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## **Introduction**

### **The Cultural Cold War and the Birth of the Asian Cinema Network**

We cannot expect that we can make all of the people of the world love us all of the time. In the interest of our security and world peace, from time to time we have to do things that some people do not like.

—Allen W. Dulles, Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (“Strengthening American Information Efforts,” at the *Propaganda and the Cold War Symposium*, Princeton University, 1963)

*SOS Hong Kong* (*SOS Hongk'ong*, Ch'oe Kyōng-ok, 1966), a Shin Films (South Korea) and Lankwang Pictures (Hong Kong) coproduction, begins with newsreel footage that displays the South Korean navy's heroic battles in Vietnam.<sup>1</sup> It is not widely known that between 1964 and 1972, South Korea dispatched over three hundred thousand troops to the Vietnam War, making it the second-largest contributor of troops to South Vietnam after the United States.<sup>2</sup> After the combat footage and a speech by President Park Chung Hee (1963–79) to the soldiers, the film's hero, a South Korean special agent named Paek Min (played by Pak No-sik), leaves for Hong Kong with a special mission to stop North Korean spies from selling information about the South Korean troops to China. Soon afterward, Paek reaches the Hong

Kong-based arms dealer Sha Lao-te through the courtesan Xianglan (played by Helen Li Mei), a queen of Hong Kong's nightclub scene who works for North Korea, and her vast network of social connections. Xianglan falls in love with Paek, her enemy, who in turn is falling for Taiwan's "Double Horse" agent, Maria (played by Ting Ying). Already consumed with jealousy and now perturbed by increasing pressure from her boss (played by Yi Min), Xianglan lures Paek and Maria to the nightclub, where their adversaries lie in wait. But she gets cold feet and puts her life at stake to pull Paek out of danger. Xianglan's boss, secretly in love with her, had proposed that they live together in Pyongyang, North Korea. Now deeply saddened, he asks Xianglan if she knows the consequence of betraying her country. She shouts with confidence, "Of course I know. But I realize it's meaningless to live without freedom!" Xianglan is shot by her boss and eventually dies. After her death, Paek returns to save Maria, and they seize the microfilm from the North Korean villains. Having accomplished his task, Agent Paek returns to South Korea.<sup>3</sup>

In South Korean espionage films produced at the peak of the genre in the mid-1960s, South Korean agents are almost always dispatched to Hong Kong. In many cases, as in *SOS Hong Kong*, they team up with female Taiwanese agents, their Hong Kong counterparts, or Korean American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents. In other words, Hong Kong was the place where the communist forces of North Korea and China set up their secret units and operated covertly in underground bunkers to dismantle the capitalist societies of "Free Asia," namely South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. The South Korean "James Bond," the nation's Cold War warrior, fought for South Korea's strategic and ideological allies.

Scarcely two decades earlier, however, the popular espionage novel *Typhoon* (*T'aep'ung*, 1942–43) showed a completely different world. Written in Chosön (the old name for Korea) by the novelist Kim Nae-söng and set in 1939, two years before the Pacific War, *Typhoon* depicts an intelligence war for the latest weapon of mass destruction, fought by Chosön, Japan, Germany, China, the UK, and the United States. *Typhoon*'s protagonist, the young detective Yu Bulan (an homage to Maurice Leblanc, the French novelist who created Arsène Lupin), travels beyond the boundaries of colonial Chosön: to Marseilles, Liverpool, Delhi, Colombo, and Shanghai, working on behalf of the Japanese colonial power. The logic of Japan's Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere (*Dai toa kyoiken*), which Japan used to instill a sense of bonding with and among its colonies, appears to have expanded the author's geopolitical imagination—after all, *Typhoon* was written in the

