The *Masquerade* (2012) is a Korean Film directed by Chang-Ming Choo that brings a different experience compared to Western norms in terms of story telling and themes. The film is centered around Ha-seon, a peasant that is given the job to temporarily take place of the king, Gwanghae, simply because he can pass as him visually. While Ha-sun sits on the throne, the film does an amazing job showing us the traditions and the personal values of each character. There are often comparisons between patriotism and independent morals where a person would have to decide between their love for their country or their personal opinions on what is good.

Multiple characters go through life changing decisions revolving around the fact that a fake king is ruling over their county better than the real king. Ha-sun makes royal decisions revolving the happiness of the people and is overall nicer to those working in the palace. He is selfless and genuinely cares for those around him.

Gwanghae is angrier and prioritizes international relations and criminal justice. He carries an aura when he walks around the palace filled with intimidation and fear. Those who make a mistake around him are immediately struck with fear and expect to be executed as they scream the phrase, “Punish me with death.”

If one were to predict the ending of the film, one would most likely think that the film ends with Ha-sun becoming the real king as Gwanghae realizes how everyone else in the palace prefers Ha-sun as the real king, but this is not the case. The movie ends with Ha-sun sailing away on a boat after the secret of a real and fake king almost gets out of hand. People have knowingly died protecting this fake king for the sake of him to simply get away safely.

We are left thinking by the end of the movie. We realize that those who chose loyalty to the real king are the ones that are kept alive in the end of the movie. Those who realized that there is a fake king sitting on the throne and attacked the king were also put to death for attacking the king after the two swapped back to original positions.

The movie leaves you in thought by the end of the movie. There is a huge lack a catharsis in this film. The audience’s mind is filled with so many questions relating to how the state of the dynasty after Ha-seon leaves. Does this film even have a happy ending? The country has their “evil” king back and Ha-seon’s changes to help the lower-class farmers were most likely reverted. Did Ha-seon leave for selfish reasons or because he has respect for the king? Why didn’t Ha-seon fight for the throne in the end knowing he was making the palace better?

The characters play an important role in expressing overall themes of the story. Due to Korea’s history, the depiction of specific types of haan can easily be noticed. Haan refers to how the characters view life even though they are going through physical and emotional oppression.

Active haan can be depicted in a way where a character actively takes charge in what they want, and what they want could be a vengeful rage or a justice filled peace maker. Haan is very easily displayed throughout the film by Ha-seon. When he realizes that the lower class is being highly mistreated and highly punished for situations they have no control over, he passes laws that help the lower class. He is told to sit and just say the words, “Do as you see fit,” but isn’t able to after he realizes he does have the power to help. He even studies up on their own form of government to further his understandings on how he can help.

Minjoong is also found in the film. Minjoong is defined as a those who are politically oppressed, economically exploited, socially alienated, and kept under-educated in culture and intellectually. The characters or group of characters that are displayed in the film are the servants towards the king. These are the people that serve the king an entire table filled meal for dinner every night in hopes to have the leftovers. They know that if they don’t make such a surplus of food for the king, they won’t have anything to eat that night. You were able to see the pure joy on their faces when Ha-seon took a small bowl from the food filled table and said he was finished eating. They appreciated everything from that table, especially the rice. The pure joy from such a small act of kindness just shows how poorly they were treated before Ha-seon sat on the throne.

Minjok is also present in the film. Minjok relates to the highly patriotic characters of the movie and their concepts. The most prominent character that displays this is the wife. The wife is entirely dedicated to the throne. She had her loyalties set from the beginning and never changed. She was loyal to Ha-seon when she didn’t know he wasn’t the real king. She was so loyal that when she realized Ha-seon was avoiding her, her immediate thought that it was her fault and almost killed herself in front of him because she thought she was not a good wife. She thought her sole job as a wife was to entertain her husband, and once she thought she was not good enough, she didn’t know what to do with her life, so she almost ended it.

The *Masquerade* is overall a good film that makes the viewer think and analyze not just what they see, but the overall subtext as well. The end really allows the viewer to think about the future of the characters, rather than the ending being simply told which is one of the main differences between mainstream and Korean cinema.