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The HMS Colloquium in the Korean Humanities Series at GW provides a forum for academic discussion of Korean arts, history, language, literature, thought and religious systems in the context of East Asia and the world. The Colloquium series is made possible by an endowment established by the estate of Hahn Moo-Sook, one of Korea’s most honored writers, in order to uphold her spirit of openness, curiosity, and education.

This volume, *Text and Context of Korean Cinema: Crossing Borders*, originates from the 9th Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium in the Korean Humanities, which was held under the same title at The George Washington University on October 26, 2002. In conjunction with the colloquium, the Freer Gallery of Art and the Embassy of the Republic of Korea co-sponsored a film series entitled “Crossing Borders: Five Recent Films From Korea,” which was screened during the month of October 2002 at the Meyer Auditorium, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. The films shown were *Joint Security Area* (2000, directed by Park Chan-wook), *Nowhere to Hide* (1999, Lee Myung-se), *Kazoku Cinema* (1998, Park Chul Soo), *Farewell, My Darling* (1996, Park Chul Soo), and *Chunhyang* (2000, Im Kwon-taek). The two Park Chul Soo films were followed by discussions with the director. On the eve of the Colloquium, Julian Raby, Director of the Freer and Sackler Galleries, and Sung Chul Yang, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, jointly hosted an opening reception at the elegant Freer Gallery of Art.

The success of the program was a result of cordial coordination between the staff of Freer and Sackler Galleries, representatives of the Korean Embassy’s Cultural Center, the staff of the Sigur Center for Asian Studies and the conveners of the HMS Colloquium at GW. Tom Vick, Film Programmer for the Freer Gallery, worked tirelessly from the beginning to the end. His expertise as a filmmaker as well as his knowledge of the field in general was essential in planning and screening the film series. Michael Wilpers, Public Programs Coordinator, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and Freer Gallery of Art, was very supportive of the whole project, and provided good advice just when we needed it. Keye-i-Chui Wi, Counselor for Culture & Information of the Korean Cultural Center, Hyunjun Min, Film Programmer for the Center and now an instructor of a Korean film course at GW, and Caroline R. Bedinger, Special Events Coordinator of the Freer Gallery also facilitated various logistics in organizing the whole event, including the opening reception at the Freer Gallery. Mike Mochizuki, Director of the Sigur Center, is an enthusiastic supporter of our annual colloquium in the Korean humanities, and has provided extra financial support so that we could meet in style. Our colleagues in the East Asian Languages and Literatures Department have also been supportive of the Korean colloquium series.

Some of the most crucial help came from far-away Seoul, where director Park Chul Soo went out of his way to help us obtain screening prints not only of his own films but also to connect us to others. For example, Kay Kim of Myung Film provided us with a print of *Joint Security Area* with no charge, thanks to Director Park’s introduction and recommendation. Director Park was an old friend of Hahn Moo-Sook, and he dramatized two of her works into award-winning TV dramas. His assistance, from the planning stage, to the actual Colloquium, to the film screening, and finally to the publication of the monograph,
was his heartfelt tribute to the late Hahn as well as to our endeavor to introduce Korean culture and civilization to the world. One of Director Park's staff, Sunnae Park, was a punctual and pleasant correspondent and problem-solver on behalf of Director Park.

Many others joined this often difficult, but essentially enjoyable, venture. Andy Finch, projectionist at the Freer Gallery's Meyer Auditorium, created magic with the help of Tom Vick and Director Park, in screening the opening night's movie with a particular technical challenge. Ikuko Tumer, Executive Assistant to the Director of the Sigur Center, arranged our schedule and other logistics so that everything would operate smoothly. Many members of the GW Korean Student Association volunteered their help and quietly and pleasantly served in different capacities. Catarina Kim, in particular, has devoted much of her time and intelligence to helping with all our endeavors this past year.

Finally, one of the most constant and crucial figures in our colloquium series has been Deborah Toy, Executive Associate of the Sigur Center, who has designed the monographs we have thus far produced from the colloquia we have had. She is the Sigur Center's central figure, who manages so many different programs with professionalism and pleasantry, which delight all members and visitors of the Center.

To these and other dear friends and colleagues, especially the authors in this collection, we express our heartfelt gratitude, and dedicate this monograph, hoping that they will find this small publication worthy of their help and encouragement.

Washington, DC
October 2003

Young-Key Kim-Renaud
R. Richard Grinker
Kirk W. Larsen
INTRODUCTION: AGAINST MIMICRY

Roy Richard Grinker

Among the American cultural elite, European, and occasionally certain forms of Chinese and Japanese cinema, have been rewarded with critical acclaim and healthy box office revenues, but until recently Korean cinema was nearly invisible to film critics and American and European distributors. So, in 2002, it was a bit startling for some readers, including Koreans and Korea watchers, when the prestigious *The New Yorker* magazine referred to a Korean film as one of the major cinematic events of the year. The 2002 Hahn Moo Sook Colloquium in the Korean Humanities addressed this change by examining the past, present, and future of Korean cinema.

Korean cinema may have entered slowly into foreign markets, but it has done so triumphantly and with notably few failures. *The New Yorker*'s review of Im Kwon-Taek’s (Im Kwŏn-t’aek) *Chunhyang*, an ancient Korean tale of love and hardship, gave Korean film unprecedented attention and an increasing number of film critics now consider Korean cinema to be among the most creative and productive artistic industries in the world. Koreans, too, see Korean cinema differently. Not long ago, nearly any American film distributed in Korea would have larger audiences than a Korean one, and this was not the case because the Korean government only let a few non-Korean films in to the country; many Koreans simply longed for the global reach offered in high budget American images, idolized American movie stars, and valued western materialism as it was represented in film. Now that the screen quota system that restricted foreign film imports has changed, and more American films show throughout Korea, one might think that Korean film would be diminished. This was the case, early on. Chris Berry reports that in 1993 the market share of Korean films in South Korea was as low as 16%. However, Korean films today compete successfully with American films, in many cases beating the blockbusters. As Berry notes, more than a million Koreans went to see the 1998 action film, *Shiri*, then went to *Titanic*. Revenues are rising, and film budgets are increasing—which, in turn, enhances the quality of the films, attracting larger audiences, and strengthening revenues—all without narrowing the range and diversity of Korean film. As the papers in this volume illustrate, Korean cinema has become a “full service” producer, offering art films, innovations in narrative and film structure, commercial action films, and dramas that range from meditations on the predicaments of contemporary urban life to nostalgic stories about ancient Korean traditions. Hollywood and Cannes are watching. American film companies are beginning to produce re-makes of successful Korean films; when someone tries to copy you, it may be a sign of your power.

The moment something becomes “global,” however, is also the moment we need to ask questions about how and why that globalization is taking place. If Korean films are being re-made in Hollywood for American audiences, does this mean that Korean cinema has been disarticulated from its “Koreanness,” that Korean film has simply become a good mimic of American cinema in order to suit American tastes?
Or is Korean cinema now just so good that it must be noticed and stands to influence cinema as a whole? If large numbers of viewers go to Korean films with English subtitles, is this because the films are better than they used to be, or is there a new American global sensibility that allows Americans to feel more comfortable watching foreign language films? Or is it simply that audiences in the U.S. are made up mostly of the large number of people of Korean descent who live in the U.S., while most other Americans continue to prefer foreign films from France or Scandinavia? Many of these questions come down to a more fundamental question, addressed in the papers below: What is represented in Korean films that makes them so popular, at home and abroad?

In his overview of what he calls the South Korean cinema “success story,” Chris Berry argues that contemporary Korean cinema has profited from state support, healthy battle with Hollywood (in which Koreans were invigorated rather than steamrolled by competition with Hollywood’s big budget films), and the decline of Taiwanese and Hong Kong cinema. Taiwanese and Hong Kong cinema was one dimensional (almost exclusively action dramas), purely commercial, and thus unable to satisfy the multiple tastes and market niches of a full service film industry. Berry’s answer to the question of what is being represented in Korean films is, it seems to me, everything: Korean cinema is quite diverse, both commercial and non-commercial sectors of Korean society support and maintain the film industry, and train increasingly large numbers of Korean filmmakers. The success of Korean cinema is not simply due to good marketing, the most common explanation. Berry and the other authors in this collection optimistically suggest that by establishing its own character, Korean cinema has become strong and multifaceted enough to be sustainable for years to come.

In his essay and recollections, film director Park Chul Soo(Pak Ch’ol-su) notes his ambivalence about the recent commercial successes of Korean film; he welcomes the increased attention and finances but worries that the creativity of Korean cinema may suffer. Park emphasizes that being creatively independent is never easy. After working as a high school Korean language teacher and serving in Vietnam, Park worked in television where he became increasingly frustrated making mass-produced, programmatic features. He refers to himself now as a gangster (chop’ok), by which he means that when he left television he became an outsider, always trying to be on the cutting edge, whether by going to extremes or by creating movies that appear unpolished or incomplete to audiences longing for perfectly coherent Hollywood stories. As Park put it, he is less interested in “story-making” (iyagi ikumim) than in exploring human nature, and human nature cannot always be presented in the conventional narrative and cinematic forms audiences expect.

Hyangsoon Yi (Yi Hyang-sun) complements Berry’s overview and Park’s summary of his career by focusing on the work of the well-established directors, Im Kwon-Taek and Park Chul Soo. Both marked a transition in Korean cinema, although in quite different ways. Im’s genius emerged late in his career with “mixed media” productions, that included Sopyonje (Sŏpyŏnje), and Chunhyang (Ch’unhyang), films that incorporated the traditional singing art of p’ansori, and Chihwaseon (Ch’ilhwason, Painted Fire/ Strokes of Fire/Lit. ‘Drunken Sage Painter’) in which he used both film and painting. The former films, especially Sopyonje, stimulated something of a renaissance in Korean traditional arts as p’ansori seemed to sweep the country’s television and radio shows for months. Before the film opened, few could have imagined 16 year-old Koreans flocking to hear the stylized traditional singing children associated with their grandparents’ traditionalist musical tastes. The key to Im’s success is that he is both commercially and artistically viable, achieving his narration through cinematic innovation rather than through predictable
and programmatic plot lines and expected imagery. As Yi argues, Im lets music and picture feedback on one another, each one informing the other, neither one in the background. As she states, in Im’s work “P’ansori is a multigenre art which comprises literary, musical, theatrical, and pictorial elements.” Just as importantly, Im’s works are about specifically Korean phenomena – Korean traditions, folklore, arts, and customs.

Park’s creativity, Yi argues, lies in his postmodernism, his ability to construct a reflexive film that features the director and actors as subjects of the film rather than make a movie that perpetuates the illusion that cinema is separate from its creators. This maneuver is not unlike similar movements in literary theory and contemporary social science, in which the privileged position of the “observer” is shattered by sustained critical attention to the role of the author or artist in the construction of an illusion of truth or reality. In *Farewell my Darling*, segments of the film are filmed by one of the characters, who is also making a film; as Peter Paik notes in his commentary, the technique anticipated the advent of so-called reality television. In the same film, a melancholy and supposedly solemn affair becomes a farce, changes in film speed alter viewers’ sense of time, and illusions are repeatedly revealed as illusions. Film becomes a mirror for the process by which realities are constructed and manipulated. But when the filmmaking (within the filmmaking) itself is intentionally of poor quality, it seems as though the director is telling us that even his mirror has cracks. For Yi, both Im and Park manage to create new and inspiring art in an age of increased capital expenditure and commercialization in the film industry. They also endured times of political oppression that severely restricted the freedoms of filmmakers. That is an achievement that should not be forgotten.

Peter Paik’s commentary agrees with the film scholar Seo Hyun-Suk (Sô Hyôn-suk) that one of the most important reasons for the commercial success of Korean films is the figure of the gangster or *chop’ok*, the concept invoked by Park Chul Soo in his remarks at the conference. The *chop’ok*, Paik argues, is an outsider, a hero viewers imagine capable of occasional compassion despite his immorality and his role as an extra-legal or illegitimate authority figure. Paik seems to be saying that audiences search for any glimpse of goodness in the figure who, at the bottom of a moral hierarchy, can only rise from immorality, as opposed to the legitimate Korean authority figures, including several former South Korean presidents, so famous for falling from grace. Paik’s essay is notable in this collection for making an argument grounded in cultural patterns. Paik contrasts the gangsters in U.S. and Korean cinema by examining the relationship between parents and sons; the U.S. gangster is constituted by his relationship to his father (as in Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather* movies in which leadership is inherited patrilineally) whereas the Korean *chop’ok* has a relationship to the father constituted by his relationship to his mother. The mother facilitates the gangster (son) who operates independently from the law (that is, independent of the father) in a Korean figuration of Oedipal victory, as the son becomes, or replaces the father.

Similarly, Ranjan Chhibber finds a reality in Korean cinema absent from contemporary Indian cinema. His polemic is against what he sees as a distortion of Indian culture in the service of mimicking Hollywood film production. Chhibber argues that Korean cinema is a model for Indian and other non-western filmmaking industries, and commentator Harvey Feigenbaum would no doubt agree. Imitation is not so much flattery as it is mimicry, and the essence of mimicry is the reaffirmation of one’s subordination to a higher power. Korean cinema, perhaps not unlike contemporary Korean history as a whole, has been a struggle against mimicry and for a distinctive, independent identity.
Opening Remarks for
the 2002 Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium
in the Korean Humanities

Mike Mochizuki

Good morning. I am Mike Mochizuki, director of the Sigur Center for Asian Studies. On behalf of the Asian Studies program at George Washington University, I would like to welcome all of you to the 9th annual Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium.

