Abstract
With the success of Dr. No and Goldfinger in Asia, film industries in Asia recognized the market potential of spy movies and began churning out their own James Bond–mimetic espionage films in the late 1960s. In the US-driven Cold War sphere, developmental states in the region, particularly South Korea and Taiwan, adopted an anti-communist doctrine to guard and uphold their militant dictatorships. Under this political atmosphere in the regional sphere, cultural sectors in each nation-state—including cinema—voluntarily or compulsorily served as an apparatus to strengthen the state’s ideological principles. This chapter casts a critical eye on the South Korea–initiated inter-Asian coproduction of espionage films produced in this period, with particular reference to SOS Hong Kong (1966) and Special Agent X-7 (1966).

Keywords: postwar South Korean cinema; Hong Kong cinema; spy movies; Cold War; inter-Asian film

As many have already argued, the James Bond film series has been extremely popular not only in English-language territories but also in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. It is roughly estimated that half the earth’s population has seen at least one James Bond film. First appearing with the publication of Ian Fleming’s Casino Royale in 1953 and crossing over to the big screen

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1 Jaap van Ginneken, Screening Difference, 154
with the screen adaptation of *Dr. No* in 1962, James Bond emerged at a turning point in British postwar history. The James Bond series is certainly a perfectly tailored global product. Renowned James Bond historian James Chapman claims that *Goldfinger* (1964) marked the beginning of Bondmania as a truly international phenomenon. Unlike the first two films, *Dr. No* (1962) and *From Russia with Love* (1963), *Goldfinger* penetrated the world’s popular culture not only in “more advanced” Western countries but also in Asia, including Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and—finally—South Korea. It was *From Russia with Love* that ignited Bondmania in South Korea. Instead of the first Bond film, *Dr. No*, it was *From Russia with Love* that first arrived in South Korea and was officially distributed at the Paramount theater in Seoul on April 25, 1965, under the Korean title of *007 wigi ilbal*. It instantaneously became the number-one foreign film of the year, drawing a record-breaking 300,000 patrons in Seoul alone. Following the rave reception of *From Russia with Love*, *Dr. No* (Korean title: *007 sarin pŏnho*) opened just four months later. By the end of the year, the two Bond movies brought a whopping 500,000 moviegoers to the theaters in Seoul, whose population was only 3 million at the time.

With the unparalleled success of *From Russia with Love* and *Dr. No*, the South Korean cultural sphere faced a sudden explosion of James Bond-style espionage (*ch’ŏppo*) films and literature, which I have named the “espionage craze”, in South Korea. Most major newspapers and publishing outlets in South Korea competitively embarked on serializing “Korean Bond” stories and comics, along with translations of the original novels. Only eight months after the introduction of *From Russia with Love*, thirteen James Bond novels by Ian Fleming were translated under the title *The Complete 007 Collection* (*007 chŏnjip*) in December 1965. Even radio stations joined the craze by airing copious dramatized daily shows based on the espionage novels on the market. The espionage craze reached its zenith in 1966. KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) TV, the nation’s government-owned major network television station, aired a special program called *The World of James Bond* instead of the station’s hugely popular *KBS Grand Show* (*KBS kŭraendŭ syo*). In December 1966, the third James Bond film, *Goldfinger* (Korean title: *007 koldŭ p’inggŏ*), was released.

Film distributors were eager to import anything related to espionage, and over twenty James Bond copycats from Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, and France were released in the market almost simultaneously.
Among them, *To Trap a Spy* (Korean title: *oon nap’olleong sollo*, 1964), a feature-film version of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, and the France-Italy co-production of the OSS 117 series, both films and literature, were the most successful. Local film producers noticed the trend after they witnessed the audiences’ ardent reception of the espionage films and actively adapted this Bond-style espionage film to their local audiences. Fourteen locally produced South Korean espionage films were released in 1966 alone—compared with one in 1964 and two in 1965—including *A Female Spy, Elisa (Yŏganch’ŏp Erisya), Shanghai 55 Street (Sanghae 55-pŏnji), Spy Operation (Kanch’ŏp chakhŏn), Starberry Kim (Sūt’aberi Kim), Tokyo Correspondent (Tonggyŏng t’ūkp’awŏn), Secret Agency (Pimil ch’ŏppodae), Red Line (Chŏksŏn chidae), The International Spy (Kukche kanch’ŏp), Special Agent X-7 (Sun’gan ŭn yŏngwŏnhi), and SOS Hong Kong (SOS Hongk’ong)*.

