb of [*haan*] and brought up in the womb of [*haan*]".[60] Though this belief is not necessarily shared by all Koreans, it provides useful insight into the rhetoric through which *haan* is often regarded.

This perspective fuels much of the discussion of *haan,* particularly amongst the Minjung Theologians, the theorists of the 1970s and 1980s *minjung* democratic movements, and within the *minjung* culture movement. Each of these constituted nationalist movements that, respectively, through religion, pro-democratic efforts, and cultural production, politicised *haan* through the term *minjung* in their 'attempts to

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[57] Ron Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity,* eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 60.
[58] Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma," 60.
[59] Suh, "Towards a *Theology*," 58.
[60] Ko Un, cited by Suh, "Towards a *Theology*," 58.

heal the nation's wounded history'.[61] Within the discourses surrounding these movements, such was the perceived importance of *haan* to the collective identity of the *minjung* – and the Korean people more generally – that *haan* was seen to be both a state of being for the *minjung* and the sentiment most overwhelmingly felt by them. In this respect, and while I elaborate further on the *minjung* and on Korean nationalism in my second and third chapters, it is important to recognise how *haan* can be a crucial element of how national community in (South) Korea is *imagined* – how in the sense of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities,* it is socially constructed and mediated.[62] Within these nationalist imaginations, *haan* united the *minjung* and provided an emotion that, in part, galvanised people of the *minjung* into action. That ability to galvanise is key to how *haan*'s social significance is perceived.

Minjung theologian Suh Nam-dong comments:

> [Haan] is an underlying feeling of the Korean people. On the one hand, it is a 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.[63]

The feelings here described by Suh, through the lens of *minjung* theory, form the basis of how *haan*'s influence on the Korean people is understood: through its sublimation, as Suh continues, to 'great artistic expressions' – which have the capacity to reflect the sentiments of the masses, and to inspire them – and as its eruption 'as the energy for a revolution or rebellion.'[64] In particular, this latter affect of the *minjung*'s *haan* has been witnessed repeatedly throughout Korean history, perhaps most notably during the Gwangju Democratic Uprising of 1980 (films about which are the focus of my second chapter). And while since South Korea's democratisation the politics of *minjung* has lost its potency – largely because the primary aim of the *minjung* democratic movement (the achievement of democracy) has been fulfilled – their spirit can be seen to have echoed, for example, throughout the series of peaceful protests in autumn 2016 against the presidency of Park Geun-hye, in the wake of the Choi Soon-sil political scandal, which led to Park Geun-hye's impeachment in 2016 and that, according to organisers,

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[61] Choi Chungmoo, "Minjung Culture Movement," 107-108.
[62] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Revised Edition (London: Verso, 2006).
[63] Suh, "Towards a *Theology* of Han," 58.
[64] Suh, "Towards a *Theology* of Han," 58.

saw as many as 1.5 million people flock to the streets in protest at any one time.[65] As such, the supposed affect of *haan* on the Korean collective (or on the *minjung*), and the cultural significance of that affect, has proved historically observable.

Moreover, *haan*'s ability to galvanise is something that has been noted of in relation to various contexts. It is not something that has been exclusively politicised under the umbrella reach of *minjung* discourse, rather it has been drawn on by people across political and social spectrums. Perhaps most notable here – especially in contrast to its application in *minjung* discourse – is the evocation of *haan* by the authoritarian President Park Chung-hee, who 'promised that *they* [Park] could resolve the issues of Korea's collective *haan* because they themselves came from the poor class and understood the hardships of life'. [66] As Sung Kil-min notes, '[Park's] political propaganda, which focussed on perseverance and hard work', advocated 'a "can do" attitude, igniting the fire of *haan*' to promote national economic development.[67] The success of that propaganda is such that South Korea's post-war economic recovery (often referred to as The Miracle of the Han), even today, is frequently understood in part as a response to the nation's *haan*; for example, sociologist Kim Kyong-dong cites national desire 'to regain downtrodden national pride or to release [the] deep-rooted age-old [*haan*] complex', as stimulus for the efforts 'to eradicate chronic poverty and attain some prosperity' in the 'era of modernization'.[68] In this respect, in the narration of national history, the feeling of *haan* has often been presented almost as a call to action, in response to externally inflicted suffering (e.g. suffering caused by colonisation, authoritarianism, or poverty).

In other words, *haan* can be thought to represent an internalised response to (unjust) external stimuli. Inherent in this is an acceptance of personal responsibility for overcoming, or ridding oneself of the source of, that *haan,* or of achieving what is known as *haan-puri* (the solution, resolution, or dissolution of *haan*). Correspondingly,

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[65] BBC News, "S Korea Sees Largest Protests Against President Park Geun-hye," *BBC News,* November 26, 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-38114558.
[66] Sung, "The Politics of *Haan*," 208.
[67] Sung, "The Politics of *Haan*," 208.
[68] Kim Kyong-dong, *Korean Modernization and Uneven Development: Alternative Sociological Accounts* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 99.

in the sense of social or even personal biography, the spectre of *haan* poses the burden of (re)claiming subjectivity, a notion often discussed in *minjung* discourses. For instance, historian Namhee Lee adeptly argues in her book *The Making of Minjung* that the reestablishment of *minjung* politics grew in response to a modern Korean history 'marked by negativity: colonialism, foreign interventions, civil war, socialist authoritarianism in the North, the equally authoritarian military dictatorship in the South, and the continuing confrontation between them.'[69] Lee argues this resulted 'in a sense of the failure of Korean history', in which the general Korean population were not directly responsible for the trajectory of their country's modernisation.[70] She writes:

> I call this a crisis of historical subjectivity, and it gave rise to the discourse of minjung, which constituted the intellectual basis of the minjung movement. This sense of failure among intellectuals and students led them to critically reevaluate and reinterpret major events in Korean history, intellectuals and university students identified the minjung, the common people, to be the true subject of historical development and capable of social change.[71]

This reclamation of historical subjectivity for the common people is the same process that *minjok* nationalism sought during the colonial era. Yet with the *minjung*, often defined by their association with *haan,* there is an added thematic component to this historiographical project: namely *haan*. For instance, writing on *haan* and *minjung* politics and theology, Chang-hee Son echoes Lee:

> The minjung must choose their own destiny with vigilance and unyielding resolve. This is the only way to work out their *haan*.[72]

That Park Chung-hee – whose regime the *minjung* movement was diametrically opposed to – (as previously noted) promoted vigilance and unyielding resolve as a means of solving the nation's *haan* of poverty, again speaks to the importance of reclaiming subjectivity to the (re)solution of *haan*. Meanwhile, the ultimate success of the *minjung* movement in replacing South Korean authoritarianism with democracy – in a sense, reclaiming historical subjectivity for the common people – has in many ways

[69] Lee, *The Making of Minjung,* 3.
[70] Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 2.
[71] Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 2.
[72] Son, *Haan*, 35.

granted weighted significance to the concepts *haan* and *minjung* within South Korean national history. For instance, President Kim Dae-jung – a former *minjung* activist – speaking at the time of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis (known as the IMF crisis in Korea) describes that 'I had laid the cornerstone of democratization with *haan* and tears', adding that 'as long as we do not escape from but keep the affect of *haan,* we can overcome the IMF event'.[73] While South Korea has risen to a level of relative prosperity and security in the years since its democratisation, in turn removing much of the need for an active *minjung* discourse, the concepts and historiographical narrative that discourse promoted still retain significance in the cultural expression and narration of South Korean experience and history – as this thesis explores in relation to film.

Before reviewing more specifically *haan*'s significance to such cultural expression of national experience, it is important to consider its manifestation as affect. As noted, the ability to galvanise is key to how *haan* is understood. Within *minjung* discourse the tendency is to consider that affect more in terms of collective affect. However, it is crucial also to understand the affective facets of the individual's *haan*. For this I lean notably on Sung Kil-min's essay 'The Politics of *Haan*', in which Sung gives key insight into how *haan* can be interpreted as affect, drawing on the prominence of *haan* in South Korea's social and political discourse. Where relevant, I draw also on the theories of linguistic relativity and trauma theory to help provide a theoretical framework through which to understand particular facets of *haan* as affect.

Haan **as Affect**

In 'The Politics of *Haan*', Sung Kil-min argues 'that the use of affect as an analytical framework can highlight the way [Korean] people's potentiality and creativity are mobilized and actualized in social and political movements against poverty, discrimination and exploitation.'[74] In doing so, Sung theorises *haan* first as a personal experience, and then as a collective experience. Like the *minjung* theorists, Sung considers the 'basic underlying components of *haan*' to be 'anger and a feeling of unfairness, both of which appear as reactions to distress, depression or personal or

[73] Kim Dae-jung, cited by Sung, "The Politics of *Haan*," 198.
[74] Sung "The Politics of *Haan*," 198.

collective trauma.'[75] This reactionary quality of *haan* is integral to Sung's theorisation, as is his consideration for the significance of suppression in the creation of *haan*:

> the suppression of these feelings of anger or inequality has traditionally been recognized as a social virtue in Korea and, in fact, when contextualized by social and cultural conditions, these suppressed affects may be accumulated and layered deep in the mind for long periods of time. The affective state of this suppression, its main etiological factor being the feelings of anger and a perception of unfairness, is called *haan.*[76]

In this sense, *haan* can be seen as straddling a boundary between consciousness and unconsciousness through an on-going process of suppression of the feelings and experiences of injustice, trauma, and anger that lead to *haan.* Yet these residual feelings can be tapped back into. For instance, 'suppressed *haan* can be channelled through *haan-puri* – dissolving or (re)solving of *haan* – which produces a force or energy for actualizing social, economic or political potentialities.'[77] Meanwhile, key to this is when one event or experience stimulates action out of *haan*, action is not stimulated just from the *haan* from the one event but from previous *haan* too: from the reservoir of an individual's and the collective's accumulated *haan.*

The process of this accumulation and interpersonal/intergenerational transmission of *haan*, though, is something that discussions of *haan* have failed to sufficiently explain. The reason for this, at least partly, can be attributed to how *haan* as a concept is often seen to have arisen from a philosophical and cultural context through which Koreans supposedly 'feel life at its depths and refuse to define reality in primarily rational terms.'[78] Consequently, as a concept, *haan* is widely perceived to be irrational, which does not mean necessarily that it is irrational but rather that to rationalise it would be to rob *haan* of that certain transcendental, irrational quality through which it is perceived. Yet in searching for a rationalisation of *haan,* we can at least attempt to understand the process of its accumulation and transmission.

[75] Sung, "The Politics of *Haan*," 201.
[76] Sung, "The Politics of *Haan*," 201.
[77] Sung, "The Politics of *Haan*," 198.
[78] Cone, "Preface," xii.

If on a basic level we understand the emotion of *haan* as arising from an amalgamation of feelings (grief, anger, resignation, suffering, the feeling of oppression, rage etc.), then it is useful to understand *haan* in relation to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, which poses that:

> a speaker's language sets up a series of lexical and grammatical categories which act as a kind of grid through which s/he perceives the external world, and which constrain the way in which s/he categorizes and conceptualizes different phenomena. In other words, a language can affect a society by influencing or even controlling the world-view of its speakers.[79]

Seen through linguistic relativity, we can understand that while the individual feelings that make up *haan* are universally recognisable, the existence of the term *haan* within Korean society and the Korean language allows for the categorisation of those amalgamated feelings as *haan.* The culturally held connotations of *haan,* then, influence the way that those amalgamated feelings are understood and even felt by those who experience *haan*. Accordingly, while the component feelings of *haan* are largely universally relatable to, any cultural specificity to the feeling of *haan* can be attributed to the existence of the term itself – as well as, as previously noted, the context from which those feelings arise. The implication, thus, is that people of other nations and cultures that lack the concept *haan,* or any similar such concepts, are unable to experience *haan*'s amalgamated feelings in the same manner as Koreans. Meanwhile, the very existence and usage of the word in the Korean language has the potential to impact the way Korean people perceive and experience the world around them.[80]

Through the supposed significance of *haan* to Korean collective identity, the component feelings of *haan,* when amalgamated, are coded as Korean. Through *haan*'s association with Korean national and cultural identity – as well as with the historical narrative of Korean suffering – we can understand that the identification of these feelings as *haan,* in the first instance, allows an individual to (consciously or otherwise)

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[79] Martin Pütz and Marjolijin Verspoor, "Introduction," in *Explorations in Linguistic Relativity,* eds. Martin Pütz and Marjolijin Verspoor (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2000), ix.

[80] It should be noted, however, that similar concepts can be found in other cultures and societies. Yet I do not discuss them here for the reason that for *haan*, as with any cultural concept, the cultural context from which it arises is most crucial to how it manifests and is understood.

understand their personal experience in terms of *the* collective Korean experience. In the second instance, having understood their experiential state in relation to *the* collective, the individual becomes able to (consciously or otherwise) depersonalise the circumstances of their subjection to the negative feelings that culminate in *haan* – in particular, the feeling that one is subject to unjust persecution or oppression – thus, creating the perception that since *we* are all victims, *I* (specifically) am not a victim.

The first instance sees the individual's experience resonate with their understanding of the collective Korean experience; it is a process of relating to the notion of the collective *haan.* To *feel the weight* of the collective (accumulated) *haan,* is to empathise with the collective *haan*. Through this empathy we can understand the transmission of an individual's *haan* into the collective, and vice versa. Instead of understanding this transmission as a literal process, it can be seen as a semantically self-fulfilling process whereby the identification of *haan* as a discernibly Korean experience or state of being means that, each time a Korean feels *haan* or sees their existence as *haan, haan* itself becomes a more discernible term as well as a more discernibly Korean term. Subsequently, communicating to others one's experiential state as *haan* contributes to its collective understanding. Thus, *haan* can be interpreted as less of an accumulation of individuals' *haan,* and more as a product of collective reinforcement: a cementation of the very idea of *haan.* This rationalisation posits the transmission of *haan* as a figurative process: a result of a social understanding of *haan* perpetuated by, amongst other things, Korean cultural products (art, literature, film, music, museums etc.). Through such mediation, as earlier discussed, the parallels of *haan* with cultural trauma are evident.

In the second instance, the extent to which an individual can depersonalise the circumstances of their subjection to unjust persecution can be seen to determine the affective dimensions that their *haan* may subsume. For instance, in extreme cases an inability to depersonalise one's own sufferings alongside a deep empathising with the collective *haan* could draw one to suicide – as one becomes overcome by the *weight* of both their own and the collective's *haan.* Or it could result in 'one's *haan* [being]

resolved by impulsively releasing or expressing anger or violence (*hwa-puri*)'.[81] This *hwa-puri* (which translates to release of fire/release of anger), as an affect of *haan,* tends to be both random and volatile, with Sung Kil-min comparing it to the eruption of a previously 'dormant volcano'.[82] Euny Hong observes:

> [*Haan*] doesn't just mean that you hate people who have wronged you for generations. It also means that random people in your life can spark the flame of [*haan*]. Someone who cuts you off in traffic or disappoints you with his or her friendship can unleash the anger of generations [(*hwa-puri*)].[83]

Sung adds that 'while *haan* may be (temporarily) released in such a manner, *hwa-puri* is not desirable because it may induce *hwa* [(anger)] or *haan* in another person who is present at the *hwa-puri.*'[84]

Alternatively, *hwa-puri* can be avoided if one successfully depersonalises their own sufferings through relating to the collective *haan.* If this happens it is possible to understand how *haan* can affect an individual in a more productive or progressive sense. This in turn, can lead one to the release, or solving, of *haan*: *haan-puri.* Whereas *hwa-puri* can be seen as the explosive potential of *haan, haan-puri* involves a more conscious process of channelling *haan.* Alternatively, *haan-puri* may come as a reaction to something positive, as Sung Kil-min notes:

> *Haan-puri* can indeed include experiences of wish-fulfilment, restoration of self-esteem, or the achievement of success. For example, the *haan* of an illiterate mother who has suffered from poverty and the violence perpetrated by an abusive husband may find *haan-puri* years later in the success of a son: her sacrifice and endurance through the hardships of the life she has led find purpose or fulfilment in the endeavors and successes of her son.[85]

For the individual, beyond that of *haan*'s composite emotions, the affective dimensions of *haan* are caught in a balancing act between the destructive and the constructive, between *hwa-puri* and *haan-puri.* Both offer the potential to relieve an individual of some of their *haan,* yet neither will cure an individual of their *haan* completely. Instead

[81] Sung, "The Politics of *Haan*," 204.
[82] Sung, "The Politics of *Haan*," 204.
[83] Hong, *The Birth of Korean Cool,* 54.
[84] Sung, "The Politics of *Haan*," 209.
[85] Sung, "The Politics of *Haan*," 209.

both function somewhat like a pressure valve, releasing individuals temporarily from the burden of their *haan*. Meanwhile, the *haan* itself can only be completely resolved, as Suh Kwang-sun David notes, 'when the total structure of the [individual's] oppressed society and culture is changed'[86]; in other words, when it is no longer appropriate or necessary for a Korean to understand their own feelings and experiences in the context of the greater narrative of Korean suffering. As with cultural trauma, the practical impossibility of such a resolution – granted by the fluidity and ever-accumulating nature of *haan* – only lends *haan* a greater sense of indelibility.

It is useful here also to briefly note the facets of *haan* known as *jeong-haan* and *won-haan* two opposing affective dimensions of *haan* that have often been discussed in relation to *minjung* discourses. As Keumsil Kim Yoon and Bruce Williams describe, *jeong-haan* 'describes sorrow, distress, and unresolved sentiment, and is self-compliance oriented[;]…it is a '*haan*' of passive acceptance and resignation.' [87] In contrast, *won-haan*, as Chang-hee Son describes, is 'a haan of righteous suffering which may lead to justified anger' that often manifests through 'masochistic and destructive' actions.[88] These can be useful distinctions to help further understand the emotional nuances and affective nature of *haan* – for instance, it is easy to understand how the accumulation of *won-haan* may result in an individual's *hwa-puri.* However, I keep my discussion of *jeong-haan* and *won-haan* here short as in the films I discuss in this thesis *jeong-haan* and *won-haan* are often invoked simultaneously. As such, I tend to avoid actively distinguishing between these facets of *haan.* Yet, where relevant, I do provide further discussion of these terms.

To summarise, *haan* can be seen as a contradictory state that fuses hope with resignation. It can be seen to emanate from a victim's complex, paradoxical in nature, whereby Korean people, collectively and individually, feel helpless to their fated sufferings yet are reluctant to resign themselves completely to victimhood. It is the accumulation of such feelings that produces a burning desire for release from those

[86] Suh, "Biographical Sketch," 25.
[87] Keumsil Kim Yoon and Bruce Williams, *Two Lenses on the Korean Ethos: Key Cultural Concepts and Their Appearance in Cinema* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015), 41.
[88] Son, *Haan,* 14-15.

sufferings. This desire fuels the affective nature of *haan,* making it both a force for progression and a destructive force, leading to further *haan.* It is accumulated individually, passed down through the generations, and channelled into the greater stream of *haan.* On a collective level, *haan* is ever-fluid, acquiring all new *haan* – from the experiences of individual people as well as from the emotional afterglow of traumatic national events (e.g. the Korean War and Japanese colonisation). Nevertheless, it remains unchanging as a sentiment capable of uniting grieving, angry, oppressed, and suffering Korean masses. The process of theorising *haan* is thus a process that frequently encounters contradiction, but significantly it is from a state of contradiction that Korean *haan* is born and raised.

Haan and the Cultural Vernacular

While my discussion so far has focussed on the English language writing on *haan,* conspicuously absent from much of the literature discussed is the historical derivation of the term itself. It is frequently referred to as a 'deep-rooted' concept,[89] but this characterisation neglects the relatively modern origins of *haan* as concept denoting amalgamated grief and sorrow, with the concept itself traceable to Japanese art critic Yanagi Muneyoshi's writings during the early years of the colonial era on the Korean "beauty of sorrow".[90] Specifically, Yanagi – an '"expert" on Korean ceramics during the colonial period' – 'defined the nature of the Korean aesthetic as an "aesthetics of sorrow"', in the process characterising the Korean people as 'perpetually sad' and the 'Korean essence [as] lonely, sorrowful, and superstitious.'[91] Despite Yanagi being an admirer of Korean art, his writings were frequently condescending to Korea and its people, with characterisations embraced by broader Japanese discourses on Korean art in a manner that supported notions of Japanese superiority. For instance, as Sandra So Hee Chi Kim notes, 'by implying that melancholy as a national attribute preceded the Japanese occupation, it naturalized the suffering of the colonized as something inherent and inevitable.'[92] There is an irony, then, that such foreign characterisations of Koreans as an essentially melancholic and historically suffering people both

[89] Chung, 121.
[90] Sandra So Hee Chi Kim, "Korean *Han* and the Postcolonial Afterlives of "The Beauty of Sorrow"," *Korean Studies* 41(2017): 259.
[91] Kim, "Korean *Han,*" 259-260.
[92] Kim, "Korean *Han,*" 261.

survived the Japanese empire and have been appropriated and perpetuated in (South) Korean social, cultural and political discourses through the notion of *haan* – a concept supposedly able to galvanise the oppressed against their oppressors. Moreover, this invariably brings into question the historical actuality of *haan* as a *deep-rooted* Korean concept. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the historicity of *haan* is not strictly of relevance. Rather, it is the historiographical and cultural significance that *haan* has accrued and holds in contemporary (South) Korea that is of interest.

To this, it is telling that much of the writing on *haan* – either consciously, or otherwise – omits the historical development of the term itself, instead drawing on the revised historiographical narratives of Korean history that both actively and implicitly promote the idea of the deep-rooted-ness of *haan.* For instance, various *minjung* theorists and theologists, writing on *haan,* refer to the foundational myth of the Korean people as a story steeped in themes of *haan.* The myth tells of a tiger and a bear who prayed every day that they would take human form. In response to their prayers, a heavenly prince 'gave them twenty bulbs of garlic and a bundle of mugwort and said, "Eat these, and confine yourselves deep in your cave for one hundred days, at which time you will become human."'[93] While the tiger could not 'tolerate the long days of sitting quietly in the cave', the bear patiently endured and was rewarded by getting turned into a beautiful woman. She would later mother a son, Dangun, who 'reigned afterwards as the first human king of the [Korean] peninsula.'[94] As Chang-hee Son highlights 'self-denial, acquiescence to a higher power, suffering, and sufferance were required of the tiger and bear so that their discontent with being animals could be resolved. In other words, their *haan* could only be resolved with more experiences of *haan.*'[95] With the suffering of the bear ultimately leading to the birth of Korea's first human King, there is a strong line of interpretation that aligns Korea's foundational myth with the idea that the Korean people are born out of a process of inherited suffering, out of *haan*.

[93] In-seop Jeong, *Folk Tales from Korea: Revised Edition* (Seoul: Hollym Corp., 2005), 30.
[94] Jeong, *Folk Tales from Korea,* 30-31.
[95] Son, *Haan,* 21.

What is notable also of this story is the degree to which this myth has been retrospectively applied to the historiography of the Korean people. Henry H. Em explains that the myth of Dangun 'had an ambiguous place in premodern historiography.' [96] Yet it was appropriated by early proponents of the Korean nationalist movement that developed in the early twentieth century in response to Korea's looming annexation by Japan. In a 1908 essay, in presenting 'a history of the ethnic nation, rather than a dynastic history, Sin Ch'aeho [(Shin Chae-ho)] traces the origin of the Korean nation to the mythical figure [Dangun]'.[97] In doing so, Shin traces the lineage of the *minjok* (the Korean race/the Korean people) back to 2333 BCE and the foundation of the Gojoseon kingdom (geographically located in the North of the Korean peninsula and part of Manchuria). He thus portrays all Koreans as one people dating back to that point, despite the fact that it was not until 936CE that the Korean peninsula was unified as a single country for the first time (under the Goryeo dynasty). This national historiography still holds a prominent place in the contemporary national imaginary (as is discussed further in my third chapter). The application of the Dangun myth by Shin speaks to how history (and national history) undergoes a constant process of reformulation, and reinterpretation. The modern development of *haan* as an important cultural concept attests to this also, and is demonstrated in how the Dangun myth – itself reinterpreted by Shin Chae-ho as a foundational myth – has since been further read and understood through the lens of *haan*, in turn offering *haan* as a key lens on history and culture through which a national imaginary (e.g. *minjok* and *minjung*) is formulated.

Jae Hoon Lee, discussing *haan* in relation to *minjung theology* and Korean culture, states that '[*haan*] has been a traditional theme of Korean literature, from the oldest poem to the modern forms of literature.'[98] Given the modern origins of the term *haan,* the word traditional makes this statement difficult to accept uncritically, unless tradition itself is considered as a modern construct. This notion itself is supported by the efforts made, to reformulate and re-establish Korean traditional culture in the post-

[96] Em, "Minjok," 339.
[97] Em, "Minjok," 339.
[98] Jae Hoon Lee, *The Explorations of the Inner Wounds – Han* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 15.

colonial era – during which the Japanese sought to systematically eradicate much of Korea's *indigenous* culture. For instance, as Namhee Lee writes, 'the [South Korean] state initiated a series of projects and institutions that gave rise to the revival of folklore as both an academic discipline and a popular project in the 1960s.'[99] Various forms of folk culture resurfaced and 'became a site of contested nationalism', both actively promoted by the state to rebuild national identity, and appropriated widely by students and protesters opposed to the state's military regime.[100] In particular Lee cites the *ma-dang-geuk* mask dance, farmers' music, the musical tradition of *pansori,* and shamanistic ritual as folk traditions that, though 'previously denigrated to the realm of premodernity and superstition, were revived by students and intellectuals and fuelled the artistic and political imagination of the period.'[101] Notable, also, is how *haan* was often interpreted as a central aspect of several of these cultural forms. For instance, contemporary understandings of shamanism often state that 'the main pursuit of [shamanic ritual] is to resolve the [*haan*] of the people.'[102] Meanwhile, *pansori,* as Suh Nam-dong explains, channels the 'dominant feeling of defeat, resignation, and nothingness' associated with *haan,* into an 'artistic [sublimation] of [*haan*] which the powerless and the frustrated experience as renunciation.'[103]

In this respect, we can see how contemporary understandings of traditional culture retrospectively establish *haan* as an important concept to Korean national culture. Meanwhile, cultural products have also often reinforced the idea of *haan* as a national trait. For instance, the box office smash-hit films *Sopyonje* (Im Kwon-taek, 1993) and *The King and the Clown* (Lee Joon-ik, 2005) feature performers of Korean *traditional* arts as their leading characters, (a *pansori* singer and masked dancers, respectively) while telling narratives where *haan* is thematically central to the plights of these leading characters. Through the thematic significance granted to *haan* in the representation of traditional culture, the films reinforce the association of *haan* with the national cultural traditions depicted, while positioning the medium of film as a vehicle for the thematic elaboration of *haan.* Through such acts of thematic elaboration,

[99] Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 189
[100] Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 188.
[101] Lee, *The Making of Minjung,* 192.
[102] Lee, *Han,* 2.
[103] Suh, "Towards a *Theology*," 58.

cultural products offer themselves as useful tools for understanding and promoting the notion of *haan* itself.

One of the most useful examples of this comes not from traditional culture but from contemporary culture, through the song 'Hood', a 2015 collaboration between Korean hip-hop artist Tablo and American hip-hop artist Joey Bada$$. Sung in English, Tablo's lyrics, in part, introduce the concept of *haan* to the western hip-hop community, doing so through a musical genre that originated from African American inner-city culture, and which has frequently occupied a political space for expressing the social struggles for, and oppression against, black urban communities in America. With appropriation of black culture frequently an issue within the Korean popular music scene,[104] the song in many respects acts as a conversation between American hip-hop and Korean popular music, in which Tablo presents a cultural justification for Korean music's adoption of the hip-hop genre. With Tablo's lyrics expressing the pain present in Korean culture, and with Joey Bada$$'s lyrics in the song expressing the pain and struggles in the Brooklyn hip-hop community, the song draws distinct parallels between the suffering of Korean people and that of urban African Americans – as is reflected through the lyrics, repeated by both artists, 'From Hongdae to Bedstuy' (a reference to notable neighbourhoods of Seoul and Brooklyn, known for urban arts), 'we're born from the same pain, shed alike tears.' Such posits culture itself (here, hip-hop) as a valuable way of communicating between, and empathising with, different communities. It also, attests to the cross-cultural relatability of sentiments and emotions of *haan* to communities who may not be familiar with the Korean context. In other words, the very musical genre of hip-hop, and its connotations, play a role in the communication of the sentiment of *haan*.

Meanwhile, Tablo's lyrics provide a useful explanation of *haan* and how Korean people relate to it:

> Where I'm from
> [*haan*] is the name we give to struggle and pain

[104] Elizabeth de Luna, "'They Use our Culture": the Black Creatives and Fans Holding K-pop Accountable," *The Guardian,* July 20, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/jul/20/k-pop-black-fans-creatives-industry-accountable-race.

> This river runs through our city like it runs through our veins
> To us it's the one thing above all things; money love, gods and kings
> It's what's driving us be it ahead or insane
> We said Shotgun to it, wishing that it takes us, navigates us to a better living
> It's with us, cramped up in a bus, subways, our schools and our building
> It's the price that our *a-ppa*s [(read, fathers)] paid to buy food for the children
> It sits at the bottom of the pot when our *eom-mas* [(read, mothers)] got that hot deonjang-guk [(a national dish of Korea)] in the kitchen
> On and on, it makes us hustle on
> For the money, we fight, fall but overcome, that's why we call it *Won*
> [*Haan*] is spoken yet unspoken, we could be broke but never broken
> It made my father work the graveyard shift and it still makes his graveyard shift
> […]
> Some call it pain, we call it *sarang* [(read, love)][105]

These lyrics offer *haan* as a lens through which to view and understand Korea, its people, its music, and its culture. In doing so they draw upon how widely felt *haan* supposedly is ('[it] runs through our city like it runs through our veins'); *haan*'s productive and destructive ability ('driving us be it ahead or insane'); the intergenerational legacy of *haan* ('it's the price our [father's] paid'); and, *haan*'s haunting presence after death ('still makes his graveyard shift'). The conceptualisation of *haan* provided by Tablo's lyrics also give insight as to why, perhaps, Korean music and culture more generally often features, as Euny Hong has noted, 'so much human misery'.[106] Hong anecdotes 'When I asked a top music executive why old Korean songs were so sad, he said, "Koreans have a lot of [*haan*]."'[107] 'Hood' goes a long way towards supporting this notion. Meanwhile, the explicitness with which it does, coupled with its expression through a contemporary form of music (hip-hop) by a contemporary music star (Tablo), alludes to the continued cultural significance of *haan* in the twenty-first century South Korea. This is important to stress considering that South Korea currently occupies a position of relative affluence, liberty and social security (relative both to other countries,[108] and to South Korea's own history). Given this, one might question

[105] Tablo, "Hood Lyrics," accessed November 27, 2016, http://genius.com/Tablo-and-joey-bada-hood-lyrics.
[106] Hong, *The Birth of Korean Cool,* 53.
[107] Hong, *The Birth of Korean Cool,* 53.
[108] For instance, South Korea possesses the world's 12th largest economy. It also rates 27th in human freedom (according to the CATO Institute's human freedom index). See, respectively, Jung Min-ho, "Korea on Track to Becoming World's 10th Largest

the extent to which a sentiment rooted in feelings of suffering, oppression, and injustice remains relevant to notions of contemporary South Korean national identity. Yet, that *haan* continues to be a key sentiment through which Korea's artists relate to their own national identity reflects a lingering social significance of *haan* to the national imaginary.

Significant, also, is that 'Hood' reflects this significance through a contemporary form, namely hip-hop music. This in many ways reflects a malleability to the expression and manifestation of the concept itself, which in turn contradicts a notion of a specific aesthetics of *haan*, such as the aesthetics of sorrow through which colonial Japanese art critics pigeonholed and essentialised Korean culture. Instead, it is important to approach *haan* in a manner that can adequately accommodate the multivalence of its cultural expression. For this, I draw on the idea of a cultural vernacular, a term which I use in a similar manner to how Miriam Hansen talks of Vernacular Modernism.

In her discussion of classical Hollywood cinema as 'Vernacular Modernism' Miriam Hansen makes use of the term vernacular for the reason that it 'combines the dimension of the quotidian, of everyday usage, with connotations of discourse, idiom, and dialect with circulation, promiscuity, and translatability.'[109] It is for the same reason that I feel it appropriate to use vernacular in my discussion of *haan.* Specifically, I argue that Korean cultural products, through their circulation and *everyday*-ness, create a language, or structure, for the communication of *haan,* organising sentiments of *haan* into widely communicable and comprehensible forms. These patterns and trends of representation, by virtue of their everyday propagation through culture and media, help construct a network of signification which we can refer to as a cultural vernacular for the expression of *haan.* And in particular, as this thesis discusses, film provides an invaluable tool for observing this vernacular in action. In the following, I

Economy in 2027: Report," *The Korea Times,* January 2, 2020, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/biz/2020/01/602_281277.html; and, "Human Freedom Index 2019: Country Profiles," CATO, accessed January 20, 2020, https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/human-freedom-index-files/human-freedom-index-2019-country-profiles.pdf.

[109] Miriam Bratu Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/modernity* 6, no.2 (April 1999): 60.

exemplify this through short analysis of the closing scenes of *Chilsu and Mansu* (Park Kwang-su, 1988), a film which not only projects themes of *haan* but demonstrates its affect.

Communicating the Cultural Vernacular of *Haan* through Film

In his lyrics to 'Hood', Tablo comments that '[*Haan*] is spoken yet unspoken'. It is on the bridge between the spoken and the unspoken that *haan* is most frequently communicated. Accordingly, it is on this bridge that, at the symbolic start of South Korean cinema's contemporary era, we can see the two painters Chil-su and Man-su to be situated, as atop their billboard they scream silently of their angers with the lives that society has inflicted upon them. 'I have nothing to say and I have a lot to say!' shouts Man-su, a sentiment that very much encapsulates *haan.* Though literally, we cannot claim their sufferings to have gone unspoken, the specificities of their situation go unheard by the society they scream out over. As an audience we are given a unique perspective on their situation, one not shared by anyone in the film besides Chil-su and Man-su. We are shown the lives and the experiences of both characters that have led them to this moment, a moment in which their *haan* is erupting from within them. We are privy also to how the spectacle of the *haan* of the two men is received by the society below.

The film shows us how the situation escalates at ground-level. First, we are shown a pair of children looking up and seeing the two men, Chil-su and Man-su, animatedly yelling. Though they cannot be heard, the two men are standing and waving their arms in anger, a sight that begins attracting a small crowd of people. Constituting this crowd, we see the two children, and an assortment of elderly people, women, and people visually coded as poor – for example, a man at the forefront of the frame wears a YMCA t-shirt. These are not the 'important, educated, successful, rich bastard[s]' of Seoul to whom Chil-su and Man-su are addressing their anger, but rather a cross-section of the *minjung,* an audience that can relate to the anger and the *haan* of which the two working-class *demonstrators* are expressing, and in spite of their inability to hear the specifics of the *demonstrators*' plight. The scene then cuts back to Chil-su and Man-su silently screaming, and then to a shot of three men looking up, whose business attire positions them more in line with the targets of Chil-su and Man-su's verbal aggression.

The following shot contrasts the sight of just three *targets* observing the spectacle with a shot displaying a dramatic growth in the size of the *minjung* crowd, thus juxtaposing the privileged few against the plighted many. This initial escalation of the situation – from two men simply yelling their angers, to becoming a spectacle for the *minjung* – depicts how just voiceless expressions of *haan* are enough to resonate with and attract the attention of *the* Korean people. Moreover, through the editing of this short sequence, the transmission and accumulation of *haan* is visualised; Chil-su and Man-su's expressed *haan* loses its context as it is received silently by an ever-growing crowd of people: the collective *haan.*

As the two men continue yelling, they soon attract the attention of the authorities (the police, and their own bosses), who in viewing them as labour activists project onto Chil-su and Man-su the socio-political context of 1988 South Korea – a time when, following the end of Chun Doo-hwan's regime, social and political tensions were brought to the forefront of national conversation, and protests were commonplace. The authorities take action to stop the already voiceless *activists,* enlisting the help of the military, in the process intensifying the painters' sense of unjust persecution. In response to the mounting police and military presence, Man-su yells 'What did we ever do that you treat us like this?' a question shared by Korea's *haan*-ridden *minjung.* Both the crowds and police presence continue to grow until, eventually, the spectacle of the two men gets the attention of the press, with live news coverage transmitting images of the *haan* of the two men to the *minjung* around the country.

Night falls and the authorities move to put an end to the spectacle, sending a team up the billboard to retrieve the two men. Chil-su is caught, while Man-su tries to flee his oppressors, climbing out onto a ladder. Seeing no way out, he takes a suicide leap from the ladder and as he falls, again silently, the film freeze-frames on the airborne Man-su. This freeze-frame works on two levels, the first trapping Man-su in a perpetual free-fall, with a potentially fatal landing always impending but never coming. Stuck forever in this moment, Man-su is nevertheless caught in a moment of freedom from his oppressors, and as such conveys hope. Thus, in this moment *haan*'s contradictory infusion of resignation with hope is encapsulated, as such creating a visual analogy of the feeling of *haan.* On the second level, the freeze-frame of Man-su in free-fall isolates

Man-su from the reality of his imminent death. In doing so he is attributed with a mythic quality, one through which he can never die, but through which his own voice is removed and he becomes a symbol to inspire others through whatever they project onto him. Though only Chil-su and Man-su will ever know the reality that culminated in Man-su's jump, seen by the collective as a political activist Man-su becomes martyred, a symbol of the consequence of state oppression.

Following the freeze-frame, we see Man-su carried off on a stretcher while members of the press ask whether he has died. That these questions go unanswered, and we as an audience never discover his fate, figuratively perpetuate Man-su's free-fall. Meanwhile, the camera cuts to a closed-mouthed Chil-su as he, arrested, is taken away by the military and the police before a sea of journalists and other onlookers. He is forced into a police car, and as he looks back at the crowds behind him he locks eyes with Ji-na – a woman with whom his (ultimately unrequited) love for symbolised to Chil-su perhaps his last salvation from the fated sufferings his class status and family background had left for him.[110] The camera freeze-frames once more, this time on the expression on Chil-su's face as it is caught in the flash of a journalist's camera. Thus, as he stares back at Ji-na he can be seen longing for a salvation he is about to be driven both literally and figuratively far away from. The freeze-frame catches him in this *haan*-ridden moment, a moment the film ends on as the credits crawl over this image, accompanied by a song that's melancholy lyrics, too, evoke sentiments of *haan* ('I will never cry again, not until the flowers bloom on that mountain far, far away').

In one respect, *Chilsu and Mansu* is a film saturated with themes of *haan* as it explores the lives of its titular characters. Meanwhile, we can see that through communicating such *haan* through cultural expression the film contributes to the cultural vernacular of *haan.* As an audio-visual medium, film possesses the ability to do this in a variety of ways, and we see this in the case of *Chilsu and Mansu.* For instance, from the voiceless anger, or silent screaming, of the two men to the freeze-frames that trap the characters within their fates – with one caught between hope and resignation and the other

[110] For example, his mother is long-since deceased, his older sister is living in America as a military bride, and his father remarried and abandoned Chil-su following his mother's death leaving Chil-su alone to struggle by himself.

longing for a salvation that will never come – the interplay between sound and image prove key to how *haan* is conveyed, and in a manner that few other mediums are capable of. Specifically, it is how sound and image are used to capture moments of contradiction and paradox (e.g. the hope and the resignation) that are pivotal to the presentation here of *haan.* There is a cinematic language and grammar at play that shapes the way that *haan* is communicated, and through such a vernacular various consistencies and similarities in how *haan* is cinematically communicated can be found throughout Korean cinema.

To fully capture the scope and scale of such a cinematic vernacular is perhaps an impossible task – especially for any one thesis alone – and it is not my intention here to do so. However, recognition of the existence of such a vernacular is imperative to understanding the place and role of *haan* within Korean cinema. As such, where possible, and where appropriate, my thesis draws attention to certain tendencies and consistencies in how *haan* is communicated both thematically and emotionally through the cultural vernacular. Meanwhile, it is the significance and function of this communication that is of central concern to my thesis.

Film Studies and *Haan*

As discussed in my introduction, *haan* has seldom been given meaningful discussion within the English language film studies discourse on South Korean cinema, yet the prominence of its manifestation in Korean cinema has frequently been noted. Consequently, the treatment of *haan* by film studies has largely been superficial. Beyond the relevant criticisms of the essentialism that discussion of *haan* can often lead to, the conceptual complexities of *haan* that this literature review has addressed are invariably a key reason for this critical superficiality to the discussion of *haan*. It is difficult to afford *haan* meaningful and concise discussion in relation to film in the absence of an established understanding of *haan*'s place and function within Korean cinema. This thesis strives to remedy this absence in a manner complementary to the existing discourse on Korean cinema, a discourse that in the course of its development over the past thirty years has grown only increasingly diverse. Specifically, while earlier texts addressed Korean cinema explicitly in the context of national cinema, as Sangjoon Lee describes, 'the field has rapidly expanded, and such diverse subjects as

Korea's colonial-era cinema, the Cold War, North Korean cinema, gender and sexuality, international film festivals, the film industry, globalization and transnationalism, multiculturalism, LGBTQ cinema, tourism, and auteur studies have been rigorously studied.' [111] As previously discussed of *haan,* there is a degree of ideological ambivalence to the term itself that allows it to be invoked in the ideological elaboration of a multitude of different issues. In this respect, there are a multitude of ways that *haan* may relate to several of the aspects of Korean cinema that have been explored through film studies, and notably this thesis draws on such aspects as historical representation, gender, and globalisation and transnationalism. Yet rather than reviewing the literature surrounding these aspects here, it is of more use to reserve such discussion for the relevant chapters.

It is however useful here to note one specific aspect of the discourse on Korean cinema that has most frequently made reference to *haan*: genre, with certain genres in the Korean context often noted for their tendencies to draw on *haan.* Alison Peirse and Daniel Martin in their edited volume *Korean Horror Cinema,* for instance, reference how narratives in Korean horror films are 'often preoccupied with [*haan*] (a sense of agonising grief and unfair suffering)'.[112] Robert L. Cagle usefully poses that *haan* and *hwa-puri* (release of anger) 'may provide a key for interpreting the psychic and cultural motivations behind the unique dynamics of South Korean film', particularly in relation to the use of violence in so-called South Korean extreme cinema. Meanwhile, *haan* is spoken of most often in relation to melodrama, which is often argued to be 'the default narrative mode in Korean cinema', underpinning 'the majority of films produced in all genres [of Korean cinema].'[113] Korean melodrama is frequently seen to have distinctive characteristics attributable to the cultural legacy of certain Korean traditions. The theatrical tradition *shinpa* – which 'connotes tragic tales of romance and female suffering, defeatist narratives with inevitably sad endings, designed as quintessential

[111] Sangjoon Lee, "Introduction: Rediscovering Korean Cinema," in *Rediscovering Korean Cinema,* ed. Sangjoon Lee (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 10.
[112] Alison Peirse and Daniel Martin, "Introduction," in *Korean Horror Cinema,* eds. Alison Peirse and Daniel Martin (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 1.
[113] Peirse and Martin, "Introduction," 5.

'tear jerkers'[114] – is one such tradition,[115] while *haan* is often cited as another 'foundational determinant' of Korean melodrama.[116] The emotional excess and sentimentalism of melodrama makes *haan* an almost natural accompaniment to the genre, in a manner perhaps less obvious for horror and extreme cinema. Yet the observation of *haan* in such varied genres and modes of cinema speaks to a broader application and functionality of *haan* in film that extends beyond genre; it alludes to the potential for *haan* to be invoked through a range of different storytelling styles and aesthetics. It is as such that this thesis considers films from a broad array of genres in Korea's popular cinema – including but not limited to documentary, historical drama, action, and fantasy – as I examine the consistencies and trends of *haan*'s cinematic application.

In this attempt to examine such trends, while melodrama itself is of particular relevance, it is important also to note that it is a subject I devote little attention to within this thesis. My reasons for this are twofold, and are not intended to dismiss any significance of *haan* to melodrama as a genre in the South Korean cinematic context. Firstly, as my thesis demonstrates, the reach of *haan* within South Korean cinema extends far beyond just the genre of melodrama. Secondly, in trying to ascertain the significance in Korean cinema of *haan* – a concept that discussion of is often complicated by essentialist rhetoric – critical reliance on another aspect (the melodrama genre) often seen as essential of Korean cinema seems an unnecessarily problematic approach. As such, I keep discussion of melodrama within this thesis minimal while, in the instances where I do draw on it, I typically refer to melodrama not specifically in terms of genre but rather more broadly as a mode of cinematic address which combines music with heightened displays of emotion. Meanwhile, it is with the subject of emotion itself that I begin this thesis, in my next chapter, as I consider the importance of emotional address to the cinematic application of *haan.*

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[114] Peirse and Martin, "Introduction," 5.
[115] It should be noted that *shinpa* was 'originally a Japanese theatrical tradition of the late 1880s, imported to Korea during the colonial period'. See Peirse and Martin, "Introduction," 5.
[116] Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia," 123.

Emotional Realism in the Korean Cinematic Context

An old woman dressed in *hanbok* (traditional Korean clothing) sits crying before a burial mound. She is otherwise alone, while the ground and trees around her are layered in a thick snow. This opening image to Jin Mo-young's 2013 documentary *My Love, Don't Cross that River* presents a scene of great grief entwined with resilience and strength; here is a woman suffering through the extreme cold just to grieve, longing for whom she has lost. The image alone is enough to conjure notions of *haan* but, through the cinematic techniques it deploys, the film does not merely present the *haan* of the woman but shares that *haan* with the audience. Between the harshness of the white of the still falling snow, along with the faint sound of the icy breeze, the sheer coldness of the woman's surroundings filters through the screen to the audience. And while the woman sits in the middle ground of the cinematic image, the sound of her crying is brought to the foreground of the scene's sound design; while she sits distanced from us, the audience, her tears sound so close they could even be our own. Meanwhile, emanating from the soundtrack, a gentle piano theme complements her grief, underlying rather than emphasising it. The overall effect is that the personal grief of the woman is transmitted to the spectator who, rendered passive, unable to console her, is left only to feel what she feels.

We know not yet the circumstances of the woman's grief, but its presentation to us through the documentary mode makes us recognise that grief as pertaining to actual lived grief. And as we share in it, the scene does not simply just portray emotion; emotion is projected in a way that makes the audience feel the very reality of the emotion behind the portrayal, its resonance with an actuality. In this manner, this scene achieves what we can term emotional realism: a form of address that channels the emotion of reality, a presentation of emotional truth that resonates with lived experience.

