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Hong Kildong in North Korea

Entertainment and Ideology in the Cinema

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Abstract

This thesis closely examines the North Korean film *Hong Kildong*, which is a film adaptation from 1986, based on the tale of Hong Kildong. It then compares the film version with a pre-modern literary version of *Hong Kildong Chŏn*.

The research field of North Korean cinema lacked a nuanced deconstruction of the ideological message conveyed in *Hong Kildong*. Consideration of the background motifs and themes was found to be generally overlooked. This thesis aims to provide for this lack.

By analyzing the North Korean film version, while using the Confucian Five Moral Relationships and virtues as a yardstick, this thesis identified how close the story followed or deviated from the Confucian ethics. The comparison between *Hong Kildong* (film) and *Hong Kildong Chŏn* (pre-modern fiction) pointed out what (ideological) changes had been made, changes mostly found in the character traits and the development of the storyline towards the end of each story, and helped to identify Juche ideological elements. Through the hypothesis, "*Hong Kildong* reflects the same ideological changes as have been made to create the yunsaek type *kodae sosŏl*," I was able to lend credit to the implications that come with the ideological changes I detected, since they then do not apply merely to this film.

My research results confirmed that the hypothesis was indeed correct. Art theory in North Korea has taken on a unified form which is broadly applied to every artistic activity, including both film and literary adaptations of pre-modern works of fiction. The same ideological development can be discerned in both types of adaptation.

The central theme, or "seed," of *Hong Kildong* can be defined as the revolutionary transformation from the old, corrupt Chosŏn society to the new, liberated Chosŏn, which is promised to those who move towards the sun, which is symbolism for Kim Il-Sung and his Juche thought.

Elements that suggest ideas contrary to Juche ideology were consistently found within the realm of Confucian thought. Confucian thought however was not condoned, nor completely condemned in the film, but rather improved to make a smooth transformation to Juche ideology possible. This suggests that Confucian thought remains, however limited, a component in the North Korean people's belief system.

However, hidden elements that reflect anti-Juche or anti-Party Line thoughts, which might have been an influence of Shin Sang-Ok's own ideas, could not be found.

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1. Introduction

From their beginning the North Korean regime has utilized film as a means to convey to its people ideological messages about the hardships of the past, the current revolutionary struggles and the ever imminent victorious future. North Korean films are therefore likely to hold many useful insights concerning the changing dynamics in state policy, ideology and mass communication. A close examination of themes in cinematic works could also expose social problems and threats which the regime might be addressing through film. *Hong Kildong*, the North Korean film adaptation of the literary classic, was named the “best North Korean film ever” by ex-North Koreans in a 2002 survey by the *Chosun Ilbo*. The film became a major success in North Korea as well as former East bloc countries, especially in Bulgaria and the Soviet Union.¹ In this thesis *Hong Kildong* will be closely examined.

1.1 Literary review and research background

In this section I will briefly explore the research field concerning North Korean cinema and research on *Hong Kildong*, which includes the research on the pre-modern literary classic, the North Korean film adaptation and the North Korean literary adaptations. I also included historical overviews of the development of ideology in North Korean cinema and of the ideological changes that have been made to North Korean literary adaptations of *Hong Kildong*.

1.1.1 Previous research on North Korean cinema and *Hong Kildong*

Western academic interest in North Korean cinema has been limited at best, with the majority of the research being conducted only during the last twenty years. In 2012 Johannes Schönherr published the first western work dealing with the scope of North Korean cinema, titled *North Korean Cinema: a History*. This semi-academic work was written using a journalistic approach in reviewing North Korean cinematic works and holding them against a basic background of academic knowledge of North Korean socio-political development. Although the book offers a helpful overview on North Korean films, the author unfortunately failed to dig much deeper than the superficial level in his reviews.

Academic works on specific North Korean films or film genres are scarce and usually focus primarily on film-related issues, using the films as research objects to illustrate arguments. Such are research on North Korean spectatorship of *The Schoolgirl's Diary* to analyze the popularity of

¹ Johannes Schönherr, *North Korean Cinema: A History* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2012), 101.

contemporary North Korean cinema,² research on *Bellflower* to analyze the North Korean social problem of the young rural population's wish for social mobility and urbanization,³ research on *Woman of the Well House* to analyze changes in the reunification genre in North Korean cinema,⁴ etc.

Hong Kildong, the North Korean cinematic adaptation of the classic Korean tale, is no more than briefly mentioned in researches, which generally focus on the pre-modern versions or its South Korean adaptations. Remarks on the North Korean film *Hong Kildong* are mostly centered on its obvious propaganda (blazing sun symbolism, anti-Japanese violence, etc.) and ideological messages (third nation utopia, revolutionary spirit, nationalism/Marxist-Leninism, etc.), while underlying themes and motifs are generally overlooked. I hope to bring a more nuanced view on and a deeper understanding of the film itself and its socio-political implications through character and motif/theme analysis of the North Korean film adaptation and through comparative research with the literary classic *Hong Kildong Chŏn*.

Hong Kildong was not only one of the most popular films in North Korea, but also the first Hong Kong-style martial arts film and a project of Shin Sang-Ok. Shin Sang-Ok, a South Korean film director, was allegedly abducted from Hong Kong with his ex-wife, actress Choi Eun-Hee, and collaborated with Kim Jong-Il's North Korean film crews between 1983 and 1986. He made films that followed the ideology of the party, but were overall more daring in expressions of love, imagination and fun.⁵ His works gained popularity among North Korean viewers for their high entertainment value, slightly erotic appeal and glimpses of foreign places.⁶ According to an anonymous ex-North Korean interviewee the tender love expressed by the main character in *Hong Kildong* in combination with his strong charisma in martial arts had a new and unique appeal.⁷

1.1.2 Historical background and development of North Korean cinema

To understand the appeal of Shin Sang-Ok's films in North Korea, it is necessary to know about the historical background and development of North Korean cinema. From its beginning, North Korean

² Sŏn-Ah Kim, "Han nyŏhaksaeng-ŭi ilki-rŭl t'onghae bon bukhanyŏnghwa kwangaeksŏng yŏngu" (A Study on the Spectatorship of North Korean Cinema around *The Schoolgirl's Diary*), *Hanminjokmunhwayŏngu* (Korean Culture Research) 34, (2010): 341-374.

³ Hangjin Lee, "Conflicting Working-Class Identities in North Korean Cinema," *Korea Journal* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 237-254.

⁴ Myŏngja Lee, "T'ongilchuje bukhanyŏnghwa-ŭi byŏnhwa: umuljip nyŏin ilkki" (Changing North Korean Movies of the Reunification Genre: *Woman of the Well House*), *Hyŏndaeyŏnghwayŏngu* (Modern Film Research) 4, (2007): 131-154.

⁵ Schönherr, *North Korean Cinema*, 91.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 190-192.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

cinema, like all its artistic activities, primarily served as a tool to educate the masses on state ideology. North Korean art had to be created under Socialist-Realist principle, which can be regarded as one of the essential elements of Marxist aesthetics. Some scholars however are hesitant to consider them aesthetic principles, given their vagueness and their liability to change under political demand.⁸ Nevertheless, Kim Il-sung propagated Socialist-Realism as the only “reasonable method of creation” in modern times.⁹ Socialist-Realism in North Korea demanded the artist to create realistic works, depicting typical characters in typical situations, which would serve to advance the socialist development.¹⁰ North Korean cinema under this principle thus was not very concerned with providing its audience with entertainment in the first place. Socialist-Realist themes of war against the imperialists, in which legendary heroes overcame all their obstacles, were a frequent recurrence in dramas and movies. Fantastic elements could not be incorporated and the only futuristic element shown was a potential reunification with the South.¹¹ Artistic works from the 1950s generally portrayed anti-Japanese cruelty as praiseworthy, with characters full of spontaneity, rather than political awareness or revolutionary consciousness.¹²

In 1955 Kim Il-Sung first mentioned his Juche theory, which began to transform the North Korean arts during the 1960s. From then onwards North Korean cinema, and all its other artistic activities, were required to follow the Juche theory of art, which was based on a creative Korean adaptation of Marxist-Leninism, with the purpose of advancing revolutionary goals.¹³ While the goal of Socialist-Realism and Juche Realism was both to raise and complete a class revolution which began with the life and struggle of the workers-class, Juche Realism developed to fit the North Korean reality, in order to overcome the limitations of Socialist-Realism.¹⁴ Socialist-Realism would focus too much on the

⁸ Yŏngmin Kwŏn, “Literature and Art in North Korea: Theory and Policy,” *Korea Journal* 31, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 63.

⁹ *The Selected Works of Kim Il Sung*, Vol. 3, (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1971), 9, quoted in Yŏngmin Kwŏn, “Literature and Art in North Korea,” 64.

¹⁰ Yŏngmin Kwŏn, “Literature and Art in North Korea,” 63.

¹¹ Antoine Coppola, «La science-fiction dans le cinéma coréen du Sud et du Nord : enjeu culturel et politique,» *Sociétés* 135, no. 1 (2017): 104.

¹² Brian Myers, *Han Sŏrya and North Korean Literature. The Failure of Socialist Realism in the DPRK* (New York: Cornell University, 1994), 102.