As shown above, from the mid-to-late 1960s, the espionage craze was so vibrant that every cultural sector was obsessed with this particular film cycle. And yet the cultural, economic, and political logic(s) that gave rise to and modified the sudden popularity of espionage films in South Korea has long been neglected and forgotten in history. I argue that the espionage craze in the 1960s was shaped by Cold War cultural politics; the first intensive postwar interregional cultural network; the rise of popular culture boosted by the advent of radio, television, popular magazines, and genre novels; and the nation’s vigorous involvement in and holistic attitudes toward the Vietnam War.

Throughout the chapter, it is my aim to show that South Korean espionage films are more complicated than just the “good” and “bad” spy confrontations in American and European ones. In contrast to the plot structures in the James Bond films in the West, which pit a single “free” Western individual spy against a whole evil empire of terrorists, subversives, and megalomaniacs under the leadership of a tyrant-dictator or communist regime (in many cases the USSR), South Korean espionage films are telling, quintessentially Korean experiences. They are transnational in the modes of production, set in exotic locales such as Hong Kong, Macau, Taipei, and Tokyo, but as South Korean espionage films primarily targeted the South Korean film market, they passionately waved a national flag. Put differently, the North-South division system and its aftermath—separated families, war orphans, and traumatic memories of the colonial past and the Korean Civil War—functioned as major plot drivers in many South Korea–initiated espionage film productions in the 1960s.

That said, this chapter primarily focuses on two South Korea–Hong Kong coproduced espionage films—*SOS Hong Kong (SOS Hongk’ong)* and
Special Agent X-7 (Sun’gan ŭn yŏngwŏnhî), both produced and released in 1966—along with several more examples and will scrutinize the sudden explosion of the espionage craze in South Korea. I will first examine the phenomenon by tracing the history of espionage films and literature from the colonial period to the Cold War cultural sphere in the 1960s. Then, I will explore the ways in which Cold War South Korean espionage films reflected the transformation of the geopolitical imaginaries of the United States–led “free Asia,” anticommunism and the nation’s involvement in the Vietnam War, the sorrow of the Civil War, and the North-South division system.

Cold War Politics, Popular Culture, and South Korean Espionage Films

The public’s sudden obsession with espionage films should be deciphered from manifold perspectives. First, espionage literature or detective novels, if not films, had a long history of enthusiastic reception in the local cultural sphere. In the early twentieth century, detective novels, particularly the Sherlock Holmes series, influenced the intellectuals and mass public in what was then a Japanese colony. Ohio State University graduate Kim Tong-sŏng first translated and introduced Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s A Study in Scarlet (Pulgŭn sil) in 1923, which was followed by a series of translated and locally created detective and spy stories in the 1920s and 1930s. As many literary historians have argued, the beginning of the genre—espionage/detective—was attributed to Kim Nae-sŏng. His White Mask (Paekkamyŏn) was serialized in The Boy (Sonyŏn), a children’s magazine, from June 1937 to May 1938. White Mask was categorized as children’s literature and was labeled a “detective novel” (t’amjŏng sosŏl). White Mask tells the story of child detective Yu Pullan (homage to Maurice Leblanc, a French novelist who created Arsène Lupin) who fights against the thief White Mask and international spies whose purpose is to steal the confidential documents of a Korean scientist. Kim serialized and published more detective novels that were set beyond the boundaries of colonial Chosŏn: in Marseilles, Liverpool,

5 Ch’oe Aesun, “Iron kwa ch’angjak ŭi ch’o’ng, t’amjŏng sosŏlga Kim Naesŏng ŭi kaltŭng—ponkyŏk changp’yŏn t’amjŏng sosŏl ‘Maître’ i hyŏngsŏng toegi kkaji” [Kim Naesŏng’s complication between the theory and the creation of the detective novels—the formation process of Ma-ārî], 51–86.
Delhi, Colombo, and Shanghai, where the detective was working on behalf of the Japanese colonial power, including *Main* (1938) and *Typhoon* (*T’aep’ung*, 1943).6