This chapter looks to understand emotional realism as a key vehicle through which *haan* is presented and projected in Korean cinema, an understanding essential to my later chapters for viewing the role of *haan* within Korean cinema. Through the notion of emotional realism, I argue we can see how *haan* has a fixed role within Korean cinema: the representation and evocation of *haan* communicates with it the lived

emotion of Korean life, society and history, and thus instils an emotional realism. To make this case, this chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I unpack what I mean by the term emotional realism through analysis of Jin Mo-young's *My Love, Don't Cross that River,* a film which specifically through its implementation of observational documentary film technique offers a useful starting place for understanding the mechanics of emotional realism. The second section develops understanding of emotional realism in relation to fiction film in the Korean context. Looking at the case of Park Kwang-su's 1988 film *Chilsu and Mansu,* I consider how cinematic evocation of *haan* creates an affective dimension to social realism, through the generation of emotional realism. In structuring this chapter as such, I introduce and conceptualise emotional realism in order to develop a framework through which we can understand *haan*'s role in Korean film not just as a thematic or idiomatic device but as cinematic affect, that allows for the emotional communication of social realism.

My Love, Don't Cross that River

Described by John Grierson famously as the "creative treatment of actuality",[117] the issue of realism (or, perhaps more accurately, of authenticity to reality, or actuality) sits at the heart of debates surrounding what constitutes a documentary film, and is accordingly central to any definition of the term. Though it is not my intention to contribute my own opinions or definitions to such debates surrounding documentary's (re)presentation of actuality – my intention is instead to use a specific documentary to help define the notion of emotional realism in a way that can then be applied to Korean film more generally – it is important to establish a general understanding of documentary's relationship with actuality. For this reason I defer to the writings of Bill Nichols, whose extensive work on the subject has been fundamental to the development of scholarly discourse on documentary film, and Paul Ward, whose 2005 book *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* sought to introduce and survey the wider discourse surrounding the subject.

Key to the writings of both scholars is the situation of documentary outside the realm of fiction. Whereas fiction '[creates] one world to stand in for another, historical world',

[117] John Grierson, cited by Paul Ward, *Documentary: The Margins of Reality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 6.

Nichols argues that 'Documentary films…refer directly to the historical world.'[118] He elaborates:

> Documentary film speaks about situations and events involving real people (social actors) who present themselves within a framework. This frame conveys a plausible perspective on the lives, situations, and events portrayed. The distinct point of view of the filmmaker shapes the film into a way of understanding the historical world directly rather than through a fictional allegory[119]

Nichols here offers an assessment of documentary that categorises it as an approach to filmmaking based on how it addresses and involves actuality (the historical world) – an assessment, he admits, not without flaws, and one deliberately over-simplified to provide 'a useful first step' definition.[120] In his work, Ward accepts a similar understanding yet, drawing on the work of Dai Vaughan, he seeks to understand documentary also in terms of how audiences engage with it:

> Dai Vaughan talks of the 'documentary response' from the spectator in relation to certain material; 'documentary' as a term describes 'not a style or method or a genre of filmmaking but a mode of response to film material. In short, viewers will respond to material in a way that recognises its direct relationship to actuality. Such a response does not mean that viewers will watch something and take it as a direct *record* of some aspect of actuality, but that they will recognise and understand that the film or programme in question is attempting to make assertions about that actuality.[121]

This assessment presupposes a spectator that, prior to engaging with the film material, understands the notion of documentary film in similar terms to Nichols' first step definition. As such, 'documentary response' is dependent on spectator preconceptions that view documentary as a specific approach to filmmaking that directly references actuality. For this reason, for the purposes of this discussion, I seek to understand documentary – specifically *My Love, Don't Cross that River* – both by the filmmaker's approach to actuality, and by the manner in which audiences engage with the supposed reality of the text. In other words, through director Jin Mo-young's adherence to

[118] Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary,* third edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 5.
[119] Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary,* 10.
[120] Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary,* 10.
[121] Ward, *Documentary,* 30.

practices of documentary filmmaking, we the audience understand *My Love, Don't Cross that River* according to its direct relationship to actuality.

The observational documentary style, implemented throughout the film, helps us reach this understanding. Advertised by a theatrical poster that poses to potential cinemagoers 'the lovers together for 76 years: "Didn't we live well?"' ('76 *nyeon in-saeng-ui yeon-in u-li cham jal sal-ass-jyo*?'), the film follows a married couple of 76 years (Jo Byeong-man, 98, and Gang Gye-yeol, 89) for just over a year in the lead up to the husband Jo Byeong-man's death. Though the weakening health and eventual death of Jo Byeong-man provides the film with the semblance of a narrative, the director seems more intent on capturing the ordinary interactions of everyday life than anything else. In pursuit of this, his film largely corresponds with Nichols' categorisation of the practice of observational documentary, which 'aims for (apparent) neutrality – the proverbial 'fly-on-the wall' that merely looks on and does not in any way interfere, intervene or (again, supposedly) creatively shape the material that unfolds.'[122] The filmmaker has no physical presence within the film, and appears to let his subjects carry on with their daily lives without interference beyond the presence of the camera.

It is the appearance of everyday life that the film constructs with relative success, as the spectator is given little reason to question the authenticity of what is depicted. For instance, the issue of performance – i.e. to what degree do the subjects of a given documentary perform to the camera? – always has the potential to interfere with a spectator's acknowledgement of the text as accurately reflecting reality. *My Love, Don't Cross that River* is no exception, with certain moments giving an impression of the performative. For example, one scene sees the husband standing outside the house's external bathroom as he sings to his wife while she uses the toilet; here we may wonder whether or not he would be singing were it not for the cameras. However, because the film focuses predominantly on the mundane, everyday moments of the couple's life together, there seems little within the film out-of-the-ordinary enough to complicate a spectator's engagement with the film as having direct relationship with actuality, regardless of whether certain moments or scenes were in fact performative or staged.

[122] Ward, *Documentary,* 13-14.

In other words, audiences have little problem accepting the actuality behind the representation. When confronted with scenes of the couple visiting a doctor, or eating their dinner while discussing whether or not the rice is undercooked, or attending a picnic for senior citizens, we understand these scenes as reflective of the events and details normal of – or natural to the course of – the couple's life together. Likewise, when confronted with scenes of the couple building snow people and enjoying a snowball fight, of two of their children having a heated argument over a birthday meal, and of Gang Gye-yeol being consoled by her daughter after learning that Jo Byeong-man's illness is no longer treatable, we understand the emotions on display in these scenes as pertaining to lived emotional actualities – i.e. to actual lived joy, actual rage, and actual sadness, respectively.

Moreover, the cinematic techniques deployed within the film do little to distort or obscure the actual events, details, and emotions referred to within the film. Music is used only sparingly, while voiceovers and so-called talking heads – techniques often associated with documentary filmmaking, though not specifically with observational filmmaking – are absent altogether. Commenting on his reasons for these filmmaking decisions, specifically in reference to the lack of voiceover, director Jin Mo-young says:

> I didn't want to use an overpowering voice because I didn't want to impose a specific idea to the audiences. Once you use narration, there are temptations to create stories that are more than what the subject has said. When the subject is looking blankly at the sky, the voiceover would keep on talking, but no one really knows what the subject is thinking about. That's why we decided to stick to just the voices of the subjects. It might be less friendly, but it is more realistic.[123]

Generally, the effect is that specific ideas are not imposed on the audience. However, this is not to say that the audience here are not imposed on. An emotional perspective is imposed on the audience, and this imposition starts with the film's opening scene through the transmission of the widowed Gang Gye-yeol's grief. As previously noted, the film begins with a shot of Gang crying, sitting in the snow before her husband's

[123] Jin Mo-young, "Interview: JIN Mo-young Director of MY LOVE, DON'T CROSS THAT RIVER," KoBiz, January 5, 2015, http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/jsp/news/interview.jsp?mode=INTERVIEW_VIEW&seq=140&blbdComCd=601019.

burial mound, a shot which is imbued with Gang's grief in a manner that relates to Béla Balázs' notion of aura:

> [A character's] milieu becomes a visible 'aura', [their] physiognomy expands beyond the contours of [their] own body. The human play of gestures and expressions continues to prevail over that of objects….[T]he 'expressions' of objects become significant only in so far as they relate to human expression.[124]

Between the very presence of the burial mound, and a stark setting naturally desaturated by the white of the surrounding snow and the (presumably) grey winter sky out-of-shot above, every aspect of the setting reflects the aura of Gang and her grief. This is compounded by an audio-closeup of the sound of Gang crying (though Gang herself is sat in the middle-ground of the shot, through the film's sound design the sound of her crying feels close to us). Grief is the primary sentiment and information communicated through this introductory scene, in particular because the film has given the spectator no prior context for understanding the image on display. We know not yet who this woman is, nor for whom she is grieving, and thus the film provokes here an empathetic response. Writing on empathy, Sara Ahmed explains that 'it is the very assumption that we know how the other feels, which would allow us to transform their pain into our sadness.'[125] Given the assumed universality of grief (i.e. that each spectator has their own understanding and experiences of grief), we are encouraged here to relate to and feel Gang's grief because it is the only relatable thing so far that the film has provided us with. Her pain, thus, becomes our sadness, and our frame of reference for understanding both her, and the film so far.

Significant, also, is that this scene breaks with the apparent linear chronology that the rest of the film adheres to; in relation to the timeline of the historical world of which the film refers, the film begins at the end. In this sense, the film is bookended by the sight of the mourning widow, a scene that transmits the widow's emotion to the audience, allowing the spectator to feel her emotion. The result of this affective bookending is that it frames the film – its narrative, and the actual events, details, and

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[124] Béla Balázs, *Béla Balázs Early Film Theory: Visible Man and The Spirit of Film,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 51.
[125] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 31.

emotions it directly refers to – within a specific emotion: the grief we share with the crying widow. Accordingly, following our first encounter with the grieving Gang Gye-yeol, we have imposed on us a frame of emotional reference, an emotional atmosphere through which the rest of the film is not just read but felt.

In this respect, we can consider *My Love, Don't Cross that River* in relation to broader discussions surrounding the transmission of affect. In the opening to Teresa Brennan's book *The Transmission of Affect,* Brennan poses 'Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and "felt the atmosphere"?'[126] as she provides an '"outside in" model'[127] for understanding the transmission of affect, whereby 'The "atmosphere" or the environment literally gets into the individual.'[128] In doing so she posits the room's atmosphere as imposing by its very nature, as capable of disposing those inside that room to the dominant affects held by that atmosphere. In social situations (the specific context Brennan explores), however, as Sara Ahmed has countered, we must also consider the ways in which 'how we arrive, how [(the mood and preconceptions with which)] we enter this room or that room, will affect what impressions we receive' from the room.[129] Ahmed further comments that:

> We may walk into the room and "feel the atmosphere," but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. Or we might say that the atmosphere is already angled: it is always felt from a specific point….The moods we arrive with do affect what happens, which is not to say we always keep our moods….We do not know in advance what will happen given this contingency....Situations are affective given the gap between the impressions we have of others, and the impressions we make on others[130]

Given that a film can be considered unimpressionable (in that the text itself cannot be affected upon), the transmission of cinematic affect lends itself more naturally to the notion of an "outside in" model; it creates an 'atmosphere' to the metaphorical 'room' a spectator enters when watching a film. Affect here is one-directional (only the spectator can be affected upon), and in this sense we can consider the film to have a

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[126] Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1.
[127] Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," in *The Affect Theory Reader,* eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 36.
[128] Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect,* 1.
[129] Ahmed, "Happy Objects," 37.
[130] Ahmed, "Happy Objects," 37.

role in angling the atmosphere of the room. This is not to say, however, that each spectator will read the atmosphere of the room in accordance with the angle the film constructs. We must consider also the spectator's angle of arrival. In using the phrase angle of our arrival, Ahmed here refers more specifically to the mood in which we may enter a room. While certainly applicable to film spectatorship – in the sense that each spectator will arrive at a text with a specific mood – for the purpose of my argument here, it would be invariably problematic to consider angle of arrival in the same such manner, and to do so without specific audience analysis. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate terminology to use to consider the social, historical, and national backgrounds of the theoretical spectators my textual analysis here refers to. While such is elaborated on later in this chapter, for now it is important to simply recognise that the atmosphere of spectatorship is angled on two fronts: angled by the fixedness of the cinematic text (i.e. by the text's creation of an angle of intended reception, of an angle of address); and, angled by the dispositions with which a spectator arrives at a cinematic text (i.e. an angle of arrival).

When practicing textual analysis, the angle of address can be considered in terms of how the construction of a cinematic text looks to impose specific affective responses. In the case of *My Love, Don't Cross that River,* various constructs are at work, but perhaps none more notable than the framing of the film between the repeated scene of Gang Gye-yeol crying before her husband's burial mound. Here through the grief transmitted to us from Gang Gye-yeol – or, by product of the *atmosphere of the room* the film here creates – we have imposed on us an angle through which we are intended to *feel the atmosphere* of the film. We are imposed on by the film's angle of address. Consequently, with each scene that follows our introduction to the grieving Gang Gye-yeol, the film reveals more of the man and the relationship that we, along with Gang, are grieving.

The following scene presents Gang and Jo together raking the leaves from the front of their house. Jo, breaks from his chores to throw leaves at Gang and soon the two descend into something of a leaf-fight. It is a scene of childlike playfulness exhibited by two people far-removed from childhood. Nevertheless, with the framing of the film and its creation of a specific emotional angle of address to the cinematic text as a whole,

rather than allowing us to share exclusively here in the frivolous joy of the married couple, that joy is set against the grief of Gang Gye-yeol and the notion that *something* has been lost. This joy is what is being mourned, and as we indulge in that joy we engage, too, in a mourning of it. Moreover, we understand the mourning we are made to feel as relating to the very real mourning of Gang Gye-yeol. It is this that I draw upon in my conceptualisation of emotional realism.

I suggest emotional realism is the transmission of an emotional truth that resonates with lived experience. In other words, emotional realism channels an onscreen emotion, one that relates or refers to a lived emotion (of a person or group of people from the historical world), to a spectator in such a way that provokes affective engagement with the cinematic text. Key to this understanding, then, is not simply the representation of emotion, but a presentation of emotion through a text that proves affective to a spectator, and moves them to feel a connection with an actuality behind what is being presented. Such a notion bears distinct similarities with what Andrew Abbott, in discussing sociological writing styles, has termed 'lyrical sociology'. Introducing the term, Abbott provides analysis of Harvey Warren Zorbaugh's sociological investigation of Chicago's transformation as a city in *The Gold Coast and the Slum* (1929). Of Zorbough's writing style, Abbott writes:

> telling a story is precisely what Zorbaugh does not do. He rather looks at a social situation, feels its overpowering excitement and its deeply affecting human complexity, and then writes a book trying to awaken those feelings in the minds – and even more the hearts – of his readers. This recreation of an experience of social discovery is what I shall here call *lyrical* sociology.[131]

The parallel I wish to draw between Abbott's lyrical sociology and emotional realism is that both refer to the techniques employed by a given text in providing an emotional angle – that relates to a lived experience – through which a text is then read, perceived, received, or felt by its audience (or by certain audiences). Though the term lyrical in its broadest sense refers simply to the expression of emotions, for Abbott, who focuses on the application of a specifically lyrical writing style within the scholarly field of sociological writing, poeticism seems inherent to his conceptualisation of lyrical

[131] Andrew Abbott, "Against Narrative: A Preface to Lyrical Sociology," *Sociological Theory* 25, no.1 (March 2007): 70.

sociology; he explains that, through use of 'more figurative language', 'a lyrical writer aims to tell us of his or her intense reaction to some portion of the social process seen in a moment.'[132] However, for cinema – an audio-visual medium, inclusive of both fiction and non-fiction, and open to a multitude of possible styles and techniques of address (from overtly poetic to more literal modes of representation) – poeticism is not the sole method through which a text can be emotionally angled. It is for this reason that I use the broader term emotional realism (instead of, say, lyrical realism) in considering the construction of emotional angles of address within cinema.

In the case of *My Love, Don't Cross that River,* the angling of its emotional realism aligns the spectator with the grief of Gang Gye-yeol in the moment she sits before the burial mound of her recently deceased husband. This creates the atmosphere of the room that is the process of spectatorship. Within that atmosphere we become trapped in that moment of grief, a moment when Jo Byeong-man's death is recent and thus Gang's grief is fresh and newly manifested. The rest of the film, in effect, provides part of the context behind that emotion, as Jin Mo-young's camera shows us the *private* and personal moments of Gang and Jo's life together. The documentation of these moments on film posits them as cherished memories that we and Gang can dwell on in our shared grief. This is most notable in the scenes depicting the routine aspects of the couple's daily lives. One scene, for instance, shows the couple as they get ready to go to sleep. Through fifteen shots over a three-minute sequence, we see the couple help each other get settled down to bed; Gang assist Jo as he gets up to urinate into a chamber pot; Gang scratch Jo's back for him; the couple sound asleep; and, Jo waking up briefly, staring over at Gang, and caressing her face with his hand as she sleeps. Another sequence shows Gang helping Jo as he baths. The sequence lasts for a minute and consists of ten shots of different parts of the process – for example, Gang scrubbing Jo with a flannel; pouring water on him with a bowl; helping him towel off; and, helping him get dressed. In these sequences, and others that capture similarly ordinary moments in their daily lives together, the editing is slow while the camera is patient and relatively unobtrusive. Through the extended nature of these sequences, we are encouraged to focus less on what the couple are doing (i.e. the mundane minutiae of their everyday life), and more

[132] Abbott, "Against Narrative," 76.

on how the couple interact while going about that everyday life. We see how they treat and care for one another, and the habits in their behaviour towards each other. Through this, the film projects the nature of, or an essence of, the couple's relationship. We are shown a relationship seemingly built on love, mutual respect, and caring for one another and, in this respect, we lay witness to a relationship worth cherishing and worth mourning.

The capturing of this essence of their relationship is important to the construction of emotional realism given that the film does not provide us with the full context of the couple's history together. What we see constitutes only fragments of the final fraction of the couple's life together, but we are also aware of a longer history that unites Gang and Jo. The theatrical poster highlights that history, noting the 76 years of life they have shared together, while some Korean audiences may even have witnessed more of that history through a previous television documentary that took the couple as its subjects.[133] Meanwhile, anecdotes of the early days of their marriage are shared by the couple in conversations portrayed in the film, thus making the spectator aware of their long history together. In the film's 86-minute running time, and with director Jin only recording the couple for just over the last year of their life together, there is a limit to how much the film can physically show us of the broader context of Gang and Jo's marriage. Yet, in drawing on Gang's grief and mourning, our recognition of the actuality of Gang's emotion (of the cinematic presentation of a lived emotion), and that emotion's resonance with our own personal preconceptions and experiences of grief allow us to *fill in the gaps*. We do not need the full context of the couple's personal history to empathise with Gang's grief; the film's emotional realism, its emotional angling, creates a felt reality that supplants the need for knowledge of the couple's personal history.

This notion of emotional realism, then, relies on the ability of audiences to be able to relate to the emotions projected by a film. Through this process of relation, emotional realism can provide a degree of universality to a text, in the sense that, broadly speaking, most societies, cultures and languages share similar conceptions of the same

[133] Jin, "Interview."

basic set of emotions (happiness, sadness, fear, grief etc.). Of *My Love, Don't Cross that River,* director Jin Mo-young has commented 'Since I wanted to produce content that could be widely consumed, I thought the story was global and could move the hearts of everyone'. [134] The universality of grief, an emotion fundamental to spectator engagement with the film, theoretically allows for audiences anywhere to be able to connect with the emotion of the film – the assumption here being that virtually every potential spectator, regardless of national, cultural or social background, comes to the film with their own experiences of grief, and their own relationships with old age. This in turn means that through the film's broadly accessible emotional register, the film can paint grand themes of death, love and mortality onto the personally specific circumstances of Gang Gye-yeol and Jo Byeong-man.

However, within that universality there is space for more culturally specific and personally specific emotional resonances to occur. For instance, the transmission of Gang Gye-yeol's grief within the film will resonate on a more personal level with Gang Gye-yeol as a spectator than it would with a spectator who has no prior relationship with, or awareness of, the film's subjects. Likewise, the emotion transmitted through the film could resonate on a more culturally specific level for Korean audiences (even those previously unfamiliar with the film's central couple) than, for instance, non-Korean audiences would. This is due to the more culturally specific connotations that Korean audiences could draw from the text, connotations that are not just recognised on an intellectual level but that are also attached to personal experiences of culture. This is not to say that there is any more, or less, emotional truth to the film depending on audience, but rather that the emotional resonances between text and audience will take on different dimensions depending on audience relation to the film's context. In other words, the manner of resonance of any emotion within the filmic text is influenced by a spectator's angle of arrival.

In the case of *My Love, Don't Cross that River,* the prominence of Korean tradition as a theme within the film is one such factor that could draw more personal emotional resonances from a Korean spectator, as opposed to a foreign spectator. For instance,

[134] Jin, "Interview."

with the film's central couple throughout the film dressed in *hanbok* – attire with strong connotations of Korean tradition – notions of Korean tradition are conjured by the very appearance of the couple. This sense of tradition is enforced by the traditional style of house they live in and the traditional rural lifestyle that the couple live (for instance, even at 98, Jo is still seen chopping fire wood). Meanwhile, the couple's traditional lifestyle is noticeably set apart from that of the other people within the film. This is particularly noticeable during a scene in which, having just learned that medicine will no longer be able to help Jo through his illness, Gang and Jo's daughter arrives – wearing wedge shoes, ripped jeans, a baseball cap and carrying a designer handbag – to console, and to share in the sorrow of, her *hanbok*-wearing parents. Through the attire of the people present, the contrast between tradition and modernity is presented in the form of a generation gap. It is through such iconography that, with the illness and eventual passing of Jo, the film is suggestive of the death of Korean tradition.

For foreign audiences, this death of tradition can be seen and recognised as a theme of the film but, for Korean audiences – with personal experiences and associations with the tradition perceived to be dying – this theme may take on a more culturally specific emotional resonance. For instance, in the case of the *hanbok,* though some people of older generations still wear it as their daily attire, within Korean society it has widely been consigned to being a formal garment worn only on family occasions or traditional holidays, such as Seollal (lunar new year) or Chuseok (the autumn harvest festival). Accordingly, while for foreign audiences the *hanbok* will likely appear as iconographic of Korean tradition, for Korean audiences this iconography will conjure more personal associations stemming from lived experiences of the tradition the *hanbok* is seen to represent (for example, with personal experiences of dressing up in *hanbok* for the Chuseok family feasts). Thus, with the death of Korean tradition framed within the film's emotional structure (i.e. framed within the emotion of Gang's grief), there is the potential for theme to be received emotionally through resonance with personal and cultural experience. In this sense, social realism may become one with emotional realism.

The effect, in *My Love, Don't Cross that River*, is less a politicisation of the notion of the death of Korean tradition (i.e. an argument that Korean tradition needs to be saved)

than a musing on the passing of tradition that allows space for, and encourages, the mourning of that way of life. Given this, it is interesting to consider the demographic makeup of the film's domestic audience. Midway through the film's record breaking domestic theatrical run, in which it became the most commercially successful Korean independent film of all time,'[135] the Korea Herald reported that 'According to the data compiled by Korea's largest multiplex chain CGV on their members, people in their 20s account for 54.2 percent of the total viewers of the film' while 'People in their 30s were second with 24.3 percent, followed by those in their 40s with 15.5 percent.' [136] Although younger audiences typically make up larger portions of cinema audiences, this statistical breakdown seems significant given the subject matter of the film. Specifically, while 'even the director had people in their 40s and 50s in mind as the film's main audience', the adult audiences most far-removed from the age and lifestyles of the film's subjects (those in their 20s) were by a sizable margin the biggest patrons of the film.[137] There is precedent for such cross-demographic appeal to similar such Korean film and television, for instance with the success of Lee Chung-ryoul's 2009 documentary *Old Partner* – the previous most successful Korean independent film,[138] which plays to similar themes of loss of traditional rural life while following the last year in the life of an elderly farmer's ox – as well with the popularity of a host of television documentaries, reality shows, and variety programs in Korea that frequently draw nostalgia from depicting, or pay tribute to, the tradition of Korean rural life. Yet, hinting more specifically at why *My Love, Don't Cross that River* achieved its success, the Korea Herald quoted one cinemagoer saying:

> "We live in such a society where everything changes so rapidly, including relationships," said Kim Eun-ah, a 28-year-old female office worker. "I was inspired by their commitment and devotion that sustained for such a long period, which unfortunately is hard to find these days."[139]

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[135] Pierce Conran, "MY LOVE, DON'T CROSS THAT RIVER Sets New Korean Indie Record," KoBiz, December 26, 2014, http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/news.jsp?pageIndex=2&blbdComCd=601006&seq=3279&mode=VIEW&returnUrl=&searchKeyword.
[136] Ahn Sung-mi, "Gray-haired Lovers Become Cinema Hit," *Korea Herald,* December 15, 2014, http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20141215000900.
[137] Ahn, "Gray-haired Lovers."
[138] Conran, "MY LOVE, DON'T CROSS THAT RIVER."
[139] Ahn, "Gray-haired Lovers."

Kim's response – presented as one representative of her specific demographic – indicates her affective response to the film (her inspiration by the couple), while setting that reaction against, if not explicitly a mourning of it, nostalgia towards the couple's way of life, with their lifestyle seen almost as one lost to an earlier era, no longer strictly compatible "these days" with a fast-moving, modern society. As such, while perhaps not indicative of a culturally specific emotional resonance, this quote is at least suggestive of Kim's engagement with the film's theme through affect. I argue that emotional realism is pivotal to this as it is through the relation of a social reality (the death of tradition) to a perceived emotional actuality (Gang Gye-yeol's mourning) that allows this social reality to be received in a predominantly emotional manner. In other words, the emotional realism of the text provides the emotional angle through which the social realism can be felt. In this manner, throughout my thesis I use the notion of emotional realism as a means of recognising the affective dimensions of social realism in the Korean cinematic context,[140] seeing emotional realism as creating an angled emotional atmosphere through which audiences can respond to social realism. Moreover, I make a point of distinguishing between audiences here not to say that Korean audiences will engage with a film's social realism on this emotional level – nor to say that foreign audiences cannot altogether do so – but rather to recognise that the affective dimensions of social realism are dependent on the relationship of the spectator with the socio-historical conditions in question. In other words, though a film may present its theme to certain audiences through appeal to the emotional (through its angle of address) that angle may not naturally align with the spectator's own angle of arrival.

Considering emotional and social realism in this way allows us to also make sense of the role that *haan* plays in the Korean cinematic context; we can see *haan* to sit in conjunction with emotional and social realism. As described in my Literature Review, *haan* is dependent on the resonance of an individual's personal experience with their perception and understanding of a collective Korean experience. In this respect, *haan* can be seen as social realist affect. Thus, when *haan* is evoked in a (Korean) spectator by a cinematic text, it offers the (Korean) spectator with an angle of address (to a film,

[140] Though it should be noted that theoretically emotional realism can be applied to other contexts, cinematic or otherwise.

a scene, or moment of cinema) that integrates a cinematic emotional reality with the spectator's personal experience and with the emotion of a perceived narrative of social history (the greater narrative of Korean *haan*). In doing so, the text provokes an emotional response to a (Korean) social reality.

In the case of *My Love, Don't Cross that River, haan* is conjured in the film's opening image; the channelling of Gang Gye-yeol's grief, set against her suffering through the cold, along with the scene's Korean iconography (the *hanbok* and the traditional burial mound) and the backdrop of the rural Gangwon-do forest, all invoke sentiments of *haan*. Specifically, they invoke the facet of *haan* characterised as *jeong-haan*:

> Which describes sorrow, distress, and unresolved sentiment, and is self-compliance oriented. It is a state of emotional mind that acknowledges unfortunate, heartbreaking circumstances. Simply put, it is a [*haan*] of passive acceptance and resignation.[141]

Through the evocation of Gang's grief, the film generates a universally relatable angle of address (or emotional frame of reference) through which spectators may engage with the film. Simultaneously, through the projection of Gang's *haan* (which incorporates her grief), the film generates for Korean spectators, a more nationalised emotional angle of address – nationalised in the sense that it can connect the Korean spectator to notions of national and cultural experience. Through such a nationalised emotional angle, *haan* may provide an emotional perspective through which any of the film's social theme's (e.g. the death of Korean tradition) are filtered and felt.

Given its impressive and arguably unlikely success at the Korean box office – as a documentary film, becoming South Korea's most successful independent feature at the domestic box office – *My Love, Don't Cross that River* stands as a useful example for introducing this phenomenon, and for seeing how emotional realism as a form of emotive address can connect with audiences. However, given the film's documentary mode – its presumed direct referencing of actuality – it offers us only a relatively simple insight into how emotional realism can be seen to function within Korean cinema.

[141] Keumsil Kim Yoon and Bruce Williams, *Two Lenses on the Korean Ethos: Key Cultural Concepts and Their Appearance in Cinema* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015), 41.

Moreover, while *My Love, Don't Cross that River* marks an important moment in Korean cinema – demonstrating the ability for independent films and documentaries to achieve substantial commercial success and cultural significance – documentary, within contemporary Korean cinema more broadly, is of relative anonymity to both domestic and international audiences. While there would be potential critical value in further investigating emotional realism's function in Korean documentary cinema (or documentary cinema more generally), for a thesis such as this – which examines *haan*'s role within popular contemporary Korean cinema – there is little reason to do so here. *My Love, Don't Cross that River* here represents a useful starting point from which to consider emotional realism, and for positioning emotional realism as a useful way to help theorise the role of *haan* in South Korean cinema. Nevertheless, it is essential to consider how emotional realism functions within the fiction filmmaking practices more representative of Korean cinema. In order to do this, I return to the case of *Chilsu and Mansu* (Park Kwang-su, 1998).

Emotional Realism and Korean Fiction Film

Whereas documentary film is understood by its direct relationship with the historical world, Bill Nichols explains that:

> fictional narratives are fundamentally allegories. They create one world to stand in for another, historical world. (As allegory or parable, everything has a second meaning; what is seen to happen therefore may constitute a disguised commentary on actual people, situations, and events.) Fictions can invent dialogue, scenes, and events that, even if they are based on facts, cannot be historically verified in order to offer insights and generate themes about the world we inhabit.[142]

Fiction's rooting in allegory invariably complicates any understanding of emotional realism. Whereas in the observational documentary we can recognise the people portrayed (such as Gang Gye-yeol) as actual people, and thus the emotions they display as displays of actual emotion, the same cannot strictly be said of fiction film. However, we can recognise the basic process of emotional realism to be largely the same. For instance, in *Chilsu and Mansu* when we see the two men standing atop their billboard, venting their anger by yelling out over Seoul, there is an underlying understanding that these are not actual people, but rather characters whose anger is performed by actors

[142] Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary.* 5.

– some audiences will also recognise the actors by their actual identities (Park Joong-hoon and Ahn Sung-ki, respectively as Chil-su and Man-su), only further cementing the understanding of Chil-su and Man-su as characters. Understanding the emotion they display as relating to any specific emotion identifiably rooted in the actuality of the historical world would seem initially problematic, especially given that neither the characters nor the film's story is based in fact. However, in viewing the characters in terms of their allegorical function, we can see how emotional realism may interconnect with the fiction of the two characters.

Significantly, we must see the characters of Chil-su and Man-su not purely as fictitious inventions, but rather in terms of their social allegory. For both, their social allegory is established through their character's backstory. In the case of Chil-su, throughout the film it is established that he comes from a poor background; his mother died when he was younger; his sister sold herself into marriage with an American G.I. to escape poverty; and, he is estranged from his father, who is living with his second family. For Man-su, we know his father is in prison as a communist sympathiser and that, because of his father's imprisonment, he (Man-su) is denied a passport – this prevents him from pursuing a career and an education abroad, and generally inhibits his ability to provide for himself. In different ways, it is their family histories more than their own personal actions that lead them both to their occupation of billboard painters, and that lead them to, one day, shout their angers out across the city from atop a billboard. Given each family history relates to broader socio-historical issues within South Korea at the time (specifically social alienation related to class status and family breakdown, and political persecution), the struggles each character faces can be seen as largely inherited from previous generations – not just of their own family but of South Korea more generally. This, coupled with their overt working class (and *minjung*) status, positions the pair as symbols of the wider 1988 South Korean working class, their lives representative of the social afflictions that have befallen that social class. In this manner, though fictitious, the characters are relatable. Through that relatability, Chil-su and Man-su in turn can be seen as referential of the lived experiences of the social issues and social groups they allegorise. Understanding this, we can see that a perceived emotional reality informs the characters and their actions within the film.

This emotional reality is at various points in the film channelled to spectators in a way that emotionally angles our engagement with the cinematic text. We see this notably in the scene that precedes the film's climax – that precedes the misinterpretation of Chil-su and Man-su's shouting by the authorities as a protest – whereby the two men dwell in and discuss their own personal stories of woe while sharing a bottle of soju on top of a billboard. It is a scene structured around the transmission of affect between the characters and to the audience, and it begins with Chil-su admitting that he found and read a personal letter sent to Man-su by his sister. Chil-su apologises while Man-su stares off forlornly into the distance, recalling the letter. The film cuts to a shot of the hazy Seoul skyline, the suggested point-of-view of Man-su, as the diegetic background noise from the busy road below quiets and we hear the nondiegetic voice of Man-su's sister read out the letter:

> Man-su, you said once that you were just a life that hung at the end of a rope. It feels like the rope that out family has been clinging to has finally snapped. The three-day parole we worked so hard to get so that Father could celebrate his 60th birthday, well, Father himself turned it down. I understand him, but at the same time, I was so heartbroken that I cried all night.

As she reads the letter out, we hear the sister trying not to cry. The camera cuts back to a close-up of Man-su's face, and gradually zooms closer as the odd facial quiver and Man-su's contemplative stare reveal him, too, to be holding back his emotion. These elements work to draw the audience into emotional alignment with Man-su. Narcissistic identification with the emotion of Man-su is encouraged through the point-of-view shot so that we *become* Man-su as *our* sister narrates the letter to *us* through voice-over, and with the quietened background sound, we are made to focus more on the sound of *our* sister's heartbreak. Through the cut-back to the close-up of Man-su's sorrowful face, we see the transmission of her emotion to him completed, while use of the close-up itself encourages us to empathise with the transmitted emotion. As Carl Plantinga argues 'facial expressions in film not only communicate emotion, but also elicit, clarify, and strengthen affective response – especially empathetic response'.[143] This empathetic response is only further provoked through the slow zoom-in on *our* face as the frame focuses deeper on how *we* (Man-su) are reacting.

[143] Carl Plantinga, cited by Corey Schultz, "Moving Portraits: Portraits in Performance in *24 City*," *Screen* 55, no.2 (Summer 2014): 282.

The emotion conjured resonates with sentiments of *jeong-haan,* and this emotional aura is emphasised further through the use of sound and shot selection as the scene progresses. As the sister finishes reading the letter, a minor-key clarinet melody joins the film's soundtrack, sustaining the emotional atmosphere conjured through the letter. At the same time, the camera cuts to a low angle, looking up at the billboard with the comparatively tiny Chil-su and Man-su sat visibly atop. Taking up most of the frame, the billboard shows a glamourous Caucasian woman wearing sunglasses and smiling while set against the backdrop of a bright blue sky. This is counterposed with the gloomy-looking figures of Chil-su and Man-su. With their faces cast in shadow and their bodies confined to the top fraction of the frame and set against the grey haze of the Seoul sky, they appear in dissonance with happiness projected by the smiling billboard woman and are marginalised by their spatial positioning within the cinematic frame. This layers on top of Man-su's melancholy a sense of his alienation, the physiognomy of which extends beyond the physical contours of Man-su and projects onto Chil-su, also.

This transmission of affect from Man-su to Chil-su continues as the camera cuts back to Man-su – still with the same forlorn expression – as he swigs from the soju bottle, and then to Chil-su as he begins to share his own personal sorrows:

> My father was a house boy. Well, he isn't anymore. He still lives in Dongducheon, but he doesn't do anything. After Mother passed away, he remarried. Now he leeches off my stepmother. I have no hope.

The clarinet melody on the soundtrack perpetuates the scene's developing mood, and is substituted out for a harmonica (which continues the clarinet's melody) as the mood heightens. This substitution musically mimics the transmission of Man-su's melancholy to Chil-su, as Chil-su proceeds to discuss how Ji-na – a middle-class girl, whom Chil-su has fallen for – got engaged 'to someone cool and successful, someone with money and education.' This implies Chil-su's belief that had his family situation put him into a position to become a cool successful person with money and education, instead of placing him in poverty, he would still have hope, and he would still have a chance of being with Ji-na. This reminds us of the underlying social reality that Chil-su allegorises, and from which his feelings of resignation and melancholy stem.

Here, music is key to the transmission of affect between characters and to the audience. As Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle note, music can be used 'affectively to encourage or emphasise a particular mood or create a general ambience'.[144] Here, the musical accompaniment builds off of Man-su's emotion and integrates Chil-su's to generate an ambience that echoes the felt experiences of the social realities the two characters allegorise, accumulated emotion that can then be channelled to the spectator. Seen, and felt, in relation to the film's South Korean context, this emotional accumulation (of sorrow, resignation, suffering, social ostracism, and ultimately anger), constructed and conveyed through the scene's narrative, aesthetics and sound, evoke the feeling of *haan,* and position Chil-su, Man-su, their social allegory, and the spectator within that *haan.* This accordingly provides the spectator with an emotional angle of address for what comes immediately next.

With the music building, and with Chil-su's relaying of his personal woe reaching an end, Man-su rises to his feet and screams in anger. As he screams the music abruptly cuts out, and hence the emotion carried within the music itself is let go of, released through Man-su's scream. The result is a moment of catharsis, an indulgence in *hwa*-puri (release of *haan* through expression of anger), shared between Man-su and the audience. Yet this catharsis is undermined by a cut back to the point-of-view of Man-su, panning across the city, showing a panorama of luxury apartment buildings and streets full of cars driving. With this view appearing totally unaffected by Man-su's scream – we see nothing but business as usual from the city below – *our* catharsis is rendered empty, ineffective; nothing appears to have changed and the issues that created *our* initial *haan* remain unresolved. On this note of failed catharsis, the film's finale builds. As Chil-su and Man-su begin shouting their angers over the city, their screams go unheard, yet the spectacle of their screaming attracts the attention of the authorities. With each escalation by the authorities that follows, this sense of failed catharsis is only perpetuated and the two are returned to an emotional state of *haan* that culminates in Man-su's suicide jump and Chil-su's arrest. The residual atmosphere

[144] Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle, "Introduction: Somewhere Between the Signifying and the Sublime," in *Sound, Music, Affect: Theorizing Sonic Experience,* eds. Ian Biddle and Marie Thompson (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 11.

created is that of the fatalistic inescapability of *haan,* for Man-su, Chil-su and the groups they socially allegorise, and this atmosphere is transmitted to the spectator.

However, the spectator's reception of the text, and their affective response to it, as such is not guaranteed. Instead, in part, it is contingent on a variety of textual aspects, the chief among which being the efficacy and credibility of any socio-historical allegory a film constructs. Specifically, for a cinematic presentation of emotion to be received in a manner resonant with a perceived emotional truth or reality, the surrounding allegory must too be resonant with a perceived social reality. For Chil-su and Man-su, for instance, this means they must constitute broadly believable allegories of South Korea's late-1980s working class for their emotive displays to be received in terms of emotional realism. This can be of particular importance to historically-set films (as is discussed more in my next chapter), where establishing a sense of historical credibility can help counteract any lack of audience familiarity with the experiences of a given past. But more generally – and though there are many ways to achieve this – the more credibly constructed a film's socio-historical allegory is, the easier it should be for audiences to accept any representation of emotion as reflective of the lived experiences of the real people or peoples allegorised, either directly or indirectly, through any given film's fiction.

Meanwhile, reception of emotional realism is also contingent on the spectator's angle of arrival to the filmic text, or the degree to which the spectator may be susceptible to the angle of address that the film constructs. Broadly speaking, we can differentiate three specific degrees of receptiveness. In the first, we have the spectator whose angle of arrival aligns with the angle of address, created by the text itself. This spectator engages with the text, and its affective dimensions, on the level of its emotional realism. Consciously or otherwise, they recognise the social allegory of the text and hence the emotions presented and projected through the text may resonate with understandings of the lived experiences of the peoples allegorised by Chil-su, Man-su, and their predicament. In the second instance, we have the partially aligned spectator, able to engage with the *atmosphere* the film's angle of address, though not on the level of social allegory. Here, the characters are simply fictitious invention and, while their emotions are theoretically relatable to, they are not seen as specifically reflective of a larger

social group. This is perhaps a spectator unaware of the social reality allegorised, or simply one who does not make a cognitive connection between the emotions depicted and those of the allegorised social group. Finally, in the third instance we have the spectator whose angle of arrival predisposes them against aligning with the film's angle of address. We can think of these spectators as what Sara Ahmed refers to as 'affect aliens',[145] those who, for whatever reason, do not experience the affective response to a text they are *supposed* to have (or rather that the text intends them to have).

We might assume from this – with the exception of the third degree (which by its nature poses an unknown entity) – the identity of each spectator. In the case of *Chilsu and Mansu,* the first degree poses a Korean spectator – perhaps one of working-class identity, or one who perhaps has lived through the social reality that the film allegorises. Meanwhile, in the second degree, we may suppose of a spectator more detached from the social realities of 1988 South Korea – perhaps a foreign spectator, or even a Korean spectator born after South Korea's democratisation. However, any assumptions will inevitably prove lacking. For instance, a foreign spectator could relate the fictional allegory of a cinematic text to a social reality separate from the film's social context, and thus still experience the text as resonant with an emotional reality. Though *Chilsu and Mansu,* for example, is set in the context of 1988 South Korea, it was adapted from a 1986 Korean play itself adapted from a 1971 novel by Taiwanese author Huang Chunming, entitled *The Two Sign Painters*.[146] Hence, while the film makes no direct reference to Taiwanese culture, a spectator could connect the emotions displayed by Chil-su and Man-su with the emotional and social *realities* of 1970s Taiwan. Alternatively, we can conceive of a spectator belonging to the 1980s South Korean working class who does not feel an emotional realism watching *Chilsu and Mansu* despite their personal experience supposedly being the object of the film's allegory. We must acknowledge, then, that various factors may influence a given spectator's receptiveness to emotional realism and recognise that, within the parameters of this

[145] Ahmed, "Happy Objects," 37.
[146] Jang Byung Won, "About the Film: First Signs of the Korean New Wave, *Chilsu and Mansu*," *Chilsu and Mansu* (Korean Film Archive Blu-ray Collection Supporting Booklet) (Seoul: The Korean Film Archive, 2004).

study, the best we can do is identify certain criteria that may predispose a spectator more to a specific degree of receptiveness to emotional realism.

This question of receptiveness gets further complicated when considering the notion of *haan,* the discussion of which frequently is befallen by issues of what Hye Seung Chung refers to as a critical nationalism. She describes critical nationalism as 'the attitude of filmmakers, critics, and scholars alike who contend that [*haan*] is uniquely Korean, a concept that almost, if not completely, escapes translatability in other cultural lexicons.'[147] The tendency this creates is one of essentialism and absolutism, one that supposes that *haan,* when expressed through cinema, is only accessible to Korean people. Chung notes that 'the critical overemphasis on such an ambiguous concept as definite marker of Koreanness contributes to the erection of "imagined [emotional] communities" of the nation and its culture'.[148] This is a problematic notion, especially when considering the implications of 'transnational circulation of filmic [*haan*] as it cross-pollinates into neighboring cultural arenas'.[149] Chung illustrates this point by considering how *mono no aware* – a supposedly 'distinctively Japanese' concept 'defined by Donald Richie as "sympathetic sadness…a serene acceptance of a transient world"' – was felt by Japanese audiences when watching Hur Jin-ho's 1998 melodrama *Christmas in August,* a Korean film that resonates strongly also with sentiments of *haan.*[150] In a similar manner, she considers the potential for Korean audiences to feel *haan* while watching non-Korean texts, such as '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'.[151] This gives evidence to what Andrew Higson describes as a possibility of transnational spectatorship in which a 'foreign commodity will be interpreted according to an 'indigenous' frame of reference; that is, it will be metaphorically translated into a local

[147] Hye Seung Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia: A Transnational *Détournement* of Hollywood Melodrama," in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema,* eds. Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 121.
[148] Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia," 121.
[149] Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia," 122.
[150] Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia," 122.
[151] Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia," 123.

idiom.'[152] The ability for Japanese audiences to detect *mono no aware* in Korean films, and for Korean audiences to feel *haan* from foreign films, takes Higson's possibility a step further by suggesting that through an ''indigenous' frame of reference' a text can even be received through local affect – or more accurately that audience response can be interpreted through local categorisations of affect. This only further supports Higson's conclusion that 'the debates about national cinema need to take greater account of the diversity of reception, the recognition that the meanings an audience reads into a film are heavily dependent on the cultural context in which they watch it.'[153]

When considering *haan* as cinematic affect, rather than viewing it as an intrinsic component of the filmic text itself, understanding it in terms of emotional realism forces us to view *haan* not just as a textual feature but as something that overlaps into the process of spectatorship. Specifically, while *haan* emotion may be exhibited and expressed by a cinematic text, in order for it to be received in terms of *haan* a spectator with familiarity with and understanding of *haan* is required; it requires an indigenous (read: Korean) frame of spectatorial reference. This is not to say that a spectator without such frame of reference will not respond to the text in a generally similar way, but rather that evocation of *haan* by a cinematic text (i.e. the reception of cinematic affect *as haan*) requires a spectator receptive to *haan* by contextual disposition. In this sense, context is the key.

Chung writes that:

> [*Haan*] indeed connotes melodramatic affect and sensibility in the Korean context. However, what is unique about Korean [*haan*] is its *context* rather than *affect* in and of itself.[154]

Rather than separating the context from the affect – in effect separating theme from affect – in considering emotional realism we must recognise the two for how they are entwined. In doing this, recognition of the manner in which imagined emotional

[152] Andrew Higson, "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema," in *Cinema and Nation,* eds. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), 62.
[153] Higson, "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema," 61-62.
[154] Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia," 122.

communities are erected, rather than problematising our understanding of cinematic *haan,* becomes crucial to it. Engagement with a text through *haan* – and more generally emotional realism – is dependent not only on the construction of an imagined emotional community but a belief in the actuality of said imagined emotional community. Pivotally, we can see social realism as key to both the construction of imagined emotional communities and the belief in their actuality; social realism draws parallels between a fiction and the perceived realities the fiction allegorises, and when fictional allegory is presented in an affective manner the emotions provoked are projected onto the realities allegorised.

Haan, as social realist affect, operates in the same way in that it effectively turns any (Korean) individual experiencing *haan* into the object of their own allegory. A parallel is drawn between the self and the greater historical narrative of *haan,* allowing the perceived emotional realities of the greater flow of *haan* to be projected onto the individual experiencing *haan,* and vice-versa. The individual thus positions themselves within the imagined emotional community of the *haan*-ridden Korean people. In cinema, the affective evocation of *haan* necessitates a spectator's engagement with a cinematic text through both social allegory and emotional realism. In this respect, evocation of cinematic *haan* is dependent on the spectator's angle of arrival at a cinematic text.

