



Reopening Wounds: Processing Korean Cultural Trauma in Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy* and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*

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ABSTRACT

In 1988, South Korean president Roh Tae-woo implemented democratic reforms in order to host the Olympic Games. These reforms opened the floodgates for Korean New Wave films. The reforms repealed censorship regulations and gave Korean filmmakers the autonomy to actualize their creative visions for the first time since they were colonized by Japan in 1910. The results of this newfound artistic freedom were films that grappled with the trauma of eighty years of colonialism, war, and authoritarian dictatorship through biting political commentary. This study explores Park Chan-wook's representation of *한* (han) Korean cultural trauma in his New Wave films *Oldboy* and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*. Using literature on trauma, film, and Korean history combined with original film analysis, this study works to explain the criticisms embedded in Chan-wook's films. The films critique revenge fantasies and both conscious and unconscious ignorance of traumatic events by demonstrating they are ineffective methods of processing *한*. His films show that the only way to heal *한* is to acknowledge and accept all wrongdoing, even one's own, and mourn the consequences of the atrocities. While *한* is specific to Koreans, cultural trauma is not. The ubiquity of cultural trauma makes the lessons in Chan-wook's works of paramount importance and global relevance. While resolution of trauma is never final, Chan-wook's films serve both as a guideline for and a performance of cultural healing in the face of moral atrocities.

Cultural trauma is as ubiquitous as it is destructive. The trying history of Korea has made cultural trauma so endemic that there is a specific word in the Korean language for the emotion: *한* (han). Park Chan-wook's revenge fantasies *올드보이* (*Oldboy*) and *친절한 금자씨* (*Lady Vengeance*) grapple with the reality of widespread trauma. Chan-wook critiques both Koreans' ignorance and the revenge fantasies catalyzed by their trauma as his characters seek bloody vengeance or bury their pain deep in the subconscious. His films demonstrate both "right" and "wrong" ways of processing pain. They reveal

that those who bear trauma cannot give into its vengeful urges, nor can they hide from it. Doing so only perpetuates—rather than heals—emotional pain. Instead, Chan-wook's films demonstrate that to heal from *한*, one must mourn all that was lost and then reconstruct an understanding of the self and the world that fits with the events.

To explain this connection between Chan-wook's films and cultural trauma, this study examines first the traumatic history of both Korea and of Park Chan-wook as a filmmaker. Then, it combines in the historical context—with literature

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on trauma and film analysis of *Oldboy* and *Lady Vengeance*—to explain how the films offer all of those who suffer cultural trauma a description of how to process the emotion.

Korea's history is marred by bloody political conflicts and brutal repression. Korean people survived Japanese colonialism (1910-45), only to be torn in half by Western powers (1945) and torn further by the Korean war (1950-53) (Paquet 1). The following decade held no solace—after the Korean War, South Koreans faced yet another trial as they were subject to political oppression during military dictatorship (1961-93) (Paquet 1). For almost the entirety of the 20th century, South Korean citizens were held captive by these political powers outside of their control. Instead, they could only watch current events pass like highlight reels on a television screen. Born in 1963, Park Chan-wook was subject to these repressive realities of authoritarianism throughout his development (Young-jin).

Two years before Park Chan-wook's birth, then—General Park Chung-hee claimed power through the 1961 May 16 Coup (Paquet 6). With his new authority, now—Chairman Park Chung-Hee established the 1962 Motion Picture Law (MPL) which turned the film industry into a heavily regulated “propaganda factory” (Paquet 46, Yecies, Shim 19). It did so by first consolidating the film industry to a more manageable size for the government by outlawing independent films and establishing a licensing system with production standards that were prohibitively stringent for all but a few film production companies (Paquet 46). Second, the MPL enforced harsh censorship by forcing directors to submit their scripts for government edit and approval (Yecies, Shim 21). The end result of the law was that films functioned implicitly and explicitly as propaganda (Yecies, Shim 21). Authoritarianism, while destructive for the film industry, catalyzed Korea's rapid economic development (Yecies, Shim 6). The nation's compressed industrialization exacerbated

wealth inequalities. 재벌 (chaebols), Korean business elites, gained outsized profits and influence over the government while the rest of Korea was left trying to scrape by. In 1979, when Park Chan-wook was sixteen, Park Chung-hee was assassinated after a severe economic downturn pushed the Korean people past their breaking point (Yecies, Shim 134). His assassination demonstrated that, though Korea had industrialized, it was still incredibly politically volatile.

