Cinematic hooks for Korean studies: using the ‘Apache’ framework for inspiring students about Korea in and through film

Brian M. Yecies
*University of Wollongong, byecies@uow.edu.au*

Ben Goldsmith
*University of Queensland, goldsmith.ben@gmail.com*

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Yecies, Brian M. and Goldsmith, Ben, Cinematic hooks for Korean studies: using the ‘Apache’ framework for inspiring students about Korea in and through film 2010, 47-72.

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CINEMATIC HOOKS FOR KOREAN STUDIES: USING THE ‘APACHE’ FRAMEWORK FOR INSPIRING STUDENTS ABOUT KOREA IN AND THROUGH FILM

Brian Yecies
University of Wollongong

and

Ben Goldsmith
University of Queensland

© International Review of Korean Studies
Vol. 7, No. 1, 2010, pp 47~72

ISSN 1449-7395
Cinematic Hooks for Korean Studies: Using the ‘Apache’ Framework for Inspiring Students about Korea in and through Film*

Brian Yecies† and Ben Goldsmith‡

Developing awareness of and maintaining interest in Korea and Korean culture for non-language secondary and tertiary students continues to challenge educators in Australia. A lack of appropriate and accessible creative and cultural materials is a key factor contributing to this challenge. In light of changes made to ‘fair use’ guidelines for the Digital Millennium Copyright Act in the United States in July 2010, and in order to prepare for a time in the near future when Australian copyright regulations might follow suit, this article offers a framework for utilizing film and digital media contents in the classroom. Case studies of the short digital animation film 'Birthday Boy' (2004) and the feature film The Divine Weapon (2008) are presented in order to illustrate new educational approaches to popular

*Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 5th World Congress of Korean Studies in October 2010 at the Chinese Culture University in Taipei; and the University of New South Wales National Strategic Conference: Korean Language and Studies Education in Australia in November 2009. A more detailed analysis of Birthday Boy and its contribution to intercultural dialogue and diasporic screen culture appears in Goldsmith B. and Yecies B. “Sejong Park’s Birthday Boy and Korean-Australian Encounters.” In Catherine Simpson & Renata Murawska (eds) Diasporas of Australian Cinema, Bristol: Intellect Books, 2009. 159-168. The authors thank Gi-Hyun Shin for the opportunity to present this material in multiple venues, and Noel Broadhead, Copyright and Digitisation Officer at the University of Wollongong Library, for his feedback on this work-in-progress.

† Senior Lecturer, School of Social Sciences, Media and Communication, University of Wollongong. Phone: +61 2 4221 4076. Email: byecies@uow.edu.au.

‡ Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies and the School of English, Media Studies and Art History, University of Queensland. Phone: +61 7 5476 7370. Email: b.goldsmith@uq.edu.au.
Korean films – the cinematic component of the ‘Korean Wave’ (‘Hanryu’ or ‘Hallyu’ in Korean). It is hoped that this work-in-progress will enable teachers to inspire students with limited language skills to learn more about Korean popular culture, history, and tradition as well as media, politics, and genre studies in dynamic ways through the use of films as cultural texts in the classroom.

Keywords: Korea and Korean culture for non-language secondary and tertiary students, digital animation short films, the cinematic component of the ‘Korean Wave’, Korean Cinema.

Introduction

In November 2009, teachers, scholars, librarians and policymakers from across Australia convened at the UNSW National Strategic Conference on Korean Language and Studies Education in Australia. One of the outcomes of this important event was a reminder of the urgent need for an ongoing source of engaging creative and cultural contents for use in non-language classes – materials that, to our surprise, are not readily available or accessible. This exploratory article offers a possible solution to this dearth of teaching and learning materials by presenting an innovative approach – or what we call the ‘Apache’ framework – to generating new content. Here, ‘Apache’ is used to stand for Awareness, Plausibility, Abbreviation, Cultural diversity, Hook, and Entertainment. The Apache framework is explained below, but first we discuss the changes made in July 2010 to the ‘fair use’ guidelines to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (hereafter DMCA) in the United States – amendments which allow new exemptions for the reproduction of visual media – as we look to a time in the near future when Australian copyright regulations might follow suit. As a case study, the Apache framework is then applied to an analysis of the short digital film Birthday Boy (2004) and the recent popular feature film The Divine Weapon (2008) to illustrate how stills and short video clips can be incorporated into lesson plans. By viewing a series of three- to ten-minute film clips, as well as a series of DVD stills (screen captures),