Theoretically this opens up the possibility for a spectator to feel *haan* evoked while watching any filmic text, so long as they identify with the text on the levels of both social realism and emotional realism. This is important to acknowledge, but when looking specifically at textual analysis it poses a problem, in that through textual analysis we are only able to identify the ways in which a text may construct an angle of address through which *haan* can more naturally be evoked during the process of spectatorship – textual analysis itself offers no insight as to how specifically a film is engaged with.

Analysis of a combination of news reports, film reviews and box office statistics may provide some insight into this. For instance, the box office success of Im Kwon-taek's *Sopyonje* (1993) was attributed, by the media of the time, to 'the degree to which it

elicited a collective outpouring of [*haan*] and an abundant flow of audiences' tears.'[155] However, when we look at *Chilsu and Mansu,* although we can see the film text to create an angle of address in a manner that could naturally evoke a sense of *haan,* there is less evidence demonstrating its resonance with Korean audiences in terms of *haan*, particularly given that 'it was not a box-office hit'.[156] While in some cases box-office success in a domestic marketplace may support a suggestion of resonance with local audiences through evocation of national sentiment or affect, the absence of box-office success does not rule out similar such resonance. As such, unless explicitly stated in the media coverage of a given film, specific audience analysis would be required – to conduct which is beyond the scope of this particular project.

Nevertheless, there is value to be found in looking at how Korean films, through the construction of angles of emotional address, lay out the component emotions of *haan* simultaneously with their social and historical allegory, and in a manner that encourages (local) audience engagement with a text through *haan.* In understanding *haan* as existing in the process of spectatorship rather than belonging specifically to a cinematic text, we can identify its role within Korean cinema in terms of emotional realism, most often through the delivery of social realism through emotive address. Throughout this thesis, my analysis is based on this understanding.

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[155] Chungmoo Choi, "The Politics of Gender, Aestheticism, and Cultural Nationalism in *Sopyonje* and *The Genealogy*," in *Im Kwon-taek: The Making of a Korean National Cinema,* eds. David E. James and Kyung Hyun Kim (Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 110.
[156] Darcy Paquet, "1980-1989," accessed December 1, 2017, http://www.koreanfilm.org/kfilm80s.html#chilsu.

Remembering Gwangju: *Haan*, Cinema, and the Cultural Memory of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising

> Today, when I hear or read of some other great injustice where innocent people are helpless against some overwhelming force, it can suddenly bring Kwangju to mind. Stories of the Tiananmen massacre, for instance, did that.[157]
>
> - Norman Thorpe

> In January 2009, when an illegal raid by riot police on activists and tenants protesting their forced eviction from central Seoul left six dead, I remember being glued to the television, watching the towers burning in the middle of the night and surprising myself with the words that sprang from my mouth: *But that's Gwangju*. In other words, 'Gwangju' had become another name for whatever is forcibly isolated, beaten down and brutalised, for all that has been mutilated beyond repair. The radioactive spread is ongoing. Gwangju had been reborn only to be butchered again in an endless cycle. It was razed to the ground, and raised up anew in a bloodied rebirth.[158]
>
> - Han Kang, *Human Acts* (2016)

The above quotes, relating to the Gwangju Democratic Uprising of May 1980, epitomise a *haan*-inflected approach to history that views historical events not as separate or isolated instances but rather as events connected regardless of their specific temporal or even geographical contexts. In this respect, Nancy Abelmann describes the idiom of *haan* as 'a historical poesis', in that:

> [*haan*] connotes both the collective and the individual genealogical sense of the hardship of historical experience. In implying the accumulated anger born of such experience, it relaxes the temporal and geographic patchwork of passive and active, resistance and non-resistance – by not forcing the distinction.[159]

Haan, thus in framing Korean history through such an idiomatic historiography, can be seen to unite the Korean people through history, interconnecting historical events through a perceived sense of shared suffering, trauma, sadness, and oppression. Perhaps no event of South Korea's post-war history has left such a prominent and

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[157] Norman Thorpe, "Memories of Kwangju," in *Kwangju in the Eyes of the World,* ed. Amalie M. Weber (Seoul: Pulbit Publishing Co., 1997), 122.
[158] Han Kang, *Human Acts* (London: Portobello Books, 2016), 215-216.
[159] Nancy Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Echoes of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 37.

*haan*ful mark on the national historical consciousness as has the Gwangju Democratic Uprising (referred to commonly as the May 18 Gwangju Democratisation Movement, the Gwangju Massacre, or simply as 5.18) – often seen as 'South Korea's Tiananmen crisis',[160] this refers to the events of May 1980 in which the Korean military responded to a pro-democratic people's uprising with a brutal massacre.

As the above quotes from Norman Thorpe and Han Kang exemplify, Gwangju's cultural and historical echo is such that the massacre's memory and trauma are often evoked and recalled, by Korean people and in a manner interpretable through *haan*, by the occurrence of other instances of government and political oppression. This speaks to the significance of the memory of Gwangju to the national cultural imaginary. I use the word imaginary here not strictly in the sense of Anderson, who in discussing nationalism 'makes use of this concept to point to the complete illusory, nonempirical, non-existent quality of the original event.'[161] Rather I use imaginary similarly to how it has been used in relation to cultural trauma theory, as Jeffrey C. Alexander argues:

> Imagination is intrinsic to the very process of representation. It seizes upon an inchoate experience from life, and forms it, through association, condensation, and aesthetic creation, into some specific shape.[162]

Imagination and mediation of representations of Gwangju have been key to how Gwangju has been remembered, and to its enduring social significance. As an audio-visual medium capable of attracting wide audiences, cinema plays and has played a notable role in cementing Gwangju's place within such South Korean cultural memory. Accordingly, this chapter considers how Korean cinema has helped mediate the memory of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising.

Specifically, I survey the changing ways in which the uprising and massacre have been cinematically represented, while arguing *haan* to be a constant in how these representations both emotionally frame the memory of Gwangju, and help embed the

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[160] Bruce Cumings, "Introduction," in *Gwangju Diary: Beyond Death, Beyond the Darkness of the Age,* Lee Jae-eui (Gwangju: May 18 Memorial Foundation, 2017), 17.
[161] Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 9.
[162] Alexander, "Theory of Cultural Trauma," 9.

memory of Gwangju within the cultural vernacular of *haan.* I begin with a brief summary of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising and its place in South Korean history, before turning to the social function cinema has played in the remembrance of Gwangju. I identify two key approaches to the cinematic portrayal of Gwangju: engagement with Gwangju's legacy of trauma and victimhood; and, a more direct process of memorialising the events of Gwangju. I address how the earlier films that address Gwangju – specifically *A Petal* (Jang Sun-woo, 1996), *Peppermint Candy* (Lee Chang-dong, 1999), and *The Old Garden* (Im Sang-soo, 2007) – employ the former approach as a means of expressing the lasting social significance of Gwangju. Meanwhile, more recent films dealing with the tragedy – notably blockbusters *May 18* (Kim Ji-hoon, 2007) and *A Taxi Driver* (Jang Hoon, 2017) – in more extensively depicting the events of Gwangju, aim to memorialise the citizens of Gwangju not just as victims to be mourned but as national heroes. I consider the social significance of both of these approaches, while drawing parallels between how the earlier and the more recent films evoke *haan* through emotional and idiomatic address in their engagement with the subject of Gwangju.

The Gwangju Democratic Uprising: A Brief History

Widely regarded as the 'most tragic and shameful incident in modern [South] Korean history',[163] the Gwangju Democratic Uprising refers to the events that occurred in the city of Gwangju between May 18 and May 27 1980, events that begun when peaceful student demonstrations on May 18 – protesting the implementation of martial law across South Korea – were met with violence and brutality by the Korean military as soldiers stormed the unarmed protesters, beating them with their truncheons. Over the following days, the military violence escalated, and provoked tens of thousands of Gwangju citizens (with some estimates exceeding 100,000 of the city's 730,000 1980 population[164]) to turn out in further protest of the military suppression, only for the military to respond with further violence. On May 21, the bloodiest day of the uprising, the military opened fire on protesters gathered outside of Gwangju's provincial hall,

[163] Gwangju 5.18 Archives, *The May 18 Gwangju Democratic Uprising* (Gwangju: Gwangju Metropolitan City History Commission, 2017), 47.
[164] Gwangju 5.18 Archives, *May 18*, 91; and, Kap Su Seol and Nick Mamatas, "Translators' Note," in *Gwangju Diary: Beyond Death, Beyond the Darkness of the Age*, Lee Jae-eui (Gwangju: May 18 Memorial Foundation, 2017), 10.

killing an estimated 54 demonstrators and wounding over 500 – these statistics, 'based on Army figures and victim compensation claims', likely vastly understate the scale of the army's slaughter.[165] Instead of quelling the demonstrators, though, the people of Gwangju responded by arming themselves, forming a Citizens' Army, and forcing the military out of the city. Citizen control of the city then lasted until the early hours of May 27 when the Martial Law Forces re-entered the city and attacked the Citizens' Army at the Provincial Hall. By the time the military's suppression operation was complete, according to 'the current status of compensation provided to those related to the May 18 Democratic movement', the actions of the South Korean state and military in Gwangju amassed 'a total of 4,634 [civilian] casualties, including 155 deaths, 81 missing persons, and those who were wounded, abducted, and arrested'[166] – a total widely accepted as a grossly conservative estimate with, for instance, The Citizen Settlement Committee[167] estimating 1,458 civilians were killed during the uprising[168] and some Gwangju citizens claiming the death toll to be even 'as many as two thousand'.[169]

Given the substantial civilian death toll, Gwangju is today remembered as a national tragedy. Meanwhile, the events of Gwangju are also significant to South Korea's historical trajectory for two key reasons. Firstly, the military suppression of the Gwangju Uprising proved pivotal in legitimising the authority of General Chun Doo-hwan; after the assassination of President Park Chung-hee in 1979 had left something of a power vacuum in South Korea, the successful institution of martial law nationwide paved the way for Chun's eventual ascension to the presidency in September 1980. Secondly, the memory of Gwangju served as a site of inspiration for the pro-democracy activism that in turn led to the downfall of Chun's regime. The initial student

[165] Gwangju 5.18 Archives, *May 18,* 94-95.
[166] Gwangju 5.18 Archives, *May 18*, 47.
[167] The Citizen Settlement Committee comprised of 20 citizens of Gwangju 'including clergymen, lawyers, professors, and politicians who were in charge of negotiations' with the military during the uprising. See, Gwangju 5.18 Archives, *May 18,* 100.
[168] Lee Jae Eui, "The Seventeen Years of Struggle to Bring the Truth of the Kwangju Massacre to Light," in *Kwangju in the Eyes of the World*, ed. Amalie M. Weber (Seoul: Pulbit Publishing Co., 1997), 153.
[169] Darcy Paquet, *New Korean Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 9.

demonstrations that began the Gwangju Democratic Uprising advocated democracy in the face of Chun's martial law and authoritarian leadership. Hence, as Lee Jae Eui notes, 'the spirit of the Kwangju Uprising was and is ultimately oriented toward the accomplishment of democracy [as well as] the national reunification of Korea.'[170] In terms of the accomplishment of democracy, this Gwangju spirit eventually succeeded; the memory of Gwangju served as a rallying point for countless subsequent democratic movements, culminating with the June Democracy Movement of 1987, which pressured Chun into reinstating presidential elections by popular vote. With the election of General Roh Tae-woo in 1988, and then Kim Young-sam – South Korea's first civilian president in over thirty years – in 1992, South Korea successfully transitioned from the military dictatorship of Chun Doo-hwan into the current era of democracy in South Korea – an era in which the nation has also developed from a third world country to one of comparative political stability and financial prosperity. On this basis the Gwangju 5.18 Archives state in their publication *The May 18 Gwangju Democratic Uprising*:

> The ultimate outcome of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising shows it should not be considered a painful, frustrated chapter in modern Korean history, but the beginning of the country's democratization. The people's sincere desire for democracy – which remained undiminished afterwards despite the terrible events of May 1980 – should serve as an inspiration to all of us.[171]

The memory of Gwangju will always be bifurcated between its legacy of democratisation, and the human cost of the uprising at the hands of the military. Yet the suggestion that Gwangju should serve as a source of inspiration alludes to the very importance of the process of memorialising Gwangju.

This process has taken place within the public and cultural spheres, and has led to various contested and contrasting representations of the Gwangju Uprising. This is not least due to the fact that circulation of news and information surrounding the events of Gwangju was largely prohibited by the Chun regime, meaning that knowledge of the events of Gwangju and the nature and scale of the military's actions were largely hidden from the wider South Korean public. The state perpetuated narrative, following

[170] Lee Jae Eui, "Seventeen Years," 154.
[171] Gwangju 5.18 Archives, *May 18*, 50.

May 1980, labelled the uprising as an act of 'sedition'[172] with the citizens involved designated insurgents, communist agitators and North Korean spies. Although various associations and organisations, intent on uncovering *the truth* of Gwangju, were formed in the years following the uprising, 'the Chun Doo Hwan regime intentionally impeded the fact-finding process.'[173] As Chunhyo Kim notes:

> The families of the victims and the citizens of Kwangju were not allowed to express their pain publicly. They had to live in darkness, even though they had resisted against unreasonable violence to protect their lives and community. The Kwangju Uprising was a forbidden topic in the public sphere until the earlier 1990s[174]

Simultaneously, the atrocities committed by the South Korean state in Gwangju were largely ignored internationally, with perhaps most notably American President Jimmy Carter wrongfully dismissing the uprising as 'another Global communist plot',[175] in effect endorsing the actions of the South Korean military. Consequently, there has been a long process of cultural contestation over the memory of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising for the 'events once labelled a riot and a threat to Korea's national security' to be now remembered 'as a righteous uprising of citizens who risked their lives to resist oppression and bring democracy to Korea.'[176]

This contestation started through a process of countermemory (as in counter to the state-promoted narrative) through the circulation of materials, information, and literature on the massacre through various underground networks. The 1985 publication of *Gwangju Diary,* which still offers arguably the most accurate and complete account of the uprising, stands out as a notable example, becoming 'an underground bestseller – read by students, workers, and all kinds of other people'

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[172] Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 50.
[173] Lee Jae Eui, "Seventeen Years," 139.
[174] Chunhyo Kim, "Representation of the Kwangju Uprising – *A Petal* (1996) and *May 18* (2007)," *Asian Cinema* 19, no.2 (2008): 240.
[175] Tim Shorrock, "Gwangju Diary: The View from Washington," in *Gwangju Diary: Beyond Death, Beyond the Darkness of the Age*, Lee Jae-eui, (Gwangju: May 18 Memorial Foundation, 2017),139.
[176] Don Baker, "Victims and Heroes: Competing Visions of May 18," in *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea's Past and Present,* eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 87-88.

despite various police raids on the book's publisher and bookshops throughout Korea, and despite the fact that readers 'faced jail or persecution' if caught obtaining the book.[177] Poetry and fiction also proved important to the process of countermemory under the Chun regime,[178] while video news footage (attained by foreign journalists) of the massacre was also illegally circulated – as is depicted in Jang Joon-hwan's 2017 blockbuster *1987: When the Day Comes,* a film which focuses on the events leading up to the June Democratic Uprising of 1987. With the eventual fall of the Chun regime and the democratisation of South Korea in 1988, the circulation of information surrounding Gwangju became legal. Materials that were previously circulated underground were brought more into the public sphere, beginning a process of historical revision, both through culture and by the state, as knowledge and memory of Gwangju was brought into the national consciousness.

By now, knowledge and understanding of the events of Gwangju are commonplace; the uprising now holds an important place within the national history, and has been memorialised in various ways by both state and community organisations – perhaps most notably with the May 18th National Cemetery, built by the government and opened in 1997. Culture, though, retains a pivotal role in spreading awareness and maintaining the memory of Gwangju. This was illustrated when, while researching this chapter, a South Korean friend told me of how they had recently watched 2017 blockbuster *A Taxi Driver* with their grandmother. The grandmother had previously not known of the events of Gwangju and, watching the film, she was horrified to learn of the atrocities her nation's government had committed against its own people in May 1980. What interested me in this story was how it was film*,* in particular, that introduced the grandmother to the events of Gwangju; it demonstrated cinema's ability to introduce audiences to, and mediate cultural memory of, any given event, and in a manner able to provoke emotional responses to historical realities not personally experienced by filmgoers.

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[177] Lee Jae-eui, "Author's Preface to the English Edition," in *Gwangju Diary: Beyond Death, Beyond the Darkness of the Age,* Lee Jae-eui, trans. Kap Su Seol and Nick Mamatas (Gwangju: May 18 Memorial Foundation, 2017), 14-15.
[178] Baker, *Victims and Heroes,* 93.

Paul Grainge notes 'as a technology able to picture and embody the temporality of the past, cinema has become central to the mediation of memory in modern cultural life.'[179] In the case of fiction film, it is the ability of cinema to restage and present – visually, aurally, and viscerally – a depiction of a historical event to large and wide-reaching audiences that distinguishes it from other mediums in terms of contribution to cultural memory. *A Taxi Driver,* for instance, earned over 12,000,000 admissions at the domestic box office,[180] a number representing almost a quarter of South Korea's population – the overwhelming majority of whom were not present at, and thus have no personal memory of, the Gwangju Democratic Uprising. That so many people can be exposed to a single representation of a national tragedy has significance; that representation is granted status within the cultural imaginary, even if only by virtue of the mass exposure of the public to it. Although *A Taxi Driver* is by far the most seen cinematic depiction of Gwangju – at least in terms of domestic box office admissions – South Korean fiction film has offered several notable contributions to the cultural memory of Gwangju. This chapter discusses how fiction film has, thus far, mediated the memory of Gwangju. Meanwhile, it considers the cultural significance of, and the place of *haan* within, those mediations.

Narrativising Victimhood

While feature films that deal directly with Gwangju remain relatively limited, those that have been produced hold important places in both Korean cinematic history and in the memorialisation of Gwangju. I suggest the cinematic response to Gwangju can be divided into three phases, each providing a different social function through how they engage with the memory of Gwangju: the phase of non-engagement, the phase of narrativising victimhood, and the phase of memorialising the events of Gwangju.

The first response by Korean cinema was in effect a non-response. Owing to the Chun regime's censorship policies and efforts to suppress the truth of Gwangju, the Korean film industry released no films dealing with Gwangju for public consumption until after

[179] Paul Grainge, "Introduction: Memory and Popular Film," in *Memory and Popular Film*, ed. Paul Grainge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1.
[180] "Box Office: All Time," KoBiz, accessed January 20, 2020, https://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/boxOffice_AllTime.jsp?mode=BOXOFFICE_ALLTIME&category=ALL&country=K.

the collapse of the regime. The industry was in effect censored into complicity with the state suppression of the truth, a complicity which continued through the immediate years following Chun's downfall. Following the nation's democratisation, despite a relaxation in film censorship, film was forbidden from depicting 'scenes of political oppression [within South Korea]', and in particular forbidden from directly addressing Gwangju.[181] This was largely due to Chun's successor being Roh Tae-woo (President from 1988 to 1993), a former military general who played a key role in the military suppression of the Gwangju Uprising, which meant that 'the government suppressed any discussion of [Gwangju] in cinema.'[182] For instance, while the first feature film to offer any depiction of the Gwangju Uprising – Chang Dong-hong, Lee Eun and Jang Yun-hyeon's *Oh! Dreamland* (1988) produced by the independent film group Jangsan-gotmae – was exhibited 'before 100,000 viewers in 500 unofficial screenings across the country', the film's production was neither registered with the state nor submitted to the censors.[183] The film and its exhibition were deemed illegal and 'arrest warrants were issued for Jangsan-gotmae president Hong Ki-seon and future producer Yu In-taek, who arranged for the first screening of the film.'[184] Films that submitted to the censors often faced extensive cuts from the Public Performance Ethics Committee, as was the case for Lee Jung-guk's *The Song for the Resurrection* which saw 25 minutes of scenes relating to Gwangju cut[185] before its eventual release in 1991.[186] Similarly, while making *Black Republic* (1990) director Park Kwang-su had intended to use actual footage of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising during the film's flashback sequences, yet was prohibited from doing so.[187] The film faced further censorship, and it was 'only after [another] flashback sequence containing anti-government activity was deleted' that the film was allowed to be released.[188] Despite Park's intentions, the released version of the film consequently features no explicit reference to Gwangju. In this

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[181] Seung Hyun Park, "Film Censorship and Political Legitimation in South Korea, 1987-1992," *Cinema Journal* 42, no.1 (Fall, 2002): 127.
[182] Park, "Film Censorship," 127.
[183] Paquet, *New Korean Cinema,* 28.
[184] Paquet, *New Korean Cinema,* 28.
[185] Park, "Film Censorship," 127.
[186] "부활의노래," Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, accessed January 20, 2020, http://encykorea.aks.ac.kr/Contents/Item/E0074438.
[187] Baker, "Victims and Heroes," 98.
[188] Park, "Film Censorship," 127.

manner, the earliest films to attempt to address Gwangju are characterised by their failure in that very attempt, either through their failure to represent Gwangju or by their failure to reach audiences.

The second phase of Gwangju's cinematic narrativisation began when, following the instatement of Roh's successor, Kim Young-sam (1993-1998), censorship relaxed enough for representation of Gwangju to be legally exhibited. Film became legally able to portray the atrocities committed in Gwangju. Nevertheless, following the relaxation of censorship the first fiction films to directly confront Gwangju – namely *A Petal* (1996), *Peppermint Candy* (1999), and *The Old Garden* (2007) – were concerned less with extensively depicting the events of Gwangju than they were with exploring the lingering traumas and suffering that stemmed from those events. These films have separately received notable critical discussion within both English and Korean film discourses, yet in discussing them here I aim to draw explicitly on the distinct similarities in how these films address Gwangju, notably in that each presents a narrative of victimhood, and each employs fractured temporality in their storytelling in a manner that uses the trauma of the past (Gwangju) to help define the present. In doing so, each film engages with *haan,* framing their narratives within its historical poesis.

Jang Sun-woo's 1996 film *A Petal* represents the starting point of this phase. The film follows an unnamed teenaged girl who, traumatised by the events of Gwangju, wanders through South Jeolla province getting taken in and raped by a series of men, as meanwhile a group of four students (friends of her brother, who died during the massacre) attempt to find her. The film experiments with film style and form, using extensive flashbacks, animated fantasy sequences, a mixture of colour and black-and-white cinematography, and frequent shifts between aesthetic realism and visual stylisation. The result is a flawed and uneven film, and one often criticised for its overreliance on the 'rape-as-national-trauma metaphor, which by the mid-1990s had grown wearyingly familiar in Korean cinema.'[189] Yet despite the deserved criticisms, it

[189] Paquet, *New Korean Cinema,* 42.

is also represents a canonical text of Korean New Wave cinema, and offers some apt and compelling allegory through its lead characters.

This allegory centres around the character of the girl who, having witnessed her mother's death during the Gwangju massacre, is traumatised to the point of a mental disorder that manifests throughout the film notably in the girl's muteness, acts of self-harm, and hallucinations. Unnamed in the film, the girl is understandable only in terms of her relationship to Gwangju, while through the construction of the film's narrative around her the film mimics the dimensions of the girls' trauma. Discussing the work of Cathy Caruth, E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang note:

> Caruth describes trauma as a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours. "The pathology," she notes, "consists solely in the structure of the experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it."[190]

We see the girl experience intrusive hallucinations, such as in one scene when, on a train, a ghost visits her and accuses her of being responsible for her mother's death. Meanwhile, the belated experiencing of the initial trauma is echoed through the film's structure, through repeated use of black-and-white flashbacks of the girl's time in Gwangju, and through frequent cutting back and forth between her experiences post-Gwangju as she is taken in and raped by a series of men. The result of this fractured temporality is that the post-Gwangju present(s) of the film are shown to be continually experienced by the girl and the spectator in relation to Gwangju. At one point, for example, we see a scene of the girl getting beaten by Jang (one of the men who takes her in) to the point where she is left crying on the floor in the foetal position. A close-up of her quivering and distressed face is then juxtaposed by a black-and-white flashback sequence of her lying in a truck full of dead victims of the Gwangju massacre, staring vacantly up at the sky. The following shot returns her to Jang's house where, lying on the ground, staring vacantly upwards, we see her being raped by Jang. The vacancy in her expression in both shots hints at the girl's inability to fully experience

[190] E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang, "Introduction: Paralysis to the Force Field of Modernity," in *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations,* eds. E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 5.

either trauma at the moment of occurrence, while drawing a parallel between the two traumas. The film then immediately returns her to Gwangju, where we see her crawling through some thicket, crying heavily, while trying to escape the military. From this black-and-white live-action shot, the film implies a continuity with a subsequent colour-animated shot of a soldier's boot stamping down onto the ground near some thicket. We see then a similarly framed shot of a giant insect's leg stepping down on the same spot. This then initiates an animated sequence where the girl is chased by various giant bugs before being rescued by man on a white Pegasus. The implication here is that this is a fantasised version of her escape, and it further alludes to the girl's inability to experience the initial trauma of Gwangju in terms of its reality. That her rape by Jang is juxtaposed with these fantasy and real scenes of Gwangju furthers the notion that her present is continually experienced in terms of her past trauma.

The film's treatment of this trauma is frequently a subject of critical comment, but specifically here it is also the film's use of perspective that is of significance. Given the girl's anonymity throughout the film, this fractured temporality structures the girl as symbolic of the traumas suffered by the survivors of Gwangju more generally. She stands in for both their suffering and their memory, being the only character in the film known to be a survivor and direct witness of the events in Gwangju. Each of the film's black-and-white flashback sequences come from her perspective. As such her perspective offers the only subjective insight into the Gwangju massacre that we, the audience, bear witness to. It is also a perspective that risks being lost; the girl herself is lost and, mute, she is incapable of communicating her experiences. Accordingly, as Kyung Hyun Kim notes, 'her inability to speak except for occasional mumblings and her failure to regain memory reflect the contested historiography of Kwangju'. [191] Meanwhile the narrative built around her mimics the very act of contestation. To this, the subplot of the film that follows the four students as they search to find the girl is important. Through their search, they embody South Korea's historiographical challenge of reclaiming the memory and discovering the truth of Gwangju, a challenge of particular pertinence during the social context of the film's release; the previous

[191] Kyung Hyun Kim, "Post-Trauma and Historical Remembrance in Recent South Korean Cinema: Reading Park Kwang-su's *A Single Spark* (1995) and Chang Sŏn-u's *A Petal* (1996)," *Cinema Journal* 41, no.4 (Summer, 2002): 106.

month marked the beginning of the trial of Chun Doo-hwan for his crimes relating to Gwangju.[192] The film echoes that social moment in which the perpetrators were known (i.e. Jang and the girl's other rapists, and Chun Doo-hwan and the South Korean military) but the extent of their crimes and the suffering they inflicted was still in need of uncovering. The film reflects this by leaving the students' quest ongoing and incomplete, with the girl still lost and roaming through the South Jeolla countryside.

Due to the film's inconclusive ending, Kim suggests that '*A Petal* leaves viewers to flirt with the idea of Kwangju as a phantasm, a spectre that resides on street corners and in everyday life.'[193] It is in the same way, I argue, that the film is evocative of the historical poesis, the idiomatic historiography, of *haan.* The film portrays Gwangju as an event with no historical closure, as ongoing despite its temporal conclusion in May of 1980. It portrays the lingering trauma of the event and implies a resonance between that trauma and subsequent others (i.e. the repeated rape of the girl), while allegorically conflating the trauma of the individual (the girl) with that of the collective (the surviving victims of Gwangju, and South Korea more generally). In this way, through the implementation of its victim narrative the film mimics the historical poesis, described by Abelmann and discussed at the beginning of this chapter, inherent to a *haan*-inflected perspective – one which collapses individual and collective sufferings and trauma into an accumulated sense of the historical suffering of the Korean people.

Similarly, *haan*ful narratives of victimhood pertaining to Gwangju can be observed in each of the other films I identify in the second phase of the cinematic narrativisation of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising. In the case of Lee Chang-dong's *Peppermint Candy* (1999), though, what is significant is how the film constructs a victim narrative around one of the perpetrators of the Gwangju massacre; the film takes as its subject a conscripted soldier brought in to suppress the Gwangju Uprising. Often noted for its reverse chronology, the film's narrative unfolds episodically. The film begins in 1999 with the middle-aged Yong-ho drunkenly arriving at and disrupting a reunion for his old student group, before climbing onto some nearby train tracks and waiting to get hit by a train, screaming 'I am going back!' right before the train hits him. As the episodes,

[192] Kim, "Post-Trauma," 95.
[193] Kim, "Post-Trauma," 107.

taken from the twenty years leading up to that moment, then play out, the film implies causality. Each episode sheds light on what drove Yong-ho to his eventual suicide, as we learn of the loss of his business due to the Asian Financial Crisis; the breakdown of his marriage due to, amongst other reasons, the adultery of both him and his wife; his time as a police officer in the 1980s where he is made to torture suspects; and his participation in the Gwangju massacre, during his military service, where he accidentally kills a high-school girl. The film ends in 1979 with a now innocent-seeming Yong-ho on a picnic with his fellow students at the spot where twenty years in the future Yong-ho will kill himself.

Much has been written on the effect of this narrative structure, with David Martin-Jones, for instance, stating:

> Most obviously, the main effect of this reverse structure is to render the initially unlikeable Yong-ho a tragic character. We are left with the image of an innocent, sensitive man, whom we know was then brutalised by the social order of South Korea over the previous two decades.[194]

In this respect, despite the horrific actions we see him commit, Yong-ho is painted as a victim of institution; his involvement in the Gwangju massacre, during his mandatory military service, is portrayed as a primal scene in his character's moral degeneration. In this sense, through the film's reverse chronology – whereby this primal scene is presented as the film's penultimate scene – the film presents its own revisionist historiography of the life of Yong-ho through a narrative structure that emphasises the very process of revision; as each episode unfolds, we the audience are made to consciously re-evaluate our perception of Yong-ho and his fate.

Moreover, this reverse chronology grants the film's final image a *haan*ful poignancy. Here we see 1979's Yong-ho sitting alone, staring up at the train overpass and the sky, having wandered briefly away from the picnic. The camera pulls slowly into an extreme close-up as his eyes tear up and cheeks quiver and, as the sound of a train is heard passing overhead, a tear falls from his eye, down his cheek. With this moment, the film ends, with a freeze-frame and a fade-to-black. In a similar manner to the freeze-frame

[194] David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 211.

used on Man-su at the end of *Chilsu and Mansu* (Park Kwang-su, 1998) (as discussed in my Literature Review), the freeze-frame here traps Yong-ho between hope and fatalism. The image captures him in the innocence, freedom and possibility of youth, as a man with his whole future ahead of him, a future not yet tainted or corrupted by the life he will live. Yet as the sound of a train provokes tears from his eyes, foreshadowing his eventual suicide, he is cast also as a figure bound by history and by the fate that we, the audience, have already witnessed. As with Man-su's perpetuated freefall, here the use of the freeze-frame captures this contradiction of hope and hopelessness caught in Yong-ho's face, and through the emotionality of the image the freeze-frame in turn elicits a sense of *haan.* This *haan* emotion is then projected onto the social allegory constructed around Yong-ho, and thus the victimisation (by such historical developments as Gwangju) of the generation of Koreans Yong-ho represents is framed through an emotional realism rendered in terms of *haan.*

Im Sang-soo's 2007 film *The Old Garden* constructs similar *haan*ful emotional framing through its closing images, while the film as a whole, consistent with the other films here discussed, uses a fractured temporality to explore the dimensions of victimhood of Gwangju. The film follows former *minjung* activist Hyun-woo as he readjusts to life following a seventeen-year stint in prison for anti-government activism during the 1980s. The film intercuts this with flashbacks from his life as a fugitive in the 1980s as he develops a romantic relationship with Yoon-hee, a teacher and a painter who helps him evade the police by providing him shelter in her countryside home. Significantly, like *A Petal* and *Peppermint Candy,* for Hyun-woo, the Gwangju Uprising is shown as a formative moment; the film's second flashback shows him, during the uprising, being told by fellow activists to leave Gwangju, an act which begins his fugitive life.

The film's portrayal of Gwangju is brief – confined only to that second flashback – but is key in establishing Gwangju as an event responsible for the suffering depicted in the film's present. The flashback begins with Hyun-woo and two fellow activists arriving at a gymnasium where the Citizens' Army – established by the citizens of Gwangju to protect the city from the military – are housing the bodies of the victims of the massacre. Narratively, the scene offers context for Hyun-woo's subsequent fugitivity, while through the shot selection and mise-en-scène it demonstrates the film's perspective of

Gwangju. The opening shot of the sequence shows dead bodies being transported on stretchers; we see shots of grieving family members hunched over coffins; close-ups of blood-splattered body bags; a member of the Citizens' Army is seen angrily yelling into phone: 'Listen, You son-of-a-bitch! Tell them to give us coffins instead of killing civilians!'; and gunshots are heard off in the distance (signalling the ongoing violence). Each of these aspects emphasise the human cost of the military's actions and the scale of the victimisation of the Gwangju people, a perspective reiterated through the film's subsequent scene in which the present-day Hyun-woo arrives in Gwangju and visits the May 18th National Cemetery. Again, through use of location, the film emphasises the lives lost due to the military's actions. Together these scenes compound the victimisation of the past (the military's slaughter) with the grief and sadness of the present (epitomised by mourners in the background at the cemetery, seen tending to graves) to portray the victimisation of the people of Gwangju as an ongoing process, uniting the past and the present. This notion, in turn, frames the portrayal of Hyun-woo and Yoon-hee's relationship, with Hyun-woo's activism during the Uprising providing the reason the couple meet and also, due to his arrest, the reason they become separated.

As the narrative develops, we learn that at the time of Hyun-woo's arrest, unbeknownst to him, Yoon-hee was pregnant with his child. Only after his release from prison in 1997, a year following Yoon-hee's death due to cancer, does he learn of the existence of his daughter and set about finding her. Their first meeting provides the film's final scene as Hyun-woo presents to his daughter one of Yoon-hee's paintings: a portrait of a high-school-aged Hyun-woo sat alongside an older Yoon-hee, her head bald from chemotherapy, painted shortly before her death. The painting is then used again for the final images of the film. In its coupling of the older, dying Yoon-hee and the younger Hyun-woo, the image captures the purity of the love they shared – apparent through their smiling faces and Yoon-hee's arms resting warmly on Hyun-woo's shoulders – while the age gap visualised, and composited through the representation of Yoon-hee's dying self, highlights a sense of loss towards the relationship that history, and particularly the Gwangju Uprising, denied them. This notion is then emphasised as the film superimposes into the blank space of the canvas, behind the couple, images of Yoon-hee's mother, father, her and Hyun-woo's daughter, and a younger, healthier

Yoon-hee, in effect turning the couple's portrait into the family-portrait-that-could-have-been, an image over which the film's closing credits roll. As with the freeze-frame close-up of Yong-ho's innocent young face, the image here conveys a sense of hope, this time through the familial unity depicted. Meanwhile, that hope is set against our cognisance that this particular family never had the chance to be unified. Ultimately, with the events of Gwangju the cause of that lack of unity, it is again a sense of victimisation – for Hyun-woo, Yoon-hee, and the generation they represent, along with the generations represented through their parents, and child – that carries through. As with *A Peppermint Candy,* this contrast creates space for sentiments of *haan* to emotionally frame this social allegory. Accordingly, we can observe *haan* to play a key role in how each of the films, here analysed, seeks to frame the remembering of Gwangju.

I use, here, the word remembering – as opposed to memory – because these films are ultimately concerned with the importance and implications of remembering Gwangju, rather than with the specific content of characters' memories of Gwangju. In each, flashbacks are integral to narrative structure and are the primary device used to portray the events of Gwangju, yet those portrayals of Gwangju are relatively brief. This allows each film to focus less on what happened in Gwangju and more on the experience of it, specifically placing narrative emphasis on victimhood more than victimisation (i.e. on the suffering it led to beyond just the ten days of the uprising itself). They portray Gwangju as an ongoing event, an unfinished chapter in Korean history, and one that *haan*fully echoes throughout history. Through its narrative's fractured temporality, *A Petal* stresses the need to reflect on, recover memory of, and actively remember what happened in Gwangju for South Korea to have any hope of reconciling the traumas of the past. *Peppermint Candy*, with its reverse chronology, similarly stresses the notion that the problems of the present should be understood through reflection on the past, while *The Old Garden* through its heavy use of flashbacks suggests that only by reflection on the past can Korea recognise what it has lost. Accordingly, they each share a message stressing the need to remember.

The cultural expression of this message, I argue, grants these films their social function, although the impact of the social function of these films individually is admittedly

difficult to ascertain, especially given that each film belongs more to Korea's arthouse scene. *A Petal* is remembered now as a key text of the Korean New Wave cinema, and *A Peppermint Candy* has been 'canonised as a modern classic',[195] yet neither reached large audiences. In relation to Gwangju, at the times of their release, their cultural significance lay more in the act of representation at a time when the memory of Gwangju was under greater scrutiny and contestation. In other words, they contributed to a broader social milieu, yet were by no means the focal point of that milieu. For example, television at the time offered a much larger contribution, broadcasting documentaries about Gwangju from as early as 1989,[196] and more notably by dramatising the events of Gwangju in the hugely popular primetime series *Sandglass* (SBS, 1995), which followed three fictional friends through the political and social turbulence of the 1970s and 1980s.[197] Garnering 'phenomenal ratings', as Keehyeung Lee notes, simply by representing Gwangju, *Sandglass* 'rekindled debates about the nature and role of the Kwangju Uprising…[by awakening] viewers from their collective amnesia regarding the Kwangju massacre.'[198] The films *A Petal* and *Peppermint Candy* engaged in this same act of contestation over public memory of Gwangju, reaching albeit smaller audiences in the process.

Since the late 1990s, though, the social milieu regarding Gwangju has shifted from one of contestation to one of commemoration and memorialisation of the victims and events of Gwangju. Notably, the South Korean state 'commemorated 5.18 for its prodemocracy legacy',[199] while the stabilisation of South Korea's democracy 'made it difficult' for the various citizens groups working on behalf of the victims of Gwangju 'to place responsibility for their continued suffering at the feet of an unjust and brutal regime' – as Linda S. Lewis and Ju-na Byun argue 'lacking the counterpoint of an

[195] Paquet, *New Korean Cinema,* 87.
[196] Baker, "Victims and Heroes," 100.
[197] Keehyeung Lee, "*Morae Sigye*: "Social Melodrama" and the Politics of Memory in Contemporary South Korea," in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema,* eds. Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005) 229, 236.
[198] Lee, "*Morae Sigye*," 237.
[199] Linda S. Lewis, *Laying Claim to the Memory of May: A Look Back at the 1980 Kwangju Uprising* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 103.

illegitimate government, they have lost their legitimacy as oppressed victims per se.'[200] Consequently, since the late 1990s cultural remembrance of Gwangju, by citizens, victims, and political groups, has been marked by 'constructive engagement with, rather than opposition to, the state.'[201] By the time of *The Old Garden*'s release (2007), the publicly-accepted historical narrative surrounding Gwangju had largely been set, thus culture – rather than promoting the need to remember – needed to engage more actively in practices of remembrance. Korean cinema's response to this came a year later through the release of *May 18,* mainstream Korean cinema's first intervention into the subject of Gwangju, and a film that in many ways memorialises the victims of Gwangju.

Memorialising Gwangju through the Intervention of the Mainstream

Discussing culture and society's 'dual tendencies' in the memorialisation of cultural trauma, Neil J. Smelser comments that:

> mass forgetting and collective campaigns on the part of groups to downplay or "put behind us," if not actually to deny a cultural trauma on the one hand, and…efforts to keep it in the public consciousness as a reminder that "we must remember," or "lest we forget," on the other. A memorial to an event, it has been pointed out, has elements of both reactions: to memorialize is to force a memory on us by the conspicuous and continuous physical presence of a monument; at the same time a memorial also conveys a message that now we have paid our respects to a trauma, we are now justified in forgetting about it.[202]

Cinematic memorialisation is no different. On one hand, viewing a film relating to a cultural trauma can certainly take on the dimensions of an act of paying respects; for duration of the film the spectator may indulge in the memory of the memorialised trauma before leaving the cinema and returning to the course of their everyday life. Yet, and although film lacks a permanent physical presence, it possesses the capacity to force a memory on a spectator through the manner in which it represents and recreates

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[200] Linda S. Lewis and Ju-na Byun, "From Heroic Victims to Disabled Survivors: The 5-18 Injured after Twenty Years," in *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea's Past and Present*, eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 59.
[201] Lewis and Byun, "From Heroic Victims," 59.
[202] Neil J. Smelser, "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, eds. Jeffrey C. Alexander et al (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 53.

(visually, aurally, and affectively) the experience of said trauma. Through that recreation, film has the ability to offer spectators what Alison Landsberg refers to as prosthetic memory, in which:

> the person [(or spectator)] does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics.[203]

It would be wrong to assume that from watching a film each spectator receives the same prosthetic memory; as Landsberg argues, 'for each, the memories are inflected by the specificities of his or her other experiences and place in the world.'[204] Yet, there is significance in that the audience members of a given film are each exposed to the same representation of a given event. While the nature of that representation (its manner, style, quality etc.) invariably affects the potency of any prosthetic memory, there is arguably greater social significance drawn from mainstream (as opposed to arthouse) cinematic acts of memorialisation due to the size of the audiences exposed to the same representation of a given event.

In the case of Gwangju, South Korea has thus far produced two, what can be considered to be, mainstream cinematic memorials to Gwangju: 2007's *May 18,* which depicts the events of Gwangju from the perspective of Gwangju's citizens, and 2017's *A Taxi Driver,* which follows a foreign news correspondent and his taxi driver as they attempt to report on Gwangju. For both, unlike the films so far discussed, the depiction of the events of Gwangju are focal to the narratives. Moreover, while the earlier films – as we have seen, and as Don Baker notes – tend 'to focus less on the heroism exercised by Kwangjuites in spring 1980 and more on the suffering they endured then and for a long time afterward',[205] *May 18* and *A Taxi Driver* both reverse this tendency. Heroism is key to how both frame the memory of Gwangju, yet both emphasise this heroism in differing ways, as I here discuss. *May 18* does so through its use of genre, leaning on the action genre to help heroise and mythologise its leading characters. *A Taxi Driver,*

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[203] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2.
[204] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory* 34.
[205] Baker, "Victims and Heroes," 98.

meanwhile, does so by depicting the heroism and exploits of real-life photojournalist Jürgen Hinzpeter and his Korean driver, in a film that highlights (narratively and cinematographically) the shifting perspectives of both of its leads in order to emphasise how personally affecting the events of Gwangju were. In both, *haan* is evoked as a key means of emotionally framing narrative. This, I argue, is key to how they attempt to frame their constructed memories of Gwangju for mainstream audiences.

May 18

Earning over 6,800,000 domestic admissions – making it 2007's third most successful film at the Korean box office, behind only Korean special-effects blockbuster *D-War* (Shim Hyung-rae) and Hollywood's *Transformers* (Michael Bay)[206] – arguably most significant of *May 18* is its status as a blockbuster and commercial hit. In representing the first mainstream attempt at addressing the traumas of Gwangju, Jung Han Seok states '<May 18> is meaningful in that it grabbed the attention of the public into the whirlpool of history.'[207] Commenting on the film's success, he adds '<May 18> won over many of the public with its universal life stories and the meticulous research efforts'.[208] These research efforts are most evident through how the film follows the historical chronology of the uprising, and devoted 'a huge amount of effort and resources on achieving its hyper-realism' in its scenes depicting the military's violence. For instance, KRW3 billion (then equivalent to roughly 2.7 million U.S. Dollars) was spent on the set for the street outside the provincial hall – a set for which a '500 meter street with real asphalt', '85% of the real provincial office', and 'the fountain in front of the office as well as the nearby buildings' had to be built just outside of central Gwangju, and which was 'later opened to the public'.[209] Such attention to detail in the film's production design lends historical credibility to the film's reconstruction of the events of Gwangju, and grants scenes of the uprising a heightened sense of realism, even when

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[206] "Yearly Box Office Statistics: 2007," KoBiz, accessed July 31, 2018, https://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/boxOffice_Yearly.jsp?mode=BOXOFFICE_YEAR&selectDt=2007&category=ALL&country=ALL.
[207] Jung Han-seok, "Review of Korean Films in 2007 and the Outlook for 2008," in *Korean Cinema 2007*, ed. Daniel D.H. Park, (Seoul: Korean Film Council, 2007), 5.
[208] Jung Han-seok, "Review of Korean Films," 5.
[209] Mark Morris, "The New Korean Cinema, Kwangju and the Art of Political Violence," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 8, no.5 (February, 2010): 15.

indulging in moments of genre style. One scene, for example, shows the citizens of Gwangju congregated outside the provincial hall prior to the military's expected yielding of their control over the city. The national anthem starts playing from speakers around the building, and the citizens start singing. Here the film evokes a sense of national unity and pride emphasised through melodramatic address, through a combination of the diegetic music, nondiegetically amplified, and various closeups and pans on the faces of the passionately singing citizens. This sentiment, however, is severed when, as the national anthem reaches a climax, the music cuts out as the military opens fire on the citizens. Their massacre of the Gwangju citizens is depicted with minimal stylistic flare and without non-diegetic musical accompaniment. The effect is one of reality (and aesthetic realism) puncturing through the melodramatic fiction. Significantly to this, the scene progresses in accordance with the historical record (i.e. the military did fire on unarmed citizens while broadcasting to them the national anthem).

Constructing this sense of historical credibility is particularly important given that the film's narrative, and the characters depicted, are fictional; it creates the impression of historicity even when the film deviates from historical events, thus making it easier for audiences to accept the characters depicted as directly allegorical of the experiences of the people of Gwangju. And the film does deviate from the historical record in a number of significant ways, notably through a narrative that focuses on a predominantly working-class group of people who get caught up in the uprising and eventually come to lead it – as opposed to the student activists at the political heart of the uprising, and who in actuality were largely responsible for the organisation of the citizens' resistance. This distortion of historical truth is key to how the film memorialises the Gwangju Democratic Uprising; it draws attention away from the politics behind the uprising, depicting it more simply as a moralistic battle between the heroic and innocent ordinary people of Gwangju, and the faceless evil of their military oppressors. Moreover, through the demographic makeup of the film's leading characters, the film focuses on the more human aspects of the uprising, on the personal relationships and

the 'community spirit of selfless assistance' so frequently associated with the spirit of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising.[210]

Relevant is how the film's cast represents a loose cross-section of Gwangju society. The film centres on Min-woo, a taxi driver who gets caught up in the events of the uprising. He is established as hardworking and generous and the sole guardian of his high-schooler brother Jin-woo, whom he supports through his studies as Jin-woo tries to get into law school at the prestigious Seoul National University. Through his younger brother, Min-woo also meets hospital nurse Shin-ae, whom he develops a romance with in the film's most prominent narrative strand besides the progression of the Gwangju Uprising. Other notable characters include fellow taxi driver In-bong, taxi passenger Yong-dae, retired military commander, Min-woo's boss and Shin-ae's father Heung-soo, and local priest Priest Kim, all of whom – along with Min-woo – join the Gwangju Citizen's Army following the military's attack. Though codedly working class, it is a cast of varied age, varied personality, and (albeit to a lesser degree) varied occupation, a cast intended to portray the broadness of the Gwangju community that united during the uprising. Despite the film's frequent and extensive sequences of clashes between the military and citizens of Gwangju, I argue it is the Gwangju community that the film aims most to memorialise.