A major contributor to South Korea's political volatility was the pro-democratic student activism endemic to Chan-wook's generation. The movements were incredibly important to Korea's gradual democratization but were not without great costs. In 1980, Korean troops opened fire on student protesters, massacring many members of the pro-democratic Gwangju Uprising. Other protests, however, were less lethal and more successful at bringing about small-scale democratic reforms (Yecies, Shim 140, Paquet 41). In 1987, the June Democratic Struggle took place, where nationwide protests broke out in reaction to the indirect presidential election of Roh Tae Woo. In 1988, students and filmmakers protested Hollywood's entrance into the Korean economy, criticizing the devastating effects of Western competition on local filmmakers (Paquet 18, Yecies, Shim 118). The 1980s were also the first decade during which students were allowed to produce their own films, and in 1988 (largely in order to host the Seoul Olympics), President Roh Tae-woo loosened the censorship restrictions of the Motion Picture Law and freed the industry from the government's harsh censorship (Paquet 19).

After the relaxation of censorship regulations in the film industry, filmmakers could finally express a vision that had been repressed for decades, giving rise to a new, highly political era of Korean film: New Wave Cinema (Paquet 21). New Wave films were characterized by biting

social commentary and undercurrents of *한* (Paquet 32). *한* loosely translates to emotional pain or regret that is endured because it is beyond the individual's capacity to process (Hyon-u Lee 124; Paquet 32). Similar to the Indigenous concept of soul wounds or the psychological concept of intergenerational trauma, *한* bends time by constantly driving the pain of the past onto present generations (Jeon 715; 718-719). The emotion *한* is an encapsulation of Korea's trying history and therefore forms a critical part of the Korean identity (Paquet 32). Though of historical origin, *한* is not a stagnant emotion; as the trauma of a nation, it grows with every tragedy. In 1991, Park Chan-wook released his first film. As part of the Korean New Wave film movement, he used his unique filmmaking style to grapple with this emotion.

Park Chan-wook is a household name in both the Korean and international film community because of his unique style of filmmaking. A cinephile since childhood, he graduated with a degree in philosophy from Sogang University and worked as a film critic before he began creating films himself (Young-jin 2). Because of his extensive expertise in film and philosophy, his films play with the distinctive elements of those fields. His works are known to subvert film genres and audience expectations (Layton 2:02, Ciecko and Lee 321). He pushes the boundaries of commercial film by refusing to pander to the audience and often explicitly challenging them (Young-jin 3). His most notable films are collected in the *Revenge Trilogy*: *복수는 나의 것* (*Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*) (2002), *Oldboy* (2003), and *Lady Vengeance* (2005) (Young-jin). Originally sold to Western countries as a box set, the postmodern style and dark humor of the trilogy captured the attention of many famous Hollywood directors, and his success at film festivals cemented Chan-wook's place as a giant in the filmmaking community (Ciecko and Lee 324). Despite the famous directors who tried to recruit him, Chan-

wook persistently pursued only the projects that he really valued. His success in the international film community allowed him more freedom to do so. His unusually high degree of control over the filmmaking process is evidenced by both his continued subversion of cinematic norms and his repeated use of the same actors across different films (Ciecko and Lee 321). Chan-wook's unilateral focus and unusual degree of control produced films that were overwhelmingly a product of his vision, as exemplified by *Oldboy* and *Lady Vengeance*. This influence was not lightly wielded—Chan-wook used it to engage with Korea's history and create complex, poignant, and political films forged in a distinctive style meant to challenge those who viewed his works.

Chan-wook's *Revenge Trilogy* combined his confrontational style with Korean New Wave norms, exemplified by *Oldboy* as it grapples with the ever-evolving nature of *한*. The movie begins with Woojin inexplicably kidnapping Dae-su and holding him captive for fifteen years. When he is released, Dae-su hunts Woojin down, seeking both retribution and the reason for his captivity. He then meets Mi-do, who helps him on his quest for vengeance, and their relationship becomes sexual. Dae-su fails in his revenge, and Woojin then reveals that he was seeking vengeance on behalf of his sister Soo-ah, who died by suicide after Dae-su unwittingly revealed her and Woojin's incestuous relationship to their high school. Woojin also reveals that his revenge was not imprisoning Dae-su for fifteen years, but rather manipulating him into an incestuous relationship with his daughter Mi-do. Woojin then takes his own life. Dae-su is hypnotized again to forget his incestuous actions, and the film ends with him and Mi-do embracing each other in the snow (Chan-wook "Oldboy").

