

**Enterprises of the Feeble:  
The Makings of Cinema in Colonial Korea**

by

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## **NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION**

Korean words in the text are romanized in the McCune-Reischauer system and Japanese-language words are transliterated in the modified Hapburn system, except for the place-names Seoul, Tokyo, and Osaka. East Asian names in the main text of this dissertation are written family name followed by given name, with exceptions for persons who refer to themselves as given name followed by family name in their own writings. All translations from Korean and Japanese sources are mine unless otherwise noted.

## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I examine the troubled unfolding of Korean cinema in the Japanese empire between the 1920s and the 1940s. I challenge the narratives of film history that those holding the perspectives of the empire have written by foregrounding the coloniality in creating cinema in East Asia. At the heart of colonial articulations of Korean cinema lie its industrial weakness, unappreciated aesthetics, and the filmic representations of feeble figures such as the disabled, wanderers, and orphans. Together, these constitute what I term “the feebleness of colonial cinema.” I investigate various projects through which filmmakers, business people, critics, and colonial bureaucrats have undertaken in order to come to terms with their cinema’s feebleness in colonial Korea. In so doing, I show the different ways in which colonial Korean cinema was defined, articulated, imagined, and created by different actors in this history.

In Part I, “Change Corporatized,” I analyze one of the dominant ways in which the Korean film world wrestled with its own industrial and aesthetic problems: the “corporatization,” or *kiŏphwa*, of the film business in colonial Korea. Faced with the industrial constraints of insufficient resources and lagging technological development, Korean filmmakers sought external aid to form a more rational industry. The discourses and practices of Korean cinema’s corporatization were situated alongside changes in film policies that were enacted during the height of Japan’s colonial wars in Asia and the Pacific. Since the colonial government could provide the help that was necessary to turn the feeble cinema into a healthy film industry, filmmakers in Korea participated in the empire’s project of utilizing cinema as a cultural and

ideological weapon for its warfare. Tracing the changing articulations of Korean cinema from the early debates about the relationship between cinema and Korean audiences to the establishment of state film corporations, I investigate the entanglement between corporatization and imperialization and show how Korean filmmakers' wartime collaboration with Japanese imperialism was profoundly grounded in their visceral awareness of, and longing to overcome, cinema's feebleness.

However, Koreans' colonial experiences during this period cannot be reduced to the sole acts of wartime collaboration. Colonial Korean cinema's industrial and aesthetic feebleness, alongside the representation of the feeble, led to multiple projects that turned the studios into laboratories of the future. In Part II, "For a Feeble Cinema," I reinscribe this feebleness as the manifestation of several different imaginations, despite the highly constrained era, by examining three sites of colonial cinema's contestation and negotiation with the dominant force of corporatization: (1) The rearticulation of Koreanness through early collaborative filmmaking between Koreans and the Japanese; (2) the revaluation of feeble figures on screen not as an undesirable representation of the colonized, but rather as a strategy for promoting themes and aesthetics unique to Korean cinema for broader audiences in the empire; and (3) a theoretical imagining of a visionary cinema that embraces its own vulnerability as a creative energy. At times failing, these projects exemplified the varying ambitions of filmmakers, entrepreneurs, film theorists, and colonial bureaucrats toward colonial cinema. By examining what colonial Koreans failed to do in terms of what they attempted, I argue that Korean cinema's feebleness paradoxically animated and enriched the political and aesthetic possibilities of colonial cinema.

## INTRODUCTION

### When I Say Colony, You Hear Empire

Korean cinema during the colonial period was privative. The meager number of films produced between 1895 and 1945 shows the weakness of the industry: 196 films of all kinds, including fiction and nonfiction as well as feature-length and short films.<sup>1</sup> In Japan, 663 films were produced in 1927 alone—the year in which colonial Korea was its most productive, releasing 14 films.<sup>2</sup> As will be repeatedly stated throughout this dissertation, colonial Koreans had no stable source of funds or equipment for cinematic production; yet they harbored ambitions of filmmaking and kept producing films even while failing commercially or critically.

The enthusiasm for cinema combined with the self-consciousness of feebleness is where our stories begin: The industry was weak, but still cinema was the most advanced popular medium of the era. Some saw cinema's profitability as popular entertainment in the flood of audiences in film theaters that showed American serial films. Others identified through cinema a political utopia created through the sense of belonging among people sitting in the same dark room. And still others might have felt the necessity of controlling any possible upheavals in or

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<sup>1</sup> A search result from the KMDb website run by the Korea Film Archive. Accessed on March 26, 2018. <http://www.kmdb.or.kr>

<sup>2</sup> A search result from the Japanese Cinema Database website run by Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs (*Bunkachō*). Accessed on March 26, 2018. <https://www.japanese-cinema-db.jp>

out of theaters or of utilizing cinema as state propaganda. This being the case, what did it mean to endeavor to make a film under Korea's weak industrial conditions? How did filmmakers in colonial Korea reconcile their privative realities with their ideals about cinema? What *were* the ideals of cinema, by the way, that deepened the filmmakers' lament over their feebleness? And what visions and projects did they create as ways to come to terms with the disparity?

This dissertation examines the troubled unfolding of colonial cinema in the Japanese empire. The cases of the Korean film industry under a shoestring budgets, insufficient equipment, and cultural and political crises under colonial rule foreground the problem of coloniality as one of the key factors that shaped national cinemas in East Asia between the 1920s and 40s. During this period, the Japanese empire pursued the project of establishing new subjectivities serviceable to the purported unity of Asian races against the West during wartime. In the process, the colonized people in the empire, constantly reminded of the colonial hierarchy, renewed their own identities by positioning and re-positioning themselves according to the changing fate of the Japanese empire.

Filmmakers, too, joined in the so-called imperialization (*kōminka*) movement, undertaking the mission to create a new imperial community in East Asia. During this period, cinema germinated in colonial soil—Korean cinema, in particular—grew under the larger purview of the empire's political, economic, and cultural imperatives. Surprisingly, Korean filmmakers' collaboration with Japanese imperialism lingered on well after the dissolution of the East Asian empire, despite being regarded as contradictory to the notion of national cinema in postcolonial Korea. This includes not only the postcolonial condemnation of collaborators for the purpose of liquidating colonial legacies, but also the way in which Koreans imagined and built their national cinema was predicated by the limits and possibilities that unfolded in the contested

site of colonial cinema. As I will demonstrate in this dissertation, the colonial experiences of Koreans, as well as of the Japanese, during this period cannot be reduced to the sole acts of collaboration; a more crucial issue lies in how the constitution of postcolonial nationhood shares the same thematics of colonialism—the notions of progress, reason, and modernity that colonialism utilizes as its own justificatory structures.<sup>3</sup> The stories I narrate in this dissertation reveal the entanglements between Koreans and Japanese, colonized and colonizers, collaboration and resistance, and possibilities and impossibilities.