¹³ Kim Jong Il, “Marx-Lenin juŭi-wa chuch’e sasang-ŭi kich’i-rŭl nop’i t’ŭlgo nagaja” (Let Us Move Forward with Marxist-Leninism and Juche Idea), in *Kim Jong Il chŏjaksŏn* (Selected Works of Kim Jong Il) (Seoul: The Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University, 1991), quoted in Hyangjin Lee, “Conflicting Working-Class Identities in North Korean Cinema,” 238-239.

¹⁴ Byŏnguk Min, “Kim Jŏngil ch’ejeki bukhan yesulyŏnghwa yŏngu” (North Korea Art Film Research of the Kim Jong-il Political System Period), *Kongyŏnmunhwayŏngu* (Movie Performance Research) 13, (2006): 158.

social history, the conditions and the revolutionary actuality and too little on the actual people.¹⁵ During the 1960s the North Korean arts began to emphasize on self-reliance and revolutionary thought to strengthen its ideological aspects, instead of its previous emphasis on class consciousness, socialist thought and peopleness which had served to create a canon of common and typical aspects.¹⁶ The necessity for Kim Il-Sung's Juche theory above Socialist-Realism is explained by Yŏngmin Kwŏn as a means to transform Socialist-Realism into a national aesthetic, which is concerned with the nation's unique sentiments, thoughts and historic conditions in building a socialist country.¹⁷ While Socialist-Realism remained an essential element in North Korean artistic aesthetics, the Juche theory (which combined Kim Il-Sung's Juche thought and Socialist-Realist aesthetics) came to represent the logic of all artistic activity, and the "seed theory", which I will elaborate on hereafter, became the guideline for the creation of ideologically sound art.¹⁸

Kim Jong-Il's installation as director of film art under the Propaganda and Agitation Bureau in 1968 and his active supervision of cinematic production did not only help him gain his father's confidence, but it likewise contributed to the application of Juche theory of art in the creation of North Korean films.¹⁹ To guide and explain active application of Juche theory of art, Kim Jong-Il published guidelines for film productions (*On the Art of the Cinema*) in 1973, followed by ideological guidelines on other artistic disciplines: *On the Art of Opera* in 1974, *On the Art of the Drama* in 1988, *On Architecture*, *On the Art of Music* and *On Fine Art* in 1991 and *On Juche Literature* in 1992. In *On the Art of the Cinema* Kim Jong-Il decrees that a film can only be called an artistic success if it succeeds in conveying to the masses the urgency of reunifying Korea and building a classless country, while instructing the people in their duties and responsibilities for that task at the same time. A successful film should also display an endless loyalty to the party and appeal to the nationalistic sentiments of the people.²⁰ The following three principles described in *On the Art of the Cinema* are of great importance for the production of films; the "seed theory", "modeling" and the "speed campaign". The "seed theory" is a principle that focuses on the planting of the seed of revolutionary thought, which must be in line with Party ideology and Kim Il-Sung's revolutionary thought, into the minds of the audience. Each film is to contain a seed of ideology. The "seed theory" requires artists to perfect their ideological knowledge and their artistic skills, it teaches artists to solve the problem of combining ideology with art and it provides the communist

¹⁵ Ibid., 159.

¹⁶ Yŏngmin Kwŏn, "Literature and Art in North Korea," 60-61.

¹⁷ Ibid., 68.

¹⁸ Ibid., 62.

¹⁹ Hyangjin Lee, "Conflicting Working-Class Identities in North Korean Cinema," 239-240.

²⁰ Ibid., 240.

Party with full supervision of the creative process. Thus it is regarded an essential element in the overcoming of creative obstacles and the creation of socialist art.²¹ Yöngmin Kwön, in his close aesthetic examination of the “seed theory”, discerned two fundamental flaws. The first flaw was that the “seed theory” proposes art to come from ideological content which then dictates form, while art is actually the combination of content and form. The second flaw is the lack of aesthetic value in the “seed theory”, because it is merely Kim Il-Sung’s ideological thought.²² Through “modeling” North Korean films show their audience an idealized society, wherein the struggles of the working class bring about a classless, liberated nation. The “speed campaign” refers to the Party’s demand for rapid production of ideologically and artistically good quality content. The “speed campaign” demands of North Korean film producers to actively create new content, for the acceleration of the revolutionary process.²³ It also helps to fulfill the needs for a successful propaganda campaign, when the objective of propaganda is considered to be such as Leonard Schapiro described; “neither to convince nor to persuade, but to produce a uniform pattern of public utterance in which the first trace of unorthodox thought immediately reveals itself as a jarring dissonance.”²⁴ The “speed campaign” makes for a more practical principle which cannot be counted as a guideline for the creative elements. In following the Juche theory of art North Korean cinema distinguishes itself from Western cinema which, according to Kim Jong-Il, only pleases its audience with flattery.²⁵ This statement again highlights the educational purpose of cinema, which cannot be a mere form of entertainment.

The 1980s mark the peak of North Korea cinema. Under the direction of Shin Sang-Ok, North Korean cinema saw the introduction of romance, which portrayed another love than the love for the Supreme Leader, fantasy, science-fiction and action movies. According to Antoine Coppola the North Korean regime allowed for this development out of concern for its own legitimacy. Films like *Hong Kildong* and *Bulgasari* were produced because the regime wanted to portray North Korea as a magical and supernatural force.²⁶ While it allowed a greater emphasis on entertainment value, the regime nevertheless kept close supervision on what was presented to the audience. The 1986 North Korean film *Hong Kildong* therefore highlights the struggle against the feudal society of the yangban, but emphasizes on the hero being a martial artist, rather than a revolutionary agitator. Robert Fouser connects this

²¹ Yöngmin Kwön, “Literature and Art in North Korea,” 67.

²² Ibid.

²³ Hyangjin Lee, “Conflicting Working-Class Identities in North Korean Cinema,” 241.

²⁴ Leonard Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (New York: 1960) quoted in Myers, *Han Sörya and North Korean Literature*, 141.

²⁵ Hyangjin Lee, “Conflicting Working-Class Identities in North Korean Cinema,” 240.

²⁶ Coppola, «La science-fiction dans le cinéma coréen du Sud et du Nord,» 103.

emphasis on the hero's martial ability to the North Korean regime being aware that a more revolutionary hero would legitimize the act of rebellion.²⁷ The five-part North Korean series *Rim Kkok Jong* demonstrates how there was indeed a genuine risk of legitimizing rebellion. In the story of *Rim Kkok Jong*, which was based on the story or biography of a historical bandit, like *Hong Kildong*, the main character struggles with a lack of rights in a feudal society. In *Rim Kkok Jong* however, the hero uses brute strength instead of martial arts to fight off his enemies and forms a group around him called the "Sworn Brothers". The series was completed between 1986 and 1993, and used to be broadcasted on television, but was prohibited after 1997 because the regime feared it would inspire riots over the worsening social conditions. The theme song, which became popular, was a call for the sworn brothers to come forward and served as a subtle form of protest.²⁸ *Rim Kkok Jong's* hero was evidently too revolutionary. It seems that entertainment elements (such as the martial arts, a love story and comic relief) could counterbalance the revolutionary spirit evoked in the story. This suggests that North Korean cinema was caught in a delicate balancing game of ideology and entertainment.

In the years after Shin Sang-Ok fled, North Korean films began to emphasize on the ideological message again. The focus shifted to the internal happiness that was supposed to come from living in North Korea and the audience was encouraged to work together on making their own living spaces prosperous instead of longing for other places. Outside pressure from the changing economic and political situations in the Soviet Union and China, and the rapid economic development in South Korea, are likely to have inspired this internal focus of the ideological content in North Korean cinema, according to Johannes Schönherr.²⁹ After the 1990s, North Korean cinema went through further developments under the influences of the military first movement, the Sunshine policy of the South, foreign collaborations and the eventual leadership change to Kim Jong-Un. Although interesting, these developments will be further disregarded as they are of no importance to my research.

1.1.3 Kodaesosŏl adaptations in North Korea

Hong Kildong Chŏn, the literary fiction, belongs to the collection of kodaesosŏl, or Korean traditional style popular novels. To get a grasp on the influence of ideological art policy on traditional works such as

²⁷ Robert J. Fouser, "Translations of Hong Kildong: From Story to Classic to Mascot and Beyond," *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society-Korea Branch* 75 (2000): 33.

²⁸ Seok Young Lee, "Regime Clamps Down on Movie Theme Song," *Daily NK*, May 18, 2011, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?catald=nk01500&num=7695>, quoted in Schönherr, *North Korean Cinema*, 102.

²⁹ Schönherr, *North Korean Cinema*, 103.

