

## Pulp Fiction Across the Globe

International Cinema has the opportunity to be a fun place on BYU's campus. There are so many different exciting films from other countries that often reflect our own times. These films don't have to be boring and heartbreaking, but instead can be for an audience looking for escape from real everyday problems. Winter Semester 2023 International Cinema put on an amazing double bill, *Santo and Blue Demon versus Doctor Frankenstein* (1974) with *Nacho Libre* (2006). International Cinema turned this into a full on show, there was a mariachi band, people in Lucha libre masks handing out candy, and plenty of laughs. Here were two genre films that are fun, about luchadores in Mexico overcoming the odds full of camp and excitement. I've been coming to International Cinema since my freshman year back in 2018, sadly I can't say that many of the films have been nearly as fun as this double bill. This is what International Cinema needs more of, genre films from around the globe. In my research I've found various genres which are often repeated throughout various countries focusing on action, horror, sci-fi, and the western. From China we have the Kung-Fu flicks;, in Italy we have spaghetti westerns, the Giallo films;, in Japan we have the Samurai film (similar to the western);, and with Latin America offering horror, sci-fi, and interesting westerns as well.

Critics often shy away from genre films, —films which [grouped together are based on theme, narrative form, subject matter, or setting. ]—looking for the types of films that will win Academy Awards. I'm looking at you *Annie Hall*, which beat out *Star Wars* in 1978 for Best Picture. While *Annie Hall* is a great movie, we all know and love *Star Wars* much more today. International films can be just as fun as *Star Wars* leaning into the pulp and camp that genre films offer. These last Academy Awards though really leaned into our love of genre films by giving the majority of awards to *Everything, Everywhere, All At Once*, which definitely fits in our genre films across the globe category. Genre films are nothing new, they've existed since the beginning of cinema, and are now reaching new critical heights. They aren't just a cult

affair anymore.

Many great directors got their starts with genre films, or simply made their careers in them. This category includes, but is not limited to, In this category we have, but not limited to, D.W. Griffith, John Ford, Raoul Walsh, Howard Hawks, Yasujirō Ozu, and on our list Akira Kurosawa. Sure later in the careers of these directors, many moved on to more reflexive films, but many of these worked in defined genres such as the gangster picture or western, which would influence the international genre films we are celebrating here. Akira Kurosawa never hid the fact that he was a fanatic of John Ford, even wearing the same hat on most of his shoots. If it weren't for Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* and *Sanjuro* we wouldn't have gotten Sergio Leone's *Dollars Trilogy* or the cantina sequence from *Star Wars*.

The following will explore various types of genre films with their cultural ties, and why they deserve further study than the already established texts on the topic. There is a natural progression from the Japanese Samurai Films is the Spaghetti Western. We celebrate Clint Eastwood and Sergio Leone, but many more of these films were made in Italy by diverse filmmakers such as Ferdinando Baldi who directed *Hate Thy Neighbor*. Spaghetti Westerns came out of the traditional westerns of Hollywood, but making something more avant-garde and even more violent. These productions incorporated various languages, such as Italian, Spanish, and even German, before being dubbed back into English. While at International Cinema we have shown *Once Upon a Time in the West* by Leone, we could show even more such as *Django* by Corbucci or even campier movies like *Hate Thy Neighbor*. These films fit as a subgenre to the western, but have helped to breed experimentation in newer films such as *Let the Corpses Tan*. Contemporarily to the Spaghetti Western was also the Chili Western from Mexico which served a similar exploitative purpose.

Low Budget Horror films always make money, this has been true since the

original Universal Monster movies. It is not surprising that other film markets, especially in Latin America would try to imitate this success. *Dracula* (1931) was released in a Spanish language production made by Hollywood starring Lupita Tovar to great success in Latin American countries. This would lead to Fernando Mendez making his own sort of *Dracula* story with *El Vampiro* in 1957, being remembered as the first Mexican cult film. Everyone loves a good horror movie, and after the explosion of zombie movies in the early 2000's even Cuba took to the genre with *Juan of the Dead* in 2011 which became an international success.

Hong Kong has always had an incredible film industry, mostly based on the success of these genre films. Before Kung Fu films the famous Shaw Brothers Studio produced James Bond knock-off films. In Hong Kong, horror, fantasy, and kung fu films were known as "seven day wonders" because they only needed to be in local cinemas for a week to make the necessary money to be able to produce more. One of the most famous examples is the explosion of Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan, but Hong Kong cinema was full of stars like Gordon Liu in my pick *36 Chambers of the Shaolin Monk*. The Shaw Brothers Studio expanded throughout the 70's and 80's making plenty of hits such as *Mighty Peking Man* also featured on my list, a Hong Kong knockoff of *King Kong* with heart.

Genre movies are incredibly popular today. Just last week I went to see *Godzilla: Minus Zero* from Japan, released in an only subbed version. This new Godzilla movie takes just about everything I've written here and makes it a reality, a monster movie that can be celebrated by genre fans everywhere, but also critically for what it has to say particularly about Japan's involvement in World War II. As we have traced the cultural impact of various international genres, I have illustrated that other genre films should be given the same credit. Not only do genre films reflect contemporary times, but international genre films can also do this across

cultural lines. This is a trend I certainly hope continues, and I hope BYU's International Cinema decides to follow suit by making room for more genre films in its calendar.