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1 The official statement regarding the DMCA can be found at: www.copyright.gov/1201/2010/Librarian-of-Congress-1201-Statement.html.
students are able to expand their knowledge of ‘korean-ness’, Korean history and Korean culture within a universally understood world of storytelling.

In October 1998, the U.S. Congress passed the DMCA, which made it illegal to copy DVDs (as well as CDs, games, ebooks and all other electronic or digital items) protected by Digital Rights Management (DRM) software. Generally speaking, educators making short video clips for teaching and learning purposes were directly violating U.S. law by using hardware or software applications to evade anti-piracy and copyright protection on these items. However, new exemptions were amended to the DMCA in July 2010, enabling academics to develop legal digital media materials for teaching and learning purposes by circumventing DRM software on commercially-purchased DVDs – as long as this is done for the primary purposes of criticism and comment. If and when Australian ‘fair dealing’ laws catch up with the U.S. laws, teachers who currently (or wish to) include Korea in their Society and Environment, English and Arts courses in Australia will have the ability to create new materials that have the potential to inspire students about Korea in and through film.2

Since the launch of the blockbuster Shiri (1999) – which outsold Titanic (1997, released in South Korea in February 1998) and exceeded US$25 million at the box office in Korea – teachers of Korean arts and culture have increased their use of film – the cinematic component of the Korean Wave – in the classroom. Yet, because so many lack appropriate content, only a few of the aesthetically provocative and genre-bending Korean films from this popular film phenomenon of the last decade have been used in the classroom. Teacher feedback from the 2009 UNSW National Strategic Conference and elsewhere clearly points to a lack of appropriate and dynamic screening choices for teachers interested in utilizing film and media in the classroom. Simply put, educators teaching Korean (and other Asian) non-language studies are interested in engaging students with a wider list of film titles beyond the commonly selected romantic, family, traditional culture, and/or war genre films such as Sopyonje (1993), Il Mare (2000), JSA (2000, aka Joint Security Area), My Sassy Girl (2001), The Way Home (2002), The Classic (2003),

2 The authors in no way condone the violation of DRM (whether local or international) copyright laws, nor do they encourage the circumvention of copyright protection on DVDs in order to generate the types of teaching materials discussed here.
As scholars of Media and Cultural Studies with long-term interests in international collaboration in film and digital media production across the Asia-Pacific region, we respectfully acknowledge that, in making their present selections, teachers are already following a range of teaching and learning strategies. Hence, it is our hope that the following analyses will contribute to their lesson plans by fostering some new thinking about how to use film in the classroom environment. To help teachers look beyond the above short discretionary list, to films that otherwise might not be available or suitable for screening in their entirety in the classroom (due to levels of violence and strong content), we explain below how the Apache framework can be used to develop new resources. With this in mind, we hope that this article addresses the urgent need for suitable teaching materials while contributing to the understanding and utilization of Hallyu.

The "Apache" framework

In this article we use the term ‘Apache’ as an acronym for six interconnected and overlapping stages (as opposed to a name that embraces the courage and drive of a diverse group of Native Americans in the Southwest region of the U.S.). These stages are: Awareness (increasing knowledge about Korea, Korean culture and creative contents, and media literacy more generally); Plausibility (identifying and presenting believable and persuasive material that can open pathways for appreciating Korean culture); Abbreviation (keeping numerous visual examples short – below 10 minutes, or presenting a series of stills in the case of a short film); Cultural diversity (using follow-up discussion questions to reveal the uniqueness of cultural diversity in Korea and explore the differences between Korea and a student’s own cultural background and traditions); Hook (encouraging students to explore Korean culture, traditions and language as well as to seek out new lived experiences – such as travel, further study and making new friendships with Koreans – on their own); and Entertainment (maintaining student interest in the classroom through presenting excerpts from dynamic film texts). To establish the context for this framework, we present short analyses of the films Birthday Boy (2004) and The Divine Weapon (2008), both of which offer rich...
opportunities to make deep connections with Korean culture when used as teaching and learning texts in the classroom.