Hong Kildong Chŏn, it will be helpful to look at the sort of changes that have been made in modern adaptations. North Korea's Juche theory of art was broadly applied to the field of art. Changes made in literature, from an ideological perspective, are therefore likely to be reflected in cinema as well. Vladimir Pucek, in his research on North Korean *kodae sosŏl* adaptations, divided the adaptations into three categories, all of which contained *kodae sosŏl* adaptations aiming to provide and improve "knowledge of the cultural heritage and evaluating it properly".³⁰ In the first category Pucek placed editions of the original *kodae sosŏl*, written in Korean script with commentaries, the second category contained editions of modern adaptations of *kodae sosŏl* which were subdivided into the *hyŏndaeŏ p'an* type and the *yunsaek* type, and the third category contained editions in modern Korean, translated from *kodae sosŏl* written in the Chinese script (*hanmun*). Among the first category of *kodae sosŏl* adaptations Pucek counted 17 literary works³¹ published between 1954 and 1960. Editions in this category stayed relatively close to their originals. Changes in the texts were generally made to enhance the understanding of the reader, by correcting errors from the original, providing commentaries on Chinese verses, historical events, persons or places and dividing the usually undivided text into chapters.³² Editions from the second category were adapted to fit a more modern use of vocabulary, grammar, expression and structure. Considerable attention was also paid to the ideological and thematic plan of works; aspects were emphasized, suppressed or even omitted to fit ideological purposes. The so-called *Hyŏndaeŏ p'an* type editions under this category were published between 1957 and 1958 and generally concentrated more on the linguistic aspects, while the so-called *yunsaek* type editions, published between 1980 and 1984, were mostly concerned with ideological changes. Changes in the *yunsaek* type editions primarily focused on eliminating ideas that were not compatible with state ideology, often found in the hero's spiritual ideas, supernatural elements, elements concerning power relations and elements concerning the existence of multiple wives or concubines for the hero. Besides ideological changes, the *Yunsaek* type editions also emphasized social motifs, condemned the license of Buddhist monks and omitted or freely copied material referenced to China without mentioning the original author or text. The omitting of Chinese references was done either out of linguistic consideration (plentiful notes in the text would disturb the reader's enjoyment and the North Korean reader's knowledge of Chinese was limited), or out of ideological consideration (rejection of the worshipping of

³⁰ Vladimir Pucek, "New Editions of Korean Traditional Style Popular Novels (*Kodae Sosŏl*) in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," In *Twenty Papers on Korean Studies Offered to Professor W.E. Skillend*, Edited by Daniel Bouchez, Robert C. Provine and Roderick Whitfield (Paris: Collège de France, 1989), 233.

³¹ The number of works here refers to the number of works of this type based on what was available to Vladimir Pucek in Czechoslovakia at that time.

³² *Ibid.*, 234.

the powerful/China, or sadaejuŭi). At the same time authors ‘Koreanized’ their adaptations by changing names of people, places and titles to fit the North Korean reality. The expression ‘Son of Heaven’ was turned into ‘King’ or ‘ruler’, for example.³³ The third category of North Korean adapted kodaesosŏl editions, translated from kodaesosŏl in hanmun, is smaller than the first two categories and shows similar changes with the second category. Literary works from the third category have likewise been published between 1954 and 1964 and after 1981.³⁴

1.1.4 Previous research on *Hong Kildong Chŏn*, the pre-modern literary work

The majority of research on *Hong Kildong Chŏn* focuses on the question of Hŏ Kyun’s authorship and the identification of the original or the closest to the original edition of *Hong Kildong Chŏn*. I will briefly discuss both topics in order to justify my choice for an edition to compare the North Korean film adaptation with.

In 1939 *Hong Kildong Chŏn* was first considered a work of Hŏ Kyun’s by Kim T’aejun, whose assumption of the authorship was based on Yi Shik’s comment in the *T’aektangjip* that Hŏ Kyun wrote *Hong Kildong Chŏn* to emulate *Shuihuzhuan* (*The Water Margin*, a Chinese classic). Although this opinion was accepted and adopted for years without even correcting Kim T’aejun’s spelling error in the title of the work (another character was used for *tong*), its accuracy began to be disputed during the 1960s. According to Yi Nŭng-U there was no evidence that Hŏ Kyun had been in any way concerned about illegitimate children, social reform or humanitarian activism, he seemed rather to have been an adulator, enjoying a relatively prosperous life as the youngest of a distinguished family, which makes it hard to connect him to a work like *Hong Kildong Chŏn*.³⁵ Kim Chin-Se added several more arguments contesting the authorship of Hŏ Kyun, saying Yi Shik’s *T’aektangjip* was edited and published twenty years after Yi Shik’s death and that Yi Shik had never mentioned *Hong Kildong Chŏn* in any work before, but that he was involved in the publication of two works that spoke negatively about Hŏ Kyun. Furthermore, *Hong Kildong Chŏn* was not found among the works Hŏ Kyun hid before his execution, nor was it mentioned in the charges against him or in the confidential memorial of his friend and later archenemy Ki Chun-Gyŏk. Lastly, Hŏ Kyun’s Buddhist faith made it unlikely that he would make his protagonist raid Haeinsa.³⁶ On this basis some scholars to this day are of the opinion not to call Hŏ Kyun the author of *Hong Kildong*

³³ Ibid., 235-254.

³⁴ Ibid., 256.

³⁵ Mookyung Kim, “Hong Kil-dong Transcending Time,” (MA diss., The University of British Columbia, 2001), 3.

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

Chŏn until there is more evidence in favor of it.³⁷ In the 1970s the dispute restarted when scholars tried to reconfirm Hŏ Kyun's authorship. These scholars hypothesized that either: 1) Hŏ Kyun wrote *Hong Kildong Chŏn* as a work of fiction, or 2) Hŏ Kyun wrote a biography on a historical person named Hong Kildong.³⁸ To establish confirmation for the first hypothesis Ch'a Yong-Ju countered the arguments which doubted the accuracy of the *T'aektangjip* by pointing out that it was unlikely that a record of a scholar like Yi Shik had been changed. He also argued that to focus on the life of Hŏ Kyun as the basis for an evaluation of his philosophical capability could not bring convincing evidence. Lastly, Ch'a pointed out that Hŏ Kyun's interest in Buddhism was not a religious one but an intellectual and even temporal one.³⁹ Cho Tong-II also argued that Hŏ Kyun's Buddhist interests did not mean he condoned the corruption of Buddhist monks. According to Cho, Hŏ Kyun did not regard Buddhism as the ultimate standard for living, but rather as a way to go against the Confucian ethics which were dominant in his time. Cho added that *Hong Kildong Chŏn* reflected Hŏ Kyun's opinions, which matched the opinions as expressed in two of his other works.⁴⁰ Regarding the second hypothesis, some scholars, even among those denying *Hong Kildong Chŏn* to be Hŏ Kyun's work, have concluded that the original *Hong Kildong Chŏn* was likely to be a biography of a thief named Hong Kildong who lived in the late 15th century and whose records can be found in the *Chosŏn Wangjo Sillok*, while the fiction *Hong Kildong Chŏn* must have been written in the 19th century.⁴¹ Arguments to support this view are found in A.F. Trotsevič's work. He wrote that the novel, the kind which was prevalent in the 18–19th century, is connected to the historical biography through several characteristics. First of all through the term *chŏn*, a Chinese term meaning 'biography', which, attached to the name of the hero, is part of a standard format for titles of both biographies and novels focusing on a singular hero. These biographies and novels are typically character-driven and share a similar structure.⁴² In the case of *Hong Kildong Chŏn*, connections in content between the fiction and the historical records (there is no biography known) are said to be very few, but one interesting parallel can be drawn. Historical records suggest that the real Hong Kildong, the thief, eventually fled to the Ryukyu Islands. This flight could have inspired the establishment of the non-Chosŏn kingdom of Yuldoguk in the fiction *Hong Kildong Chŏn*.⁴³

³⁷ Fouser, "Translations of Hong Kildong," 30-31.

³⁸ Mookyung Kim, "Hong Kil-dong Transcending Time," 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴² A.F. Trotsevič, "Korean Fiction and History," In *Twenty Papers on Korean Studies Offered to Professor W.E. Skillend*, Edited by Daniel Bouchez, Robert C. Provine and Roderick Whitfield, (Paris: Collège de France, 1989), 313-317.

⁴³ Fouser, "Translations of Hong Kildong," 36.

The identification of the original edition of *Hong Kildong Chŏn* is possibly even more difficult to establish than the authorship of Hŏ Kyun. First of all, a version of the biography of Hong Kildong, if ever one was written, does not exist (anymore) and neither does a record exist pointing out the original edition of the fictional work. There are currently some 30 different pre-modern editions of *Hong Kildong Chŏn* in existence, which are nearly all written in the Korean vernacular script.⁴⁴ Novels in vernacular Korean script from the 18th and 19th century generally have unknown authors, making it extra difficult to find an original edition. Researchers have not been able to agree on the original, or closest to the original edition. Chŏng Kyu-Bok decided on the twenty-four-leaf Seoul wood-block print, called Hannam version, as the closest to the original. Song Sŏng-Uk however decided that the thirty-leaf Seoul wood-block print, called Yadong version, was the closest to the original. Yi Yunsŏk agreed with Song Sŏng-Uk that the Yadong version was closer to the original than the Hannam version, on the basis that the last part of the Hannam version seemed shortened from the Yadong version. However, Yi Yunsŏk thought the eighty-nine-leaf Kim Tong-Uk manuscript was closest to the original. Yi Chong-Ju introduced the thirty-leaf Sŏgang University Hanmun manuscript and believed it to be the closest to the original version, which Cho Yong-Ho agreed, but Chŏng Kyu-Bok disagreed on.⁴⁵ The determination of *Hong Kildong Chŏn*'s original edition therefore remains undecided.