### *Film History as Colonial History*

Whenever I had to describe this project in a nutshell for curious minds, I often conflated my project of Korean cinema with a history of East Asian cinema during the colonial period—on purpose. That was not only to invite conversation across the historical accounts in East Asian colonies, but also to mark how this project is situated within the very dynamic between colonial and national construction of cultural history; to constitute this film history as an entangled colonial history. And during my yearlong sojourn in Japan between 2015 and 2016, many times when I introduced this project as an “East Asian film history during the colonial period (*shokuminchiki*),” people working on Japanese history replied with a kind smile: “You mean, the imperial period (*teikoku jidai*)?”

When I say “colony,” you hear “empire.” Though not in a strict sense, “colony” and “empire” are represented here as interchangeable. This shows how different histories—Korea’s colonial history and Japan’s imperial history—encounter one another in the same time and space.

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<sup>3</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 36-53.

Film history during *the* period emerges out of the convergence of “colony” and “empire.” The coincidence between film history and colonial history is obvious in Korea, where cinema constituted part of its colonial modernity.<sup>4</sup> It was American missionaries who in the late 1890s first brought cinema to Korea. One of the first movie theaters was established in 1903 by two American entrepreneurs, Henry Colbran and Harry Rice Bostwick, who also built the first steam railway in Korea in 1898. Meanwhile, Japanese residents in Korea opened film theaters in newly created entertainment districts of Seoul, such as the Kotobukiza (est. 1908) and the Naniwakan (est. 1909). As for film production, the involvement of the Japanese Hayakawa Koshū in Korea’s first feature film, *The Tale of Ch’unhyang* (1923) is well known. Also noteworthy are Japan’s efforts to utilize cinema for colonial rule even before its formal annexation of the Korean Peninsula.<sup>5</sup> For example, Itō Hirobumi, the first Resident-General of Korea (1905-1909), commissioned the Yoshizawa Company to film the events and landscapes of Korea and held occasional film screenings for propaganda purposes.<sup>6</sup> Under Itō’s direction, another company, called Yokota, established a branch in Seoul in 1908 and produced films like *Trip around Korea* (*Kankoku isshū*). After Japan’s official annexation of Korea in 1910, the newly established Government-General of Korea organized the Motion Picture Unit in order to make use of cinema as an effective tool for educating and controlling the colonized people.

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, *Korea’s Occupied Cinemas, 1893-1948: The Untold History of the Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 2012); Chōng Chong-hwa (Chonghwa Chung), “Negotiating Colonial Korean Cinema in the Japanese Empire,” in Takashi Fujitani and Nayoung Aimee Kwon, eds., “Transcolonial Film Coproductions in the Japanese Empire,” special issue, *CrossCurrents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 2, no. 1 (2013), 139-69.

<sup>5</sup> Pok Hwan-mo, “*Chōsen Sōtokufu no shokuminchi tōchi ni okeru eiga seisaku*” [Colonial rule and film production of the Government-General of Korea] (PhD diss., Waseda University, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> The Yoshizawa Company produced *Momijigari* (1899), which is the oldest extant Japanese film. For the history of the company, see also Irie Yoshirō, “Yoshizawa Shōten shu Kawaura Kenichi no ashiato (1) Yoshizawa Shōten no tanjō” [Trajectories of Kawaura Kenichi, the owner of the Yoshizawa Company (1): Origins of the Yoshizawa Company], *Tōkyō Kokuritsu Kindai Bijutsukan kenkyū kiyō*, no. 18 (2014), 32-63.

Japanese cinema's early development, too, cannot be severed from the state's expansion as a colonial empire. As Markus Nornes noted in his study of Japanese documentary films, for example, the aforementioned Yoshizawa Company expanded its film business with the so-called *jiji eiga* (current events film) by dispatching its cameramen to capture images of Japan's military intervention in Asia, such as the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900 and the Russo-Japanese War in 1904.<sup>7</sup> These early war films added to the furor of the Japanese audience over the state's military spectacle, mixing fictive and nonfictive elements. While criticized as *yarase*—"staged" or "fabricated"—for being a precursor of the deceptive mode of war propaganda of the later era, "[t]his indeterminate mixture of fiction and nonfiction constitutes a central feature of Japanese cinema in the early period," as Nornes has noted.<sup>8</sup> This central feature, however, cannot be solely about the development of Japanese cinema into the split between fiction and nonfiction. As it unfolded on the stage of the spectacular wars, this early Japanese cinema's mode of *yarase* reveals the mixture of Japan's political reality as an emerging imperial power in Asia and the cultural fantasy that Japan created and fulfilled by actually acquiring new territories. Considering that Japan won Taiwan and Korea as trophies of war at the turn of the century—in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), respectively—the development of Japanese cinema, which mediated the wars, was profoundly tied to the political transformation of Japan as a colonial empire. Wars created spectacles that catalyzed a political furor; then the cinematic fantasies realized themselves when Japan acquired colonies.

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<sup>7</sup> Markus Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film: From Meiji Era Through Hiroshima* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



*When I Say “Colony,” You Hear “Empire”*

As much as they attest to the commensurability between Korea’s colonial history and Japan’s imperial history, these different names for history foreground an incommensurable distance in the narrative modes of this entangled history. These names manifest—and are manifested by—a historian’s present vantage point towards the past. In this sense, whether it is “colonial” or “imperial” is a matter of how one positions herself to reflect upon the colonial or imperial past in relation to the postcolonial present. To a certain extent, I say “colony” because I situate the history within the Korean Peninsula, and you hear “empire” because you relate the history to what happened regarding the Japanese archipelago. My choice of colony, and your choice of empire, then foreground different grammatical subjects of this past history.

But the word “choice” here is misleading—especially when “colony” is heard as “empire,” but not necessarily vice versa. About two decades ago, historian Andre Schmid laid out a critique of the historiography of modern Japan, arguing that historians of Japan had not appropriately accounted for the “Korea problem” while simply isolating Japan’s modern history within its postwar national boundaries.<sup>9</sup> According to him, studies of modern Japanese history up to that time had largely been based on claims for the uniqueness of Japanese colonialism, on the one hand, and the reduction of Japan’s imperial history—which actually harks back to the late 19th century—to the wartime between 1931 and 1945, on the other. The most significant problems, however, come from the lack of attention to the archives composed in the languages of the colonized. Note that this emphasis on the languages of a historian’s archives should not be

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<sup>9</sup> Andre Schmid, “Colonialism and the ‘Korea Problem’ in the Historiography of Modern Japan: A Review Article,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 59, no. 4 (November 2000), 951-76.

interpreted as simply a call for multilingual enterprises.<sup>10</sup> Rather, I consider Schmid's critique as an urgency of inventing new grammars for taking into account the colonial experiences in writing Japanese modern history. In this sense, existing scholarship's disinterest in Korean-language (or any other colonized language's) archives is not in itself critical. The fundamental problem comes from "where interactions between the home islands and the colonies are primarily unilateral, from the former towards the latter." In this writing of history that perpetuates historians' disinterest, Schmid continues, "Japan not only 'extended' and 'undertook,' [...] but also sought to 'carry out' and 'bring about'—doing so 'with vigor, confidence and determination.' The center, be it Tokyo or the seat of rule in the colony itself, emerges as virtually the sole locus of agency."<sup>11</sup> In other words, the Korea problem requires that a historian think upon how to discover the active voices of the colonized, which are in many cases articulated only in passive-voice sentences.