As noted in your program, this colloquium is made possible by an endowment created by the estate of one of Korea’s most honored writers, Hahn Moo-Sook. This colloquium is truly one of GW’s special treasures. Its aim is to highlight, examine, and celebrate Korea’s cultural achievements, both contemporary and historical. For me, this colloquium not only confirms how dynamic and how strong Korean studies is at GW, but also demonstrates how important the humanities are in our Asian Studies curriculum.

Like many of you, I had the opportunity last night to view Director Park Chul Soo’s funny and bittersweet movie Kazoku Cinema, which depicts the making of a documentary film about a dysfunctional family. Mr. Park introduced his film by warning the audience about the movie’s various surprises.

When I was trying to find a seat with one of my colleagues in the crowded auditorium, I was worried that I would not be close enough to read the English subtitles. To my pleasant surprise, I discovered that the dialogue in Kazoku Cinema is entirely in Japanese.

In the middle of the movie, the film crew raises the issue of whether or not to mention that the family that is the subject of the documentary is in fact a family of Korean ancestry. They in the end decide not to mention this fact and choose instead to stress the documentary’s universality. With this, I felt that the movie did a terrific job of alluding to the theme of this year’s colloquium: “Crossing Borders.”

I would like to close by thanking Ambassador Yang and the Freer Gallery for hosting last night’s elegant reception. I would also like to thank all of the lecturers and commentators in today’s program. And finally, I would like to express my appreciation to the conveners, Professors Young-Key Kim-Rinaud, Richard Grinker and Kirk Larsen, for all their hard work in organizing this colloquium.
Opening Remarks for the 2002 Hahn Moo-Sook Colloquium in the Korean Humanities

Mike Mochizuki

...
FULL SERVICE CINEMA: THE SOUTH KOREAN CINEMA SUCCESS STORY (SO FAR)

Chris Berry

Fifteen years ago, South Korean cinema was in precipitous decline. It was facing deadly competition from Hollywood as import barriers were dismantled, and had almost no export market. Today, South Korean cinema is widely considered the most successful and significant non-Hollywood cinema anywhere in the world. It is successful both in the domestic market and internationally. This essay sets out to understand this phenomenon. First, it attempts to trace South Korean cinema’s comeback story. I feel a need to do this because I find that so many of my South Korean friends and colleagues are reluctant to admit this, or focus solely on the problems the industry is facing in the future. There may be worries about the future and there may be “ifs” and “buts” about the present state of the South Korean film industry. But we should start out by acknowledging its success.

In considering some of the reasons for the recent success of South Korean cinema, two further observations can be made. First, if we pay attention to the international export success of South Korean cinema, we can see that it has carved out a new route. This is based on regional markets at least as much as Europe and the United States. Second, unlike the successes of the Taiwanese and Chinese “new waves” since the 1980s, it is not based on the old European art cinema model. This raises a question about the viability of art cinema, independent feature films, short films, independent documentary, and other less profitable and commercial modes of filmmaking in South Korea. It may even lead some people to believe that those other modes of filmmaking are not an integral part of the new South Korean cinema success story. Yet, my third and final point will be to argue against this and for the importance of what I want to tentatively call “full service cinema,” including a full range of modes of production and consumption. In making this point, I want to challenge another very common assumption not only in South Korea but everywhere—the idea that art cinema and independent cinema are opposed to mainstream commercial cinema. While there may be an aesthetic opposition between them, it is a strategic mistake to translate this into an institutional opposition. Even though their philosophies may be very different, as I will attempt to outline today, they need each other to succeed.

* * *

First, the success of the South Korean film industry today needs to be emphasized as a rare phenomenon internationally and documented. It can be traced both domestically and internationally. Domestically, the South Korean film industry has faced the onslaught of Hollywood, as have so many other national cinema industries. The Hollywood industry has harnessed the United States government to its cause. In one country after another, they have combined the dubious rhetoric of so-called “free trade” with levers such as “most favored nation” trading status and access to the World Trading Organization. The result of these pressures has been the forced dismantling of measures to foster local film industries on the grounds that they constitute unfair protections and barriers to free trade (Miller et al., 2001, 110-146).
In the South Korean case, two different sets of protectionist mechanisms are concerned. One consists of limits on film imports and has disappeared. The second consists of limits on foreign film exhibition, and these have survived so far. Until the 1980s, importers could only obtain a license to import a foreign film into South Korea if they produced South Korean films. This tie between local production and imports was dissolved in 1985, with the introduction of a new Motion Picture Law (Ho, 1986). As result, the number of imported titles almost doubled from twenty-seven in 1985 to fifty in 1986 (Korean Film Commission, 2000). On 1 July 1987, the same law was revised to allow foreign companies to produce and distribute films directly in South Korea rather than work through local partners (Lee, 1988). Between 1987 and 1988, imported titles leapt from 84 to 175, and by 1990, they took 80 per cent of the box office (Korean Film Commission).

As the South Korean film industry felt the pressure from Hollywood imports in the late eighties and early nineties, the second kind of protectionist mechanism—the screen quota—was “the only windbreak” (Park, 1991). This quota applies not to imports, but to exhibition. Since 1996, 106 days per year must be reserved on each screen for local productions, down from a high of 165. (The law specifies 146 days, but includes circumstances in which forty more can be opened for foreign films.) According to Trade Minister Han Duck-soo in 2000, “There are only eight nations in the world, including Spain, that keep such a screen quota system. And their theaters show home-produced movies for about 50 days a year on the average” (The Korea Herald, 7 July 2000). The United States began demanding removal of this quota system intensely in bilateral talks in 1998 and 1999 during the run-up to South Korea’s entry into the World Trade Organization. Initially, the South Korean government responded sympathetically (The Korea Herald, 29 June 1999). But the threatened removal of screen quotas provoked a strong defense campaign by local filmmakers, during which they undertook such dramatic measures as shaving their heads and hunger strikes (Alford, 1999; The Korea Herald, 2 July 1999). This struggle was recorded by Cho Jai-hong in a 1999 documentary film, Shoot the Sun by Lyric: The Fight for Screen Quotas in Korea, which won attention in countries facing similar struggles, such as Taiwan (Yu, 1999). The campaign was successful, although Washington and Hollywood continue to push for abolition.

The familiar debate between free trade advocates and those expressing concern for local jobs is also found in South Korea. Concern for local interests is most commonly voiced, but Hollywood is not totally without local supporters. Even an official of the South Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which defended the screen quota against the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s call for a quick phase-out (Hwang, J., 18 June 1999), conceded that, “In the long term, the protectionist measure doesn’t help enhance the local film industry’s competitiveness” (Hwang, J., 14 June 1999). Popular support for this position was also aired on bulletin boards (The Korea Herald, 29 June 1999).

In South Korea, in addition to concern about imports from Korea’s neo-colonial protector, the United States, the other country whose films cause worry is its former direct colonizer, Japan. Until recently, South Korea had legal blocks on the import of cultural products from Japan, but these have also been dismantled. While the first films imported were not successful in the marketplace, some more recent imports have done well, leading to fears of “another Japanese invasion,” as one article puts it (The Korea Herald, 30 June 2000). Although Hollywood was the number one source of imports in 2000, Japan was the second most important foreign supplier, taking 7.1 percent of box office that year (Kim, M., 2000). This year, Spirited Away has done well at the South Korean box office, as elsewhere.
However, unlike just about any other country in the world, it seems that competition with Hollywood imports has stimulated the South Korean film industry rather than steamrollered it. The other unusual characteristic of South Korean cinema is the maintenance of the screen quota system. This correlation suggests that the screen quota system may have helped to create the atmosphere of basic investment confidence necessary for this unusual achievement. Any argument that this constitutes an unfair practice can be countered by pointing out the false assumption behind such charges that the global film trade is a level playing field. Hollywood’s resources far outstrip those of any national cinema industry. It can use those resources not only to outdo its competitors in publicity but also to support below-cost sales designed to make a local industry untenable.

In response to the higher production values of Hollywood films and in the atmosphere of investment confidence created by the quota system, there was a doubling of the average budget for South Korean films from 1995 to 2000’s level of US$1.7 million (Pacquet, 2001a). For South Korean blockbusters, the average rose from over US$2 million to the US$9.1 million budget reported for the 1999 science fiction film Yongary (Korea Times, 5 August 1999). However, even this figure does not change the accuracy of critic Chang Suk-yong’s observation in the same year but about an earlier South Korean blockbuster; “its production cost is incomparable to Hollywood blockbusters which spend an average 90 billion won ($74 million)” (Korea Times, 11 March 1999). As a result, it is commonly remarked that South Korean action films have far more drama and dialog and less special effects and action than their Hollywood equivalents.

Despite these reservations, it is unquestionably the case that South Korean blockbusters led the resurgence of the local industry, both in the domestic market and overseas. Titanic’s South Korean box office record of 4.7 million viewers was swiftly overtake by the local 1998 action blockbuster, Shirii, which attracted 5.78 million viewers (The Korea Herald, 21 July 2000), over twenty times the average for a local film then (The Korea Herald, 24 November 1999). Shirii itself has since been both taken up for American distribution by Columbia and trumped within South Korea by the 2000 action blockbuster, Joint Security Area (Pacquet, 2001a), which in turn was overtaken by the 2001 film Friend, which set a new all-time box office record of 8.14 million viewers (Pacquet, 2002a). So far, 2002 has not been such a hot year for high budget blockbusters, and the most successful film to date has been the far lower budgeted The Way Home, bought by Paramount for release here in the United States.

The new success of high budget South Korean films with better production values and greater emphasis on marketing has increased South Korean share of the domestic market to levels unprecedented since import quotas were dropped. As budgets have increased, actual numbers of South Korean films produced as a percentage of total number of imports and domestic productions distributed dropped from 76 percent in 1984 to 14 percent in 1999 (Korean Film Commission, 2001). But while the market share taken by South Korean films dropped as low as 15.9 percent in 1993 (Korean Film Commission, 2001), it returned to 35.8 percent in 1999 and 32.8 percent in 2000 (Kim, M., 2000), meaning that the screen quota was not even necessary in those years. In 2001, it finally overtook Hollywood’s share of the local market, which stands at 40 percent, and reached 49 percent (Pacquet, 2002a). According to Rhee Tae-rim (2001a), “recent Korean movies recorded the highest share of any local movie market worldwide except for France.” Possibly, Bollywood may have a higher share still, but among highly developed and urbanized countries Rhee’s observation is correct.
Furthermore, this domestic commercial success has been accompanied by exports. Under conditions of trade protection, South Korean cinema was not particularly export-oriented in the 1980s, nor was it prepared to compete internationally after the abandonment of trade quotas. With the exception of 1990, sales of overseas distribution rights never exceeded US$1 million before 1998 (Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2002). But as budgets have risen along with production values, an older generation of producers has given way to a new generation of younger and more internationally oriented producers. As a result, the situation has changed. In 1998, rights sales jumped from $492,000 the year before to just over US$3 million. 1999 dollar-value film exports were ten times the 1998 level (Pacquet, 2001a). Both Shiri and Joint Security Area set new records for the export price of South Korean movies to the former colonizer, Japan, with the former selling for US$1.3 million and the latter for US$2 million (The Korea Herald, 29 November 2000). Shiri even accomplished the unprecedented breakthrough of topping the Hong Kong box office for three consecutive weeks in 1999 (Korea Times, 11 April 2000). But in 2001, the overall success was even greater, with a 60 percent increase in rights sales over 2000 to a total US$11.25 million (Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2002).

These sales achievements have been accompanied by ever greater successes at international film festivals. In 2002, Im Kwon-taek became the first South Korean director to win Best Director at Cannes, when his ninety-eighth feature Chihwaseon shared the prize with Paul Thomas Anderson’s Punch-Drunk Love (The Korea Herald, 25 May 2002). Soon after, Lee Chang-dong won a Special Director’s Award and actress Moon So-ri won Best Actress at Venice for Oasis (Korea Times, 9 September 2002). These successes in the feature film world have been echoed in other fields, so that South Korean animation directors have won major international awards for the first time with Lee Myung-ha’s award for Existence at Hiroshima in 2000 and Lee Sung-gang’s for Mari Ryagi at Annecy this year (Korea Times, 10 June 2002).

Sales into the American and European art-house circuits have been a part of this international success. To take the United States as an example, Im Kwon-taek’s Chunhyang was the first South Korean film to be given a theatrical release, and this occurred in January 2001 (IMDB). With its historical setting and passion for the details of traditional culture, this film would seem to follow a typical European and American art-house pattern of satisfying the Western taste for the exotic pioneered by Rashomon and followed by so many other Asian films all the way down to Chen Kaige’s Chinese film, Farewell to My Concubine.

But despite the continuing appetite for the exotic, the art-house circuit has changed. My observations here are impressions, rather than based on careful research. But I think it is fair to say that with the transition from independent movie theaters to art-house chains, the art-house in Western Europe, North America, and Australasia is no longer as interested in either formal or cultural difference as it was. More formally and culturally demanding films are increasingly confined to screenings on the festival circuit, which has burgeoned in the last decade. At the same time, the art-house circuit itself has become an alternative release circuit for foreign independent genre films with a twist.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the South Korean films to follow Chunhyang in the United States have tended to fit this newer pattern. Tell Me Something is a thriller with a sexy twist along the lines of Basic Instinct. Nowhere to Hide is a glossy gangster flick,
and Shiri is an action blockbuster. Last year, My Wife is a Gangster created a stir when Miramax bought the re-make rights for US$1.1 million, a much higher figure than had been paid for any South Korean film before (Pacquet, 2001b). This decision to buy re-make rights is the surest sign of the mainstream commercial rather than old-fashioned art-house tendency in this international South Korean success story. My Sassy Girl and Hi, Dharma have also been bought for re-making in Hollywood (Pacquet, 2002a).