Research on the content, leading value system and social ideology of *Hong Kildong Chŏn* has not been quite as extensive as the research on the original edition or Hŏ Kyun's authorship. In an essay on the social background and value systems of *Hong Kildong Chŏn*, Yi Yunsŏk and Ch'oe Sangch'ŏn examine the confrontation between Hong Kildong and the feudal Confucian Chosŏn society. In the first chapter they look at the relationship between the hero and his family. The birth of Hong Kildong from a concubine and the oppressive relationship between Minister Hong and concubine Ch'unŏm can be interpreted as strong critique from the author on the patriarchal power, according to Yi and Ch'oe. The author highlighted his critique by the portrayal of the concubine as being far more excellent than the legal wife.⁴⁶ The family attitudes concerning the departure of Hong Kildong are telling as well. Even though the Ch'onan concubine is the one that plotted against Hong Kildong, Yi and Ch'oe stated that the overall responsibility was with Minister Hong, because nothing in the patriarchal house can be done without his permission. Yet there was not one character who objected to the maltreatment of Hong

⁴⁴ Yunsŏk Yi, Kyŏngjin Hŏ, Muiŏng Park, Aekyŏng Park and Yŏnghŭi Kim, *Hanguk kojŏnmunhak ilki-ŭi maeknag-kwa chip'yŏng* (Context and Prospect of Korean Classical Literature Reading), (Seoul: Minsokwŏn, 2015), 168.

⁴⁵ Mookyung Kim, "Hong Kil-dong Transcending Time," 10-11.

⁴⁶ Yunsŏk Yi and Sangch'ŏn Ch'oe, "Hongkildongjŏn-ŭi yŏksa sahoechŏk bunsŏk" (Socio-Historical Analysis of the Tale of Hong Kildong), *Hangukjŏnt'ongmunhwayŏngu* (Korean Traditional Culture Research) 5, (1989): 258.

Kildong, except for the hero and his mother. Although Minister Hong was conflicted in his heart concerning Hong Kildong, he followed the Confucian social values nevertheless. The main prosperity of the family was more important than the individual; important enough to sacrifice someone, even your own child. Hong Kildong's escape therefore is not only meaningful as the preservation of his life, but also as a step towards liberated life in the struggle to free society of structural contradictions.⁴⁷ The same absolutist moral code and family egotism of the elite class is detectable later in the story when Minister Hong and his other (legitimate) son are used to attempt controlling Hong Kildong's activism. It shows the inhumane attitude of the feudal authority towards Minister Hong and his son. The son in his turn only is concerned about Hong Kildong because he wants to maintain the family rights.⁴⁸ In the second chapter Yi and Ch'oe focused on the meaning of the formation and the activities of Hong Kildong's hwalbindang. They argue that Hong Kildong, in forming the hwalbindang rejected the inhumane morality of the yangban society and transformed himself into a revolutionary leader, while organizing an anti-feudalist group with which he was able to contest the domination of the central government.⁴⁹ The raid on Haeinsa, which was in the first place a test for Hong Kildong to prove himself as the leader of the bandits, reveals the author's critique on Buddhist clerics and doctrine but does not mean a complete denouncement of Buddhism either, according to Yi and Ch'oe. Buddhism retained ground in the Chosŏn society, regardless of Confucianism being the dominant belief system, because Confucianism did not have a religious doctrine to replace the Buddhist religious beliefs with. *Hong Kildong Chŏn* revealed that Buddhist clerics, having little authority of their own, conspired with local authorities and became corrupted. Buddhist monks started to accumulate riches, relying on the religiosity of the people, thus revealing the opportunistic properties of the Buddhist clerics.⁵⁰ The raid on Hamgyŏngdo, which was the birthplace of Yi Songgye and also the resting place of his ancestors, was interpreted by Yi and Ch'oe as a symbolical challenging of the Chosŏn dynasty.⁵¹ In the third chapter Yi and Ch'oe examine Hong Kildong's establishment of Yuldoguk, a new kingdom overseas. Yuldoguk was a monarchy where people enjoyed equal rights, not because the contradictions were eradicated, but because Hong Kildong's supernatural abilities made it possible. Yet Yuldoguk lacked realism, compared with the first half of the story, and there was no justification for the conquest of Yuldoguk. Yi and Ch'oe contribute this expression of Hong Kildong's excellence to a common theme in classical literature, the war story, which

⁴⁷ Yi and Ch'oe, "Hongkildongjŏn-ŭi yŏksa sahoechŏk bunsŏk," 260-261.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 266-267.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 262, 265.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 263.

⁵¹ Ibid., 264.

was often added for the reader's enjoyment.⁵² Peter H. Lee, in his foreword on a Wanp'an edition's translation, commented that Yuldoguk was a society free of discrimination on blood lineage, but a replica of the Confucian society and a no-place nonetheless.⁵³ Lee's comment resonates with Yi and Ch'oe's conclusion that *Hong Kildong Chŏn*, although criticizing feudal authority and striving to construct a society of equality, has revolutionary limits. The victory of Hong Kildong over the feudal authority is no more than a compromise, resulting in the acquiring of the title of Minister of War, which is a more personal, watered down victory. The anti-feudal sentiments are rather vague and half-finished. Lastly, the revolution is largely based on Hong Kildong's personal heroic actions.⁵⁴

As is clear from Yi and Ch'oe's analysis, the social value system against which Hong Kildong was struggling was a Confucian feudal society, in which the elite class exploited the lower classes. In the Chosŏn period society was divided into four hereditary classes, 1) yangban, the elite class who were eligible for government and official positions, 2) chungin, middle people with access to technical training and local government, 3) sangmin, the majority of the common people and 4) ch'onin, lowborn people including slaves, shamans and kisaengs. In theory yangban, chungin and sangmin were free and equal citizens under civil law while the ch'onin was subordinate, but in reality the yangban were the ruling class while chungin, sangmin and ch'onin were all ruled over.⁵⁵ *Hong Kildong Chŏn* reflects the struggle of the Chosŏn people against yangban oppression and the reaction of the yangban in enforcing the Confucian moral code to sustain their rule.⁵⁶ The Confucian elements in *Hong Kildong Chŏn* are further examined by Kim Mookyung, who focused on the Three Bonds and Five Relationships in determining the reflections of Confucian ethics. Her work proposed the hypothesis that Confucian ethics were reflected in both pre-modern and modern versions of *Hong Kildong Chŏn* and concluded that this was indeed true, but that in case of overcoming personal, social or political injustice it is acceptable to disobey the code of conduct between sovereign and subject, when necessary.⁵⁷ *Hong Kildong Chŏn* furthermore expressed that regardless of age, social status or family background, anyone can make a difference in the face of injustice; that the good will be rewarded and the evil punished.⁵⁸ The encouragement of good deeds and the punishment of evil is also a characteristic element in Chinese literature, which

⁵² Ibid., 272.

⁵³ Peter H. Lee, ed. *Anthology of Korean Literature. From Early Times to the Nineteenth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981), 119.

⁵⁴ Yi and Ch'oe, "Hongkildongjŏn-ŭi yŏksa sahoechŏk bunsŏk," 273-274.

⁵⁵ Dong-Il Cho, *Korean Literature in Cultural Context and Comparative Perspective* (Seoul: Jipmoondang, 1997), 95.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁷ Mookyung Kim, "Hong Kil-dong Transcending Time," 68.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

demands the complete denial of the genre of tragedy.⁵⁹ Given the origin of Korean traditional literature as based on a combination of rich expression from the Korean oral literary tradition and the ideology from Chinese-character literature⁶⁰, the influence of Chinese literature and its Confucian thought is undeniable. The Late Chosŏn period hero fiction, which was one of the most popular genres, is also said to be most influenced by Chinese works.⁶¹ Scholars in the 1960s made several comparisons between Korean and Chinese fictions and in the 1980s were even debating whether Chosŏn works of fiction were original or adaptations of Chinese fiction.⁶² Regardless, Korean traditional fiction has its own unique characteristics and development. Confucian ethics are so ingrained in Korean culture that South Koreans to this day can easily identify themselves with it.⁶³ Although North Korea officially is not a Confucian nation, North Koreans might actually be able to identify themselves with it as well. The North Korean notion of class, as explained by Lee Hyangjin, is not only based on the economic system, but also on the “cultural legacies of the Confucian occupational order”⁶⁴; a notion of class which is not dictated by personal achievements of individuals, but by hereditary status of entire families. Therefore, the struggle against injustices based on class issues are likely very relatable to North Koreans.

1.1.4 Research goals

This thesis will analyze *Hong Kildong*, a North Korean film adaptation from 1986. By close examination of its characters and symbolism in screenplay and by comparison with a pre-modern literary version of *Hong Kildong Chŏn*, this study attempts to identify the various ideological elements of *Hong Kildong* and to deconstruct the message the film is conveying. This thesis will also test the following hypothesis: *Hong Kildong* reflects the same ideological changes as have been made to create the yunsaek type *kodae sosŏl*.

