

# Diverse Themes, Genre Fusion, and Audiovisual Spectacle: A Study of South Korean Science Fiction Films

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**Abstract:** *Science fiction (sci-fi) films are a unique genre within Korean cinema. Since the early 21st century, Korean sci-fi films have expanded the imaginative space of domestic science fiction by exploring various thematic fields. The cross-genre approach in these films has facilitated mutual creative exchange and genre diversification, while innovative audiovisual construction has produced visually striking spectacles. Korean sci-fi films have continuously experimented and evolved, gradually forming their own national characteristics and developmental path. This represents a significant creative exploration of genre and commercialization in Korean cinema. Therefore, it can be said that Korean sci-fi films are always responding to the dynamic changes in social, technological, and cultural landscapes.*

**Keywords:** *Science Fiction Films, Themes, Film Genres, Audiovisual Spectacle*

## 1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, with the continued promotion of cultural support and revitalization policies by several democratically elected governments, including Kim Dae-jung's civilian government and Roh Moo-hyun's participatory government, South Korea's cultural and creative industries became an important part of the nation's "soft power economy." South Korean cinema emerged as a key global hub for both film production and consumption. As noted, "Diversity and originality allowed South Korean cinema in the 21st century to rapidly stand out; the wide variety of film forms and fresh, unique expressions have continuously revitalized the industry, liberating it from historical limitations while opening up new industrial structures".<sup>[1]</sup>

Since the 21st century, South Korean sci-fi films have developed despite the lack of a rich historical accumulation in this genre, with over 30 films produced. Drawing on the successful experiences of both domestic genre films and the global sci-fi film industry's evolution, South Korean sci-fi films have made numerous attempts at innovation. The creation of these films is characterized by imaginative and diverse subject matter, a trend toward genre fusion, and distinct audiovisual construction and expression.

## 2. Diverse Themes Showcasing Local Sci-Fi Imagination

If the development of Korean cinema over more than a century can be seen as a representation of Korean culture, then the continuous development of Korean sci-fi films since the 21st century, as an art form, equally reflects Korea's cultural past, present, and future. Sci-fi films are among the best mediums for presenting future imagination, and the distinct themes of South Korean sci-fi films vividly showcase the breadth and depth of Korean filmmakers' local sci-fi imagination. The term "film theme" generally refers to the primary content that a film's story focuses on, such as transcending time and space, artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, biotechnology, brain science, future politics, social life, alien species, and space exploration. In line with the current development of South Korean sci-fi films, these works have covered nearly all the major thematic areas in the sci-fi genre.

The theme of transcending or traveling through time is a frequently explored subject in science fiction films, typically realized through highly advanced technology or supernatural events. This is also evident in Korean sci-fi films. For instance, the film *Heaven's Soldiers (2005)* tells the story of three individuals who travel back in time to Joseon-era Korea to assist Admiral Yi Sun-sin in achieving

victory in battle. Their time travel occurs suddenly due to the unexpected arrival of a comet. Similarly, in the Korean sci-fi films *Alienoid* (2022) and its sequel *Alienoid 2* (2024), time travel is a central plot device. The films feature both modern characters traveling to ancient times and ancient characters traveling to the modern era, with time travel often leading to plot twists, serving as a technique to enhance the drama.

As one of the classic motifs in sci-fi narratives, time travel in Korean films differs from that in American sci-fi films, which often emphasize the mechanics of building time-travel devices.<sup>[2]</sup> Instead, Korean sci-fi films focus on how present-day characters alter their future by changing certain past actions. In some cases, the ancient and modern settings are merely narrative backdrops, with the time-traveling aspect offering a legendary quality to the story. The purpose of this is often to cater to the audience's desire to engage with national history while consuming the imaginative spectacle of sci-fi. So far, all the time travel in these films occurs between Korea's modern and ancient periods, without any instances of characters traveling to other countries' historical timelines. This may reflect a localized approach in Korean filmmaking, suggesting a "spatial boundary" that this particular genre has not yet overcome.

