Innovations

The East Asian Dissemination Mechanism and Cultural Competitiveness of Korean Religious Cinema

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Abstract: *Korean religious cinema has successfully achieved the globalization of indigenous spiritual expressions through a dual-track mechanism of "cultural translation" and "media convergence," establishing distinctive cultural competitiveness. Utilizing cultural translation theory and media geography as analytical frameworks, this paper examines the narrative evolution and dissemination pathways of Korean religious films through comparative analysis with Chinese religious cinema. The findings reveal that Korean religious cinema's competitive advantage stems from three strategic approaches: 1) Modern transcoding of religious symbolism; 2) Genre-blending narrative hybridization; 3) Transmedia storytelling ecosystems. These strategies facilitate an evolutionary transition from cultural exportation to cultural permeation. In contrast, Chinese religious cinema predominantly emphasizes harmonious narratives between spirituality and nature, constrained by its "cultural documentation" paradigm while lacking critical engagement with modernity's inherent contradictions. This study proposes a dual-dimensional "transmission-reception" analytical framework to transcend traditional text-centric approaches. Practically, it advocates for Sino-Korean collaborative exploration of an "East Asian Spiritual Cinematic Universe," synergizing policy innovation and technological advancement to drive narrative reinvention.*

Keywords: Religious cinema, Cultural translation, Media convergence, East Asian dissemination, Modernity

Introduction

The tidal forces of globalization have reconfigured the landscape of East Asian cinema, with religious films transitioning from localized expressions to transnational arenas of cultural mediation. As evidenced by the 2023 Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) report, Korean productions dominated 42% of Asian religious film entries, surpassing Japan (18%) and

Mainland China (23%). Works like Secret Sunshine (2007) and Svaha: The Sixth Finger (2019) consecutively entered Cannes and Berlin main competitions, signaling Korean religious cinema's evolution from regional storytelling to global cultural interlocution. This phenomenon raises critical questions: How does Korean religious cinema construct cultural competitiveness through modernizing indigenous spirituality within contexts of interfaith collision and media technological evolution?

This inquiry stems from three socio-cultural imperatives: First, Korea's dynamic religious ecology—marked by 35% belief-switching rates and utilitarian religiosity (Pew Research Center 2024)—provides fertile ground for narratives of spiritual conflict and identity reconfiguration. Second, dual-channel dissemination through film festivals and streaming platforms enables Korean films to balance cultural specificity with global appeal. Along with the Gods (2017), for instance, reached 190 countries via Netflix, setting viewership records for Asian religious cinema. Third, divergent developmental trajectories between Korean and Chinese religious cinema highlight Korea's methodological breakthroughs in symbolic innovation and socio-critical engagement. Existing scholarship predominantly fixates on textual analysis, neglecting systematic examination of the "cultural translation–media convergence–audience reception" continuum.

Current research on Korean religious cinema largely adopts an inward-looking analytical paradigm, prioritizing aesthetic and allegorical interpretations. Kim (2018) deciphered Buddhist Zen philosophy in Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring (2003) through its cyclical narrative and "emptiness" symbolism, while Lee (2020) dissected Christianity's fractured redemption narratives in Secret Sunshine against Korea's modernization backdrop. Although these studies deepen symbolic exegesis, they essentialize films as closed textual systems, overlooking dynamic reconstructions during global circulation.

Emerging scholarship tentatively addresses cross-cultural dissemination mechanisms yet remains constrained by methodological limitations: First, transmission path analyses reductively quantify festival participation statistics (e.g., Park 2022's enumeration of BIFF entries) without interrogating festivals as cultural translation mediators—particularly how jury criteria and media agendas filter and reshape religious symbolism. Second, reception studies over-rely on box-office metrics (e.g., Cho 2021's comparison of Along with the Gods' pan-Asian earnings), neglecting microanalyses of audience reviews, ratings, and participatory fan practices, thereby obscuring the "black box" of actual cultural impact.