Furthermore, it is not only the type of film that has been driving South Korean cinema’s international success that is different from the “new waves” of art cinema that made Taiwanese and mainland Chinese film well known overseas in the mid to late-1980s. The trade pattern is also different. At least as important as sales to the transformed American and European art-house circuits have been sales into the East and Southeast Asian region. With the exception of Japan, the price per title in East and Southeast Asian markets may not be as high as in the United States. However, the numbers of titles circulating through the region has been much higher. To take Hong Kong as an example, in early 2002 Shiri’s impressive performance was surpassed by My Sassy Girl, which topped the local box office and took US$1.2 million in only 19 days. In the single month of January 2002 alone, five South Korean features were released in Hong Kong, and they are now being released regularly there, although by no means all are as successful as My Sassy Girl. Success in Hong Kong has pioneered interest from other countries in the region, such as Taiwan, Thailand, China, Malaysia, Singapore, and other countries (Pacquet, 2002a). In Taiwan, Singapore, and Thailand, where Shiri and Friend had done less well, My Sassy Girl has been the breakthrough film for South Korean cinema. South Korean-Chinese co-production Musa the Warrior is having a 500-screen release in China and a 150-screen release in France, although the success or failure of this effort is not known to me at the time of writing (Pacquet 2002b).

Furthermore, the regional focus of these film successes is magnified when it is understood that they are part of a wider South Korean pop culture hallyu or “Korean fever” that has been running hot throughout the region. Like its Japanese counterpart (Iwabuchi, K., 2002), this phenomenon appears to be driven by popular television dramas, but it also includes pop music. In 1997, when China’s CCTV state television aired the drama “What Is Love?” it was the most successful foreign television series ever screened in China. Pop music groups rapidly followed, touring China and other parts of the region. Similar phenomena have occurred in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Vietnam, and Japan. In China, the fashion for South Korea has reached the point where, when asked which foreign country they would most like to visit, 61.7 percent of net users polled in one survey chose South Korea (Kim, Y., 2002).

In these circumstances, it might seem that less commercial types of film including independent films, documentary, and art cinema are less crucial to the new South Korean cinema. Of course, the reasons for the success or failure of any film industry or film movement are always individual and specific, as well as complicated and difficult to determine with any certainty. However, a note of caution should be sounded about jumping too quickly to such a conclusion.

To make this argument, it is necessary to distinguish between the institutional structures of different cinemas in the region. If we compare South Korean cinema with some of its competitors, we can see immediately that one of the main differences between them is that South Korean cinema has remained a “full service cinema” so far. By this I mean that South Korean film industry and culture remains has highly diversified throughout the 1990s; it has
included mainstream feature films, an active documentary movement, art cinema, animation, film festivals, an archive with an active screening program, and so forth. Art cinema emerged in the 1920s and functioned as a way of responding to the challenge of global Hollywood by pursuing local national art cinema production as a complement to Hollywood commercial cinema in the domestic market and a niche in the international market (Neale, S., 1981). Alternatively, other cinemas such as Hong Kong or Hollywood have stressed mainstream studio filmmaking to the exclusion of almost everything else. Neither of these models seems to be holding up so well at the moment in comparison to the “full service” approach. Can it be any coincidence that both of the other two thriving international cinemas in developed countries—the French and American cinemas—also fit into this “full service” model?

I have written elsewhere about the differences in fortunes between the mainland Chinese and South Korean film industries (Berry, C., 2003). Here I would like to consider two other regional examples that sadly have recently been less successful—Hong Kong and Taiwan. Neither of these industries operates as a full service model. The Hong Kong industry is a purely commercial operation, with little or no state support and notoriously minimal independent and art cinema sectors. This has only begun to change because the Hong Kong film industry has also been in decline through most of the 1990s. In 1993, 242 local films were made. By 2001, that figure was down to 126, and ticket sales also halved over the same period (Kwang, M., 2002). The first half of 2002 saw roughly 30 films made (Kan, W., 2002a). Significantly in terms of the topic of this talk, a recent report on the situation specifically cited two competitors—Hollywood and South Korea (Kwang, M., 2002). Of course, it is difficult to know exactly what the causes of this decline are. They include capital and talent outflow in anticipation of 1997, a severe VCD piracy problem centered across the border in the southern part of the People’s Republic of China, the lack of the special circumstances of the anticipation of 1997 that created a particular local interest in local films, and other factors. But in contrast to a full service cinema with multiple sectors and various kinds of government policy support, once things go wrong for a single-sectored industry there are few alternative paths to take. So desperate are things in Hong Kong now that the government has set new precedents by running a modest Film Development Fund for over three years now (Kan, W., 2002a). Furthermore, the industry has sent a delegation of over 116 persons from 61 companies to Beijing to try and persuade the mainland to place the same restrictions on Hong Kong films as they do on foreign films (Kan, W., 2002b).

These problems also apply to a cinema that has placed all its eggs in the art film basket, such as that of Taiwan. The Taiwanese mainstream commercial industry survived until the early 1980s, despite being caught between censorship by a right-wing dictatorship, and imports from Hollywood and Hong Kong. During this period, Taiwan and Hong Kong effectively divided the Chinese-language market outside the People’s Republic between them. Hong Kong emphasized action genres that appealed to younger audiences, whereas Taiwan’s emphasis was on romances and melodramas suitable for all the family (Chiao, 1991). Television removed that audience, and the industry went into decline in the 1980s, relieved only by the emergence of the art cinema known as the Taiwan New Wave. However, while the Taiwanese art cinema has brought film festival awards and glory, it has not been either a big international money maker or successful at the local box office. By 1999, only fourteen Taiwanese films were released in Taiwan, and they earned a grand total of only approximately US$457,000 in Taipei. 85 Hong Kong films were shown, earning just over US$2 million. But the lion’s share of the market was given over to the 239 foreign films, almost all from Hollywood, which took 70 percent of screen time and 96.7 percent of total box
office revenues in Taipei (Lu, F., 2002). Unsurprisingly, as Ti Wei points out in his discussion of the New Taiwanese Cinema, this decline corresponds to the progressive capitulation to Hollywood’s demands for “free trade,” which culminated in the total elimination of both screen and import quotas in 2001, on the eve of Taiwan’s entry into the WTO. The government’s support for films that won prizes in international film festivals helped to maintain the New Taiwan Cinema, while the mainstream commercial cinema died. But without any other measures to maintain a “full service” model, now it is almost impossible for these films to gain a release in Taiwan itself. Furthermore, although there is little evidence to support such a conclusion, many local critics even blame the decline of Taiwanese cinema as a whole on the New Taiwan Cinema, and many young Taiwanese actively loathe it (Wei, T., 2002).

In these circumstances, it is important to place more focus on the “full service cinema” that South Korea has effectively pursued in the last decade and more. For, if South Korean commercial cinema is breaking new records both at home and abroad, this may not only be due to commercial investment. It may also have something to do with the high level of cinematic literacy and creativity fostered amongst its young filmmakers. This has been developed by exposure not only to local and Hollywood features but also to the wide range of material from all over the world screened at South Korean film festivals and in art-house cinemas in Seoul (Kim, S., 1998). It may not only be due to the adoption of modern marketing methods. It may also have something to do with the wide range of film publications and film courses available in South Korea. In turn, the survival and success of those film festivals, film publications and other less commercial filmmaking activities in South Korea may also be financially and structurally tied to the financial health and general social and political commitment to the cinema engendered by international commercial success. In conclusion, I hope that the “full service model” that has characterized South Korean cinema through this last decade is maintained for the sake of both the commercial and the non-commercial sectors of the industry and culture.

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OLD MASTERS AND NEW CINEMA:
KOREAN FILM IN TRANSITION

Hyangsoom Yi

Since the late 1980s Korean cinema has undergone salient changes in its industrial structure, modes of practice, and aesthetic orientation. Its remarkable transformation into a powerful cultural force in Asia has elicited considerable attention from both the commercial and critical sectors of the international film circuit. Recent discussions of Korean cinema have largely been centered on its market expansion and generic diversification over the past two decades. Accordingly, a strong spotlight has been cast on groundbreaking newcomers in the industry as catalysts for its rapid growth. The nationwide Shiri (Shiri, 1999) syndrome brought about by Kang Chegyu and similar phenomena triggered by Pak Ch’anuk’s Joint Security Area (Kongdong kyŏngbi kuyŏk, 2000), Kwak Kyŏngt’ae’s Friends (Ch’ingu, 2001), and Yi Chŏnghyang’s The Way Home (Chibiro, 2002) well illustrate this tendency.1

Amidst the unprecedented success of the new generation of Korean filmmakers in both local and global arenas, one question remains to be investigated: how do old masters of Korean cinema define their art in this period of dynamic transition? My article addresses this vital and yet somewhat neglected issue by examining thematic and stylistic changes in recent films by Pak Ch’ŏlsu (Park Chul Soo) and Im Kwŏnt’ae (Im Kwon-Taek), two prominent figures who began their directorial careers in earlier decades but have continued their search for their own film language to the present day. Pak’s Farewell My Darling (Haksaengbugunsinwi, 1996) and Kazoku Cinema (Kajok simena, 1998) and Im’s Chunhyang (Ch’unhyangdyŏn, 2001), while employing the conventional mode of storytelling as a structural scaffold, often break down the wall between diegesis and nondiegesis. They thereby undermine cinematic illusionism, which has long dominated Korean film. Pak continues his formal experiment in his latest work Bongja (Pongja, 2000) in which he blends social and virtual realities by means of a digital camera. In a similar spirit of border-crossing and hybridization, Im incorporates traditional Korean painting into the visual language of Painted Fire (Ch’iwigasŏn, 2002). These veteran filmmakers’ playful attitudes toward the possibilities of the cinematic medium and especially their common concern with reflexivity and intertextuality reveal their changing views on life, art, and society. In light of their long contributions to the plot-driven mimetic tradition of mainstream cinema, Pak’s and Im’s innovative styles can be seen as ironic yet earnest responses to the shifting cultural milieu of today’s Korean film.

The democratization of Korean society towards the end of the 1980s had an enormous impact on the film community, illustrated by the emergence of the Korean New Wave. After years of working in the commercial film industry and for a major television broadcasting company, Pak declared his departure from both and founded Park Chul Soo Film in 1994 with the aspiration to “create world-class” films with “experimental and artistic qualities.” The general direction of his independent filmmaking is intimated by his confession that “I am tired of playing the role of
a storyteller.” Pak’s rejection of the ‘well-made’ movie subsequently materialized in a variety of manners in 301/302 (301, 302, 1995), Farewell My Darling (1996), Push! Push! (Sanbuinkwa, 1997), Kazoku Cinema (1998), and Bongja (2000). Deemphasized in all these films is a tightly organized plot based on the conventional notion of causal links. Compared with his feature films from the pre-independence era, which strive for verisimilitude, Pak’s latest films are more episodic in structure and thus more permeated with textual ambiguities.

Particularly noteworthy among the above works are Farewell My Darling and Kazoku Cinema, in which Pak employs metafictional techniques as a way of integrating the filmmaking process with the cinematic narrative. These two films center on a family reunion which is interrupted by a film crew shooting the family gathering as a staged event. The reflexive elements in Farewell My Darling range from simple intertitles for the five-day funeral procedure to freeze frames and the director’s own cameo appearance as the filmmaker Ch’ anu, the eldest son of the deceased. While these techniques are aimed at undermining the autonomy of the diegetic world, Ch’ anu’s documentary-shooting of his father’s funeral, in particular, occasions Pak to contemplate the nature of the cinematic medium itself. According to Pak’s directorial notes, Ch’ anu, who acts as a central player in the drama of the funeral, ironically observes everything from a filmmaker’s point of view (Park Chul Soo). Ch’ anu’s dual position as the observer and the observed in the house of mourning applies to Pak’s role at his father’s funeral in real life.

The self-referentiality of Farewell My Darling is further effected by the appearances of a conventional still camera, an 8-mm video camcorder, a television, and a movie camera in the film narrative. Through these devices, Pak celebrates the development of the cinematic art and his own career in it. On the other hand, the self-reflexive signification processes in Farewell My Darling contain Pak’s criticism of the unethical manipulation of the camera’s capacity for creating illusion. This message is conveyed in the episode about the local video shop owner who seduces P’ albong’s young wife by brandishing his camcorder to rouse her sense of vanity and glamour. The filmmaking process itself is parodied when this self-styled video artist films three women from a downtown coffee-shop who are paying their last respects to their former customer, now deceased and mourned.

In Farewell My Darling, reflexivity helps generate a carnivalesque atmosphere in the narrative. As Pak himself puts it, a traditional Korean funeral can easily turn into a village feast, where the somber ritualistic mood is continuously diffused by ludicrous and farcical situations. Pak’s hand-held camera, frenetic jump-cuts, and occasional fast motion effectively capture the topsy-turvy world of the rural wake. It is in this liminal space that the meaning of the family in contemporary Korean society can be analyzed, negotiated, and reconfigured ritualistically in the film. This social process is shown when the frantic swine-chase sequence ends with exposing that Pau, the mysterious urchin lingering in the margins of the extended family, is in fact an illegitimate son of the deceased. Along with this surprising revelation, another family secret is divulged: the deceased’s expulsion of his daughter Ch’ ansuk due to her affair with their house servant. These incidents, while laying open the cracks in the ethical mores of Confucian patriarchy, are resolved happily in the end, as the two outcasts—Pau and Ch’ ansuk—are officially accepted into the family. In this way, the funeral as a passage rite triggers the community to confront contradictory elements in its order and redress its overall structure. Farewell My Darling treats the erosion of traditional values and at the same time traces their course of adaptation in changing times.