In the context of artificial intelligence and genetic engineering, robots and genetically replicated humans (also known as androids or clones) are major themes in science fiction films. This subject occupies a significant portion of Korean sci-fi films. Among films featuring artificial intelligence, *Natural City* (2003) is an early example of Korean sci-fi. It tells the story of a future where the protagonist, R, a soldier assigned by the government to capture runaway AI robots scheduled for destruction, falls in love with a female robot named Ria. The film explores the idea that artificial intelligence can awaken to possess independent consciousness and emotions, while also focusing on the emotional connections between humans and robots, and the conflict between emotion and reason. *The Prayer* (2022) focuses on a caregiving AI robot and addresses themes of advanced technology, aging, caregiving work, and euthanasia, exploring issues of family, responsibility, morality, suffering, and faith. In *JUNG\_E* (2023), a future military AI development company attempts to clone the brain of a legendary mercenary and military strategist to create the ultimate AI combat soldier, raising questions about the use of AI in warfare. *Wonderland* (2024) tells the story of people reuniting with their loved ones through an AI service called "Wonderland", which recreates the deceased using big data, prompting reflections on whether AI can help humans reconcile emotional regrets.

The theme of artificial intelligence is currently the most prolific in Korean sci-fi cinema, closely related to the recent surge in AI technology. Films in this genre generally convey the idea that, even though humans create AI to enhance their own well-being, and despite AI's potential to fully develop human-like emotions and memories, humans maintain the stance that "no matter how advanced AI becomes, humans are unwilling to alter the subject-object relationship, wherein humans, as creators and subjects, always retain the authority and control over AI as the object."<sup>[3]</sup> This context reflects humanity's attempt to approach artificial intelligence from an anthropocentric standpoint, a premise that often serves as the direct source of conflict in these films. In Korean sci-fi films that feature artificial intelligence, AI—whether portrayed as human-like or as obviously mechanical—is typically depicted as serving human functions and being controlled by humans. However, these films also commonly explore the idea that artificial intelligence can develop self-awareness and human-like qualities, striving to break free from human control and seek freedom after achieving self-awareness.

The narrative resolutions of these films often involve different characters adopting varied perspectives on artificial intelligence. Korean sci-fi films about AI tend to focus on the following anxieties: "For such artificially created beings, human concerns generally revolve around issues of 'losing control' 'identity' and 'ethics' " These themes explore the inherent human fears about the potential of AI to escape its intended purpose and raise questions about its place in society and human identity.<sup>[4]</sup> This question is posed for the audience to reflect upon. The film attempts to present how humans would respond to the crisis of artificial intelligence going out of control, whether AI can be considered as human, and how it should be viewed from a moral and ethical standpoint. It prompts deep contemplation on whether artificial intelligence should be granted the same level of respect and treatment as humans, and if it deserves equal standing with humanity in every aspect.

The theme of genetic engineering in science fiction films often revolves around the concept of genetically replicated humans, with the central theme frequently being the anxiety over the potential loss of control over these creations. In the film *Seobok* (2021), the experimental subject *Seobok*, created through stem cell replication and genetic manipulation, is the world's first clone to possess the secret of immortality. In *The Witch: Part 1. The Subversion* (2018) and *The Witch: Part 2. The Other One* (2022), the super-powered female protagonists are artificial humans created through genetic modification in a

secret facility.

However, ethical issues pose deeper and more significant challenges. For instance, in *Seobok*, the clone Seobok, who holds the secret to immortality, ultimately cannot affirm the value of his own existence and chooses self-destruction. From this perspective, such films reflect a profound reflection on the ethical dilemmas brought about by human genetic engineering. These narratives delve into the moral complexities and questions of identity, highlighting the potential consequences of pushing the boundaries of science and technology.