After Korea was liberated from Japan in August 1945, however, the geopolitical boundaries of the new nation left no room for Kim’s transnational imagination. The world around the writer had changed completely. Japan had surrendered to the West. Korea was divided into two states—North and South. Moreover, the “evil forces” of the West were now the nation’s new mentors. Kim’s new country, the Republic of Korea, resided in the United States, the seat of the world order that had drawn the new map of “free Asia.” This anticommmunist bloc was controlled by the new hegemonic regime, the United States, by way of financial aid, cultural domination that disseminated the American way of life, and military base camps in various cities in Asia, particularly in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan, which Bruce Cumings pertinently terms the “Archipelago of Empire” that in fact established a “territorial empire.”7

Developmental states in the region, particularly South Korea, vigorously adopted an anticommmunist doctrine to guard and uphold their militant dictatorships. In this regional political atmosphere, cultural areas—including cinema—voluntarily or compulsorily served as an apparatus to strengthen the state’s ideological principles. Following this logic, South Korean special agents—such as the Korean “Bond” in *SOS Hong Kong* and *Special Agent X*-7—act passionately against the communists of North Korea and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to protect the country’s allies: Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Remarkably, it had taken only two decades for the fear of Japan’s remilitarization in South Korea to be fully converted into the logic of anticommmunism. Consequently, the animosity toward the Japanese empire during the occupation period turned into a fear of communism, and under this consensus—the anti-Red matrix—Japan emerged as an adopted “reeducated” son of the United States and the financially self-sufficient “big brother” in the metastable regional entity, at least in the realm of the film industry.

Second, the rise of the middle class in 1960s South Korean society ignited popular cultures that were different from the intellectuals’ highly selective cultural tastes. The number of city residents spiked, and accordingly, these

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7 See Bruce Cummings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea*, 393.
new patrons boosted the film industry. Along with the inflow of migrant workers to the metropolis, South Korea faced a rapid influx of American culture, that is, “core” modernism. Unlike prewar intellectuals who had been educated by the Japanese school system, this “new” generation—called the “4.19 generation”\(^8\)—was eagerly consuming Western, predominantly American, cinema and music. The 4.19 generation had reached approximately 100,000 in number in 1960, and they became the dominant consuming power in postwar South Korean society.\(^9\) Contemporary Western ideas and literature were imported to university campuses, along with the Beatles, Cliff Richard, and Elvis Presley. Hollywood cinema became the norm, and Hollywood’s young rebels James Dean and Marlon Brando and their French counterpart Alain Delon became the icons of the young generation. Radio, television networks, and the motion-picture industry, in tandem with the growing number of college students, all contributed to the spread of popular genre films such as Spaghetti Westerns, martial arts, and espionage.\(^10\)

Third, most South Koreans were fascinated by James Bond’s cosmopolitan lifestyle, adventures, and dangerous missions, which took him to places very few would have been able to visit. To contemporary Korean viewers, Jamaica, Turkey, Italy, Switzerland, the Bahamas, and Yugoslavia were their “imaginary” spaces of desire. In contrast to phantasmagoric images displayed in Western Bond movies, South Korean counterparts could only exhibit the nation’s strategic and ideological allies—Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan. Cold War politics enabled 1960s South Korean cinema to create a new type of detective—a cosmopolitan Korean “Bond”—who could travel beyond the boundaries of the peninsula. The South Korean “Bond” fought for South Korea’s “free Asia” allies. He visited such cities as Hong Kong, Macau, Taipei, and Tokyo, places that most South Korean viewers could not visit. Thus, as they watched “Bond” films, they could take pleasure in witnessing their secret agent triumph against North Korea and Communist China. Indeed, South Korea’s aviation industry seriously lagged behind its Asian competitors. Korean National Airlines (KNA), the nation’s first national flag carrier and only airline company at the time, only operated between Seoul and Hong Kong every Thursday until the early 1960s and

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8 This term was created after the April 19 revolution in 1960 when students and laborers united and fought together against Park’s regime. See Eui Hang Shin, “Political Demography of Korea,” 171–204.
9 Ibid., 126.
10 For more about the martial arts film and literature phenomenon in South Korea, see Lee, “Martial Arts Craze,” 173–95.
then gradually extended to Japan and Taiwan by the end of the decade.\textsuperscript{11} Visiting foreign countries, even an adjacent country, was reserved only for a few privileged people.