Pak’s interest in the subject of family and his formal
playfulness continues in Kazoku Cinema, the film made in expectation of the Korean government's historical lifting of its long-held ban on importing Japanese cultural products, including films. Kazoku Cinema is based on the Korean-Japanese writer Yu Miri's award-winning novella of the same title. Yu's autobiographical narrative revolves around irreconcilable conflicts among the members of a broken Korean-Japanese family. The narrative unfolds from the eldest daughter Motomi's first-person point of view, which is tinged with a weary, helpless sense of resignation.

Yu's text lends itself easily to cinematization. This is partly owing to the motif of filmmaking at the crux of Yu's plot. Also, the author relies heavily on visual images in sketching tension and distance among the characters. Pak concurs with Yu that the estrangement among the Hayashis represents the disintegration of the family as a meaningful social unit in today's individualistic and materialistic world and that their alienation is a widespread condition of modern family life rather than a situation unique to Korean-Japanese households. This explains why he chose Yu's novella for a project “about my family, our story” (Park Chul Soo). Between Farewell My Darling and Kazoku Cinema, Pak's concern with family issues has widened from national to transnational spheres. Pak maintains that a dysfunctional family, approached as a malaise of modernity, befits a comedic rather than tragic genre and a black comedy at that (Park Chul Soo).

From a formal perspective, what attracts our attention to Kazoku Cinema is the prominence of its self-referentiality. Pak keeps much of Yu's original storyline in his adaptation, but he has shifted its focus from a portrait of the troubled family to diverse methods for constructing and presenting their bizarre reunion in cinematic terms. As a result, the processes and implications of film production and consumption emerge as the most striking features of Pak's version of "Kazoku Cinema." This new emphasis is borne out by added scenes that are not present in the literary source: a shooting sequence at the father's house and the family's theater preview of their movie. As a metacinema, Kazoku Cinema portrays numerous aspects of filmmaking, from the pre- to postproduction stages: actors' script reading, rehearsal and makeup sessions, and their NG's and ad-libs. Various kinds of shooting and editing techniques are also introduced. In addition, Pak shows the typical errors of technical staff, such as a shortage of film stock in the middle of shooting. This consequence is instantly transmitted to us as the screen darkens for seconds, while the staff members' agitated speeches are clearly audible. Another anecdote about the crew's inattentiveness involves the interference of doorbell sounds with the location shooting inside Motomi's apartment. Other details of filmmaking interspersed in Pak's text include slate clapping, film editing, color treatments, audio mixing, sound-image synchronization, and so on. As illustrated by the family picnic in the last segment of the film, behind-the-scenes technical support even requires a creation of an artificial storm with a compressor and a powerful fan. Filming demands meticulous preparations, but a finished product is just as much contingent upon circumstantial parameters, both natural and human. Pak acknowledges that Kazoku Cinema itself blends the scripted and impromptu dialogues and action (Park Chul Soo).

In Kazoku Cinema, reflexivity constitutes narrative content as well as form. Pak tackles reflexivity more intensely in this film than in the previous one. In Farewell My Darling, for example, Ch'anu's documentary crew is nearly invisible, and their equipment is equally unnoticeable. The screen is occupied by kaleidoscopic scenes of the wake, which are visually and emotionally quite engaging. By contrast, in Kazoku Cinema, Pak assigns as much screen space to the fictitious director Katayama's crew...
as to Motomi’s family, who act in Katayama’s film. Pak does not appear as a character in Kazoku Cinema. Instead, he delegates his directorship to Katayama in the same fashion that Ch’eru plays his double in Farewell My Darling. Conceptually, Katayama’s documentary is embedded in Pak’s Kazoku Cinema. Perceptually, however, Pak’s and Katayama’s visual texts frequently overlap on the screen in such a way that we, the audience in the theater, are sometimes left unable to determine which of the two we are presented with. The confusion augments as the characters themselves ask one another if the camera is on, even though we do not see Katayama’s cinematographers on the screen.

Pak’s skillful maneuvering of the framing device and reflexive techniques in general resonates with a postmodern epistemological conundrum. Kazoku Cinema is neither a documentary nor a fiction, as its characters themselves admit. Katayama’s project purports to reconstruct the Hayashi family’s life experiences. But once the filming starts, they all realize that their fictional existence cannot replicate their real lives and that no precise correspondence exists between them. As is expected, their acting often departs from the script. History and story, and reality and fiction cannot be thoroughly severed from one another in art, even in representational art. Alternately oscillating between and espousing both the conventional narrative film and self-conscious avant-garde modes, Kazoku Cinema forces us to review the criteria for genre classification. The blurry demarcation between reality and illusion urges a perceptive spectator to dwell on moral ramifications as well. This theme is communicated through Motomi’s autistic brother Kazuki, who mechanistically but poignantly repeats a statistical report on how people tend to habitually lie.

Kazoku Cinema revisits the familiar theme of life as drama but adds a postmodern touch by associating it with the omnipresence of the camera. Opening and closing with a close-up of a movie camera, Pak’s film stresses that contemporary urban life does not allow us freedom to escape from the gaze of the camera and from voyeuristic curiosity. For evidence, suffice it to point out the Polaroid camera, Fukami’s accomplice in his fetish for women’s hips. Before this old sculptor’s camera, even the quite reticent heroine Motomi, who loathes acting in her family movie, ends up performing; yet, she is reduced to only a body part. A woman’s fragmented body image once again takes center stage when Motomi’s mother awkwardly poses her naked torso for mammography as if she would act before a movie camera. Whether it is Motomi’s narcissistic “pleasure in being looked at” or her mother’s self-conscious surrender to the scrutiny of an x-ray machine, Pak’s black comedy capitalizes on our deprived subjectivity in the ubiquity of unspurnful imaging devices (Mulvey 835). In Yu’s novel, Motomi’s mind’s eye controls the narration, but in Pak’s film, the camera eye substitutes. The camera is not a passive tool but an active gazer. The movie camera in the opening shot directly aims its lens at us and thereby objectifies us. Our exiting from the theater at the end of the film is also prefigured by the closing sequence, in which the camera tracks the family’s departure from the movie house after screening their own movie.

Although Pak highlights the omnipresence of the camera in contemporary culture, he does not confer omnipotence on it. This conclusion is drawn especially from the bleak ending of the film, which instead of bringing a resolution to the family discord, presents a new trouble: the father’s mysterious disappearance. For the Hayashi family, the documentary-making occasions a cathartic reenactment of their trauma. But it fails to eliminate their hostilities or heal their wounds. The camera cannot be a problem-solver. In Kazoku Cinema, filmmaking is handled more or less as festivity. The same analogy is made in Farewell My Darling between a funeral and a festival. For Pak,
then, filmmaking is a ritual, which like a funeral, is
performed within a finite temporal passage. Cinematic
production and its products come to an end. But life
cannot have a preconceived final closure; it goes on,
to borrow a cliché. The missing father and all sorts of
suspicion about his dubious motives signify the
impossibility of a happy ending for Kazoku Cinema,
which is designed to mirror life as it is lived, in defiance
of the false illusionism of the conventional film.

While metafiction has been Pak's preoccupation
as an independent filmmaker, Im has pursued
possibilities of mixed media in his latest works,
Chunhyang and Painted Fire. In order to understand
the significance of these two works, it is important to
place them in the context of Im's long filmmaking
career. Im is a prolific director who has made nearly
one hundred pieces in divergent commercial genres
during his four decades of work in the mainstream
film industry. There are several crucial turning points
in his directorship since the early 1960s. Toward
the end of the 1970s, his acute agony over the "cheap
entertainment values" or "lies" of his films turned him
to the "serious issues of our lives" (Im 247-48). This
sheds light on the significance of Mandala (Mandara,
1981), which some critics count as one of the prime
contributors to the advent of the Korean New Wave
(Rayns; Wilson). From another point of view, a genuine
path-breaker in Im's artistic development and also
for his distinguished position within the national film
community can be located in Sopyonje (Sŏp'yonje,
1993), which set a box-office record, "heralding the
revival of South Korean culture" (Cho 136). In the
international realm, Im's fame and visibility came
decisively with Chunhyang, as it became the first
Korean film commercially distributed in American
theaters. This historic event was followed by another
round of publicity surrounding the Best Director Award
he received for Painted Fire at the 2002 Cannes
Film Festival.

Im’s serious adventures with film's formal
properties, especially his attempts at a crossover
between film and other arts began in the mid-1990s.
Im introduced p’ansori to the screen in 1993 with
Sopyonje, and three years later he integrated
animation into the visual text of Festival (Ch’ukche,
1996). Of particular significance among Im’s works
from the mid-1990s is Sopyonje, which kindled public
interest in p’ansori and the lives of p’ansori singers.
The film’s enthusiastic domestic reception and
spectacular financial success paved the road for
Chunhyang, another one of Im’s endeavors to
transplant p’ansori in film but with a conspicuously
different aesthetic conception. Im says that he
discovered the beauty of p’ansori around 1978 or
1979 and began to form an idea for a "film about
p’ansori." His immediate goal for making Sopyonje
was to “demonstrate that our beautiful and moving
p’ansori is as great as—if not superior to—any other
music” (258).

As Im’s recollection suggests, his understanding
of p’ansori at the inception stage of Sopyonje was
confined to its emotive appeal as music and to his
response as a listener. Therefore, “the most important
objective” in his directing "was visually to complement
the beauty of the singing and transfer it to the audience
clearly” (Im 259). This statement explains Im’s
relatively simple manner of interpolating the
characters’ p’ansori practices and performances as
elements of action and on-screen diegetic music. In
other words, the sound-image match in this film is
designed to achieve optimal plot advancement and
maximal emotional stir. A vivid example of this is found
at the climax of the film, when Songhwa and her
estranged step-brother Tongho recite a number from
the Song of Shim Ch’ong in their tension-filled
reunion.

If Sopyonje is a film about p’ansori, Chunhyang
can be called a p’ansori film. In the latter, the traditional
story-singing art fulfills multiple functions based on its
generic complexities. First of all, it serves as an
extradiegetic voice-over, narrating and commenting on segments of the story. P’ansori furthermore covers all three types of film sound: speech, music, and background noise. A great number of dialogues in Im’s film are taken from the p’ansori version of the folk tale: the Song of Ch’unhyang. Some speeches are quoted verbatim and delivered through lip synch between a character and the master singer Cho Sanghyŏn. For instance, Cho’s song lyric is choreographed with Ch’unhyang’s lines when she expresses her despair and outrage at the news of Mongnyong’s impending departure for Seoul. This method is more dramatically employed later when the new magistrate Pyŏn interrogates Ch’unhyang. Halfway through the audio track of this sequence, her voice recedes and Cho’s vocal track is put on in tune. The two voices run together on and off as Ch’unhyang speaks her words and Cho sings them. Soon afterwards, Cho’s voice takes over Ch’unhyang’s speeches entirely.

In Chunhyang, Im’s use of p’ansori for background noise deserves special mention. In the early part of the film, when Pangja, ordered by his master Mongnyong, is on his way to Ch’unhyang’s house, his light, rhythmic walk is comically synchronized with the lyric and beat of the song. The amazing effect of the image-word-sound tuning is credited to the vocal artistry of the p’ansori performer. Cho’s song for Pangja’s action showcases the audio effect called “micky-mousing.”10 When Mongnyong, Wŏima, and Hyangdan are walking across a public cemetery to visit Ch’unhayang in prison, Cho supplies onomatopoeia for natural and supernatural phenomena, such as a gusty wind, pouring rain, ghostly flickers, and howling animals as a way of engendering an eerie nocturnal mood. Mimicking atmospheric noises with the trained voice is an integral part of a p’ansori singer’s technical accomplishments.11

In spite of these relatively minor instances of incidental music and sound effects, p’ansori in Chunhyang is on the whole not subordinate to the visual narrative. On the contrary, music is in a dominant position vis-à-vis the plot and picture. Ch’unhyang’s torture scene attests to p’ansori’s control over the narrative content. If this sequence were shown in its entirety, its length would correspond roughly to the duration of the famous “Song of Ten Strokes.” The amount of time allotted to the beating scene on the screen, then, would far exceed its practical communicative values measured in terms of plot development. The simple message of Ch’unhyang’s plight would be repeated ten times in the pattern of a soldier’s thrashing followed by the heroine’s protest. Although each stroke is unique for its verbal pun, its visual counterpart is bound to become monotonous. This is likely why the camera cuts to the singer in the extradiegesis after the fourth beating, diverting the viewer’s attention to the p’ansori performance itself. This transition epitomizes the way p’ansori punctuates the pace and rhythm of the film’s visual narrative in Chunhyang.

P’ansori’s regulating force over pictorial cues in Chunhyang can also be elucidated in terms of the different rhythmic cycles of traditional Korean music. The fast cycle, chungjungmori, is associated with humorous scenes which involve low comic characters, such as Pangja, and the two soldiers sent for Ch’unhyang by Magistrate Pyŏn. Contrasted with chungjungmori in comic sequences, the slower-paced chungmori matches distressful or sorrowful moments. The visual messages are accordingly low-keyed and languid so that their movements become consonant with the chungmori rhythm of the original p’ansori singing. A good example is the lovers’ separation scene.

Music’s superior position over image is possible in Chunhyang because of Im’s double layering of the text. In the classical narrative film, music usually constitutes part of a sonic background or atmosphere whose primary purpose is to enrich the affective
dimension of the story. Music thus plays a secondary role in film, often remaining “unheard melodies” (Gorbman). This hierarchy, however, is reversed in Chunhyang due to Im’s ingenious structural arrangement. Temporally, Im’s text alternates between a live musical recorded in the modern theater and a motion picture set in a premodern fictional universe, but in its spatial design, the former is superimposed upon the latter. Hence, p’ansori operates as both a narrative and a metanarrative in Chunhyang, whereas its role is circumscribed in Sopyonje to character attributes and action components.