In science fiction films, biochemical technology often leads to catastrophic events, with animal-related disasters being a key focus. *The Host (2006)* tells the story of how a U.S. military unit illegally dumps large amounts of formaldehyde into the Han River, causing aquatic creatures to mutate. *Okja (2017)* portrays the story of a genetically modified giant animal named Okja (a six-ton pig) and the deep bond between Okja and a young girl named Mija, who grew up with the creature in the valleys of Gangwon-do. These films, by depicting the anxiety surrounding disasters and how humans respond to them, reflect an awakening of ethical consciousness.

For example, *The Host* effectively portrays the indomitable spirit of the Korean people, who demonstrate tremendous courage and resilience in the face of adversity. Historically, Korea was under the control of foreign powers for long periods, and this oppression fostered a sense of perseverance and shaped a strong, unyielding national character. In the film, both the elderly grandfather and the young granddaughter exhibit extraordinary bravery and decisiveness when confronting a powerful enemy.

In *Okja*, the film expresses a hopeful vision of harmonious coexistence between humans and genetically modified creatures, suggesting a broader reflection on humanity's relationship with nature and technology. These films, while highlighting the potential consequences of scientific tampering, also promote a message of ethical responsibility and the importance of compassion in facing such challenges.

In the realm of futuristic politics and social life, one of the most well-known films is *Snowpiercer (2013)*, which depicts a future where most of humanity has perished due to a sudden climate catastrophe, and the remaining survivors board a perpetually moving train, the "Snowpiercer." The film tells the story of oppressed passengers from the tail section of the train who rise up in rebellion, fighting against the ruling elite for survival and dignity. *Illang: The Wolf Brigade (2018)* portrays a guerrilla-style terrorist conflict that erupts when forces opposing the unification of North and South Korea carry out attacks, leading to a showdown between special police units, terrorists, and enemies within the government as the two nations prepare to establish a unified government.

The theme of imagining future societal life is a significant focus in sci-fi films, often critiquing authoritarian political systems or envisioning the pursuit and defense of an ideal political state. These films frequently present the idea of resisting authoritarian power to fight for freedom. In *Snowpiercer*, the rebellion leaders are not the supposed revolutionary figure Curtis, but two Korean characters—a father and daughter. Their goal is to destroy the entire train, liberating humanity and achieving true spiritual freedom. *Illang: The Wolf Brigade* integrates the vision of national unification and the efforts to defend its fruits into a cinematic reflection of the times. These films engage with themes of social justice, power dynamics, and the struggle for autonomy, portraying the fight against oppression and the quest for freedom as central elements of the human experience, particularly in future political contexts.

Space exploration is one of the most prominent themes in sci-fi films, and while Korea's exploration of this genre started later, it gained traction in 2021 with the release of Korea's first outer space adventure film, *Space Sweepers (2021)*. That year is referred to as the beginning of Korea's space movie era. *Space Sweepers* is set in 2092 and follows the crew of a space junk-cleaning ship who stumble upon a humanoid robot and become involved in a dangerous deal. In 2023, Korea continued to explore the space genre with *The Moon (2023)*, which tells the story of a manned lunar mission that encounters a catastrophic accident, leaving an astronaut stranded on the moon as the Korean space agency struggles to rescue him.

In *Space Sweepers*, the portrayal of human life in near-Earth space can be seen as an extension of current societal conditions projected into space, offering a vision that is not far-fetched—where transnational corporations control Earth (and near-Earth orbit like UTS), while ordinary people remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The main storyline of *The Moon* is rooted, on one hand, in the fact that South Korea is already one of the countries with strong aerospace technology in the real world. Korean audiences are thus psychologically prepared and have expectations for space exploration films set in their own country. On the other hand, the story represents an imaginative leap into the future of

space exploration, with Korean filmmakers attempting to push this universally appealing genre forward in hopes of gaining recognition and favor from international audiences.