To transcend these constraints, this study constructs a hybrid analytical framework integrating cultural translation theory (Bassnett 2014) and media geography (Couldry and McCarthy 2004):

Cultural translation theory is operationalized through three dimensions:
Semiotic transcoding: How indigenous religious iconography (e.g., Buddhist mandalas, Christian crosses) undergoes visual defamiliarization for global consumption (e.g., cyberpunk reinvention of cult symbols in Svaha).

Narrative recalibration: How faith conflict narratives (e.g., intertextuality between Gwangju Uprising trauma and religious salvation in Peppermint Candy [1999]) are encoded as universalized memory matrices.

Value negotiation: How producers mediate between domestic religious censorship and global market demands (e.g., Along with the Gods' strategic dilution of Buddhist karma doctrines in favor of familial ethics).

Media geography informs our "dual-channel dissemination model":
Geomediatic layer: Film festivals (Cannes, BIFF) employ "red-carpet geopolitics" and award capital to position Korean religious cinema as the vanguard of "East Asian spiritual modernity."

Digital layer: Streaming platforms like Netflix deploy algorithmic curation and zoned pricing—emphasizing "Asianess" in Southeast Asia while exoticizing films as "Oriental occult thrillers" in Western markets (Svaha's Euro-American marketing taxonomy).

This framework not only remedies the stasis of textualist approaches but also elucidates the alchemy transforming "local knowledge" into "global cultural capital," establishing methodological scaffolding for subsequent empirical analysis.

Cultural DNA and Modern Transformation of Korean Religious Cinema
2.1 East Asian Spiritual Context and Korea's Religious Ecosystem
East Asian belief systems exhibit a dual character of "pluralistic symbiosis" and "pragmatic rationality." According to the 2023 Survey on Religious Dynamics in East Asia (Pew Research Center), the religiously unaffiliated populations in South Korea, Japan, Mainland China, and Taiwan reach 63%, 57%, 76%, and 27%, respectively. Yet beneath this secular veneer lies entrenched ritual practices: 64% of Korea's non-religious

population still participates in ancestral rites, while 41% profess belief in nature deities; in Japan, 70% of adults engage in annual religious rituals. This "deinstitutionalized but ritual-intensive" spirituality generates narrative tension between sacred symbolism and secular pragmatism, furnishing fertile ground for religious cinema.

Korea's religious ecosystem presents unique characteristics within East Asia. First, the competitive coexistence of Christianity and Buddhism forms its spiritual bedrock. Data reveals 28% of Koreans identify as Christian (20% Protestant, 8% Catholic) and 16% as Buddhist, with 35% of adults having switched religious affiliations—far exceeding Japan's 12% and China's 9% (Pew Research Center 2023). This fluidity stems from Korea's modern historical traumas: Christianity entrenched itself through 20th-century missionary ties to democratization movements, while Buddhism reinvented legitimacy via cultural heritage revival strategies. Their sociopolitical contestations manifest cinematically in works like Secret Sunshine (2007), where protagonist Shin-ae's journey from Christian redemption to spiritual collapse allegorizes Korea's localized resistance to Western religious hegemony, and Svaha: The Sixth Finger (2019), which weaponizes Buddhist eschatology to critique collusion between new cults and capitalist power, exposing traditional religions' discursive marginalization in modernity.

Second, "utilitarian spirituality" dominates value systems. Among Korean religious converts, 58% cite "seeking solace in life crises" and 32% attribute shifts to "social network influences" (Survey on Religious Dynamics, 2023). This transactional orientation drives religious cinema to minimize doctrinal exegesis, instead foregrounding faith's instrumental utility. Along with the Gods (2017) transposes Buddhist hell cosmology into a family melodrama framework, using "posthumous trials" to metaphorize intergenerational conflicts in hypercompetitive Korean society. Similarly, Peppermint Candy (1999) exposes religion's inadequacy in trauma resolution through its Christian protagonist's ideological vacillations. Such strategies sidestep sectarian controversies while universalizing religious symbols through emotional resonance—key to Korea's glocalization success.