In describing the spirit of that historical community, Jung-woon Choi characterises it as 'the absolute community':

> In the absolute community, there were no private possessions, and citizens did not differentiate their lives from that of others; time ceased to flow. All distinctions between humans disintegrated as disparate individuals joined together as one. Only then could Kwangju citizens risk their lives to band together against the overwhelming force arrayed against them.[211]

Though somewhat hyperbolic, Choi's description reflects the spirit of communal struggle and sacrifice embodied by the citizens of Gwangju throughout the uprising, a spirit that *May 18* seeks to reconstruct. This is epitomised, for example, through the

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[210] Gwangju 5.18 Archives, *May 18,* 119.
[211] Jung-woon Choi, "The Formation of an "Absolute Community"," in *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea's Past and Present*, eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon, Hwang (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 4.

friendship that develops between In-bong and Yong-dae. Their introduction to one another comes prior to the start of the uprising when, while riding in In-bong's taxi, Yong-dae enrages In-bong by using the seat of In-bong's car to wipe dog faeces off of his shoe. Despite their antagonistic first encounter, when they meet again during the protest on May 21 (just prior to the national anthem shooting), not recognising one another, they fast develop an affinity as together they rally the protestors by making jokes at the military's expense. In the field of protest, the distinction of driver and customer is erased, as is their animosity towards one another, and as the film progresses they develop a close friendship before dying side-by-side, brothers in arms, during the film's final battle. Though these two characters predominantly offer the film's comic relief, the nature of their friendship echoes with the broader spirit of community the film seeks to portray through the wider cast of the Citizens' Army. The film captures this spirit as something to be memorialised, and even depicts an act of memorialisation of that community when, in one scene, the newly formed Citizens' Army poses to take a photograph. This leads In-bong to comment that the photograph looks like a wedding photograph, thus rendering the people photographed more in terms of family than army.

Significant to the community constructed, also, is the distinctly apolitical nature of its key characters, in that their participation in the uprising is not so much ideological (e.g. prodemocratic) as it is reactionary to the moral injustices carried out by the military. The events of Gwangju are depicted as an interruption to the course of their ordinary lives. We see this during the film's first display of military violence, when Min-woo and Shin-ae's date at a cinema is interrupted when tear gas seeps into the cinema. The doors then burst open as a protester comes through, followed by a soldier who beats him with a truncheon. Min-woo and Shin-ae leave the cinema where they subsequently get caught up in a melee and chased down an alleyway by a soldier. The effect is that history is presented, quite literally, as an intrusion to their everyday lives. Moreover, it is only following personal tragedy that the key characters join the protests – for example, Jin-woo joins after a fellow classmate is killed by soldiers, while Min-woo only joins after his younger brother, Jin-woo, is killed. The significance of the apoliticism and demographic of the film's central cast – who take leading roles in the formation and organisation of the Citizens' Army, following the events of May 21 – is the contrast

to the demographic makeup of what in actuality became the core leadership of the Citizen's Army following May 21. This thirteen-member organisation, 'named the Kwangju People's Struggle Leadership' consisted of predominantly university-educated democratic movement activists in their mid-twenties to early thirties (the oldest being thirty-three years old, a notable contrast with the *May 18*'s Civilian Army leader Heung-soo, played by the then fifty-five-year-old Ahn Sung-ki).[212] The effect of this contrast, this historical licensing, distances the film's characters and its portrayal of Gwangju from the politics of the time. In turn, the film presents their actions not in terms of a response to Chun Doo-hwan's ultimately successful implementation of martial law but as a collective response to a human tragedy, and to oppression in a more general (read, less historically specific) sense.

Through this collective response, the characters are presented as heroes, and through this lens of heroism the film seeks to memorialise them. This is achieved most notably during the climax of the film in which the Provincial Hall falls under attack by the military, and the film's remaining lead cast (with the exception of Shin-ae) are killed in the ensuing gunfight. The sequence melds action aesthetics – typical of mainstream blockbuster cinema – with a melodramatic sensibility in a manner that emphasises the bravery and sacrifice of the Gwangjuites while framing that representation through *haan*ful emotional address.

The attack sequence begins with the military storming the Provincial Hall in a series of shots showing the soldiers aggressively shooting, and shots of the Citizens' Army members taking cover and running out of the line of bullet fire. We see a tank blast knock Min-woo and Heung-soo temporarily to the floor of a corridor, in the process knocking a two-way radio out of one of their hands. Then, through a closeup on the radio we hear a voice of a Citizens' Army fighter saying 'Beloved citizens. Please remember my name. I'm Lee Dong-kyu'. This is followed by similar radio messages from two other individuals of the Citizens' Army who, like Lee Dong-kyu, have not been

[212] Jong-chul Ahn, "*Simin'gun*: The Citizens' Army During the Kwangju Uprising," in *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea's Past and Present,* eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 16-18.

previously introduced to the audience – one announces 'It's me, Byung-jo's father. I came here because of my son but now my poor wife will be all alone', while the other declares 'I am Han Min-jae, a grade 12 student from Gwangju High. Long Live Korea! Long live Gwangju!'. Solemn strings music enters the film's nondiegesis, melodramatically emphasising the fatalistic sentiments of these previously unknown Gwangju citizens. Meanwhile, these radio messages are intercut with shots of Min-woo and Heung-soo as they try to shoot their way to safety. The action aesthetic through which Min-woo and Heung-soo are here filmed helps render them as heroes. Then, through the parallel sequencing used, this heroism is projected onto the previously unknown Gwangjuites and onto their pleas to be remembered.

Through the previous anonymity of these fellow Gwangjuites, the film makes explicit its intention to memorialise the exploits of the historical Gwangju people through allegory of the fictionalised heroism of Min-woo and the other characters. As, over the radio, the student Min-jae yells 'Long live Gwangju!', we hear a gunshot ring out and Min-jae fall silent – thus implying his death. Here, the heroism through which the film represents the Citzens' Army of Gwangju is punctuated with a sense of loss, which in turn renders their heroism as martyrdom. This sense of martyrdom is then returned to the film's main cast as several key characters are subsequently given similarly melodramatically constructed radio deaths through their shootout with the military – most notably with the deaths of In-bong and Yong-dae.

This generic embellishment is made more significant by the fact that no such final shootout occurred during the actual final siege of the Gwangju Uprising on May 27. As Henry Scott-Stokes and Lee Jae Eui detail, one of the key aspects of the Gwangju Uprising's final phase 'that has escaped public attention' was that 'there was, in effect, no last battle';

> With the exception of [Citizens' Army Spokesperson] Yun Sang Won, who was killed by a grenade in the auditorium of the Provincial Hall – no outstanding member of the key group of student and worker leaders was killed. The last battle for the Provincial Hall ended in about "ten to thirty minutes," [during which]…mostly the students took refuge behind filing cabinets and desks, and when the moment came and they faced a choice

> between surrender or being shot, they preferred to come out with their hands up.[213]

They add that, though during the siege 'needless killings did occur', 'the incoming military – whatever their faults – did not seize the opportunity to round everyone in sight and kill them.'[214] Yet through the action sequences of *May 18*'s climax, the opposite is portrayed; the film depicts a fight-to-the-death for most of the key cast, with the military showing little-to-no restraint. This is most notable when, in making his escape from the Provincial Hall, Min-woo gets cornered by a mass of soldiers. He is ordered to surrender but, when he is called a 'rebel', he refuses and is shot dead amidst an indiscriminate flurry of bullets – his final breaths condensing to mist in the air in another stylistic and melodramatic embellishment. Along with the fellow members of the Citizens' Army, through the film's action genre-infused climax, Min-woo and his fellow Gwangju-ites are granted valiant hero's deaths, rendered tragic also by the sequence's melodramatic stylings. With Min-woo's death followed by the film's final scene – showing Shin-ae driving through the Gwangju night pleading to the city 'Don't forget us!' through a loud speaker – his martyrdom becomes mythologised and memorialised as representative of Gwangju's actual fallen heroes, whom we are urged not to forget.

Through the melodramatic embellishments of this scene, and throughout the film, the film frames its memorial to the Gwangju-ites through emotion, and through emotion that can be understood in terms of *haan*; it is often argued that 'Korean melodrama hinges upon the national sentiment of [haan],' while Hye Seung Chung notes also that '[*haan*] indeed connotes melodramatic affect in the Korean context.'[215] *Haan,* meanwhile, punctuates the film's final moments, during a brief addendum to Shin-ae's plea for remembrance. This addendum features the film's core characters alive and

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[213] Henry Scott-Stokes and Lee Jae Eui, "Epilogue," in *The Kwangju Uprising: Eyewitness Press Accounts of Korea's Tiananmen,* eds. Henry Scott-Stokes and Lee Jae Eui (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2000), 223-224.
[214] Scott-Stokes and Lee, "Epilogue," 224.
[215] Hye Seung Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia: A Transnational *Détournement* of Hollywood Melodrama," in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*, eds. Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 121-122.

well, reunited and posing for Min-woo and Shin-ae's *wedding-photo-that-could-have-been* – a setup that parallels the previously discussed Citizens' Army photograph. All the characters are happy and smiling with the exception of Shin-ae – notably the only key character photographed who survives until the end of the film, and the uprising. She instead wears a solemn expression. A solemn military march provides the nondiegetic musical accompaniment, mimicking both Shin-ae's sorrow and the reason for that sorrow (i.e. the actions of the military). The shot itself provides a similar effect to the family portrait that closes *The Old Garden,* in that it commemorates the future that was robbed from these characters by the events of Gwangju. Meanwhile, through the music, this addendum goes further, creating a moment of melodramatic surrealism that shapes how the film wishes us to remember these heroes, in effect establishing an angle of address through which its emotional realism is projected. Sorrow and mourning cannot be removed from our memory of the event, just as sorrow does not leave the face of Shin-ae on the day of her, albeit imaginary, wedding to Min-woo. Yet the overwhelming mood of the characters around her is one of celebration and community, suggesting a need also to celebrate these fallen heroes and the spirit of Gwangju and the absolute community. Through this juxtaposition, we can see a sense of *haan* to emanate from these contrasting sentiments of loss and joy, and specifically through the subversive sentimentality of the wedding photo image granted by the dark tones and implications of both Shin-ae's sorrowful stare and the musical accompaniment. Meanwhile, with these emotions and sentiments presented through a commemorative artefact (a wedding photograph), the film stresses the importance of (*haan*) emotion to the memory and memorialisation of Gwangju.

In this manner, with the film also generally acting as a commemorative artefact, the film projects emotion onto its constructed memory of the history of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising. To this, rather than explicitly detracting from the historical credibility of this memory, intervention of genre lends that memory its frame, through theme and emotion. The flourishes of action aesthetic – notably present through drawn out sequences of death and oppression – grant the characters victimised themes of both martyrdom and heroism. Meanwhile, through the film's melodramatic embellishments, the film provokes a sense of human tragedy, and feelings of sorrow and *haan.* This is only compounded through the sense of historicity that the film

constructs, notably through set design and a plot that mostly follows the historical progression of events during the Gwangju Uprising. This historicity is re-emphasised by a post-script that reads the official death toll of the events of Gwangju, the film's final reminder of the reality behind its representation. Between this emotion and historicity, the film constructs and reconstructs a memory of Gwangju, its citizens, and its spirit, thus imbuing them with a perceived emotional realism; the emotions depicted and evoked are understood as directly allegorical of the real emotions experienced by the historical Gwangju community. Meanwhile, this reconstructed memory of Gwangju is underscored notably by sentiments of *haan,* sentiments that – emphasised through the film's closing moments – are intended to linger in the minds of spectators as, and after, the end credits roll.

A Taxi Driver

Like *May 18,* Jang Hoon's 2017 film *A Taxi Driver* frames the history of Gwangju through a lens of emotional realism, yet the manner in which it memorialises Gwangju deviates significantly from that of its predecessor. While *May 18* places the narrative emphasis on the collective experience, on the community of Gwangju, *A Taxi Driver* presents a more subjective and personal memory of Gwangju. It does so by centring on the exploits of real-life photo-journalist Jürgen Hinzpeter who, upon hearing rumour of the uprising, travelled from Japan to Gwangju to cover the unfolding events. The film follows his efforts in getting to Gwangju, capturing footage of the uprising, and subsequently making it safely out of Korea in order to show the footage to the world press. Key here, also, is the presence of the titular taxi driver, who accompanies Hinzpeter in his journalistic mission. The film loosely establishes a buddy film dynamic between the two in which their mismatched personalities and backgrounds offer frequent narrative conflict throughout the film as they bond and eventually become friends. Significantly, also, both the driver (a Seoul taxi driver) and Hinzpeter represent outsiders to the Gwangju community, and throughout the film their difference in identity and perspective – both to those in Gwangju, and to each other – is frequently foregrounded both narratively and aesthetically.

Perspective and identity – in particular the national and regional identities of the film's leads – are key to how the film navigates the memory of Gwangju. In the case of

Hinzpeter, while the role is played by the German actor Thomas Kretschmann, and while his German nationality is identified within the film, the film is more concerned with his general foreignness than his German-ness. For example, we are introduced to him in a foreign correspondents' office in Japan, conversing in English with an English reporter and two other international journalists (credited as Foreign Correspondent 1 and 2). This immediately ascribes to him a transnational identity, while signifiers of his German identity are largely absent or minimalised. Most notable is the virtual absence of German language in the film, as the character of Hinzpeter spends the film's duration speaking English. Hinzpeter thus becomes codified by his transnational otherness; he is largely de-nationalised, defined by a border-crossing otherness and by his non-Korean status. Meanwhile, the titular taxi driver, who spends most of the film referred to not by name but as the 'Seoul taxi driver', is codified specifically by his regional identity, and by a regional identity distinct from that of the people of Gwangju. That both characters are presented as outsiders to the events and community of Gwangju is significant as it reflects also the distance to the events of the film of the film's contemporary audiences; released in 2017, 37 years after the Gwangju Democratic Uprising, the overwhelming majority of audiences would not have personally witnessed the events of the uprising. The film uses these characters' outsider perspectives to bridge history, presenting their journey to Gwangju and back as a journey of historical discovery, and one that proves personally transformative. The film introduces these characters by their difference before – through the course of the film, as they become further exposed to the events of Gwangju – eroding the boundaries of that difference, symbolically assimilating them with the oppressed people of Gwangju. In doing so, and by stressing their individual perspectives, the film charts their personal affection by the events of Gwangju, in turn presenting subjective experience of Gwangju as an identity-altering event. As I here discuss, this is key to how the film represents the history of Gwangju, and is pivotal in how the film emotionally frames its memory of Gwangju through *haan.*

In the case of the Seoul taxi driver, through the opening scenes, the film establishes the driver's personality and perspective well. We are introduced to him as he gets caught up in a traffic jam caused by student demonstrations. Here, his apathy towards the political realities of the time is highlighted as he complains about the 'spoiled bastards'

protesting, asking if they went to university just to protest, and suggesting (to himself) that they should be sent to 'Work themselves to death in the burning desert in Saudi Arabia' (a reference to his previous work in Saudi Arabia), to 'realise "Wow, my country is great!"'. This apathy, or ignorance, to the students' cause is further emphasised when a student dashes out of a street towards his taxi, forcing him to swerve, an action that results in his car's wingmirror getting knocked off. The Seoul driver yells after the student for damaging his car, as the student is chased by the riot police. Song's driver continues to vent his frustrations as the student gets further out of sight, before being interrupted by a woman in labour and her husband needing a taxi ride to the hospital. When it transpires that the couple accidentally left their wallets at home, he berates them, demanding they come by and pay him double the next day, while the wife cries out in the pain of her contractions before him. In this way, the Seoul driver is coded initially by his political apathy, by his self-centeredness, by his *cheap*ness, and by his concern for money – a notion that frequent allusions to are made throughout the film.

This is counterposed, by the generosity and altruism through which the taxi drivers of Gwangju are portrayed. For example, our first introduction to Hwang Tae-sol (a local Gwangju taxi driver, and a key supporting character) comes in a hospital car park when he is overheard refusing a fare to a local reporter on the principled basis that if journalists continue not reporting on the uprising then he is right to refuse to drive them. In response, the Seoul driver remarks 'Gwangju taxi drivers must be rich, turning down fares like that.' Moments later, a heavily damaged taxi comes speeding into the car park and pulls up. Its driver jumps out and immediately piggy-backs a severely injured high-schooler into the hospital. Through the parallels here with the Seoul driver's introduction, he is immediately marked as antithetical to the selfless Gwangju drivers.

However, throughout his time in Gwangju, his differences with the Gwangju drivers are eroded as he gets further exposed to the tragedies of Gwangju – getting caught up in clashes between the military and the protesters – and to the generosity of the Gwangju people. Key in this is the character of Hwang, who represents a Gwangju counterpart to the Seoul driver. Though initially established by his differences to the Seoul driver, the two develop a friendship as Hwang takes the Seoul driver and Hinzpeter into his

house after their taxi breaks down. Hwang helps get the taxi fixed up, and the next day provides the Seoul driver with the South Jeolla Province licence plates that will help him make it out of the city safely, an act which demonstrates his acceptance of the Seoul driver's inherited status as a citizen of Gwangju, granted to him by his first-hand experience of the military's atrocities and by assistance in the journalistic efforts of Hinzpeter.

His transformation into a *citizen* of Gwangju and a Gwangju hero is further highlighted when during the film's climax he takes his taxi – fixed with the South Jeolla Province licence plates, thus making it visually indistinguishable from the Gwangju taxis – and leads a procession of other Gwangju (South Jeolla) taxis into the line of fire in order to rescue wounded citizens. His willingness here to potentially sacrifice his taxicab demonstrates the extent of his transformation – from the man who started the film enraged by a protester damaging his wingmirror – as he demonstrates the same self-sacrifice and altruism through which the taxi drivers of Gwangju throughout the film are characterised. Meanwhile, this sacrifice and altruism is only emphasised later in the film during an extended car chase sequence, in which the Gwangju drivers each crash their vehicles into those of the authorities in close pursuit of the Seoul taxi, thus allowing the Seoul driver to safely ensure Hinzpeter's escape. The sequence itself, for the film, marks an uncharacteristic indulgence of explicit genre (action) style, and one that admittedly temporarily ruptures the film's historical credibility – not least because the real Hinzpeter's reports make no reference to any such car chase.[216] Nevertheless, the crude effect of this action genre intervention – much like in *May 18* – marks these taxi drivers conspicuously in terms of their heroism, thus reaffirming notably the Seoul driver's transformation into a historical hero.

For both of the film's leads, personal transformation is also signified through cinematographic style, and specifically through the differences in shots focusing on the Seoul driver and on Hinzpeter. Through our introduction to the driver, for instance, as

[216] See, Jürgen Hinzpeter, "An Eyewitness Report of the Kwangju Citizen's Uprising in 1980," in *Kwangju in the Eyes of the World,* ed. Amalie M. Weber (Seoul: Pulbit Publishing Co., 1997), 29-50; and, Jürgen Hinzpeter, "I Bow My Head," in *The Kwangju Uprising: Eyewitness Press Accounts of Korea's Tiananmen,* eds. Henry Scott-Stokes and Lee Jai Eui, (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2000), 63-76.

we see him singing while driving his car happily through daytime Seoul, he is presented through clean and crisp cinematography that emphasises the bright colours of the frames' palette (for instance, the pastel yellow of the driver's uniform and the green of his taxicab are often the brightest colours in any given frame). This presents a direct contrast with the grittier darker tones of the softer and smokier focussed shots that are used upon our introduction to Hinzpeter, when talking with other journalists in Japan he learns about the uprising in Gwangju. These cinematographic introductions reflect key aspects of each character and help visualise the characters in terms of their difference (the bright blissful social ignorance of the driver, and the gritty journalistic realism of Hinzpeter). These differences in perspectives are stressed throughout the film's opening scenes, and ultimately provide a frequent source of friction between the film's central duo. And while, following Hinzpeter and the driver's meeting, the film largely ceases to denote these differences in perspectives through its use of colour – likely in part due to the practical limitations of having the two featured in the same frame for significant portions of the film – cinematography nevertheless continues to play a key role in negotiating difference.

This is clear through how the film uses point-of-view shots, specifically through how shots of Hinzpeter's POV are initially frequently mediated through the lens of the camera his character uses to record the events of Gwangju. This is evident notably in a sequence of four consecutive shots, as the duo first enter Gwangju. We first see a close-up of Hinzpeter emotionlessly filming through his camera, followed by a POV shot of graffiti on a shop front that mimics the framing and film stock of the camera Hinzpeter uses; it uses a darker, grainier hue and a narrower aspect ratio. The film then cuts to a closeup of the driver, and then to the driver's POV, for which the film returns to its standard framing and cinematography as the driver, too, looks out on the graffiti. The symmetry in the shots used stresses the difference in perspective between the two characters by emphasising the objectiveness of Hinzpeter's journalistic viewpoint: specifically in that the through-the-camera-lens POV shot makes conspicuous the very act of journalism, reminding us Hinzpeter's role is to observe and document, to act as a vessel for history.

The film returns to these camera-lens-mediated POV shots several times before Hinzpeter and the driver first witness a skirmish between the military and protesters. Yet during this first skirmish, the film begins to aestheticise, again through use of POV shots, a change in the perspectives of the two characters. The sequence begins with the two, accompanied by a Korean journalist, and Jae-sik (a student activist, acting as a translator for Hinzpeter) standing on the roof of a building looking down as the clash begins. We see the characters looking down over the edge of the building, as close-ups of their reactions are intercut with point-of-view shots. Close-ups on Hinzpeter filming the scene through his camera are accompanied by the whirring sound of his camera and followed by POV shots employing, again, the narrower aspect ratio and grainier film stock similar to what would have been used by his actual camera. The footage gives the impression of archive news footage, and is interspersed with POV shots of the other characters, which use the film's typical wider-aspect ratio and higher-grade film stock. The cinematography sets Hinzpeter's perspective apart from the Koreans featured in the sequence. Through its mediation by an instrument of technology his point-of-view is marked as objective – in the sense that it conveys Hinzpeter's personal detachment from, and impartiality towards, the events he is filming – whereas the unmediated POV shots used for the Koreans mark their witnessing of the clash in a more subjective and personal manner.

For the Seoul driver, echoing his gradual apprehension of the significance and severity of the events of Gwangju, he is the last of the four characters to take notice of the clash and to have his own POV shots featured in the progression of the sequence, shortly before the group head down to street level and get caught within the melee. As they join the street, we then follow the Seoul driver in a series of tracking shots as he gets briefly separated from Hinzpeter, disoriented by the military's tear gas and bumped around trying to make his way against the flow of the protesters (i.e. away from the military). Within each shot, the brightness of the yellow of his uniform makes him stand out from the protesters of Gwangju, emphasising his distinction from the people of Gwangju. Yet as the sequence develops, the distinction of both the driver's and Hinzpeter's respective perspectives from the people of Gwangju is eroded.

This begins when the Seoul driver finds Hinzpeter and accidentally knocks Hinzpeter's camera out of his hand, damaging the camera and consequently depriving Hinzpeter of the ability to mediate his own perspective and maintain his personal objectivity. The cinematography then begins to mimic Hinzpeter's loss of journalistic objectivity. The film cuts to a series of close-ups of tear gas cannisters being fired and landing in the crowds, then to a front-facing mid-shot of a unit of soldiers as they begin a charge towards the camera, towards the protesters. At this moment it cuts back to a slow-motion mid-shot in which the Seoul driver, Hinzpeter and Jae-sik are centrally framed, caught in a crowd of protesters, and looking towards the on-coming military. This framing marks a consolidation of the driver's and Hinzpeter's perspectives with the people of Gwangju who surround them. This consolidation is further visualised by the brightness of the driver's uniform here washed out by the smokiness of the tear gas, and by Hinzpeter, unable to use his camera, looking on at the scene with his own eyes. The use of slow-motion, breaks with the direct realism of the previous real-time shots, emphasising a sense of subjective experience.

This sense of subjectivity is furthered as we cut to a series of POV shots from their collective perspective, which depict the soldiers proceeding to storm the protesters through a cloud of tear gas smoke. Use of slow-motion, combined with back-lighting of the tear gas smoke breaks with cinematographic realism creating instead a view of the events unfolding that conforms with Béla Balázs' characterisation of cinematographic expressionism: 'It provides the total image of a milieu, but stylizes it into an expressive physiognomy rather than leaving it to the viewer to imbue the scene with [their] own momentary mood.'[217] In other words, such expressive cinematographic stylisation imposes a milieu or mood through which a shot, sequence or scene should be received by a viewer. Here through the smoke, the soldiers are cast as dark, faceless silhouettes, while through the slow-motion their movements appear exaggerated. This creates a milieu of horror that emphasises the brutality of the soldiers' actions, as they wield their truncheons and beat at the protesters. Deep, minor key, strings music joins the film's nondiegesis, striking an ominous tone reflecting and adding to the atmosphere of fear felt by the driver, Hinzpeter and the citizens of Gwangju. The effect of the music

[217] Béla Balázs, *Béla Balázs: Early Film Theory. Visible Man and the Spirit of Film*, ed. Erica Carter, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2010), 51.

and cinematography is that it creates an emotional realism that projects and stresses the subjective experience of being caught up in the battle. Moreover, the fact that these shots are taken from the consolidated points-of-view of Hinzpeter, the driver, and Jae-sik marks the abandonment of both Hinzpeter's and the driver's statuses as *the other* (the foreign other, and the regional other, respectively). This is reinforced as the film cuts to a shot of Hinzpeter pulling his camera back to his eye and starting to film, a shot followed immediately by a POV shot unmediated by his camera lens and filmed using the newly introduced expressionistic slow-motion cinematographic style. This editing and shot selection symbolically completes Hinzpeter's loss of objective perspective (or journalistic detachment).

Cinematographic expressionism – characterised by the use of slow-motion and smoke (or tear gas) as a means of emphasising the brutality of the military and the suffering, pain and death of the Gwangju citizens – becomes a key part of the visual language through which the film depicts the horrors of Gwangju, as it is employed again during the two other battle scenes portrayed during the film. For instance, during a subsequent night-time skirmish sequence, colour is used to amplify this effect, with the smoke in the air, and the light more generally, coloured burnt orange. Compounded by infrequent shots featuring buildings on fire, this lighting creates the impression of a city on fire and grants it an almost hellish quality, most notable when the Seoul driver stumbles across a truck of stripped, bound, and beaten protesters; filmed from the driver's POV, through the orange hue of the smoke in the air, the writhing bodies packed into the back of the truck appear like tortured souls in a manner reminiscent of any number of cultural depictions of the Biblical hell. While no doubt a deviation from the aesthetic reality of the historical event, this visual stylisation seems intended to stress the horror felt by those who witnessed and experienced that history, thus favouring emotional over aesthetic realism.

Meanwhile, the video-camera-mediated point-of-view shots, indicative of Hinzpeter's journalistic objectivity remain absent from these battle sequences, even though during both sequences Hinzpeter is seen filming the action unfold. Close-ups of Hinzpeter's face emphasise his inability to personally distance himself from his camera's subject, as his face appears emotional and often tearful while he operates his video camera – a

notable distinction from the stoic facial expressions we see from him during the film's earlier scenes, and one indicative of his emotional affectedness. Meanwhile, the POV shots that follow are shot using a mixture of the film's typical and expressionistic cinematographic styles, further stressing his perspectival convergence to the citizens of Gwangju. In fact, the film only returns to the camera-lens-mediated POV shot for one other scene in the film: when, having left Gwangju only to return out of a sense of duty, the Seoul driver finds Hinzpeter crying in a hospital before the dead body of the student and translator Jae-sik. Here the driver reminds Hinzpeter of the importance of Hinzpeter's journalistic mission, and tells him he needs to keep filming everything he is witnessing in Gwangju. This scene marks Hinzpeter's most visibly emotionally affected moment of the film, and so, when he brings the camera to his face, the trauma and sadness caught in his facial expressions juxta-posed with the subsequent camera-lens-mediated POV shots create a strong contrast. These POV shots, which give the impression of historical actuality through their recreation of the news footage style, bear an inherent objective emotionless that is betrayed by the closeups of Hinzpeter's personal emotional reaction. In this contrast, Hinzpeter's personal identity is rendered divided, caught between his status as a member of the foreign press and his personal empathy with the citizens of Gwangju, developed after having shared in their suffering and oppression by the military.

While for the Seoul driver, his personal transformation culminates with his identification with the people of Gwangju and signalled through his convergence to the Gwangju taxi drivers, similar can also be said of Hinzpeter's character within the film. Yet while the driver's shift in identification occurs on a regional basis, Hinzpeter's is conceived of on a more national level, as he develops a closer identification with Korea more generally. As noted previously, Hinzpeter begins the film marked by his foreignness. Yet throughout the film, alongside adopting a more subjective perspective on the events of Gwangju, the film draws attention to the instances in which he is exposed to specifically Korean culture. Most noticeable in relation to this, is a scene in which having been invited to Gwangju taxi driver Hwang's house for a traditional Korean dinner, Hinzpeter tries kimchi for the first time. Despite claiming to be able to eat spicy food, he finds the kimchi too spicy to handle, leading him to ask for 'Wasser' (German for water) in the only moment of the film that the character of Hinzpeter

speaks German. This moment draws attention to Hinzpeter's foreign status, by highlighting the cultural differences between him and his Korean setting, before the Seoul driver says (as the film's English subtitles read) 'You come to a foreign country, break a camera, eat kimchi. You've been through a lot, too.' In saying this, the scene marks the acceptance of Hinzpeter – in the moment where he is most noticeably German – by a Korean community, made up here of the Seoul driver, Hwang and his family, and Jae-sik. The Seoul driver's comment notes Hinzpeter's geographic displacement, his newfound perspective (alluded to by the broken camera) and his exposure to Korean culture (the kimchi). Through the words he uses, each of these experiences are recognised by the driver for the hardship and suffering that accompanies them; while the subtitles read 'You've been through a lot, too', the Korean '*neo-do cham go-saeng-i-da*' translates perhaps more accurately to 'You've had a lot of hardship, too.' The implication is that he has been accepted on account of the hardships he has endured. And in particular, in equating eating kimchi (or enduring the spiciness of kimchi) – an everyday act for most Koreans – to one such act of hardship, the driver's words suggest that Hinzpeter has been accepted for having experienced the everyday hardships of South Korean life.

Regarding the buddy movie – a genre which *A Taxi Driver* loosely structures around its two central characters – Cynthia Fuchs comments: 'the buddy movie typically collapses intramasculine differences by effecting an uncomfortable sameness, a transgression of boundaries between self and other, inside and outside'.[218] Rather than collapsing intramasculine differences, this moment marks the collapsing of the intranational differences of its central buddy duo, with in particular Hinzpeter's foreign identity collapsing into *the Korean* through the Seoul driver's acceptance of Hinzpeter for the codedly Korean hardships he has suffered. Moreover, through this Korean codification of Hinzpeter, Hinzpeter's experiences become rendered in terms of *haan.*

[218] Cynthia J. Fuchs, "The Buddy Politic," in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in the Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (New York: Routledge, 2008), 194.

It is often argued that 'by definition, only Koreans have [*haan*]'.[219] Accordingly, in *A Taxi Driver,* it is only after German journalist Jürgen Hinzpeter becomes codified as *Korean* that he (and his emotion) is able to be characterised with respect to *haan.* This characterisation through *haan* is most apparent in the closing scenes, beginning with a scene in which, prior to boarding his plane leaving Korea, Hinzpeter asks for the Seoul driver's name and a contact number – so that he can pay for the taxi's repairs when he returns to Korea. The driver, noticing a packet of Sa-bok cigarettes in his taxicab, writes his name down as Kim Sa-bok, and provides a fake phone number. Consequently, when Hinzpeter returns to Korea he is unable to find the driver. Through a pair of scenes that close the film, this unresolved search for *Kim Sa-bok* is then portrayed as something of a lifelong quest for Hinzpeter. The first of these scenes features Hinzpeter returning to Korea in 2003, as Hinzpeter did in real life, to receive the Song Kun-ho Journalism Award – an award given for contributions to Korean journalism, a further indicator of Hinzpeter's acceptance by Korean society. Giving a speech in acceptance of the award, Hinzpeter comments:

> I still remember the faces of the citizens I met in Gwangju, that spring of 1980. And I will never forget. But there is one face in particular that I miss dearly. My brave friend, Kim Sa-bok. He is a taxi driver. Without him, news of the Gwangju Uprising would have never reached the world. I'm afraid my words fail to express my gratitude, but you're always in my thoughts. Mr. Kim, my dear friend. Thank you. I've missed you. I'll keep waiting. I hope to see you again soon.

This speech is intercut with shots of the Seoul driver in 2003, still working as a taxi driver, reading a news article about Hinzpeter and saying 'I wanted to see you again, too. At least I see you like this. You've grown old too', before a customer steps into his taxi, and he must drive off into the night through the streets of Seoul. The sentiments expressed by both men, resonate strongly with notions of *haan,* specifically through the senses of loss and longing evoked. It is on this note of *haan* that, as Song's driver drives away and the film fades to black, the film's narrative closes, thus framing the film's narrative through the sense of *haan* felt by Hinzpeter, through remembrance of his lost friend.

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[219] Euny Hong, *The Birth of Korean Cool: How One Nation is Conquering the World Through Pop Culture* (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2014), 52.

A postscript then states:

> The footage Hinzpeter risked his life to shoot with the help of Kim Sa-bok was broadcast to the world, exposing the military dictatorship's oppression. Hinzpeter tried several times to find the taxi driver Kim Sa-bok. In January 2016, he passed away without having met him again.

Like the postscript of *May 18,* these words remind viewers of the historical actualities on which the film is based, while highlighting the heroism of Hinzpeter and Kim Sa-bok. Meanwhile, through iterating that Hinzpeter died while still searching for his lost friend, the postscript stresses the personal emotional reality behind the sentiments of *haan* the preceding scene conjures. These sentiments are reiterated once more through the footage of the real life Hinzpeter – taken from November 2015 (2 months prior to his death) and filmed in his native German – upon which the film ends. Hinzpeter comments:

> It would be truly wonderful if I could meet you again. Oh…really, I'd be happy beyond words. If I could find you through this footage, and then meet you once again, I would just be so happy. I'd rush over to Seoul in an instant, ride with you in your taxi, and see the new Korea.

Importantly, while the shift in Hinzpeter's national codification – from foreign (or transnational) other, towards *Korean* – allows Hinzpeter's sentiments to be rendered in terms of *haan,* through the use of archive footage here *haan* is projected directly onto the historical figure of Hinzpeter and his personal perspective. With the use of the archive footage underlining the historicity of the film's source material and main characters, the projection and evocation of *haan* here – along with its separate composite emotions – implies a resonance between the emotionality constructed through the film's final scenes, and the lived experiences and memories of Hinzpeter; it accentuates the perceived (*haan*ful) emotional realities through which the film frames its historical narrativisation. This projects the film's narrative in terms of remembrance, and specifically in terms of Hinzpeter's *haan*ful remembrance of the events of Gwangju and of his lost friend.

Important also is how that lost friend is projected as a Gwangju hero through the film's narrative, first through the driver's gradual assimilation with the people of Gwangju, and then through the eventual bravery of his actions in Gwangju that culminates in the film's climax with the extended car chase sequence – in which the Seoul driver drives

Hinzpeter and his film footage safely out of Gwangju, pursued by various military personnel. As previously noted, the chase sequence itself, through over-indulgence of action genre spectacle, breaks with believability; unlike the climactic shootout that ends *May 18,* the chase here represents not an embellishment of history through use of action genre convention but rather an altogether historical invention, one that pushes the boundaries of acceptable historical licence. And yet the underlying emotional reality that punctuates the film's emotional framing (i.e. the lived emotions of Jürgen Hinzpeter, allegorised throughout the film and depicted directly through the film's closing real-life footage) goes a long way to redeeming the historical credibility breached through the film's climax, a credibility that proves key to the projection of emotional realism. The subsequent closing scenes, in particular, act to remind audiences of the film's rooting in historical actuality, primarily through the emotional address of the character Hinzpeter's awards speech and later of the real-life Hinzpeter; the consistencies in content and emotional tone of speech in both instances work to directly realign the fiction of the film with the historical reality behind it, in a manner that preserves the themes and messages that the fiction of the film cultivates. The heroism of the driver is one such theme, and through the self-granted anonymity the driver retains by providing Hinzpeter a fake name, the heroism of the driver is then projected onto Gwangju's people more generally, and onto all the anonymous heroes of Gwangju (both dead and living) that have been lost to history. Finally, through the film's final scenes, which position the driver's heroism within the *haan*-inflected memory of Hinzpeter, the film sutures an emotional angle of address into the way that it seeks to memorialise the heroism of the people of Gwangju, in turn offering contemporary audiences a specifically and *haan*fully angled prosthetic memory on a traumatic chapter of Korean history.

Mediating Memory through *Haan*

An unexpected consequence of *A Taxi Driver*'s release was that it led to the identification of the taxi driver, of the real Kim Sa-bok. Interviews and articles began surfacing in which the driver's son, Kim Seung-pil, revealed details of the driver's life, his relationship with Hinzpeter, and the fact that the real Kim Sa-bok had died in 1984 of liver cancer, caused by a heavy drinking habit he developed following his

experiences in Gwangju.[220] Notable, to this was how the journalism surrounding this revelation – despite contesting the historical accuracy of parts of the film's representation[221] – often echoed the manner in which *A Taxi Driver* emotionally framed its narrative of history. Headlines such as 'Real-life heroes of "A Taxi Driver" pass away without having reunited', resonate with the sentiments of *haan* through which the film presents their post-Gwangju estrangement. Meanwhile, since the revelation, in 2019 real life convened to reunite the two estranged friends, with the remains of Kim Sa-bok relocated and interred next to a monument in Gwangju enshrining Hinzpeter's remains. Of this, Vice Secretary General of the May 18 Memorial Foundation Lee Ki-bong commented that it was 'meaningful to let them encounter even after both of them passed away',[222] a suggestion that, again, resonates with notions of *haan* and perpetuates the narrative of *haan* that *A Taxi Driver* instils. This attests to how the memory of Gwangju presented by *A Taxi Driver* has carried beyond the screen and has continued to shape the historical narratives and cultural memories – the very act of historiography – surrounding the Gwangju Democratic Uprising, its victims, and its heroes.

This speaks to the broader network of mediation of cultural memory and cultural trauma, of which cinema plays an important role. Over the past three decades, the Gwangju Democratic Uprising has repeatedly been a subject of exploration for South Korean cinema. While the films discussed in this chapter may vary in how they depict the events of May 1980, they collectively play an important role in the cultural mediation of the memory of Gwangju, and arguably an increasingly central role – granted by the scale of audience exposure to these depictions. While the earlier films dealing with Gwangju espoused messages stressing the importance of collective

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[220] Choi Min-young, "Real-life Heroes of "A Taxi Driver" Pass Away Without Having Reunited," *Hankyoreh,* May 14, 2018, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/844517.html.

[221] For example, contrary to the film's portrayal, the son revealed that the real Kim Sa-bok and Hinzpeter had a longstanding professional relationship dating back to at least 1975. See Choi, "Real-life Heroes."

[222] Hyeong-Ju Lee, "Two Real-life Heroes of Movie 'Taxi Driver" Meet in 40 Years," *The Dong-a Ilbo,* December 25, 2018, http://www.donga.com/en/article/all/20181225/1589117/1/Two-real-life-heroes-of-movie-Taxi-driver-meet-in-40-years.

remembrance, more recent films have helped fulfil that message by memorialising Gwangju for sizable mainstream audiences. And as the events of Gwangju retreat further from living memory and into history, film has the continued ability to introduce new generations, and new audiences, to the memory of Gwangju, and the continued ability to preserve a sense of the emotional realities of the lived event. Especially when mainstream cinema engages in this process, how that memory is constructed, narrativised, and thematically and emotionally framed impacts how the memory of Gwangju lives on.

In terms of cinema's mediation of that memory so far, it is significant that, despite the varied representations of Gwangju, *haan* is repeatedly evoked and used to emotionally and thematically frame narratives relating to the uprising. Consequently, the cultural memory of Gwangju has repeatedly been cinematically mediated through the idiom and emotion of the national sentiment of *haan.* This helps embed memory of Gwangju further within the historical poesis of *haan* as a key moment of hardship in the imagination of the historical (South) Korean experience, and a moment that's emotional residue remains unresolved. The films discussed here – be it in the prospect of a heavily traumatised girl still wandering through the South Jeolla countryside, through a portrait of a family that never came to be, or in the pleas of a journalist to reunite with his lost friend – each emphasise this lack of resolution and thus perpetuate the feeling of *haan* that stems from the memory of Gwangju, while simultaneously reinforcing Gwangju's position of prominence within the South Korean idiomatic historiography of *haan.* In this respect there is a process of self-perpetuation at work whereby the evocation of *haan* through historical representation reinforces the significance of *haan* to a moment of national history and cultural trauma. This is not a process exclusive to cinematic representation of Gwangju, but rather one that occurs whenever *haan* is invoked in the telling of aspects or narratives of national history. I explore this notion further in my next chapter, as I consider a recent cycle of films addressing the history and legacy of South Korea's 1910-1945 colonisation by Japan.

Constructing Nation: Colonial Era Korea in the Popular Cinematic Imaginary

In my first chapter, I characterise *haan* as social realist affect, through how it assimilates and equates an individual instance with the notion of a broader and historical collective Korean experience. My intention in doing so is to conceptualise *haan* not just in terms of theme or affect, but in terms of its interrelatedness as both theme and affect. This is a key distinction from much of the existing discussion surrounding *haan*'s role in Korean cinema, in which *haan* is typically conceived of as a distinct, or isolated, theme. While I do not dispute that it can and does manifest cinematically as such, I contend that more typically it does not manifest itself as thematic in-and-of itself, but rather that it acts as an emotional and idiomatic lens through which other themes are contextualised with, and into, a Korean national context. This chapter explores this notion in relation to how national and historical allegory is emotionally and thematically constructed by a recent wave of popular films depicting Korea's colonial era. In doing so, I argue that *haan* is key to how these films project national identity.

When it comes to national identity in South Korea, no two periods have provided such a formative impact as have the 1910-1945 annexation of Korea by Japan, and the 1950-1953 Korean War which left the country divided in two. It is perhaps no surprise then that in the development of a popular contemporary South Korean cinema, films concerning the North-South divide, at least, have played a significant role. From *Shiri* (Kang Je-gyu, 1999), to *J.S.A: Joint Security Area* (Park Chan-wook, 2000), *Silmido* (Kang Woo-suk, 2003), *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War* (Kang Je-gyu, 2004), and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* (Park Kwang-hyun, 2005), much critical attention has already been given to how films relating to the Korean War and its aftermath proved important to the early development of the Korean blockbuster into a dominant and successful staple of the Korean film industry. Naturally to films of such subject matter, appeals to national identity proved key to the popularity of these films in the local market. For instance, as Darcy Paquet writes of 10 Million Club member *Taegukgi*: 'the work's primary draw for local audiences was its dramatic (and melodramatic) portrayal of a nation that lived through tremendous upheaval and suffering, ultimately shaping the

kind of country that exists today.'[223] In other words, key to the film's appeal was its use of the past as a site for elaboration and reinforcement of present-day national identity – a notion which is key to how I here consider Korean cinema's exploration of the colonial era.

The years since *Taegukgi* have seen the North-South divide remain a prominent subject matter within the landscape of popular South Korean cinema, yet only in recent years (i.e. since the release of Choi Dong-hoon's *Assassination* in 2015) have films dealing with Korea's colonisation by Japan found consistent box office success and resonance amongst audiences. There are countless potential reasons for this previous lack of popular appeal to the subject matter, but quantity of films set in the era is not one of them. As Jinsoo An notes:

> Since its liberation in 1945, South Korea has produced over two hundred films that are set in the colonial era (1910-45). Not only is that number impressive, but a breakdown by decade shows a pattern of consistent production output: there has been no discernible drop in production of colonial-themed films. This consistency over time suggests that the anticolonial nationalist impulse is an ideological constant in South Korea's cultural production and that nationalist ideology is embedded in postcolonial society.[224]

Despite such consistency of production, and such dominant ideological orientations of South Korean society, colonial era-set films historically have garnered limited popular and critical interest, with much of the historical output – in particular the pre-democratisation output – dismissed as propagandistic.[225]

Nevertheless, recent years have seen a change as films set in colonial era Korea have found a great degree of resonance with contemporary audiences and critics.[226] A wave of films – including *Assassination, The Age of Shadows* (Kim Jee-woon, 2016), *The Tiger*

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[223] Darcy Paquet, *New Korean Cinema: Breaking the Waves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 99.
[224] Jinsoo An, *Parameters of Disavowal: Colonial Representation in South Korean Cinema* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 4.
[225] An, *Parameters of Disavowal,* 4.
[226] Fabien Schneider, "Gyeongseong, the Exotic City of the Past," KoBiz, October 12, 2016, https://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/features.jsp?blbdComCd=601013&seq=335&mode=FEATURES_VIEW.

(Park Hoon-jung, 2015), *Dongju: The Portrait of a Poet* (Lee Joon-ik, 2016), *The Handmaiden* (Park Chan-wook, 2016), *The Last Princess* (Hur Jin-ho, 2016), *Spirits' Homecoming* (Cho Jung-rae, 2016), *Anarchist from Colony* (Lee Joon-ik, 2017), and *The Battleship Island* (Ryoo Seung-wan, 2017) – have reached relatively large audiences in the Korean marketplace,[227] employing a broad range of commercial and arthouse styles to tackle a similarly broad range of stories and subject matters relating to colonised Korea. Yet despite the diversity of these films, there are key identifiable consistencies in how they portray and narrativise Korea's colonial past, not least in how *haan* is deployed to emotionally and thematically supplement key themes like Korean collaboration (with the Japanese Empire), female agency, and narratives of historical failure. This chapter analyses how *haan* helps frame each of these themes with respect to the cinematic construction and imagination of (South) Korean national identity.