Schmid's critique has since reverberated with his generation of historians, who produced more nuanced accounts of Japan's colonial history, bringing to the fore the agencies of the colonized, including but not limited to Koreans, Ainu, and Okinawans.<sup>12</sup> But this has not yet been the case among Anglophone academic writing in film studies. For example, Michael

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Peattie and Ramon Myers, two of the historians under Schmid's critique, published an official letter in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, making a sarcastic remark that they expected Schmid to show the linguistic breadth of archives of his own study. See Mark Peattie, Ramon Myers, and Andre Schmid, "Communications to the Editor," *Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 3 (August 2001), 813-16.

<sup>11</sup> Schmid, "Colonialism and the 'Korea Problem,'" 957.

<sup>12</sup> Notable examples include Kim Brandt, *Kingdom of Beauty: Mingei and the Politics of Folk Art in Imperial Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Katsuya Hirano, "The Politics of Colonial Translation: On the Narrative of the Ainu as a 'Vanishing Ethnicity,'" *Asia Pacific Journal* 4, issue 3, no. 9 (January 12, 2009) <https://apjjf.org/-Katsuya-Hirano/3013/article.html>; Michele M. Mason, *Dominant Narratives of Colonial Hokkaido and Imperial Japan: Envisioning the Periphery and the Modern Nation-State* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Wendy Matsumura, *The Limits of Okinawa: Japanese Capitalism, Living Labor, and Theorizations of Community* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

Baskett's *The Attractive Empire* vividly depicts how Japan unfolded the idea of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere on and off the screens in Asia and the Pacific; however, his detailed account of the transnational history of Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria, and the South Seas takes for granted the unilateral flow from empire to colonies, not vice versa.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Baskett opens his book with a South Korean film, *2009: Lost Memories* (2002), which stages an alternate history in which Japan did not lose its empire in 1945, as a telling example of the commercial viability of the subject of the Japanese empire. Aligning the film with the ongoing disputes about Japan's colonial and war responsibilities in Japanese contemporary media—films, manga, and public discourse—Baskett considers this South Korean re-imagination of the Japanese empire as an attempt “to rewrite their own histories of Japanese imperialism that were similarly ‘tampered with’ or reinterpreted by the Japanese.”<sup>14</sup> But since *2009: Lost Memories* is based in science fiction, its rewriting of history reveals as much about how the film intended to *attract* its audience by creating a non-existent imperial past as about how it *was attracted by* the Japanese empire. In the stories of how Japan has produced an attractive empire—whose lineage remained even in a film of a former colony more than 50 years after its dissolution—this South Korean film is represented as merely a replica of the past ideology in the 21st century.

Of course, we need to be wary of the film's display of an “ideological desire for a [Korean] sub-empire” in Asia, which cultural studies scholar Chen Kuan-Hsing has criticized in the Taiwan context.<sup>15</sup> *2009: Lost Memories*' creation of Korea's own version of an “attractive empire” is not unrelated to contemporary Korea's sub-imperial desire lurking in the so-called

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Baskett, *The Attractive Empire: Transnational Film Culture in Imperial Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Chen Kuan-Hsing, “The Imperialist Eye,” *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 17-64.

Korean Wave, or *Hallyu* of the late 1990s and beyond. However, the back currents from the global consumers of *Hallyu* reveal how a circulation of culture is not solely about the unilateral movements dispatched from Korea's cultural empire. As works in fan studies have suggested, global audiences engage with contemporary Korean culture in their local contexts, not necessarily conforming to Korea's cultural imperialism. Rather, they actively produce and reproduce the Korean Wave, creating a different kind of cultural community.<sup>16</sup> By then, the Korean Wave is not purely about Korea any longer; it has been repurposed for a new generation of prosumers in Southeast Asia, as a self-differentiation through a distant culture in Latin America, or as a critique of the race culture in the US. This is not because the Korean Wave texts are malleable for different purposes, but because of the agencies of their consumers, who also become distributors, producers, and creators, especially in the era of social media.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the different media environment, the same can be said with regard to the stories in this dissertation. I do echo Baskett's view about the development of cinema in East and Southeast Asia as the effect of colonial history; however, that colonial origin of Korean cinema—for example—cannot be reduced to the agency of Japanese imperialism that “either launched the film industry there or at the very least significantly transformed it.”<sup>18</sup> If the visions of empire were “a multicultural, multilingual, multi-industrial enterprise,”<sup>19</sup> then they were driven not only by the centrifugal forces of empire but also the centripetal forces from colonies

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<sup>16</sup> Beng Huat Chua, “Structure of Identification and Distancing in Watching East Asian Television Drama,” in Beng Huat Chua and Koichi Iwabuchi, eds., *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave* (Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 2008), 73-89; Sangjoon Lee and Markus Nornes, eds., *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Youjeong Oh, “The Interactive Nature of Korean TV Dramas Flexible Texts, Discursive Consumption, and Social Media,” in *Hallyu 2.0*, 133-53.

<sup>18</sup> Baskett, *The Attractive Empire*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

that embraced cultural, linguistic, and industrial differences from Japan. The colonized filmmakers were not simply exhausted by an “excuse to expand Japan’s sphere of influence.”<sup>20</sup> As I will discuss, even the most blatant propaganda films still exude some sense of the ambition and vision the filmmakers harbored for cinema in colonial Korea, whether their actions may be called collaboration, opportunism, or resistance. As Andre Schmid has argued, “Writing the history of empire as an outward flow from center to periphery is a necessary part of understanding the Japanese colonial enterprise, but the subject that remains curiously unbroached in [existing scholarship] is the impact of the colonial experience on Japan itself.”<sup>21</sup>

Historiographies of Korean cinema are not immune to this problem, showing that multilingual archives—especially utilizing Korean-language sources—do not guarantee the multilateral exploration of the entangled history. The titles of two recent monographs, Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim’s *Korea’s Occupied Cinemas* and Dong Hoon Kim’s *Eclipsed Cinema*, may best encapsulate this problem.<sup>22</sup> For Yecies and Shim, the Korean film industry was occupied by foreign forces from the beginning to the end of their story: In the earliest phase, the missionaries and entrepreneurs from the West played a central role; the Japanese occupation of Korea determined Korean cinema until 1945; and during the years immediately following the dissolution of the empire, the US military force took over the southern half of the Korean Peninsula and wielded its cultural power. The authors may have chosen “occupation” as a comprehensible term to include different types of international forces. However, as a political consequence of the power imbalance between the occupiers and the occupied territory,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>21</sup> Schmid, “Colonialism and the ‘Korea Problem,’” 957.