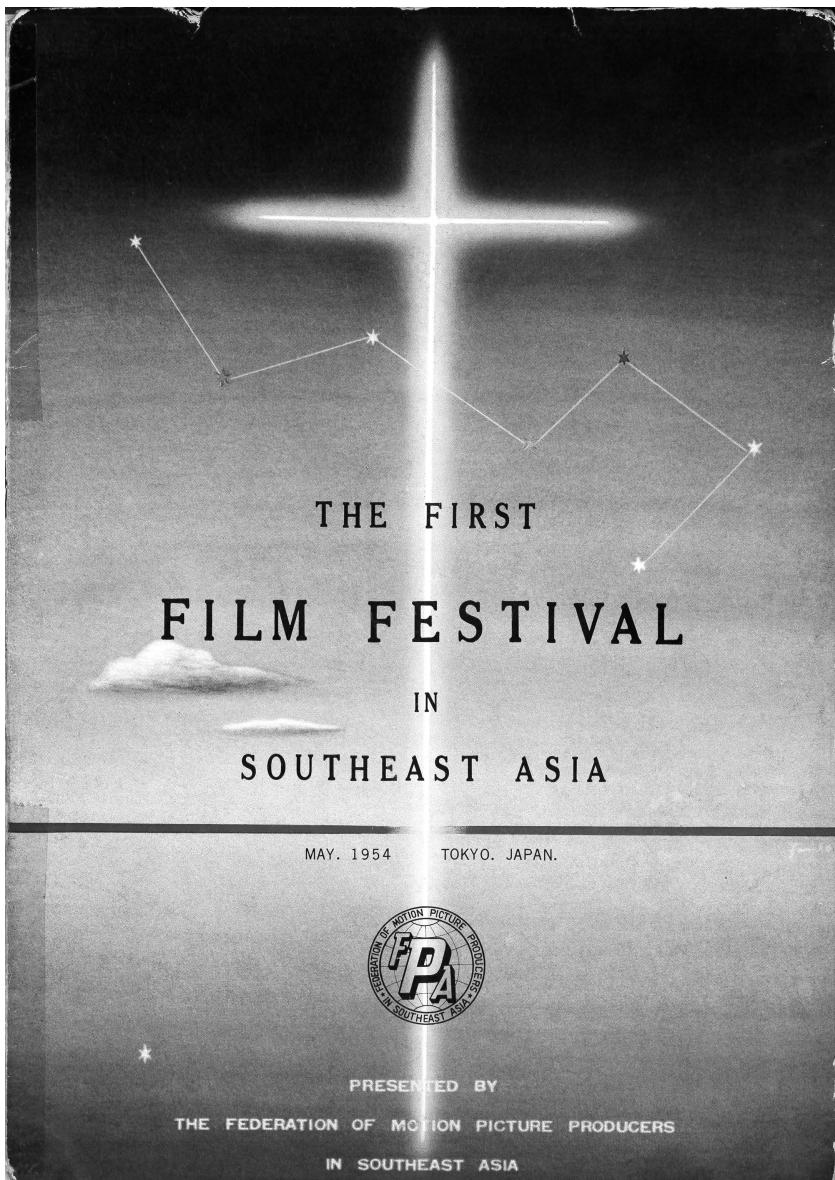
wake of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.<sup>4</sup> After Korea was liberated from Japan in August 1945, however, the geopolitical boundaries of the new nation left no room for Kim's transnational imagination. The world around the writer had changed completely. Japan had surrendered to the West. Korea was divided into two states—North and South. Moreover, the "evil forces" of the West were now the nation's new mentors. Kim's new country, the Republic of Korea, resided in the United States, the seat of the world order that had drawn the new map of "free Asia."