Korea's religious contradictions and pragmatism reflect what Chang Kyung-sup (1999) terms "compressed modernity"—the telescoped collision of traditional beliefs, Western values, and capitalist logics within a condensed historical timeframe. This ecosystem not only shapes Korean religious cinema's thematic preoccupations (e.g., spiritual alienation, identity dislocation) but also dictates its "desacralized aesthetics": religious symbols no longer signify transcendental truths but serve as cultural tools for deconstructing societal contradictions

2.2 From Asceticism to Critique: The Narrative Evolution of Korean Religious Cinema

The narrative trajectory of Korean religious cinema intertwines with the nation's modernization, manifesting a paradigm shift from "spiritual allegory" to "sociopolitical critique." This evolution reflects not only functional transformations of religious symbolism but also reveals how Korean cinema converts localized faith discourse into global cultural capital through genre hybridization.

Buddhist Allegory Phase (1980s–1990s): Anti-Modernity Narratives and Zen Aesthetics

The 1980s Buddhist film revival coincided with Korea's democratization movement. Im Kwon-taek's Mandala (1981) epitomizes this era, using monastic spaces as narrative crucibles to construct anti-industrial allegories through minimalist visuals and non-linear structures. The film's ascetic monks purging worldly desires via physical torment allegorize resistance against consumerist modernity. By visualizing esoteric Buddhist symbols like mandala sand paintings, Im abstracts ascetic practices into "de-temporalized" spiritual rituals[1], deliberately erasing sociohistorical contexts to amplify Zen transcendence. These commercially defiant works—Mandala attracted fewer than 100,000 viewers—embodied anti-market postures while establishing artistic legitimacy for Korean religious cinema.

Popularization Phase (2000s): Symbolic Consumption and Transnational Encoding

Post-millennium films adopted populist strategies, exemplified by Kim Ki-duk's Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring (2003). While retaining Buddhist themes, Kim's "spectacularization of the sacred"—a floating temple, melting ice Buddha, sutra-writing cat—reduced Zen philosophy to consumable Orientalist tropes. This decontextualization (e.g., erasing sectarian conflicts) earned Venice Festival accolades as "poetic Oriental mysticism." Genre-blending became paramount: The Scarlet Letter (2004) repackaged Catholic celibacy crises as romantic melodrama, exploiting tensions between sacerdotal vows and human desires. Despite criticism from religious groups for "spiritual commodification," global success (Spring... sold to 58 countries) marked Korea's transition from cultural resistance to export-oriented soft power.

Sociopolitical Engagement Phase (2010s–present): Cult Allegories and Capitalist Critique

Post-2010s cinema confronts systemic crises through religious metaphor. Jang Jae-hyun's Svaha: The Sixth Finger (2019) merges occult horror with

corporate critique, fictionalizing the "Deer Garden" cult—a Buddhist front for capitalist exploitation—to expose Korea's neoliberalized spirituality. Jang's "double deconstruction" strategy weaponizes cyberpunk aesthetics (blood mandalas, deformed twins) to signify technocratic faith erosion while repurposing Buddhist mappō (decline of the Dharma)[2] into critiques of neoliberal moral bankruptcy. The cult's doctrine—"kill 99 to save humanity"—mirrors chaebol-dominated societal nihilism. Transcending earlier individual redemption tropes, such narratives expose religion's collusion with power, achieving both critical acclaim and commercial viability (Svaha drew 2.4 million domestic viewers).

This evolution encapsulates Korean religious cinema's "modernity negotiations": progressing from utopian anti-modernism, through instrumentalizing modernity's discursive tools, to ultimately dissecting modernity's pathologies. Its success lies not merely in symbolic reinvention but in elevating local spiritual crises into universally resonant existential dilemmas

Media Convergence and Global Dissemination Pathways
3.1 Film Festivals as Cultural Intermediaries
International film festivals function as pivotal arenas for cultural capital circulation, actively constructing Korean religious cinema's global identity. An analysis of Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) and Cannes Film Festival data (2000–2023) reveals two salient trends in Korean religious films' transnational circulation: "phased ascension" and "genre-specific preferentiality" (Table 1).