What I argue is distinct about this wave of films is the consistent manner through which the era depicted plays an active role in cinematically mediating national identity. Key to this is the transitionary nature of the colonial era for Korea, and the unique position it holds within the national imaginary. The era was a point of rupture in the nation's history: in effect, it brought an end to the sovereignty of Korea's centuries-old Joseon Dynasty; it saw the country undergo dramatic transformation through its turn to modernisation; and, it represents the last definable era of *unity* for the Korean people before, in the aftermath of Japan's surrender to the allied forces in World War Two, the nation divided into North and South. Simultaneously, the era acted as a symbolic battlefield for defining the very idea of Korea. As Gi-wook Shin and Michael Robinson note, there is broad 'conviction that turn-of-the-century nationalism was not a pent-up reservoir of pre-existing Koreanness ready to flow along the deep new channel provided by imported concepts of the nation-state'.[228] Instead 'the notion of the nation'

[227] The least commercially successful of the films mentioned (the independently produced *Dongju: The Portrait of the Poet*) still accrued almost 1,200,000 admissions, an impressive haul for an independent feature in South Korea. KoBiz, accessed March 26, 2020, https://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/main/main.jsp.
[228] Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, "Introduction: Rethinking Colonial Korea," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea,* eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 5.

was 'contested, negotiated, reformulated, and reconstructed during the colonial period, and the process continues today in different form.'[229] In particular, the era saw the development of discourses around certain nationalist concepts (e.g. *minjok* and *minjung*) that remain to this day an important part of how many Koreans relate to the idea of Korea and interpret national history. Perhaps for these reasons, Shin and Robinson take note of the 'disproportionately dominant role Japanese colonial repression plays in historical narratives on Korea', particularly in relation to Korea's nationalist historiographies.[230] It is for similar reasons that the era provides an important cinematic space for constructing an image of nation, of Korea's national past, in a way that speaks to contemporary issues relating to national identity.

In this sense, I suggest that the colonial era offers contemporary Korean cinema a space similar to that which America's Old West offers American cinema, in particular through the Western genre. As Christine Gledhill writes:

> For [some] critics…a crucial factor is the precise moment in the conquering of the west that the western takes up – a moment critical in the formation of America as a nation balanced between the past and the future, 'when options are still open'. Most critics agree that the fact that this moment of choice is past intensifies its possibility for ideological elaboration. Options closed off by history and a developing social order can safely be reopened, nostalgically indulged, judged and closed off again.[231]

In the manner through which the past is reopened for ideological elaboration, a distinct parallel can be drawn between cinematic representations of the Old West by the American Western genre, and Korea's colonial era by contemporary South Korean cinema. There is, though, a key difference in that, while the Western presents the theme of 'conquering the west' as critical to nation building, for these Korean films the strive for liberation – not conquest – provides the key thematic backdrop against which elaboration of national identity, from a contemporary perspective, takes place. *Haan* I argue is key to how these films confront the strive for liberation and connect that strive with certain prominent other themes. Accordingly, in this chapter, I analyse how *haan* is used as a filter through which themes of Korean collaboration with the Japanese

[229] Shin and Robinson, "Introduction," 15.
[230] Shin and Robinson, "Introduction," 7.
[231] Christine Gledhill, "The Western," in *The Cinema Book,* 3rd edn., ed. Pam Cook (London: British Film Institute, 2007), 374.

Empire, Korean historical failure, and female agency in liberation efforts are channelled.

Resistance and Collaboration

> *Nae-ga il-bon gwon-lyeog-e dae-hae-seo-neun ban-gam-i iss-ji-man min-jung-han-te-neun o-hi-lyeo chin-mil-gam-i deul-ji.*
>
> English language subtitles: 'I am against the Japanese authorities, not the Japanese people.'
>
> \- Park Yeol (Lee Je-hoon)
> *Anarchist from Colony*

These subtitles epitomise what today remains a widespread cultural attitude held by Korean people towards Japan. The two nations have a long history of conflict that predates Japan's annexation of Korea by several hundred years,[232] but Japan's colonisation of Korea, in particular, has resulted in a number of grievances that remain to this day unresolved. Including the various acts of mass murder and violence committed by the Japanese empire, their cultural assimilation policies, and the general oppression of the Korean people during the colonial era, Korean suffering was so extensive that, as Brandon Palmer explains, 'Korean historical remembrance of the colonial era is dominated by a sense of [*haan*]'.[233] This sentiment lingers so strongly in both public and political discourses that, as Palmer elaborates, the actions of Japan during the colonial era:

> [remain] a salient issue in contemporary diplomatic relations between the two Koreas and Japan; North and South Koreans demand that the Japanese government assume more accountability for the exploitation of Koreans during the war. However, the Japanese government has instead obfuscated the process by which victims gain redress.[234]

This issue sits at the heart of, for example, the recent trade dispute between South Korea and Japan, which began in July 2019 and is (at the time of writing) still ongoing. Stemming from – in brief terms – disagreement between the two countries 'over what constitutes proper contrition and compensation' for Korean comfort women (sexual

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[232] Euny Hong, *The Birth of Korean Cool: How One Nation is Conquering the World Through Pop Culture* (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2014), 54.
[233] Brandon Palmer, *Fighting for the Enemy: Koreans in Japan's War, 1937-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013), 190-191.
[234] Palmer, *Fighting for the Enemy*, 190-191.

slaves for the Japanese military) and Korean labourers conscripted to work in Japanese factories and mines,[235] the dispute has spilled over into the public sphere, with large numbers of the South Korean public boycotting Japanese goods.[236] In this way, the *haanful* feeling of unresolvedness to many of the historical wrongs committed by Japan still permeates (South) Korean national consciousness. Yet given the sensitivity with which Koreans often have towards their colonial past, the distinction made by Park Yeol in Lee Joon-ik's *Anarchist from Colony* is an important one, and one which largely defines the approach with which the current wave of colonial-era set films negotiates Japan and the Japanese people.

While earlier films dealing with the colonial era, particularly those made in the decades immediately following the end of colonisation, featured 'established visual protocols of anti-Japanese ideology',[237] the current wave of films comply instead simply to an anti-colonial ideology – one that distinguishes between the Japanese colonial state, and the Japanese people and their culture. These films frequently centre around themes of resistance and activism against the Japanese state, while avoiding overt villainisation in their portrayal of the Japanese people more generally. They thus echo Park Yeol's stance of (as the English subtitles read) being 'against the Japanese authorities, not the Japanese people.'

Anarchist from Colony's narrative provides a good example of this attitude: based on true events and characters, the film follows independence activist Park Yeol through his arrest and trial on the charge of high treason. As the film depicts, Park uses the trial as a public site through which to upstage Japanese authority – he demands to stand in the court on behalf of the Korean people; to wear traditional Korean clothes in court;

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[235] Youkyung Lee and Sohee Kim, "Why Japan and South Korea Have Their Own Trade War," *The Washington Post*, September 12, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/why-japan-and-south-korea-have-their-own-trade-war/2019/09/11/82b64246-d4fb-11e9-8924-1db7dac797fb_story.html.

[236] Justin McCurry, "South Korean Boycott of Japanese Goods Hits Beer and Carmakers," *The Guardian,* September 4, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/04/south-korea-boycott-japanese-goods-beer-car-sales.

[237] An, *Parameters of Disavowal,* 44.

to stand in the court to condemn Japanese invasion; to only speak Korean at the trial; and to sit in a seat as high as the judge's. Meanwhile, the film offers sympathetic portrayals of various Japanese figures. For instance, fellow activist and Park's romantic partner, Kaneko Fumiko, is posited as Park's co-lead in the film's narrative; Park's lawyer is identified within the film as the first Japanese person to receive honours in Korea; while one scene sees Park visited in prison by a Japanese novelist and a Japanese anti-imperial activist, who 'On behalf of Japan…came to deliver apologies.' In this sense, the above subtitled dialogue of Park Yeol – spoken in one of the film's opening scenes – establishes well the politics of representation at work within the film.

Yet, the subtitles omit much of the nuance of Park's statement, which translates more literally to 'While I have antipathy towards Japanese authority, I feel an affinity with the *minjung*'. The key distinction here is the use of the term *minjung* (the oppressed masses) instead of, as the English subtitles translate, the Japanese people. Significantly, this use of the word *minjung* situates his attitudes within the rhetoric of Korean anticolonial discourses of the time, as well as of more recent political discourses in South Korea (notably the *minjung* movements of the 1970s and 1980s). It frames his attitudes distinctly in relation to (Korean) nationalism – a term which, it should be stressed, I do not consider to be the inherently negative or regressive concept it is often characterised as in contemporary public discourses, but rather as a semantically neutral concept that should be regarded differently according to how specific nationalisms manifest. [238] Given Korean anticolonial nationalism is pivotal to representation in *Anarchist from Colony* – and in most of the films discussed in this chapter – it is important here to understand the development of Korean nationalism.

Discourses of Korean nationalism, in the sense that they are recognised today, developed
against the backdrop of the colonial era. Key was the development of the belief in the ethnic homogeneity of the Korean people, a belief which political activists and

[238] For example, in this chapter I refer more specifically to anticolonial nationalism in Korea, which promoted unity and preservation for the Korean people and culture in the face of the very real threat posed against them by colonial oppression. Such nationalism is rooted not in notions of national superiority, but more in the right for the nation and its people to exist.

intellectuals incubated and popularised in the years leading up to and following Korea's annexation by Japan. A notable early proponent of this belief was Shin Chae-ho, whose 1908 text *Doksa Sillon* established the basis of a Korean ethnic-national historiography (*minjok sahak*). This historiography, as Henry H. Em explains, narrates 'the history of Korea as the history of the Korean *minjok,* a category inclusive of every Korean without regard to age, gender or status distinctions'[239] and marks an important break with previous national historiographies for its ethnic, as opposed to dynastic focus.[240] In reformulating history around the notion of the Korean *minjok* (the belief that ethnic Koreans constitute a homogenous historical constant), the *Doksa Sillon* deviated from the previous typically episodic historiographies of Korea's monarchic rulers, instead offering an unbroken narrative of the survival and perseverance of the Korean people. This, in turn, can be seen to have contributed to the establishment of what Partha Chatterjee, in his seminal work on anticolonial nationalisms, refers to as the 'inner domain' – the 'spiritual' domain that bears 'the "essential" marks of cultural identity.'[241] Chatterjee writes that 'nationalism declares the domain of the spiritual its sovereign territory and refuses to allow the colonial power to intervene in that domain.'[242] Seen in these terms, the *minjok* historiography created an inner spiritual domain in which the essence of Koreanness was held within the idea of the Koreans as one people, as a shared bloodline, a domain that could not be penetrated by foreign colonisers and that theoretically could only be destroyed with the total eradication of the Korean people. Such ethnic historiography, as John Lie argues, cannot 'bear serious scrutiny' – for instance, given historical 'movement of populations to and from' the

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[239] Henry H. Em, "Minjok as a Modern and Democratic Construct: Sin Ch'aeho's Historiography," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 339.

[240] Em elaborates that 'by identifying the *minjok* rather than the monarch, as the subject of an evolutionary history (where the strong survive and the weak perish), Sin Ch'aeho's "Toksa sillon" displaced traditional forms of Confucian historiography – *p'yŏnnyŏnch'e* (chronicles) and *kijŏnch'e* (annal-biographies) – with the (tragic) epic form. Sin Ch'aeho adopted a novel way of telling what Confucian historians had already known; his narrative utilized new codes to produce new structures of meaning quite different from that found in histories written in the chronicle and the annal-biography styles.'
Em, "Minjok," 341.

[241] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 6.

[242] Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 6.

geographical region of Korea, the notion of a single Korean bloodline cannot hold up to examination.[243] Yet, what Lie describes as a 'willing suspension of disbelief in the notion of a common national sensibility…predicated on a belief in the shared genealogy and sociology of Koreanness' remains to this day a prevalent and defining aspect of various Korean nationalisms.[244]

Usage of the term *minjung* grew out of the evolution of discourses on *minjok* nationalism. Em notes that 'In Sin Ch'aeho's [(Shin Chae-ho)] anarchist writings (1925 on), the all-embracing identity of *minjok* is replaced by the more partisan category of *minjung*',[245] a term which in differentiating the oppressed from those in power is inherently more political. Described as 'a more amorphous category than Marx's proletariat', the Korean *minjung* have 'throughout Korean history…formed the wretched majority – exploited, beaten, starved, lulled into subservience and obedience.'[246] It was through the lens of the *minjung* that Shin advocated anticolonial activism. He believed that given the historical plight of the *minjung*:

> the *minjung* was uniquely capable of sweeping away all oppressive and exploitative institutions and practices….Through a program of assassinations, bombing, and uprisings, Sin Ch'aeho believed, the "conscientized" segment of the *minjung* could succeed in imparting "resolve"…to the *minjung.* When the *minjung* as a whole resolved to take the path of revolution, all the cunning and savagery of the colonial state would not be able to stop the revolution.[247]

Notably, the term *minjung* is not itself directly referential to nationality; although often used synonymously with the Korean *minjung* (the oppressed Korean masses), the term actually refers more broadly to all masses who suffer systematic oppression. Yet, by consequence of its usage in nationalist discourses – the *minjung*'s evocation through similar such political and activist terms as those used by Shin Chae-ho – the word's literal meaning cannot be detached from the nationalist lens through which it has been used.

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[243] John Lie, *K-Pop: Popular Music, Cultural Amnesia, and Economic Innovation in South Korea* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 116.
[244] Lie, *K-Pop*, 116.
[245] Em, "Minjok," 356.
[246] Em, "Minjok," 360.
[247] Em, "Minjok," 360.

Returning to *Anarchist from Colony,* the significance of Park Yeol's use of the term *minjung* lies in the context of his dialogue 'While I have antipathy towards Japanese authority, I feel an affinity with the *minjung*.' The comment is made by Park in discussion with a friend about whether he should accept the Japanese Kaneko Fumiko as a comrade and romantic partner. Thus, in using the term *minjung* here in binary opposition to *Japanese authority,* Park distinguishes not between *Korean* and *Japanese,* but rather *the oppressed* and *the oppressors* – to which Fumiko falls into the former. Nevertheless, through the associations of the term *minjung* with Korean nationalism, by referring to Fumiko as part of the *minjung,* he in essence equates her to the Korean people and their suffering.

Park's comments engage Fumiko in a symbolic process of naturalisation; crudely put, she is accepted by Park and his activist comrades as an *honorary* Korean. This process of symbolic naturalisation plays out in various different ways throughout the film. When the film introduces us to her, we see her learning Korean pronunciation, and she spends much of the film speaking in, and improving in, the Korean language; she introduces herself to Park using first her Japanese name and then a Korean name, Mun-ja; during her and Park's trial for treason, she dresses in *hanbok* (Korean traditional dress); following her death in prison, her grave is exhumed so her body can be buried in Park's hometown in Korea; and, a Korean actress, Choi Hee-seo, is cast to play her within the film. In these and other ways, throughout the course of the film Fumiko becomes increasingly codified as *Korean.* On a more minor level, similar *naturalisation* is signified with regards to Park's defence attorney Fuse Tatsuji, through the film's postscript which acknowledges that Fuse 'was the first Japanese to be honoured Order of Merit in Korea in 2004'. And similar representations of symbolically naturalised sympathetic foreigners are an identifiable, if minor, feature amongst the wider range of films in the recent wave of colonial-era set films – for example, the Russian Ludvik in *Age of Shadows*; the Japanese bartender Kimura in *Assassination*; and the Japanese Lady Hideko in *The Handmaiden.*[248]

[248] This process of symbolic naturalisation of foreigners is exhibited beyond just films dealing with the colonial era, as we have seen through the characterisation of Jürgen Hinzpeter in *A Taxi Driver* (Jang Hoon, 2017)

These symbolic naturalisations are product of the anticolonial nationalist ideology through which these films operate. By depicting foreigners sympathetic to the Korean cause, who themselves have suffered from Japanese colonial authority, these films do not other these characters by virtue of their foreignness. Rather, in codifying them to varying degrees as *Korean,* they strip them of that otherness. In terms of nationalist ideology, this in turn reinforces the inner domain of Korean national culture, of which Chatterjee writes 'the colonial state…is kept out of'.[249] In the attribution of *Koreanness* to these characters, these films not only demonstrate the imperviousness of the Korean inner domain to colonial authority, but also signify a loss of colonial authority to the strength of that inner domain. Within this process, the defection and *naturalisation* of Japanese characters like Fumiko proves particularly symbolic.

Similarly, with regards to (Korean) anticolonial nationalism, while colonial power is refused entry to the inner domain, perhaps nothing threatens the inner domain so much as assimilation, and specifically voluntary assimilation, to the colonial powers. Much is publicly known about the Japanese assimilation policies[250] – which sought to suppress 'the Korean ethnicity' while advocating 'the spiritual unity between the Koreans and Japanese to legitimize its rule and to reduce dissent.'[251] Yet, not until relatively recently has critical attention been given to the role of ethnic Koreans who chose to assist Japan. As Brandon Palmer notes:

> The activities of pro-Japanese Koreans (K: *ch'inilp'a*) fostered a social environment in which Koreans were expected to submit to government demands. Japanese officials would have had great difficulty ruling Korea without the assistance of the thousands of ethnic Koreans who served as educators, policemen, and patriotic heads.[252]

The development of discourse and debate surrounding colonial modernity in Korea – the notion that colonisation 'was critical to the modernization of the [Korean]

[249] Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments,* 6.
[250] As Brandon Palmer notes, 'these policies required Koreans to speak Japanese, visit Shintō shrines, recite imperial rescripts, and take Japanese names. In other words, Koreans were asked to abandon 3,000 years of Korean customs and adopt Japanese culture.' Palmer, *Fighting for the Enemy,* 22.
[251] Palmer, *Fighting for the Enemy,* 18.
[252] Palmer, *Fighting for the Enemy,* 24.

peninsula [253] – since the 1990s has brought with it increased scrutiny of the relationship between 'colonialism, modernity, and nationalism.'[254] Correspondingly, it has led to greater historical awareness of the role of Korean collaborators of the Japanese Empire, as well as an increased understanding of the complexities of the relationship of the Korean people with Japanese authority, an understanding extending beyond a simplistic oppressed-oppressor dynamic. Korean cinema has responded to this, with Cynthia Childs noting that 'before the late [2000s]…it was difficult to find films addressing the colonial past which would not be classified as 'trauma cinema'', yet recent films have indicated 'a moving beyond the master-narrative of Koreans as eternal victims and a coming-of-age for Koreans as global citizens, citizens who have always had and used agency'.[255] Through analysis of the films *Radio Days* (Ha Ki-ho, 2008), *Modern Boy* (Jung Ji-woo, 2008), and *The Good, The Bad, The Weird* (Kim Jee-woon, 2008), Childs argues that by engaging with notions of colonial modernity recent colonial era-set films 'freely re-think aspects of the past as an indication of upheavals that have taken place in the imagining of Korean national identity since the turn of the century'.[256] This is true also of the more recent wave of popular films dealing with the colonial era. Yet through the manner with which they engage with Korean collaboration, in their imagining – or reimagining – of Korean national identity these films also reinforce South Korea's anticolonial nationalist impulse.

These films display a tendency to portray the historical reality of Korean collaboration as the most significant threat to the prospects of Korean independence, as well as an existential threat to Korean national identity. Meanwhile, the manner of their portrayals often evokes notions of *haan.* Choi Dong-hoon's *Assassination* provides perhaps the most notable example, providing an action thriller set around a plot to assassinate a Japanese general and a high-profile Korean collaborator to the Japanese state. Collaboration is a central theme of the film and one that leads repeatedly to personal tragedy for the Korean characters within the film. In this manner, the theme of collaboration is ultimately rendered through *haan* emotion.

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[253] Palmer, *Fighting for the Enemy,* 9.
[254] Shin and Robinson, "Introduction," 5.
[255] Cynthia Childs, "Representations of a Colonial Past in Contemporary Korean Cinema," *Asian Cinema* 23, no.1 (2012): 70.
[256] Childs, "Representations of a Colonial Past," 71.

The theme of collaboration is established clearly in the film's opening scenes. The film begins in 1911 with a meeting at a hotel between Japan's Governor-General to Korea, Terauchi, and Lee Geung-young's pro-Japanese businessman Kang In-guk. The meeting is interrupted by an attempt to assassinate the Governor-General by Lee Jung-jae's independence fighter Yem Seok-jin, who detonates a bomb near the Governor-General and proceeds to shoot his way through the Japanese soldiers who try to protect the Governor-General. Yem is ultimately unsuccessful, as Kang pulls the Governor-General over his shoulder and carries him off to safety. This act serves as a visual metaphor for the Japanese state's dependency on Koreans for survival, with Terauchi representing Japanese Imperial authority and Kang representing Korean collaboration. It resonates strongly with Palmer's previously noted suggestion that were it not for the 'assistance of…ethnic Koreans' Japan would not have been successful in ruling Korea.[257] Based on this notion, themes of collaboration within the film are developed.

This development begins with the rendering of Kang's collaboration in terms of family betrayal. In the immediately following scenes, Kang returns to his family home to find his wife harbouring the attempted assassin Yem. His wife confronts him, accusing Kang of complicity by likening his actions to the betrayal of Korea by collaborators to the Japanese state:

> Japan conquered us without even a fight. Don't we deserve better? We were just handed over. By someone like you.

She chooses to help Yem escape and, with her and Kang's infant identical-twin girls, attempts to flee the family compound to Manchuria. Rather than permitting their escape, Kang orders his men (fellow Koreans) to catch and kill his wife and the independence fighter Yem. In the ensuing chase, Yem is shot, injured, and caught, while Kang's wife is shot in the head and killed by the family butler. A closeup here of the blood from the bullet wound spraying onto the white canvas of the rickshaw, serving as Kang's wife's getaway vehicle, signifies the conflation of Kang's betrayal of Korea with a betrayal of his own family. Specifically, the splattered blood – emphasised through the closeup angle – evokes Kang's destruction and disregard for both the blood

[257] Palmer, *Fighting for the Enemy,* 24.

of his family, and by extension Korea's bloodline. Given the importance of Korean ethnic homogeneity to the Korean anticolonial nationalist imaginary, this spilling of blood seems particularly emblematic of the threat to Korea, and Koreanness, posed by Kang's collaboration.

Moreover, out of this act of family betrayal key elements of the film's plot are established, specifically through the respective fates of the infant twins following the chase. One daughter – known within the film by her Japanese name, Mitsuko – is returned to her father, while the other is carried away by her wet nurse. The film transitions forward to the year 1933 where we are reintroduced to this daughter as Ahn Ok-yoon, an independence fighter who is recruited into the film's central assassination plot. She then leads a small group of independence fighters in a mission to kill Kang In-guk and a Japanese general at the wedding of Mitsuko and the general's son, Lieutenant Kawaguchi Shunsuke.

With the marriage arranged by Kang as a means of attaining higher status for himself and his family, the film further stresses the conflation of selling out one's family with selling out one's country. Here the father actively encourages the cultural assimilation of his daughter, referring to her only by her Japanese name and marrying her off to the son of a Japanese General, another symbol of Japanese authority. Notable to this is also the manner in which Mitsuko's fiancé is characterised. For instance, one scene shows him boast of personally killing 300 Koreans, while in another he shoots dead a young Korean girl for accidentally knocking into him. Such unjust killing of an innocent child establishes him as ruthlessly anti-Korean, and casts him as a two-dimensional, unsympathetic villain who embodies the Japanese state's disregard of – and brutality towards – Korean life. This villainy reflects also onto Kang, through his willingness to marry his daughter off to such a man. Only, by the nature of his collaborator status, Kang's villainy within the film is portrayed as more severe, as is emphasised in a scene shortly following Kawaguchi's killing of the young girl in which Kang commits a similar act of ruthless murder. Here, having learned of Ahn's assassination plot, Kang visits her apartment where, upon opening the door, he shoots and kills the woman whom he believes to be both his long-lost-daughter and would-be-assassin. There is a degree of symmetry in the two acts of murder. Both occur unexpectedly and are staged similarly:

the killers are framed to the right and the victims to the left, similar distances from one another; both victims are killed with a single shot, which leads each to fall in protracted manners to the floor; and, both killers carry out their murders without any visible hesitation or remorse. Through these parallels, Kawaguchi's anti-Korean brutality is echoed through Kang's act of murder.

Yet Kang's brutality is amplified by his very willingness to kill his own daughter on behalf of the Japanese Empire, an act which again conflates family betrayal with betrayal of nation. This is signified through the visual emphasis on the daughter's blood as she dies. She is filmed in slow-motion as she falls to the ground, and the fall is shown through three different camera angles: front-facing closeup, front-facing midshot, and a reverse-angle midshot, each of which, through the use of slow-motion, emphasise the blood drawn from the bullet-wound as it splatters through the air. Though filmed in a different manner, the focussed attention on the blood splatter recalls the visual emphasis on the blood of Kang's wife splattering onto her rickshaw, creating a visual motif of spilled-blood as allegory for familial, and national betrayal – the betrayal of the *minjok* bloodline. Incidentally, the spilling of blood is not visually accentuated in Kawaguchi's murder of the young girl, as for the Japanese Kawaguchi the act is not one of betrayal. For Kang, though, having killed both his wife and daughter, his betrayal manifests in intergenerational terms which, projected onto national lines, reflects his betrayal of Korea's then-present (symbolised by the wife), and of Korea's future (symbolised by the daughter).

Kang's national betrayal, however, is eventually met with karmic retribution. Writing on the subject of Korean collaborators, Palmer notes:

> Koreans who cooperated often did so for a multitude of reasons. Suffice it to say that some elites were coerced; others acted with Korea's long-term interest (namely independence) at heart; and some cooperated to gain social status and economic benefits. Underlying the actions of many were self-preservation and the enrichment of their families.'[258]

In *Assassination,* Kang is overtly motivated by these latter categories. His introduction in the film, through his meeting with the Governor-General, establishes his desire to

[258] Palmer, *Fighting for the Enemy,* 25.

gain social status and economic prosperity through cooperation with the Japanese state, while throughout the film he repeatedly justifies his actions by claiming they were committed to protect the family. It is notable, then, that social status, family enrichment, and self-preservation are each denied to Kang as the film develops. Firstly, through the dramatic ironic twist in which he mistakenly, and unknowingly, kills the wrong daughter. Instead of his estranged daughter and would-be-assassin, Ahn, it is in fact Mitsuko – the daughter he personally raised, and who shortly before Kang's entrance had arrived at the apartment to meet Ahn – whom Kang shoots dead, resulting in the loss of the very family he was hoping to enrich. Secondly, at the wedding he arranged for Mitsuko as a means of gaining social status and official rank, he becomes enraged to learn that the Governor-General turned down his wedding invitation. To Kang, this invitation refusal signifies the Japanese state's intention of denying him rank. In discussing Korean complicity to Japanese assimilation policy, Mark E. Caprio gives evidence to the suggestion that 'the Japanese and Koreans may have harboured conflicting images of "assimilation," with the Japanese envisioning a vertical cultural integration and the Koreans a more horizontal political and economic amalgamation.'[259] This notion is alluded to here by the Governor-General's declining of the invitation; as a gesture it signifies, through the denial of social status to Kang, the systematic unobtainability for Koreans of equal status to the Japanese under the Imperial state.

Finally, Kang's collaboration does not grant him self-preservation; he ultimately falls victim to the independence movement's assassination plot against him, his death marking an avengement of his disloyalty to Korea and, more generally, of Korean complicity in its own colonisation. Following Kang's unintended murder of Mitsuko – instead of her identical twin sister Ahn – Ahn assumes Mitsuko's identity in order to get close to Kang and assassinate him. The assassination plot culminates at Mitsuko's wedding to Kawaguchi where Kang, unbeknownst to him, walks Ahn down the aisle to marry her off to the lieutenant. With Kang, as earlier discussed, accused by his wife of being like one of the people who 'just handed over Korea' to the Japanese, the film here symbolically restages the very annexation of Korea as an arranged marriage – with Ahn

[259] Mark E. Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 200.

(representing the Korean people) pushed down the aisle in a wedding dress for a marriage to the lieutenant, a symbol of Imperial authority. Yet, while at the beginning of the film Kang's wife notes that 'Japan conquered [Korea] without even a fight', the film offers a symbolic revision to that history when, reaching the altar, Ahn reveals a gun hidden in her bouquet. With the assistance of a fellow independence fighter, she initiates a shootout which leaves the Japanese officials in attendance dead. Here, the image of the reluctant bride resisting her marriage through an extended action sequence presents contemporary Korean audiences with a fantasy of colonial resistance that history did not grant their ancestors at the time of Korea's annexation.

Kang's death offers a violent exorcism of Korean complicity to Korea's historical fate, doing so with a return to the spilled-blood motif. Ahn corners Kang and aims a rifle at him, although ultimately it is one of her comrades – Hawaii Pistol – who kills Kang, shooting him in the neck. Filmed in a medium-closeup, we see Kang recoil from the bullet, and blood splatter from his neck onto his shirt – here, the white shirt offers a strong visual contrast to the almost-black blood, thus emphasising the blood itself. A subsequent mid-shot then shows Kang lying dead next to a puddle of his own blood. Whereas previously such visual emphasis on spilled blood signified familial and national betrayal, that connotation is here reversed. It marks the removal of a traitor from the family bloodline. This in turn is projected onto the *national bloodline* (the *minjok*) as Hawaii Pistol subsequently tells Ahn of a so-called 'patricidal club' – a group of Koreans who killed their collaborator parents. In doing so, he alludes to the broader prevalence and influence of Korean collaborators to the Japanese state, while his evocation of patricide draws on the generational burden on the Korean people to acknowledge the degree to which Korean people participated in and enabled their annexation by Japan. Key also is that by Hawaii Pistol denying Ahn the opportunity to kill her own father – an act that would symbolise a rupturing of her association with the actions of her father – the film promotes not a disavowal or disownment of that history, but rather a reconciliation with it.

The film then further promotes its message of reconciliation with the emotional wounds of Korean collaboration in a distinctly emotional manner, invoking *haan* for cathartic effect in the film's post-liberation-set coda. Following the aftermath of the

wedding hall shootout – in which Ahn safely escapes, but Hawaii Pistol is killed following a confrontation with the now-turncoat Yem Seok-jin – the film resituates itself from 1933 to 1945. This temporal shift is signified through the screening of newsreel footage of Korea's liberation to a roomful of independence movement members. While the newsreel brings an atmosphere of jubilance to its audience, we see one of the movement's leaders (Kim Gu) leave the screening to meet with a sorrowful fellow high-profile member of the resistance (Kim Won-bong). Asked as to the reason for his emotion, he replies 'It is liberation, but so many people died.' He then lists names of his fallen comrades, lighting flames on soju glasses to honour each one, before adding that 'People will forget them, right?' At this moment, solemn music starts playing in the film's soundtrack and the two men both express their sentiments of regret for the dead, toasting to them with their soju. The camera cuts to a closeup of the lit shot glasses, signifying fallen Koreans, and fades into a brief montage of Koreans celebrating their independence while the score – a solemn instrumental rendition of William Arms Fisher's 'Goin Home'[260] – grows louder. These elements together convey the conflict between celebration and grief elicited by Korea's liberation, emotion that is granted a sense of historicity notably by the focus on Kim Gu and Kim Won-bong—two characters who, unlike the majority of the film's cast, are not fictitious inventions but rather prominent historical figures. The emotions they express, then, are presented as directly allegoric of the grief and celebration felt by the historical figures themselves – along with that of the broader Korean public of 1945 – in turn creating a sense of emotional realism. Meanwhile, through the nature of the conflict between the grief and celebration exhibited, the scene evokes the residue of *haan* from the colonial era, a residue that has permeated post-colonial Korea's memory of its history.

The film then transitions to 1949 and the trial of Yem Seok-jin, who following his arrest (for the attempted assassination of Governor-General at the start of the film) switched allegiances to become an enforcer of Japanese law, simultaneously becoming the film's chief antagonist. The transition to his trial for crimes against the nation, juxtaposed with the previous scene's evocation of *haan* emotion, posits Yem's crimes – his collaboration with the Japanese authorities – as another source of national *haan.* While

[260] Itself an adaptation of the theme from the Largo of Antonín Dvořák's 'Symphony No.9' (known also as the 'New World Symphony').

throughout the film he commits countless acts that cement his guilt as a traitor of Korea, he is ultimately acquitted, following a passionate monologue in which Yem lies of how his actions were committed out of patriotism (i.e. in order to help the Korean resistance). His monologue is greeted with cheers of support from the courtroom spectators, and as he leaves the courthouse he is saluted by members of the Korean police. This indicates his acceptance into the public record as a Korean patriot, as was no doubt the case for countless Korean collaborators following Korea's independence, and in spite of their actions against Korea.

The film poses such misconceived commemoration of collaborators as an issue of Korean history in need of reconciliation, doing so by employing genre again for escapist catharsis. Walking home from the courthouse, Yem believes he spots the deceased Mitsuko in the crowds of a Seoul high street, as if haunted by the crimes of past. He follows her into a secluded enclosure behind the high street where he is confronted by a man who turns out to be Myung-woo – a former independence fighter who was shot in the face by Yem earlier in the film. Here, the film borrows elements of Western genre aesthetic. The two men wear long coats and fedoras, which provide them visual similarity to typical Western genre attire – in particular, Myung-woo's black coat and hat are reminiscent of, for example, Lee Van Cleef's appearance as Angel Eyes in Sergio Leone's 1966 Spaghetti Western classic *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly.* Made up of a small space between worn-down wooden buildings, with dusty ground and piles of cut up wood lining the sides, the enclosure, too, is given an architecture similar to that of an Old West street.

Confronted by Myung-woo, Yem turns to leave only to be met by Ahn. Unable to speak – due to the facial wound inflicted on him by Yem – Myung-woo signs to Ahn who then relays a message to Yem:

> Why'd you betray your comrades?...My mission from 16 years ago – 'If Yem is a spy, kill him' – is now fulfilled.

Here, that Myung-woo's words are spoken through Ahn provides a sense of a Korean collective speaking with one voice, fulfilling their retribution against a national traitor. Immediately following these words, Myung-woo pulls out a six-shooter gun – again iconic to the Western genre – and, along with Ahn, shoots Yem repeatedly. As he dies,

Yem falls through a gate, revealing a wide-open deserted expanse, with a mountain range offering a distant backdrop. Framed in wide angle, he stumbles towards the expanse before collapsing, dead. Throughout this sequence, the music of the film's soundtrack builds to a peak in volume, drama and tension until the moment Yem dies, at which point the music quickly diminuendos into a note of calm. This contributes to the sense of catharsis provided by Yem's death; the music mimics Ahn's emotional trajectory within the scene and conveys that emotion to audiences. Meanwhile, considering the rendering of Yem's collaborationism as a source of *haan,* this catharsis – felt by Ahn and offered to the audience – manifests in terms of *haan-puri* (the release, or resolution, of pent up *haan*).

The film's brief appropriation of Western genre iconography adds symbolic significance to this release. Given the scene's Seoul setting, the very desertedness of the expanse in which Yem dies appears conspicuous and, filmed in a dusty colour palette, it elicits a sense of the Western frontier. With the frontier within the American Western genre repeatedly conceived of as a site of nation building, and of 'ideological elaboration',[261] here *Assassination* borrows that same quality and applies it to a Korean context. In presenting, in effect, a Korean frontier, the film presents an expanse that in its featureless openness gives Korea a clean slate on which to build its future. It offers a sense of hope and possibility. Meanwhile, in foregrounding Yem's dead body, the shot suggests that that sense of hope and possibility is dependent on a national recognition of the wrongs that Koreans have committed to their own country through collaboration, and on the reconciliation of *haan* stemming from those wrongs; the *haan-puri* evoked through Yem's death is suggestive, to audiences, of the potential national catharsis that may come from achieving such reconciliation more thoroughly within the telling of national history.

This need for reconciliation is compounded also by the suggestion of the need to recognise the sacrifice of Korea's true heroes – the fallen resistance fighters – and, contrary to Kim Won-bong's prediction, to not forget them. The subsequent shots achieve this, beginning with a closeup of Ahn's face looking out over that frontier and

[261] Gledhill, "The Western," 374.

Yem's dead body. There is a solemn look in her eyes as seemingly she remembers her fallen comrades, as is implied through a cut into a series of brief flashbacks to scenes of her with said comrades. First, we see her with her two key assassination plot partners posing for a photograph in front of a Taegukgi (what is now the national flag of South Korea), cheering to Korean independence ('*Dae-han dog-lib man-se*'). With a similar effect to the staged photographs in *May 18* (discussed in my previous chapter), this flashback depicts and emphasises an explicit act of commemoration, with the taking of the photograph marking a documentation of the nation building efforts of Ahn and her fellow resistance fighters. The film then cuts to a shot of Ahn with Hawaii Pistol, and then to a shot of Hawaii Pistol's also fallen associate Young-gam telling Ahn 'Don't forget us!' Like Shin-ae's plea for remembrance at the conclusion of *May 18,* that this is the film's final line of dialogue amplifies the film's closing message of the need for remembrance of the fallen heroes of Korean national history.

This remembrance is then projected through an emotional angle of address that draws on sentiments of *haan.* This is stressed as the film fades from the smiling face of Young-gam, as he pleads for remembrance, into another flashback from a previous scene in which Ahn and her fallen comrades dance together joyously at a bar prior to carrying out their assassination plot. Here the scene is filmed in slow-motion and with a sepia-hue, the sepia in particular lending an air of nostalgia to this recalled memory. The slow-motion accentuates shots of Ahn looking at her now deceased comrades, suggesting a concerted effort by her to remember – almost as if in the moment she is aware they will all die and she will live. Echoing this, throughout the sequence Ahn appears noticeably less jovial than her comrades and becomes increasingly withdrawn to the point that the film finishes with a prolonged shot of Ahn's watching face as the rest of the room, and the people in it, are pulled slowly out of focus. As a flashback, the scene is composed as Ahn's memory, and concurrent with the milieu evoked by the visuals of that memory is a solemn sounding piece of non-diegetic clarinet music reflecting Ahns' sorrow and sense of loss towards the people depicted in her memory. Similar to how *haan* is invoked in the previously discussed scene between Kim Gu and Kim Won-bong, the scene frames this memory through a sentiment of *haan,* through the dissonance between Ahn's sorrow and the joyousness captured in the smiling faces and cheerful dancing of her comrades. Significant to this is that contrary to the cathartic

release of *haan* emotion provided in the moment of Yem's death, here the film does not dissolve the *haan* for the fallen resistance fighters but rather fixates on that emotion, concluding the film through a lingering sense of *haan.* And through recalling the supposed historical *haan* of Kim Gu and Kim Won-bong, through similar invocation of *haan,* here the film renders this lingering sense of *haan* in terms of emotional realism.

Incidentally, a parallel with *May 18* can be found in the manner in which the emotional framing of *haan* is constructed; the dissonance between the aesthetic and musical reflection of Ahn's sorrow, and the happiness of the (now deceased) friends remembered through her flashback, elicits a sense of *haan* in a similar way to the cinematic construction of the *wedding-photo-that-could-have-been* (discussed in my previous chapter). Both of these films, in their closing scenes, express a message of remembrance of (South) Korean history's fallen heroes – those who died while opposing (colonial, and authoritarian) oppression – and frame that remembrance through sentiments of *haan.* Significantly, the parallels in how that *haan* is evoked speaks to the existence of a cinematic vernacular of *haan.* Specifically, in these instances, it is through cinematic oxymoron that *haan* is structured into the films' angles of address, through the filming of scenes portraying joy and hope through a cinematic milieu permeated by sentiments of sorrow and fatalism. Both films, then, conclude on this sentiment of *haan,* which in turn projects that sentiment onto the broader narratives of each film, framing those narratives through *haan*.

With *haan* an emotion that when elicited invokes a sense of the national, these endings invariably reflect the manner through which these films approach notions of the national. Specifically for *Assassination,* in thematically focussing on the colonial struggle between resistance and collaboration – between cultural preservation and cultural assimilation – the film essentially revolves around the battle over the inner domain of Korean national culture. In this sense, the film engages with Korea's anticolonial nationalist impulses. Yet, specifically through its positioning of Korean collaboration and complicity thematically as the narrative's most significant source of antagonism – as opposed to the Japanese Empire itself – the film makes overt the complexities of Korean culpability in its own subjugation. As such, the film presents a progressive revisionism in its approach to anticolonial nationalist historiography, one

that is introspective, self-reflexive, and that puts the spotlight on the actions of Koreans, as opposed to their colonial oppressors.

Through the cathartic *haan-puri* provided by Yem's death, the film promotes the positive effect of acknowledging and interrogating the extent of that national complicity in the traumas of Korea's past. Meanwhile through evoking the lingering *haan* of all who suffered and died during the colonial era, the film stresses that, though the trauma of the era may never be resolved, there is importance in remembering both the trauma itself and the national efforts made to overcome it. By consequence, the persistence of *haan* as a national emotion is reinforced as an integral component of the inner-domain of Korean national identity.

There are consistencies with this approach to Korean anticolonial nationalist history to be found in several other films of the recent wave of popular, colonial-era-set Korean films, specifically in their navigation of Korean collaboration and complicity with the Japanese state. A scene in *The Last Princess,* for instance, depicts the Princess Deokhye being denied entry back to Korea following its independence, only to then witness Han Taek-soo – a character who at the film's beginning poisoned Korea's king – be allowed to freely return to the homeland. The incongruity of a national traitor being permitted entry, without any atonement, while an innocent princess – an embodiment of Korean sovereignty and culture – is not, resonates strongly with *haan.* In doing so, it stresses the need to correct the historical record on who should be held to account for Korea's past. Meanwhile, *The Tiger* re-enacts the protection of Korea's inner domain against the threat of Japan and its Korean collaborators. Its story focuses on the recruitment of Korean hunters, by the Japanese, to kill Joseon's last tiger – an embodiment of Korea. The tiger resists, killing countless collaborators and Japanese soldiers, before ultimately letting itself die at the hands of the one hunter (Chun Man-duk) who refused to help the Japanese. The tiger's death, thus, signifies the impenetrability of the Korean inner domain to Japanese Imperialism. Its death, too, is filmed through *haan* through the cinematic oxymoron created through a slow-motion shot of the tiger and Man-duk freefalling off of Mount Jiri to their deaths, their bodies never to be found. Similar to Man-su's freefall, which concludes *Chilsu and Mansu* (discussed in my Literature Review), in their freefall they are caught in a moment of freedom from the will of their

oppressors, yet one of imminent death, accordingly evoking themes of *haan* through the contradictive infusion of hope and fatalism. Other films, such as *Battleship Island, The Handmaiden,* and *The Age of Shadows,* also confront the issue of collaboration, engaging in *haan* to varying degrees as a means of readdressing Korean national identity and national history for contemporary perspectives.

In this respect, the closed-off nature of the colonial era is of pertinence. As a chapter of Korean history, the colonial era has long since been over; Korea's independence from Japan has conclusively been resolved in a manner that the Korean War, for instance, has not – this is not, though, to dismiss or dispute the significance of various ongoing social issues and grievances that stem from the colonial era, but simply to say that the era of Japan's direct rule over Korea has been concluded since 1945. As an era confined to history it offers – as has the frontier era to the American Western genre – a time period suitable for reopening and 'ideological elaboration'[262] by contemporary cinema. Much like the intentions of the patricidal club in *Assassination,* cinematic re-visitation of the era allows for Korean filmmakers to address and reconcile the wrongs of Korea's previous generations. In doing so, it allows for the era to be used as a space in which to reflect and revise historiographical narratives that frame Korea's national history, and notably – as my next section explores – the narrative of Korean historical failure.

Narrativising Failure

> Even when we fail, we move forward. The failures accrue, and we tread on them to advance to higher ground.
>
> \- Jung Chae-san (Lee Byung-hun)
> *The Age of Shadows*

In one of the concluding scenes of *Assassination* a temporal transition from the successful assassination plot in 1933 to the year 1945 is marked through the use of United News newsreel footage announcing Japan's declaration of its surrender to America. Here, between the American source of the newsreel, and the English language used in the newsreel (e.g. an English language title card, reading 'Japan sign final surrender!'), Korea and its liberation are essentially presented as a footnote in another nation's (America's) telling of history. Coupled with the twelve-year ellipsis between

[262] Gledhill, "The Western," 374.

the assassination plot and the screening of the newsreel (and hence, the liberation of Korea) the film implies that the successfully carried out assassination – the focal point of the film's plot – had no significant impact on the trajectory of Korean liberation. This reflects the historical reality of Korean resistance to the Japanese Empire. Korea was not instrumental in its own liberation, which came instead by consequence of Japan's surrender to America at the conclusion of a global conflict (World War Two). For the (South) Korean 'postcolonial consciousness', this resulted in what Namhee Lee refers to as 'a failure of Korean history', a sense of Korean passivity in the making of their own history.[263] This failure and passivity invariably presents a challenge to the narration of national history, and to storytelling centring on Korean resistance against the Japanese. Specifically, history denied Korea any ultimate victory over its colonisers. Thus, for any narrative of Korean resistance to resonate with historical actuality, it must be a narrative marked by failure.

In this respect, for the recent wave of colonial-era-set films, the above words – spoken by independence movement leader Jung Chae-san in the closing sequence of Kim Jee-woon's 2016 espionage thriller *The Age of Shadows* – largely epitomise the approach taken to narrativising resistance and failure. The words convey a sentiment of resilience in the face of defeat, while acknowledging that further suffering and failure is inevitable in the process (as per the context of the film's plot) of liberating the Korean people from the Japanese Empire. This seems consistent with the historical 'mosaic' of Korean anticolonial resistance, described by Brandon Palmer to consist 'of small, individual acts that, taken by themselves, are insignificant.'[264] Thus for a film to lay claim to historical realism, as Jinsoo An notes, 'the anticolonial political resistance can be imagined only on a small and myopic scale, in terms of sporadic but continuous disruption of the larger colonial order.'[265] While ineffectiveness and failure present an implicit necessity to such imagining of Korean resistance during the colonial era, there is importance in the manner with which narratives, in Korean film, are structured around such failure. That importance, I argue, lies in how these narratives retell Korean

[263] Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 3-4.
[264] Palmer, *Fighting for the Enemy,* 13.
[265] An, *Parameters of Disavowal,* 20.

national history in a manner resonant with the semantic structures common to the broader cultural vernacular of *haan.* This can be observed notably through *The Age of Shadows,* and specifically through how its closing sequence frames the film within a narrative of failure.

The sequence begins with police-captain-turned-resistance-fighter Lee Jung-chool meeting with, and handing a bag presumed to be carrying explosives to fellow resistance fighter Sun-gil. As he does, Sun-gil relays to him the above words of independence leader Jung Chae-san, before a subsequent shot shows Sun-gil carrying the explosives bag while riding a bicycle through the front gates to the building of the Government-General of Korea (built in 1926 to serve as the Japanese Headquarters in Korea). Relayed over this shot, we hear the voice of Jung Chae-san, in the scene's non-diegesis, repeating the same message that 'Even when we fail, we move forward….' This shot then cuts to one of resistance fighter Kim Woo-jin lying on the floor of his prison cell. Here, the camera pans from Kim's face to a carving on the wall that reads 'Resistance fighters pass through here', before the shot cuts to black and the film's credits begin. Each of these elements within the composition of this closing sequence, as I here explain, reinforce a narrative of failure while inflecting it with a *minjung* sensibility, in a manner consistent with the narrative structures throughout this recent wave of popular Korean films dealing with the colonial era. The essence of this sensibility is contained in the above words of Jung Chae-san.