*Sanjuro* (1962) Akira Kurosawa *Japan*

The sequel to Kurosawa's nameless ronin in *Yojimbo*, *Sanjuro* is a fun samurai film that would influence diverse genres such as sci-fi and the western. *Sanjuro* stars Toshiro Mifune in a much more goofy role than in his other Kurosawa films. Akira Kurosawa is one of Japan's greatest genre filmmakers, while *Sanjuro* might not be as reflexive as his *Seven Samurai* or *Rashomon*, but it is much more exciting, ending with a bloody final.

*Three Outlaw Samurai* (1964) Hideo Gosha *Japan*

Three poor Samurai take the magistrate's daughter hostage, trying to create social change. *Three Outlaw Samurai* is one of the favorite films of director Rian Johnson which influenced his entry into the *Star Wars* universe *The Last Jedi*. This was director Hideo Gosha's first film, and what an effort it is. The success of *Three Outlaw Samurai* led to his subsequent film *Sword of the Beast* and other genre films.

*Hate Thy Neighbor* (1968) Ferdinando Baldi *Italy*

A pulpy spaghetti western directed by Ferdinando Baldi. Baldi is one of the more accomplished spaghetti western directors not named Sergio Leone or Sergio Corbucci. The films of Baldi are filled with awesome action and violence, in *Hate Thy Neighbor* there are exciting gladiator battles with claws. *Hate Thy Neighbor* may not be your traditional spaghetti western, but there is a map supposedly leading to treasure, revenge, and lots of it. The setting of *Hate Thy Neighbor* is a little past the idea of the old west, more like Civil War time in the south, but still fits the genre well.

*Let the Corpses Tan* (2017) Hélène Cattet and Bruno Forzani *Belgium*

An homage to all things genre from two French filmmakers. *Let the Corpses Tan* is a psychedelic, erotic, violent, and extremely weird film. Hélène Cattet and Bruno Forzani implement the same techniques that made the spaghetti westerns and Giallo films exciting such as smash cuts, zooms, and closeups to tell a neo-noir story. At its base *Let the Corpses Tan* is a generic crime film, cops and robbers, but it's mediterranean setting leads to some amazing cinematography. The colors in *Let the Corpses Tan* often pop like the color palette used in a Dario Argento film.

*El Vampiro* (1957) Fernando Mendez *Mexico*

*El Vampiro* is Mexico's first cult/horror film, influenced by the success of Hollywood's Universal Monster Films in terms of lighting and set design. This film would start a trend for low budget horror films in Mexico. Fernando Mendez was an accomplished director, after the success of *El Vampiro* there was a sequel called *El ataúd del vampiro* which followed, along with a slew of exploitation films such as the *Santo* series of films.

Juan of the Dead (2011) Alejandro Brugués *Cuba*

A zombie movie from Cuba which spends about 96 minutes making fun of the United States and bureaucracy, not unlike one of Cuba's other films *Death of a Bureaucrat*, similarly dealing with the countries' political state in terms of humor. *Juan of the Dead* came out at a time when the zombie genre was exploding, *The Walking Dead* was on tv, George A. Romero was still making films within the genre, and in England Edgar Wright had made *Shaun of the Dead*. Similar to every zombie film the title character Juan is an unlikely hero. There is friendship and brotherhood here, and even some bromance. The so-called survivors of this zombie outbreak are literal outcasts, which only makes it all the more funnier that they were the only ones to be smart enough to defeat the zombies, think about Ash throughout *The Evil Dead* series of films. First and foremost *Juan of the Dead* is fun, which is something we need more of.

36 Chambers of the Shaolin Monk *China*

Starring one of Hong Kong's biggest Kung Fu stars Gordon Liu, a young student trains through the 36 Chambers to lead a rebellion. Distributed by the legendary Shaw Brothers studio. *36 Chambers of the Shaolin Monk* was one of the many Shaw Brothers films that became wildly successful in the United States, influencing the first album by rap group Wu Tang Clan.

Mighty Peking Man (1977) Meng Hu Hua *China/Hong Kong*

A Hong Kong style retelling of the classic King Kong story taking advantage of the success of a renewed interest in Kong due to a remake made in Hollywood the year prior. The film has fun special effects, reminiscent of the classic monster movies and tv shows like *Ultraman*. Quentin Tarantino loved the film so much that he helped it get re-released in the late 90's after his own successes in genre type films.

Godzilla: Minus Zero (2023) Takashi Yamazaki *Japan*

A prequel to the 1954 monster movie classic celebrating 70 years of *Godzilla*. In the last days of World War II, a kamikaze pilot struggles with survivor's guilt after his first encounter with the legendary monster on Edo Island. There is romance, drama, and of course our favorite giant monster, while still dealing with relevant topics for our day. This film is much more powerful than anything Warner Brothers has done with the franchise, being a fresh and original take on the monster, also done with a much lower budget.