<sup>22</sup> Yecies and Shim, *Korea’s Occupied Cinemas*; Dong Hoon Kim, *Eclipsed Cinema: The Film Culture of Colonial Korea* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

“occupation” consequently effaces the historically specific dynamics between an empire and a colony that have built one another—directly speaking, during the first half of the 20th century, no empire existed without colonies, as much as colonies are the result of imperialism. However, if Korea is set in a merely receptive position—as an “important territory for the global expansion of the American and Japanese film industries”<sup>23</sup>—how can we speak for the interaction that transpired from the relationship between empire and colony? Where is the place for Koreans in “a cinema predominantly controlled by non-Koreans”?<sup>24</sup>

These recent projects of Korean cinema history claim to have departed from the nationalist historiography that has pursued the construction of nationhood. In particular, Dong Hoon Kim—who traces the transnational dynamics embedded in the formation of film culture in Korea as larger than the set of Korean films—brings to the fore variegated stories *eclipsed* by the historians who situated them in the “dark age.” Shedding light on the eclipsed stories of Korean cinema, Kim highlights a variety of historical issues such as Hollywood cinema’s popularity and the introduction of Japanese *benshi* shows in silent film theaters. Granted, it should also be noted that the colonial history of Korean cinema is no longer eclipsed by nationalist historiography at least in scholarly discourse.<sup>25</sup> Already in the late 1990s, Yu Sŏn-yŏng had pointed to American

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<sup>23</sup> Yecies and Shim, *Korea’s Occupied Cinemas*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> Overcoming nationalist frameworks has been an important rationale that diversified the English-language scholarship about Korean cultural history. In case of film history, however, I want to note how symptomatic it is that in order to problematize nationalist historiography, scholars often rely on the example of Yi Yŏng-il’s *Complete History of Korean Cinema (Han’guk yŏnghwa chŏnsa)* published in 1969. In fact, already since the 1990s, Korean historians have unfolded many stories—marginalized and “eclipsed” by nationalism—which complicated the binary between collaboration and resistance, the one that perpetuated the notion of national history. Film history, too, has since been revised accordingly, by adopting the thesis of colonial modernity as well as turning to the methodologies of cultural history. When any serious historian will not resort to nationalism as a historiographic frame, it would be another form of cultural essentialism to paint Korean historiography as nationalist in order to ground one’s own research upon a “new” terrain such as transnationalism.

cinema's popularity in colonial Korea, conceptualizing the spectatorship in what she termed the "inscription of Hollywood modernity."<sup>26</sup> Also, a new generation of film historians has enriched the scope of the history by producing more nuanced historical accounts with detailed film analyses.<sup>27</sup> Partly thanks to the Korea Film Archive's mid-2000s discovery of more colonial-era films lying dormant in the vaults of overseas film archives, such new scholarship has explored new materials in multiple forms and languages as well as their excavation of new stories of the colonial history—such as audiences in the colonial theaters, the media mixture of film and theater, and the politics of sound in Korean cinema. Their rich accounts of colonial Korean cinema and its interaction with various cultural and political forces converge on a question about coloniality: What is colonial Korean cinema? My dissertation joins them in navigating the history of colonial Korean cinema, yet in a way that engages in a broader conversation with other colonial experiences. In this sense, the question about colonial Korean cinema would be revised in more general terms thus: What is colonial about Korean cinema?

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<sup>26</sup> Yu Sŏn-yŏng, "Hwangsae singminji ūi munhwa chŏngch'esŏng" [Cultural identity in the yellow colony], *Ŏllon kwa sahoe*, no. 18 (Winter 1997), 81-122; "Yukch'ejŏk kŭndaehwa Halliudŭ modŏnit'i ūi kagin" [Bodily modernization: Inscription of Hollywood modernity], *Munhwa kwahak*, no. 24 (Winter 2000), 233-50; "Hwangsae singminji ūi sŏyang yŏnghwa kwallam kwa sobi silch'ŏn 1934-1942" [Spectatorship for western movies in the yellow colony, 1934-1942], *Ŏllon kwa sahoe* 13, no. 2 (Spring, 2005), 7-62. Yu's notion about Hollywood modernity as part of Korea's colonial modernity reverberates with Miriam Hansen's "vernacular modernism" as they both highlight how Hollywood films embodied and disseminated a certain way of experiences of modernity. See Miriam Hansen, "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no. 2 (April 1999), 59-77.

<sup>27</sup> Kim Ryŏ-sil, *T'usa hanŭn cheguk t'uyŏng hanŭn singminji* [Projecting empire, reflecting colony] (Seoul: Samin, 2006); Yi Yŏng-jae, *Cheguk Ilbon ūi Chosŏn yŏnghwa singminji mal ūi pando hyŏmnyŏk ūi simjŏng chedo nollŭ* [Korean cinema in imperial Japan: The peninsula in the late colonial period, and the affect, institution, and logic of collaboration] (Seoul: Hyŏnsil Munhwa, 2008); Yi Sun-jin, "Chosŏn musŏng yŏnghwa ūi hwalgŭksŏng kwa kongyŏnsŏng e taehan yŏn'gu" [The mode of action and theatricality in colonial Korean silent cinema] (PhD diss., Chungang University, 2009); Yi Hwa-jin, *Sori ūi chŏngch'i singminji Chosŏn ūi kŭkchang kwa cheguk ūi kwan'gae* [Sound politics: Theaters in colonial Korea and audience of the empire] (Seoul: Hyŏnsil Munhwa, 2016).

### *Colonial Cinema and Febleness*

The term “colonial cinema” is in fact a slippery notion. Different contexts may determine the notion differently: a cinema *from* colonies, a cinema *about* colonies, and/or a cinema *for* colonies. In its diversity, this multiple implication represents the relationship between cinema and colony as obscure: Does it situate cinema in its place of origin? Is it about an object of representation? Or does it refer to any function of cinema in the colony—entertainment, education, or propaganda? We can unpack this conceptual trouble within a leftist discussion of colonial cinema in 1930 in Japan. In his essay “On Colonial Cinema,” published in *Proletarian Cinema*, Sasa Genjū—then the central figure of Japan’s proletarian film movement—shared with readers the difficulties in defining colonial cinema.<sup>28</sup>

[Colonial cinema] may refer to films with colony as their backdrops, or films that stage colony. Or it does no harm to include films that cover lands that were previously unreclaimed but now formed capitalist states—such as Paramount Pictures’ *The Virginian* (1929). Also films taking colonial and semi-colonial nations as subject matter, and by extension, films covering the oppressed nations, [may be included in the category]. MGM’s *Hallelujah!* (1929) is an example.<sup>29</sup>

By this definition—“for convenience,” as Sasa himself has confided—colonial cinema depends on the notion of colony as a filmic subject matter. This is based on his assumption that regardless of generic differences—among educational films produced by the government, avant-garde art cinema, humanitarian films, and commercial films—cinema representing colonies would ultimately serve as capitalist propaganda. Sasa’s argument may not sound so foreign to

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<sup>28</sup> Sasa Genjū, “Shokuminchi eiga ni tsuite” [On colonial cinema], *Puroretaria eiga* 2, no. 9 (October 1930), 16-27.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.



those familiar to Iwasaki Akira's discussion about cinema in capitalist society.<sup>30</sup> As Sasa did for colonial cinema, Iwasaki drew on a typology of cinema's ideological commitment—such as tourism, war, patriotism, religion, bourgeois ideology, and petty bourgeois ideology—to show how all converged on a single problematic: Cinema is a means of propaganda and agitation. Sasa Genjū's colonial cinema, in this sense, is added to Iwasaki's taxonomy of capitalist propaganda, as it represents a type of cinema with which to utilize a colony and its exotic people and landscapes as a commercial vehicle.