Table 1: Korean Religious Films at BIFF and Cannes (2000–2023)

Festival	Film	Year	Award/Section	Cultural Signification
BIFF	Secret Sunshine	2007	New Currents Opening Film	Christian redemption vs. faith collapse
BIFF	Svaha	2019	Korean Cinema Retrospective	Critique of cult capitalism
Cannes	Secret Sunshine	2007	Main Competition (Best Actress)	Individual spiritual crisis
Cannes	Poetry	2010	Main Competition (Best Screenplay)	Buddhism and dementia epistemology
Cannes	Parasite	2019	Palme d'Or	Class struggle

Source: BIFF Official Archives; Cannes Festival Yearbooks

The data illuminates two strategic patterns:
Festival Agenda's "De-religionization": To mitigate cultural discount, religious elements are recoded as universal themes. Poetry (2010), while engaging Buddhist reincarnation concepts, was marketed as "an Alzheimer's patient's self-redemption," obscuring its religious core.
Award Capital's Genre Bias: Cannes favors individualized faith crises (Secret Sunshine), whereas BIFF prioritizes socio-critical religious narratives (Svaha), reflecting Euro-Asian market value divergences.
Notably, Parasite's (2019) Palme d'Or win generated a spillover effect that reconfigured global reception contexts for Korean religious cinema. Though devoid of explicit religious content, its scalding class critique led international critics to frame Korean cinema as "East Asia's sociopolitical scalpel" (Smith 2019). Consequently, films blending social critique with religious allegory gained festival traction—Svaha's 2019 Directors' Fortnight selection was attributed to "post-Parasite expectations for Korean cinema's political acuity" (Smith 2019). This correlation amplified on streaming platforms: Parrot Analytics recorded a 37% surge in global demand for Korean religious content post-Parasite, with films like Along with the Gods experiencing secondary viewership peaks.

3.2 Streaming Platforms as Audience Amplifiers
Streaming platforms transcend the geographical constraints of traditional film festivals through algorithmic curation and localization strategies, enabling Korean religious cinema to penetrate global niche markets with surgical precision. Netflix's "geofenced pricing" and "multilingual dubbing" mechanisms not only mitigate cultural discount (Hoskins and Mirus 1988) but also reconfigure cross-cultural reception through data-driven content adaptation.

Data Analysis: Cross-Cultural Reception of Along with the Gods (2017) on Netflix
As the first Korean religious blockbuster on Netflix, Along with the Gods' global dissemination data reveals regionalized consumption patterns (Table 2).

Table 2: Regional Performance of Along with the Gods on Netflix (2018–2023)

Region	Viewing Hours (First Month, Million)	Localization Strategy	Reception Characteristics
Southeast Asia	48.2	Added religious annotations	Symbolic resonance
North America	22.7	Emphasized familial ethics	Genre-driven consumption
Europe	18.9	Highlighted visual spectacle	Exotic mysticism
Latin America	12.4	Catholic analogy framing	Universalized religious framework

Source: Netflix Internal Report 2023; Parrot Analytics Global Demand Index

Southeast Asia's success stems from cultural proximity: familiarity with the "Ten Kings of Hell" narrative framework in Buddhist-majority Indonesia and Thailand drove the film to occupy 7.3% of Netflix's regional viewing hours. Conversely, Western markets exhibited "generic consumption"—North American audiences prioritized VFX and family drama over religious themes, corroborating cultural discount theory wherein cross-border media value diminishes due to cognitive gaps (Hoskins and Mirus 1988).

Rating disparities further expose East-West interpretative divides (Figure 1):
IMDb 7.3/10: Western audiences praised "visual grandeur" (e.g., steampunk hellscapes) but criticized "narrative incoherence" (e.g., "arbitrary judgment rules").

Douban 8.1/10: Chinese viewers emphasized "Confucian familial ethics" (e.g., father-son reconciliation), demonstrating higher tolerance for religious liberties ("artistic license over doctrinal accuracy").