In Chunhyang, p’ansori is paradigmatic of film as a comprehensive art and of film viewing as a total aesthetic experience. P’ansori is a multigenre art which comprises literary, musical, theatrical, and pictorial elements. In Chunhyang the diegesis is conjured up by the performer’s narration and singing in the extradiegesis. The film’s visual narrative depicts what is taking place in the imagination of a p’ansori audience sitting in a modern proscenium theater. A good p’ansori performer is one who can create images on the audience’s mental screen, with his/her artistic techniques. P’ansori consists of storytelling (nori) and singing (ch’ang). At a superficial glance, therefore, p’ansori performance appears to proceed only in two modes, literary and musical. But its performative context requires two additional expressive modalities: visual and theatrical. The performer’s voice, whether it is for narration or singing, should function like a “paintbrush” which depicts the meanings of the words. This pivotal aesthetic principle of visualization is called imyon kuri. Meaning “painting an inner side,” this principle can be understood as “the vocal metaphor of the picture within” (qtd. in Park, “P’ansori” 17).

Along with the “painting” ability, theatrical gestures cannot be overlooked in the p’ansori singer’s successful communication with the audience. Shin Chaehyo, a seminal patron of p’ansori in the nineteenth century, emphasizes “presence,” “narrative,” “voice,” and “gesture” as the four fundamental rules of p’ansori (Pihl 97). “ Presence” underlines the p’ansori performer’s acting ability, which, together with “gesture,” reinforces the “inherent theatricality” of p’ansori (Pihl 99). Although the p’ansori performer’s dramatic gestures are more minimal and symbolic in comparison with those of Western opera singers’, the existence of the theatrical term “pallini” (dramatic gesture) reiterates the trait of p’ansori as a performing art.

In addition to p’ansori’s multigenre aesthetics, the fluidity of Im’s camera and the prevalence of long shots offer other grounds for approaching the diegesis of Chunhyang as the p’ansori audience’s visual fantasy. Throughout the film, Im makes a sharp contrast between the relatively static shots of the p’ansori performers and the free-flowing scenes of the Ch’unhyang tale. In the inner story, tracking and craning shots, dolls, and panning are abundantly found. The camera’s smooth and seamless movement is well exemplified when it glides over and through the walls and gates of the labyrinthine architectural compounds of a traditional Korean village. Im’s camera also zooms in and out noticeably. This unencumbered visual style resembles the unbound spatial imagination of the audience. It also suits the tendency of a folktale to move forward swiftly from one event to another and from one place to another rather than lingering on characters’ psychological vicissitudes.

Im’s heavy use of long shots for the diegetic world also enhances the dreamy quality of his visual language in Chunhyang. Long shots deepen a sense of distance between Ch’unhyang’s world and that of the modern-day spectators. They are effective in articulating the ambiance of an event. Im’s composition of outdoor shots tends to furnish ample room for natural scenery as an appropriate context for dramatic action, while drawing attention to the balance and harmony
between human figures and their scenic backdrop, as in traditional landscape painting.

Im’s mobile camera for the diegesis drastically differs from its more rigid movement for the p’ansori singer and his drummer in the extradiegesis. The opening sequence shows the two performers on the stage from the angle of the theater audience. As the film develops, the camera work becomes more cinematic in that it is not fettered by the audience members’ limited position as observers of the center stage. The singer’s face appears as a close-up on the screen. The camera also moves to the back of the performer and captures for us the increasingly ecstatic responses of his audience.

All these structural complexities of Im’s film demand active spectatorship. As we experience a music film, so Cho’s audience experiences a musical. However, the division between the two types of audience is somewhat tenuous, for we are inclined to exercise a double consciousness with regard to Cho’s stage performance and to the narrative film. In a similar vein to Pak’s manipulation of the characters and spectators of Kazoku Cinema, Im plays the trick of linking the audiences inside and outside of the film world. The increasing amount of chumissae, the audience’s verbal interjections in the p’ansori performance which Im blends in Cho’s vocal track, fosters a sense of immediacy, as if we were participating in a live p’ansori performance. Simultaneously, however, the recorded interjections also remind us of the mediated nature of our contact with the master singer filmed on stage. The elaborate textual organization of Im’s film entails moments of self-reflexivity. When the screen switches from diegesis to extradiegesis, the visual narrative freezes. This stoppage foregrounds the fictitiousness of the narrative film.

Im’s use of the p’ansori stage as an intermediary space between fiction and nonfiction imparts larger thematic implications by questioning a black-and-white view of life and society. When Wolmae forgives the depraved figure Pyon in the last scene of the film by relating that without him, there would not have been the virtuous Ch’unhyang, she points out that good and evil forces are intricately meshed with one another in their workings in society. As Wolmae’s final line suggests, Im’s film as a whole emphasizes the ways in which various dyadic terms are intertwined: the upper and lower classes, the past and present, the theater and film, and even low and high arts. P’ansori began as a folk art performed by the outcast kwangdae. Its elevated status today as the nation’s intangible cultural treasure is corroborated by Cho’s performance in modern stage facilities with a “fourth wall.” To a certain respect, p’ansori’s ascendancy to a canonized high art parallels the grand epithet recently given to Im: the “people’s director.” Im is always attracted to earthly folk material such as p’ansori, whose vivacity is fully exhibited in spontaneous, communal performative conditions. The folk roots of Im’s art are confirmed by his choice of Chang Sungop’s life rather than the illustrious biographies of official court painters, for his latest work Painted Fire.

Both Im and Pak made shifts in their film styles in the 1990s, but the artistic visions they have pursued diverge from each other. Their differences are lucidly seen in the ways they have coped with the pressure of globalization. As is illustrated by his movement from Farewell My Darling to Kazoku Cinema, Pak has attempted to address transnational subjects and themes. His concern lies in the changing values of contemporary Korean society as it has been integrated into the larger global village. From this perspective, Japan is no longer a neighbor from which Koreans should distance themselves in aversion. Instead, Pak says, we should make efforts to dismantle the barriers of history between the two nations and probe issues they are commonly faced with. Pak’s pioneering use of a digital camera in Pongja can be understood along the same lines, as a spirited acceptance of changing technology and a changing
world order; he embraces them as an impetus for expanding the horizons of his artistic experiments.

Im holds a different view in regard to the function of the cinema in the global age. Since Sopyonje, he has searched for stories and situations that "only" Koreans can offer to the world audience. He states that he made a film about p’ansori because "our culture was being toppled by Western culture" (258). This seemingly self-defensive remark was made at the height of pressure from Hollywood distributors to open up the Korean film market. Although many of Im's works treat traditional Korean society, one should refrain from rashly concluding that his preference for uniquely Korean cultural themes is nationalistic. Rather, it should be contextualized in his broad idea of the film's role in society. Im believes that the cinema can preserve culture—its institutions, products, customs, values, and attitudes. This vision of film apparently derives from his profound faith in the camera's recording capacity.

Whether they remain in or outside of the film establishment, these two old masters have braved the vortex of the historic rejuvenation of Korean film culture. Their formal innovations have pushed the aesthetic boundaries of contemporary Korean cinema, but their active presence in the national film community has other positive effects as well. Above all, it has helped allay the apprehension that the majority of successful Korean directors these days are inexperienced and untested by time and thus that the prospect of Korean cinema is uncertain and insecure. Im’s and Pak’s enduring careers might also serve as sources of wisdom, if not solutions, for those troubled by commercialism. Despite its unprecedented vitality, the current state of the Korean film industry has raised concerns about the increasing concentration of capital on mass-entertainment pieces. Of course, even seasoned filmmakers such as Pak and Im cannot be free from financial anxiety. Motomi’s mother in Kazoku Cinema sums up this problem blatantly:

For them [movie-goers] to feel it worthwhile to have one to the theater, you have to make it so that the audience will have hope that the family will get together again. Why would they bother to come see a movie that doesn’t even have that? Don’t you think so, Mr. Director? You have to make it that way for the film to be worthwhile for yourself too, and to make money.

The conflict between artistic integrity and popular appeal, according to Pak, haunts him. This eternal dilemma notwithstanding, Pak at least wishes to produce good films for the globalization of Korean cinema, and more importantly, for his own "rebirth." Pak and Im are survivors of the oppressive sociopolitical climate and dire economic conditions that have plagued generations of Korean filmmakers. While inheriting various old legacies of the industry, these weather-beaten directors have been groping toward a different cinema. Their recent works thus provide useful insights into the fresh visions for the future of Korean national cinema.

Notes

1 In this article, the modified McCune-Reischauer system is adopted for the romanization of Korean words.


3 http://www.parkchulsou.co.kr. This website will be referred to as “parkchulsou” in the text hereafter.

4 Farewell My Darling, conceived in 1986 and concretized years later when Pak’s own father died, is autobiographical in many respects. Ch’antu, played by the director and even given his surname “Pak,” is an experienced film director making a documentary of his father’s funeral.

5 This interpretation is based on Victor Turner’s theory of liminality.

6 This lifting took place in 1998.

7 According to Pak, he makes a passing appearance in one of the early shooting scenes in Motomi’s room, but this is hardly noticeable in normal viewing circumstances (personal interview, 25 October 2002).
The film’s popularity led to the publication of “Sopyonje” Movie Book, the first of its kind in the history of Korean cinema. For the cultural and historical significance of this book, see Cho, pp. 135-36.

Gerard Genette defines “extradiegetic” as “external to (not part of) any diegesis” (Prince 29). This term is often treated as synonymous with “nondiegetic.” In this article, however, “extradiegesis” indicates the space where Cho’s p’ansori performance occurs. A distinction between “extradiegesis” and “nondiegesis” is necessary to differentiate sounds originating from Cho’s theater space and those from outside it. The former is described as “extradiegetic,” and the latter is marked as “nondiegetic.” The scene of Mongnyong’s first nocturnal call on Ch’unhyang is accompanied by the sounds of a traditional Korean zither kayagum as background music. This is a rare but quintessential example of nondiegetic music in this film.

Micky-mousing is “the split-second synchronizing of musical and visual action.” This term derives from its frequent use in animation films (Brown 16).

For the onomatopoetic of p’ansori, see Park, Voices from the Straw Mat: Toward an Ethnography of Korean Story Singing, pp. 204-08.

In a sense, Ch’unhyang illustrates Erwin Panofsky’s idea that film’s possibilities lie in “spatialization of time” (281).

In its interart design, Ch’unhyang is similar to a music video, except that the film stands solidly on narrativity.

In the ch’ang edition of the Song of Ch’unhyang, it is Mongnyong, not Wolmae, who remarks that Pyŏn occasioned the revelation of Ch’unhyang’s faithfulness. For Mongnyong’s full line see Kim, p. 303.

For a detailed account of this problem, see Yu Gina, pp. 14-15.

Works Cited


—. Personal interview. 25 October 2002.


BEING A MOVIE DIRECTOR

Park Chul Soo

My life has been studded with uncertainty, struggle, and destruction. I knew how hard and painful a job it would be to record my life story on a few pieces of paper. Nevertheless, I am doing this in the faint hope that this work will introduce a piece of my world of cinema.

I am a ruffian—in fact, those in the film circles call me a movie gangster. I might have gained this nickname, not simply because I was the first to create an independent movie production company in Korean movie history, but also because I am still operating it successfully a decade later. I like to think that the nickname is affectionate praise for my single-handed effort to make movies of my own taste, without bending to any pressure, in spite of a low budget and the terrible market situation.

My debut to the film world is quite unique compared to that of other filmmakers. I was born in the remote countryside on the southern part of the Korean peninsula. I was the first son—burdened with all the suffocating expectations from my parents in the manner that first sons have always been. I passed the entrance examination of a decent school, thereby not disappointing my parents. I was so different then compared with today that I myself get confused about who I really am.

My family was a constant prisoner of wretched poverty. After I went to Seoul to attend college, I chose to go to Vietnam to fight because of my unbearable tenacious poverty. I clenched my teeth to endure the war, reading my mother’s letters telling me “Don’t die, Don’t kill.” When I came back to Korea, all I had left was the overwhelming remorse of coming home after sending several buddies to the other world, and one silver medal.

I became a high school Korean language teacher—fulfilling the wishes of my parents. I spent my youth teaching poetry and literature to adolescents. However, my heart was always empty. Was I longing for a fierce, competitive world? Or was it thirst for money? The choice I made to fill that gap was embarking on a big enterprise.

After a few years of mundane life, I began wandering again in search of something different. It was during that period that I encountered the world of movies. I began working at the bottom of the totem pole in a production department, but was speedily promoted, becoming an assistant director in no time. Not infrequently, I found myself shouting “Ready, Action!” standing in for the director. Soon, I joined the ranks of movie directors themselves, making quite a few films and receiving accolades as an excellent director for some. I was scouted by a TV broadcasting station. Just about the time when the critics were calling me the Number One PD (Program/Production Director) of Korea, I wrapped up my TV-drama making and came back to film. Since then, more than a decade has gone by.

Readers will now understand why I said my history as a filmmaker is quite unique. Until I was in college, I had no interest in film and had seen only two movies in my entire youth. Neither had I ever studied about
film through books. That is probably why I never go by any particular book.

While making countless movies and TV dramas, I began questioning myself again. It dawned on me that all the characters, situations, and stories looked so unnatural and forced. Even when people said they looked very natural, I could not agree and felt that they were contrived. That was it! I was sick and tired of “stories.” I had been making numerous stories and creating fiction, but one day, I suddenly became obsessed with the thought that I had been lying. For sure, the film audiences and TV viewers were enthusiastic about dramatic and tightly constructed stories, but I began to agonize over what kind of significance they had for me. No matter how realistic an object is, if one looks at it though the camera lens, it is bound to be draped in the producer’s intent.