Lastly, as literary scholar Kim Hyŏn noted in 1969, the psychological need to find diversion from the gloomy political and economic situation at the time, marked by the South Korean military’s dispatch to Vietnam and the brutally oppressive public domain, helped promote the espionage craze in the latter half of the 1960s.\textsuperscript{12} The nation’s involvement with the Vietnam War in 1964 and the massive dispatch of troops in 1966 mobilized the sense of “ongoing war” among civilians in this divided nation-state that ignited the public’s interest in international politics and the “holy” war against the communists. The public response was that the Vietnam War was an extension of global communist expansionism, and as such, people believed, it had to be resisted. However, the more serious question was about the nation’s security itself. According to Se Jin Kim in his 1970 article, there were three groups of opinions. First, it was argued that the pulling out of 49,000 elite troops would jeopardize the security of the country. Second, the opposition raised the question of the cost of military involvement in terms of both human lives and the budgetary burden. Third, the policy to expand military participation was alleged to be an insidious plot between the government and big business interests.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, in 1966, the Park government needed to persuade both the opposing party and the public of the need for South Korea to participate in the Vietnam War. Indeed, 1966 was the zenith of the espionage craze in the nation’s cultural sphere. Accordingly, \textit{SOS Hong Kong} reflects the political and social atmosphere of the time. The film certainly glorifies South Korean troops, the Brave Tiger Division (\textit{Y\'ongho pudae}), and the nation’s involvement in the war.

Coproducing Espionage Films

\textit{SOS Hong Kong} is a film that was coproduced by South Korea (Shin Films) and Hong Kong (Lan Kwang Pictures). Shin Films was the largest motion-picture studio of its time, having produced and released 224 films during its

\textsuperscript{11} In 1969, the publicly owned monopoly airline Korean National Airline (KNA) was privatized, and Korean Air (KAL), a private company, was formed.
\textsuperscript{12} Kim Hyŏn. “Muhyŏp sosŏl ŭn wae ilk’imun’ga [Why we read martial arts novels],” 294–303.
\textsuperscript{13} Se Jin Kim, “South Korea’s Involvement,” 524–25.
operation between 1952 and 1975. Shin Sang-ok, the de facto owner of the studio, was a director, producer, and studio executive who had been one of the industry’s most powerful men during the 1960s. Shin was deeply involved with the militant government’s film policies through his wife, Ch’ae Un-hui, who had a long-term amicable relationship with President Park Chung Hee (1963–1979) and the state’s second authority, Kim Chong-p’il. Shin was, for the Park regime, a model entrepreneur. The Park regime supported Shin in establishing a modern and profitable motion-picture business that could export its output to foreign markets. During the 1960s, Shin actively engaged in multiple coproductions with Hong Kong and Taiwan and tried to export Shin Films’ output overseas using his formal and informal network with Shaw Brothers of Hong Kong and other small-scale regional productions. Shin had a keen eye for the latest trends. Shin Films imported three espionage films in 1966: the France-Italy coproduction espionage films *Secret Agent Fireball* (1965), *Fantomas Strikes Back* (1965), and *That Man in Istanbul* (1965). With the success of the imported European espionage thrillers, Shin Films decided to produce its own espionage films. This time, it was with Hong Kong’s Lan Kwang Pictures.

Hong Kong was indeed the perfect country to co-produce espionage films. Hong Kong film producers and audiences saw *Dr. No* earlier than Koreans did. The craze started in Hong Kong immediately after *Dr. No*’s public release on May 9, 1963. In the Cantonese cinema world, a female version of James Bond, the protagonist in the Jane Bond cycle, came into being in the latter half of the 1960s. *Black Rose* (1965) was the initiating force of this cycle, followed by its sequel *Spy with My Face* (1966) and other commercially successful ones, including *The Dark Heroine Muk Lan-fa* (1966) and *The Precious Mirror* (1967). This cycle, predominantly done in Cantonese, was, according to the Hong Kong Film Archive’s press releases, “likely the only one in the history of world cinema in which women are the primary dispensers of violence and where the violence is readily embraced by a predominantly female audience.”