Oldboy reflects *한* through postmodern cinematographic form. Trauma does not adhere to the linear logic of time, and the form of the movie reflects that non-linearity—the boundary between

the past and the present is deliberately blurred. This is best demonstrated by a scene in which Dae-su is depicted chasing down the memory of witnessing Woo-jin's incest (Jeon 727-731; Mi-Ok Kim 257). The school in which this scene takes place is a maze, and at every twist and turn, the characters pulsate from past to present. The disorienting camerawork makes temporal distinctions irrelevant (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 1:20:00-1:20:51). By visually confusing the past moment of the trauma and the present, the film demonstrates how trauma makes the distinction of past and present irrelevant. The camerawork shows how *han* incessantly pulls the pain of traumatic events into the present, keeping the wounds raw even if they were inflicted long ago (Herman 37). Through this scene in *Oldboy*, Chan-wook demonstrates that *han* is unaffected by the passage of time and will continue to inflict suffering on the body until it is addressed.

han is also coarsely exhibited in one of the most uncomfortable scenes in *Oldboy*, a scene in which Woojin uses a gas to sedate Dae-su and Mido after they have sex and then lays with their unconscious bodies in bed (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 1:06:10). Survivors of traumatic events are often compelled to reenact the moment of terror literally or figuratively, which results in a tendency to put oneself in harm's way (Herman 39). These symptoms are clearly exhibited by Woojin. Throughout the film, Woojin repeatedly endangers himself to manipulate Dae-su into reenacting the incestuous relationship he had with his sister. By lying in bed with Dae-su and Mi-do after they have sex for the first time, Woojin is reliving his own initial incestuous acts—the point of no return in his life. He does so by creating a parallel point of no return in Dae-su's life. Through this scene, Chan-wook portrays both how Woojin is influenced by *han* and how he perpetuates the emotion by inflicting his trauma onto others.

Lady Vengeance also follows a character suffering from *han*. In the film, Geum-ja seeks

revenge against Baek, the man who killed her son. Geum-ja is falsely accused of her son's murder and condemned to thirteen years of incarceration. After her release, Geum-ja seeks out her daughter—who was raised in Australia—and returns with her to Korea. She tracks down Baek to enact her violent revenge. However, after realizing he killed four other children, she delays her vengeance to include all the families who were wronged. After torturing and killing Baek, the families eat chocolate cake. Geum-ja walks home in the snow and, in the middle of the street, offers her daughter a white cake. Her daughter offers the cake back to Geum-ja, and the movie ends with Geum-ja crying into the dessert (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance").

The characters in both *Oldboy* and *Lady Vengeance* not only struggle with *han*, they personify it. Geum-ja and Dae-su, like *han*, are pulled from the past into the present. Entering modern Korea after more than a decade of isolation, they are literal relics of the past (Choi 173; Jeon 736-737; Kyung Hyun Kim 192). Geum-ja and Dae-su's disconnect from the present can be seen in Dae-su's obnoxious 90's-style sunglasses (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 21:43), Geumja's thirteen-year-old polka-dotted dress (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 7:26), Dae-su's outdated vocabulary (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 23:03), and Geum-ja's equally outdated North Korean weapon (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 19:19). Geum-ja and Dae-su physically embody the unyielding hold of past trauma on an individual—they are stuck in the past and cannot break free.

Geum-ja and Dae-su reflect trauma not only through their appearances but also through their actions. Survivors of trauma are often compelled by the "death drive" (Herman 41): the compulsion towards violent, self-destructive behaviors often culminating in one's own demise. The compulsion of the death drive manifests in both Geum-ja's and Dae-su's extreme and violent paths to revenge and well-exemplified by a standoff between Dae-su

and Woojin halfway through *Oldboy*. Dae-su has a hammer to Woojin's head, ready to enact his revenge, kill Woojin, and move on from the kidnapping towards the rest of his life. But when Woojin threatens to stop his own heart and die, taking with him the reason he kidnapped Dae-su, Dae-su relents (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 0:55:00-0:57:12). Given the choice between "revenge or the truth," Dae-su's desire to know why he was kidnapped is overpowers his sense of self-preservation (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 0:56:06). The compulsion of the death drive is greater than the risk of losing his and Mi-do's life at the vindictive hands of Woojin. By showing how the death drive compels Dae-su to choose truth over vengeance, Park Chan-wook demonstrates that it is not the desire for revenge that truly drives his characters, but rather, unhealed trauma.