If that is the case, what is the most fundamental matter?

This very question made me probe the object called the ‘human being’ which is the most practical and the most basic question. This ‘human being’ became my main subject matter and theme.

The human being

A human is human by virtue of being alive. What are the most natural conditions of being alive? That is precisely the question I want to answer. A person must be born, eat, excrete, have sex, form relationships with other human beings, and die. I constantly reflected on these fundamental elements of human beings. No more story-telling! The basic and natural, physical elements never lie. Never! Perhaps unconsciously, I may have approached those elements like an obsession.

I thus went through innumerable mental experiments and trials and errors before I started my film production company, declaring that I would make ‘new cinema.’ The first piece created in this spirit was 301/302, a film about the desire for food and the desire for sex. This movie contrasts two women, an amateur cook whose spare time is spent preparing and eating lavish meals, identified by the number of the apartment she lives in, 301, and another, living across the hall in 302, who has an eating disorder and cannot stand food. The two women’s inner landscapes are depicted through food, the ultimate feminine medium. As a result, much of the narrative was eliminated, and the visual image came to play the central role. Thus was born a film, which internally ended up with a much stronger narrative. This was the first Korean film to be distributed world-wide, which for me was of great significance.

This script for 301/302, based on a poem, was written by a 19-year old New York University student, Sur-Goon Lee (Yi Sō-gun). (She would later become a movie director, debuting with a film she entitled Rub Love.)

The next movie I made was Haksang pugunsinwi (Farewell, My Darling).1 Korean countryside funerals have many interesting aspects to them. There are so many unusual people, and so many unusual things happen during those funerals. Thanks to the deceased, people can eat to their hearts’ content. By crying their heart out in a manner they could not even dream of in normal times, people can release their stress. Thus the home of the bereaved becomes a kind of house of feasting for the living.

If you have ever had someone very close to you die, you will recall, death is not as tough as people fear in general—really it is not a big deal. The dead body lying down appears increasingly to be an object, as time passes by. Its face even looks peaceful.

If living is an activity of production, isn’t death perchance a release of excrement? The dialectic of life and death must be something like this. ‘Death’ is made loaded and mysterious by human beings, but in fact the gap between life and death is only paper-thin. For this reason, I approached ‘death’ light-hearted. The natural scenes that were captured thus resulted in a pleasurable film that makes the living laugh.
I decided to make the movie after planning it for a decade. My father left this world a couple of years before I actually made the film.

In a great many places, this work contains different impressions and my own psychological states looking at my father’s death from different angles. As I received critical acclaim inside and outside of Korea for Farewell, My Darling, I sometimes joked that I waited until my father died to make the film (with a guilty feeling in regards to the old man who passed away...).

The third creation, Sanbuinkwasha Push! Push! is a ‘cinema of gossip,’ staged at an OB/GYN clinic, a place totally unknown to men and most-feared by women. My idea was to cut out fragmentary articles from newspapers or trashy magazines and then assemble them into a movie.

If one of the two previous movies, 301/302, is about sex and food, and the other, Farewell, My Darling, is about death, this film, Push! Push!, is about birth. The focus of this movie is simply the great variety of incidents that occur in a clinic. There is no cause at the beginning that triggers this series of events, nor is there any storyline that is sustained through the conflict, climax, etc. I produced the movie as though I had tried to chase the lives of innumerable people, simply to answer the question, “What goes on in there?” using the camera crew as voyeurs all the time.

I really wanted to overturn the negative image of OB/GYN clinics. Exactly as I had inverted the sadness and gloom associated with funerals in the movie Farewell, My Darling, I wanted to show what a hilarious and lively place such a clinic actually is. I wanted to expose how many mistakes are committed because of prejudices and misconceptions. For this purpose I chose subject-matters such as tenacious obsessions with male infants and female virginity. When I finished this piece, people began referring to these three movies as the Park Chul-Soo Trilogy, although I had never planned it that way.

With the next film, Kazoku Cinema, I was seeking an opportunity to change my surroundings and my inner state without losing my composure. I needed a new stimulus of the kind that I had had when I created my own company and produced ‘new cinema’ four years earlier.

As I was finishing the film Push! Push! I was thinking about making a film about my family and my family’s story, when I came across the perfect script. In retrospect, it was a funny coincidence that helped give birth to the movie, Kazoku Cinema. Just imagine... a Korean resident in Japan, who escapes death several times, miraculously survives and writes a novel, which is then translated into Korean, which in turn is read by a woman, who obtains the movie rights for the book after the author’s long and arduous scrutiny of my qualification as a filmmaker. Every preparation had been made for filming, when the Korean currency was suddenly devalued because of the financial crisis of 1997. My funds were short of the production cost and I had to take out loans.

In making this movie, I wanted to view the family from a realistic, but not conventional, point of view. One thing I had to make sure was to have a vision for cinema and a vision for the family. The picture is of a family breaking up and dispersing in an ultramodern civilization—in this there is no East or West. This movie is about the conflict between the “traditional family” (first-generation Koreans living in Japan) and the “modern, disintegrating family” (second-generation Koreans in Japan). It is a black comedy, made so by adopting the interesting structure of a film within a film. The viewers can laugh and cry over the reality and routine of the family.

In addition, I also have a film entitled Sung Chul (Sungch’ŏl), 80% of which has been completed but which unfortunately has been interrupted because of protests from some Buddhist groups. The film dailies are sleeping in my warehouse, but I am burning with the desire to finish this work, if it takes my life itself.
Another film of mine that I cherish is called *Bong-ja* (Pongja)—to me the most uncomplicated and the most lovable of all the movies I have made. The movie, shot with a digital camera, is about the mysterious friendship between two contrasting women—one a slightly stammering but ultimately innocent kimpeap maker named Bong-ja (Pongja) and another young woman who has seen and experienced all, called Jadu (Chadu)—and how they embrace the world.

These are my fragmentary thoughts about my oeuvres since the mid 1990s.

I have made over twenty films, but I am still constantly thirsty for more. I stay awake thinking about what I should make next. For me, the commercial success of a movie has no particular meaning. It is not because I have had little commercial success lately—I have made works that became big hits in the past. Of course, if many people watched my movies and I made a lot of money, that would be nice. But what makes me even happier is when I encounter a director who decided to enter the world of cinema because he or she was inspired by my films and has joined the ranks of the best directors. Or, when I run into some drunkards in a cheap bar talking about my works. Or still, I really feel much better when a ‘Park Chul Soo film’ mass-produces a mania as if it were a brand name. (It is no wonder I am still as poor as I have always been. But, some day the sun will shine...)

As many directors do, I tend to get engrossed in trying to catch inspiration by being exposed to all sorts of media, be it objects, phenomena, or people. I try to observe the world with all my senses acutely alert like the blade of a sword. I loathe what is not new. Such things bore me. That is why I do not often go to the movie theatre. I believe that it is cutting corners, and amounts to cheating the audience, when a director cannot constantly make new kinds of work. Because of this tenet of mine, I often hear “the Park Chul Soo film is different from others. It is experimental. It is defiant.”

By making something new, I do not mean simply that the contents, forms, or technical aspects should be changed each time. What I have in mind is that, even when observing the same phenomena or concerns, I must do it with my unique perspective and search dozens, hundreds, of my own ways to increase, decrease, tear apart, and restore them. Only through such a process can one produce a truly creative and unique work of art.

As a strategy to achieve such a goal, I recommend all creative independent souls to take extreme measures. The ‘Middle Way’ is good for religious people, but not for filmmakers. ‘Extreme measures’ might superficially be associated with the word ‘destruction,’ but in fact, extremism or radicalism expands the width of thought from zero to infinity, and is, therefore, a virtue that all artists should possess.

For this reason, I get frustrated and drained when I see Korean movies these days. A few years ago, gangster movies were in fashion, and then came the genre called ‘Korean-style blockbusters.’ Today, everyone is making romantic comedies that teenagers love. Korean movies now account for more than 50% of all the movies shown in Korea, and it is wonderful that Korean audiences are rushing to see Korean movies. However, we ought to discourage movie production that only has the goal of making a profit by blindly following particular styles and themes of commercially successful mainstream movies without artistic struggle and effort. Fortunately, there are a small number of films that are like jewels; thus Korean cinema still has possibilities.

We often hear that lately the Korean cinema has achieved a great leap forward. Many films are recognized in major international film festivals and are also favorably regarded in the market. I see three primary factors for this success. These are the expansion of investment finances, the dedication of talented people, and the emergence of multiplex theatres. However, even these factors that have
nourished the Korean cinema have not always played only positive roles.

With changes in government policy, it became possible for new enterprises to enter the movie business in the late 1990s. Soon an unusual phenomenon emerged of overflowing capital in Ch'ungmuro, the 'Korean Hollywood.' With mammoth capital locked in, Korean movies also show the tendency to become big-scale Hollywood-like blockbusters, and the new expression, 'Korean-style blockbuster,' was coined. The only problem is that most of these movies made with huge capital do not even break even after their openings. It is common knowledge that the most important factor in blockbuster movies is an impeccable narrative structure, followed by spectacular scenes. The fact of the matter is that the extravagant scenes are there, but only on the basis of loosely woven storylines. Who would want to watch such movies? This is an urgent problem that Korean cinema has to solve.

Since the 1990s, many talented people have entered the world of movies and have been very active. In the past, most new directors were in their late 30s or 40s. Today, they are in their 20s, and early to mid 30s. Some are trained entirely in Korea, and others have come back after a period of study abroad. Irrespective of where they have been trained, their common characteristic is that each of them looks at film through his or her own point of view, and seeks both artistic and commercial objectives at the same time, which is enhancing the vitality of the film industry.

As a person who has founded a school for future film artists, I feel a heavy sense of responsibility whenever I encounter young people who will some day be the leaders in Korean cinema. As I mentioned before, I constantly try to sharpen their senses and demand that they look at the world in their own unique way. I refuse to limit their education to a fragmentary knowledge of film studies or techniques. Just as I did not learn from books when I was young, I want to transmit to them what I felt and learned as I produced movies out in the field.

Finally, I recognize that the advent of multiplexes has played a role in expanding the pie share of Korean cinema. With a motto of 'convenience' and 'variety of choices,' multiplexes began mushrooming like bamboo shoots after a rain. They came to attract all kinds of viewers, especially the middle-aged, and some people claim that multiplexes have contributed greatly to the Korean cinema’s occupying a higher proportion of the market. But behind such positive development is an all-out commercialism. While commercially successful films occupy several movie theatres at the same time, others that are not so popular at their openings are immediately withdrawn from the market. As a result, the movie industry has gotten its priorities all mixed up. Instead of worrying about the quality of the film, they focus on large-scale marketing tactics and on strategies for acquiring massive material and financial resources. Thus the flourishing of multiplexes, far from promoting diversity of films, has enriched only those films made with great production cost, featuring famous stars, which are conducive to early commercial success. With multiplexes, the rich have gotten richer and the poor poorer. The multiplex is not a magic wand creating new viewers, but new audiences are bound to appear, as a new multiplex is added almost daily. However, there will be a limit to this trend. This is because the number of viewers is closely related to the general economy and the appearance of alternative productions. In brief, it is crucial that we embrace the advantages of the multiplex but remain fully aware of its limitations. Frankly, I get scared whenever I go to a multiplex. I feel like a coin inserted into a slot machine.

It now costs more and more to produce movies, but the number of films produced is decreasing every year. This trend is partly due to the loss of investment following the failure of big-scale movies, but the ultimate cause is the producers' tendency to invest
only in commercially safe movies. In other words, they do not invest in low-budget, experimental films, which are commercially risky. This is a sad fact for directors like me, although the situation is improving slightly as Korean cinema is still diversifying. Some systematically necessary conditions exist such as increasing the number of theatres that specialize in artistic films or unrated movies, guaranteeing their economic security, but most important, encouraging investors, producers, and many other people in the film world to examine their assumptions about movie-making in various forms and depths. I find it gratifying that of late, young directors, producers, and other filmmakers with such ideas have appeared in Korean cinema.

I have once more rambled on, which makes me feel ashamed. I am reminded of an old Japanese director, who said, “I have made hundreds of movies for decades, but I still do not understand what cinema is.” I feel the same way.

I only know that I still have so many things to do and to say through film. The main obstacle to my creative desire is neither those investors who refuse to sponsor my work nor the finicky viewers, not even the awful toothache that starts on the first day of filming, after having given me no problem for the entire year. The worst obstacle is the lazy thought or hubris, “What I’ve accomplished so far should do!”

What sustained me from those days when I hated poverty even worse than death to this very moment is my intense and experimental way of thinking and practicing. I will continue to work hard with the same attitude until the very last caption of my life is projected on screen.

Next August a new film of mine, Green Chair, will be released. My viewers may once again turn away from it, and the movie might be a replay of my previous works, with their sad fate of only roaming around international film festivals. Even if that should be the case, I will never give up my way of filmmaking. Nothing will stop me.

Appendix

The Korean cinematic world is perturbed these days because of the so-called ‘screen quota’ controversy. Under Article 19 of the Republic of Korea Motion Picture Promotion Implementing Decree, Korean movie theatres are required to show Korean films two-fifths of the time, i.e., 146 days per year, on each screen. The quota may be reduced to 106, following the discretion of the Minister of Culture, or the heads of local government units under certain circumstances. Thanks to this quota policy, Korean movies could not only survive, but could also hit it big, if they are well-made. This helped Korean films gain considerable popularity, and the Korean movie industry has grown at a tremendous speed, especially since the new millennium. Even as late as 1999, Korean movie sales barely made ₩300 billion ($261 million), but in 2000, they surpassed the ₩600 billion ($522 million) mark. The market share of Korean movies jumped from 40% in 1999 to 48% in 2000.