South Korean film director Chŏng Ch’ang-hwa’s first Hong Kong film for

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15 For example, see Ae-Gyung Shim and Brian Yecies, “Asian Interchange,” 15–28.
16 Wong Cheuk Hon, president of Lan Kwang Pictures, was one of the most frequently appearing Hong Kong producers in the 1950s and 1960s South Korean cinema. He coproduced, with a number of Korean companies, *Because I love You* (Sarang hanin kkadak e, 1958), *Deep in My Heart* (Choyonghan ibrul, 1967), *509 Tank Forces* (Changnyŏl 509 taejŏnc’adae, 1967), and *SOS Hong Kong*. See Huang Zhuohan, *Dian ying ren sheng: Huang zhuo han hui yi lu* [A Life in Film: Memoirs of Wong Cheuk Hon], 103-105.
17 “Film Archive.”
Shaw Brothers, *Temptress of a Thousand Faces* (*Qian mian mo nu*, 1968), can also be included in this cycle. Hong Kong film producers introduced their first big-budget Hong Kong “Bond” films in 1966. Shaw Brothers’ Hong Kong studio director Lo Wei, who later became famous for his work with Bruce Lee, embarked on his first James Bond–inspired espionage thriller, *The Golden Buddha* (*Jin pu sa*, 1966) with Paul Chang Chung and Jeanette Lin Tsui, which was shot entirely in Bangkok.\(^{18}\) To produce more espionage films, however, Shaw turned its attention to Japan. Inoue Umetsugu, a veteran genre film director, came to Hong Kong in April 1966, and two films were already simultaneously under production. Inoue made *Operation Lipstick* (*Die wang jiao wa*, 1967) as his first Shaw movie.\(^{19}\) It was a Hong Kong-style espionage film.\(^{20}\) In November, Nakahira Kō produced another espionage film, *Interpol* (*Te jing 009*, 1967). The trend yielded the first Shaw-Nikkatsu espionage film, *Asiapol Secret Service* (1966), which was produced in two versions: starring Wang Yu for Hong Kong and Hideaki Nitani for Japan, under the direction of Akinori Matsuo.\(^{21}\)

Vietnam War, Family Reunion, and the Birth of a (New) Country

*SOS Hong Kong* begins and ends with newsreel footages that display the South Korean navy’s heroic battles in Vietnam. After the combat footage and Park Chung Hee’s speech to the soldiers, our hero—a South Korean special agent named Paek Min (played by Pak No-sik)—arrives at the Korean Intelligence Agency. The chief of the department issues an order: “According to the report of the agent ‘A’ in Hong Kong, two North Korean spies are going to sell information [of our troops] to China. And this information is possibly harmful to us. I hope you leave for Hong Kong at once to see the info.” The film then follows Paek Min’s journey in Hong Kong. *SOS Hong Kong*, helmed by Shin Sang-ok’s right-hand man Ch’oe Kyŏng-ok, aimlessly exhibits Hong Kong’s famous Star Ferry, Tsim Sha Tsui’s dark and narrow alleys, and dazzling skyscrapers. Paek indeed possesses all the James Bond-club qualities: he is a somewhat flamboyant, elegantly dressed, womanizing gentleman and a ‘Mr. Know-It-All’ who is equipped with various high-tech gadgets.

\(^{18}\) “Hong Kong’s Bond,” 32–33.

\(^{19}\) “Spycatcher Pei-pei’s Deadly Mission,” 4–5.


\(^{21}\) “Asiapol.”
Soon afterward, Paek reaches the Hong Kong–based arms dealer Sha Lao-te through the courtesan Xianglan (played by Helen Li Mei), a queen of Hong Kong’s nightclub scene who works for North Korea, and her vast network of social connections. Xianglan falls in love with Paek, her enemy, who in turn is falling for Taiwan’s “Double Horse” agent, Maria (played by Ting Ying). Already consumed with jealousy and now perturbed by increasing pressure from her boss (played by Yi Min), Xianglan lures Paek and Maria to the nightclub, where their adversaries lie in wait. But she gets cold feet and puts her life at stake to pull Paek out of danger. Xianglan’s boss, secretly in love with her, had proposed that they live together in Pyongyang, North Korea. Now deeply saddened, he asks Xianglan if she knows the consequences of betraying her country. She shouts with confidence, “Of course I know. But I realize it’s meaningless to live without freedom!” Xianglan is shot by her boss and eventually dies. After her death, Paek returns to save Maria, and they seize the microfilm from the North Korean villains. Having accomplished his task, Agent Paek returns to South Korea. Interestingly, Paek, once a humorous and womanizing Korean “Bond,” suddenly loses all his interest in Maria, who conveniently disappears in the final sequence. Maybe there was no time to develop a romantic relationship. Indeed, the nation was in danger.