The subject matter in Korean sci-fi films is diverse, but overall, the stories are closely connected to local Korean elements. Although *Snowpiercer* was adapted from a Western comic book, the film reflects the unique cultural identity of Korea. As noted, “*Snowpiercer*, as a Korean-American co-production, while influenced by American cultural values, retains the cultural subjectivity unique to Korea under the direction of Bong Joon-ho.” This balance of local themes with global narratives reflects Korea's ambition to establish a distinct voice in the sci-fi genre while appealing to both domestic and international audiences.<sup>[5]</sup>

Korean sci-fi films emphasize localized world-building and a deep understanding of everyday life. They maintain Korea's unique cultural traditions and national identity while actively incorporating commercial elements from Hollywood cinema. In depicting real-life experiences, these films also create imaginative spaces that feel both familiar and futuristic. This blend of sci-fi imagination reflects the self-referential approach of Korean filmmakers, drawing from the country's own political, economic, cultural, and technological landscape.

### 3. Cross-Genre Creation and the Integration of Expressive Elements

Within the framework of commercial cinema, Korean sci-fi films draw on Hollywood's experience in producing genre films, using repeated production, innovation, and exploration of different sub-genres to maximize the richness, distinctiveness, acclaim, and popularity of Korean sci-fi. Through cross-genre creation, Korean sci-fi films continue to explore and build a path toward genre classification and commercialization. Genre films are defined as “a group of films that share clear similarities in terms of theme, plot, character types, settings, and cinematic techniques.”

This strategic blending of Hollywood influences with localized creativity allows Korean filmmakers to enhance the appeal and uniqueness of their sci-fi films, positioning them both domestically and internationally.<sup>[6]</sup> Films within the same genre share common characteristics, but the genre itself is gradually solidified, enhanced, and evolves through each individual work. American scholar Robert Kolker, when discussing “the boundaries of genre,” remarked: “They (genres) help the audience connect with the film, promising a narrative structure and types of tasks that satisfy certain audience desires. However, they also set boundaries... If these are too rigid... the audience may rebel. When a film becomes too self-conscious, the boundaries of the narrative structure approach the point of breaking.” This insight highlights the balance that filmmakers must maintain between adhering to genre conventions and innovating within them to keep audiences engaged without becoming predictable or formulaic.<sup>[7]</sup>

The above discussion emphasizes that cross-genre fusion is a wise choice in genre filmmaking, and in the case of Korean sci-fi films, this statement proves to be highly convincing. Science fiction was not traditionally a strong genre in Korean cinema, but the advantage lies in the absence of historical baggage and a more open mindset that allows for borrowing from various beneficial forms. Korean filmmakers have embraced the approach of “fusion and re-innovation,” blending sci-fi with elements from Korea's established genres like action, suspense, comedy, thriller, and romance. This approach can be seen as a creative exploration that fuses the country's unique cultural heritage with a global perspective.

By combining sci-fi with other genre elements, Korean sci-fi films have been able to expand their creative horizons and achieve genre diversification. This cross-genre approach has propelled the development of Korean sci-fi films, allowing for fresh narratives and innovative storytelling while appealing to both domestic and international audiences. Action films are a well-established genre in Korean cinema, and the fusion of sci-fi with action elements has become one of the most mainstream choices in Korean sci-fi filmmaking. As noted, “the unique nature of action films means they can never avoid the use of violence; the necessity of violent conflict defines their ‘action narrative.’”

In Korean sci-fi films, the integration of action sequences often amplifies the intensity of the narrative, providing a dynamic platform for the exploration of futuristic, technological, or fantastical themes. This combination not only enhances the visual spectacle but also aligns with audience expectations, especially in the context of physical confrontation and high-stakes scenarios, which are often central to both action and sci-fi genres.<sup>[8]</sup> Due to the heavy emphasis on action depiction and presentation in action films, Korean filmmakers have skillfully combined sci-fi with action elements in