As the Korean movie industry experienced dynamic growth, foreign production companies became both concerned and fascinated. They began to sense that the Korean screen quota is an obstacle to their entering the Korean market. For this reason the superpowers in movie making have repeatedly demanded that the Korean government abolish the screen quota policy. The United States has continued to pressure Korea to reduce the quota to 18 days per year—a half or to 20% of the current quota—threatening that the US-ROK Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT), currently under negotiation, will not be signed unless the quota is reduced. Some economic bureaucrats in Korea maintain that this deadlock is causing serious economic consequences. Some are raising hell, as if all current economic crises originated from the screen quota system.

If the screen quota policy is abolished, the number of Korean films produced will diminish, in which case many young people, who are nurturing cinematic
dreams in spite of the miserable pay that can hardly sustain their basic needs in life, must look for other jobs. Among them are countless actors. Also, even first-rate Korean movies will have a hard time securing 200 movie theatres simultaneously. Hollywood film distributors openly demand, as a condition to showing their blockbuster films, that the Korean movie theatres also show some of their other movies. The reality is that many theatres are actually succumbing to these pressures.

More critically, under such circumstances possibilities of viewing artistic films or independent movies in theatres are drastically diminished. Even today there are numerous cases where signboards come down barely a week after a movie opens. If the screen quota policy is relaxed or abolished, low-budget movies will have a tough time entering the distribution network, and even their production activity will become difficult. The fact that Korean movies have enjoyed more than 40% of the market share annually is partly due to the high quality of many, but also thanks to the current screen quota system.

Relaxing or abolishing the screen quota system will result in yielding Korean theatres completely to Hollywood movies. Officials of the ROK Economic Ministry are promising them financial support, and American movie companies are pledging that they will invest an equivalent amount of money in Korea, but only in mega studios or theatres. For Americans to want to invest in Korean studios and theatres when Korean movie production is in decline shows their intention to infiltrate the Korean movie world from production to screening. This is why the people in the Korean film industry are demonstrating, taking such extreme measures as shaving their heads and sweating under the blazing sun, every time the controversy of the screen quota system surfaces.

The struggle for the screen quota system is a struggle to preserve our culture, and not to benefit a specific interest group. The abolition of the screen quota policy is not just giving up our market share; it is losing Korean culture. When one’s culture is lost, all is lost.

Another worrisome trend in the Korean movie industry today is the increased proportion of the prints and advertising (P & A) costs, the major expenditure of film distribution, in the whole production cost. This is due to the increase in the cost for producing final prints for theatre screenings and in the advertising costs before and after the release of a new film.

---Translated from the Korean text, "Yŏnghwa kamdok," by Young-Key Kim-Renaud

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Notes
1 "hakaeng pugunsinwi"(학문부군신위 [學文府君神位]) is an honorific title written on a tablet identifying an ordinary deceased man. The phrase literally means ‘ancestral tablet for the departed student.’ A man who dies without attaining any significant position in life is identified as a person in preparation for such a position, i.e., a student. — Tr.
2 "sanbuinkkwa" literally means ‘Department of Obstetric and Gynecology’ — Tr.
3 Park Chul Soo founded a non-profit film school called Taejŏn yŏngsang’wŏn (Taejon Film School) in Taejŏn, south of Seoul, in 2002, with the sponsorship of the City of Taejon and the Expo Park—Tr.
4 This law was introduced in 1967—Tr.
5 Statistical figures vary depending on sources. For example, one source cites the following figures for the Korean-film market shares: 16.5% (1999), 27.3% (2000), 32.1% (2001), 27.7% (2002), and 45.9% (2003) (http://news.empas.com/show.ts?20030814n00073/) — Tr.
The Figure of the Gangster and the Rise of Korean Cinema

Peter Yoonsuk Paik

Hyangsoon Yi’s reflections on the fate of art cinema amid the breakthrough success of Korean films both at home and abroad raises the point that directors of art films have looked to the originary divide of cinema—the realist/documentary stance exemplified by the Lumière brothers and the fantastic/artifice approach of Méliès—to renew their craft. Whereas Park Chulsu’s insistence upon the reflexivity of the medium frames a stylistics that can be described as ethnographic and improvisational, Im Kwon-tae’s Chunhyang redoubles the artifice of filmmaking by intercutting a p’ansori performance into Chunhyang to produce an aesthetics aimed at preserving elements of Korean cultural heritage. Both Park and Im belong to earlier generations of filmmakers whose directorial debuts predate the recent rise of Korean film to global prominence. Park’s Kazoku Cinema stands as a remarkable anticipation of the contemporary fascination with reality television, and, furthermore, manages to achieve a level of wit and depth of character missing from those programs. Chunhyang, on the other hand, has the distinction, as Professor Yi writes, of being a p’ansori film, in which the narrative is shown as following the rhythm of p’ansori singing. Even as art films have flourished in the past decade in Korea and achieved international recognition, the current success of more commercial Korean film, I argue, has to do with its capacity to achieve a high level of artistic value within popular genres.

Chris Berry’s paper opens out to an intriguing series of questions pertaining to the translatability and the untranslatability of certain genres and themes. Now the fact of Hollywood cribbing from other film cultures is a far from new phenomenon—there have been successful remakes of French films such as Nikita and Cousin, Cousine, and even that quintessential science fiction blockbuster, Star Wars, is a reworking of a samurai film by Akira Kurosawa called The Hidden Fortress (1958), while Quentin Tarantino’s films have drawn plot elements and even dialogue from Hong Kong and Japanese B-movies. But what does appear startling in the present is the putative cultural divide between East and West that is being bridged when Hollywood studios start buying films from Korea and Japan to remake into big budget productions with well-known stars—Cameron Diaz has been mentioned for the leading role in the American version of My Wife is a Gangster.

Among the films that have successfully crossed boundaries, whether in achieving art house notoriety and cult film status, or in being sold to a major Hollywood studio, it would seem that films dealing with gangsters are disproportionately represented. Takeshi Kitano in his identity as Beat Takeshi has won international recognition for his yakuza films, and Chow Yun-fat’s collaboration with John Woo in a series of action thrillers enabled them both to restart their careers in Hollywood. And one of the most talked about films at Cannes last year was City of God from Brazil, which portrayed the wars over the drug trade fought by rival gangs in the favelas. Within Korean cinema itself, the most successful film to date, Friend, has a chop’ok theme, and gangsters figure prominently
in a broad range of works, even in romances such as Fallan, a tender tale of loss involving a petty criminal and a Chinese immigrant, and genre-bending farces like My Wife is a Gangster. Indeed, films dealing with organized crime travel have tended to travel quite well throughout the industrialized nations, and it is tempting to consider how the gangster might turn out to be a representative subject in this era of globalization.

According to Hyun-Suk Seo in his recent essay, "To Catch a Whale: A Brief History of Lost Fathers, Idiots, and Gangsters in Korean Cinema," the key to the commercial success of Korean cinema in the early 2000s is the figure of the chop 'ok. Seo argues that the long years of military dictatorship, and before that the war and Japanese occupation, have fed a pervasive sense of resignation and despair among young males, leaving them unable to find within Korean society positive models for life and action. The brute force exercised by a repressive political order had discredited or rendered impotent the traditional sources of authority, such as police, teachers, soldiers, and clergy. Thus the figure of the gangster came to exert a spellbinding force upon democratic sons chafing against the yoke of their authoritarian fathers. Seo writes, the "outsider status" of the chop 'ok.

reserves a space for mental integrity and ethical purity that incapable fathers, distrusted cops, and other fragile icons of the military era could never fully assume. They certainly are in a better position to prove themselves to be [more] fun, romantic, reasonable, and even morally righteous than any other social groups... Mutual devotion and group integrity become the ultimate virtue of masculinity that the audience agrees to honor. The appeal of the jopok film, Seo argues, has less to do with depictions of graphic violence or physical prowess than with the "ambivalence of social evil and ethical benevolence" embodied in the character of the gangster. In Bae Changho's comic melodrama Whale Hunting (1984), Seo observes that it is not the courage of the physically slight misfit that fulfills his quest to help a prostitute break free from the gang that pimps her. Rather, it is an unexpected gesture of mercy on the part of the gangster boss, who is impressed by the prostitute's plea to spare her companion in exchange for her voluntary return to the brothel, which provides the resolution to the main crisis of the narrative. According to Seo, Whale Hunting's conclusion amounts to a wishful fantasy, symptomatic of the defeatism felt by the Korean public during the dictatorship of Chun Doo-hwan, in allowing a flicker of compassion, however brief, to flare up in a morally illegitimate figure of authority.

It is interesting to contrast the widespread appeal of the figure of the chop 'ok in Korean cinema to the tremendous popularity enjoyed by mafia films in the United States. In the U.S., I would argue that the classic version of the mafia narrative centers on the leader of a crime family, and thus dramatizes the dilemmas and crises of a subject empowered by taking up a symbolic mandate. Francis Ford Coppola's The Godfather, Part II depicts the dissolution of traditional authority as power and enjoyment have become irrevocably split for the new don, Michael Corleone. The tragedy of Michael Corleone is that his assumption of his father's symbolic mandate as leader of a criminal empire results in the rebellion and eventual loss of his family—his brother, his wife, and his children—whereas his father could both enjoy his power and be recognized as familial patriarch. Furthermore, both the Godfather films and the HBO series The Sopranos evoke the deep unease of consumer capitalist society in which work is recognized as being antithetical to the common good. The appeal of these shows arises out of the feeling that the duties of a mob boss are not different in kind from those of a CEO, as born out by the remarkable scene of the New Year's celebration in The Godfather: Part II in which mobsters and heads of major
American corporations are welcomed in Havana by then-dictator Batista.

In the Korean context, the figure of the chopok is patterned not upon the matrix of the father-son relationship, but rather upon that of the mother-son relation. The film that I think best exposes this ideological mechanism does not belong to the genre of the gangster film, nor is its protagonist a member of a gang. Rather, in the horror film Sorum (dir. Yoon Jong-chan, 2001), the protagonist, Yong-hyung (Kim Myung-min) is a gawky taxi driver whom we later learn is an orphan. At the beginning of the film, we see him moving into a dilapidated apartment, in which the previous tenant had burned to death. By nature a loner, his attachment to his pet hamster, as well as his awkward Bruce Lee impressions, which he performs whenever he is by himself, make it easy for the audience to write him off as ridiculous and pathetic.

However, our own lack of knowledge regarding the strange history of the apartment complex prompts our identification with Yong-hyung as he learns that the body of a woman murdered twenty-five years earlier might still be hidden in the building somewhere. The sudden flickering of fluorescent lights and the falling to the floor of posters pinned to the wall intensify the sense that a supernatural force inhabits the building. Most of the residents of the apartments seem to be mourning one form of loss or another, and Yong-hyung finds himself attracted to an upstairs neighbor Sun-young (Chang Jin-young), whose brutish husband beats her every night. One night, she asks for his help in disposing of her husband's body—she claims it was an accident—and the two shortly become lovers. However, he grows suspicious of her motives—he eavesdrops upon an argument between Sun-young and her friend. Mistaking his lover's rhetorical questions for literal ones, Yong-hyung becomes convinced that she will betray him, and, during a drunken quarrel, strangles her. As he explodes in a rage, Yong-hyung reveals, in a chilling speech about how he has managed to "live comfortably," that he has in fact already murdered at least two people, upending our view of him as a comical figure. The film achieves the effect of an inverse demonic possession—the viewers become unsuspecting spirits inhabiting a body that turns out to be far more brutal and violent than they ever expected.

A writer who lives in the building tells Yong-hyung that the building is possessed by the spirit of the latter's mother, who has summoned him home. He removes a photograph from Sun-young's purse, which reveals that his father had married Sun-young's mother after murdering his own mother, and that he has not only committed incest but also killed his own half-sister. The vicious cycle is instructive. The mother responds to her victimization at the hands of the sadistic father by embracing unconditionally a son who becomes capable of acting out the father's appalling trajectory. The mother's lullaby at the close of the film represents maternal devotion transformed into something monstrous—a devotion from beyond the grave that is willing to accept any action from its object. Indeed, the desire of the mother, reigning unfettered in the absence of the patriarchal prohibition, robs even murder of its spontaneity. On the one hand, the son discovers the pattern of his own fate when he realizes that he has repeated the crimes of his father. What appalls him, though, is the revelation that even his spontaneous lashing out is the object of maternal desire, and hence no longer spontaneous but guided by unspeakable motives—the monstrous maternal that reigns unfettered in the absence of the moral law.

If the Freudian myth of the primal father who withheld sexual enjoyment from his sons speaks powerfully to a South Korea chafing under the authoritarian rule of the military dictators, Sorum highlights the decisive role played by the maternal in perpetuating a brutal patriarchy. The mother responds to her victimization at the hands of the sadistic father by embracing unconditionally a son who is capable of
acting out the father’s appalling trajectory. Indeed, it is a maternal presence that provides an ironic justification of Yong-hyung’s chilling monologue on how to lead a life “without worries.” There are echoes of classical Greek tragedy in how the film exposes the most corrosive fantasies spawned by the family romance in a society attempting to overcome the pernicious legacies of colonialism and military dictatorship.

NOTES
2 Ibid.
INTERPRETING CHRIS BERRY’S FULL SERVICE CINEMA IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT: KOREA VS. BOLLYWOOD

Ranjan Chhibber

As the two featured papers here demonstrate so effectively, Korean Cinema is a true force to be reckoned with. It is only lately that it has been recognized as so, due to the various trade barriers that Professor Berry has pointed out in his paper.