In the early 1950s, threatened by the expansion of communism throughout the region and particularly by the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the ascending popularity of communism in Southeast Asia, and the outbreak of the Korean War (1950–53), the US government believed it necessary to construct a military bulwark and a "free Asia" bloc in the region. Lazar Kaganovich, a Soviet politician and first deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers (1953–57), proclaimed in 1954 that "if the nineteenth century was a century of capitalism, the twentieth century is a century of the triumph of socialism and communism" and asserted that the Soviets' influence was spreading rapidly across Asia.<sup>5</sup> To counter this influence, the United States constructed the Western bloc, a term that refers to the countries allied with the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) against the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact (1955). As part of this bloc, the US-driven "free Asia" alliance contained vast networks of newly sovereign nation-states. Ranging from the Philippines and Indonesia to South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, this anticommunist bloc was controlled by the new hegemonic regime, the United States, via financial and cultural domination that disseminated the American way of life. Bruce Cumings calls this bloc an "archipelago of empire" that effectively established a "territorial empire."<sup>6</sup> According to this logic, Japan emerged as an adopted and "enlightened" child of the United States and a financially self-sufficient "big brother" in the metastable regional entity. Remarkably, in just two decades, the animosity toward the Japanese empire during the occupation period had given way to fear of communism, resulting in a new consensus dubbed the anti-Red matrix. Within this new regional order, the cultural arenas of the various "free Asia" countries, and particularly their motion picture industries, were closely linked.

The first signs of a regional Asian film industry had in fact appeared in Japan in the 1930s and were deeply tied to Japan's imperial ambitions across the region. The "Greater East Asian Cinema" (*Dai toa eiga*) operated under the Japanese empire's "New Filmic System" design, in which each

colony was linked to the others under the slogan of “the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere.”<sup>7</sup> This ambitious network ended with the Japanese surrender. The idea of creating a regional cinema network, however, was revived in the mid-1950s with a new outfit: the Asian Film Festival and its mother organization, the Federation of Motion Picture Producers in Southeast Asia (FPA). Founded in 1953, the FPA was the first postwar pan-Asian film organization. A year later, its annual event, the Southeast Asian Film Festival (renamed the Asian Film Festival in 1957), was held in Tokyo for the first time. The Japanese film executive Nagata Masaichi (1906–85), president of Daiei Studio, was the FPA’s founding force and first president. Nonetheless, the FPA and its film festival should not be viewed as simply a perpetuation of Japan’s unfinished colonial business. Instead, this new regional alliance was, in the words of Markus Nornes, tempered “by the legacy of Japanese imperialism and the overwhelming power of bilateral relationships with the United States.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, the FPA was a platform of a US-designed “free Asia” motion picture network that I call the “anticommunist motion picture producers’ alliance” in Cold War Asia.<sup>9</sup> This new network received financial and administrative support from US institutions, particularly a San Francisco-based philanthropic organization called The Committee for a Free Asia (renamed The Asia Foundation in 1954).

This book is a history of postwar Asian cinema. I am not, however, telling a comprehensive story of the films, filmmakers, and cinematic movements of the region. Rather, this is the first book-length examination of the historical, social, cultural, and intellectual constitution of the first postwar pan-Asian cinema network during the two decades after the Korean War armistice in July 1953. I argue that Asia’s film cultures and industries were shaped by the practice of transnational collaboration and competition between newly independent and colonial states, with financial and administrative support from US institutions. More specifically, this book looks at the network of motion picture executives, creative personnel, policy makers, and intellectuals in Asia at the height of the Cold War and beyond. It shows how they aspired to rationalize and industrialize a system of mass production by initiating a regional organization, cohosting film festivals, coproducing films, and exchanging stars, directors, and key staff to expand the market and raise the competitiveness of their products. I claim that this network was the offspring of Cold War cultural politics and American hegemony. While providing financial and administrative aid to the film industries and supporting intellectuals and anticomunist cultural producers in Asia, US agencies—the Asia Foundation (TAF) in particular—actively intervened in



**Figure 0.1.** Official poster for the first film festival in Southeast Asia, May 1954. It was held in Tokyo from May 8 to 15. This film festival started as the Southeast Asian Film Festival and was subsequently renamed twice, first as the Asian Film Festival in 1957, then as the Asia-Pacific Film Festival in 1983. Photo courtesy of the Federation of Motion Picture Producers in Asia-Pacific (FPA).

every sector of Asia's film cultures and industries during the 1950s. The presence of the Asia Foundation is particularly important here. With a clear and consistent vision of "free Asia," the field agents of this philanthropic organization, founded in 1951, encouraged "native" film producers and directors to fight against the communist forces, with proper guidance from the foundation's motion picture officers and Hollywood's anticommunist veterans. The culmination of their efforts was the inauguration of the FPA.