their cross-genre creations. By integrating the unique qualities of action films, they create visually impactful and violent action sequences, which enhance the overall appeal of sci-fi films. For instance, in the AI-themed film *Natural City* (2003), the blend of sci-fi and action elements creates a tense and thrilling atmosphere. A more influential example is the sci-fi action film *Snowpiercer* (2013), where oppressed passengers from the tail section of a strictly hierarchical train, led by a revolutionary leader, fight their way car by car towards the front in a quest for survival, sparking a “revolution.” *Heaven’s Soldiers* (2005) not only incorporates action elements but also includes elements of war films, as modern soldiers travel back in time and use modern firearms to battle the Jin dynasty’s ancient weaponry, delivering spectacular action sequences. The sci-fi action film *Clocking Out* (2016) showcases government and organizational agents battling monsters that have taken over Korea, offering a compelling display of action spectacle. In *Seobok* (2021), various interest groups pursue and attack the titular character, and Seobok retaliates using his superhuman abilities, with the action sequences offering significant visual impact. *The Witch* (2018) and *The Witch: Part 2* (2022) also belong to the sci-fi action genre, where the super-powered female protagonist fights those who threaten her safety. The display of strength and speed in the fight scenes is a highlight of the action in this series. *Alienoid* (2022) and *Alienoid 2* (2024) combine multiple elements, including modern and ancient time periods, humans and aliens, Taoists, and immortals, blending sci-fi, action, and fantasy genres in a cross-genre creation. *JUNG\_E* (2023) is a sci-fi adventure action film set against the backdrop of a civil war in outer space, showcasing battles between humans, robots, and artificial beings.

In action films, the admiration for solving problems through force reflects the deep influence of Korea’s unique “hate” culture. “Hate” as a psychological and behavioral trait of the Korean people, can be understood as the sorrow continuously accumulated from repeated misfortune and disappointments. As described, the most distinct characteristics of Korean cinema—its darkness and explosiveness—are inseparably tied to “hate” culture. This has long been the central theme and dominant emotion in Korean artistic expression. Prolonged social injustice, political oppression, economic exploitation, and foreign invasions have cumulatively formed this collective unconscious emotional root, which has been passed down to future generations through the nation’s spiritual DNA. The “hate” culture often manifests in Korean action films through intense emotional outbursts, conflicts, and the depiction of characters confronting overwhelming odds or injustices. The use of force or violent resolution in these narratives reflects a deep-seated emotional response to long-standing societal pressures and hardships, making “hate” a key emotional driver in Korean cinematic expression. “hate” is both an emotion and a form of energy, often manifesting as anger or pain. In sci-fi films, conflicts are often resolved through violent action, which, on one hand, reflects the collective unconscious rooted in “hate”. On the other hand, sci-fi films with action elements benefit from a blend of action and violence, borrowing and sharing from the action genre. This organic fusion significantly enhances the artistic expression of sci-fi films, expanding the scope of their narratives. By incorporating “hate” as a driving emotional force and using action sequences to resolve conflicts, these films resonate with deeper cultural underpinnings. The combination of sci-fi’s futuristic imagination with the visceral nature of action elements adds a distinct layer of intensity, allowing for a more dynamic and powerful storytelling approach. This fusion enriches the genre, providing not only entertainment but also a medium for exploring complex emotions and societal issues.

Sci-fi films often blend with elements of suspense, horror, and thriller genres, resulting in compelling works such as *The Host* (2006), which features a terrifying, mutated, man-eating creature. The creation of this monstrous figure, along with the atmospheric horror, plays a crucial role in capturing the audience’s attention. Similar films include *Clocking Out* (2016), which portrays a fear-inducing atmosphere as mysterious monsters overrun Korea. Space exploration, often accompanied by unknown dangers, is another genre where sci-fi blends with adventure. For example, *Space Sweepers* (2021) merges space exploration with action and adventure, while *The Moon* (2023) combines sci-fi with adventure as well. In these films, the adventure elements frequently serve as trials in the protagonists’ journey of growth and heroism, not only helping shape the characters but also ensuring the films’ entertainment value.