His words epitomise the predicament and resolve of the Korean *minjung*.[266] Jung's sentiment balances hope and perseverance with resignation to further suffering and struggle in a manner resonant with the sentiments of *haan* that have historically marked and motivated the Korean *minjung.* Given the historical utilisation of the term *minjung* by Korean revolutionaries, resistance fighters, and anarchists during the colonial era,[267] the evocation of such a sentiment by an independence movement leader bears historical appropriateness. Meanwhile the significance of the evocation of such a sentiment, in concurrence with the composition of the sequence in which these

[266] Em, "Minjok," 360.
[267] Em, "Minjok," 356.

words are evoked, lies in how it structures narrative and meaning within *The Age of Shadows* around what can be described as a *minjung* sensibility.

The film's plot focuses on the efforts of a cell of resistance fighters, led by Kim Woo-jin, as they recruit police captain Lee Jung-chool to help try to smuggle explosives from Shanghai to Gyeongsang (the name given to Seoul during the colonial era). As such the film invariably taps into the thematic structures surrounding Korean collaboration, discussed previously in this chapter. Meanwhile, in the course of their cell's resistance against the Japanese Empire, the independence fighters encounter several failures, obstacles, and betrayals. By the end of the film, each member of the cell is left dead, imprisoned, or exiled. However, Lee Jung-chool – having been successfully turned from collaborator to activist – is able to make it through with the explosives and ultimately use them to blow up a banquet for high ranking police bureaucrats, Imperial parliament members and supporters of the Japanese regime. In this respect Lee's actions fulfil the sentiment behind Jung's message of success built out of, and in spite of, accumulated failures, a message that stresses the importance of continued struggle and effort for attaining freedom from oppression for the Korean people.

This perseverance (in spite of, and through, the accruement of failures), is key to how the film invokes *minjung* sensibilities. Similar to the ethnographic historiography promoted – as previously discussed – by *minjok* nationalism, *minjung* historiography seeks to understand Korean history from the perspective of the Korea's *minjung.* Proponents of *minjung* nationalism, notably during the colonial era and the *minjung* movements of the 1970s and 1980s, sought to 'critically reevaluate and reinterpret major events in Korean history…[by] identifying the minjung, the common people, to be the true subject of historical development and capable of social change.[268] This, Namhee Lee argues, is crucial to the reconciliation of the failure of Korean history,[269] as stressing the historical subjectivity and agency achieved by the broader Korean people throughout history allows for the historiographical positioning of the *minjung* as the '*subjects of history*', 'the people who *shape* history rather than settle for being

[268] Lee, *The Making of Minjung,* 2-3.
[269] Lee, *The Making of Minjung,* 3.

shaped *by* it'.[270] In this sense, framed through the words of Jung Chae-san *The Age of Shadow*'s narrative of perseverance through failure can be understood in terms of realising and reclaiming that subjectivity.

The above described closing sequence of the film takes this message further, emphasising the role of the collective to fulfilling Jung's message, and hence to claiming that subjectivity. To this, it is the various repetitions and transferences of Jung's words and their message that highlight the importance of the collective: the initial, off-screen, transference of Jung's message to Sun-gil; Sun-gil's relaying of the message to Lee; Lee's transference of the explosives to Sun-gil, symbolising the practical application of the message; and, the transference of that message directly to the audience with the non-diegetic intervention of Jung's voice, as we see Sun-gil entering the Japanese Headquarters. Through the quantity of these interpersonal transferences, the sequence emphasises the shared collective responsibility for *accruing failures* – for continued effort in maintaining the struggle against the Japanese.

There is significance also in the parties involved. Specifically, Lee represents proof of the efficacy of Jung's message, having reached *higher ground* from the failures of others (by blowing up the banquet). Yet, Lee's actions within the film do not accomplish the independence movement's ultimate goal (independence), and so his passing of the explosives to Sun-gil – a minor character, only present in the film's final sequence – represents a sharing of responsibility. This *passing of the torch,* is marked also as a generational shift with Korean screen icon Song Kang-ho (playing Lee) sharing responsibility to the significantly younger,[271] relatively unknown,[272] actor Kwon Soo-hyun (Sun-gil). The relative anonymity both of actor Kwon Soo-hyun and his character within the film – especially in contrast to the status of Song and his character Lee Jung-chool – further emphasises the importance of the broader and anonymous collective.

[270] Donald N. Clark, "Growth and Limitations of Minjung Christianity in South Korea," in *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence*, ed. Kenneth M. Wells (Honolulu: University of Hawai'I Press, 1995), 91-92.
[271] Kwon was 30 (international age) at the time of the film's release, in comparison Song was 49 years of age
[272] Prior to the film's release, the actor had just three screen credits (across film and television), each for minor or supporting roles.

Meanwhile, the inter-generational nature of Lee's transference here hints at a hope for liberation in the future and with future generations, a hope compounded by the younger Sun-gil as, accepting the explosives, he assures the older Lee 'I'll succeed, for sure.'

Whether or not Sun-gil is successful is left ambiguous as we see him subsequently cycle into the Japanese Headquarters. On the one hand, the film suggests optimism for his success, as the sequence depicts Sun-gil being checked by security before being allowed to enter freely and without suspicion through the main gates. The accompanying music, as it subtly builds in volume, tempo and texture, further strikes a tone of optimism and potential for Sun-gil's success. However, this optimism is undercut by the presumed historical knowledge of the Korean spectator. In reality the Japanese headquarters were not destroyed by resistance fighters during the period of Japanese occupation.[273] Moreover, while the film is set in the 1920s, audiences would be aware that Korea was not liberated from Japanese rule until 1945, and not as direct result of the actions of any independence movements but rather due to Japan's surrender to the Allied forces at the end of the Second World War. Thus, history itself makes failure implicit within the image of Sun-gil cycling towards the Japanese Headquarters.

In its embodiment of the contradiction of hope for success despite the knowledge of failure, meaning in the image of Sun-gil riding towards the Japanese headquarters is constructed in a similar manner to (as discussed in previous chapters) the freezeframe of Man-su leaping to his death from the top of a billboard in *Chilsu and Mansu* (Park Kwang-su, 1988), Han Yoon-hee's painted family portrait in *The Old Garden* (Im Sang-soo, 2007), the wedding photograph in *May 18* (Kim Ji-hoon, 2007), and Ahn's flashbacks at the end of *Assassination.* Each of these images both help structure meaning in, and emotionally frame, the narratives of their respective films. Moreover, through their embodiment of such contradictory yet coexisting sentiments (e.g.

[273] Following liberation, the building served as 'headquarters of the American military occupation (1945-48) and later became the central government building of South Korea' before eventually being demolished in 1995 to make way for a reconstruction of Gyeongbuk palace (the royal palace that previously stood on the site before its demolition by the Japanese). An, *Parameters of Disavowal,* 2-3.

freedom/resignation, familial cohesion/fracture, joy/grief), each image is imbued with notions of *haan.* This again speaks to the prominence of a cinematic and cultural vernacular for communicating *haan*: a common series of consistencies in the way in which *haan* is portrayed and evoked through culture.

The Age of Shadows reinforces the *haan*ful contradiction of hope and failure in its subsequent and final shot. Following the image of Sun-gil cycling towards the Japanese Headquarters, the film transitions to a shot of resistance fighter Kim Woo-jin lying on the floor of his cell, asleep. The camera pulls in on his face as it breaks into a smile. With a stream of light – presumably from a cell window, off camera – leaving all within the frame but Woo-jin's face in shadow, his smile further evokes a sense of hope. Through the juxtaposition of Woo-jin's smile with the previous shot of Sun-gil, the suggestion is that Woo-jin's sleeping smile is caused through some cognisance of, or a dream of, Sun-gil's potential destruction of the Japanese Headquarters. With Woo-jin, and his imprisonment, symbolic of the failures of the resistance movement, his smile indicates an imagining of the *higher ground* that can be reached through his own failures. As such, in this moment Woo-jin embodies Jung Chae-san's message that 'Even when we fail, we move forward', the message intended to inspire the future of Korean resistance. With this message fresh in the viewer's minds (spoken by Jung over the image of Sun-gil) and embodied by Woo-jin and his predicament, the camera pans up from Woo-jin to the wall upon which he has carved 'resistance fighters pass through here.' This message, again, reiterates and builds upon Jung Chae-san's sentiment. Carved into the wall of a prison cell, the only recipients of Woo-jin's words will be other resistance fighters who have presumably failed (and in such a manner that leads to their arrests). Yet through the use of the wording 'pass through' (Korean: *da-nyeo-ga-da*), Woo-jin's words allude to the temporariness of the imprisonment, and hence of the failures, in contrast to the persistence of the resistance fighters who shall outlast – be it literally or symbolically – the terms of their imprisonment. Woo-jin's words, thus, evoke the immutability of the spirit of Korean resistance, a notion granted permanency by their carving into the stone of the cell wall. This symbolic immutability is augmented by Woo-jin's own muteness – having bitten his tongue off during torture by the Japanese, though he cannot verbalise it, his message is still able to be transmitted. And through the very immutability of Woo-jin's message, in spite of his imprisonment, the film is

suggestive of Woo-jin's continued ability to exert influence on the world within the film, by inspiring fellow resistance fighters and thus posing a continued threat to the authority of the Japanese colonial oppressors. In this respect the film shifts narrative emphasis away from narrative outcome, placing it instead on the importance and nature of the very struggle (to reach whatever outcome, even if that outcome remains unreached): on the act of perseverance, and specifically of spiritual perseverance.

Within the context of a narrative centred around anticolonial struggle, such narrative emphasis encompasses a perspective invocative of Partha Chatterjee's notion of the spiritual inner domain of national identity. In stressing the spiritual perseverance of a collective group of people, these narratives enact the creation and the protection of an inner domain, a 'space where colonial power cannot interfere.'[274] Chatterjee suggests of the inner domain that 'if the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being.'[275] Accordingly, in enacting the preservation of the inner domain, such a narrative structure provides a natural vehicle for constructing and projecting specific national identities. In the Korean context, these narratives provide a natural vehicle through which notions of the *minjung, haan,* and Korean nationalist historiography can be explored.

In this respect, there is significance in the prevalence of narratives underpinned by failure in resistance, yet perseverance of spirit, in the recent wave of popular films that address the colonial era. For instance, *Dongju: The Portrait of a Poet* tells the true story of poet Yun Dong-ju who was arrested while trying to publish a volume of resistance poetry. As per history, the film tells of his torture and eventual death in prison, but pivotally the survival of his poetry in the film – as in real life – conveys a sense of his spiritual perseverance. This is echoed notably through the film's final scenes in which through a voiceover Dong-ju recites one of his poems (*Foreword*) as the film displays him in his prison cell coughing up blood, thus implying his imminent death. He is eventually carried out of the cell by the prison guards, but the camera stays fixed on

[274] Kim Shin Dong, "The Creation of *Pansori* Cinema: *Sopyonje* and *Chunhyangdyun* in Creative Hybridity," in *East Asian Cinema and Cultural Heritage: From China, Hong Kong, Taiwan to Japan and South Korea*, ed. Yau Shuk-ting, Kinnia (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 164.
[275] Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments,* 6.

the empty cell as the voiceover continues to recite the *haanful* words of his poem (e.g. 'I was tormented even by the wind rustling the leaves'). The effect of this conveys how in spite of Dong-ju's death his poetry lives on, a sentiment that implies his metaphoric spiritual transcendence of the confines of his prison cell in a manner reminiscent of the fate Woo-jin in *The Age of Shadows*. Meanwhile, as previously discussed, *Assassination* depicts the resistance of its lead heroes as ultimately inconsequential, in that despite the success of their assassination plot they did not help liberate Korea. All directly involved in the plot, besides Ahn, are killed undertaking it, while the traitorous Yem lives to continue enforcing Japanese law until the empire's eventual surrender. Yet his murder, post-Korean-liberation, by Ahn and Myung-woo underlines the perseverance of the spirit of the resistance fighters. *The Battleship Island,* too, highlights the inconsequential nature of Korean resistance as it tells the story of a group of Korean workers' attempt to escape an island-based forced labour camp. Their escape is marked by failure in the sense that countless Koreans die during the escape, including several of the film's main protagonists. However, a boatful of Koreans – many wounded in the process of the escape (and some fatally so) – do make it off of the island. The film concludes with the boat sailing away, while far in the background the mushroom cloud from the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki can be seen. The moment symbolises the successful spiritual preservation of the Korean people from the Japanese Empire, with the bomb blast implying the defeat of Japan during World War Two. Yet the film's final images, showing the boatful of escapees simply watching on at the bomb blast, evokes how – despite their resistance efforts – in reality the Korean people were little more than bystanders in the process of their liberation. These images are granted a *haanful* poignancy, too, in their juxta-position with the death of the film's central protagonist (Lee Jang-ok), aboard the boat, in the arms of his crying daughter; her grief, set against the hope implied by the prospect of Korea's liberation, presents a cinematic oxymoron invocative of *haan.*

Each of these films enacts a narrative of historical failure for Korea coupled with the spiritual perseverance of its people. This is something Jinsoo An alludes to with respect to the South Korean cinematic representation of the colonial era more historically:

> Postcolonial cinema's nationalist orientation rests on the systematic rendition of Korea as an occupied but porous space where Koreans can carve out sites of resistance and integrity. In other words, postcolonial

> cinema negates the greater reach of the colonial power, that is, its infiltration into the "minds" of the Koreans, by setting up a countervailing way of looking that reorganizes colonial space for Korean alterity.[276]

The prevalence of such representation is key here; it signifies the collective efforts of South Korean filmmakers to project depictions and fictionalisations of national history through a lens of anticolonial nationalism, specifically by invoking and emphasising the perseverance of Korea's inner domain. In the Korean historical context, seen often as an inescapable cycle of ever-accumulating national and individual suffering that can only be either persevered or succumbed to, *haan* is a natural accompaniment to such narratives of spiritual perseverance. Moreover, given the tendency in the recent wave of colonial-era films to evoke *haan* through such narratives, *haan* itself is playing a significant role within the historiographical function of Korean cinema as it narrates and allegorises national history.

Female Representation through the Colonial Era

As we have seen, in the recent wave of colonial era-set films, the past is reopened and ideologically elaborated on to emphasise certain themes within an anticolonial nationalist historiography. Yet it is also relevant to consider how the colonial era is reopened as a space in which to reimagine and reconstruct national identity in a manner that addresses more contemporary issues of (South) Korean society, as well as of issues of contemporary Korean national cinema. As such, while the themes previously discussed in this chapter (i.e. collaboration, failure, and perseverance) were each drawn directly from historical context, in this chapter's final segment I shift attention to how the recent wave of colonial era-set films engage with an issue of greater contemporary precedence: female representation.

As is also the case for countless national cinemas, there is 'a serious imbalance in the Korean film industry's gender ratio' both in terms of opportunity for cast and crew, and in terms of representation.[277] As Kim Hyung-seok notes 'there are less and less

[276] An, *Parameters of Disavowal,* 7.
[277] Kim Hyeong-seok, "Independent Films Working With the Stars," KoBiz, November 15, 2016, http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/features.jsp?mode=FEATURES_VIEW&seq=339&blbdComCd=601013.

opportunities for actresses', compared to their male counterparts.[278] This is conspicuous in the vast disparity between starring roles for men and for women in mainstream Korean cinema, reflected for instance by just one of the current ten most successful films at the Korean box office featuring a woman in the leading role – incidentally Jun Ji-hyun in *Assassination,* a film that features an otherwise predominantly male cast.[279] This disparity, Kim suggests, has resulted in 'female acting talents…stretching their spectrum to independent films that offer roles that are unique and have their own individual style.'[280] Meanwhile, the lack of opportunity for women in the mainstream speaks to the simple fact that the stories told by Korean cinema are overwhelmingly male-centric.

In his book *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema,* Kyung Hyun Kim explores the development of contemporary Korean cinema into such a masculinised visual space. He contends that, following the democratisation of South Korea, 'the [cinematic] negotiation of a post-authoritarian sensibility and value system was structurally rewoven through gendered relations that reinforced masculine subjects.'[281] He examines how post-authoritarian Korean cinema has navigated a diverse range of Korean masculinities 'in configuring itself to mould a modern subjectivity.'[282] Concurrently, cinematic exploration of femininity has been limited to the extent that 'the underrepresentation of women not only relegates them to marginal positions in cinema but also allows for the cinema to underscore themes that interest men.'[283] Ultimately, he concludes:

> Korean cinema has vied to recuperate a modern identity and also a story that complements and formulates this ideal. Yet the woman is once again posited at once as the object that stands only in relation to man's drive toward mastery of his time, environment, and being. In a medium borne out

[278] Kim Hyeong-seok, "Independent Films."
[279] KoBiz, "Box Office: All Time," accessed March 22, 2019, http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/boxOffice_AllTime.jsp?mode=BOXOFFICE_ALLTIME&category=ALL&country=K.
[280] Kim Hyeong-seok, "Independent Films."
[281] Kyung Hyun Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 6.
[282] Kyung Hyun Kim, *Remasculinization,* 8.
[283] Kyung Hyun Kim, *Remasculinization,* 8.

> of fantasy, this kind of production of woman proves to be, without equivocation, only excessively prohibitive.[284]

Though this conclusion refers to the situation of Korean cinema up until 2004 – when Kim's book was released – it is difficult to argue that there has been substantial widescale progress in addressing this within the industry since. Female-led films have largely been consigned to the realm of independent cinema, while the mainstream tends to continue configure a modern subjectivity through a masculine perspective.

Nevertheless, in recent years ripples of change have been observable. 'A demand from audiences for more films with woman-centered narratives and female protagonists' has been evidenced by the success of female-centred films like 2018's *Little Forest* (Yim Soon-rye).[285] This has been met by an increasing tendency for cinema to portray strong and more complex female characters.[286] Such is still far from a dominant trait of Korean cinema, but there is significance in the growing nature of the tendency. Moreover, this tendency is reflected in the manner of female representation observable within the recent wave of colonial era-set films, and in the popularity for these films. Whereas Korean cinema has displayed a historical tendency to simplistically characterise women as either helpless victims, or as objects of male desire – or as both simultaneously – here women are instead granted a higher degree of agency, in turn allowing for greater diversity in terms of female representation.

This manifests itself most notably in the manner in which women are portrayed in terms of national allegory. Writing in 2007 on gender and representation of the colonial era in Korean cinema, Frances Gateward writes of how 'history is being deployed then, in the most "manly" genres – the epic, action film, and sports film – in order to create a public memory and national identity that is essentially

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[284] Kyung Hyun Kim, *Remasculinization,* 276.
[285] Song Soon-jin, "2018 Korean Film Industry Yearly Report," KoBiz, December 12, 2018, http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/features.jsp?blbdComCd=601013&mode=FEATURES_VIEW&seq=449.
[286] Park Jin-hai, "Charisma Incarnate – Women Save Men," *The Korea Times,* March 20, 2019, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/culture/2019/03/703_265726.html?fbclid=IwAR0nlS6Mtea5-E240I7ndQXZfFIIGFnjWiM49d0Hh-hYY4ImrPskEiU2naM.

hypermasculinist.[287] She argues that, through the stories told by the earlier films set in the colonial era, male characters are framed within narratives that avoid 'tropes of victimization' while emphasising their agency and resistance to colonial authority, in turn granting those characters 'moral triumphs and individual successes' in the absence of any 'ultimate victory' over Japan.[288] She elaborates:

> The cinema provides Koreans with the opportunity to refight the battle and emerge with its national pride intact….Or more correctly, I should say they provide Korean *men* with such opportunities, as women are sidelined to serve the narrative functions of allegory for the subjugated nation, guarantors of heterosexuality in the homosocial texts, or sidekicks who highlight the heroism of the male hero.[289]

Gateward's analysis draws on the gendered lines upon which national allegory has typically been constructed, most notably through the portrayal of Korean historical agency and heroism as male, and Korean subjugation and victimhood as female. In particular, the use of women to embody national trauma and suffering has been a consistent feature of Korean cinema in its contemporary era, and throughout a range of cinematic genres and subject matters[290] – as is discussed in my previous chapter in reference to *A Petal* (Jang Sun-woo, 1996). Yet the diversified approach to female representation in recent films set in the colonial era marks a noticeable diversion from this trend. If Korean cinema previously has constructed a 'hypermasculinist' national history, this recent wave of films – if not feminising that history – marks a collective attempt to begin balancing the scales of gender in historical representation.

Assassination exemplifies this most notably through the roles within the film of Jun Ji-hyun. In playing the twin sisters, Mitsuko and Ahn, Jun embodies the two faces of national historical allegory. Through Mitsuko – forced into a marriage, and later killed by her father – Jun represents the subjugated nation; while in portraying the independence fighter Ahn she embodies Korean heroism and perseverance, ultimately

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[287] Frances Gateward, "Waiting to Exhale: The Colonial Experience and the Trouble with *My Own Breathing*," in *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema,* ed. Frances Gateward (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 191-218 (202).
[288] Gateward, "Waiting to Exhale," 202.
[289] Frances Gateward, "Waiting to Exhale," 202.
[290] Chunhyo Kim, "Representation of the Kwangju Uprising – *A Petal* (1996) and *May 18* (2007)," *Asian Cinema* 19, no.2 (2008): 249.

surviving the colonial era and killing the traitorous Yem. While typically, as Gateward suggests, these two facets of national allegory were separated along gender lines, here both are portrayed through the film's lead actress. Significant also is the fact that the film does so while indulging in what is typically a 'manly' genre: the action film. Jun offers a formidable presence as the film's main action star, and notably in outliving the male members of the main cast her character Ahn becomes the film's primary symbol of Korea's eventual prevailing over colonisation. In this respect the film is able to subvert the typically masculinist tendencies of both its genre, and the national history and identity the film draws upon.

The masculinist nature of national history is further subverted by the status and authority granted to Ahn within the film. This is illustrated when Ahn is nominated, by independence movement higher-up Kim Won-bong, to lead the group undertaking the film's central assassination plot – a group, including Ahn, made up of three former convicts. Kim asks if anyone has a problem with a female captain, and when a male comrade says that he does, Kim responds by asking Ahn what she was previously convicted for. When she replies 'for shooting my superior', the objecting comrade promptly tells her 'You be captain, then', averts his eyes from his new captain, and immediately makes himself busy by sorting through the group's weapons armoury. Presented as a moment of comedic levity, this interaction dispenses with the notion of gender as a matter of conflict between the independence fighters. It makes overt the gender-based prejudices that exist both in society, and in narratives of national history, and shows up their absurdity; Ahn's actions and experience (i.e. shooting her superior), not her gender, are shown to be the only important qualities indicative of her ability to lead. From that scene on, Ahn's gender presents no issue to her comrades, while her authority is shown to be respected. This is most significant when seen in terms of trends of representation of history. Notably if Korean resistance was typically depicted in film as a male domain, Korean cinema is now challenging such portrayals – such can be evidenced by Ahn's character in *Assassination*; the status of Uhm Ji-won's independence movement leader in *The Good, The Bad, The Weird* (Kim Jee-woon, 2008 – a precursor to the wave of popular films discussed in this chapter); and the equality and comradeship extended towards characters like Kaneko Fumiko in *Anarchist from Colony,* and Yeon Gye-soon in *The Age of Shadows*. Together these films serve an

important historiographical function, revising the historical narrative by normalising portrayals of women as key participants of the independence movement within the cultural memory of Korea's national history.

Revisionism acts not just to give representation to the historical reality of female activism during colonial times, but also to engage with discourses surrounding gender equality and feminism from a more contemporary perspective. In *Anarchist from Colony,* for instance, one scene shows Park Yeol and Fumiko sign a cohabitation agreement with one another that makes explicit that the romantic relationship between the two be dependent first on the acceptance and treatment of each other as comrades, as equals. This condition reflects the film's commitment to the ideology that gender equality should be a condition of nation-building movements, such as the independence movement under which Park and Fumiko were comrades. Yet this ideology did not strictly manifest in the historical reality of Korea's anti-colonial resistance, of which Kenneth Wells notes 'the nationalist focus on the restoration of political rights to Koreans left little opening for activism on behalf of women's social rights.'[291] Given the existence of both Park and Fumiko as historical figures, rather than equating this to historical inaccuracy, I believe this marks an attempt to retrospectively structure gender equality into Korean cultural memory of the anticolonial movements of the past, and into the notions of national identity that such movements cultivated. In effect, this provokes revision to national identity itself by retrofitting gender equality as a key tenet of activist ideology during the struggle for Korean independence. Given that South Korea remains a largely 'male-dominated' society in which feminism is only relatively recently 'taking root' among younger generations,[292] there is significance in that *Anarchist from Colony* – a film screened to 2,359,647 domestic spectators[293] – imagines gender equality as a core value of the Korea that Park and Fumiko hoped to

[291] Kenneth M. Wells, "The Price of Legitimacy: Women and the Kŭnuhoe Movement, 1927-1931," in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, eds. Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 218.
[292] Yonhap, "Over 40 Percent of Korean Females in 20s are Feminist: Survey," *The Korea Herald,* January 15, 2019. http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20190115000554.
[293] KoBiz, "Film Directory: Anarchist from Colony (2017)," accessed February 4, 2020, http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/films/index/filmsView.jsp?movieCd=20178982.

help liberate from the Japanese; the film offers contemporary audiences exposure to a representation of history in which gender equality is explicitly tied to national identity.

It is true that in both of these films – in accordance with Frances Gateward's evaluation of historical trends of representation of the colonial era – the female characters can be seen to 'serve the narrative [function] of allegory for the subjugated nation[294] – or for subjugation more broadly, in the case of Fumiko. Importantly, though, they are not narratively side-lined in the process. Rather than being made 'sidekicks who highlight the heroism of the male hero',[295] they are themselves rendered – either alongside, or instead of their fellow male characters – in terms of heroism. Key to this is the exhibition by these female characters of agency, their active resistance against their subjugation. This is important given that, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the historical realities of the colonial era do not always allow for successful heroism – characterised by victory over colonial oppression – within the parameters of a given narrative. For instance, in accordance with the historical record, Fumiko in *Anarchist from Colony* dies in a Japanese prison, while Park Yeol only attains his freedom following Japan's surrender to America. Similarly, while entirely fictitious, Ahn's defeat of Yem in *Assassination* comes also only after Japan's surrender, meaning that Yem's oppression of other Koreans continued uninhibited until the historical conclusion of the colonial era. Yet in occupying the narrative functions not only of allegory for national subjugation, but also of historical agency against that subjugation, these female characters are rendered as vehicles for the preservation of the Korean inner domain. While they represent the victimisation of nation and embody the nation's trauma and emotional wounds, the provision of agency grants them control also of the spiritual resolution of those wounds, resolution that has repeatedly been framed in terms of cathartic *haan-puri.*

We have seen this already in the case of *Assassination* – whereby Ahn's killing of Yem, framed through a sense of *haan-puri,* is rendered as a manifestation of Ahn's own *haan-puri* through the editing from the wide angle of Yem's death into a closeup of Ahn's face – but it is perhaps most notably realised in Cho Jung-rae's 2016 film *Spirits'*

[294] Gateward. "Waiting to Exhale," 202.
[295] Gateward, "Waiting to Exxhale," 202.

Homecoming. Based on the historical testimonies of Korea's 'comfort women', the film tells the story of two teenaged girls (Jung-min and Young-hee) who are abducted into sexual slavery by the Japanese military. There, along with countless other victims, they are raped, abused, and emotionally traumatised. Eventually they try to escape, but only Young-hee makes it to safety as, during their escape, Jung-min is shot and killed. Interspersed with this narrative is a secondary plot, set in 1991, that follows Young-hee at a time when historically the existence of comfort women was being brought to the forefront of public consciousness. Young-hee is forced to confront the traumas of her past, and in doing so participates in a shamanic homecoming ritual for the spirits of the comfort women. It is in the cinematic presentation of this shamanic ritual that the film both depicts a literal act of *haan-puri,* and offers *haan-puri* to the national consciousness of Korean audiences.

Korean Shamanism – Korea's folk religion, believed to be a 'method that human beings can use to interact with any god or spirit'[296] – is intricately associated with *haan.* As Jae Hoon Lee writes:

> Korean Shamanism, the indigenous religion that has served as the matrix of Korean culture throughout its history, has been developed around the reality of [*haan*]. The shamans, the living symbol of [*haan*] in Korea, become themselves through the experience of [*haan*], while the main pursuit of their rituals is to resolve the [*haan*] of the people.[297]

This latter point is reflected in *Spirits' Homecoming* in the character of the shaman's disciple (Eun-kyung), who conducts the homecoming ritual. According to tradition, to become a shaman a person first has to suffer a great personal trauma (referred to as *sin-byung* 'which is common to shamans in Siberia and Japan, [and] is understood in Korea in relation to [*haan*]'[298]). This process is depicted in the film when the teenaged Eun-kyung – following her father's murder, and her rape by an ex-convict – is shown being placed by her mother into the care of an elderly shaman to become a shaman herself. This scene establishes Eun-kyung in terms of her *sin-byung* – and thus in terms of *haan* – while contributing also to the development of *haan* as a theme within the film.

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[296] Don Baker, *Korean Spirituality* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 20.
[297] Jae Hoon Lee, *The Explorations of the Inner Wounds – Han* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 2.
[298] Lee, *Han,* 97.

Notably, it draws parallels between her rape and the historic victimisation of Korea's comfort women, thus projecting the accumulation of personal trauma intergenerationally into the collective realm of *haan*. Hence, when Eun-kyung conducts the spirit's homecoming ritual – intended to give peace to the spirits of the deceased and displaced comfort women by returning them to their homes in Korea – there is the implication that the ritual resolves some of the *haan* of her own victimisation along with that of Young-hee's, and of comfort women more generally.

This conflation of individual and collective, past and present *haan* is evoked visually through both the film's portrayal of the ritual, and in the sequence immediately preceding the ritual. In this sequence, the film intercuts scenes of the teenaged Young-hee and Jung-min in 1943 as they make their escape and Jung-min dies, with the elderly Young-hee and Eun-kyung in 1991 as Eun-kyung channels the spirit of Jung-min and speaks to Young-hee. The intercutting between these timelines indicates the displacement of temporality instigated through the shamanic ritual. This displacement is then reflected in the 1991-set scene through the visual manifestations of both the teenaged Young-hee and Jung-min framed in place of the elderly Young-hee and Eun-kyung, respectively. Through this, the past is brought into the present (1991) and the present is given opportunity to communicate with the past. Young-hee is able to express to Jung-min her remorse for having left her behind, while Jung-min tells Young-hee to 'Don't rush, eat plenty of wonderful food, do fun things, then come' – essentially expressing that Young-hee should live the rest of her life happily, unburdened by the past. As Jung-min's spirit then goes to sleep, the visual manifestations of the teenaged girls disappear too, and the elderly Young-hee is left crying over the sleeping body of Eun-kyung, before fainting herself – a moment that indicates Young-hee's release of *haan.*

The shaman's disciple Eun-kyung wakes up and begins the spirits' homecoming ritual, a sequence which again displaces temporality. We see, for instance, shots of Japanese Imperial soldiers standing in the crowd observing the ritual in 1991, and shots of Eun-kyung standing in 1943 at an open mass grave full of murdered comfort women. We see butterflies come from the dead bodies and begin to fly up into the sky, indicating the spirits of each victim leaving their bodies and beginning their journey home. This

is filmed through a crane shot that slowly pulls back as butterflies fly up with it, a shot which positions us, the audience, amongst the spirits as they begin their return. This shot fades back to 1991 where Eun-kyung is shown performing her ritual. The camera here appears to be floating, keeping us positioned, above, as spirits observing the ritual, being sent home. As the ritual ends, the film fades into shots of the butterflies flying across rural Korea – the camera, again, flies with them – while the song 'Arirang' plays in the background. The use of music here compounds the visuals with connotations of both *haan* and of national identity, given the song's *haan*ful lyrics and its reverence as an unofficial national anthem (for both Koreas). This sequence finishes with a butterfly returning to Jung-min's house, a shot followed by one of Jung-min herself returning to that house. This shot recalls a scene from the beginning of the film in which Jung-min returns to her home to find Japanese soldiers there waiting to take her away, only this time Jung-min finds only her parents as she returns. She hugs her mother, while a closeup of the mother's face shows a tear fall down her cheek – a shot which *haan*fully encapsulates the mother's joy of seeing her daughter again, and the sadness inherent in that this reunion can only take place in a spiritual realm. The film then ends with a shot of the *reunited* family eating a meal together outside. It presents a harmonious scene, the very harmony of which resonates with a sense of the cathartic release of *haan-puri*. Notably here, again we can see the existence of a cultural vernacular for communicating sentiments *haan*; like the final scenes of *May 18, The Old Garden,* and *Assassination, haan* is communicated through the depiction of a spiritual reunion between Jung-min and her loved ones, a reunion the film denies her in the *reality* of her character's life.

Through the national signification of the accompanying 'Arirang,' and the positioning of audiences – through the camerawork – amongst the spirits, this *haan-puri* is rendered simultaneously as: the individual *haan-puri* of Jung-min; that of the returning spirits of all comfort women; the release of *haan* for the national trauma that stems from the history of comfort women; and finally, the release of audiences' *haan* for the comfort women. The film cannot resolve the historical reality of the comfort women, but it offers an attempt to symbolically exorcise the emotional wounds left by the historical forcing of Korean women into sexual slavery, emotional wounds that remain strongly felt within the contemporary national psyche. The collective need for such

spiritual reconciliation perhaps attests to why, as the film's postscript notes, the film was produced with the sponsorship of 75,270 citizens, and as to why following its release the film 'became the most successful narrative indie film in Korean cinema history with almost 3.6 million admissions'.[299] Meanwhile, Zoran Lee Pecic notes that the film 'amassed tremendously positive response from the general public, clearly related to its premiere coinciding with the widespread criticism of [a since contested] settlement agreement between Japan and South Korea over the 'comfort women' issue',[300] a point which given the content and focus of the film – particularly its ending – again alludes to the film's potential ability to offer audiences some catharsis (or *puri*) over an issue unresolved in the real world. Most importantly, though, to this chapter, the film provides useful evidence of how, by encompassing both national victimisation and trauma, and national agency (and preserving of the inner domain of national identity), female representation within Korean cinema can play an important role in reconciling with the traumas and *haan* of national history.

The film's success – as does that of *Assassination, Anarchist from Colony, The Handmaiden,* and *The Last Princess* – also demonstrates the receptiveness of domestic audiences to seeing national history represented as a less overtly masculinised space. Whereas previously, as Gateward notes, anticolonial resistance was cinematically constructed as a codedly male domain,[301] recent films are challenging this by granting female characters the ability to transcend and resist typical allegoric functions of national subjugation. This is not to say that these films are without flaws in how they go about this. (Each have their criticisms, with *Spirits' Homecoming*, for example, receiving feminist critique for 'gloss[ing] over' some of the more complex issues regarding 'women survivors in postcolonial South Korea', such as their 'social stigmatization'.[302]) But the significance of these films lies less in any of their individual flaws, and more in the collective attempt to understand and represent history as a

[299] Pierce Conran, "TWENTY TWO Secures Korean Release on Comfort Women Day," KoBiz. July 30, 2018, http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/news.jsp?mode=VIEW&seq=4919.
[300] Zoran Lee Pecic, "Shamans and Nativism: Postcolonial Trauma in *Spirits' Homecoming* (2016) and *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits* (2013)," *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 12, no.1 (2020): 71.
[301] Gateward, "Waiting to Exhale," 202.
[302] Pecic, "Shamans," 75.

space in which women fought actively to reclaim their agency from the structures of their oppression.

Meanwhile, more broadly the collective domestic success of the recent wave of colonial era-set films, coupled with their nationally introspective content, points to domestic South Korean audience desire to revisit the colonial era to help formulate and understand national identity. Such is not a trend that seems to be slowing, given that the wave of popular films discussed in this chapter has not yet subsided; films such as *A Resistance* (Joe Min-ho, 2019), *The Battle: Roar to Victory* (Won Shin-yun, 2019), and to a lesser extent *Herstory* (Min Jyu-dong, 2018) have been released and found relative success during the writing of this thesis, suggesting the ongoing nature of this wave – although they have not here been analysed due to issues of access.

While in reopening the past for ideological and thematic elaboration these films are not radically revisionist in their reformulation of history, they do revise national historical representation in a manner more befitting of contemporary South Korean society, by accentuating certain themes. Though other consistent themes, no doubt, can be found in this process of cinematic historical elaboration, my analysis here has focussed specifically on the themes of Korean culpability in their subjugation (through collaboration), perseverance through historical failure, and female agency, each of which influence the manner in which national identity and national history is projected. For each, as we have seen, *haan* is often evoked in their cinematic elaboration, offering an emotional and thematic lens through which each theme is ultimately projected. Given the perception of *haan* as both an 'ethos' and 'the very pathos' of the Korean people,[303] its cinematic accompaniment of these other themes helps embed those themes into the formulations of national identity and national history projected.

In other words, *haan* – when detected – helps render these themes in terms of the (Korean) national. It is perhaps in this respect that *haan*'s function – both socially and cinematically – is most flexible, in that theoretically *haan* can be invoked or

[303] Chang-hee Son, *Haan of Minjung Theology and Han of Han Philosophy: In the Paradigm of Process Philosophy and Metaphysics of Relatedness* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2000), 15.

appropriated as a means of promoting almost any ideology within the Korean context, through the appeal to a supposed national sentiment in the process of ideological elaboration. In this respect, it should be noted, there is enormous potential for *haan* to be cinematically politicised for a host of different causes or ideologies. In this chapter I have demonstrated part of that potential, while focussing specifically on trends of application, showing *haan*'s function within the promotion of both anticolonial nationalist, and feminist renderings of national history within the recent wave of colonial era-set films.

'Wow, Korean Firefighters Should Join the Avengers': A Cinema of Cultural Attractions in Korea's Mainstream Cinema

The past twenty years have seen South Korean cinema produce an increasingly diverse range of commercial hits featuring a wide range of subjects, genres, and styles. This diversity invariably poses a challenge with regards to film selection for a thesis such as this, with as broad a mandate as to interrogate the manifestation of *haan* across contemporary popular Korean cinema. In my previous two chapters, I focus predominantly on the manner in which *haan* has been used as an emotional and thematic device in the representation and ideological elaboration of specific historical contexts that have provided frequent subject of exploration by South Korean cinema, and which have received notable commercial success. Yet, given that the Gwangju Democratic Uprising and the colonial era are both subject matters now ingrained within South Korean cultural memory through the cultural vernacular of *haan,* there is a degree to which the resonance of *haan* within the films discussed is inevitable due to the traumatic nature of their respective historical contexts. As we have seen from the success of *May 18* (Kim Ji-hoon, 2007)*, A Taxi Driver* (Jang Hun, 2017)*, Assassination* (Choi Dong-hoon, 2015)*,* and *The Age of Shadows* (Kim Jee-woon, 2016)*,* amongst others, these historical contexts are capable of drawing sizable domestic audiences to the cinema. Nevertheless, they represent only part of the broader selection of Korean films on offer to domestic cinemagoers at local multiplex cinemas. As such, it is important for me to adjust my approach to factor in the broader nature of Korean popular film. Thus, rather than concerning itself with film subject matter, this chapter takes film mode as its focus. Specifically, it addresses *haan* in relation to the most commercially prosperous mode of contemporary Korean cinema and arguably the most significant facilitator of the industry's development: blockbuster cinema.

While the concept of the blockbuster is interpretable differently depending on national and historical context, it is predominantly understood in relation to the mode of filmmaking cultivated within the Hollywood film industry, in which as Chris Berry describes 'Hollywood blockbuster films have commanded attention by virtue of their

exceptional bigness – big budgets, big stars, big effects, big publicity campaigns'.[304] This emphasis on 'exceptional bigness' is fuelled on the level of production by aspirations of exceptionally big commercial success, meaning that, for film studios and financiers, the practice of making blockbusters is largely underpinned by a capitalist drive for profitability. This drive has helped turn the Hollywood blockbuster into 'a transnational product' frequently able to conquer box offices worldwide,[305] while through the blockbuster mode Hollywood has provided an imitable model of success to any cinema with the means to imitate it. At the turn of the new millennium, South Korean cinema was in a position to do just this – albeit on a smaller scale – and found that 'in order to remain competitive at the box office, South Korean filmmakers have been forced to reproduce the signifying codes, and modes of production associated with Hollywood.'[306] As Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient note:

> From an industrial and economic perspective, we can see that, in duplicating some of the storylines, narrative strategies, stylistic flourishes, and thematic motifs developed in Hollywood, the South Korean film industry has been able to claim a large percentage of the total market share.[307]

This narrative of the development of the South Korean industry as product of the rise of the local blockbuster, starting with the release of *Shiri* (Kang Je-gyu) in 1999, is by now well established. Moreover, this trajectory has brought us to the point where not only is Korean cinema, led by its blockbuster class, collectively outmatching Hollywood at South Korea's domestic box office – as is marked by the consistent achievement of an above 50% market share of admissions annually since 2011[308] – but also where several of those blockbusters have become commercially successful transnational products in their own right. Zombie action film *Train to Busan* (Yeon Sang-ho, 2016) for instance, upon its release 'set new box office records for Korean films in Singapore,

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[304] Chris Berry, ""What's Big About the Big Film?": "De-Westernizing" the Blockbuster in Korea and China," in *Movie Blockbusters,* ed. Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2003), 218.
[305] Julian Stringer, "Introduction," in *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2003), 10.
[306] Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient, *Movie Migrations: Transnational Genre Flows and South Korean Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 45.
[307] Chung and Diffrient, *Movie Migrations,* 45.
[308] Kim Hyounsoo, ed. *Status & Insight: Korean Film Industry 2018* (Busan: Korean Film Council, 2019), 11.

Malaysia, the Philippines, and Taiwan' as well as a new record for Asian films released in Hong Kong (Chinese language films included).[309] Kim Yong-hwa's *Along with the Gods* films (2017 and 2018) have likewise set box office records abroad,[310] signalling the heightened profile of the Korean blockbuster in international markets – particularly in Asia. Nevertheless, Korean blockbuster cinema remains a long way from being able to rival Hollywood success abroad, and the domestic audiences remain the prioritised target for Korean blockbusters and the primary source of box office revenue.[311] It is in this targeting that there is a notable difference between Hollywood and Korean blockbusters in terms of their content and textual assemblage.

In striving for 'global popularity', the 'more common approach' for Hollywood studios and filmmakers is 'to render [film] contents less culturally specific',[312] thus reducing the potential for what Francis L.F. Lee refers to as '*cultural discount*' – i.e. that 'part of the appeal of the products will be lost because [non-domestic audiences are] not likely to have the same background knowledge, linguistic competence, and other forms of cultural capital to fully appreciate them.' [313] For Korean cinema, however, the blockbusters that garner commercial success typically retain high levels of Korean cultural resonance. This chapter considers how that resonance is formatted through an adherence with global standards of blockbuster filmmaking. I begin by considering the blockbuster mode, and its dependence on spectacle, with regards to Tom Gunning's notion of a cinema of attractions. I then offer clarification on how I am referring to the term cultural resonance, specifically with regards to notions of Koreanness. Then, through the case studies of Kim Yong-hwa's *Along with the Gods* fantasy series (2017

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[309] Darcy Paquet, "Review of Korean Films: A Year to Remember," in *Korean Cinema 2016*, ed. Lee Kun-sang (Busan: KOFIC, 2017), 8.
[310] Park Jin-hai, "'Along with Gods' Looks to be another Blockbuster," *The Korea Times,* July 25, 2018, http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/news.jsp?mode=VIEW&seq=4965&blbdComCd=601006.
[311] For example, in 2018 admissions for Korean films at the domestic box office generated revenue of over KRW 817 billion, while comparatively export revenue generated just KRW 48 billion (less than 6% of the domestic revenue). See Kim ed. *Status & Insight,* 27, 51.
[312] Francis L.F. Lee, "Hollywood Movies in East Asia: Examining Cultural Discount and Performance Predictability at the Box Office," *Asian Journal of Communication* 18, no.2 (June 2008): 121.
[313] Lee, "Hollywood Movies," 119.

and 2018) and JK Youn's *Ode to my Father* (2014), I discuss both how these films incorporate the exceptional bigness of blockbuster visual style and spectacle as a means of asserting the technical expertise of Korean cinema, and how these films foreground Koreanness through their construction of spectacle. I argue these films generate cultural resonance, which in turn allows for *haan* to be evoked through key moments of emotional spectacle. Although my primary focus in this chapter is not the capitalist impulses for maximising profitability that typically drive blockbuster filmmaking, that drive does underlie much of what I discuss in this chapter. I address this in the concluding section of this chapter by considering how the construction of nationally coded emotional spectacle through *haan* relates to Chris Howard's notion of the national conjunction (discussed in my introduction chapter) around which, he argues, South Korean cinema has built its success.

Blockbusters, Spectacle, and Cinemas of Attractions

It is important to clarify how I am referring to the blockbuster. As Julian Stringer notes, 'some movies are born blockbusters; some achieve blockbuster status; some have blockbuster status thrust upon them.'[314] In other words, blockbuster status is assigned to films for a variety of different reasons: by the manner of their production, by virtue of their commercial success, by virtue of their reception and reputation by audiences etc. In this chapter, I focus specifically on films that are born blockbusters, where the term blockbuster refers more directly to the production strategy of a given film – to the combination of big budgets, stars, special effects and high production values,[315] elements that are typically levied into the production of cinematic spectacle. My interest in this chapter lies in how it is through the currency of spectacle that the blockbuster mode manifests itself most distinctly in the on-screen product that audiences watch.

Jinhee Choi writes:

> Spectacle can be thought of as an extratextual quality, which [Steve] Neale calls "presentational prowess." This can be taken to mean that certain textual features – whether visual or aural – are designed to evoke awe or admiration of some sort via their size, elaborate technique, excess, power,

[314] Stringer, "Introduction," 10.
[315] Berry, "What's Big About the Big Film?" 218.

> or energy. These features include spectacular landscapes, explosions, chases, battles, fights, costumes, and more.[316]

In this sense, cinematic spectacle constitutes not a form of signification but a form of direct address constructed to provoke an affective response in the form of spectatorial pleasure. It relates to a quality of exhibitionism, and one that has been elaborated on through the discourse that has grown from the 1986 publication of Tom Gunning's essay 'The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde'.

The phrase cinema of attractions was originally used to conceptualise the early years of cinema (circa. 1895-1908) 'less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power…and exoticism.'[317] These early films were based around their 'ability to *show* something',[318] and through such exhibitionism, Gunning summarises 'the cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle – a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself.'[319] Key within this is the presence of the spectator, through the manner in which the spectator is directly addressed; as Wanda Strauven elaborates, the spectacle or attraction 'is a force put upon the [spectator]'.[320] It is with regards to this form of direct address that the concept of a cinema of attractions has found application beyond just the early years of filmmaking, to the discussion of Avant-Garde cinema and certain practices of narrative filmmaking.