The FPA was for at least its first two decades the single most important pan-Asian film industry organization.<sup>10</sup> Its annual event, the Asian Film Festival, was unique in that it was hosted in neither a single city nor a single country. Instead, this film festival adopted a peripatetic system that moved it from country to country each year; no member country was allowed to accommodate the festival in two consecutive years. From the beginning, then, the Asian Film Festival was not a conventional film festival, but rather a regional alliance summit for the region's film executives, accompanied by screenings of each participant's annual outputs, a series of forums, and film equipment fairs and exhibitions. Public screenings were not offered. Previous studies claim that the festival was primarily a "public relations event for the industries" and that its aim was "to become the Asian equivalent of the Cannes and Venice Film Festivals, a prestigious event at which filmmakers competed and made business deals."<sup>11</sup> These views have been echoed by other historians of postwar Asian cinema. However, by treating the history of the Asian Film Festival as a struggle between a few motion picture studios and executives in Japan and Hong Kong, previous studies have depolitized the significance of the FPA and its secret alliance with the Asia Foundation. In fact, the underlying aim of the FPA was "to protect 'free Asia' from the invasion of the communist forces throughout cinema."<sup>12</sup> The Asia Foundation's clandestine financial backing of the FPA and many of its individual members is now coming to light for the first time.

Despite their historical significance, the FPA and its annual film festival have not received the scrutiny they deserve.<sup>13</sup> While preparing for the Asian Film Festival's fiftieth anniversary in 2005, Rais Yatim, Malaysia's minister of culture, arts and heritage (2004–8), lamented the paucity of available primary materials. He wrote that "no one man or entity keeps in store the 50 years struggle and the success of the festival."<sup>14</sup> Likewise, film festival studies in Asia, particularly of the pre-1990s period, have yielded few results. This is partly because the festivals do not fit comfortably within the rigid borders of national cinema studies; furthermore, film festivals in Asia are still a new field of inquiry.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the Asia Film Festival, the FPA, and other



**Figure 0.2.** The official logo of the Federation of Motion Picture Producers in Southeast Asia (FPA). Photo courtesy of the Federation of Motion Picture Producers in Asia-Pacific.

equally important festivals and regional organizations in this period were seldom bound to a single nation. Most of them were regionally constructed entities, closely tied to nongovernmental organizations or the cultural policies of postwar US hegemony. In view of this situation, the present book sheds new light on the field of cultural Cold War studies.

Over the past two decades, much research has been published on the clandestine psychological warfare programs developed by the US government at the height of the Cold War. Kenneth Osgood and Laura A. Belmonte delve into the ways the Truman-Eisenhower administrations wielded propaganda and campaigns to influence public opinion.<sup>16</sup> The pivotal work in this area is Frances Saunders's *The Cultural Cold War*, which was published in 2000. Saunders examined how the CIA funded intellectual magazines, musical performances, art exhibitions, and the like to be used as "weapons" against the

Soviet Union and its allies.<sup>17</sup> A closely related body of work has since then documented the cultural conflict between the Soviet Union and the Western democracies. Greg Barnhisel, in his study of modernist art and literature's role in Cold War diplomacy, argues that "modernism" became a weapon in what has become known as the "cultural Cold War," the struggle for cultural prestige and influence between the Soviet-led Eastern and the US-led Western blocs. Cultural diplomats during the 1950s, Barnhisel argues, presented American modernism in painting, literature, architecture, and music as "evidence of the high cultural achievement of the United States."<sup>18</sup> The Eisenhower administration (1953–61) made use of the President's Emergency Fund for International Affairs to subsidize trade fair presentation by private industry, US national exhibitions in Europe and the Soviet Union, publications, and tours abroad by artistic groups. The US State Department's Cultural Presentations program likewise sent its finest performers of modern dance and ballet, classical music, rock 'n' roll, folk, blues, and jazz to Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Soviet Union to win the hearts and minds of the Third World and to counter perceptions of American racism.