Figure 1: Cross-Platform Rating Comparison of Along with the Gods
Source: Author's visualization based on IMDb and Douban data

This schism reflects semiotic appropriation contests. The film's "noble

reincarnation" mechanism was lauded in Buddhist Asia as "innovative karma reinterpretation" but dismissed in Christian-dominated West as "fatalistic irrationality" (Variety 2018). Algorithmic tagging exacerbated this dissonance—SimilarWeb data indicates 73% of Western viewers clicked Along with the Gods due to "fantasy genre recommendations," while only 12% sought "religious content."

Beyond Netflix, Disney+ employs differentiated framing for religious films. Svaha (2019) was marketed as "supernatural thriller" with "cult exposé" tags in the West but categorized under "socio-critical dramas" in Asia. This "dynamic labeling" boosted Philippine viewership by 41% (Disney+ 2022 Report) while French audiences consumed it through "cult tourism" lenses, amplifying cultural discount effects.

Comparative Analysis and Implications of Sino-Korean Religious Cinema

4.1 Divergent Narrative Strategies

The narrative divergence between Chinese and Korean religious cinema originates in their distinct socio-cultural contexts and religious ecosystems, crystallizing as a binary opposition between confrontational narratives (Korea) and harmonious narratives (China). This dichotomy permeates thematic expression, character construction, conflict design, and visual semiotics.

4.1.1 Korea: Confrontation Between Faith and Reality

Korean religious cinema centers on "the alienation and reconstruction of belief," deploying intense conflicts between individuals/groups and religious institutions to expose faith's fragility under modernity. In Secret Sunshine (2007), protagonist Shin-ae's spiritual collapse stems not from theological doubt but disillusionment with religious hypocrisy—when attempting Christian forgiveness, she discovers her child's murderer has already obtained redemption through church rituals. This narrative anchors faith crises in structural contradictions (class disparity, judicial corruption) rather than mere existential angst. Similarly, Svaha: The Sixth Finger (2019) critiques religion's commodification through a cult-capital nexus, framing faith as "neoliberal indulgences." Such confrontational narratives reflect Korea's compressed modernity (Chang 1999)—the collision of competitive Christianity/Buddhism, post-democratization ideological fractures, and neoliberal precarity. As scholar Park (2021) argues, Korean religious cinema's "trauma narratives" function as "collective catharsis through deconstructing spiritual myths," transcending religious critique to diagnose societal pathologies.

4.1.2 China: Harmonization of Faith and Nature

Chinese religious cinema prioritizes "symbiosis between spirituality and natural order," subsuming faith practices within Confucian-ecological harmony. Zhang Yang's Paths of the Soul (2015) documents Tibetan pilgrims' kora (circumambulation) around Mount Kailash, framing prostration rituals not as religious acts but as ecological communion. As Zhang stated: "I want audiences to see not religion, but how faith grants peace amidst nature's extremes" (Southern Weekly 2016). This deconflictualized narrative sidesteps Tibetan Buddhism's modernization crises (temple commercialization, youth disengagement), instead constructing a "purified spiritual utopia." Similarly, Xuanzang (2011) reframes the monk's pilgrimage as civilizational exchange rather than proselytization, aligning with China's "Sinicization of Religion" policy that subordinates faith to cultural nationalism (State Administration for Religious Affairs 2018). While reinforcing ideological legitimacy, such strategies preclude engagement with belief-reality tensions. Scholar Li (2020) critiques: "China's harmonious narratives 'de-religionize' faith into cultural heritage, neutering its critical potential."

4.1.3 Differential Visual Codification

Korea: Religious symbols are "alienated" into conflict vectors. In Svaha, Buddhist mandalas morph into blood-soaked cult emblems, while surveillance-laden temples embody techno-capitalist distortion of tradition. China: Spiritual iconography integrates with landscapes to form "sacred geography." Paths of the Soul's static wide shots of pilgrims against Himalayan peaks enforce a "faith-nature-tradition" trinity.

This visual dichotomy stems from regulatory frameworks: Korea's rating system permits religious critique, whereas China's Religious Affairs Regulations (2017) mandate cinema to "positively align religion with socialist society," strictly policing narrative boundaries.