Geum-ja and Dae-su are not the only characters who are motivated by the death drive; Woojin, too, exhibits self-destructive tendencies. Unlike the others, though, Woojin is wise to the inefficacy of revenge, stating that "revenge is good for your health, but what happens once you've had your revenge? I bet that hidden pain probably emerges again" (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 0:56:44). Nonetheless, suffering—trapped in his body, absent other alternatives—is expressed through the death drive and compels him to play out his revenge scheme, even though deep down he knows it will not heal his *han*. When Woojin dies by suicide at the end of the film, the prophecy of the death drive fulfills, and its inescapability espouses (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 1:51:16). Woojin's suicide again demonstrates that the lack of retribution was not the root of his suffering, but something deeper that revenge could not address.

Just as *han* inflicts suffering on those who experience the emotion, as personifications of the emotion, Geum-ja, Dae-su, and Woojin inflict suffering on those around them and others in society (Eunah Lee). The revenge films contain gruesome acts of violence, like Detective Choi

twisting scissors buried in Baek's neck (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 1:35:49) and Dae-su pulling out another man's teeth one-by-one and cutting out his own tongue with scissors (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 41:35; 1:45:47). Woojin even shoots his own right-hand man in the head at point-blank range (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 1:39:33). Furthermore, their quests for retribution result in collateral damage inflicted on innocent characters. For instance, in *Oldboy*, Dae-su aggravates and pummels a group of teenage boys and ties up a dentist for information, Woojin strangles Dae-su's friend with computer wires, and Geum-ja's friend is beaten (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 1:03:46, "Oldboy" 22:30; 1:12:55, 1:10:44). These characters have nothing to do with the traumatic event, but like *han*, Geum-ja, Dae-su, and Woojin inflict pain from their past indiscriminately onto others in the present. Herein lies Chan-wook's critique: vengeance does not heal trauma; it only grows the *han* by spreading the pain to others.

The haphazard violence committed by Geum-ja, Dae-su, and Woojin inflicts their trauma onto the next generation. Both Geum-ja and Dae-su's daughters, Jenny and Mi-do, lose their parents as a consequence of traumatic events—Geum-ja's wrongful imprisonment and Dae-su's kidnapping, respectively. Because Jenny and Mi-do are raised in other countries, they are presumably free from the traumas of Korea. However, they are still affected by *han* because, as daughters of both protagonists, they are caught in the crossfire of the older generation's grievances. Mi-do is held captive by a gang and, because of Woojin, is hypnotized into engaging in an incestuous relationship with her father (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 57:30, 1:03:49). Jenny witnesses her mother hold another person hostage at gunpoint (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 1:07:38). In the moments where Jenny and Mi-do are exposed to the horrible acts of vengeance perpetuated by their parents and Woojin, revenge invades the past, present, and future. In the name of vengeance, Dae-su, Geum-

ja, and Woojin drive their unresolved 恨 from the past through the present and into the future generation. Chan-wook shows that their misguided attempts to heal the pain ensure their children will carry their trauma as well, proving violence does not resolve 恨; it merely creates another source.

Chan-wook accentuates his critique of vengeance by subverting the revenge genre norms to confront the audience with the reality of its violence. In the revenge film genre, the initial act of trauma—the grievance—often happens off-screen and is instead alluded to through synecdoche. The acts of violence are left unseen because the viewer's imagination is always worse than anything the director can show on the screen (Voir, 7:00). Chan-wook applies this technique to the initial grievance in *Lady Vengeance*, displaying four brightly colored keychains instead of the actual children Baek killed (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 1:13:43, Voir 7:43). Chan-wook subverts the genre by also applying this technique when the protagonists enact their revenge on Baek: in lieu of the acts of torture committed by the families, the audience is shown only blood-stained wood and the traumatized faces of those who enacted the violence (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 1:33:34, 1:34:33). This allusion to violence implicates the disturbing impact of revenge without much actual violence. Imagining the horrors of revenge emotionally drains the audience and makes them question why they were rooting for vengeance in the first place (Vior 15:57). Through the emotional toll of this genre's subversion, Chan-wook manipulates the audience into experiencing not only how ineffective revenge is at addressing trauma but how it exacerbates it by creating new suffering.