Adding to the reasons he presents for the slow entry of Korean films into the West, it should also be noted that the more popular Asian Japanese and Hong Kong films appealed to the West and other parts of the world more quickly, thanks largely to the appeal of martial arts and on-screen violence. Korean cinema could have easily copied the clichés of the martial arts film, perhaps using its own Tae Kwon Do, but, as Professor Yi has so eloquently pointed out, Korean Cinema is progressing along its own unique cinematic path.

Both of today’s papers are an extremely important contribution to film studies, and are not meant simply for the elucidation of intellectuals, but should be read by filmmakers and producers in other parts of the world that have yet to break into the North American market.

As this convention’s topic is “Crossing Borders,” it would not be out of place to raise the issue of other countries emulating the recent international success strategies of Korean Cinema. India, in particular, could learn from the Korean example.

To cite Professor Berry’s work, once again—I don’t think it can be cited enough—Korean cinema greatly improved with the lifting of protectionist trade barriers and the importing of Hollywood films. For many decades since its independence, India, too, has wrestled with leftist protectionist barriers when it has come to the importing of foreign films and television. It is only in the past decade or so that India has fully opened its film and television markets to outside sources, of which Hollywood is the main player.

Indian filmmakers and producers now stand at the very crossroads that Korean cinema once stood at. Many young Indian filmmakers favor abandoning the Indian visual style of filmmaking, and replacing it with a copied Hollywood model. Yet this solution would not attract international attention to Indian films. The Korean example shows that retaining a country’s own cinematic style will be enough to attract the attention of world audiences.

While Indian films have been made that literally copy Hollywood films such as Fatal Attraction, remade as Pyaar Tune Kya Kiyaa, those are not the films that will make an impression on the world. On the other hand, Hollywood scrambles to remake brilliant and unique Korean films like My Sassy Girl.

Certain Indian filmmakers who have totally abandoned the Indian style of filmmaking, received some attention internationally, but never at the level that recent Korean films have been achieving. Earlier this year, the Smithsonian had a retrospective on Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray; however, Ray’s films are less Indian than they are Italian Neorealist, which rightfully ignores Ray’s copying of European Realist styles.

Korean films represent themselves internationally,
thanks to their filmmakers’ persistence of vision and commitment to their indigenous advances in film form. India, however, is often represented by outsiders, since Indian filmmakers have for the most part been insecure with their cinematic style (Merchant). Nature abhors a vacuum, and it must be filled. And it is filled by Canadian directors, such as Deepa Mehta, who makes films that distort Indian culture for cheap sexual thrills, like her pseudo-ethnographic atrocity, Fire.

Add to this American filmmaker Mira Nair’s deliberate distortion of India, which was screened proudly by this university as an example of an “Indian film,” Monsoon Wedding, and one can easily see what would have happened to Korean cinema if it did not follow the trends pointed out in the previous papers.

Professor Yi’s paper is one that could be extremely helpful in pointing out how India could retain its own unique cinematic style, and still achieve international success. The depiction of Pansori is what helps to give some Korean films their power: the singing and theatricality help to serve as an aural comment on the visual style of these films. These musical scenes are at the very heart of some Korean films, and form crucial sutures between turning points in the films.

This can be related directly to India’s Bollywood film style, in which singing and dancing are just as important as the Korean film. However, some Indian filmmakers have felt somewhat ashamed of these sequences, and prefer to omit them completely, like Ray does; or outsiders claiming to be Indian filmmakers will mock them, as Nair does in Monsoon Wedding. The Indian intelligentsia is largely to blame for disowning popular Bollywood films (see Ashis Nandy’s unartistic wholesale dismissal of Bollywood’s films in his Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema). Either way, until the importance of the musical song and dance sequences are appreciated by the Indian film intelligentsia, then they will not be appreciated by foreign audiences, either, and the rich visual style of these Bollywood films will continue to be neglected.

Korean cinema also can serve as a role model for Indian filmmakers if they emulate what Professor Berry calls its “Full Service Cinema.” India must harness all of its filmmaking styles and be able to recognize the power in all of its genres. India’s intelligentsia is guilty of sidelining the beauty of mainstream Bollywood films, and one only finds Indian film festivals glorifying alternative Indian cinema, and Indian documentary. Aside from a small group of Leftist intellectuals, these festivals are shunned by the majority of Indian moviegoers (Hindustan Times). But if a “Full Service Cinema” model is adopted, and the stigma attached to Bollywood films is lifted by the intelligentsia, then India’s box office potential worldwide will no longer be limited.

Korean cinema is receiving international acclaim for not being being something exotic—it is receiving international acclaim for the same reason films from Western nations do: for its cinematic artistry and illuminating mise en scene.

It is no wonder that Hollywood is anxious to distribute these films and also remake them. They are a testament to the genius of Korean filmmakers. Both of today’s papers should be celebrated for calling attention to these facts, and for their illuminating insights into the progression of Korean films.

By opening their markets to Hollywood, Korean filmmakers did not have to present cinematic caricatures of Hollywood to its local audience. As the Korean example demonstrates, one does not need to jettison one’s cultural vision in the cinema. It also defeats the argument of political protectionists who believe that opening up one’s markets to Hollywood will lead to a destruction of local cinema culture. On the contrary, the Korean example shows that it will make local cinema stronger.

If the other Asian nations, including India, pay attention to Korea’s example, then they, too, can
achieve Korea’s success. Let us hope that Korea’s cinematic success story will spawn sequels in different languages across many borders.

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Remarks on the Korean Film Industry

Harvey Feigenbaum

Introduction

I'm a political scientist and an expert on French economic policy, so when Young-Key Kim-Renaud approached me to be on this program, I understood that I was the obvious choice to be a commentator on these papers.

Before reading these papers my chief knowledge of the Korean film industry came from one dinner I had in Seoul with Miki Lee. Ms. Lee is president of Cheil Jedang Foods and Steven Spielberg's Korean partner in his new Hollywood mini-studio, Dreamworks SKG.

Ms. Lee gave Mr. Spielberg $300,000,000 in exchange for a 10 percent share in Dreamworks.

In addition to being president of Korea's largest food corporation, Ms. Lee is the granddaughter of the founder of the Samsung Chaebol. I think what she and Mr. Spielberg have in common, besides an interest in film (and, I suspect, boredom with the food business) is that both considered Ms. Lee's investment something akin to chump change.

The Argument

I'd like to address my remarks by putting Professor Berry's paper in a broader context. I think Korea's success in the film industry is rooted in the same principles as its more general success in economic development. Korea has been successful mainly by ignoring the advice of American economists. These economists have something akin to a religious faith in market forces which they believe work best when government is least present. Koreans believe that markets left to their own devices do not always lead to optimal outcomes, and that a watchful and active state is necessary to promote the public interest. This is as true in the area of culture as it is in the area of the economy.

Korea's economic success is based on state intervention. If the Korean government did not intervene to protect nascent industries and to encourage large firms, the country would still be largely underdeveloped. Indeed, they only got into trouble when they listened to the American-trained economists of the IMF and liberalized their financial markets, leading to the catastrophic difficulties experienced a few years ago.

In the area of film, Korea has pursued an intelligent policy of protection. They preserve a space for the Korean film industry (though it has been open to more competition since the mid 1990s). The government subsidizes the industry as well by providing a nationally owned film production facility that is open to all Korean film-makers. This has a major advantage, for instance, over the French system of subsidizing film making: in France the money is given out through an old-boy network that favors films d'auteur, art house films which attract only a limited public. The Korean system is more open and is not biased toward just the ultra-intellectual films of High Art. Thus, Korea offers a greater diversity of films, as Professor Berry notes in his contrast with the Taiwan industry. Like the scions
of Hollywood, Korean producers are aware that there is no magic formula for success and that some films, even arty ones, become unpredicted hits.

Indeed, Korean producers, though protected, are very sensitive to the market. The bulk of movie goers in Korea, even more so than in the US, are teenagers, and Korean producers are sensitive to this market. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the Hollywood Reporter last year named Korea the world’s hottest film industry. Moreover, the Korean producers don’t always go it alone. They have been very active in seeking international partnerships to learn how to be successful producers of entertainment. Hence the deal between Chell Jedang and Dreamworks SKG (and hence my dinner with Miki Lee). (Ms. Lee also entered into a deal with Hong Kong entrepreneur Raymond Chow in the area of film exhibition).

**Conclusion**

Let me conclude by whole heartedly endorsing the thesis of Professor Berry. One of the reasons for success of Korean film is that it is a “full-service” industry. A full service industry is important, not only because most films lose money, but because commercial films are often not very commercial and art films are occasionally (though only occasionally), delightfully surprising at the box office.

The one truism in Hollywood is that no one knows what works. It is fortunate for the Korean film industry that Koreans know this, too.
Profiles

Speakers:

Chris Berry


Hyangsoo Yi

Hyangsoo Yi is an assistant professor of comparative literature at the University of Georgia. Her research areas are Korean literature, Korean and Japanese cinema, and Irish literature. Her publications include: “Kurosawa and Gogol: Looking through the Lens of Metonymy” (Literature/Film Quarterly); “The Real, Anti-real, and Transcendental in Four Korean Buddhist Films” (Pathways into Korean Language and Culture, eds. Sang-Oak Lee and Gregory Iverson); “Evolving Aesthetics in Korean Cinema: From ‘Literary’ to ‘Art’ Films” (Getting to Know Korea, Korea Society); “The Journey as Meditation: A Buddhist Reading of O Chŏng-hŭ’s ‘Words of Farewell’” (Religion and Literature); “Neither Mountain Nor Marketplace: Placing the Buddhist Nun in Contemporary Korean Literature” (International Journal of Korean Studies); “Nomadic Imagination and Identity in Korean Literature: A Genealogical Approach” (Korean Literary Thought, ed. Hyung-Chul Chung). She has also written articles on modern Irish drama.
PARK CHUL SOO

Park Chul Soo is one of Korea’s best-known and respected directors, whose films have received critical acclaim in film festivals around the world. He was born in 1948 and studied business management at Sungkyunkwan University. He began his film career first as an assistant director to one of Korea’s premier filmmakers, Shin Sang-Ok. His director’s debut work, “The Rain That Falls At Night” (1979), earned him both the Grand Bell and Paeksang Awards for ‘Best New Director.’ During the next decade he enjoyed a successful career as a producer and director of TV dramas, winning the Paeksang Award for ‘Best Artistic TV Movie’ and Korean Broadcasting Grand Prix for ‘Best TV Movie’ with his dramatization of Hahn Moo-Sook’s short story, “A Festering Finger” (1985). He also dramatized Hahn’s novel, Encounter (1986). In 1988, Park returned to filmmaking. He directed a powerful love story “My Hollyhock Flower” (1988), which swept the Paeksang Awards for Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Director and Best Picture that year. After the formation of his own production company in 1994, Park has directed and produced a series of films, receiving worldwide recognition for his innovative style. His “301/302” (1995) was selected for screening at major international film festivals such as Sundance and Cannes. In 1996, his “Farewell, My Darling” (1996) was a winner of ‘The Best Artistic Contribution Award’ at the 20th Montreal World Film Festival and of the Grand Prix at The 12th Tashkent International Film Festival. “Push! Push!” (1997) explores not only the fears and taboos surrounding childbirth but also the ways that pregnancy and birth reveal social attitudes towards sex and morality. “Kazoku Cinema” (1998) is based on the award-winning autobiographical novel by Japanese-Korean writer Yu Miri. webmaster@parkchulsoo.co.kr, http://www.parkchulsoo.co.kr/html/Main/english/ pes_main_e.html

Opening Remarks:

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Discussants:

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Peter Yoonsuk Paik was born in Seoul, Korea, and grew up in California. After receiving his A.B. from Brown and Ph.D. from Cornell (both in Comparative Literature), he is currently teaching world cinema in the Department of French, Italian, and Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. His work has been published in The Yale Broch Symposium, Religion and the Arts, and Postmodern Culture. His reviews of Korean films have appeared in The Film Journal and The Asian American Village@IMDiversity.com. pypaik@uwm.edu, http://www.uwm.edu/People/pypaik/

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Roy Richard Grinker is Professor of Anthropology and International Affairs, and Human Sciences at The George Washington University. He received his B.A. from Grinnell College in 1983, and his Master’s and Ph.D. degrees in Social Anthropology from Harvard University in 1985 and 1989, respectively. Between 1983 and 1988 he conducted 22 months of fieldwork with the Efe (Pygmies) and Lese farmers of the Ituri Forest, Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire). Publications based on that research include Houses in the
Rainforest: Ethnicity and Inequality among Farmers and Foragers in Northeastern Zaire (1994, University of Chicago Press). He is also the editor of Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation (co-edited and introduced with Christopher B. Steiner) (1997; Blackwell), and In the Arms of Africa: The Life of Colin M. Turnbull (2000, University of Chicago Press). A specialist in Korean studies as well, he has conducted fieldwork in South Korea since 1992 and is the author of Korea and its Futures: Unification and the Unfinished War (1998; St. Martin’s Press).

Young-Key Kim-Renaud

Young-Key Kim-Renaud is Professor of Korean Language and Culture and International Affairs, and Chair of the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at The George Washington University. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Hawaii. She is a theoretical linguist with a broad interest in the humanities and Asian affairs. She is the author or editor of six books: Creative Women of Korea: From the Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century, The Korean Alphabet: Its History and Structure, Theoretical Issues in Korean Linguistics, King Sejong the Great: The Light of 15th-Century Korea, Studies in Korean Linguistics, and Korean Consonantal Phonology.

Kirk W. Larsen

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