Notably, in most South Korean espionage films, South Korean agents are almost always dispatched to Hong Kong. In many cases, as seen in SOS Hong Kong, they team up with Taiwanese female agents or Hong Kong counterparts. In other words, Hong Kong was the place where the communist forces of North Korea and China set up their secret units and operated covertly in underground bunkers to dismantle the capitalist societies in South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. For postwar South Koreans, Hong Kong was a place of wealth, fortune, and exotic beauties. Consequently, South Korean audiences saw Hong Kong’s highly modernized cityscape and exotic tropical landscape through the coproduced films.22 Hong Kong film scholar Stephen Teo argues that many of these Asian James Bond films are mostly “cheap and crude imitations of not only the character of James Bond but also the plot structures in the Bond films.” These films, Teo continues, reflect the Cold War in Asia and depict “the Cold War confrontation of the free world and communist world in simplistic, Manichean terms portraying ‘good’ and ‘bad’ secret agents who are licensed to kill.”23 On the surface, and particularly in the context of Hong Kong cinema, Teo locates an appropriate argument.

22 Kim Soyoung, “Genre as Contact Zone,” 97–110.
23 Stephen Teo, “The Liaozhai-Fantastic.”
But not all Hong Kong secret agents fight against evil communists. Tan See Kam, aptly calling this Bond-style crime thriller film cycle *bangpian*,\(^24\) argues that Hong Kong espionage films targeted the Chinese diasporic film market, “having a particular appeal for young cosmopolitans in the Chinese diaspora who sought and embraced the fun of ‘trans-ness’ that cosmo-localized pastiche, fluidity and hybridity afforded,”\(^25\) and that they are therefore “apolitical” and “denationalized.”\(^26\)

Furthermore, a coproduction partner’s geopolitical considerations also played out to become ideologically neutral. For example, in the espionage film *Asiapol Secret Service*, coproduced by Shaw Brothers in Hong Kong and Nikkatsu in Japan, our hero Yang Mingxuan (played by Jimmy Wang Yu) is a top-secret agent in the Japanese branch of Asiapol (Asia Police Secret Service: APSS). Asiapol is a fictional pan-Asian police organization so secret that its doings are apparently unknown even to the governments and law enforcement of the countries in which they operate. The headquarters of Asiapol is located in Hong Kong. Asiapol has five member countries: Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand. Intriguingly, Asiapol’s geopolitical considerations exclude two United States-influenced developmental states: South Korea and Taiwan. Thus, in this film, Mingxuan does not dismantle the communist activities in Asia. Instead of North Korean and Chinese agents, there is a megalomaniac, George (played by Nikkatsu’s top asset Jo Shishido), who is the leader of a criminal organization, ADU, based in Bangkok. He is planning to smuggle humongous quantities of gold into Japan in order to break down its capitalist economy. However, George is actually driven by personal revenge on Japan, where his mother had been abandoned and died miserably.

South Korean espionage films should be distinguished from Hong Kong’s *bangpian*, which can be characterized by their politically neutral content. South Korean espionage films, regardless of the production’s transnational nature, were aimed exclusively at the local market and addressed local memories of the colonial past and the civil war. The climaxes of these films, in contrast to other global Bond (or Bond-influenced) films, have almost always been dramatic/tear-jerking encounters of “long-lost” families, particularly South Korean agents/fathers/brothers.

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24. “In Hong Kong, *bangpian* is industrial parlance for contemporary actioners inspired by James Bond movies: *bang* (which sounds like Bond in both Mandarin and Cantonese) signifies both Bond movies and global Bondmania, while *pian* refers literally to films.” Tan, “Shaw Brothers’ *Bangpian*,” 196.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 198.
and North Korean/Korean-Japanese/Korean-Chinese agents/daughters/sisters. For example, in Kim Suyong's *Tokyo Correspondent* (1968), a North Korean secret agent whose mission is to kidnap a South Korean scientist in Tokyo finds out, in the final sequence, that the South Korean scientist is his long-lost father. They were separated during the Korean Civil War. An “evil” leader of the North Korean organization already knew of their relationship. Having converted to the world of liberal democracy (*chayu minjujuŭi*), the North Korean agent turns his gun away from his father and instead shoots the North Korean scoundrels, his former colleagues. Jang Irho's local box-office success *The International Spy* tells a comparable story. A North Korean undercover agent Chebi (played by Yi Tae-yŏp) is South Korea's number one enemy who is based in Hong Kong. Chebi is dispatched to Seoul to carry out a mission to assassinate a leading political figure in South Korea. He is performing this mission in order to meet his missing father. Again, the two were separated during the war. It is revealed that the South Korean politician is indeed Chebi's long-lost father. Chebi turns his gun toward the other spies and shoots them but is killed by the North Korean spies.