While the inherently disturbing quality of violence is enough to indict the logic of revenge, Chan-wook adds another unsettling layer to the critique through the calculated and clinical nature of revenge in *Lady Vengeance*. There is a noticeable

lack of tension as, one-by-one, the families enact unspeakable violence on Baek: drawing little pieces of paper with scribbled red numbers, waiting side-by-side on a bench in matching clear plastic raincoats, and calmly filling a bucket with the blood of a dead man and folding up the tarp (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 1:29:05; 1:35:08; 1:36:12). It feels wrong. It feels too real and too casual. The acts of violence, especially when conducted in such a calculated and nonchalant manner, blur the line between good and bad, normal and abnormal (Jeong 170). Impactfully, this lack of dramatization allows the audience to project themselves onto the characters (Voir 8:24). In typical revenge films, revenge requires the strength and skill of a superhuman or a specially trained military operative (Voir 10:45). In *Lady Vengeance*, it only requires a human to make the choice to harm another human. It becomes something any person—even members of the audience—could do. Chan-wook's casual portrayal of violence thereby critiques revenge by forcing the audience to identify with characters committing atrocious crimes.

Chan-wook also challenges the logic of revenge through his characters' response to their successful vengeance in another genre subversion. At the end of a revenge story, it is common for the protagonist to die from injuries incurred on their quest for vengeance (Voir 14:17). However, if they die, it is only after they have enacted their vengeance (Voir 14:27). Their death is depicted as peaceful, comforted by the knowledge that justice has been served (Voir 14:27). Woojin's suicide at the end of *Oldboy* flips this trope on its head. While Woojin is unscathed at the end of his revenge plot, he dies by suicide shortly after (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 1:51:16). The viewer expects to see Woojin live on in triumph or at least die content. Instead, Chan-wook portrays the exact opposite: after his revenge, Woojin flashes back to his sister's suicide. His emotional distress is palpable as he watches her fall to her death (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 1:49:44-1:51:15).

Woojin's flashback and suicide show that his trauma persists even after his revenge is successful. In *Lady Vengeance*, the enactment of revenge is equally ineffective at addressing the families' underlying suffering. After torturing Baek, some families stagger out of the room with their faces contorted in pain; others fall through the doorway, traumatized and covered in blood (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 1:34:33). Through depicting the emotional distress experienced by both Woojin and the families after their revenge, Chan-wook shows that retribution does not help characters process their *han*; often, it only worsens the pain (Choe 38, Herman 189).

Acting on fantasies of revenge is an ineffective method of processing *han*, but ignoring its existence is just as lethal. Chan-wook demonstrates the inefficacy of trying to forget *han* through the parallel suicides of Soo-ah and the man on the roof. At the beginning of *Oldboy*, Dae-su holds onto a suicidal man to prevent him from falling to his death. This moment between the nameless man and Dae-su is later paralleled when Woojin holds Soo-ah to prevent her from falling to her death. The difference in this scene is that Woojin eventually releases Soo-ah (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 1:50:57). However, while Dae-su does talk the man off the ledge, he only does so to get the information he needs to start his revenge plot. When the man attempts to explain why he wants to kill himself, Dae-su walks away, ignoring the root cause of the pain. As he leaves the building, the man crashes into a car below, and Dae-su does not even flinch (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 21:53). The parallel between the suicides of the two characters is emphasized not only through the angle at which they were filmed but also in their fate of oblivion. Dae-su, too caught up in his revenge plot, forgets about Soo-ah, and the viewer, too caught up in the revenge plot, forgets about the nameless man. Through both characters' suicides, Park Chan-wook displays the deadly consequences of failing to address emotional pain.

The ambiguous and unsettling ending of *Oldboy* similarly demonstrates the inefficacy of forgetting as a solution to dealing with cultural trauma. At the end of *Oldboy*, Dae-su asks to be hypnotized to forget his incestuous actions. The hypnotist guides him to split into two different people, the monster who has committed the evils and the rest of himself (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 1:54:03). As he walks away from the monster, he walks away from his hurtful memories. This hypnosis mirrors the post-traumatic amnesia experienced by survivors of trauma. Survivors' memories of the traumatic event are often split off from ordinary awareness (Herman 42). As a result, they live without conscious remembrance of the traumatic event, but the memories and the trauma remain trapped within the body. Dae-su's ambiguous expression at the end of the film, a mixture of pain and joy, portrays this reality: forgetting leaves lingering trauma (Jeon 736). The unresolved memories burden survivors and influence them subconsciously. Chan-wook's depiction of Dae-su's ambiguous expression at the end of the film makes it clear that while Dae-su may not remember the event, he is far from healed.