⁵⁹ Hak-chu Kim, *Chungguk Munhak Sŏsŏl* (Discussion of Chinese Literature) (Seoul: Pŏmhak Tosŏ, 1976), quoted in Dong-Il Cho, *Korean Literature in Cultural Context and Comparative Perspective*, 200.

⁶⁰ Dong-Il Cho, *Korean Literature in Cultural Context and Comparative Perspective*, 11.

⁶¹ Seung-Ah Lee, “Conception of the Hero in Korean Popular Fiction of Late Chosŏn Period” (PhD diss., University of California, 2014), 3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶³ Mookyung Kim, “Hong Kil-dong Transcending Time,” 74.

⁶⁴ Hyangjin Lee, “Conflicting Working-Class Identities in North Korean Cinema,” 242.

1.2 Methodology

For my analysis of *Hong Kildong*, I used as source the film made available on YouTube by DPRKVideo⁶⁵ and focused on the interaction between characters, their relationships and any element that I could identify as symbolic or ideological. Using the Confucian Five Moral Relationships and their virtues as a yardstick, I measured how these interactions and elements either followed along or deviated from the Confucian ideology.

Ideally my research would then compare *Hong Kildong* the North Korean film with the original literary edition of *Hong Kildong Chŏn*, but since it is impossible to ascertain an original for the literary version, I chose to make use of a translation of the Wanp'an wood-block edition⁶⁶, which is close to the twenty-four-leaf Seoul wood-block edition. Since the twenty-four-leaf Seoul wood-block edition is one of the editions considered to be close to the original and Yi Yunsŏk also based his analysis of the social value systems and background of *Hong Kildong Chŏn* on the Wanp'an wood-block edition, it should be regarded as an appropriate research object. Especially since my comparative content analysis does not focus on linguistic comparison. To compare *Hong Kildong* the film and *Hong Kildong Chŏn* the literary work I wrote down all the differences and realized the differences centered on the character traits and the development towards the end of the story. Therefore I focused mainly on these elements.

For the discussion on the results of the second part of my research, the comparison between *Hong Kildong* the film and *Hong Kildong Chŏn* the literary work, I formulate the following hypothesis: *Hong Kildong* reflects the same ideological changes as have been made to create the yunsaek type kodae sosŏl.

My research is limited to the analysis of *Hong Kildong*, and one pre-modern literary version of the story. *On the Art of the Cinema*⁶⁷ has been used as a source to identify specific Juche ideological elements, but it has not been exhaustively analyzed alongside *Hong Kildong*.

⁶⁵ DPRKVideo, (2012, March 31), *Hong Kil Dong (1986, English Subtitles)* [video file], Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVnXAuaFY_s&t=4491s.

⁶⁶ Hŏ Kyun, "The Tale of Hong Kildong," Translated by Marshall R. Pihl, In *Anthology of Korean Literature. From Early Times to the Nineteenth Century*, Edited by Peter H. Lee, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981), 119-147.

⁶⁷ Kim Jong Il, *On the Art of the Cinema*, (Pyongyang: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1989), 1-468.

2. Analyses and Results

In the first part of this section I present the results of the analysis I conducted on *Hong Kildong*, the North Korean film adaptation, which focused on the Confucian virtues, the Confucian Five Moral Relationships and ideological symbolism. The second part of this section contains the results of a comparison between the North Korean *Hong Kildong* and the classical novel *Hong Kildong Chŏn*, in which I paid attention to the changes made regarding the storyline and the characters as well as the possible ideological implications that come with these changes.

2.1 Analysis of *Hong Kildong*, the North Korean film

Before going into the analysis of characters, symbolism or other interesting details, I will first briefly give a synopsis of the story of Hong Kildong, as told in the North Korean film adaptation. After that, I will demonstrate how the characters in the film reflect and deviate from the Confucian Five Moral Relationships and its virtues, followed by other ideological elements that characterize the North Korean film adaptation of Hong Kildong.

2.1.1 Synopsis of *Hong Kildong*

The story begins on a night of heavy rain and thunder, when the lowborn concubine of Minister Hong gives birth to a son. This event was the catalyst of a lot of domestic unrest, caused by the legal wife of Minister Hong, who hated the concubine and her son and found every opportunity to maltreat them.

When Minister Hong was sent on a three year mission to the capital, Kildong and his mother prepared to move to a different house. As they set out they were confronted with a band of robbers, who were ordered by the legal wife to kill Kildong and his mother. An old martial artist, however, who introduced himself as the father of the concubine, rescued them with his magic skills. Kildong was so impressed that he became the old man's apprentice. Not long after beginning his training, Kildong received a flute from the old man, which he was to practice playing every day.

As the years went by, Kildong developed into a skillful young man. During his apprenticeship Kildong one day encountered the same bandits, whom the old man saved him from as a child, in the tavern at the foot of the mountain. It came to a confrontation in which Kildong accidentally killed the chief of the bandits. While all bandits dispersed, Kildong and the tavern owner were left with a large treasure bag. In it was an unconscious Yonhwa, the daughter of Minister Rim. Yonhwa, nursed back to health by

Kildong's mother and grandmother, immediately fell in love with Kildong and Kildong also developed feelings of love for her. To continue his martial arts training, however, Kildong had to send Yonhwa back to her parents.

As Yonhwa went back to her home and Kildong finished his martial arts training, there was talk of a marriage between them, which was quickly canceled when Kildong's illegitimate birth status became known to the Rim family. Yonhwa however was firm on her decision to only marry Kildong and refused any other. In the Hong family the hostility of the legal wife against Kildong and his mother reached another peak as she ordered T'ükchae, the younger brother of the accidentally killed chief of the robbers, to kill Kildong at night. The plan failed when Inhyöng, the legitimate son of Minister Hong and older brother of Kildong, came to warn him. Kildong decided to leave his home that night.

Upon leaving his family, Kildong started to build a national reputation as the flutist who saved the poor from corruption and injustice. People of the elite yangban class everywhere began to fear the sound of the flute and the attack of the martial artist. A new encounter with T'ükchae convinced the thief to turn over a new leaf and he became Kildong's informer and helper.

As the Japanese ninjas invaded the kingdom and stole treasures and women, the royal guards and officers proved to be useless in countering the force, but thanks to the united efforts of Kildong, T'ükchae, his former bandits and peasant rioters, the Japanese ninjas were defeated and the treasure and women were brought into safety. As a reward for his efforts, the king was willing to give Kildong anything, but the only thing he longed for, marriage with Yonhwa, was still denied him because of his illegitimate status. Indignant with this insurmountable and persistent discrimination, Kildong got on a boat with his mother, Yonhwa, T'ükchae and the former bandits and sailed away to find a better place without discrimination.

2.1.2 The foundation of Confucian principles and the Five Moral Relationships

Confucianism is based on the idea that people, society and nature are all connected to form one unity of harmony. The ultimate principle behind this harmony is called Tao (or "The Will of Heaven").⁶⁸ When people identify their will with the will of Heaven, they can achieve divine happiness. To know the will of

⁶⁸ U-yöng Ch'oe, *Chosön Sahoë Chibae Kujo wa Yugyo Ideology* (The Governing System of Chosön and Confucian Ideology) in *Han'guk Sahoësa Yöng'uhoe*. *Han'guk Sahoësa Yöng'uhoe Nonmunjip*, vol., 42: *Han'guk Sahoë Kujo üi Chönt'ong kwa Pyönhwa*, (Seoul: Munhakkwa Chisöngsa, 1991), quoted in Mookyung Kim, "Hong Kil-dong Transcending Time," 58.

Heaven people have to practice the Five Virtues (compassion, righteousness, respect, wisdom and sincerity) and behave correctly according to the Confucian Moral code.

The Confucian Moral code distinguishes five relationships, with each of these relationship types having their own core virtue. The most important virtue, which is at the base of all moral relationships, is filial piety. The Five Moral Relationships and their core virtues are; affection and compassion in the relationship between parent and child, rightness and justice in the relationship between ruler and minister, differentiation in the relationship between husband and wife, precedence and order in the relationship between an older and a younger person, and trust and sincerity between friends.⁶⁹

The relationships between Hong Kildong, his family members, Yonhwa, the thief T'ŭkchae, the king, the ministers and the servants reveal the moral code each character is obeying or disobeying. The story is set in the Chosŏn period, when the Confucian moral code was officially the correct code of conduct. A close examination of the characters' relationships might reveal if and how the portrayal of the Confucian moral code has been changed to fit the requirements of North Korean cinema.

2.1.3 The relationship between parent and child

In *Hong Kildong* there are six different portrayals of the parent and child relationship. There are even more if we also consider the relationships between Kildong and the legal wife, and Inhyŏng and Kildong's mother as parent and child relationships.

Kildong's relationship with his mother was full of affection and compassion. In several instances Kildong and his mother shared each other's burden of being maltreated; they cried together and took care of each other. In the face of curiosity however, Kildong ignored his mother's orders. Kildong wanted to witness the fight between the old man and the robbers on the day they left home, and he wanted to know how the old man had caused the robbers to become motionless. When his mother told him to say goodbye to the old man, Kildong proceeded in asking the man to teach him the martial arts. Nevertheless, Kildong also was resolved to make his mother happy in place of his father, when they descended the mountain of the old man and decided they were not going back to Kildong's father.