*Special Agent X-7*, a coproduction of Asia Pictures (South Korea) and Yuk Lun (Hong Kong), is certainly one of the most well-crafted and representative examples. Special Agent X-7 was distributed at the Shaw Brothers’ theater chains in Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore in September 1967. The plot concerns a South Korean “Bond,” Myŏng-nyŏl, known as X-7 (played by Namgung Wŏn), whose mission is to retrieve a secret document stolen by a beautiful double agent, Huang Lin (played by Diana Zhang Zhongwen). North Korean spies and a Chinese-Portuguese triad boss, Wang Tai Tu, provide the convoluted intrigue, which involves gun and bullion smuggling. North Korea’s primary purpose is to smuggle a significant amount of gold first to Japan and then to South Korea to help North Korean agents conduct covert activities there.

Huang Lin is the hero’s sex interest, but X-7 cannot forget his ex-girlfriend Yun-hŭi (played by Kim Hye-jŏng) a Zaninichi (Korean in Japan). X-7 first met Yun-hŭi in Tokyo, and they loved each other deeply. They were separated when her father and brother, Chungsŏp (played by Ch’oe Sŏng-ho), an old friend of X-7, decided to leave Japan for North Korea. Her father and brother were indeed active members of Choch’ŏngnyŏn (the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan; Chaeilbon Chosŏnin Ch’ongyŏphaphoe). She

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27 It was released on August 26, 1967, under a different title, *International Secret Agent* (國際女間諜). Oddly enough, Shin Sang-ok was credited as the film’s director.
wanted to remain in Japan, but her patriarchal father shouted, “You mean you wish to be Japanese forever?” In the end, Myŏng-nyŏl (X-7) and Yun-hŭi were separated. Many years pass. Yun-hŭi confronts X-7 in Hong Kong, but she has become a North Korean spy. Meanwhile, Lin falls helplessly in love with X-7. Interestingly, she voluntarily reveals her past to X-7, now a father/brother figure whom she trusts the most, in the middle of the film. Lin and her brother had lost their father during the Pacific War, and they were adopted by a Chinese family and then trained as communists. Lin’s brother is severely ill and has been hospitalized in Tokyo. Lin needs money. A shrewd North Korean agent (played by Hŏ Chang-gang) promises to cover the cost of her brother’s hefty hospital bills. Toward the end of the film, similar to Tokyo Correspondent, Wang Tai Tu turns out to be Huang Lin’s long-lost father after she has become his mistress. Wang, to save his daughter, betrays his team and is killed by a brutal North Korean agent. Interestingly, there is a second layer of the “father” story here. At the end of the film, Yun-hŭi realizes that her father is now in Seoul, not in P’yŏngyang. X-7 hands her a letter from her father. He explains:

X-7: I know that you’re forced to do the things you’re doing by your brother. If you know what is hypocrisy, then you should know what is truth … this is your father’s letter.

YUN-HŬI: But isn’t he in North Korea?

X-7: No. He’s now in Seoul.

YUN-HŬI: Seoul? Is that true?

X-7: Eight years ago, your father was deceived by the enemy and went back to North Korea. Later, he found out that it was a trick, and for freedom, he risked his life and ran away back to Seoul. He’s now being protected by our secret services. He’s very well right now.

After Yun-hŭi agrees to go back to South Korea with him, X-7 says, “Welcome to your mother country!” This repetitive theme of family reunions became South Korean espionage films’ structural archetype in the 1960s and 1970s, distinguishing the South Korean espionage cycle from its Western counterparts. But why have Korean “Bond” films been so obsessed with the themes of family reunions, war orphans, and the traumas of the colonial past? Certainly, the South Korean espionage films mobilized Confucian values to enunciate the North Korean communist forces’ vicious state of mind. Indeed, the North Korean organization lets people commit incest among families, plots a father’s murder at the hands of his son, manipulates innocent civilians in the “free” world, andkidnaps South Korean tourists,
as seen in *Tokyo Correspondent*, *The International Spy*, and *Special Agent X-7*. Therefore, North Korean communists—the “evil” forces—should be exterminated. Accordingly, South Korean secret agents are fighting against the communists. In the last scene of *Special Agent X-7*, Yun-hŭi, X-7, and Huang Lin are all at the airport. Huang Lin, wearing an elegant Chinese *cheongsam*, gets on the plane to return to Hong Kong. X-7 and Yun-hŭi, as a couple, are waving. Now, X-7 is dressed in a conservative black suit and a tie, while Yun-hŭi has her long hair back in a braid and is wearing a *hanbok*, as if the future of the country—indeed, the birth of a (united) nation—lies with them.