What is absent in Sasa Genjū's discussion of colonial cinema, however, is any specific consideration of Japan's own colonies. In fact, his essay was part of *Proletarian Cinema's* special issue about colonial cinema. Along with his essay, the magazine's special issue included photo-montage pages with anti-colonial slogans, a review of *Storm over Asia* (*Pomotok Chingiskhana*, dir. Vsevolod Pudovkin, 1928), and two letters from activists in colonies; but none of them mentions either Japan's official colonies like Korea and Taiwan or internal colonies like Okinawa and Hokkaido. The photo montage displays African American rallies with a caption about upheavals in “China, India, Indonesia, and American Blacks [that called for] overthrowing imperialism”;<sup>31</sup> *Storm over Asia* is a Soviet film about Mongols against British imperialism, but not about Japanese imperialism; two correspondences were sent from North Karafuto (North Sakhalin, then occupied by the Soviet Union) and Shanghai.

Of course, it may be a hasty conclusion that Japan's leftists in the 1930s were not interested at all in their country's colonial enterprises—we also find that the initial editorial plan

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<sup>30</sup> Iwasaki Akira, “Senden sendō shudan toshite no eiga” [Film as a means of propaganda and agitation], pt. 1, *Shinkō geijitsu*, no. 1 (February 1929), 19-30; pt. 2, no. 2 (March 1929), 33-46.

<sup>31</sup> *Puroretaria eiga* 2, no. 9 (October 1930), photo pages.

for this special issue included an essay about censorship in colonial Korea.<sup>32</sup> Yet the total absence of any of Japan's colonies results in a certain degree of abstraction of colonial realities, which led to the lack of attention to the agency of the colonized. When it comes to Japan's high-profile film activism in the 1920s and 30s, we should remember that it did not stop at the mere critique of capitalism. In fact, what stands as a milestone next to Iwasaki's essay "Cinema as a Means of Propaganda and Agitation" is Sasa Genjū's 1927 "Toy, Weapon: Movie Camera."<sup>33</sup> In the essay, Sasa called for reappropriating the bourgeois leisure machines for proletarian cinema: If cinema was a means of capitalist propaganda, why not for the communist revolution? Nonetheless, such a vision is missing in Sasa Genjū's critique of colonial cinema. In this understanding, "colony" for colonial cinema falls into a representation that is merely inflected by the bourgeois ideology. Under the representation serviceable for capitalist propaganda, the colonized then remained passive in the making of their own cultural enterprises.

While the word "colonial" was abstractly configured as imperial aggression for Japan's leftists, it was a reality lived by those in a colonized world. We identify the disparity between the intellectuals in the empire's home islands and those in the colony from a roundtable discussion held in March 1930 by leftist film magazine *New Cinema* (*Shinkō eiga*)—the precursor of *Proletarian Cinema*—and joined by Korean filmmaker Kim Yu-yōng along with other Japanese leftist film activists based in Tokyo.<sup>34</sup> The discussion was getting heated over the so-called tendency film (*keikō eiga*), a genre of commercial films made with leftist subject matter by

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<sup>32</sup> See the advertisement of *Puroretaria eiga*'s October issue published in *Puroretaria engeki* (October 1930), inside back cover page.

<sup>33</sup> Sasa Genjū, "Gangu buki satsueiki" [Toy, weapon: Movie camera], *Senki* (June 1928), 29-33.

<sup>34</sup> "Shinkō eiga zadankai" [Roundtable on new cinema], *Shinkō eiga* 2, no. 3 (March 1930), 66-77. Other participants include Isikawa Osamu, Kotoki Sōjirō, Okada Shizue, Takehara Reiji, Sakura Fujiko, Kino Minako, Yamamura Yōzō, and Noda Tadao.

filmmakers sympathetic to social movements. Though laying out criticism about the vices of capitalism, tendency films were not completely satisfactory for the activists who envisioned proletarian cinema. For them, these films would be another piece of evidence that showed the impossibility of proletarian cinema in the mainstream industry. However, Kim Yu-yŏng, the only Korean participant, must have thought differently, when he abruptly asked, “But wasn’t *What Made Her Do It?* great enough?”<sup>35</sup> to which another Japanese participant responded, “That tendency film still fell short of a proletarian film.” Admitting the film’s defects as a genuine proletarian film, Kim still argued that those disadvantages should be “extenuatory” (*jōjō shakuryō*) considering the conditions in which its makers struggled to produce “that much” criticism about capitalism.<sup>36</sup> Where the Japanese saw the limitations of the bourgeois film industry, Kim rather identified a potentiality for necessary critiques of contemporary society. Returning to Korea, he wrote a review of *What Made Her Do It?*, addressing to Korean readers his point that had been unaccepted by the Japanese leftists:

As long as this film does not contain any reactionary color, we can consider this as one of our films. In other words, while not a purely proletarian film, [it is] still among the films that disclose proletarian tendency.<sup>37</sup>

Kim’s endorsement of a film that the Japanese leftists refused to celebrate shows how the shared language of international communism was spoken differently for different experiences.

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<sup>35</sup> *What Made Her Do It?* (*Nani ga kanojō o sō sasetaka*, 1929) was directed by Suzuki Shigeyoshi, one of the characters later in this dissertation. His Korean film co-directed with Yi Kyu-hwan, *The Wanderer* (*Nagūne*, 1937), will be discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>36</sup> “Roundtable on new cinema,” *Shinkō eiga* 2, no. 3 (March 1930), 76.

<sup>37</sup> Kim Yu-yŏng, “*Pandora ūi sangja wa p’uro yŏnghwa Muōsi kŭ yŏja rŭl pogosō*” [Review of *Pandora’s Box* and *What Made Her Do It?*], pt. 5, *Chosŏn ilbo* (April 3, 1930), evening edition, 5.