We focus on these two films because the settings, artifacts and costumes used in them are distinctively Korean. Both films have been acknowledged in Korea as exemplars of national imagination and achievement in terms of storytelling and production. At the same time, their distinctive aesthetic styles, treatment of cultural values and thematic development – their production values – make them truly international in scope. When used as case studies in the classroom, *Birthday Boy* and *The Divine Weapon* can be shown to tell stories not only about Korea and Korean cinema, but also about transnational cultural flows. In addition, both films make constant allusions to other films and cinemas – through the subtlety of their aesthetic styles as expressed through camerawork, editing, sound and music, utilizing filmic techniques and a narrative structure familiar from mainstream Hollywood cinema. In sum, each film makes a significant contribution to international screen culture while contributing to the maintenance of important cultural traditions in their respective treatments of Korean history. In so doing, these two films offer students exciting pathways for better understanding Korea and discovering its rich history and culture in different ways.

![Birthday Boy DVD cover](image_url)  
Figure 1. *Birthday Boy* (2004) DVD cover. Image courtesy of AFTRS.
Birthday Boy

The Oscar-nominated short animated film *Birthday Boy* (2004) was written, directed and animated between 2001 and early 2004 by Korean-born (and Australian permanent resident) Sejung Park at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (hereafter AFTRS). *Birthday Boy* opens up new ways of using film in the classroom – not as a category with fixed boundaries, but as a web of relationships spanning borders and cultures. This is an intriguing film to teach students at all levels because, while it is profoundly ‘Korean’, it was made in Australia by students at the national film school. However, the dialogue in the film is not in English, and the film is not set in Australia. At every level, it challenges the audience’s efforts to identify its intrinsic ‘Australian’ess’ against a quintessential ‘Korean’ backdrop. As a result of this complexity, *Birthday Boy* can be used to foster an intercultural dialogue about Koreans, ‘korean-ness’ and Korean history and culture.

The film is set in Korea in 1951, during the war that pitted the north of the country and its allies, China and the Soviet Union, against the south and a United Nations coalition led by the U.S. But the film is not really about the war as such. Rather it explores the impact of war on

3 Park made this film at the AFTRS with the support of a team of Australian fellow students who helped him to bring his vision to the screen. Those credited on the film include Andrew Gregory (script editing and production), Megan Wedge (sound design), Adrian Rostirolla (editor), and James Lee (music).

4 Park came to Australia as a mature-age student, having worked as an illustrator and commercial artist in Korea after completing his military service there. His position as a postgraduate student at AFTRS allowed Park the luxury of working on the *Birthday Boy* film for two years. Although he had developed extensive storyboards and draft scripts before enrolling, working with a team of eight students and AFTRS mentors, the film evolved painstakingly slowly. The film was provoked by Park’s observations of cultural specificity and differences in the ways in which birthdays are celebrated in Korea and Australia. (Sejong Park, quoted in Rankin 2005: 3)

5 The AFTRS was established by an act of the Australian Federal Parliament in 1973 with Commonwealth funding from the Federal Arts Department and a brief to train filmmakers to produce films and programs of high technical and creative merit. Its postgraduate courses are open only to Australian citizens and permanent residents. As a result, the films, documentaries, and radio and television programs produced at AFTRS are inevitably, indisputably, ‘Australian’.
those left behind, and so has a more universal and timeless appeal than a conventional war film.