Sci-fi films are typically built on unknown or surreal settings, while suspense, thriller, and adventure elements are particularly adept at creating tension and a sense of mystery. This combination makes the story more gripping, as audiences are drawn into exploring unknown worlds while simultaneously confronting unexpected dangers and mysteries. The dual stimulation of suspense and adventure significantly enhances the story’s appeal, as the tension and uncertainty from thriller elements and the excitement and challenges from adventure contribute greatly to a more immersive and engaging viewing experience.

The combination of sci-fi and comedy elements in films showcases humor and light-heartedness. For instance, the sci-fi comedy *Invasion of Alien Bikini* (2011) tells the story of a conservative male protagonist, Young-gun, and an alien woman who aggressively pursues him, with the film filled with rich comedic elements. In *Natural City* (2003), in addition to sci-fi and action, the film also incorporates romance, exploring the emotional relationship between a human and a robot. While sci-fi often conveys a serious or profound tone, comedy softens this intensity, making the film more enjoyable and accessible. This blend can attract a broader audience, satisfying both sci-fi enthusiasts and those who prefer a more relaxed and humorous atmosphere. The sci-fi elements provide imaginative and visually spectacular scenes, while the comedy adds charm and entertainment, allowing viewers to enjoy both the awe and humor simultaneously.

Korean sci-fi films, much like how New Hollywood inherited and reinvented classic Hollywood cinema, seek to innovate by combining elements from different genres such as action, suspense, adventure, comedy, horror, and romance. Instead of conflicting, these genre elements merge to form a unique and engaging narrative experience. This fusion enriches the audience's storytelling experience, effectively stirring emotions and broadening the appeal of the films. In this sense, genre blending has become a key factor in the success of Korean sci-fi films.

Furthermore, the cross-genre creation of sci-fi films dynamically broadens the boundaries of the genre and promotes cultural exchange and dissemination. This fusion and innovation not only drive the development of Korean sci-fi films but also inject new energy and vitality into the broader Korean commercial film industry, expanding its creative possibilities and audience appeal.

#### 4. Creating Audiovisual Spectacles to Convey Impactful Sensory Experiences

Korean blockbusters have taken a dominant position in the market, becoming a key phenomenon in the industrialization of Korean cinema. The sci-fi genre, in particular, exhibits a trend of “cross-genre” exploration, blending elements from various genres to create specific audiovisual effects. These effects lead to the formation of fresh and spectacular visual and auditory experiences, marked by their strong sensory impact. For audiences, the audiovisual elements are the first aspect of the film to be perceived. The visual spectacle, in particular, stands out for its striking impact. As noted, “A spectacle, in my view, refers to extraordinary images and scenes that possess strong visual appeal, or fantasy images and scenes created through various high-tech cinematic techniques.”

This focus on creating visually captivating and awe-inspiring scenes is a hallmark of Korean sci-fi films, where the integration of different genre elements helps craft new and exciting viewing experiences. These visually stunning spectacles not only engage the audience but also elevate the cinematic experience, contributing to the success and distinctiveness of Korean blockbuster films in the global market.<sup>[9]</sup> In sci-fi films, audiovisual spectacles often provide the setting for the story, allowing for the expression of extreme imagination. For example, in *Avata* and *Interstellar*, the depiction of alien worlds offers a powerful visual context for the narrative. Alternatively, these spectacles can deliver visual impact, especially during key moments or climaxes in the plot. Films like *Inception* and *Lucid Dream*, with scenes of collapsing dreamscapes and the wonder of dream creation, exemplify this sensory impact. In essence, both types of spectacle represent the consumption of imagination. Crafting such visual spectacles brings a dual impact—both visual and psychological—for the audience, a result that sci-fi films strive to achieve and that is an inevitable requirement of modern film production. Korea's film industry is highly developed, with advanced and mature computer-generated effects (CG) that are among the world's leading technologies. Korean CG technology is primarily used in the production of fantasy, disaster, and war films, which has helped build significant expertise in delivering impactful special effects and audiovisual experiences for sci-fi films. This strong foundation allows Korean filmmakers to create the necessary visual spectacles that are essential to the sci-fi genre, contributing to the global competitiveness of Korean cinema.