Kildong's relationship with his father was less affectionate. Although Minister Hong did not dislike his illegitimate son and was genuinely happy when he found out that both Kildong and his mom were alive when he saw them again after all those years without contact, he never defended Kildong against the maltreatment of his legal wife. He also showed little compassion when Kildong lamented his

⁶⁹ Yŏngho Ch'oe, Peter H. Lee, Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed. *Sources of Korean Tradition, Volume Two: From the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 39-42.

sorrow of not being able to call his father ‘father’ and his brother ‘brother’, and that he was not a proper match for the girl he loved. Interestingly Kildong expressed that he would be a happier man if his father was of lower birth, instead of if his mother was of higher birth.

Kildong’s relationship with the legal wife was absolutely devoid of any affection or compassion. The legal wife did everything to distance herself and loved ones from Kildong and his mother, denying Kildong even the right to use kinship titles towards Inhyŏng and Minister Hong. Despite the harsh treatment, Kildong never became complacent.

Inhyŏng’s relationship with his mother was not that affectionate either. He was filial to her, but did not agree with her treatment of Kildong and the concubine. Inhyŏng was often caught between the cruel intentions of his mother and the well-being of her victims. When Inhyŏng saw Kildong’s mother scrubbing floors one day he called for a maidservant to take over the work, but did not succeed because his mother ordered the maidservant to do something else and on top of that gave Kildong’s mother more laborious tasks to do after. Nevertheless, Inhyŏng could never expose his mother to punishment, because “mother is mother”, as was twice repeated in the film. The relationship between Inhyŏng and his father did not stand out much in the film, but Inhyŏng treated Minister Hong with filial piety when he offered to go to Seoul with him when he was little, and when he offered to try and capture the ‘black corps’ to fulfill the king’s order to his father.

The relationship between Yonhwa and her mother was largely influenced by her father. Yonhwa’s mother typically took on the mediating role between Yonhwa and her father, always siding with the latter. Yonhwa’s communication with her parents therefore always was directly to her father. Even though the relationship between Yonhwa and her father was full of affection, there was little compassion. Yonhwa wanted only to marry Hong Kildong, regardless of his status or family background, and argued that he was the savior of her life and therefore she should serve him, if she was to follow moral etiquette. Minister Rim could not agree; that he was a savior did not mean anything, but because Hong Kildong was of low birth, he was no better than an ugly, useless elite. He also threatened to disown Yonhwa if she refused to marry the handsome minister-to-be elite boy that he found for her.

2.1.4 The relationship between ruler and minister

The relationship between ruler and minister was briefly expressed between the king and the ministers Hong and Rim. The core virtue of a moral relationship between ruler and minister is that of rightness and justice. From the beginning however it becomes clear that at least one of the ministers did not report truthfully about the well-being of the people. On the other hand, the king only scolded the

ministers for being quarrelsome and did not make an effort to find the truth. A disinterested king can hardly be expected to rule with rightness and justice. Minister Rim, who falsely pacified the king with reports of peace and harmony, was downplaying the crisis of thieves for the security of his personal official position. Although the king did intend to solve the problem of thieves, it was but a passive resolution. When eventually the king was also a victim of robbery, he became very angry at his ministers who had failed to protect him. The king then became actively resolved to get the thieves punished and dismissed minister Hong and Rim until they had captured the thieves and restored the king's money box. Interestingly the king did not mention the need for them to return any other losses, such as the kidnapped women or stolen property of the people. Lastly, the king did not seem firm or responsible in his words when Hong Kildong appeared before the king after the Japanese ninjas were defeated. The king promised to grant him anything he wished for, be it rank or wealth, but upon learning from his minister that Hong Kildong was an illegitimate son, the king had to deny Hong Kildong his wish to marry Yonhwa. Things might actually have been arranged if the king had granted him rank. Unless rank pertained to a profession status rather than birth status, but then it is doubtful the king could allow that for an illegitimate son.

2.1.5 The relationship between husband and wife

In *Hong Kildong* there are three different portrayals of the relationship between husband and wife. The core virtue of a moral relationship between husband and wife is that of differentiation. Interestingly, the relationship between Minister Hong and Kildong's mother is the most harmonious and at the same time the one with the most difference in status between husband and wife. The status difference however, would have made it easier to establish a relationship in which the woman is gentle and complacent, while the man is strict but righteous. In her relationship with Minister Hong, Kildong's mother offered him her services without fear or hesitation, and Minister Hong provided a house for Kildong and her when he had to go to Seoul for three years. Because Kildong and his mother were never able to make use of the house and stayed away for much longer than three years, Kildong's mother did not dare return to Minister Hong, perhaps out of a sense that she had not been filial enough to him. Yonhwa's mother and Minister Rim had a similar relationship, but their circumstances concerning their daughter's marriage disturbed the harmony in the household.

The relationship between Minister Hong and his legal wife was without much harmony. The legal wife dominated her husband's household by forcefully dividing the family members of elite birth and those of low birth. She was also not fully devoted to her husband's causes, but instead feared her

own safety (because of the thieves) and the loss of material possessions (the house they had to leave), before agreeing to accompany her husband to Seoul. Minister Hong on the other hand did not seem concerned with the legal wife either. He let her rule over the household while he did his own things. Minister Hong's general attitude towards his legal wife seems to be best expressed in one of the first scenes of the film; when his wife was lamenting the fact that he impregnated a lowborn maidservant instead of a mistress of higher birth and Minister Hong replied with little emotion to forgive him.

2.1.6 The relationship between an older and a younger person

The relationship between an older and a younger person is most virtuous when it knows precedence and order. The relationship between Kildong and Inhyŏng was technically that of a younger brother (Kildong) and an older brother (Inhyŏng), but in their younger years there seemed no differentiation, as can be seen in the scene where Kildong stood on Inhyŏng's back trying to pick fruits from a tree, before the legal wife separated them. In their later years both also asked each other for favors; Kildong forgave the legal wife for sending an assassin to attempt his life because Inhyŏng asked him to and Inhyŏng took care of Kildong's mother because Kildong left her in his care when he went out to become a national helper of the poor.

Kildong's relationship with the old man who called himself his grandfather and also became his teacher was a very ordered one. As Kildong learned the martial arts from the old man he was to call him teacher and not grandfather. Kildong also had to listen well and do everything his teacher told him to. The old man demanded complete devotion from Kildong in learning the martial arts, therefore Kildong was ordered to descend the mountain immediately if he had any thought in pursuing the love of Yonhwa. Kildong also hunted the mountains to exchange what he caught for wine in the tavern. He did not drink it, but brought it up the mountain for the old man to drink.

The relationship between Kildong and T'ŭkchae was nearly opposite to the moral code. Although T'ŭkchae must have been at least ten years older than Kildong, in terms of precedence Kildong came first in their relationship. It was Kildong who had mercy on T'ŭkchae when they accidentally met a third time. That time T'ŭkchae asked Kildong to kill him when T'ŭkchae had reflected how Kildong was using his skills for the good of others, while T'ŭkchae himself was still robbing and vengeful for the death of his brother. Kildong was the better man and symbolically killed the old T'ŭkchae, so T'ŭkchae could turn over a new leaf. From that moment on T'ŭkchae became an informant and helper to Kildong. This was emphasized by T'ŭkchae asking Kildong if he can be his subject.

Other instances where a filial heart and precedence in the relationship between a younger and an older person are shown are for example between Inhyŏng and Kildong's mother. Inhyŏng called Kildong's mother stepmother, which is a term that he, as the legitimate son, probably did not have to use, but it showed a filial heart towards her as the concubine of his father and the mother of his brother. Inhyŏng also inquired after the health of Kildong's mother and generally behaved like a filial son to her. Yonhwa likewise behaved like a filial daughter to Kildong's mother. When Yonhwa was recovered and stayed in the mountains with Kildong, his mother and the old man, she offered Kildong's mother to help with cooking even though she evidently had little experience or skill. In this way she showed her filial heart to her elders. Kildong's mother, in her relationship with the legal wife, did not experience affection, but she also showed that there was precedence in their relationship. Although presumably the legal wife was older, but Kildong's mother's humbleness in asking forgiveness for her son's playing with Inhyŏng was likely founded on status difference more than age difference.

2.1.7 The relationship between friends

The core virtues in the relationship between friends are trust and sincerity. A friend in is defined in the Confucian moral code as someone of the same kind.⁷⁰ Although the ministers Hong and Rim were each other's rivals rather than friends, their relationship was the only kind in *Hong Kildong* that can be considered as a relationship between friends. Ministers Hong and Rim were the same in status and gender, and quite possibly in age as well. There was however no trust or sincerity between them. Besides their quarreling in front of the king, Minister Hong rejoiced in the prospect of lowering the head and status of Minister Rim by allowing his illegitimate son to become the son-in-law of Minister Rim. Before Minister Rim had found out about the status difference of their children, he tried to favor the match by radically burying the rivalry, which only surfaced that much stronger when he did discover Kildong's illegitimate birth status.