Dynamic and subtle camerawork are a prominent feature of *Birthday Boy*. Of course, with an animated film these are computer-generated approximations and re-creations of camera moves in the digitally-animated space, which nevertheless work to reinforce the storytelling and enhance mood cues in the film. The two opening shots swoop majestically from a close-up of a butterfly sitting on a rooftop, then sweep down over the roof and track into the fuselage of a crashed airplane, to end facing the child protagonist, Manuk, who is sorting through the ruins of war. The transition between shots is masked by the film’s title, first appearing onscreen in Chinese characters, then dissolving to form the words ‘Birthday Boy’ in capital letters, in English, in a stylized typeface. The next shot frames Manuk through a hole in the fuselage as he walks out into the sunlight. In a long wide shot we then watch Manuk exit the wreck of the plane and walk towards the camera; the shot ends with a close-up of his face, reinforcing his importance in the story and allowing viewers to contemplate what the animation has achieved in its opening sequence.

The film uses a palette of naturalistic earthy colors, full of greens, browns and rusty reds, unlike those used in many other animated films. Its purpose is to set the scene and support the storytelling rather than to demand attention in itself. The only natural flora or fauna depicted in the film (insect noises are heard throughout) is the butterfly seen in the opening shot, an unidentified white and orange Pieridae, which is suddenly disturbed by a metallic clang. Its flight seems to launch the camera backwards over the wooden roof of a traditional Korean building.

The use of the butterfly motif is not inadvertent. In Korean culture the butterfly can symbolize happiness – perhaps an allusion to Manuk’s impending happiness at making a toy – although this may be one of many moments in the film that invites a cross-cultural reading. The Greek word for butterfly is ‘psyche’, which also means the soul or the form that a person takes in the afterlife. The flight of the butterfly might then refer here to the flight of the soul of Manuk’s soldier father who, as we will learn, has recently been killed.

A birthday present – or what appears to be a present – plays a pivotal role in the film. The film looks and sounds in ways that privilege the perspective of the young birthday boy, Manuk. On his jacket he wears a small white vertical label (shown in Figure 2-A) traditionally
worn by Korean children on their birthday. However, the ‘present’ turns out to contain the last possessions of Manuk’s soldier father, including his military identification tags (pictured in Figure 2-D).

Figure 2. Birthday Boy DVD screen captures. Images courtesy of AFTRS
We first encounter Manuk through sound, hearing him rummaging and singing in the wreck of an airplane that has crashed through the roof of a house in his village. He is looking for a particular piece of war refuse – a bolt – which he intends to use, resourcefully, to make a toy soldier (see Figure 2-A). Through his imaginative play he builds numerous soldiers and tanks with scavenged metal, his personal trophies of war. When he eventually reaches home after a number of adventures involving a train hurrying tanks to the front (which he admires gleefully in Figure 2-B) and the launching of make-believe grenades at a postman on a bicycle (Figure 2-C), Manuk finds a parcel that he (and we) assume is a birthday present. Instead, the box contains his father’s last known possessions: an old leather wallet and a photograph of Manuk with his father, his dog tags, and his army boots.

Manuk goes inside his home to play with the toy soldiers he had handcrafted from the detritus of war. As he falls asleep on the floor, the camera slowly zooms in on a desk on which his toy collection is displayed. Above the desk we see family portraits of his grandfather, his parents in their traditional wedding outfits, and his father in army uniform (Figure 2-E). The house is silent except for the boy’s shallow breathing. After a few seconds, and as the screen fades to black, we hear his mother arriving home. As the credits are revealed, the audience is left to ponder the significance of the box discovered by Manuk and reflect on the assumptions that were confounded by its contents, and consider what impact this will have on Manuk’s family, and families across the Korean Peninsula.

Since the film has no English dialogue, the filmmakers have worked hard to make Birthday Boy comprehensible to a non-Korean audience while still being a convincing depiction of Korea and Korean life in 1951 for a Korean audience. Manuk’s song, his game, the postman’s cries and his mother’s greeting are all sung or spoken in Korean, with English subtitles. We identify with Manuk through sound at two critical moments: first, as the train passes him, its noise diminishes, leaving only the wind and his heartbeat between the boy and the train; and second, in his war game that culminates in the assault on the postman, Manuk talks with his father and we hear the sounds of explosions and gunfire in his head. The use of an environmental soundtrack is also notable here, particularly the sounds of insects, birds and frogs, which run throughout the film.