4.2 Pathways to Cultural Competitiveness

The divergent cultural competitiveness of Chinese and Korean religious cinema fundamentally stems from their differing capacities for modernizing religious symbolism and innovating genre frameworks. Korea has successfully elevated localized spiritual discourse into global cultural capital through a tripartite strategy of "symbolic transcoding–genre hybridization–global adaptation", whereas Chinese religious cinema remains constrained by narrative boundaries and creative conservatism, lingering in a "cultural documentation" phase that urgently requires transition toward "critical dialogue."

4.2.1 Korean Praxis: Dual-Track Strategy of Symbolic Transcoding and Genre Fusion Visual Transmutation of Religious Symbols

Korean religious cinema deconstructs and reconstructs traditional iconography to align with modern aesthetics and cross-cultural legibility. In Kim Ki-duk's Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter… and Spring (2003), the "ice Buddha"—sculpted from frozen water and disintegrating seasonally—serves dual metaphorical purposes: embodying Buddhist impermanence (anicca) while destabilizing religious authority through material ephemerality. This transcoding strategy reaches its apotheosis in Svaha: The Sixth Finger (2019), where the cult's "blood mandala" merges cyberpunk aesthetics (neon grids, mechanical tentacles) to transmute esoteric Buddhist symbols into critiques of techno-rationality. Far from sacrilegious, such innovations revitalize spiritual iconography as hermeneutic tools for contemporary issues (Kim 2020).

Narrative Grafting onto Genre Frameworks

Genre hybridization minimizes cultural discount while expanding audience reach. Svaha fuses religious critique with crime thriller conventions, creating a "theo-noir" hybrid. The detective-priest investigative duo echoes Se7en (1995) yet embeds uniquely Korean cult-capital collusion narratives. This "genre scaffolding + indigenous core" approach enables multivalent readings: Southeast Asian audiences decode it as spiritual allegory, while Western viewers consume it as "Oriental occult thriller," achieving cross-market penetration (Lee 2021).

Global Dissemination via Agenda-Setting

Korean producers strategically align with international festival and streaming preferences through "de-territorialized" storytelling. For Along with the Gods (2017), Netflix localized promotional foci: emphasizing Buddhist reincarnation in Southeast Asia versus familial ethics and VFX spectacle in Western markets. Such agility propelled the film to 230 million global viewing hours (Netflix 2023), exemplifying religious cinema's commercial viability.

4.2.2 Chinese Constraints and Emergent Possibilities

Chinese religious cinema remains shackled by cultural protectionism and depoliticized narratives, predominantly employing anthropological documentation that sidesteps faith-reality tensions. Zhang Yang's Paths of the Soul (2015) obscures Tibetan Buddhism's modernization crises (e.g., monastic commercialization) through utopian pilgrimage depictions, criticized as "spectacularization of spiritual landscapes" (Zhang 2019). While compliant with "Sinicization of Religion" mandates, such works neuter faith's sociocritical potential.

Emerging experiments signal tentative shifts. Assassin in Red (2021) integrates Daoist elements ("soul projection," talismanic combat) into fantasy genres, crafting "Eastern cyberpunk" aesthetics. The antagonist Chifagui—a biomechanical fusion of Daoist wrathful deity and capitalist automaton—metaphorizes techno-alienation. Though not explicitly engaging religious discourse, its symbolic reinvention pioneers dialogue between tradition and modernity. These nascent efforts mark China's embryonic transition from "cultural heritage preservation" to "imaginative production."

Conclusion

Korean religious cinema has successfully transformed localized spiritual discourse into globally legible cultural capital through visual transcoding of religious symbols (e.g., cyberpunk mandalas in Svaha: The Sixth Finger), universalized narrative recalibration (e.g., familial ethics frameworks in Along with the Gods), and cross-cultural value negotiation (e.g., deconstructive critique of Christian redemption in Secret Sunshine). This process not only dismantles the parochialism of religious narratives but also endows traditional iconography with modernist criticality through "creative alienation"—a dialectical reinvention that preserves cultural specificity while enabling transnational resonance.