This gap is opened apparently between the empire's center and the colonial worlds.<sup>38</sup> Kim's different assessment of the film was rooted in the colonial realities with which he was living. In Korea, the leftist film movement was not as strong or organized. Let alone the support groups like Japan's Society for Prokino's Friends (Purokino Tomo no Kai), whose wide membership included renowned filmmakers such as Itō Daisuke and Mizoguchi Kenji,<sup>39</sup> the Korean leftist film movement did not even have the financial and technological resources to continue its activities. Under this situation, films like *What Made Her Do It?* seemed rather revolutionary as they fulfilled, if only partially, the dreams of Korean leftists. At the roundtable in Tokyo Kim was speaking of his devastating experiences of colonial filmmaking, which his Japanese "comrades" regrettably did not understand.

My understanding of colonial cinema is grounded in filmmakers' painful acknowledgment of their reality in colonial Korea. Here, I consider colonial cinema as a cinema that emerges out of colonial realities, a cinema that had to come to terms with the feeble conditions in the colony. What I call the "febleness of colonial cinema" is drawn from three characteristics of Korean cinema. First, as mentioned above, Korean cinema was feeble in terms of its industrial structure. Here I use the term "industry" to describe the practices of production, distribution, exhibition, and consumption, but in fact, we could say that Korean cinema did not have an industry proper. Film production was at the whims of individual investors. Without

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<sup>38</sup> Lu Xun also noticed coloniality as a blindspot of Japan's leftists when he translated Iwasaki Akira's aforementioned essay "Film as a Means of Propaganda and Agitation" in 1930. In his translator's note, Lu Xun pointed that what Iwasaki described as the problems of bourgeois ideologies was much more complicated in semi-colonial Shanghai due to another power dynamics between colonial forces and Chinese film audiences. See Victor Fan, *Cinema Approaching Reality: Locating Chinese Film Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 48-53.

<sup>39</sup> For the full membership of the Society, see Takada Tamotsu, "Purokino Tomo no Kai ni tsuite" [On Society for Prokino's Friends], *Puroretaria eiga* 2, no. 7 (July 1930), 83.

anyone specializing in the distribution business, many of the filmmakers had to tour the country to show their films. And the profits gained from film screenings did not feed back to the poverty-stricken filmmakers. When only “insults and debt” remained in their hands,<sup>40</sup> these filmmakers yearned for external help to rescue them from this perpetual industrial weakness. In the 1930s, colonial filmmakers’ awareness of their feebleness gradually unfolded in the discussion about corporatizing Korea’s film business. As we will see in Chapters 2 and 3, the logic of corporatization would be later appropriated for justifying wartime collaboration with the empire, which claimed to nurture the inchoate colonial cinema.

Secondly, the films produced under privative conditions were generally considered rubbish. They were neither aesthetically pleasing nor technically well made. While colonial audiences still loved to watch Korean films, to which they could relate, Korean films were considered inferior to those productions from Hollywood or Japan. In that regard, colonial-era Korean films have no entry into the realm of world cinema filled with great films and their artists. However, there were some film critics in colonial Korea, like Im Hwa, who tried to reframe the rubbish Korean films as retaining a unique creative agency; as we shall see in Chapter 6, Korean cinema’s singular aesthetics differ from those of any other cinema, and more importantly, differ in themselves. The poor quality of colonial cinema, in this sense, may provide us with an alternative mode for cinema historiography that does justice to the marginal, peripheral, and thus oftentimes neglected cinemas, while not judging them by the standards set by the dominant film aesthetics.

Third, on the level of representation, cinema screens in colonial Korea brimmed with images of the feeble, such as madmen, sick people, drifters, and orphans, as if films had been

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<sup>40</sup> Na Un-gyu, “Sinbyŏn sanhwa” [Idle talk of mine], *Taejung yŏnghwa*, no. 3 (May 1930), 17.

self-reflexive about the feeble industrial and aesthetic conditions. On the one hand, this representation of feeble figures contributed to defining the general impression about Korean cinema as somewhat unpleasant, gloomy, and dismal. As Korean cinema came into more contact with the audiences outside the peninsula in the 1930s, some Korean film critics began taking issue with the dismalness characteristic of Korean cinema, requesting that films conform to the more hopeful ideology of the Japanese empire. However, on the other hand, the feeble figures can be understood as a cinematic translation of colonial experiences that were grounded in the dismal reality. In this sense, as we will see in Chapters 4 and 5, if the call for a more cheerful representation drew on the larger viewership of the empire, the continuing representation of feeble figures was speaking to the very domestic audiences in colonial Korea.

To narrate this history that emerged out of feeble colonial cinema is to look back at the numerous failures that filmmakers, bureaucrats, businesspeople, and film critics made in their contribution to the formation of Korean cinema: Failures in producing films; in generating a new public through cinema; in representing better images of Korea; in exporting films overseas; and in theorizing cinema. Embarking on this journey through colonial history, I have to note that the failures, while resulting from a purported lack, manifest the constant attempts that these historical actors made. And each of these attempts highlights the various projects of colonial cinema. Thus, in this dissertation, I examine as much what colonial Koreans failed to do as what they attempted: the visions embraced in their failed attempts. In the contested site called colonial cinema, the actors of this history harbored, projected, and actually tested their visions for a new cinema to come. Colonial cinema was an enterprise of the feeble.

## *Enterprises of the Feeble*

This dissertation investigates various enterprises of the feeble in its two parts, each of which consists of three chapters. Part I, “Change Corporatized,” traces discursive, industrial, and legal formations of Korean cinema from the mid-1920s to the 1940s. In Chapter 1, “The Colonial Masses,” I examine the debates about Korean cinema triggered by a film, *Arirang* (1926), and its popular success—the first success for a Korean film world that had just started producing commercial features in 1923. The chapter explores how Koreans began navigating cinema’s possibilities for generating a new public by envisioning a collective cinematic experience based in ethnicity as well as class, despite the colonial situation. Chapter 2, “Talking (About) Korean Films,” continues to discuss the formation of colonial Korean cinema, now with the advent of sound cinema technology in the early 1930s. Sound cinema, introduced even before Korean cinema found its maturation in the form of silent cinema, posed a great challenge for Korean filmmakers, who now needed to think about securing their business in a more healthy and rational industrial structure. Their efforts for “corporatization,” or *kiŏphwa*, led to the story in Chapter 3, “Corporatization as Imperialization,” of political entanglements with Japanese imperialism, which sought to utilize cinema as a means for war propaganda. In this chapter, I explore the period when the notion of Korean cinema was transformed by conforming to Japan’s project of imperialization. With these three chapters, Part I narrates a story of how Korean cinema was first imagined and celebrated as a vehicle for setting colonial culture in motion, and how its mobility was ironically demarcated by the very force that allowed that mobility—one that actually rendered mobility into mobilization.