Korea's highly developed CG technology provides a solid technical foundation for the visual effects of space sci-fi films. *Space Sweepers*, with an investment of 24 billion KRW, is a high-budget sci-fi film that heavily relies on advanced technology to create its virtual landscapes and futuristic worlds. Many of the film's key settings—such as the satellite where space pirates live, the outer space city inhabited by human elites, and the spaceship used for collecting space debris—are brought to life through extensive use of CG technology. These visually stunning elements are what audiences typically look forward to most in space exploration-themed sci-fi films.

From the set design and story construction of *Space Sweepers*, it is evident that the film is built on

space-based visual effects with a “punk” narrative. It features “cyberpunk” elements, where the scenes depicting the residential areas for common people resemble the neon-lit slums from *Blade Runner*, and “wasteland” scenes, showcasing Earth as a desolate, dust-covered planet after pollution. This fusion of visual aesthetics—cyberpunk and post-apocalyptic—combined with the advanced CG effects, not only enhances the film’s world-building but also fulfills the audience’s desire for immersive, futuristic visuals. This blend of high-tech visual storytelling and thematic depth makes *Space Sweepers* a standout example of Korean sci-fi. *Space Sweepers* made a concerted effort to appeal to global audiences, particularly sci-fi enthusiasts, by presenting a convincingly futuristic space world. In *The Moon* (2023), the space settings, including the lunar landscape, the moon base, and the spacecraft interiors, are intricately designed. Utilizing advanced CG technology and meticulous craftsmanship, the film offers viewers a highly realistic depiction of space. Whether it’s the vast, desolate surface of the moon or the complex, detailed interiors of the spacecraft, the attention to detail enhances the overall sense of authenticity. The film also excels in its special effects, with scenes featuring space disasters, fuel leaks leading to explosions, and meteor showers being especially impressive. These sequences not only deliver stunning visual effects but, through precise special effects and immersive sound design, make audiences feel as if they are experiencing the tension and excitement of space exploration firsthand. The combination of cutting-edge visual effects and immersive atmosphere helps create a captivating viewing experience, making the film a standout in the space sci-fi genre.

In the gene technology-themed film *Seobok*, one of the most visually striking and pivotal action scenes occurs when Seobok uses his supernatural powers to tear through steel walls and escape from the laboratory. Faced with an onslaught of armed personnel, Seobok is able to manipulate the elements through telekinesis, creating devastating force to counterattack. This scene is undoubtedly one of the film’s major highlights. When the military and police unleash a barrage of gunfire, including heavy machine guns mounted on armored vehicles, Seobok forms a telekinetic shield to protect himself from harm. He then retaliates by summoning a massive whirlwind of debris that crushes his attackers, followed by compressing their weapons and vehicles into scrap metal. He ultimately creates a massive sinkhole, causing nearly all the soldiers and police to fall into it, where they are left screaming in despair.

This visual spectacle is not only impactful but also serves as an entertaining and visceral experience for viewers. The scene, like much of the film, is brought to life through extensive use of CG technology, delivering a powerful blend of science fiction and action. Similarly, *The Witch* and *The Witch: Part 2* also showcase grand and imaginative scenes of superhuman abilities, with their large-scale, visually impressive effects being key components of their appeal. In the context established by the film, reality can be understood as the narrative guiding the audience to “believe” in the audiovisual experience presented on screen. This constructed reality aligns with what is expected to happen according to the plot, and the sensory stimulation brought about by the audiovisual impact creates a sense of authenticity. The visceral experience of the film’s sights and sounds leads viewers to perceive the on-screen events as a form of true reality, even though it is shaped by the film’s narrative and special effects.