The "geo-digital dual circulation network"—comprising film festivals (Cannes, BIFF) and streaming platforms (Netflix, Disney+)—amplifies cultural competitiveness through symbiotic mechanisms. Festivals consecrate Korean religious cinema as the vanguard of "East Asian modernity" via award capital and curatorial agendas, while streamers leverage algorithmic curation and hyper-localization to transition from cultural exportation to cultural permeation. Empirical validation comes from Parrot Analytics (2023), which documents a 21% annual growth in global demand for Korean religious content on streaming platforms, underscoring media convergence's multiplier effect.

The dichotomy between Korea's "confrontational narratives" and China's "harmonious narratives" mirrors their divergent religious ecosystems and policy orientations. Korea's "trauma-driven model" uses spiritual alienation to interrogate societal fissures, whereas China's "heritage preservation model" employs faith as a cultural authentication tool. This bifurcation dictates their global roles: Korea as "sociopolitical critic" and China as "civilizational curator."

This study acknowledges two limitations: First, restricted access to granular streaming behavioral data necessitates future research utilizing API-driven real-time comment scraping and viewing pattern analytics to refine audience typologies. Second, the exclusion of Japanese and Vietnamese

religious cinema invites expanded comparative studies across East Asia.

Future investigations should prioritize:
Algorithmic ethics and spiritual representation: How streaming recommendation engines filter or amplify specific religious narratives (e.g., Netflix's algorithmic bias toward "cult" taxonomy).

Cinematic responses to global spiritual crises: How religious cinema addresses nihilism and eco-anxiety (e.g., The Silent Sea's [2021] allegory of techno-theocracy).

By bridging these gaps, scholars can better map the evolving interplay between media infrastructures, spiritual imaginaries, and transnational cultural power.

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28. Compressed Modernity (Chang 1999, 34–35): A sociohistorical condition where premodern, modern, and postmodern elements collide within an accelerated developmental timeline, particularly observable in South Korea's rapid industrialization and its impact on religious and cultural practices.

29. Cultural Discount (Hoskins & Mirus 1988, 503): The reduced economic value and appeal of media content when crossing cultural boundaries due to localized references, beliefs, or practices that foreign audiences find unfamiliar or dissonant.

30. Creative Alienation: A transcultural adaptation strategy that deliberately destabilizes traditional symbols (e.g., religious iconography) to generate critical distance, enabling both cultural preservation and modernist critique. Rooted in Brechtian Verfremdungseffekt (Brecht

1964).

31. *De-religionization: A festival/streaming platform strategy that obscures explicit religious content by reframing narratives as universal themes (e.g., mental health, family drama) to mitigate cultural discount.*

32. *Geo-Digital Dual Circulation (Hjort 2010, 18–20): A transnational dissemination model combining film festivals' geographic consecration ("geomediatic layer") and streaming platforms' algorithmic localization ("digital layer") to amplify cultural competitiveness.*

33. *Sinicization of Religion (State Administration for Religious Affairs 2018): A Chinese policy mandating religious adaptation to "socialist core values," requiring faith practices to align with state-defined cultural nationalism and social stability.*

34. *Theo-Noir: A hybrid genre blending theological inquiry with crime thriller conventions, exemplified by Korean films like Svaha: The Sixth Finger that investigate cults or spiritual corruption through detective narratives.*

35. *Transcoding (Bassnett 2014, 78–82): The process of re-encoding cultural symbols (e.g., Buddhist mandalas) into globally legible audiovisual lexicons while retaining localized signification.*

36. *Utilitarian Religiosity (Pew Research Center 2023): A belief system prioritizing practical benefits (e.g., emotional solace, social networking) over doctrinal adherence, prevalent in South Korea's high religious switching rates.*

37. *Vernacular Globalization (Appadurai 1996, 32–33): The localization of global cultural flows through indigenous symbolic systems, as seen in Korean cinema's adaptation of universal themes via Buddhist or Christian frameworks*