Han remains trapped within the bodies of not only those who forgot the sources of their trauma but also those who are unwittingly ignorant of them. Mi-do, despite not knowing that Dae-su is her father, is still affected by the incestuous nature of their relationship. The discomfort experienced by the viewer at the ambiguity of whether the incestuous relationship will continue is a testament to the inefficacy of ignorance. Furthermore, in this ignorance, Mi-do cannot remove herself from the relationship and move forward, because she does not know it is a source of trauma. Herein, Chan-wook's critiques connect with theories of trauma recovery: Mi-do's ignorance prevents her from healing because to heal, a survivor must reconstruct the event that is at the root of the trauma (Herman 176).

Addressing the root of the trauma means opening Pandora's box. The characters must let all the evil out, and only then will they have hope (Post-conflict Hauntings Transforming Trauma and Memory, 79). In the instance of *Oldboy*, Chan-wook gives Mi-do a literal Pandora's box: the purple box holding the photo album documenting her and Dae-su's incestuous relationship (1:36:07). Because she never opens the box, she is never given the chance to heal, she is never given hope, and the situation remains a blight on her own and Dae-su's life. Mi-do's unresolved trauma is visually performed when she and Dae-su embrace at the end of the film. Chan-wook uses the camera angle to frame Mi-do's all-red outfit as a stain amongst the white snow (Chan-wook "Oldboy" 1:55:20). The red clashing against the white represents the *한* that forgetting and ignorance could not wipe away.

While the red stain of trauma may never be wiped away, healing does not mean returning to purity—it means learning to live with the stains. While the trauma Geum-ja and Dae-su experienced and the actions they took in response mean they could never return to who they were, they remain redeemable. This phenomenon is played out best in *Lady Vengeance*. At the beginning of the film, Geum-ja refuses to eat the tofu and accept the purity it represents (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 7:00-7:05). However, at the end of *Lady Vengeance*, Geum-ja offers Jenny a white cake she made and implores her to "be white" (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 1:48:26), to not be like her, to be free of sin. In response, her daughter offers the cake back, and Geum-ja accepts it (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 1:49:05). The fact that she accepts the cake rather than the tofu is noteworthy for two reasons. First, accepting cake instead of tofu is a refusal of the notion that someone must be pure or free from sin to move forward in their lives (Choe 42-43). Rather, it argues for a kind of forgiveness that acknowledges the pain of past transgressions moves forward despite it. Second is that Geum-ja accepts not something that is offered to her, but

something that she made herself. This is a metaphor for the fact that healing and closure cannot be offered from another—they must come from the self. Because healing requires adapting to the wounds trauma has inflicted on one's own life, it is only through the work one puts into themselves that they can heal.

The next step towards healing that Chan-wook shows is mourning. After Geum-ja accepts the cake, she buries her face in the dessert and cries (Chan-wook "Lady Vengeance" 1:49:05). Geum-ja's tears are important because they represent mourning. To heal from trauma, its roots—the loss—must be addressed, and acknowledging that loss often comes in the form of mourning (Herman 188). Dae-su and Geum-ja lose more than a decade of their lives, they lose their children and families, and most of all, they lose themselves. Caught up in their revenge plots, they turn into the very demons they seek to destroy. By mourning this loss of not only their families but themselves, Geum-ja and Dae-su can begin to reconstruct an understanding of themselves and the world that both fits with past events and permits forgiveness for themselves, like Geum-ja does with the cake. In this way, Chan-wook demonstrates that instead of allowing the wounds of trauma to fester with ignorance or become infected with revenge, those who suffer from *한* must allow themselves to feel the full pain of the loss and then mourn. It is by reopening old wounds, experiencing their pain, and then finally healing from within that Chan-wook's characters begin to redress their trauma.

Park Chan-wook's films exemplify the follies of both acting on and ignoring *한*. His films demonstrate that the only way to heal *한* is to acknowledge and accept all wrongdoing, even one's own, and mourn the consequences of the atrocities. While *한* is specific to Koreans, cultural trauma is not. It is widespread, as evidenced by the effects of Apartheid in South Africa, the Rwandan Genocide, the legacy of slavery and ongoing atrocities committed against BIPOC Americans.

The ubiquity of cultural trauma makes the lessons in Chan-wook's works resonate with paramount importance and global relevance. While the resolution of trauma is never final, Chan-wook's films set both a guideline for and a performance of cultural healing in the face of moral atrocities.

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