The Alienoid series had a massive budget of 40 billion KRW for its special effects, ensuring top-tier quality in the sci-fi scenes, alien creatures, and time-travel elements. This significant investment allowed the film to deliver a vivid portrayal of ancient Taoist sorcery, dazzling action sequences, and awe-inspiring visuals, such as the enormous alien spaceship soaring through the skies and streets of modern-day Seoul, and the intense battles between robots and alien prisoners. These are prime examples of the spectacular visual presentation that sci-fi films excel at, with thrills and excitement as the core effects intended to captivate the audience.

The creation of audiovisual spectacle in Korean sci-fi films is not only a priority in space exploration, genetic engineering, or alien-themed films but also stands out in other genres of commercial blockbusters. For instance, in the sci-fi action film *Snowpiercer*, the snow-covered landscapes and frozen world outside the train evoke a sense of cold and desolation. These scenes, made possible by realistic special effects and cinematography, showcase the grandeur and harshness of the snowbound world, reinforcing the film’s underlying theme of environmental degradation. Similarly, in the sci-fi adventure action film *JUNG\_E*, the battle scenes, the clashes between intelligent machines, and the display of the protagonist *JUNG\_E*’s immense strength all rely on high-quality special effects. These effects not only make the action sequences more impactful but also intensify the film’s sci-fi atmosphere. The use of cutting-edge visual effects enhances the overall experience, making the action more thrilling and emphasizing the futuristic and technological themes central to the story. These spectacles serve as a hallmark of Korean sci-fi, elevating both the visual and emotional engagement of the audience.

Technological innovation and application are crucial indicators of the development of the film industry, providing essential support for the visualization of imagination. “Genre films are the product of the overlapping development of art and industry, representing the interaction between spontaneous industrial mechanisms and artistic creation.”

This fusion of art and industry is particularly evident in the sci-fi genre, where advanced technology enables filmmakers to push the boundaries of visual storytelling. The integration of cutting-edge effects, CGI, and cinematography allows sci-fi films to manifest creative ideas that would otherwise be impossible to portray, ensuring that the genre continues to evolve both artistically and commercially. The synergy between technological advancements and artistic innovation creates a platform where filmmakers can explore new possibilities, delivering visually stunning and emotionally engaging narratives.<sup>[10]</sup> Compared to other genres, the development of sci-fi films is more heavily dependent on the progress of the film industry. Recent films featuring themes such as artificial intelligence, time travel, and space exploration have showcased the new heights of Korea's sci-fi film industry to both domestic and international audiences. In the context of a consumer-driven society, the creation of audiovisual spectacle serves as a survival and dissemination strategy for Korean sci-fi blockbusters in the competitive market. Given the vast potential of both domestic and international sci-fi markets, there is a growing demand for filmmakers to produce sci-fi works that not only embody “local imagination” but also possess a “global perspective.”

This balance between local and global elements is crucial for Korean sci-fi films to achieve success. By blending culturally specific narratives with universal sci-fi themes and cutting-edge visual effects, Korean filmmakers can create works that resonate with a wide audience, enhancing both artistic creativity and marketability.

## 5. Conclusion

Korean sci-fi films exhibit a diversified approach in terms of subject matter, focusing on national cultural traditions, contemporary themes, and visions of the future. In constructing narratives, Korean filmmakers emphasize learning from the creative experiences of sci-fi films from Western countries. They continually expand genre boundaries, with sci-fi showing a trend of "cross-genre" exploration, blending with well-established Korean genres like action, suspense, and comedy, thereby enriching the range of expression and elements used. The creation of audiovisual spectacles through technological support, which delivers powerful visual and auditory impact, is a key reflection of the development level of Korea's film industry. The growth of Korean sci-fi films is characterized by distinctive localized creativity while also beginning to explore pathways for international dissemination. Thus, Korean sci-fi films continually respond to the ever-changing social, technological, and cultural landscapes.

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