However, this mobilization as a historical consequence entailed a much more complicated process because of the agency of the colonized, who harbored diverse ambitions for

their cinema in the ever-changing colonial reality. Hence, the three chapters in Part II, “For a Feeble Cinema,” zoom in on three sites of negotiation and contestation, in order to see how filmmakers, entrepreneurs, and film theorists attempted to redefine colonial Korean cinema quite differently than the terms determined by the centrifugal flow of imperialism. The first two chapters in Part II delve into Korean filmmakers’ strategies for producing and distributing Korean films. In order to arrange for filmmaking resources, Koreans sought to produce films together with more advanced Japanese filmmakers, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, “Imperial Ethos, Colonial Pathos.” This chapter shows how the imperatives to expand Korean cinema’s global market triggered a reflection on Koreanness, as filmmakers became conscious of the gazes of the others in forming Korean cinema’s local color at the expense of the representation of colonial realities for Korean audiences. The issue continues to be discussed in Chapter 5, “Boys Written In, Girls Written Off,” where a Korean film entrepreneur strategizes to produce films about Korean children in order to cater to the audiences in Japan’s imperial center. The chapter examines films such as *Tuition* (*Suŏmnyo*, 1940), *Homeless Angels* (*Chip ŏmnŭn ch’ŏnsa*, 1941), and *Love and Vow* (*Ai to chikai*, 1945), in particular, to show that colonial cinema was redefined as a child as much as it offered representation of children. If these two chapters discuss more industrial projects, Chapter 6, “Cinema That Has (Yet) to Come,” investigates theoretical imaginations for colonial cinema. Drawing on film critic Im Hwa’s intervention into the corporatization of the early 1940s, the chapter explores how a different cinema could still be articulated, despite the fraught era of wartime mobilization in the Japanese empire. Though failed, the theoretical exploration of the potentialities of colonial cinema would teach us how to think about a privative cinema that often falls out of significance in the history of a world cinema written in the grammar of great auteurs, masterful artisans, and well-established industries. The



conclusion of the dissertation summarizes the stories with multiple projects of colonial cinema and connects them with the afterlives of Korean cinema in the postcolonial era. From the history of colonial cinema—the archive of indeterminate futures in the past—I conclude by bringing into question once again the position of a film historian. How shall we narrate this history full of indeterminate futures? When one says empire, we say colony.

**PART I**

**Change Corporatized**

## CHAPTER 1

### The Colonial Masses: The First Korean Cinema Debates

#### *Arirang and Korean Cinema's Discursive Formation*

A bell rings to signal the beginning of the screening. The light dims. And then when the large title *Arirang* appears on screen, the audience applauds all together. This has a different taste from the masterpieces of Western cinema. Even though there's no national border in art, [*Arirang*] was made by our countrymen: The closer the film is to our own environment, the bigger the joy grows.

—From Ko Han-sŭng's review of *Arirang* in 1926

The first chapter of Korean cinema typically begins with *Arirang* (1926), a film that endowed its hero Na Un-gyu with the title of the “father of Korean cinema.” The film depicts how a mentally-ill young man Yŏng-jin has suffered under the brutal exploitation of the landlords, which precipitates a conflict between tenant farmers and Ki-ho, the landlord's agent. At the end of the movie, Ki-ho attacks Yŏng-jin's sister and Yŏng-jin in turn, driven to madness, kills him. As Yŏng-jin is arrested for justifiable homicide, people sing the song of “Arirang” on and off the screen altogether. The legend has it that the silent film narrators called *pyŏnsa* (known as *benshi* in Japan) would oftentimes spontaneously improvise a critique of the Japanese colonial rule by commenting on the film's depiction of the suffering of peasants as that of the colonized. Interpretations such as these, while reinforcing the ethnic sense of belonging among Korean audiences, could also turn the film theater into an unruly space of rebellion by the

enflamed viewers. When this happened, the attendant colonial police in the theaters would immediately stop the show and arrest the *pyōnsa* if necessary.

The impact of *Arirang*, which is said to have filled the hearts of colonial Koreans with the spirit of resistance against Japan, has extended far beyond the colonial period. The film is no longer in existence along with hundreds of other missing films produced during the colonial period.<sup>1</sup> The very absence of the film has since boosted its legend not simply as a silent film classic but as an exemplar of Korean cinema. Especially in the 1960s, film historians in both North and South Korea endeavored to decolonize Korean cinema—whose recent past had been tainted with the dark history of its collaboration with Japanese imperialism—and they identified the pure ideals of Korea’s independence and nationhood from *Arirang*.<sup>2</sup> Although the film was already no longer available for viewing, *Arirang* was christened *the* anti-Japanese film (*hang-Il yōnghwa*) for having exemplified Korean cinema’s undercurrent of consistent spirits in anti-colonial struggles.<sup>3</sup> By reassessing and yet upholding the purported spirit of *Arirang*, postcolonial film historians in both North and South Korea rebuilt their national cinemas.

With the 1990s turn in the field of Korean film studies to a more empirical and historical approach, new scholarship has challenged the nationalistic film historiography. For example, film historian Cho Hŭi-mun argues that *Arirang*’s director could be Japanese Tsumori Shūichi,

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<sup>1</sup> The loss of *Arirang* has also boosted its legendary status, endlessly reproducing the speculation and inciting the public imagination. Rumor has it that its prints are still kept in the personal archive of Kim Jong-il, the deceased North Korean dictator who is also well-known film enthusiast. Abe Yoshinige, a Japanese film collector, has long argued that his film collection included *Arirang*, but the release of the catalog after his death in 2005 confirmed the opposite.

<sup>2</sup> Cho Hŭi-mun, “Nambukhan ũi Na Un-gyu yōn’gu hyōnhwang kwa pigyo” [Comparison between studies of Na Un-gyu in North and South Korea], *Yōnghwa yōn’gu*, no. 16 (February 2001), 159-200; Kim Ryō-sil, “Sangsangdoen minjok yōnghwa *Arirang*” [*Arirang* as an imagined national cinema], *Sai*, no. 1 (2006), 239-70.

<sup>3</sup> Kang Ho, *Na Un-gyu wa kŭ ũi yesul* [Na Un-gyu and his arts] (P’yōngyang: Munhak Yesul Ch’ongdongmaeng Ch’ulp’ansa, 1962); Yi Yōng-il, *Han’guk yōnghwa chōnsa* [Complete history of Korean cinema] (Seoul: Samaesa, 1969).

not Na Un-gyu whose role was, according to Cho, limited to merely composing its screenplay.<sup>4</sup> While Cho's contention regarding the authorship in early Korean cinema is based on today's conception of directorial authority in filmmaking, and should thus be reconsidered in terms of the ambiguous division of filmmaking labor of the time, it has sparked a scholarly debate about the validity of labeling *Arirang* as an "anti-Japanese film." In a similar vein, Yi Chŏng-ha examines the contemporary discourse about *Arirang* and contends that the film was received as less a politically-committed anti-Japanese film than an action adventure genre film.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, all the remaining resources such as scripts, *pyŏnsa* narration records, as well as the film's novelization reveal that the film, at least on the textual level, did not include any direct reference to Japanese colonialism. Rather, empirical examinations of remaining documents about the film suggest that *Arirang* had a stylistic affinity with popular American films, to which even Na Un-gyu testified in 1936.<sup>6</sup> Recent revisionist scholarship goes further to raise a historiographical problem: The overemphasis on this single film has marginalized other important factors that contributed to the heterogeneity of early film culture in colonial Korea, such as the influence of American cinema and the Japanese involvement in colonial filmmaking. To a certain degree, it is this process of demystifying *Arirang* that has fueled the revised study of early Korean film history.