All five of the screen images in Figure 2 can be used in the Apache framework to enliven the teaching of Korean history, culture and
society through the medium of *Birthday Boy*. They can help to raise awareness of the impact of the Korean War from multiple perspectives, using plausible examples that illustrate concrete motifs such as traditional dress, home life, and family structures. Comparing and contrasting American and Chinese perspectives, for instance, with Korean views of the military conflict, can foster new understandings of the war and its aftermath. To encourage further engagement, students can be asked to identify or nominate specific still images and/or abbreviated scenes from this film or other media sources (books, magazines, films) to expand class discussions. In turn, the new knowledge set and advanced research and critical skills that students develop through these exercises enhance and celebrate *cultural diversity*. A student’s empathy toward other cultures is *hooked*. Finally, exploring Korea and Korean culture in this hands-on and visual way can make teaching and learning *entertaining*.

To date, *Birthday Boy* has won over 40 awards at festivals around the world including the Best Animated Short at the prestigious SIGGRAPH Computer Animation Festival in 2004, and a nomination for best short film in the 2005 Academy Awards (even before Park and fellow students had graduated from the AFTRS). These achievements are testament to the universal resonance of its story and the accessibility and coherence of its style. The film’s realist style of animation is filled out by the sound design, which works together with the music, editing and animation to create Manuk’s world. For all films, but particularly for animation, sound and music play important roles in grounding characters in the story, introducing audiences to the story world, and maintaining credibility. The soundscape of *Birthday Boy* is convincingly Korean, evidence of the success and subtlety of the engineering resources mustered by the Australian studio context.

*Birthday Boy* is one of the most popular and celebrated short animations in Korea’s modern cinematic history. Although specific data is difficult to obtain, illegal copies have been sighted throughout Korea and China. Park’s own journey as a director has been extraordinary, with unprecedented success on the international festival circuit, multiple

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6 It also won the Prix Jean-Luc Xiberras at the Annecy International Animated Film Festival in 2005 (which had a special focus on Korea) and Best Short Animation at the 2005 BAFTA awards. It has been screened at over 100 film festivals around the world, and is the most awarded film in the almost forty-year history of the AFTRS.
international awards, and a reputation in Korea akin to a national hero. However, what sets Birthday Boy apart is its treatment of Korean sentiment, history and culture in a way that seems to be universally accessible and the fact that it was produced within the Australian film industry. While the film has a particular resonance for the Korean community in Australia, it also has the potential to make waves within Australian schools insofar as it offers a new way of thinking about – and seeing – Korean, Australian and international film culture.

Figure 3. The Divine Weapon film poster. Image courtesy of CJ Entertainment

The Divine Weapon

The Divine Weapon is a feature-length fictionalized historical drama set in the mid-15th century during the era of King Sejong – the Joseon Dynasty’s fourth king. Sejong was a revered ruler who made significant

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7 In March 2005 Korean National Assembly woman Sohn Bong-suk organized a screening of the film and invited Park to speak before members of the government and film industry as well as several hundred students studying animation. This screening aimed, among other things, to showcase Park’s accomplishment as the first Korean to be nominated for an Academy Award.

8 More attention to the history of Australian and Korean film encounters needs to be paid – particularly in light of the Australian Government designation of 2011 as the ‘Year of Friendship’ between Australia and Korea.
advances in Confucianism, the Korean language (with the development of Hangul), and science and technology. These developments enabled Korea to expand militarily and culturally while also protecting its national borders.

The film portrays a band of greedy merchants who find themselves caught up in political infighting between the Korean royal household and officials from China’s Ming Dynasty. The conflict is driven by questions surrounding Korea’s relationship with and loyalty to China. The merchants (headed by actor Jeong Jae-yeong) are coerced by the commander of the Royal Korean Army into hiding an unknown guest – the daughter of a well-known weapons designer who is being pursued by a band of Chinese assassins. In a flashback, we learn that her father has killed himself and his workers with a suicide bomb while the assassins were attacking his laboratory. The arms fabricator’s daughter (played by Han Eun-jeong) is the only person who can continue her father’s life-long work. After the head merchant discovers his guest’s true identity, he demands lucrative trading contracts with China and Japan in exchange for his continued services. Eventually, the merchant and his men follow their hearts rather than their purses, and decide to help the daughter manufacture gunpowder and then complete the secret (‘divine’) weapon – an arrow-firing machine gun, which promises to save the nation. And, by the end of the film (spoiler alert here), Jeong Jae-yeong’s character falls in love with the daughter (see the couple about to kiss in Figure 4-D).