## Annotated Bibliography

Hu, Brian. "All the Right Moves: Mobile Heroes and the Shaolin Temple Film." *Worldly Desires: Cosmopolitanism and Cinema in Hong Kong and Taiwan*, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 143–78. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv7n0b48.10>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2023.

Brian Hu talks about the emergence of the Shaolin Temple Film in 1970's Hong Kong cinema. These films started from the Shaw Brothers studios as James Bond knockoff type films, before settling into the "kung fu film genre". This genre appealed to a cosmopolitan audience in the cities of Hong Kong and Taiwan. While being basically action films they also taught discipline to this audience to teach them how to be like a Shaolin monk. The stories of these films came from Chinese folklore.

Landy, Marcia. "'Which Way Is America?': Americanism and the Italian Western." *Boundary 2*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1996, pp. 35–59. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/303575>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2023.

Marcia Landy talks about how the "spaghetti western" adapted American ideas for a European audience. In particular the Europeans aren't calling Americans monsters, but rather meeting somewhere in the middle creating a shared genre here. Landy calls this a "philosophy of action" There is a history given of Italian cinema, stating that the neorealists tried to do the opposite of the "genre film" so prevalent in Italy at the time, genres which often promoted the fascist lifestyle of Mussolini. Landy talks about how Sergio Leone was drawing from other international sources such as the Japanese samurai film to create his cowboy hero, citing Yojimbo and Sanjuro as significant. The article continues to talk about how americanism has been important to Italians since they first immigrated to the United States at the turn of the century as being influential to this shared culture.

Tierney, Dolores. "Mapping Cult Cinema in Latin American Film Cultures." *Cinema Journal*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2014, pp. 129–35. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43653662>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2023.

Dolores Tierney maps out first the way Latin America has taken the zombie film into their own films and culture, talking about *Juan of the Dead* from Cuba and a Santo film from Mexico. The first "cult" or genre film was *El Vampiro* from 1957 directed by Fernando Mendez in Mexico. This tradition of cult films in Latin America was based on Hollywood's B-Movies such as *I Walked With A Zombie* directed by Jacques Tourneur.

López G., Víctor Manuel. "Mexican Wrestling: Its Compensatory Function in Relation to Cultural Trauma." *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2010, pp. 33–45.

*JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jung.2010.4.4.33>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2023.

Victor Manuel López gives a short history of the “lucha libre film” starting with *El Santo contra el cerebro mal* (1958), explaining how El Santo is a superhero to the Mexican people.

There is an explanation and significance given for the mascaras that wrestlers wear in this sport, explaining the *kitsch* value of professional wrestling. Wrestlers like El Santo are “baptized” with these heroic names.

Brinkman, Eric, and Pagnoni Berns Fernando Gabriel. “Chapter 6 Beyond Interesting The Affective Complexity of Barbara Bouchet in *Don’t Torture a Duckling*.” *Bloodstained Narratives: The Giallo Film in Italy and Abroad*, University Press of Mississippi, 2023, pp. 102–114.

Eric Brinkman talks about the film *Don’t Torture a Duckling* by Lucio Fulci in his chapter on Italian Giallo Films focusing on the female actresses importance on this genre. For Brinkman Barbara Bouchet is both a believable killer while still maintaining a look of complete innocence. *Don’t Torture a Duckling* while being a film from 1972 has regained consciousness in popular culture due to restorations and 4k releases in physical media from companies like Arrow Video. Arrow Video’s release of *Don’t Torture a Duckling* shows a new interest in these Giallo films from a younger generation as this release was just one of many. *Let the Corpses Tan* (2017) is referenced as an example of new filmmakers going back to this genre outside of Italy.

Desser, David. “Kurosawa’s Eastern ‘Western’: ‘Sanjuro’ and the Influence of ‘Shane.’” *Film Criticism*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1983, pp. 54–65. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44018742>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2023.

David Desser discusses various reviews of Kurosawa’s *Sanjuro*, the sequel to *Yojimbo*. In Desser’s reading it is Kurosawa’s harkening back to the American Western which makes it a success, seeing it as nearly a remake of George Stevens’s critically acclaimed *Shane*. The character of Sanjuro is a lot like a western cowboy, fitting into 13 of 16 functions that define the classical Hollywood western such as, a society which doesn’t completely accept its hero, a conflict of interest between the villain and society, all leading up to the hero finally being accepted by society. Sanjuro, much like Shane, serves as a teacher to the society that he enters as an outsider. Both these characters exist as a mythic figure to their respective cultures.

Cashill, Robert. “ALL THINGS KONG-SIDERED.” *Cinéaste*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2006, pp. 39–43. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41689969>. Accessed 2 Nov. 2023.

Robert Cashill is reviewing the 2005 Peter Jackson film *King Kong*, while reflecting on the influence that Kong has had on our culture over the past 80 years. Cashill brings up the remake of King Kong from 1976 which directly brought about Hong Kong's version of the same story with *Mighty Peking Man* the next year. The original *King Kong* from 1933 can be seen as a "woman's picture," describes Cashill which the 2005 version fails to reach. Cashill also cites *Grass* (1925) and *Chang* (1927) as being two silent films produced by Merian C. Cooper which would directly influence the creation of Kong.