In the realm of cinema and audiovisual studies, recent studies have provided new insights into US radio propaganda during the Truman-Eisenhower era by tracing the histories of the troubled existence of the Voice of America (VOA) and the CIA's clandestine sponsorship of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. For their part, film historians have revealed how the CIA worked covertly with Hollywood during the Cold War. Tony Shaw, who works on the cultural Cold War and cinema, investigates the complex relationship among filmmakers, censors, politicians, and government propagandists in *Hollywood's Cold War* and discusses British cinema's contribution to Cold War propaganda in *British Cinema and the Cold War*.<sup>19</sup> Andrew J. Falk and John Sbardellati provide new perspectives on Hollywood's involvement with Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee. Sbardellati uncovers the breadth and impact of the investigative activities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the motion picture industry from 1942 to 1958, showing how the former FBI director J. Edgar Hoover became obsessed with the idea of subversion on the silver screen. It was Hoover and his FBI who decided that communists, anarchists, and other left-wing film artists were determined to turn Hollywood's ideologically "correct" films into propaganda vehicles. Falk tells a story of Hollywood and television artists who persisted despite this in expressing controversial views about international relations. These artists, whom Falk aptly names America's "new negotiators," used their influence in cultural affairs to address issues including

the developing conflict with the Soviet Union, the atomic bomb, foreign aid, Palestine, anticolonial movements, and the United Nations (UN).<sup>20</sup> In highlighting how the US film industry functioned as one of the cultural sectors of the state-corporate network during the Cold War, a significant number of studies have scrutinized the Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA), formerly the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MP-PDA), and its global businesses in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Turkey, Germany, and Spain, along with the distribution of Soviet films in the United States during this period.<sup>21</sup>

Historians of Hollywood and European cinema might be surprised, however, to discover how little has been written about American involvement in Asian cinema during the cultural Cold War. Although the Cold War was by definition a global conflict and the United States confronted both the Soviet Union and China on the Asian periphery, Asia has often been glossed over in the cultural Cold War literature, most of which focuses on US cultural policy and is concerned with the European theater.<sup>22</sup> Scholarship on the Cold War in Asia has certainly been growing. However, very little of this scholarship deals with cultural matters, and film cultures and industries in Asia during the Cold War have largely been overlooked. Moreover, little attention has been paid to the significance of the Asia Foundation and its clandestine activities in the cultural fields. It is also true that the FPA's intimate network with the Asia Foundation, like the presence of the FPA itself, has been almost entirely omitted or simply forgotten in the emerging literature on the history of Asian cinema. Drawing on records of the Asia Foundation, the FPA, and the Asian Film Festival, this book is a novel attempt to reconstruct Asian film history. This history is not a linear narrative of the relevant nations' cinematic heritage or a close analysis of selected canonical opuses. Rather, it adopts a transnational and regional approach to the region's film cultures and industries in the context of new economic conditions, shared postwar experiences, Cold War politics, US cultural diplomacy, and intensified cultural flows in Asia.<sup>23</sup>

This pioneering study is divided into two parts, titled "The First Network" and "The Second Network." Each part aims at a different level of discussion, although the two levels are tightly connected. "The First Network" begins and ends with the Asia Foundation. Roughly from 1953 to the early 1960s, during the Eisenhower administration, this nongovernmental philanthropic organization surreptitiously supported anticommunist motion picture industry personnel, ranging from producers, directors, and technicians to critics and writers in Japan, Hong Kong, Burma (Myanmar),