Seen in wider perspective, The Divine Weapon is an overtly nationalistic story about Korea’s assertion of its independence from the increasing control of China’s Ming Dynasty and its ruthless aim of expanding its empire. According to the film, King Sejong’s key instruments for breaking free of the Ming’s tightening grip were the Hwacha multi-arrow rocket launcher, ‘exploding arrows’ (Shingijeon in Korean), and gunpowder, which are all shown being developed in secret. In fact, the race to obtain the secret Shingijeon manual, by both the Koreans and the Ming, in order to perfect this array of projectile weaponry is the primary motivator of the central narrative and all of the main characters.

The film focuses on two primary themes, which are illustrated in the screen images in Figures 4 to 8. First is Confucianism, embodying ethical and philosophical guidelines that encourage Koreans to maintain high standards in their everyday lives, work and play (sport and leisure), and cultural traditions, here extended to include scientific and
engineering ventures. The second major theme is public versus private spaces, including a range of indoor and outdoor zones occupied according to class – that is, negotiated in different ways by commoners, noblemen, scholars, businessmen and others associated with the royal family. The intersections between these two themes provide each character (and, simultaneously, students in the classroom) with a blueprint for personal and social interaction during the Chosun Dynasty.

All thirty of the screen images in Figure 4 to Figure 9 can be used in the Apache framework to create and/or supplement teaching materials in the classroom. In particular, this group of images, selected from over 150 screen captures made by the authors, offers exciting pathways for raising awareness about Korean social, cultural and scientific history. The images are plausible, and show abbreviated examples that illustrate the themes of Confucian tradition, and public and private spaces, through the film’s treatment of human interaction, dedication to scientific and technological advancement, political independence, and the customs and traditions found in daily life in Korea (associated in particular with food, dress, architecture, and religion). As in the case of Birthday Boy, the advanced knowledge and critical thinking skills that students will develop by considering these images in depth enhances and celebrates cultural diversity as their empathy toward other cultures is hooked through the use of entertaining colorful still and moving images.
In *The Divine Weapon*, the cultivation of high moral standards and high levels of precision and expertise as guiding Confucian ethical and philosophical principles is established from the outset through the montage of images in the opening credits – calligraphic notes, geometric equations and mechanical engineering devices such as compass, rulers,
protractors, and angles (see Figure 4-A). Combined, these visual elements reveal the advanced scientific, engineering and investigative methods and skills mastered by Koreans and dating back more than 500 years. An outdoor gunpowder factory (Figure 5-D) is founded on the need for careful and precise measurement of rare ingredients. And performing arts such as Pungmul, a traditional Korean folk music and dance form (Figure 4-E) – which appears at the very end of the film during a display of innovative fireworks – also require advanced training and expertise in drumming, dancing, and singing. Today, Korea prides itself on the individuals and groups of performers (such as Kim Duk Soo, Hwang Byungki, and Park Tongjin) who represent the cream of the nation’s talent to the outside world with their high standards of art and cultural performance.