The contemporary special effects blockbuster, in particular, has a strong tendency to exhibit cinema of attractions practices. Strauven, for instance, identifies *The Matrix* (Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 1999) 'as a reloaded form of cinema of attractions in that it is "dedicated to presenting discontinuous visual attraction, moments of spectacle

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316 Jinhee Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 33.
317 Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 382.
318 Gunning, "Cinema of Attraction," 382.
319 Gunning, "Cinema of Attraction," 384.
320 Wanda Strauven, "Introduction to an Attractive Concept," in *Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 17.

rather than narrative."'[321] Meanwhile, Dick Tomasovic has written of how *Spiderman* (Sam Raimi, 2002) implements 'a profoundly exhibitionist system of the *image-attraction,* because, after all, it is always a question of giving to see rather than of telling'.[322] Similar arguments can be made of the films of Marvel Cinematic Universe, the DC Extended Universe, and the films of various other ongoing Hollywood blockbuster franchises (*Star Wars, Jurassic Park, Avatar,* etc.) which extensively foreground the spectacle of their special effects work. Similarly, much publicity regarding the *Mission: Impossible* franchise is directed towards the films' practical stunt-work, and a significant reason fans watch the films is for the attraction of seeing Tom Cruise *really* jump off the world's tallest building (*Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol,* Brad Bird, 2011), *really* hold onto the outside of a plane as it takes off (*Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation,* Christopher McQuarrie, 2015), or *really* fly a helicopter (*Mission: Impossible – Fallout,* Christopher McQuarrie, 2018). This is not to say that the narratives to these films are insignificant to their appeal, but understanding these films in terms of a cinema of attractions forces a recognition of the dependency for their storytelling on the creation of spectacle. A mark of a quality blockbuster is that it features a compelling enough narrative to keep audiences engaged between spectacles, between attractions, and to get audiences invested in the outcome of the spectacles – we need to care that Tom Cruise's character does not die when jumping off a building, holding onto a plane, or flying a helicopter. But, at the same time, without the creation of spectacle the narratives of these films are considerably less compelling. In other words, audiences do not buy tickets for a *Mission: Impossible* film primarily for the quality of its script. Spectacle, thus, constitutes the integral component of blockbuster appeal.

For Korean blockbuster cinema, the situation is similar but, as Jinhee Choi comments, 'for regional blockbusters, such as Korean blockbusters…"spectacle" should be taken in a relative sense and discussed within a specific historical context.'[323] For instance, relative to Hollywood, Korean blockbuster cinema has considerably smaller budgets to

[321] Strauven, "Introduction," 11.
[322] Dick Tomasovic, "The Hollywood Cobweb: New Laws of Attraction: The Spectacular Mechanics of Blockbusters," in *Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 314.
[323] Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance*, 33.

work with. In 2018, Korea's most successful domestic film, special effects blockbuster *Along with the Gods: The Last 49 Days* (Kim Yong-hwa), 'was budgeted at 20.5 billion won (approximately US$18.2 million)'. [324] Comparatively, the most successful Hollywood film at the Korean box office that year – special effects blockbuster *Avengers: Infinity War* (Anthony Russo and Joe Russo) – cost over US$300 million more to produce, with a budget over 17 times the size of that of Kim Yong-hwa's film.[325] Both films represent some of the most expensive productions for their respective industries, yet the disparity between their budgets is substantial. This disparity can be attributed largely to two inter-related factors: the Korean film industry's relative (to Hollywood) financial limitations; and, its relative lack of an international distribution infrastructure sufficient enough for Korean films to consistently rely on audiences beyond just Korea for recouping production costs. Invariably Korean blockbuster cinema stands at a financial disadvantage to Hollywood cinema, but its contemporary era has been defined by the ambition to outperform Hollywood in the domestic market – meanwhile, films from other national cinemas are mostly squeezed out of the market.[326] To a large degree, this competition has been marked by the attempt to match Hollywood in terms of the aesthetic quality of its final product.

Chris Howard notes:

> Korean blockbusters are subject to the pressure to compete with the production values of other (principally Hollywood) blockbusters, thus leading to their dependence on stars and spectacle. In achieving such values, there is often a sense of patriotic pride in the South Korean industry for being able to compete on such terms with Hollywood.[327]

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[324] Darcy Paquet, "Review of Korean Films: A Year of Surprises," in *Korean Cinema 2018*, ed. Kim Hyounsoo (Busan: Korean Film Council, 2019), 8.
[325] Christian Sylt, "Disney Reveals Muscle of 'Avengers: Infinity War'," *Forbes,* April 27, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/csylt/2018/04/27/disney-reveals-avengers-infinity-wars-financial-muscle/#21d901334e48.
[326] For example, in 2018, Korean cinema accounted for 50.9% American films 39.1%, Chinese and Hong Kong films for 0.3%, Japanese films for 1.3%, and European films for 1.6% of all domestic box office admissions. This reflects the recent historical tendency in the South Korean market, whereby there is only minimal box office competition from national cinemas besides those of America and South Korea. See Kim ed. *Status & Insight,* 28-29.
[327] Chris Howard, "Contemporary South Korean Cinema: 'National Conjunction' and 'Diversity'," in *East Asian Cinemas: Exploring Transnational Connections on Film*, eds. Leon Hunt and Leung Wing-Fai (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), 92.

Specifically with regards to spectacle, this industry pride exerts a significant influence on how Korean filmmakers approach blockbuster filmmaking. Kang Je-gyu's 2004 Korean War film *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War,* for example, was famously 'made to prove that Korean filmmakers could produce scenes as impressive as the battle sequence that opens Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* (1998).'[328] Similarly, afterlife-set fantasy film *Along with the Gods: The Last 49 Days* features a sequence in which hell ghouls manifest as a pack of velociraptors that are then attacked by a tyrannosaurus rex, before a mosasaurus bursts up through the ground and swallows two of the film's characters. With only marginal narrative importance, the sequence serves mainly to demonstrate Korean cinema's ability to produce visual effects comparable to Hollywood. Specifically, through shot selection and CGI rendering, the sequence offers almost shot-for-shot imitation of iconic special effects moments from Steven Spielberg's 1994 film *Jurassic Park* (through the velociraptor and tyrannosaurus attack) and Colin Trevorrow's 2015 film *Jurassic World* (with the appearance of the mosasaurus), two hugely successful blockbusters that at the time of their releases set high-water marks for the standards of special effects cinema internationally.

This patriotic pride by Korean filmmakers in the technical quality of their blockbuster cinema, meanwhile, has been reciprocated by audiences in the form of a patriotic consumption that has often proved influential to box office success.[329] Overall admissions hauls for certain films have been inflated by an unspoken 'national agreement that argues that "we have to see and praise the film because it is a Korean blockbuster utilizing such a high level of technology,"'[330] as has been discussed of various spectacle-driven Korean blockbusters such as *Shiri, The Host* (Bong Joon-ho, 2006), and *D-War* (Shim Hyung-rae, 2007). In his writing on such patriotic consumption, Chris Howard cites the 2006 criticisms towards it of Korean indie auteur

[328] Nikki J.Y. Lee, "Localized Globalization and a Monster National: *The Host* and the South Korean Film Industry," *Cinema Journal* 50, no.3 (Spring 2011): 53.
[329] Howard, "Contemporary South Korean Cinema," 91.
[330] Jung Han-seok, "Review of Korean Films in 2007 and the Outlook for 2008," in *Korean Cinema 2007*, ed. Daniel D.H. Park (Seoul: KOFIC, 2007), 4.

Kim Ki-Duk, who – critiquing such blockbuster cinema for its (debatably) detrimental effect on cinematic art and diversity – claimed:

> When you go to the multiplexes these days, you're immediately grasped by six posters of *The Host.* Rather than propagating this kind of repressive effect, why don't you just build a cinema with 10,000 seats so everyone can see the film and chant 'Dae-Han-Min-Gook' (Viva Great Korea).[331]

In citing Kim, Howard accurately draws on how Kim links 'patriotic consumption with the commercial aspects of the industry',[332] but the quote also reflects an attitude that the quality of being Korean constitutes not just a factor of audience appeal but a cinematic attraction in and of itself to Korean audiences. In this sense a film's very Koreanness becomes a marketable commodity, something that can be appealed to by studios and filmmakers in hopes of bigger local box-office returns.

This was perhaps most evident during the release and reception of *D-War* in 2007. Though Korean produced, this English-language special effects blockbuster – set in Los Angeles and featuring a predominantly American cast – was designed explicitly to target the American market while demonstrating the development and prowess of South Korean CG technologies. The film represented a huge technical achievement for Korean cinema, but drew heavy criticism for, what film journalist Jung Han-seok generously refers to as, its 'artistic incompleteness'.[333] The film features a flimsy and largely incoherent plot, serving predominantly as an excuse to show extended sequences of a dragon destroying parts of Los Angeles. The film indulges extensively in cinema of attractions filmmaking, using narrative primarily as a means of linking cinematic spectacles together. The result of this, as one US critic wrote: 'when [the filmmakers] decide to sic [the dragon] on downtown Los Angeles, the movie turns shockingly watchable. Until that sequence, there was no evidence that anybody involved with this laughable fantasy knew what he or she was doing.'[334] The film was similarly critically panned by both the foreign and Korean press. Nevertheless, it

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[331] Kim Ki-duk, cited by Howard, "Contemporary South Korean Cinema," 91.
[332] Howard, "Contemporary South Korean Cinema," 92.
[333] Jung, "Review of Korean Films in 2007," 4.
[334] Wesley Morris, "'Wars' is Absurd Action Fantasy," *The Boston Globe,* September 15, 2007, http://archive.boston.com/ae/movies/articles/2007/09/15/wars_is_absurd_action_fantasy/.

became the most successful film of 2007 at the Korean box office, which is particularly significant given that the second-place film was international megahit and special effects blockbuster *Transformers* (Michael Bay)*,* a film that's storytelling received similar – albeit slightly more favourable – criticism. Both films constitute instances of cinema of attractions blockbuster filmmaking, set in the US, and filmed in the English language. And while critical consensus deemed *D-War* the inferior film, its status as a Korean film – with almost exclusively Korean-produced special effects[335] – was enough of an attraction that South Korean audiences flocked to it in greater numbers.[336]

On the subject of spectacle, however, *D-War* exhibits what I argue to be a commonality within South Korean blockbuster cinema: it makes spectacle out of markers of Korean culture, and thus out of *the Korean.* Despite the film's American locality, its plot centres on the discovery of a corrupt *Imoogi* – a mythical Korean dragon. As such, while audiences witness the spectacle of a dragon unleashing destruction on Los Angeles, the dragon's origins in Korean mythology lead to the spectacle itself being culturally rendered.

This is not to say, in the case of *D-War,* that there is any meaningful depth to this cultural rendering. In fact, the extent to which the film engages with Korean mythology is mostly superficial and self-orientalising. For instance, an early scene shows American actor Robert Forster's character recounting to a young Caucasian boy the myth of the *Imoogi* in an LA antique shop with an abundance of Buddha statues and other Asian antiquities of ambiguous national origin. This iconography locates the recounted *Imoogi* myth within a broader *oriental* or *Asian* aesthetic. As Forster's character continues to recount the myth, and as the film shows scenes set in early 16th century Korea as the *Imoogi* first emerged, the film continues this self-orientalising practice. For example, we see someone training in martial arts for no real narrative purpose; visually impressive Buddhist temple architecture provides the background for characters to provide narrative exposition, despite the fact that historically the era these scenes are set in was a time of fierce suppression of Buddhism and Buddhist

[335] Lee, "Localized Globalization," 56.
[336] For comparison, according to boxofficemojo.com *Transformers* drew nearly US$320 million and the US box office, to *D-War*'s US$11 million.

practice[337]; and spectacle is generated when the army belonging to an evil *Imoogi* destroys a Joseon town – for example, we see several traditional Korean houses blow up. Here, rather than accurately or authentically representing Joseon culture, the film simply borrows its aesthetic cache. It gives a quality of the ancient and exotic to the intended visual pleasure of the film's extensive CGI spectacle. Such does not make *D-War* a unique case; similar arguments of cultural inauthenticity have been levelled at various other Asian blockbusters across the years – Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (2000)[338] and *Hero* (Zhang Yimou, 2002) are notable examples.[339] Yet for *D-War,* and its status as a South Korean blockbuster, the significance of this relates specifically to its intended audience.

Constructed explicitly to be marketable to western (in particular, American) audiences, the film uses the perspective of its American characters to construct a western gaze that frequently posits the film's *Asian*ness as an object of visual pleasure, as object of spectacle and attraction. On one hand, it makes spectacle of certain aspects of Korean culture, but in doing so it robs them of their cultural resonance and value, turning cultural artefacts and icons into one-dimensional signifiers and stereotypes, to western audiences, of an Asian other. In the process of this self-orientalising absorption, dilution and distortion of Korean culture into amorphous western notions of *Asia* and the *orient*, cultural resonance is lost. In this respect, *D-War* is an outlier for Korean blockbuster cinema, which typically is produced to appeal primarily to domestic audiences, and accordingly does not engage to the same extent in practices of self-orientalism.

Rather, in their presentation of *the Korean* to Korean audiences, cultural resonance retains importance as Korean films construct representation of self to be exhibited to self. Through the blockbuster format, this inevitably involves making spectacle of self.

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[337] James Huntley Grayson, *Korea – A Religious History: Revised Edition* (Abingdon: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 122.
[338] Christina Klein, "*Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*: A Diasporic Reading," *Cinema Journal* 43, no.4 (Summer 2004): 20
[339] Haizhou Wang and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, "Hero: Rewriting the Chinese Martial Arts Films Genre," in *Global Chinese Cinema: The Culture and Politics of Hero,* eds. Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) 92.

For this chapter, this is where my interest lies: in how Korean blockbuster cinema makes spectacle out of *the Korean.* Significantly, as my analysis of the *Along with the Gods* films and *Ode to my Father* exemplifies, in making spectacle out of *the Korean,* Korean blockbuster cinema frequently exhibits the capacity to make emotional spectacle out of *haan.*

Approaching *Koreanness*

Again, I must here clarify my terminology, in particular with regards to the notion of *the Korean,* or cultural *Koreanness.*[340] In doing so, I distinguish between cultural specificity and cultural resonance, positioning cultural resonance as the lens through which I consider cultural Koreanness. To begin with, I refer to Hyangjin Lee who argues:

> The notion of Korean-ness [(read, Koreanness)] assumes that the collective identity of the nation can be defined by its unique cultural experiences and traditions. It is invented for others' recognition of the presence of 'us', or vice versa, by stressing the distinctiveness of national traits through cultural traditions. This conceptual artificiality does not accurately reflect the heterogeneity of social reality, however.[341]

In her critique of the conceptual limitations of Koreanness, Lee here conceptualises Koreanness in terms of cultural specificity: the idea that there are traits specific or unique to, and essential of, Korea that in turn define the notion of Koreanness. Such is a restrictive definition that limits any understanding of *what Koreanness is* to being the collective sum of its cultural markers. In the process, it neglects the cultural context and cultural history that makes specific markers significative of a specific culture; it provides an outside-in approach to conceptualising cultural identity, where Korean culture is defined by the culture's surface, by how it looks from the outside, how it is perceivable to *others.* Lee articulates the general problem with this, which is that understanding Koreanness through cultural specificity neglects the cultural heterogeneity, the variation and diversity of cultural life, in (South) Korea. Yet, for the purposes of this chapter – which considers Koreanness in relation to the films that mainstream Korean audiences watch – there is another key issue with this conceptual

[340] I use the terminology 'cultural Koreanness' here to differentiate it from ethnic Koreanness, which is not discussed in this chapter.
[341] Hyangjin Lee, "*Chunhyang*: Marketing an Old Tradition in New Korean Cinema," in *New Korean Cinema*, eds, Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 67.

understanding of Koreanness in that it enforces an outsider perspective for defining a national cultural identity, a perspective that is not shared by the vast majority of the audiences for the films I here discuss.

For this reason, I propose understanding cultural Koreanness instead through an inside-out model, through the notion of cultural resonance which I use not to define a specific cultural [nationality]-*ness* itself, but to emphasise the role of a broader social and cultural context in marking certain iconography, traditions, and experiences as cultural. It foregrounds the cultural context in the process of interpreting the extent to which something is resonant with, or related to and evocative of, the notion of – in this case – the Korean. In this sense, cultural markers should be seen as marked by a culture, rather than as marking a culture themselves.

In less distinct terms, I touch on this notion in my first chapter, through the example of the image of a *hanbok* (Korean traditional clothing). I argue that for foreign observers, the image of a *hanbok,* as a form of clothing distinct from their own typical clothing, will likely appear as iconographic of (i.e. specific to) Korea; the marker of the *hanbok* here is a point of contact with a separate or unknown culture. For Koreans, however, the image of a *hanbok* will likely resonate with more subjective associations and personal interactions with the *hanbok* in their own cultural setting (e.g. with personal experiences of dressing up in *hanbok* for Chuseok celebrations). This is not to claim any uniformity with the specific associations each individual Korean will draw from an image of a *hanbok* but – in the sense of an Andersonian imagined (cultural) community – those subjective associations of the *hanbok* with personal experiences of Korean culture are key to how individuals relate to the broader idea of that culture, the idea of cultural *Koreanness.*

Elaborating on his terming of the nation as 'an imagined political community', Anderson writes:

> It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.[342]

[342] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* Revised Edition (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

A similar *imagined*-ness is key to how cultural Koreanness should here be considered. As an idea that theoretically lives in the minds of each Korean, what it is understood to be invariably differs from person to person. Yet there are also broad and imprecise, collectively shared yet unspecified, ideas as to what Koreanness is – as is the case for any nation or culture. It is thus a socially negotiated concept, one built on subjective associations widely shared within a broader cultural context and community. Consequently, it is an open and changeable concept, one that that theoretically does not have strict boundaries or limitations; it has endless potential to incorporate any cultural marker, tradition, or experience that is widely shared within the Korean socio-cultural context. In conceptually approaching Koreanness through the idea of cultural resonance, it is this quality of shared-ness that I wish to stress. If something is culturally marked as *Korean* then there is a connectivity between that thing and a broader cultural context; that thing will relate to, and resonate with, the personal associations of Korean audiences with that cultural context.

I do not here aim to draw assumptions as to what, specifically, these personal associations may be, but in drawing on cultural resonance in Korean blockbuster cinema my interest lies in how spectacle provides a key cinematic device for foregrounding Korean culture, and its Koreanness, within given narratives. A key result of this foregrounding, I argue, is how it enables emotional address through the culturally resonant affect of *haan.* This is perhaps best observed in the films of the *Along with the Gods* fantasy series. In the following I discuss how these films use spectacle to navigate the cultural variance of Koreanness through their use of ensemble casts and narratives that span Korea's past (the Goryeo period: 918-1392 CE), its present, and the afterlife. In the process, the use of spectacle accentuates the Korean, thus encouraging audiences to interpret and experience the film in relation to notions of Koreanness. This, I argue, positions *haan* as pivotal to the films' emotional address, particularly through the spectacles constructed during their climaxes.

Along with Gods: A Cinema of Cultural Attractions

> When a person reaches the afterlife, they are judged 7 times over the course of 49 days. Tried by deceit, indolence, injustice, betrayal, violence, murder, and filial impiety, only the souls who pass all trials are reincarnated.

- Buddhist Scripture
(from the preamble to *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds*)

Based on a webtoon (digital comic) of the same name, the *Along with the Gods* films are set around the above outlined Buddhist concept of the afterlife, and centre on a team of three guardians of the afterlife as they guide different Paragons (honourable souls) through each of the trials of the afterlife. To date, two films have been released in the franchise: the first (*Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds* – to be referred to as *AWTG1*) revolving around the trials of Korean firefighter Kim Ja-hong; and, the second (*Along with the Gods: The Last 49* Days – to be referred to as *AWTG2*) following the trials of Kim Ja-hong's brother, Kim Soo-hong. Both films are structured similarly through loosely episodic narratives as each Paragon is judged by different gods on how they lived their lives with respect to specific crimes or sins (with each trial taking place in the hell for the corresponding crime or sin). Accordingly, these films combine elements of courtroom drama and melodrama – as various heart-rending details of the Paragons' lives are brought up within the trials and judged – and adds these elements to the film's overall fantasy genre setting, which provides the film's main source of visual attraction and spectacle. It is primarily through this generation of visual attraction that these films put on display their own Koreanness, incorporating both contemporary and traditional Korean culture, and even *haan,* into their spectacle. Thus, I argue these films constitute something of a cinema of cultural attractions: films where the narrative acts mainly to link together a variety of different attractions that, to varying degrees, make spectacle of aspects of the films' represented Korean culture.

The importance of spectacle to these films is stressed from the opening shot of *AWTG1.* It begins with an aerial top shot looking down on a plume of smoke from a burning skyscraper. The camera pulls down through the smoke, through the propeller blades of a passing fire service helicopter as it drops water onto the fire. Drops of water then fill the screen as the camera continues to fall down towards the building where we see a firefighter (Kim Ja-hong) burst out of a window with a young girl in his arms. He freefalls several stories until he is caught by the rope around his waist. The camera keeps him centred throughout this, falling with him and ultimately beneath him into a low angle after the rope catches him. As he swings in mid-air, the camera shoots back up past him to focus in on his rope catching fire. There it moves back around into a top

shot, keeping both Kim and the rope in focus until the rope snaps and Kim plummets to the ground with the young girl safely protected in his arms. The camera again falls with him, eventually pulling into an extreme closeup on his eye as he dies. Within the space of approximately 40 seconds, this all occurs in what appears to the spectator as a single shot.

With the amount of CGI-enhanced action caught within this shot, this sequence acts as a statement of the franchise's technical ambition: its desire to advance South Korean cinema's mastery of special effects. The film's VFX supervisor, JongHyen Jin, directly references this in an interview with the Korean Film Council, stating of *AWTG1* 'I believe this film is only the beginning…but if we continue to make films with extensive VFX, the quality of the films will only improve.'[343] Similarly, to *D-War,* the franchise aims to be a high-water mark for Korean special effects cinema and thus must produce visual attraction technically comparable to that of the international standards set by contemporary Hollywood cinema. The technical prowess exerted in *AWTG1*'s opening shot exhibits such a comparable standard, and this comparability is something that the filmmakers take conspicuous pride in. For example, later in the film, a similarly constructed sequence sees Kim freefalling in a giant sinkhole (leading to the Hell of Violence), catching one of the guardians (Lee Deok-choon) in mid-air and protecting her in his arms before hitting the bottom of the sinkhole. Through its visual construction, and similarities in development of action, this sequence references *AWTG1*'s opening shot, and provokes another of the guardians (Hae-won-mak) to comment 'Wow, Korean firefighters should join the Avengers'. Here, the filmmakers make explicit, to audiences, a comparison between their work and that of arguably a high-water mark for international special effects cinema (The *Avengers* franchise). In doing so, they position their work as a worthy equal to the *Avengers* films*,* while drawing explicitly on nationality; the guardian takes note of Kim's Korean nationality as he takes wonder at the firefighter's heroic feat. Such provokes the idea that – again,

[343] JongHyen Jin, "Interview: JongHyen Jin, the VFX Supervisor of ALONG WITH THE GODS: THE TWO WORLDS," KoBiz, January 30, 2018, http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/interview.jsp?pageIndex=8&blbdComCd=601019&seq=299&mode=INTERVIEW_VIEW&returnUrl=&searchKeyword=.

like *D-War* – the special effects spectacle on display has enhanced value because it is Korean, that the film's Korean national origin is part of the attraction.

AWTG1's opening shot also establishes a key device of the film's visual language for generating spectacle, specifically in its fluid and (apparently) continuous camera movement. The camera in this sequence repeatedly pulls between closeup and long shot, as it switches between fixation on specific visual details, and on the broader scene; the speed of the camera movements fluctuates depending on the action, (e.g. speeding up as Kim falls, or slowing to a stop when his rope catches him); and, the sequence switches between moments of slow-motion and real-time speed. The overall effect of this kinetic movement creates a visceral thrill for the spectator, reminiscent of the changing movements and fluctuating speed of a rollercoaster ride.

This relates to the origin of the term cinema of attractions. Originally, as Gunning explains, '"attraction" was a term of the fairground' (and primarily referential to the roller coaster) used by 'the young Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein and his attempt to find a new model and mode of analysis for the theater.'[344] For Eisenstein 'an attraction aggressively subjected the spectator to "sensual or psychological impact"', thus 'creating a relation to the spectator entirely different from [their] absorption in "illusory [depictions]."'[345] Gunning borrows the term, himself, to emphasise how early cinema relates to spectators through 'exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption.' [346] With regards to feature length and narrative cinema, however, exhibitionist confrontation and diegetic absorption should not be seen as mutually exclusive practices; they are often employed simultaneously 'allowing interaction between spectacle and narration', as Gunning himself notes.[347]

We see this in *AWTG1*'s opening shot, where the spectator is pulled into the film through the roller-coaster thrill – through the plummeting motion of the camera as it falls through a plume of smoke – before any characters are even introduced. Then, in

[344] Gunning, "Cinema of Attraction," 384-385.
[345] Gunning, "Cinema of Attraction," 384.
[346] Gunning, "Cinema of Attraction," 384.
[347] Tomasovic, "The Hollywood Cobweb," 311.

the middle of this thrill, we are introduced to the film's lead character Kim Ja-hong, who becomes the focal point of this opening attraction; his heroism is on display as he falls to his death to save a young girl, while the trajectory of his fall becomes the primary influence on the course and direction of the very camera movements that provide the thrill here. In this manner the spectacle itself becomes a tool for narrative exposition, and a tool that the *AWTG* films use repeatedly.

As with any fantasy film, there is an internal logic to the fantasy world depicted that needs some degree of explanation for audiences to be able to comprehend the film. The *AWTG* films, with their depiction of a Buddhism-inspired afterlife, are no different. Given that the laws of nature of this afterlife differ extensively to those of the world of the audience, extensive exposition is demanded of the film. While characters (typically Kim's guardians) frequently have to explain elements of the afterlife, verbalised explanation is often accompanied by, or replaced with, cinematic spectacle demonstrating the internal logic of the fantasy world. The roller-coaster-like continuous kinetic movements of *AWTG1*'s opening shot are frequently used for this. For example, we are introduced to the afterlife through an aerial shot that flies through a stony mountain range to reveal a large canyon filled with thousands of people, all wandering towards the far end of the canyon. A caption tells us this is the 'Gate of the Afterlife', while the camera swoops down low, flying over the heads of – as can be inferred from the caption – the dead souls. Then, as the camera reaches the far end of the canyon, it tilts up to reveal, above the gate, a giant mountain statue of a man (subsequently identified by one of the guardians as King Yeomra, 'The judge of the Hell of Filial Impiety, and the king of kings'). This aerial shot emphasises the sheer scale and size of the afterlife – with the souls looking miniscule compared to the mountains around – while stressing the significance to this realm of King Yeomra (a key character to the franchise); his statue towers over the crowds, staring down, judgementally pointing at them. Similar swooping aerial camera shots are used to introduce and capture the scale and grandiosity of the fantasy settings of each of the different hells of the afterlife, each of which vastly differ in their geological settings (i.e. volcanic, waterfall, forest, glacial canyon, frozen lake, sinkhole, and desert).

What is at stake at each hell is similarly shown through cinematic spectacle instead of verbal explanation. At the Hell of Murder, a top shot reveals the ground around Kim Ja-hong drawn away from him, revealing him to be standing on a platform high above a pit of lava. The camera falls down past him, and tilts upwards as it falls, showing his platform to be held up by a tower of dead souls trying to climb their way out of the pit. The camera continues to fall to the surface of the pit, pulling back to show the tower surrounded by a sea of flailing bodies as they burn in the lava. Lava spits up in front of the camera repeatedly before the camera flies back up to ground level. Similar to the film's opening shot, this continuous shot fluctuates in speed of movement and direction, imitating the movements of a fairground-ride as it shows the spectator the fiery fate awaiting Kim if he fails his trial at the Hell of Murder. Similar camerawork is used at the Hell of Indolence, where the camera flies down over a waterfall to reveal a giant three-armed stone mill crushing the bodies of thousands of people and pushing them out into a sea to get chewed on by fish with vaguely human faces; and at the Hell of Violence, where the ground opens up beneath Kim, revealing a vortex of souls getting hit by rocks and boulders. Albeit through different styles of camerawork, the potential fates at stake at the other hells are similarly exhibited, instead of told, through CGI spectacle: at the Hell of Deceit, we see razor-sharp vines take hold of, and cut at, Kim before he is eventually exonerated in his trial; at the Hell of Injustice, we see a man in a water-filled glass cubicle as the water around him freezes solid; and, we see a woman locked into a mirror and shatter into shards of glass at the Hell of Betrayal. In this manner, throughout *AWTG1,* exposition of the consequences of failing a trial are repeatedly shown through CGI body horror spectacle – albeit body horror with minimal gore, appropriate for viewing by children.

Meanwhile, the previously discussed fairground-ride-style camerawork is returned to, and perhaps most conspicuously indulged in, as the film provides exposition to a pivotal subplot when, in travelling from the Hell of Indolence to the Hell of Deceit, Kim and his guardian take a literal log flume ride through Blade Forest. While on the ride, their boat gets chased and attacked by a host of hell ghouls. One of the guardians explains that the appearance of the ghouls must be caused by a vengeful spirit whose presence in the living world is causing time in the afterlife to speed up and the afterlife itself to become more dangerous. This is a key piece of world-building exposition that

provides basis for a subplot in which one of the guardians (Gang-lim) ventures to the living world to hunt down the vengeful spirit: Kim's brother Kim Soo-hong, who gets accidentally killed at a South Korean army base during his military service. This potentially complicated plot detail is dealt with through minimal verbal explanation as, again, visual spectacle is used to show the workings of this fantasy world. The camera work mimics the speeding up of time, by emphasising the speed of the log flume, and focuses viewer attention on the newfound danger of the afterlife; the camera either positions itself, and thus the spectator, onboard the characters' boat as it careens down the flume, or it swirls around the boat, drifting in and out of real-time and slow-motion to emphasise the combat skills of the guardians as they fight off the ghouls.

Each of these spectacles helps the audience to better understand the laws of nature of the afterlife, inscribing those laws with a quality of to-be-looked-at-ness. Rather than intricately explaining the internal logic of this fantasy world, the presence of that logic is exhibited to us as visual and visceral attraction designed to elicit both awe and thrill. In this respect, the creation of cinematic spectacle is pivotal to how the film navigates its narrative, as well as the fantasy world of the afterlife.

In turn, the aesthetic construction of the afterlife itself is presented as an object of spectacle. In this respect, the film makes frequent spectacle of its own Koreanness, as the *mise en scène* of the afterlife is steeped heavily in traditional Korean iconography. The gods in the afterlife, for instance, each wear elaborate costumes inspired by the traditional clothing of Korea's Goryeo and Joseon dynasties. They read their judgements off of traditional-looking scrolls, while the trials often take place in settings surrounded by traditional Korean architecture – often similar to that of Korea's Buddhist temples. Certain guards to the gods wear *dokkaebi* (a demonic creature of Korean mythology) masks, while various statues and artefacts that decorate each hell are similarly referential to a range of aspects of Korean historical, traditional, and mythological culture. Through the afterlife's tradition-inspired production design, then, Koreanness is explicitly coded into the visual attraction of the film.

To a large extent this can be seen as superficial, as much of the iconography is not used to elicit explicit meaning. However, any superficiality is beside the point; the

significance of this iconography lies in the distinction between cultural specificity and cultural resonance. For example, seen through a contextual vacuum, the *dokkaebi* mask is perhaps an empty signifier. To foreign audiences it may be seen as a culturally specific marker of, and a point of contact with, a part of Korean culture that they have comparatively limited knowledge and experience of. Yet for Korean audiences, there are a multitude of cultural resonances that may be drawn from the image of a *dokkaebi* mask, given the prominence of the *dokkaebi* character within various aspects of Korean culture. Described by In-seop Jeong as 'the typical Korean goblin', the *dokkaebi* is a figure of Korean folklore that 'usually takes pleasure in making people happy, but sometimes it brings trouble to men.'[348] It is a well-known character that 'very often appears in fairy tales', and children's books in Korea,[349] and features regularly in various forms of popular culture – for instance, as the titular character in the hugely popular 2016 tvN television drama *Sseul-sseul-ha-go Chan-lan-ha-sin – Dokkaebi* (Eng. *The Lonely and Great God – Goblin*). Jeong adds that 'some people believe that the goblins are the spirits of good people who have died but for some reason have not been permitted to go to the world of the blessed'.[350] As such, it is a figure also associated with Korean folk religion and animism. In Korean society the *dokkaebi* has various connotations that connect it with various aspects of Korean culture. What those connotations are is not strictly relevant here – particularly given the *dokkaebi*'s minimal role within the film – rather what is relevant are the connections to Korean culture that grant the figure of the *dokkaebi* resonance with a general notion of Koreanness.

This is the case for the vast majority of the Korean iconography abundant in the visual construction of the afterlife. Though the basic concepts that underpin the afterlife in the *AWTG* series are loosely taken from Buddhism (i.e. the seven hells), how the afterlife is realised in the film incorporates various iconographic features of Korean folk religion, animism, Buddhism, and Korean history. It is not an authentically Buddhist imagining of the afterlife, but rather a hybridised vision of the afterlife where

[348] In-seop Jeong, *Folk Tales from Korea: Revised Edition* (Seoul: Hollym Corp., 2005), 21.
[349] Jeong, *Folk Tales from Korea,* 21.
[350] Jeong, *Folk Tales from Korea,* 21.

the only aesthetic consistency is a general sense of Koreanness, granted by the abundance of Korean cultural markers. This sense is compounded by the relative absence of traces of foreign cultures in the afterlife – for instance, the souls suffering in each of the hells appear to be exclusively Korean. Meanwhile, in making visual attraction of the afterlife's Koreanness, that Koreanness is frequently made conspicuous and, thus, emphasised. Though individually the iconographies are of little significance, their collective abundance has the constant effect of nationally rendering the film's angle of address. This is to say that it encourages meaning and emotion to be received through a lens of the national, of the Korean.

To a similar effect, the Koreanness of contemporary Korean life is presented also through cinematic attraction, though in a manner more entwined with the development of the film's narrative. In particular, given *AWTG1*'s loosely episodic structure centred around the different trials in the afterlife, at each trial the actions of Kim Ja-hong throughout his life are placed on display and scrutinised. Memories, or rather historical actualities, of Kim's life are watched back through what is referred to as the Mirror of Karma: a feature of the afterlife that manifests in different manners at each trial. For example, at the Hell of Indolence, the Mirror of Karma functions like a cinema projector, projecting memories onto the surface of a waterfall. At the Hell of Violence, a memory of Kim fighting his brother as a child is reconstructed through moving rock figures. At the Hell of Filial Impiety, faces of people are formed by a moving sculpture in a sand dune. Accordingly, there is fairground attraction novelty to how the Mirror of Karma manifests in each Hell, while what is projected through the mirror is given a to-be-looked-at-ness by the simple fact that the memories are explicitly being watched by each character involved in the trials.

The memories, as shown through the Mirror of Karma, are the exhibits of each trial, the evidence to be judged, and given Kim's status as a Paragon these memories are at times shown to be an exemplary standard of modern Korean life. This is most obvious during the trial at the Hell of Indolence, at which Kim is judged for the degree to which he lived his life to its fullest. There, through the mirror, scenes of Kim working for the national fire service are shown to us – him playing table tennis with his colleagues in his down time, moving a bee's nest, saving a cow from a river during a monsoon, and rescuing a

cat from a building. He is commended for his hard work and bravery, and when asked the reason for his diligence he replies that he did it for the money to support his ailing elderly mother, to put his younger brother through law school, and to help them all escape poverty. For this reason, he in his spare time worked also at a s*amgyeopsal* (Korean barbecue) restaurant, delivered vegetables to a traditional Korean market, cleaned the floors of a *jjim-jil-bang* (a Korean-style spa/bathhouse), and worked as a temp driver. We are shown scenes of each of these jobs (firefighter, restaurant worker, cleaner, driver) which, though not exclusive professions to Korea, reflect a general cross-section of modern South Korean working-class life, particularly when considering that several of his workplaces are nationally coded as Korean (i.e. the national fire service, a restaurant for a staple meal of Korean cuisine, and a Korean-style bathhouse). This brings a quality of the national into the depiction of Kim and his work life, meaning that his work ethic is exhibited throughout the trial and explicitly coded as a Korean working class ideal. Within the context of the trial, this quality of idealness offers spectacle to the characters present; it draws awe in particular from the God of Indolence who suggests raising a statue in Kim's honour. And while (out of context) the scenes of Kim working may seem relatively everyday and unexceptional to audiences, that they are presented to the film's characters as an attraction encourages the spectator to view them as an attraction also.

Though perhaps not the conventional type of spectacle one would expect to see in a special effects blockbuster, these scenes of Kim's daily life are nevertheless presented as spectacle – in a manner designed to impress upon the spectator. Just as the characters do, we are supposed to marvel at Kim's relentless hard-working, and then later by scenes of his suffering due to that overwork. We see him exhausted to the point of falling asleep on the job at several of his workplaces, while another memory shows him having a nosebleed over his bankbook before fainting in line at the bank. The image of blood dripping onto his bank balance stresses both the extent to which he has suffered and exerted himself, and his motivation – to help his family escape the financial struggles of their poverty. These memories emphasise Kim's suffering, yet the quality of Kim's most on display in this trial is not the suffering itself but the perseverance and resolve through that suffering, for the benefit of his family. That is to say, it is through the emphasis on that resolve that what is exhibited during this trial

can be read in terms of *haan,* and specifically the *haan* that emanates from poverty – the repeated emphasis on Koreanness throughout the film, further encourages reading scenes such as this through such national sentiment. In this sense, we can see theme to take a role in structuring what the film presents as attraction.

For the theme of *haan,* this is repeatedly the case. At the trial for the Hell of Indolence, we are, as are the characters, meant to be impressed by Kim's display of self-sacrifice. It leads one of his guardians to exclaim that Kim worked so hard 'His true day off was the day after his death', a statement that equates his death to an act of *haan-puri* (release of *haan*). This is significant since repeatedly *haan* – how it manifests for the film's characters, and their attempts to release it – serves prominently as narrative theme in *AWTG1* (and *AWTG2*) and is often made attraction of within the film, particularly during the film's climax.

In describing the nature of *haan-puri* Sung Kil Min offers the example of:

> an illiterate mother who has suffered from poverty and the violence perpetrated by an abusive husband may find *haan-puri* years later in the success of a son: her sacrifice and endurance through the hardships of the life she has led find purpose of fulfilment in the endeavors and successes of her son.[351]

I raise this example here for the parallels that can be found between it and how *haan* of poverty manifests as narrative theme in *AWTG1,* a theme pivotal to the film's closing attractions. As has been mentioned, similarly to the mother in Sung's example, Kim's self-sacrifice comes in part for the hope that his younger brother can get through Law School and succeed later in life (a common theme in Korean cinema, as can be seen from *Taegukgi, May 18,* and *Ode to my Father* amongst others). But Kim's mother, also, bears similarities to the mother in Sung's example. Mute (instead of illiterate), and with an absent partner (the existence of Kim's father is altogether unmentioned), instead of an explicitly abusive one, several of the memories exhibited during the trials in the film refer to Kim's relationship with his mother and their situation of poverty. In the trial at

[351] Sung Kil Min, "The Politics of *Haan*: Affect and the Domestication of Anger in South Korea," in *The Political Economy of Affect in East Asia*, ed. Jie Yang (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 209.

the Hell of Deceit, for example, Kim is tried for lying to his mother in a series of letters to her in which he pretends to have a wife and a child and to generally be living a happy life. He sends the letters to his mother at a time when she is ill, hospitalised and likely to die, and the letters themselves offer her joy through the learning that her suffering has helped her son to lead a good life. Like the mother in Sung's example, the reception of Kim's letters can be seen to offer his mother a form of *haan-puri.* With that *haan-puri* exhibited through the trial, Kim's deceit is deemed honourable, and he is absolved of the crime of deceit.

The relationship between Kim and his mother, and their *haan* of poverty, is also the key thematic focus of the final two trials, the trial at the Hell of Violence and the trial at the Hell of Filial Impiety. Both trials centre on the same episode in Kim Ja-hong's life, when as a teenager, to free his family from the sufferings of their poverty, we see him plan to kill himself, his mother and brother. He holds a pillow over his mother's face, but cannot bring himself to push down and smother her. Eventually he abandons the plan. His brother, however, sees Ja-hong holding the pillow over their mother's head, leading to a violent fight between the two brothers which ends with Kim Ja-hong running away from home, never to return, vowing to himself to devote his life to financially supporting his family. Kim's fight with his brother provides the subject of the trial at the Hell of Violence, while Kim's treatment of his mother provides the subject of the film's final trial before King Yeomra at the Hell of Filial Impiety. This final trial provides the emotional crux of the film as Kim's guardians try to prove that Kim was forgiven for his acts of filial impiety; any crime or sin that has been forgiven in the world of the living cannot be punished for in the afterlife.

That forgiveness is shown in the final trial when the spirit of Kim Ja-hong's brother, Kim Soo-hong visits their mother in her dream and begs her to forgive Ja-hong. This dream is presented as evidence in the afterlife through the Mirror of Karma – which manifests here with the mother's face and its movements constructed and reflected through a giant sand sculpture – and presents a key moment of the film's plot through emotional spectacle. The sequence intercuts between Soo-hong and his mother talking to one another in her dream in the living world, and shots of Kim Ja-hong, King Yeomra, two afterlife prosecutors, and the guardians all watching this interaction as it unfolds

through the Mirror of Karma. The sequence begins with Soo-hong reminding his mother of the night that Ja-hong ran away, with both him and his mother crying heavily through this interaction. The sequence develops as follows: a camera pulls in on Ja-hong as he watches on; Soo-hong explains that 'Ja-hong worked all his life for you and me' as the sequence cuts to a shot of the sand sculpture of the mother's face as a tear rolls down her cheek; it then cuts to a mid-shot of King Yeomra and the two prosecutors watching on, as one of the prosecutors holds back their own tears. Key within the early shot progression in this sequence is the focus on emotional faces. As Carl Plantinga argues, 'facial expressions in film not only communicate emotion, but also elicit, clarify, and strengthen affective response – especially empathetic response.'[352] In particular, he notes, 'the represented face' is able to induce 'emotional contagion', the 'phenomenon of "catching" others' emotions or affective states.'[353] Here, facial emotion – particularly that of the mother, caught both in closeups of her face and through the attraction of the sand sculpture – is depicted literally as provocative of emotional contagion; her tears elicit tears from the in-scene spectators, which in turn provoke similar empathetic responses from the film's audiences.

This contagion is emphasised throughout the sequence as it progresses, with each character present seen in some way affected by the emotions exhibited by the mother and Soo-hong – either in person, or through the sand sculpture. The following shot shows one of the guardians start to tear up as he watches on; then we see a close-up of Soo-hong, still crying as his mother calls his name, cut to a closeup of Ja-hong watching on in anticipation, and then back to Soo-hong as in slow-motion he looks up at his mother. The mother then takes Soo-hong's hand and tells him, 'You boys didn't do anything wrong. It was all me. It's all because you had a terrible mom.[354] Do you understand?' Meanwhile, we are shown this embrace through the sand sculpture in the

[352] Carl Plantinga, "The Scene of Empathy and the Human Face," in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion,* eds. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 240.
[353] Plantinga, "The Scene of Empathy," 242-243.
[354] This dialogue is quoted directly from the film's subtitles, which lose some of the nuance of the original Korean dialogue *"Ni na-ppeun eom-ma-ga jal mos han geo-ya*". Communicated somewhat crudely, they do however express the key detail: that the mother had always seen herself, and not either of her children, as responsible for how circumstances developed.

afterlife, before a closeup of Ja-hong as tears flow down his face is shown. Notable here is the shift in the dynamics of the emotions that are elicited through the scene's emotional contagion. While the sequence begins with the tears of Soo-hong and his mother shed due to the lingering pain of an emotionally unresolved episode of family history (the circumstances culminating in Ja-hong running away from home), the sequence enacts the resolution of that episode. Thus, by the sequence's conclusion, the emotion exhibited stems from reconciliation with, and release of, that long-held emotional pain. This is shown notably in the emotional response of Ja-hong who, in floods of tears, runs into the sand sculpture, crying out 'Mother, mother'. He reaches out for his mother and the sculpture collapses away into just a pile of sand, thus marking both the mother's forgiveness and dissolution of the family's pent-up emotional hurt. Through the transmission of affect displayed within the scene, and projected through the film's angle of emotional address, both the film's audience and the in-scene spectators are taken through, and positioned to empathise with, the scene's emotional trajectory, from the initial pain to the point of emotional release.

Within this emotional trajectory there is a strong connection to *haan,* with the moment of forgiveness itself manifesting as a moment of *haan-puri* through reconciliation for Kim, his mother and his brother as they each vent their pent-up grief and emotion regarding their familial estrangement. As previously noted, through the persistent foregrounding of Koreanness throughout the film, the family experiences depicted – specifically here that of poverty, and the emotional strain it places on a family unit – are framed through a lens of the national. This presents the family's poverty in the context of broader national social realities of poverty. And while the specifics of their situation (i.e. Kim's aborted murder-suicide plan that led to their separation) represent an extreme response to that poverty, through the emphasis on the emotion stemming from that poverty the film draws an emotional realism between Kim's family and the social realities of poverty in contemporary South Korea. The lens of the national helps render this emotional realism in terms of *haan* and *haan-puri,* as does the collective outpouring of emotion depicted (i.e. the emotional contagion that occurs within the scene).

Narrative significance aside,[355] the construction of this is notable for the manner in which it presents this emotional realism, along with the *haan-puri* of Kim's mother's forgiveness, as an attraction, as spectacle. Repeated shots displaying people watching on provide an exhibitionist quality to the act of forgiveness, as does its recreation through the movements of the CGI sand sculpture. Characters watch and are impressed upon, affected by the spectacle on display, regardless of their personal associations with the Kim family – as is reflected by the prosecutor presenting the case against Ja-hong failing to supress his emotional reaction. The frequent use of closeups of people crying makes the very emotion of the sequence a key part of its attraction, part of what is to-be-looked-at. Meanwhile, the impression of scale and size are granted to the emotional release depicted by the representation of emotional contagion that turns the reconciliation of a family's emotional wounds into a larger communal activity. The sequence thus conjures what can be considered emotional spectacle, whereby exhibition of emotion, and here of *haan-puri,* is a structured attraction impressed upon the cinema spectator.