Ceylon (Sri Lanka), South Korea, and the Chinese diasporas in Southeast Asia, as well as American and British motion picture producers in Malaysia and Thailand. What the Asia Foundation's motion picture project aimed at was to construct an alliance of anticommunist motion picture producers in Asia and to use the network as an anticommunist force to win the psychological war against the Soviet Union and China. The first part in this book, accordingly, identifies the cultural, economic, and political logic that gave rise to and modified the FPA and the Southeast Asian Film Festival. It argues that the history of the organization, at least in the first several years, was the product of US-driven Cold War politics that delineated the new map of "free Asia," an anticommunist bloc controlled by a new hegemonic regime: the United States.

More specifically, the Asia Foundation supported Japan's Nagata Ma-saichi, the producer of the Oscar-winning film *Rashomon* (Kurosawa Akira, 1951), in his bid to become a leader of the "free Asia" film industries. Nagata initiated the FPA, hosted the Asian Film Festival, and helped film producers and technicians in the FPA member countries train their peers in the latest film technologies, including color cinematography, developing, sound design, and modern acting skills. In addition, the experienced technicians of Daiei Studio received guidance from a Hollywood screenwriter chosen by the foundation's motion picture team. The Asia Foundation also produced a Burmese-language anticommunist film, *The People Win Through* (*Ludu Aung Than*, George Seitz Jr., 1953), and indirectly financed nine feature films in Hong Kong by pouring US dollars throughout the 1950s into Asia Pictures, the project of a local journalist, Chang Kuo-sin (1916–2006). South Korea was another beneficiary. South Korea's Korean Motion Picture Cultural Association (KMPCA), in fact, received almost the entire budget of the association's early operations.

With core motion picture projects in Japan, Hong Kong, and South Korea as well as small and ad hoc projects in Burma, Ceylon, and the Philippines, the Asia Foundation and its passionate motion picture officers—Charles M. Tanner (1919–2006), John Miller (1915–?), Noel F. Busch (1906–85), and James L. Stewart (1913–2006), none of whom had any professional training in the motion picture industry to speak of—invested enormous energy in Asia's film industries. At times, they brought in Hollywood Cold War veterans such as Cecil B. DeMille (1881–1959), Frank Capra (1897–1991), Frank Borzage (1894–1962), and Luigi Luraschi (1906–2002) as project advisors. The Asia Foundation's motion picture project team firmly believed that a little help from Hollywood would immensely increase the production quality of Asia's

native films. Once improved, these films could travel to the American film market, which would ultimately benefit what they perceived as Asia's less-developed film industries. Using its San Francisco network, the Asia Foundation introduced select Asian films, particularly foundation-funded films, at the newly launched San Francisco International Film Festival, which had been started in 1957 by the local film exhibitor Irving M. "Bud" Levin (1916–95). The Asia Foundation saw the San Francisco festival as a gateway to Hollywood.

At the end of the 1950s, however, the San Francisco office of the Asia Foundation decided to decrease its involvement with the FPA and significantly cut the budgets for most of its motion picture projects in Asia. The Asia Foundation could not fully achieve its initial goals. Many factors contributed to the disappointment of its motion picture operations, but most important, the foundation's core collaborators in Asia were not capable of leading the regional organizations. Many of them had insufficient experience in filmmaking. Their films attracted neither local audiences nor Hollywood's sophisticated foreign film distributors. Furthermore, the film industries in Asia had been growing rapidly without America's direct help during the latter half of the 1950s. South Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong experienced a "Golden Age" of cinema in the 1960s, when each country churned out over two hundred films per year. The Asia Foundation gradually reduced the scope of its motion picture project and terminated the operation entirely in the early 1960s.