Throughout the film, the theme of expertise is also unraveled in the context of both leisure activities and rigorous swordplay. At the start of the film, for example, villagers at an outdoor festival create a meticulous display of food offerings to please the gods (Figure 4-B). They also engage in archery and martial arts contests in order to flush out the individual with the most accurate and advanced skills (Figure 4-C). Here, technique and mastery are applauded. In the middle and toward the end of the film, the main characters are engrossed in the tireless pursuit of flawless weapon design, a precise formula for gunpowder, and ideal conditions for launching weapons (Figure 5-D and Figures 8-A to 8-E).
The second major theme in the film – occupying, exploiting, and negotiating multi-layered physical environments – reflects the historical challenges involving the protection and sovereignty of the Korean kingdom and the diversity of inhabitants within its local, regional and
national borders. Here a myriad of both public and private spaces (as seen in the screen captures in Figures 5 and 6) serve as gateways for discussion. Examples include the large inner courtyard of the merchant’s trading house (Figure 5-A), and the inside of the same house (Figure 6-A) where the protagonist is surrounded by shelves containing colorful hand-made textiles (hemp and or/silk), traditional wooden and lacquer storage boxes, green ceramic vases and tea cups, hand-made books, calligraphy brushes, and examples of other traditional handicrafts. Entertainment establishments for businessmen enjoying the services of gisaeng (Figure 6-B), as well as kitchen and food preparation areas (Figure 6-C), the inner palace rooms in which the King receives acupuncture treatment (Figure 6-D) and holds meetings with officials (Figure 6-E) are some of the spaces that are accessible only to certain individuals or groups.

These distinctive indoor spaces are contrasted with a variety of outdoor environments (which also are contrasted with each other). Villagers and monks roam through the clay-wall-lined streets, stopping now and then to greet or eavesdrop on others (see Figures 5-B and 5-C). In another scene (not pictured here), a group is shown waiting outside the palace gates, presumably wanting to learn of any political developments resulting from the Ming’s visit to the king. In Figure 5-E, the main characters pay their respects to a slain Buddhist monk at his outdoor cremation ceremony, which takes place on a riverside beach.

These examples illustrate the privileged nature of access to both public and private spaces in Korea in this period, which in turn governed how various spaces were used. The sanctity of these spaces is underlined by the care that has gone into their design and building as film sets, and by their addition of visual richness and narrative depth to the film.
Figure 6. *The Divine Weapon* DVD screen captures. Author’s collection.
Scenes involving the royal palace (pictured in Figures 7-B to 7-E) naturally stand in contrast to the indoor and outdoor spaces accessible to the average Korean. More to the point, because they were actually filmed in the Gyeongbok Palace, which was founded in the mid-1390s,
they are particularly useful for studying royal rituals and the architecture of Seoul in the Chosun dynasty. Apparently, these scenes were the first of their kind to be filmed in the present-day palace. The image of the Chinese imperial palace (the Forbidden City in Beijing) in Figure 7-A represents one of the few establishing shots of the setting in which official meetings about the ‘Korea problem’ take place in the film.
Figure 8. The Divine Weapon DVD screen captures. Author’s collection.

Figure 9. ‘Mythbusters’ TV episode Alcohol Myths screen captures. Author’s collection.
Today, both Koreans and non-Koreans exhibit a fascination with the spectacular technology involved in weapons like the Hwacha and the Shingijeon and the scientific thinking developed during the reign of King Sejong. References to this era of innovation are found in several different popular culture contexts, which can also be incorporated into teaching materials.

In a 2008 episode of the *Mythbusters* television series (see Figures 9-A to 9-E), the hosts tested the capabilities of this historical Korean weapons technology.\(^9\) A comment from the show’s narrator (Robert Lee) summed up the performance of the Hwacha multi-arrow rocket launcher: “It’s the launch of a lifetime. A spectacle not seen by man or beast in 500 years. And, every arrow but one took flight. So, this rocket attack would be devastating.” In her analysis, show co-host Jessi Combs added: “The Hwacha worked on many levels. But, most of all, it was frightening. All of those arrows flying into the air on fire and exploding would definitely make me turn around and run.” As one might expect, in their quest to test the capabilities of the Hwacha, the *Mythbusters* hosts strove for precision in their experiments and, as a result, achieved a successful demonstration of the apparatus.

The technological innovations portrayed in *The Divine Weapon* (seen in action in Figures 8-A to 8-E) have resonated beyond the film and digital media industries and found their way into other educational circles. In November 2010, the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (better known by the acronym KAIST) held a science storytelling camp in which Kang Woo-suk, producer of *The Divine Weapon*, screened the film and gave a talk about its production background. After the screening the audience witnessed a special demonstration of the Hwacha in action. In this way, the film has generated an unexpected extra-textual life of its own, a phenomenon from which teachers across multiple disciplines in Australia (and elsewhere) can benefit.