2.1.8 Other noteworthy elements in *Hong Kildong*

Quite a few elements stood out either as depicting characteristics of a Confucian society, both moral and immoral, or as depicting Juche enlightened characteristics. The characteristics of an immoral Confucian society centered primarily on the life and conduct of the elite yangban society. The image of a drunken governor, who bought and abused unwilling girls for his entertainment, is a typical depiction of

⁷⁰ Ibid., 41.

immoral abuse of status which was possible under Confucian principles. The elite were also shown to use money for arranging all sorts of things, such as landownership or manpower. Their fear upon hearing the sound of a flute betrayed that their use of money was dishonest. It could mean to signify the elite as being corrupt, but it also neatly ties in with anti-capitalist ideas. The immoral life of the elite was further emphasized in the portrayal of the local as well as royal guards, who were useless in their task to secure the safety of the people and the king. Portrayed as idiotic and cowardly, they were shown to be powerful only in number and status, but not in virtue, intelligence or skill.

The Hong and Rim households also displayed various elements that belong to a Confucian moral setting. First of all, Minister Hong's elopement with another woman besides his wife was not the real problem; what his legal wife lamented was that the woman in question was a mere maidservant of low birth. Later it is by Kildong's knowledge of the Confucian classics that the audience learned that little Kildong had an excellent intelligence and a personal understanding of (Confucian) moral justice. From Minister Rim's visit to a go-between or matchmaker for Yonhwa and Kildong's marriage it became clear that the Rim family was inclined to belief in the supernatural. Minister Rim even stated the good luck of the marriage to be God's or Heaven's will.

The Confucian role model for Hong Kildong showed up in the form of an old man who called himself Kildong's grandfather and became Kildong's martial arts teacher. As a martial arts teacher, the old man was a relentless, but good-natured and friendly teacher. His character exuded harmony and happiness. His actions of protecting and teaching Kildong also demonstrated that he seemed to have mastered the Five Virtues. Besides the martial arts he taught Kildong to practice self-discipline, by ordering him to exercise before breakfast. Kildong's martial arts training served to prepare him for his duties in the rest of his life. Interestingly his teacher also made some remarks that resonate with the Juche ideology and reflect the ideological shift that has been made during the 1980s in the modern adaptations of *Hong Kildong Chŏn* or the literary classic. The last lesson that the old man gave to Kildong was that the "magic" of martial arts is a combination of intelligence, physical strength and mental strength. There is no room in his explanation for any spiritual influence of supernatural component. The old man ends the training by stressing that the martial arts should only be used for defending the country and saving the people from misery, and not for any other purpose. This can be interpreted as a reminder for the North Korean viewer that they should use their talents for the sake of the country and not for their own personal goals.

When Hong Kildong took leave of his teacher and descended the mountain, he was like a reformed man. Already during his later years of training he had rejected the thought of accumulating

money, which was evident from his refusal to join the band of robbers, before he even knew they were robbers. Kildong's character as he re-entered into the corrupt world was like that of an innocent babe; in front of his father he seemed to have forgotten the proper (Confucian) etiquette between parents and children, as he had to awkwardly readjust his sitting position in greeting his father. He was also unaware of the overall corrupted mindset of the upper class and the suffering of the people. These scenes seemed to highlight the "sobak ham" of Hong Kildong. Deemed a national virtue by leftists in the beginning of the 20th century, "sobak ham" is seen in North Korean literature as a typically Korean character trait associated with the simple rural folk. It can be translated as "spontaneity" or "naivety", but has only positive connotations and serves as the opposite of the "un-Korean urban culture and emotion".⁷¹ However, as soon as Hong Kildong learned about the corruption and the injustice he used his skills to protect the people and to punish those who harmed them. He even reminded the king of this duty, by pointing out that the victory over the Japanese ninjas was an effort of the people and pleading the king to be considerate of the people. He asked the king to let the people do their jobs and live their lives in peace.

The enemy of the Korean people, whether Confucian or already enlightened with Juche ideology, is presented in the film as the robbing and murdering, thoroughly evil Japanese ninjas. Of all the bad guys that Hong Kildong had to fight, the ninjas were the only ones who do not knock out their opponents but slash and kill them. Upon hearing that the ninjas kidnapped Yonhwa, Kildong knew they must be foreign and would require of the whole nation to gather forces and defeat them. Various elements thereafter attributed to the further demonizing of the Japanese as a cruel, barbarian enemy. The Japanese did not speak the Korean language, they gave evil looks and smiles, they had no restraint but were openly lusting after the Korean women they kidnapped and they were ruthless without offering forgiveness or mercy even for their own people.

After the Japanese were defeated the film showed how Yonhwa had been enlightened with Juche as well. Instead of waiting to be rescued, Yonhwa took initiative to see whether it would be safe to emerge from the prison, and when she determined that it was, she stayed at the entrance to guide all the women stepping out. Regardless of this heroic act of Yonhwa, it does not reflect a true equality between men and women, which the film does imply would exist within a Juche enlightened society. The North Korean idea of female empowerment, as expressed in various films with female protagonists,

⁷¹ Myers, *Han Sorya and North Korean Literature*, 18.

is an active woman whose fate nevertheless remains firmly in the hands of men.⁷² Yonhwa's actions did not signify a break from the patriarchal order.

The last scene of *Hong Kildong* can be interpreted as a symbolic depiction of revolution. On the boat were Kildong, his mother, Yonhwa and her maid, and T'ŭkchae and the former band of robbers; they have all experienced the unfairness of the Confucian society in which corrupt yangban are harming the people and they were willing and enlightened to find or create a new social order. On the shore were Inhyŏng and a man who seems to be Minister Hong; they also witnessed the unfairness of the Confucian society, but were not enlightened (enough) to want to break away from the old order. Both Inhyŏng and Minister Hong were not directly disadvantaged, but actually profited from their position in the Confucian society. Out of all the characters in the film, the character with the morally most correct form of conduct is probably Inhyŏng, but he does not move away from the Confucian moral code when it is part of the cause of injustice. That the characters on the boat are said to sail away into the sunset is a symbolism for moving towards the Juche ideological thought of Kim Il-Sung (whose name means "becoming the sun"). Leaving the country to find a new place is an unusual way for North Korean cinema to deal with hardships, since the people are encouraged to cultivate and improve their own places. However, the conquest of a peaceful and just kingdom, which the North Korean audience knows is how the story of *Hong Kildong* ends, in this way symbolizes the glorious future of North Korea.

2.2 Comparing *Hong Kildong* the film with a pre-modern literary version

The biggest differences between the North Korean film and the pre-modern literary version are the way the works move towards the end of their story and the character traits of most of the characters. In the introduction, I proposed the following hypothesis: *Hong Kildong* reflects the same ideological changes as have been made to create the yunsaek type kodaesosŏl. As I examined the changes made for the film version, I also paid attention to how this hypothesis holds out. Let's first take a look at the story endings.

2.2.1 Story endings

In the film version *Hong Kildong* had to deal with his inferior status as a human, for being born from a maidservant. After a successful battle against the nation's darkest enemy, *Hong Kildong* yet again missed out on his reward because he was not eligible due to his low birth status. From anger and indignation he set out with his dearest loved ones to find a place where he can be a complete human being. Implicated in the narration at the end was the idea that he will find it.

⁷² Julia Mayer, "Peonies of Pyongyang: Women in North Korean Cinema," *Metro Magazine* 198 (Oct 2018): 68.

In the pre-modern literary version Hong Kildong also had to deal with his inferior status, but he took his future in his own hands. Instead of becoming a learned man like Mencius and Confucius, which his lowborn status denied him, he decided to become a master in the martial arts, learning Taoist magic. With his advanced capabilities and his followers, Hong Kildong went around the nation raiding the rich. This caused such chaos that he became an enemy to the king and his ministers. The king ordered Inhyŏng and Minister Hong to entice Kildong, by reminding him of his filial duties, to turn himself in, but Kildong escaped every time. To bargain for peace, the king made a compromise and bestowed the title of Minister of War on Hong Kildong before the latter left the country. Hong Kildong managed to rescue two maidens from real monsters (not monster-like foreigners) from the underworld, while he was on his travels in China. He married the maidens there. In an overseas kingdom, which Hong Kildong conquered and reigned in, he finally lived in a nation without discrimination on birth status.

The difference in ending is not merely the inclusion or exclusion of the conquest of foreign land, but the entire motivation for wanting to find a new place to live, which has much to do with the character traits that are given to Hong Kildong, the hero of the stories. In essence the film hero and the literary hero both recognized that the Chosŏn society had nothing more to offer them, but the film hero wanted to leave because he was done with being denied his fair share in living a full human life, while the literary hero wanted to leave because he was done with punishing and avenging injustices and had already received all the recognition and reward he could get for it.

The marriage of Hong Kildong with the two maidens can be seen as a victory over his inferior status. There was no problem for Hong Kildong to marry the two maidens who were of the elite class in China. Although this part of the story is completely left out of the film version, as it would be problematic for the ideological message to include a multiracial, polygamous marriage into the storyline, it is interesting to see where the inspiration for the attack of the Japanese enemy might have come from. The inspiration for Hong Kildong as a flutist likewise seems to have come from a scene that was impossible to include without taking an ideological freedom. In the literary version Hong Kildong twice transformed himself into a little boy, sitting on a donkey and playing an 8-holed flute.