Likewise, in a final scene of *Golden Operation ’70 in Hong Kong* (*Hwanggŭm 70 Hongk’ong chakchŏn*), produced in 1970, South Korean special agent Pak Yŏng-il (played by Sin Sŏng-il) and Korean-American CIA agent Richard Han (played by Ch’oe Mu-ryong) are taking renowned South Korean scientist Dr. Ko to the Kai Tak airport in Hong Kong. These two agents have worked together to break down the North Korean spies’ operation to mass produce counterfeit money and rescue Dr. Ko, who is a specialist of printing technology. Han and Pak ask, “Dr. Ko, how long have you been abroad?” “It’s been 17 years,” Dr. Ko responds with a feeling of deep regret. He continues, “Seoul may look different, right?” Pak responds proudly, “You will be very surprised. Seoul is now a world city.” Pak then emphasizes, “Now it is time to serve the country!”

**Conclusion**

*Golden Operation ’70 in Hong Kong* was one of the genre’s last entries. Indeed, South Korea’s espionage craze lasted only a few years before its quick decline. After its peak in 1966, the espionage craze was precipitously replaced by a new obsession—martial arts cinema (*muhyŏp yŏnghw*a). In 1966, the thirteenth Asian Film Festival was held in Seoul.²⁸ It was there that Shin Sang-ok, the director of the festival committee, encountered King Hu’s hugely successful martial arts film *Come Drink with Me* (*Da zui xia*, 1966) and instantly recognized the film’s commercial value. *Come Drink with Me* was officially distributed at the Paramount theater in Seoul in April 1967, under the title of *Pangnang ŭi kyŏlt’u* (Duel of the Drifters), and instantaneously became the number-one foreign film of the year. A business-savvy film producer, Shin soon imported a series of Shaw Brothers *wuxia* (martial

²⁸ For more about the Asian Film Festival, see Lee (2020).
 arts) films. All the *muhyŏp yŏnghwa* (martial arts films) imported by Shin Films performed extremely well in the Korean market. There were virtually no *muhyŏp yŏnghwa* produced in South Korea between 1960 and 1967, but suddenly, nine martial arts films were produced and released in 1968 alone. Astoundingly, eighteen South Korean martial-arts films came out in 1970. In contrast, only two espionage films—*Operation Tokyo Expo '70* (*Expo 70 Tonggyŏng chakchŏn*) and *Golden Operation '70 in Hong Kong*—were released in 1970. Apparently, the espionage craze in South Korea was over. Maybe Korean audiences lost their interest in the espionage genre, as there were too many domestic films that were cheaply produced, heavily edited to meet the distributors' needs, and hastily released.

As the apparent progeny of Cold War politics in the West, espionage films witnessed unprecedented popularity around the globe in the 1960s. With the success of *Dr. No* (1962) and *Goldfinger* (1964)—along with French, Italian, and German copycats—in Asia, film industries in Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea recognized the market potential and embarked on churning out their own James Bond–mimetic espionage films in the late 1960s. Since the regional political sphere has always been multifaceted, however, each country approached genre conventions with their own interpretations. Certainly, South Korean espionage films copied the various devices of their Hollywood counterparts, such as “the oversexed and virtually invincible super (heroic) spy, the egregious use of women as sexual objects, the pervasiveness of Western technology (through gadgetry), and the role of the megalomaniacal and ruthless villain.” At the same time, however, these films also possess a significant amount of local interpretation with local languages (Korean), geopolitical themes (North-South Division), ideology (anticommunism), and social/historical issues (separated families, war orphans, and traumatic memories of the colonial past and the Korean Civil War). In other words, South Korean producers borrowed genre conventions to produce quintessentially local products that could only appeal to local audiences, regardless of how transnational their mode of production was.

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