The film has traveled well both within and outside Korea. Its US$10 million budget was large by Korean film industry standards, but relatively small for comparative period films with special effects produced in Hollywood. The film generated nearly US$20 million at the domestic box office in less than three months, and more than US$24

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\(^9\) See "Alcohol Myths" (season 8, episode 13), originally aired on 22 October 2008.
million in total domestic ticket sales before going to commercial DVD.  

More importantly, the sets, props and elaborate costumes displayed in this historical drama offer both domestic and international audiences the opportunity to gain valuable insights into Korea’s past – beyond the genre’s recurring motifs of martial arts and sword-fighting.  

**Conclusion**

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<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Birthday Boy</th>
<th>The Divine Weapon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Devastation created by the Korean War and its impact on the economy, politics, industry, culture and society (including youth and the family).</td>
<td>History, food, dress, architecture, and religious customs and traditions found in daily life. Importance of science and technology in Korea and Korean history. Comparative differences between Korea’s Chosun Dynasty and China’s Ming Dynasty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plausibility</td>
<td>Divide content into a small number of nominated study modules. Link these topics to a range of other historical accounts of the Korean War – perhaps from U.S. and Chinese perspectives.</td>
<td>Divide content into a small number of nominated study modules. Link developments in Korea at this time to similar developments in other parts of Asia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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11 In terms of international audiences, The Divine Weapon was invited to a variety of international film festivals including the Deauville Asian Film Festival (Festival du film asiatique de Deauville) in France, the Santa Barbara Film Festival, the Hawaii International Film Festival, Montreal’s Fantasia Film Festival, and Iran’s Fajr Film Festival. In addition, the film’s distributor, CJ Entertainment, sold it to importers in Malaysia (including for use in in-flight entertainment), Iran, India, Thailand, Germany, Russia, Turkey, and Poland.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Identify key clips and still images (screen captures) that illustrate discussion topics and open pathways for further research.</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Diversity</td>
<td>Consider Korea’s capacity for survival and passion for rebuilding society, and Australia’s role in recent developments in Korea.</td>
<td>Korean ingenuity, determination, fighting spirit, culture, nationalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hook</td>
<td>Use study modules to facilitate new understandings of Korea’s recent past and to captivate appreciation for the historical traumas that Koreans have overcome.</td>
<td>Use in-class investigation of these historical examples to encourage students to explore Korean culture, traditions and language as well as to seek out new lived experiences – such as travel, further study and new friendships with Koreans – on their own. Incorporate images and explanations of current places of interest that students can visit in Korea (online or in person) when presented with the opportunity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Story offers universal lessons within a unique animated format.</td>
<td>Use clips and images from this and other films to maintain student interest in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Korea and Korean popular culture are in the midst of fundamental and transformative change, making it vital for teachers and students of Korean Studies to gain a better understanding of Korea’s potential contributions to the power dynamics of education as well as creative and cultural industries in Asia and across the globe. As we have attempted to illustrate in this article, the Apache framework can help to meet this need by using it to create a collection of dynamic cultural materials from Korean films, whether short or feature-length, suitable for teaching and learning. Both *Birthday Boy* and *The Divine Weapon* offer numerous opportunities to engage students with a range of non-language themes, issues and topics that, in turn, have the potential to promote cross-cultural exchange, dialogue and learning. Similar
exercises involving other recent period films – which may not all be appropriate for screening in their entirety – such as Untold Scandal (2003, adapted from the French novel Dangerous Liaisons), The King and the Clown (2005), Shadowless Sword (2005, post-produced in Australia), and Three Kingdoms (2008, an official co-production between China, South Korea and Hong Kong) could also be useful for comparing their themes with those explored in The Divine Weapon. Moreover, this approach can be used as a universal tool for creating new resources for a range of subjects to explore other national cinemas and the creative and cultural materials they contain. In any case, we hope the introductory analysis in this article offers readers some new ideas for ‘hooking’ students’ interest.

References

Rankin, P. (2005) 'Making Headlines', Rave Magazine, 22 February (p. 3).