2.2.2 Character traits

As already became clear from the examination of the story endings, the character traits of Hong Kildong differ quite a lot. In the film Hong Kildong's great sense of justice and his martial arts abilities both served the purpose of defending and protecting the common people. When he first decided to learn the martial arts it was not for himself alone, but also to protect his mother. He knew from the beginning

that his struggles were not merely his own and from this altruistic point of view Hong Kildong fought for rights and for equality. In the literary version Hong Kildong became a martial artist because he wanted to become a great man. Since his first plan, which was to become a learned man like Mencius and Confucius, was denied him on grounds of his inferior birth, he chose the next best option, which was to become a martial artist. His superior capabilities in the martial arts were so advanced that they took on a magical form, with ominous signs and transcending the physical boundaries. Upon mastering the martial arts (which were defined in the story as Toaist magic), surviving an attempt on his life, in which he kills his assailants, and leaving home in a rage, it becomes clear that Hong Kildong had not a real plan or goal for his abilities. He is described as wandering aimlessly until he happened to stumble upon a bandits' lair. From that encounter onwards Hong Kildong first proves himself as a capable martial artist and bandit, to proceed with plundering the riches of the dishonest magistrates and upper class. As his successes accumulated, so his self-image seemed to grow bigger. Hong Kildong expended his influence by multiplying himself and so brought the whole nation into chaos. As Yi Yunsök has also mentioned, Hong Kildong's influence over the nation was basically an exercise of royal authority which challenged the domination of the Chosŏn government.⁷³ His request to receive the title of Minister of War showed the personal interest of Hong Kildong, and the display of splendor with which he received the title confirms his disposition. Kildong's move to conquer a different nation therefore easily reads like the peak of his plan to establish himself. These egotistical character traits are somewhat justified by the prophecy of his greatness, conveyed to his father in a dream before his birth, an element which is also left out of the film version.

Minister Hong in the film version was rather passive; his legal wife dominated the household and he seemed neither to agree nor disagree with her rules and regulations. He loved Kildong and the concubine, but did nothing much to protect them. Minister Hong in the literary version was the master of his household. Although he loved Kildong, but because Kildong is of low birth, Minister Hong felt he could not express any love, but was inclined to scold and rebuke Kildong. In the literary version it was also Minister Hong who decided that Kildong was forbidden to use kinship terms to address his father and brother, even though at a much later time he took that restriction away again.

In the film Inhyŏng and the legal wife were at opposite ends when it came to the sympathy they felt for Hong Kildong. In the literary version however, Inhyŏng is not involved in Kildong's public activities and the legal wife is not the one behind the attempts on Kildong's life, making them both passive, yet sympathizing observers of Kildong's struggle. When a fortune-teller was hired to make a

⁷³ Yi and Ch'oe, "Hongkildongjŏn-ŭi yŏksa sahoechŏk bunsŏk," 265.

false declaration regarding Hong Kildong's future, it became clear that Inhyŏng and the legal wife were inclined to believe superstition. The bad forebodings concerning the family if Kildong was to live, made them approve of the plan to have Kildong assassinated.

The thief T'ŭkchae was in both the film and the literary version hired to take Kildong's life. In the film T'ŭkchae had several encounters with Kildong and eventually became his companion in the fight against the Japanese ninjas and the subsequent search for a better country. In the literary version T'ŭkchae's role is much smaller; he is killed by Hong Kildong in their first encounter. T'ŭkchae's motive for killing Kildong in the first encounter was in both versions to receive money, the second encounter's motive in the film was for revenge and the third and final hostile encounter was a chance meeting in which he transformed into an honorable man. This development mainly highlighted Kildong's merciful character, but it also demonstrated the possibility of conversion to the "good side".

Hong Kildong's personal enemy in the literary version was a character that does not appear in the film version. Instead of the legal wife, it was a childless concubine of Minister Hong who was jealous of Kildong's mother and therefore plotted Kildong's death. By consulting with a shaman and hiring a fortune-teller to make a false prophecy, the concubine managed to convince Minister Hong that Kildong would bring bad luck to the family if he were to live. The childless concubine was also the one to hire T'ŭkchae. The motive behind the attempt on Kildong's life was jealousy in the literary version, whereas the motive in the film was based on family honor or pride.

In the discussion section I will look at the ideological changes that necessitated the changes to characters and character traits, as I discuss my hypothesis.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

In this section I will first discuss the results of my analyses on *Hong Kildong* and *Hong Kildong Chŏn*, focusing especially on the moral conduct of the characters as good/evil, or moral/immoral. I will also discuss the main characters' reflection of Juche ideology. Thereafter I will discuss the ideological changes that have been made for the film version and evaluate my hypothesis. I will end this section with my conclusions.

3.1 Discussion

In the literary review I briefly touched upon the influence of Chinese literature and its Confucian thought upon Korean fiction of the 18-19th century. One of the demands of Chinese literature was the punishment of evil and the rewarding of the good. If a character behaved morally correct, it was a good character and they would be rewarded in the end, an immoral character was bad and would be punished in the end. The defeat of the Japanese enemy is a textbook example of this principle. The principle also applies to the other characters in *Hong Kildong*, except that there was no reward or punishment. A moral character was still a good character and an immoral character was still a bad character. There was a distinction however between the moral behavior of those who sailed away in the end and those who did not.

Inhyŏng and the old man were moral characters who followed the Confucian moral code and were never seen to defy it. The opposite can be said about the legal wife and minister Rim; they did as they saw fit to maintain their position in their homes and society, and did not hesitate to bend the truth, to scheme and to complain. Minister Hong was somewhere in the middle of this moral spectrum. Especially in the yangban circles, between king and ministers, immoral expressions were most common; lack of restraint, lack of trust, favoritism, egotism, etc. These were the nobles, and the nobles were thus all perceived as immoral/bad characters.

The four main characters that sailed away in the end were all moral characters, but they also have known at least one moment where they defied the Confucian moral code or practiced charity/forgiveness. Curiosity, spontaneity and "sobak ham" in the characters, in combination with the idea of working for the collective good of the people are characteristics of people who are enlightened with Juche ideology. The characters on the boat therefore must have portrayed the enlightened.

The ideological changes made for the *kodae sosŏl* adaptations consist of omitted elements, changed elements or emphasized elements. Omitted from the *yunsaek* type editions was any reference to China, *sadaejuŭi* (flunkeyism) and any supernatural element. *Hong Kildong Chŏn* was traditionally a story with quite a few references to China, such as Kildong's travels to Chinese places and his marriage to two Chinese maidens. Kildong's skills traditionally also displayed his command of the supernatural. The North Korean film version did not include any of these elements. Kildong's skill was made (more) realistic and was emphasized to come from intelligence, physical and mental strength only.

Changes were made in the *yunsaek* type editions to the spiritual ideas of the hero, to elements concerning power relations and to elements concerning the traditionally polygamous relations of the hero. The spiritual ideas of the hero had to support an atheistic world view, Kildong was made to be much less humble towards the corrupt Chosŏn king in the *yunsaek* type edition and he had only one wife. The same changes can also be detected in the film version.

Emphasized in the *yunsaek* type editions are the social motifs of class struggle and the enmity between the common people and the oppressive *yangban* elite. This is also a central theme in *Hong Kildong*. The *yunsaek* type editions further Koreanized works by omitting Chinese places, titles and expressions, and replacing them with Korean ones. There is no mentioning in *Hong Kildong* of any Chinese names or places.

3.2 Conclusion

Based on the above discussion of results, I can first of all conclude that the hypothesis I proposed in my introduction is correct. *Hong Kildong* indeed reflects the same ideological changes as have been made to create the *yunsaek* type *kodae sosŏl*.

My analysis results suggest that *Hong Kildong* portrays the transition from a corrupt former Chosŏn period, with its Confucian morals that do not bring happiness and peace, to the revolutionary struggle led by the enlightened figures of Hong Kildong, his mother, his love Rim Yonhwa and his friend T'ŭkchae, who have all let go of the Confucian morality and embraced a new ideology. The film ends with Hong Inhyŏng and his father, who have not let go of the Confucian old order, but have sympathy with the enlightened on the boat, looking on as the boat moves toward its hopeful future. This hopeful future lies right into the sun, which symbolizes Kim Il-Sung and his ideology. Although to leave the country is an unusual element in North Korean films, because it goes against the idea of creating prosperity in the place you live in, it makes sense as the symbolical move away from old notions and

going towards the achievement of the Korean revolution. The main theme or “seed” of *Hong Kildong* is thus class struggle that will lead to a revolution to achieve a classless society in which all are equal and liberated.

Elements that suggest ideas which are contrary to Juche ideology are consistently within the realm of Confucian thought. Confucian thought however was not condoned, nor completely condemned, but rather improved to make a smooth transformation to Juche ideology possible. This suggests that Confucian thought remains, however limited, a component in the North Korean people’s belief system.

Hidden elements that reflect anti-Juche or anti-Party Line thoughts, which might have been an influence of Shin Sang-Ok’s own ideas, could not be found.

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