As well as being central to the emotional spectacle of *AWTG1*, *haan* is a notable component of several of the film's visual spectacles. Most notably, we see this during the subplot of the film featuring the vengeful spirit of Kim Soo-hong as he is chased through the living world by afterlife guardian Gang-lim. Whereas the narrative strands revolving around Kim Ja-hong and his relationship with his mother draw more on the facet of *haan* known as *jeong-haan* – 'a haan of long endured endearment or unquenched longing, or unfulfilled, long-suffering love'[356] – this subplot, engages heavily with the more destructive side of *haan* known as *won-haan.*

As Chang-hee Son describes, *won-haan* is 'a haan of righteous suffering which may lead to justified anger and various actions to bring about justice over a lengthy time, the accumulation of won-haan in a person tends to become a masochistic and destructive

[355] Kim's mother's forgiveness leads King Yeomra to absolve Kim Ja-hong of the crime of Filial Impiety, and grant him immediate reincarnation, an act which concludes the film's narrative.
[356] Chang-hee Son, *Haan of Minjung Theology and Han of Han Philosophy: In the Paradigm of Process Philosophy and Metaphysics of Relatedness* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2000), 14.

force.'[357] With the Kim Soo-hong subplot triggered by his death during military service, when he is accidentally shot by a fellow soldier, his spirit exhibits each of the traits described of *won-haan* by Son. This is most visible during the subplot's climax, which culminates with one of the biggest visual set pieces of the film. Following Soo-hong's unexplained disappearance, his mother arrives at his military base protesting for an explanation, and is subsequently roughed up and pushed over by one of the men covering up Soo-hong's death. Witnessing this, Soo-hong's vengeful spirit becomes enraged with justified anger. The masochistic element of *won-haan* then manifests as, while his anger engulfs him, the flesh of his face begins to burn and crumble away. His *won-haan* thus manifests first as self-destructive before, by product of his anger, a giant tornado forms around him causing destruction at the military base, sending vehicles flying, and tearing buildings apart. Accordingly, the spectacle exhibited here is one coded heavily by notions of *haan* and *won-haan,* and by extension constitutes a cultural attraction, an attraction of Korean cultural emotion.

Similar cultural attractions – as has been shown – are prevalent throughout *AWTG1,* a special effects film that relies on the quantity and quality of its spectacles to allow spectators to follow what is an admittedly contrived and convoluted narrative. In the process, Koreanness is, in various ways, a prominent and identifiable element reflected in the construction of many of the spectacles exhibited. The same is very much the case in *AWTG2* which follows the trials in the afterlife of Kim Soo-hong. This sequel expands on the Koreanness that it represents, through a narrative more extensively situated in the living world. Poverty, and the *haan* of poverty, is similarly a prominent theme through a subplot that involves two of the guardians sent to ascend the soul of an old man being protected by a House God (Seong-ju).[358] Meanwhile, another subplot reveals the previous interconnected lives of the three afterlife guardians when they were alive during the Goryeo dynasty. Through this subplot the aesthetics of Korean history – the costumes, props, and architecture of the Goryeo dynasty – offer several attractions

[357] Son, *Haan,* 14-15.

[358] With the old man living in poverty as the only guardian (i.e. a grandfather, not a guardian of the afterlife) to a young boy, and with their traditional-style Korean house planned to be destroyed by city developers, Seong-ju is intent on protecting the old man until at least the boy starts school and until Seong-ju can find the boy a more stable financial situation.

through a variety of battle and fight scenes, and through general *mise en scène*. Meanwhile, *haan* resonates strongly within this subplot as it becomes apparent that each of the guardians is unknowingly responsible for the suffering of one of the others. In short, this subplot's narrative reflects the complicated interconnectedness of *haan,* a notion that manifests in a key moment of spectacle at the end of the subplot when a dramatic fight scene leaves each of the three guardians dead. Again, the plot of *AWTG2* is complicated and messy, but strung together through a discontinuous string of visual and emotional spectacles that are frequently culturally resonant with the Korean context. In this respect, I argue these films represent a cinema of cultural attractions.

Moreover, and given their status as special effects blockbusters, I think it is particularly notable the extent to which emotional spectacle is a central component of their narrative development. This is due to the fact that the most prominent underlying narrative thread within both films is the quest for forgiveness (Kim's quest for his mother's forgiveness, and Gang-lim's quest for the forgiveness of his fellow guardians for having killed them both in his previous life). Naturally, to such a subject matter, the attempt to elicit an emotional connection with the spectator is important to how the films' attractions are structured to address audiences. Emotional address through spectacle is thus central to the *Along with the Gods* films in a manner that may seem rare – though not anomalous – for a special effects blockbuster. For instance, while one could look to the love story of *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997) as a similar example from Hollywood cinema, typically special effects blockbusters are narratively driven by more externalised quests, such as saving the world or the universe (e.g. the *Avengers* films, *Mission Impossible* films, *Star Wars* films, *Lord of the Rings* films etc.). This is not to say that emotional address is not a key element of these films, but rather that the production of visual and visceral spectacle garners greater importance than that of emotional spectacle. It should be noted that for international blockbuster cinema more generally, the importance afforded to emotional spectacle may be more varied. However, the extent to which that importance is afforded is of little relevance to this chapter, given that non-American foreign films (special effects blockbusters, in particular) seldom receive significant exposure at, and impact, the South Korean box office; competition for mainstream audiences tends to be exclusively between Korean and Hollywood films. In this respect, emotional spectacle represents a distinguishing

factor for Korean blockbusters; I argue that, compared to Hollywood blockbusters, South Korean blockbusters tend to afford more weighted significance to emotional spectacle within their textual assemblage.

Emotional Spectacle in *Ode to my Father*

JK Youn's 2014 blockbuster *Ode to my Father* provides an excellent example of the importance of emotional spectacle to the Korean blockbuster. The film's narrative begins with the 1950 evacuation of the North Korean city of Hungnam where, in the chaos of the situation, a young boy (Yoon Deok-soo), with his two younger siblings and their mother, become separated from his father and one of his sisters. After the family's relocation to the South Korean city of Busan, this separation forces Deok-soo prematurely into the role of family patriarch. The film then follows his efforts over the following decades until the present day, as he grows into a man, and tries to provide for his family. Predominantly a melodrama, the importance of emotional address to the film is inherent, but what is significant is how that emotional address is repeatedly tied to moments of visual spectacle.

As a period film, many of the film's attractions stem from the recreation of the various eras depicted in the film – from the aesthetics of the past – yet there are also several visual set pieces throughout the film which provide key moments of spectacle. The first of these comes towards the film's beginning, during the evacuation of Hungnam. The historical event itself saw the US Navy evacuate 105,000 soldiers and '100,000 civilians facing certain death' from the port city of Hungnam, with Merchant Marine ship the SS Meredith Victory, in particular, evacuating 14,000 on a ship 'designed to carry less than 60 people'.[359] During this evacuation, the film focuses specifically on the evacuation efforts of the SS Meredith Victory, and it generates spectacle mainly from the sheer scale of the evacuation it depicts. Countless Koreans are shown caught up within the melee to make it onto the boat, with people scrambling through the doors to the cargo bay and climbing up the sides of the boat in desperate attempt to survive. Frequent cutting between shots of people rushing to the boats and getting knocked down

[359] Jon Dunbar, "Grandson Reveals 'Untold Story' of Hungnam Evacuation," *The Korea Times,* January 2, 2018, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2018/01/177_241853.html.

escalates the sense of franticness to the spectacle, within which Deok-soo and his family are caught up and eventually become separated. This separation occurs as the family are forced to climb up the netting on the side of SS Meredith Victory to reach safety. Deok-soo carries his sister Mak-soon on his back as around him people fight to make their way up the netting, forcing some people to fall off into the water below. The background music becomes tense, reaching a peak as a man's hand reaches to Mak-soon's shoulder. The music then cuts out along with any diegetic sound as Mak-soon's sleeve rips and she falls away. A deep thud sounds out as Deok-soo collapses onto the deck of the SS Meredith Victory but, as he looks down at only his sister's sleeve in his hand, the loss of sound in this moment emphasises the loss of family. As he calls out for his sister, his father joins him at the side of the boat. The father tells Deok-soo 'If I don't come back, you're the head of the family; that means whatever happens, you put the family first,' and then climbs back off the boat as Deok-soo cries and shouts after him. Solemn strings music joins the film's nondiegesis as the father searches unsuccessfully for Mak-soon. As the SS Meredith Victory then starts to leave, we see a shot-reverse-shot sequence of Deok-soo and his family crying and shouting to the father, and of the father below being left behind. The use of music and sound here adds to the sense of imminent loss, while the shot-reverse-shot – due to the boat's gradual departure – stresses the growing distance between the family and the father. The film then cuts to shots of the city of Hungnam as various explosions are set off, destroying buildings and huge parts of the city. Then, with the city in the background engulfed in black smoke and further explosions, we see a slow-motion montage of crying families aboard the departing ships, closeups of the crying faces of Deok-soo and his mother, and shots of the father left helplessly stranded behind, before an aerial shot pulls out over the CGI-rendered fleet of departing US naval ships. With the music throughout this montage continuing to evoke a sense of sadness and loss, the overall effect of this sequence is that it compounds the emotions of family estrangement with the visual spectacle of the scale of the evacuation and of the destruction of Hungnam. This compounding, thus, turns the family drama depicted within the scene into a moment of spectacle in and of itself, into something as much to-be-looked-at as the explosions that destroy Hungnam. Meanwhile, an emotional realism is conveyed as audience understanding of the size of the emotional impact on the family is amplified through the extent of the destruction of Hungnam depicted through the visual attraction of the explosions. This in turn

enhances the impact of any emotional transmission from the characters on-screen to cinemagoers.

Similar compounding of visual spectacle and emotional address is repeated during each of the film's subsequent major visual set pieces which, I argue, provokes a Pavlovian response in which throughout the course of the film the spectator is conditioned to ultimately receive spectacle from the exhibition of emotion alone (i.e. without accompanying visual spectacle). First, in Germany – where the adult Deok-soo travels to work as a coal miner to help support his family in Korea – an explosion inside the mine leads the mine to collapse, leaving Deok-soo and lifelong friend Dal-goo trapped inside. Following the initial visual attraction of the mine collapsing, we are shown two sequences depicting emotional pain: a sequence of Deok-soo's girlfriend (Young-ja) hearing of the collapse, rushing to the mine, then breaking down in tears as she pleads with the mine's manager to allow a rescue operation; and, a sequence in which Deok-soo imagines and narrates – with a sorrowful quiver in his voice – a letter to his father, telling of how he has been looking after his family, trying to find his lost sister, and how life has been hard. Emotion is brought to the surface – through Young-ja's tears, and the sentiments of hardship and longing expressed in Deok-soo's letter – but the manner of emotional address is of less importance here than the juxtaposition of these scenes with the visual spectacle of the collapsing mine. Through this juxtaposition, as with the destruction of Hungnam, the size of this spectacle of destruction conveys a sense of the magnitude of the emotional pain that emanates from the characters' separation and loss of loved ones (i.e. Young-ja's fear for losing Deok-soo, and Deok-soo's separation from his sister and father). This sequence, thus, continues the film's thematic motif that uses sizable visual destruction to convey the depth of characters' emotional turmoil.

This motif recurs in a scene set in Vietnam during the war – where Deok-soo works in the military, again to earn money for his family – which features a slow-motion sequence in which the impact of a bomb explosion on a street corner plays out temporally in reverse up until the moment before the bomb explodes. The explosion is then shown again in real-time as its destruction unfolds, thus emphasising the to-be-looked-at-ness of the explosion by showing it twice. Caught up in the blast, we then see

Deok-soo lying on the ground where his voice nondiegetically narrates a letter to Young-ja, his now wife. The camera, in slow-motion, pans and tracks over the scale of the damage of the explosion as Deok-soo lies to his wife that he is safe and well living in Vietnam, conjecting that 'Isn't it a relief to know that it was us, and not our children, who were born into this difficult era and lived through all these hardships?...I wish that none of all this had ever happened. Still I'm thankful that these troubles have been suffered not by our children, but by you and me.' Through its expression of righteous suffering, it is a message of *haan*ful sentiments, and one that leads Young-ja to burst into tears, as the sequence ends with her receiving the letter in Korea. Again, through the visual emphasis afforded the destruction from the bomb blast through its presentation as spectacle, a parallel is drawn with the extent of that destruction and the extent of Young-ja's emotional hardships due to her separation from her husband Deok-soo.

This motif manifests a final time in a scene showing Deok-soo, Dal-goo and fellow members of the military attempt to evacuate a Vietnamese village onto a small motorboat just as the Viet Cong attack. As a battle ensues, the sequence parallels, on a smaller scale, the previously depicted evacuation of Hungnam. We see this most notably in a succession of shots that mimic those used at the moment Deok-soo lost his sister at the film's beginning, as Deok-soo clings to the netting on the back of the boat with a young girl on his back. This time, however, the girl is pulled onto the boat, and it is Deok-soo who falls off the netting, after a bullet hits his leg – although, in the subsequent shot Deok-soo is pulled back onto the boat by a Korean soldier. We see, then, a large explosion from three different angles as the pier to the small village is blown up, before solemn music returns to film's non-diegesis and the camera, through a series of slow-motion pans, displays the crying faces of the now-displaced Vietnamese refugees.

In each of these cases, visual attraction (the spectacles of a mine collapse, a bomb explosion, and a wartime skirmish) is juxtaposed with the exhibition of moments of heightened emotion, emotion that stems from displacement and separation from families and loved ones. Through the parallels drawn between these spectacles of sizable physical destruction and the depth of emotional pain of the film's characters,

the repetition of this motif conditions the viewer to infer great depth to emotional pain whenever emotion stemming from separation is portrayed within the film. Through this emphasis on size, it encourages the viewer, ultimately, to receive spectacle from the expression of emotion alone, and by consequence have that emotion impressed upon them. This reaches fruition in the film's climax, in a relatively visually unspectacular, yet emotionally moving sequence.

This climax stems from a segment of the film that revolves around the efforts during 1983 to reconnect family members separated during the Korean War with each other. Deok-soo travels to Seoul to join the thousands of Koreans in Yeouido Plaza trying to find their lost relatives. CGI-enhanced wide angles of the plaza, and montages of Deok-soo searching through the plaza – all showing various tents, crowds of people, and thousands of placards for missing people – display the enormous scale of the reconnection efforts of the time. However, the climax to this segment substitutes this emphasis on visual scale for a simpler and more intimate aesthetic as it centres around Deok-soo's appearance on *Finding Dispersed Families*, a KBS television show that aired daily from June 30 to November 14 1983. Historically, the show gave families the opportunity to appeal to any lost family members watching, and live broadcasted attempted-reunions that showed possible relatives talk together (for the first time since the war) to determine whether or not they were in fact related. Through this format, over the 138 days during which the show was broadcast, 53,536 participants were aired and 10,189 families were reunited.[360] Archive footage of these reunions is shown within the film, through various shots that show people crowded around television sets watching the highly emotional scenes of real people bursting into floods of tears as they identify and reconnect with their family members. As such, the film displays these actual broadcasts in a manner that emphasises their to-be-watched-ness and positions them as emotional events, as is shown by not just the emotional reactions exhibited by participants on the programme but also by the audiences shown (in the film) watching the television show. This stresses the emotional realism of these events, and their resonance with the broader emotions in South Korea stemming from the division of Korea. Accordingly, when the fictitious Deok-soo is shown within the film

[360] "KBS Finding Dispersed Families," KBS Archive, accessed February 8, 2020, http://english.kbsarchive.com/.

as a participant on the show he, and the emotions he exhibits, are framed with regards to the broader emotional realities that stem from that division.

Through this emotional angling, the film directly addresses the spectator through the filming of its climax, a roughly five-minute sequence in which Deok-soo appears on the television show and eventually determines that a woman is his lost sister Mak-soon. This is achieved primarily through a fourth-wall-breaking shot-reverse-shot sequence that positions the spectator between Deok-soo and his sister, and provokes audience identification with the emotions of the characters exhibited. With Mak-soon living and based in Los Angeles, she is shown to Deok-soo via video link, and shown to us through a front-facing closeup of the television screen Deok-soo stares into. This framing is mimicked through a front-facing medium closeup of Deok-soo and the English-to-Korean translator sat beside him as they look towards the camera. Deok-soo and his sister, thus, look directly towards us, the spectator, as they talk to each other, crying throughout the interaction as it becomes increasingly clear that they are in fact siblings. While the closeup and medium closeups on these emotional faces incite a process of emotional contagion, the subjective viewpoints in which they position the spectator (i.e. those of Deok-soo and Mak-soon) provoke specifically empathetic identification with both characters. For instance, Berys Gaut identifies the point-of-view shot and the expressive reaction shot as two key film techniques that can prove 'effective vehicle[s] for affective and empathetic identification with a character'.[361] In particular, with regards to the expressive reaction shot, she argues:

> if we are confronted with visual evidence of an individual's suffering, we have a strong tendency to empathize and sympathize with her. Tales of mass disasters in distant countries also have the power to move us to empathy and sympathy, but generally more effective is a confrontation with the individual visage, with the particularities of an individual's plight etched in her expression.[362]

Through the shot-reverse-shot editing of this sequence, the audience gaze is constantly positioned through a point-of-view shot, looking at an expressive reaction shot. We are

[361] Berys Gaut, "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film," in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*, eds. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp.200-216 (pp.209-210)
[362] Gaut, "Identification and Emotion," 210.

directly confronted by the particularities of, at a given moment, either Deok-soo or Mak-soon's plight as they are etched into their crying faces, while the camera imposes on us the gaze of, at a given moment, the other sibling. This staging continuously positions the spectator as both the cause of and the receiver of the emotional responses of each character, in the process provoking the transmission of that emotion to audiences. This culminates when Mak-soon, looking directly at us while framed through the video link screen, holds up the torn *hanbok* she was wearing on the day of the Hungnam evacuation and asks Deok-soo (or, asks us) 'Am I your sister? It is a moment of direct address, both to the cinema audience and to Deok-soo, that leads to the acceptance for both characters of their familial connection, a realisation that leads to even greater emotional outpouring for the two siblings, as well as the rest of their family – who are seen crying as they watch on a television set from their home in Busan. It is through this direct address that we, too, are encouraged to share in this emotional reaction. The sequence, thus, displays great emotion, and provokes from the spectator similar such emotional reaction, while achieving as such with minimal visual flare; it uses predominantly static shots that borrow from the relatively uncinematic and visually unsophisticated aesthetic of the original 1983 television show.

The emotion that this scene exhibits provides arguably the biggest and most affecting spectacle of the film. This is significant given the film's status as a high-budget blockbuster, and a film that features prominent use of special effects spectacle. Unlike the *AWTG* films, these visual attractions are far more in support of narrative than the narrative is in support of the attractions, but they are nevertheless rendered cultural by the cultural and historical significance of the events made spectacle of. Meanwhile, the emotional attraction of this climax is dependent on spectator investment in the film's narrative and characters, which is built up through the film's previous spectacles. Each of the film's previous major spectacles (the Hungnam evacuation, the mine collapse, the bomb in Vietnam, and the village evacuation), through their size, scale, use of special effects, and the impression they leave on the spectator, reflect the size and extent of Deok-soo's struggles (emotional, mental, and physical) as he tries to provide for his family. Such is emphasised through the juxtaposition of these spectacles with sequences of exhibited emotion that – in the cases of the evacuation, mine collapse, and the bomb explosion – make direct reference to Deok-soo's struggles and suffering.

Thus, during the television broadcast in which Deok-soo reunites with his sister, this moment enacts the emotional payoff, the culmination, for Deok-soo's decades of struggle; the previous visual spectacles – more typical to blockbuster filmmaking – enhance the impact of the emotional spectacle constructed through the television reunion.

Through the overwhelming sense of emotional release created in this moment, the film resonates with *haan-puri.* This resonance with *haan* grows organically from the film's subject matter. The Korean War, and the family divisions it led to, have long since provided a deep well of *haan* to the Korean collective, as well as to countless individuals and families personally affected by the national trauma. Throughout the film, Deok-soo embodies a national response to this trauma and this *haan* through his struggles to adopt his lost father's role of providing for his family. As such, Deok-soo's reunion with his sister here, through drawing on the emotional realities of those actually reconnected families, enacts the *puri* (release, or solving) of individual *haan.* This family reunion projects onto the national, offering a symbolic national reunification of – if not North and South Korea – South Korea and the broader Korean diaspora.[363] Meanwhile, the film's emotional address functions to encourage audiences to share in and feel such *haan-puri* of national healing.

Such reunification is stressed further in a subsequent scene which shows Mak-soon with her Caucasian husband and children, all dressed in *hanbok,* visit Seoul to reunite with her mother, Deok-soo, and the rest of the family. It is a brief scene that positions the act of homecoming – here of returning to pay respects to the homeland, to the ancestors (notably the mother), and national tradition (signified by the *hanbok*) – as an important step in the national healing, and as a source of *haan-puri.* This is evident in the voiceover narration that ends the scene, in which Deok-soo explains 'My mother died the year after meeting Mak-soon'; the suggestion being that the mother found peace (or, *haan-puri*) after reuniting with her daughter following decades of separation.

[363] Notably, Deok-soo is here reunited with a sister who, following the Hungnam evacuation, was adopted by an American family, and subsequently lost her Korean roots and even her Korean language ability.

This theme of *haan-puri,* of the release that comes with coming to terms with and accepting the past, is further evoked through the film's closing scenes, which ultimately see an elderly Deok-soo in the present day make peace with the fact that he will likely never see his father again. We see him alone in a room crying while telling a photograph of his father 'Dad, I kept my promise. And I found Mak-soon. In that sense, I've lived well enough. But it was so hard.' The camera pans from a closeup of the elderly Deok-soo's face over to, and then through, a mirror on the wall, revealing the same room with Deok-soo as a young boy crying in it. The father then steps in from off-camera to hold his son and tell him 'I know how hard it was for you, and I'll always be thankful. You did all the things that I couldn't do.' The effect here is similar to that of the dream visitation that concludes *AWTG1*; it offers Deok-soo the fantasy of a dialogue with his father and allows the two to reconcile their *haan* from how things have transpired since their separation. Beyond the cinematic trickery of the camera floating through the mirror to reveal Deok-soo's younger self, the scene engages only sparingly in the optics of visual attraction. Nevertheless, in part through its presentation to us in the supposed reflection of the mirror, this act of father-son reunion and reconciliation again structures the emotions on display as attraction.

Through their resonance with *haan* such attractions are granted cultural resonance, while the repeated conjuring of *haan* throughout the film frames the film noticeably in relation to the national. Similar can be said of the film's national-history-traversing narrative, which encourages us to view Deok-soo and his family as embodying the national. Meanwhile, notions of the national are repeatedly emphasised within the course of the film's narrative. For instance, throughout the film Deok-soo has a series of chance encounters with various national icons (Hyundai Groups founder Chung Ju-yung, fashion designer Kim Bong-nam, and trot singer Nam-jin), while various traditional Korean events are depicted within the film (traditional weddings, a *Chuseok* feast, and a *Jesa* ancestral rites ceremony). Meanwhile, the segments of the film in which Deok-soo works abroad (in Germany and Vietnam) are framed through a Korean perspective. For example, in both segments Deok-soo is surrounded by Korean communities (Korean miners, and the Korean military, respectively), and he communicates only sparingly with the local people; in Germany, Deok-soo's courtship of Young-ja sees the couple bonding over Korean food; in Vietnam, Deok-soo's chance

encounter with singer Nam-jin leads to a brief sequence where Nam-jin sings part of his hit song '*Nim-gwa Ham-kke*'. The effect is that the film, even when situated in foreign locales, repeatedly places Korean perspective and culture on display. In this way, the degree to which *Ode to my Father* parades Korean culture, history, and national sentiments towards that history must be seen as integral to its domestic appeal.

In other words, the foregrounding of Koreanness, and consequently the film's cultural resonance, are key to the attraction of *Ode to my Father.* In this respect, while my analysis of this film and the *AWTG* films has been aimed at dissecting how cultural resonance and resonance with *haan* are structured into the film's angle of address (particularly through spectacle), it is imperative to consider how this links with the commercial aspects of blockbuster filmmaking as industry practice.

Emotional and Cultural Spectacle in the National Conjunction

On the surface there might appear to be little similarity between a special effects-laden fantasy series about the guardians of the afterlife, and a historical melodrama that traverses South Korean social history, yet both are instances of Korean blockbusters that engage extensively in emotional address through their construction of spectacle, evoking the nationally coded sentiment of *haan* in the process. Being members of the 10 Million Club – referring to films that receive over 10 million admissions (roughly one fifth of South Korea's population) at the domestic box office – both also constitute cultural phenomena[364] and box office hits. It is impossible not to attribute some of that domestic success to the efficacy of these films' emotional spectacle and address. Invariably in the cases of each, their success comes down to a variety of factors, and the degree of causality attributable to any one will always be impossible to determine. But given the prominence and centrality of nationally coded spectacle and nationally coded emotional address (through *haan*) to these films, such *haanful* emotional

[364] Admission to the 10 Million Club, as Pierce Conran notes ascribes a film with the status of 'pop culture phenomenon'.
Pierce Conran, "Korean, The Final Frontier for Original Cinema," KoBiz, August 22 2017, http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/features.jsp?mode=FEATURES_VIEW&seq=376&blbdComCd=601013.

address should be assumed to be an important component of their overall appeal to Korean audiences.

This relates to what Chris Howard refers to as the national conjunction, during his analysis of the contributing factors to Korean cinema's record-breaker phenomenon of the early 2000s – referring to the succession of Korean films that, following *Shiri,* set various domestic box office records. This national conjunction provides an important concept through which to appreciate how commercial success for domestic films at the domestic box office is multifactorial, dependent on a combination of audience taste and habit, industry promotion, and quality, subject and content of the filmic text. As Howard describes, this national conjunction constitutes an 'assemblage of film text, industry strategy and mode of consumption principally organised along 'national' lines', and acts as a ''tool' that helps Korean majors generate these films' enormous box office rewards.'[365]

In terms of textual assemblage, cultural resonance is invariably an essential component of this national conjunction. While there is always a degree to which cultural resonance constitutes a by-product of a film's cultural setting, the films discussed in this chapter are explicitly structured to resonate with a Korean cultural context. This should not imply any uniformity to the manner in which people from that context connect with the text. For example, despite its substantial box office admissions haul, *Ode to my Father* sparked criticism for what some viewed to be its politically conservative and whitewashed view of national history, one that promoted uncritical patriotism and omitted any 'mention of human rights abuses' committed by the military regimes in power for much of the film's historical context.[366] As Kyung Hyun Kim describes 'it would be difficult to pick a film that produced more intense political reaction than *Ode to My Father* not only in that year [of its release] but in the entire history of Korean

[365] Howard, "Contemporary South Korean Cinema," 89-90.
[366] Steven Borowiec, "'Ode to My Father' Stirs the Box Office and Debate in South Korea," *Los Angeles Times,* January 31, 2015, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-ode-to-my-father-south-korea-20150201-story.html.

cinema.'[367] This political reaction provoked much public debate,[368] and in turn generated 'buzz' for the film following a 'slower than expected' start to its box office run, eventually helping propel it to over 14 million domestic admissions.[369] Such positive impact of controversy on box office performance is nothing new – for instance, *D-War* was a similar beneficiary following public debate over its artistic merit (or lack thereof) and cultural (in)authenticity.[370] But importantly in these instances, this debate, too, is explicitly organised on national lines. To a large degree it stems from the cultural resonance of the film texts, which only stresses the initial importance of cultural resonance to textual assemblage.

In the cases of the *AWTG* films and *Ode to my Father,* as this chapter has shown, cultural resonance is to a large degree achieved through nationally coded emotional address in tandem with the creation of nationally coded blockbuster spectacle. While the blockbuster mode itself is invariably deployed as an industry strategy for maximising box office appeal, the manner in which these films employ that mode frequently and explicitly foregrounds the Korean context through the construction of spectacle and emotional address. There is difference in how these films achieve this. The *AWTG* films exhibit Koreanness through their cinema of (cultural) attractions filmmaking, as they use their narratives predominantly as a means of linking cinematic spectacles, many of which are coded as culturally Korean. Spectacle in *Ode to my Father,* meanwhile, arises more directly by product of the film's history traversing narrative. In each of these cases, though, the use of cinematic spectacle culminates in the delivery of emotional spectacle, and specifically emotional spectacle culturally resonant through its

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[367] Kyung Hyun Kim, "*Ode to My Father* (2014): Korean War through Cinema," in *Rediscovering Korean Cinema,* ed. Sangjoon Lee (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 502.

[368] For example, the film received public support both from then-President Park Geun-hye and leader of the liberal opposition party (New Politics Alliance for Democracy) Moon Jae-in.
Ahn Sung-mi, "'Ode to My Father' Stirs Nostalgia, Controversy," *The Korea Herald,* January 6, 2015, http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20150106000904.

[369] Ahn "Ode to My Father."; and "Box Office: All Time," KoBiz, accessed January 20, 2020, https://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/news/boxOffice_AllTime.jsp?mode=BOXOFFICE_ALLTIME&category=ALL&country=K.

[370] Jung Han-seok, "Review of Korean Films in 2007," 6.

evocation of *haan* and *haan-puri.* In this respect, this emotional spectacle, too, is structured around national lines. Importantly, that the emotional spectacle of *haan* is positioned as the focal point of these films' climaxes indicates the weighted significance of nationally coded emotional spectacle to the textual assemblage of these films (as is discussed further in my conclusion chapter).

Emotional address and emotional spectacle – through implementation of the blockbuster mode and engagement with *haan* – are frequently central components in the textual assemblage of South Korea's popular cinema more generally, and notably in its most popular cinema through the films of the 10 Million Club.[371] Though discussed in this thesis in slightly different terms, 10 Million Club members *A Taxi Driver* and *Assassination* both can be seen to exhibit similar tendencies to *Ode to my Father* and the *AWTG* films of compounding visual spectacle and *haan*ful emotional address. Similar cases could easily be made also of: *Taegugki,* notably through the reunion of two brothers fighting for different sides during the film's final battle sequence along the 38th Parallel; *The Host,* through the scenes of family loss and separation as a result of giant-monster attacks; and *Tidal Wave,* through similar scenes of familial loss and separation that take place during the devastation of the film's titular tidal wave. Though much more can be said of these films, and several others, the high-budget blockbuster visual attraction is a key part of how these films offer what can be deemed emotional spectacle. Emotional spectacle is not a feature unique to the Korean blockbuster, but what is significant is how the infusion of emotional spectacle with themes and sentiments of *haan* within the Korean blockbuster nationally renders the manner of these films' audience address, and by extension their audience appeal and attraction. In this respect, given the prominence of nationally coded emotional address amongst the most domestically popular films of South Korean cinema, it is clear that emotional address occupies an important place within the national conjunction.

[371] For a list of these films, refer to Table 1 (page 7) in the introduction chapter of this thesis.

Conclusion

Looking at a range of films, varied in genre, subject matter, style and mode, my thesis has shown *haan* to frequently manifest itself within contemporary South Korean cinema. While, in a sense, this has never been disputed, what previous studies have failed to sufficiently determine is the significance of that prominence. Throughout this thesis I have accounted for some of that significance by drawing on how *haan* is structured into both thematic representation and emotional address in some of the most domestically popular films of South Korean cinema. Key to this has been the attempt not to regard *haan* as a foundational characteristic of a Korean national cinema but rather to interrogate the role *haan* plays – when thematically and emotionally elicited – in relating to and representing the national. As Hye Seung Chung notes, in previous discussions of *haan* in Korean cinema there has been a tendency towards 'essentializing the uniqueness' of aspects of Korean cinema (e.g. 'Korean melodrama') 'on the grounds of the ontologically uncertain [*haan*]'.[372] However, questions of the uniqueness, distinctiveness, or specificity of Korean film (as a result of *haan*) – problematic as they often are – have limited critical value, especially when they neglect the implications of that uniqueness, and its effect on audiences. For this reason, I have not considered notions of uniqueness to be relevant to my discussion. Instead I have argued *haan*'s significance to lie in the role *haan* plays of connecting with film audiences, particularly in the respect that thematic and emotional evocation of *haan* in film has the capacity to appeal to (Korean) audience conceptions of the national by drawing on a sentiment of deep cultural resonance in Korea. Such appeal, when afforded a position of precedence in the textual assemblage of a film, I argue has proven itself to be of great significance to some of South Korean cinema's most culturally important and domestically successful films.

In this thesis I have analysed several notable examples of films where such position of precedence has been afforded to *haan.* In particular, this precedence is shown by when and where, within a film text, *haan* is most elicited. From the silent screams of Chil-su

[372] Hye Seung Chung, "Toward a Strategic Korean Cinephilia: A Transnational *Détournement* of Hollywood Melodrama," in *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema,* eds. Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 122.

and Man-su in *Chilsu and Mansu* (Park Kwang-su, 1988), to the pleas for remembrance of prodemocracy activists in Gwangju (*May 18.* Kim Ji-hoon. 2007) and independence fighters in the colonial era (*Assassination.* Choi Dong-hoon. 2015), to family reunions (*Ode to my Father.* JK Youn. 2014; *The Old Garden*. Im Sang-soo. 2007) and acts of family forgiveness (*Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds.* Kim Yong-hwa. 2017), much of the analysis in my thesis has focussed on the evocation of *haan* specifically during the climaxes and final scenes of the films analysed. *Haan* frequently plays a central role in emotional and thematic address at these moments, thus highlighting the weighted significance of *haan* within the overall structure of these texts. These moments represent culmination points for both film narrative and theme, meaning that the evocation of *haan* at these moments frames these narratives and themes through the lens of *haan* – itself a nationally coded lens. Moreover, it frames the films themselves through that lens.

Writing on the transmission of affect (as discussed in Chapter 1), Sara Ahmed comments:

> We may walk into the room and "feel the atmosphere," but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. Or we might say that the atmosphere is already angled: it is always felt from a specific point….The moods we arrive with do affect what happens[373]

In other words, moods tend to linger, or the moods with which we leave one room affect how we encounter the next. The same is the case when it comes to watching films; the moods that we are left with when a film ends affect how we remember a film. In this sense, there is weighted significance to the emotions, moods and affects provoked by a film's conclusion. Those are the moods that linger most, and the moods through which our memories of films are filtered. For example, if a film leaves us feeling uplifted we are more likely to remember it as an uplifting film; if it leaves us feeling sad we are more likely to remember it for that sadness. This is not to say that there are no other factors that influence how we remember the film, but rather that the concluding mood, sentiment or emotion that a film leaves us with presents a vital reference point for how

[373] Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," in *The Affect Theory Reader,* eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 37.

we engage with that film once we finish watching it; it helps frame, or retrospectively organise, our memory of it, its narrative, themes and meanings.

Of the films discussed in this thesis, the strong and observable tendency for films to indulge overtly with sentiments and emotions of *haan* through their closing scenes does just this. They elicit a lingering tone of *haan* – or in some cases a feeling of *haan-puri* (for instance, in *Spirits' Homecoming.* Cho Jung-rae. 2016; *Ode to my Father*; and the *Along with the Gods Films*) – through their angles of emotional address, which audiences, if receptive, are encouraged to leave the cinema indulging in. In this respect, the structural significance of *haan* within these films is of limited relevance to international audiences; the composite emotions and thematic elements pertaining to any evocation of *haan* are still structured into the film's address, yet they inevitably resonate less culturally with audiences detached from, or less knowledgeable or empathetic with, South Korea's cultural context. For Korean audiences, however, by nature of *haan*'s relation to cultural understandings of Korea, Korean history, and Korean perspective(s), the provocation of *haan* implicitly encourages a form of nationally coded spectatorship; it encourages audiences to, consciously or otherwise, interpret a film in relation to their understandings of the broader national narrative of the *haan* of the Korean people. This is especially so when *haan* is provoked through a film's climax and closing scenes.

It is imperative to note that I do not believe that such specifically national coded emotional address is a phenomenon unique to Korean cinema. What is perhaps unique of the Korean context, though, is that there is a name for a specific cocktail of emotions that when elicited can conjure notions of the nation. For the study of film, this makes it comparatively easier to identify how that specific cocktail of emotions is structured into a film, while allowing us to better understand the impact of that structuring. In this respect, through looking at *haan* this thesis has highlighted that impact, by arguing the importance of emotional address as a tool for delivering – or helping to deliver – social, historical and political commentary, and theme more broadly. Through the evocation of *haan,* that commentary, or theme, is projected onto a national context, rendered in terms of its relation to *the* Korean. This is significant in the context of a popular national cinema, and in particular a popular contemporary South Korean cinema that is often

preoccupied – as has been discussed throughout this thesis – with issues and narratives of (South) Korean history and society.

Haan, as my thesis has argued, is frequently evoked to the effect of relating to that Korean cultural or social context. It is not necessarily an identifiable component of every domestically popular film, but there is a substantial regularity to its manifestation in South Korea's popular cinema, and notable variance in the manner of that manifestation. As social realist affect, the evocation of *haan* has the ability to act as an emotional lens through which theme and social commentary in film are filtered. In representations of historical events, it has the ability to inflect cultural memory of an event or period (such as the Gwangju Democratic Uprising, or the colonial era) with the emotion of the broader historical narrative of the suffering and struggle of the Korean people, thus embedding those events and periods within the idiomatic historiography of *haan*. In conjuring notions of the national, *haan* can prove a useful tool for ideological and thematic elaboration of the national, while portrayals of acts of *haan-puri* have the ability also to offer audiences catharsis or reconciliation with those aspects of national identity and national history. At the same time, *haan* presents a potentially valuable tool for tapping into national impulses of domestic audiences, thus generating broader national appeal. In these respects, there is a flexibility and a malleability to *haan* that allows for its function of nationally coding theme and emotional address to be applied for a wide range of means and purposes.

As such, there is significant potential for *haan* to be politicised in the promotion of ideology (as noted in Chapter 3). Theoretically, the evocation of *haan* through thematic elaboration of a given ideology frames that ideology within a national sentiment of perceived resonance to *all* Koreans, thus in a sense promoting that ideology as an ideology *of* the people. In practice, cinematically at least, this function of *haan* has been applied to a variety of (often contrasting) views from across political and ideological spectrums. For instance, the evocation of *haan* in *Ode to my Father* (discussed in Chapter 4) can easily be related to what Kyung Hyun Kim describes as the film's 'validation of…Confucian ideals'; Deok-soo's suffering throughout the film is presented

as consequence of his commendable fulfilment of filial responsibilities.[374] Conversely, *Chilsu and Mansu* reflects a disillusionment with the tradition of filial piety, with Chil-su and Man-su's *haan* (as noted in Chapter 1) both stemming, in part, from the burdens placed on them by society as a result of their fathers' abandonment and imprisonment (respectively). In this sense, no ideology has a monopoly on *haan,* but where relevant, in this thesis, I have identified notable trends in such ideological application of *haan* – in particular, the promotion of feminism and anticolonial nationalist ideology through films dealing with the colonial era, and through the cinematic contestation of the cultural memory of Gwangju.

More generally, the continued manifestation of *haan* in South Korean cinema contributes to a broader cultural vernacular of *haan,* that uses the idiom and emotion of *haan* for narrating and framing Korean experience. We have seen from the recurrence of certain techniques, themes and narrative structures that, within this vernacular, cinema, too, has to a degree developed its own shorthand for communicating *haan* – perhaps most notably through the construction of cinematic oxymoron, in which contradicting themes and emotions are portrayed and elicited in a given image, sequence, or scene. To a considerable extent, though, this process is self-perpetuating; for as long as Korean cinema, and culture more generally, continues to mediate national experience narratively and emotionally through notions of suffering, loss, longing, injustice and resentment, *haan* will continue to be a valuable cultural lens through which to interpret, and gain understanding of, notions of national experience.

In this respect, the extent to which popular South Korean cinema continues to render stories of the national in terms of *haan* will be an interesting subject for future analysis given various contemporary and ongoing shifts in social conditions, cultural attitudes and demographic makeup within South Korea. In many ways the notion of *haan* developed its cultural precedence as a means of reconciling self-identity with a (South) Korean socio-historical context marked by injustice, oppression, trauma, and suffering for the general (South) Korean population, for the *minjung.* However, with South Korea

[374] Kyung Hyun Kim, "*Ode to My Father* (2014): Korean War through Cinema," in *Rediscovering Korean Cinema,* ed. Sangjoon Lee (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 511.

more than three decades removed from its democratisation, there are perhaps questions as to how long *haan* will remain a key marker through which to relate to a broader sense of Korean experience. For instance, the overwhelming majority of South Korea's current leading filmmakers grew up during – and were thus directly influenced by their experiences of – the politically tumultuous and socially repressive pre-democratic era. Comparatively, the years since democratisation have been marked instead by a far greater degree of liberty, and by a level of national prosperity. This is not to dismiss the social significance of economic turmoil, national trauma and political turbulence stemming from such events as the 1997 IMF crisis, the 2014 Sewol Ferry Disaster, and the 2016 impeachment of President Park Geun-hye. Nor should it dismiss the existence and prevalence of certain social issues more generally in the country. But to a considerable extent, contemporary social anxieties today stem less from issues of national identity than they historically have. Accordingly, the prominence of *haan*'s cinematic presence will be interesting to monitor over the coming years and decades of South Korean cinema, especially as new generations of filmmakers emerge and begin to shape the landscape of South Korean cinema.

On one hand, *haan* will likely continue to be prevalent in South Korea's period cinema, given that period cinema tends to concern itself conspicuously with issues of nation and narratives of national history, and given the *haan*ful residue emotions of certain eras and historical events that still resonate with large numbers of South Korean society. For example, the recent wave of popular colonial era-set films (discussed in Chapter 3) shows little sign of subsiding – with more recently Won Shin-yun's *The Battle: Roar to Victory* garnering 4.8 million admissions at the domestic box office in the summer of 2019[375] – while the large-scale public boycotts of Japanese goods last year[376] exemplify the persistence of (South) Korean resentment and anger stemming from the unresolved wrongs of that history. As such, *haan* will likely continue to offer

[375] "Film Directory: The Battle: Roar to Victory (2019)," KoBiz, accessed January 14, 2020, https://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/films/index/filmsView.jsp?movieCd=20184462.
[376] Justin McCurry, "South Korean Boycott of Japanese Goods Hits Beer and Carmakers," *The Guardian,* September 4, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/04/south-korea-boycott-japanese-goods-beer-car-sales.

a natural accompaniment to Korean cinema's elaboration of that specific past. Similar will likely be the case for such tumultuous periods as the Korean War, the Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan eras, and the 1997 IMF financial crisis. Yet considering the present-day absence of such widescale existential threats to national identity as those posed previously by Japanese occupation, the Korean War, and South Korean authoritarianism, there could well be questions over whether or not – when the present era becomes the past – filmmakers will continue to use *haan* as a cinematic device for relating to the national in representations of this current era of South Korean history.

Similarly, for contemporary filmmakers depicting the present, *haan*'s place in cinema is less clear. Given that the contemporary issues that concern South Korean society, and which filmmakers often explore – wealth disparity, suicide, corporate corruption, etc. – tend to be less conspicuously tied to notions of national identity than do the issues explored in period cinema, *haan*'s role in the cinematic elaboration of various contemporary issues is far harder to discern. This is not to say that filmmakers do not structure *haan* into these films, but rather that, when national context is not foregrounded, how deliberate or incidental *haan*'s resonance is to a given film is often less apparent. In films where it is less apparent, there is limited critical value to be ascertained from textual analysis with respect to *haan*. As such, films that do not foreground the national, and films set in the present day, have received only limited discussion in this thesis. However, in present day-set films that do foreground the national, *haan* can hold an important position within a film's angle of address, as has been discussed notably with regards to the *AWTG* films and *My Love, Don't Cross That River* (Jin Mo-young, 2013).

Underlying this is perhaps the question of how much, moving forward, the national will remain a theme of key interest to South Korean filmmakers and studios, particularly given the seemingly ever improving international profile of South Korean cinema, with various films in recent years achieving notable commercial success and critical revelry abroad. The most significant example of this is Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019), which since its release has – amongst other critical accolades – won the Palme d'Or at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival, four Oscars at the 2020 Academy Awards (becoming the

first non-English language film to win Best Picture), and accumulated USD224 million across box offices worldwide – including notably USD49 million at the US box office, making it 2019's most successful foreign language film and the most successful Korean film of all time at the American box office.[377] While the film itself can be seen as highly resonant with the Korean cultural context – and even evocative of *haan*, notably through its final scenes – its enormous success abroad will no doubt galvanise a local South Korean film industry which has in recent years been growing increasingly internationally-minded, particularly in terms of its commercial aspirations. Whether that translates to studios and filmmakers aiming 'to render [film] contents less culturally specific' in the quest for 'global popularity' – the approach commonly taken by Hollywood, as Francis L.F. Lee argues –[378] is yet to be seen.

Yet in the development of a strong and prosperous film industry, South Korean cinema has so far retained a substantial and recurrent self-interest in issues of Korea and national identity, the representation of which has frequently drawn on *haan* as a key cinematic device. In many ways, and regardless of the future of Korean cinema, this is the important point to stress, especially given the reflective tone recent discourse has taken towards South Korean cinema, both culturally in South Korea – with the industry celebrating the 100-year anniversary of Korean cinema in 2019 – and academically, notably with the recent release of Sangjoon Lee's comprehensive edited volume *Rediscovering Korean Cinema*. There has been a recent critical emphasis on re-evaluating South Korean cinema. In the spirit of this, I have aimed through this thesis to return attention to the function and critical significance of *haan* within that cinema.

Furthermore, I believe that there are other notable avenues of investigation that my research into the significance of *haan* to emotional address in Korean cinema could be of benefit to. For instance, in placing weighted significance on the evocation of *haan* to audiences receptive to *haan* (i.e. Korean audiences), my focus has been predominantly on South Korea's popular cinema, which in turn has largely minimised discussion of

[377] These figures are accurate to the time of writing
Box Office Mojo, accessed 28 February, 2020, https://www.boxofficemojo.com.
[378] Francis L.F. Lee, "Hollywood Movies in East Asia: Examining Cultural Discount and Performance Predictability at the Box Office," *Asian Journal of Communication* 18, no.2 (June 2008): 121.

South Korea's arthouse cinema, an arthouse cinema that often reaches wider audiences on the international festival circuit than it does in the domestic market. The issue here of international and transnational exhibition, though, provokes a different set of questions that would offer intriguing topics for future research, questions regarding the influence of *haan* in exported cinematic representations of South Korea, and regarding the manner and extent to which foreign audiences respond to *haan*ful emotional address. Similarly, subjects such as Korean cinema's commercial auteurs (e.g. Park Chan-wook, Bong Joon-ho, and Kim Jee-woon) and specific *representative* genres (e.g. horror, action, and extreme cinema) – areas that have provided subject of notable previous analysis within the academic discourses surrounding Korean cinema – have been granted minimal analysis within this thesis. As much as anything else, their exclusion from my discussion has been based in my desire to avoid using *haan* to ascribe notions of uniqueness and cultural specificity to these aspects that are seen in various film communities – often outside of South Korea – to in some way *represent* Korean cinema. But these are also all areas of Korean cinema where the ideas discussed in this thesis could shed valuable insight, by considering the extent to which they engage audiences through nationally coded emotional address, and through *haan*.

Ultimately, it is the importance to South Korean cinema of this emotional address that my thesis has most stressed. There is a link between emotional address, theme, and social commentary that needs further academic scrutiny, but which this thesis has shown can be of central importance within the textual assemblage of film. In the case of *haan* in particular, the effect of that link is a nationally contextualising one, and one that in tapping into the historical poesis of *haan* – into the greater narrative of the accumulated suffering of the Korean people – can provoke (Korean) audience empathy with the deeper reservoir of Korean *haan.* That deeper cultural context is vital to any understanding of the affective dimensions of *haan* in Korean cinema, and only in attempting to deepen that understanding can voice be brought to the silent screamings of South Korean cinema.

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