Nevertheless, the FPA network did not disappear. When the Asia Foundation's Cold War mission ended, a new network emerged. The new network, which I call the "Asian Studio Network," used the existing regional and interregional links that TAF and a group of anticommunist motion picture producers had vigorously struggled to create and maintain throughout the preceding decade. "The Second Network" begins at this critical juncture. This section argues that the new motion picture studio network in "East Asia"—Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan—did not emerge out of the blue.

During the 1960s, the FPA gradually took a new direction. The most conspicuous change arrived in the form of state intrusion, especially from South Korea and Taiwan. The map of the regional film industry also changed. The once powerful Southeast Asian film industries largely disappeared from the Asian Film Festival's annual line-ups in the 1960s. Instead, East Asian film moguls—Run Run Shaw (1907–2014; Hong Kong and Malaysia), Loke Wan-tho (1915–64; Singapore and Hong Kong), Shin Sang-ok (1926–2006; South

Korea), Li Han-hsiang (1926–96; Taiwan and Hong Kong), and Henry Gong Hong (1915–2004; Taiwan)—came to dominate the festival and the FPA. Interestingly enough, none of them received any financial or administrative support from the Asia Foundation except Run Run Shaw. Manuel de Leon of the Philippines was likely the only influential Southeast Asian film producer still participating in the FPA during this decade.

The two chapters in the second part of this book, accordingly, examine the Asian studio network as a cultural and industrial phenomenon in Cold War, colonial, and postcolonial Asia. Chapter 6 explores Shin Films, which was the largest motion picture studio of its time in South Korea. During its two decades of operation, from 1952 to 1975, Shin Films was owned, controlled, and managed by Shin Sang-ok, who bore complete responsibility for all of the products that Shin Films distributed. Shin was a director, a producer, and a studio executive who was deeply involved with the military government's film policies. This chapter scrutinizes Shin Films' business and management structure, aesthetic styles, mode of production, political relations with the Park Chung Hee government, and transnational networks with the FPA. The seventh and final chapter continues where chapter 6 leaves off, expanding its temporal and spatial boundaries into the global sphere. With the unexpected success of the Shaw Brothers' medium-budget production *Five Fingers of Death* (*tian xia di yi quan*, Chōng Ch'āng-hwa, 1972; also known as *King Boxer*) in the United States in 1973, American media conglomerates turned their attention to Asia. Seeking to maximize profits, they poured capital into this region to secure kung fu films for global distribution. Hong Kong, as a cultural producer of kung fu films, generated the so-called "kung fu craze" in the context of the political undercurrent of United States-China normalization, epitomized by Nixon's visit to the PRC in 1971.

By then, the powerful studios of the 1960s—Shin Films, Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC), Grand Motion Picture Company (GMP; Guolian), and Motion Picture and General Investment (MP&GI)—were all declining, for various reasons. MP&GI had to cut down its film production after the untimely death of its president Loke Wan-tho during the 1964 Asian Film Festival in Taipei. Li Han-hsiang left GMP in 1970, and Shin Films was forced to shut down its business in 1975. With the success of kung fu films worldwide, however, Shaw Brothers and the newly launched Golden Harvest studio finally found a way to reach out to the world beyond Asia. The Asia Foundation's motion picture team and most Asian film moguls had anticipated such an opportunity for decades. The desire of the Hong Kong film industry to expand into the global arena, beyond the traditional market of

Chinese-speaking communities in Southeast Asia that Shaw Brothers and MP&GI had controlled since the mid-1950s, led to the possibility of constructing a global identity. Shaw's desire to extend its market to non-Asian territory—that is, Hollywood—was finally fulfilled. But the opportunity didn't last long.

Competing with television and facing the waning of the kung fu craze in the global market as well as the unexpected death of Bruce Lee (1940–73), the Hong Kong film industry decreased its global collaborations considerably. Once affluent and influential, the Asian cinema network virtually disappeared in the late 1970s. Since then, the rich history of Asia's first pan-Asian film industry network, which lasted over two decades, has been largely forgotten—until today.

And the story begins now.