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<sup>4</sup> Cho Hŭi-mun, "Yŏnghwa *Arirang* ūi chaep'yŏngka" [Re-evaluation of *Arirang*], *Yŏnghwa yŏn'gu*, no. 13 (December 1997), 158-81.

<sup>5</sup> Yi Chŏng-ha, "Na Un-gyu *Arirang* ūi chaegusŏng *Arirang* ūi hwakgŭkchŏk hyogwa hogŭn hyogwa ūi saengsan" [Reconstruction of Na Un-gyu's *Arirang*: The action effect of *Arirang* and its reproduction], *Yŏnghwa yŏn'gu*, no. 26 (August 2005), 265-20.

<sup>6</sup> Na Un-gyu, "*Arirang* ūl mandŭl ttae" [When I was making *Arirang*], *Chosŏn yŏnghwa*, no. 1 (October 1936), 46-49.

Whether it was an anti-Japanese film or simply a popular entertainment film, however, it is undeniable that *Arirang* was a historical event that vouched for the viability of Korean film production in the 1920s. Indeed, this 1926 film was so popular that, by 1946, it was screened at least 800 times in Seoul alone. Everywhere during the colonial period, one could hear people sing its theme song “Arirang,” now remembered as the most popular folk song, while its origin in the 1926 film has been forgotten.<sup>7</sup> Along with other films based on similar motifs and stories, Na Un-gyu made two sequels in 1930 and 1936, seeking a revival of his fame from the late 1920s. Indeed, in his 1940 historiography, Im Hwa would go as far as to coin the silent era of Korean cinema as “the era of Na Un-gyu.”<sup>8</sup> Given these iterations of the film’s popularity, what needs to be center focus is not “whether *Arirang* could be reduced into [the category of] national cinema (*minjok yŏnghwa*),” but rather “the cinematic and cultural transformation in Korean film history that stemmed from the film,” as acutely suggested by Kim Sang-min.<sup>9</sup>

But “transformation” may sound a bit hyperbolic, depending on what the word means in the sense of historical continuity and discontinuity. Kim Sang-min, for example, argues that *Arirang* set a milestone for Korean cinema’s style by adopting American cinema’s speed, editing techniques, as well as genre effects. Aside from the difficulties in analyzing styles of a film that no longer exists, however, *Arirang*’s alleged appropriation of Hollywood styles would be a natural development rather than a stylistic transformation. According to the Government-General

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<sup>7</sup> Taylor E. Atkins, *Primitive Selves: Koreana in the Japanese Colonial Gaze, 1910-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Im Hwa, “Chosŏn yŏnghwa paltal sosa” [A little history of the development of Korean cinema], *Samch’ŏlli* 13, no. 6 (June 1941), 201.

<sup>9</sup> Kim Sang-min, “*Arirang* kwa Halliudŭ” [*Arirang* and Hollywood] in Cinema Babel Research Group ed., *Chosŏn yŏnghwa wa Halliudŭ* [Colonial Korean cinema and Hollywood] (Seoul: Somyŏng Ch’ulp’an, 2014), 112. Kim argues that “*Arirang* has a special implication in Korean film history as the first ‘cinema’ (*yŏnghwa*) whose cinematic image disentangled from the lecture and subtitles constituted the narrative in a more active way” (145).

of Korea's yearbook published in 1935, American films accounted for 62 percent of the film market in colonial Korea.<sup>10</sup> Such popularity of Hollywood movies was among the colonial state authority's concerns since it shrank the peninsula's market for films from Japan's main islands. In 1934, the colonial government finally raised the bar for importing Western films by legislating the Rules for the Regulation of Motion Picture Cinema (*Katsudō shashin eiga torishimari kisoku*).<sup>11</sup> Seen from the perspective of the broader arena of film spectatorship in colonial Korea, *Arirang*'s success can be assessed as a culmination of a certain mode of spectatorship that was accustomed to—and fond of—American films. On the other hand, the difficult industrial conditions for filmmaking in colonial Korea remained unchanged even after *Arirang*'s success. Throughout the 1920s, the economic situation was not auspicious for Korean filmmakers who suffered from poverty as the lion's share of their films' success always went to investors and exhibitors. Until the mid-1930s, film production still relied upon one-time investments by speculative capital, rather than secure itself in a more rationalized film company. Even when a filmmaker was lucky enough to secure funds from a random benefactor, film equipment was not readily available so that shooting was delayed.

More than its stylistic challenges or industrial reforms, I argue, the significance of *Arirang* in Korean film history lies in how it immediately triggered a discussion about what Korean cinema is—or rather, what Korean cinema should be—as a popular medium. As mentioned above, *Arirang* has been represented as the first Korean film that bore witness to a sizable audience crowding into film theaters. This unprecedented event has sparked among contemporary filmmakers and critics the following questions regarding the relationship between

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<sup>10</sup> *Shōwa 10 nen Chōsen nenkan* [The almanac of Korea, Shōwa 10 (1935)] (Keijō [Seoul]: Keijō Nippōsha, 1935), 574.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion within the context of legal actions about film in the Japanese empire, see Chapter 2.

cinema and the masses: Who are these people that flocked to see *Arirang*? What do they want from colonial screens? What is to be done in order to succeed the legacy of this film? In other words, what is the prescription for cinema in colonial Korea? In this chapter, I investigate how filmmakers and critics examined the above questions in their attempts to *define* cinema in the context of colonial Korea between the late 1920s and early 1930s. As to the issue of what should constitute cinema in colonial Korea, filmmakers and critics were divided: On the one hand, there was a group of leftists who criticized contemporary films for simply encouraging modern vices of consumerist culture and argued for cinema's important role in raising class consciousness; on the other, popular filmmakers like Na Un-gyu and Sim Hun defended their films as a necessary entertainment that would comfort the colonized people. Despite these differences, Korean filmmakers and critics converged on the vexing issue of the relationship between cinema and colonial reality—in other words, what should cinema mediate in a colonial context?

*“Insults and Debt”*: *The Golden Age or Deadlock of Korean Cinema*

If anyone stops me and asks [...] what is left in my hand: other than *insults and debt*, I have no answer.

—Na Un-gyu, “Idle Talk of Mine” (1930)

*Arirang*'s success ushered in “the era of deluge, or the golden age of filmmaking” to colonial Korea.<sup>12</sup> Korean film production had grown significantly in quantity, releasing 14 films in the year 1927 alone, including *At Daybreak* (*Möndong i ttül ttae*, dir. Sim Hun), as well as Na Un-gyu's films like *Rat* (*Yasö*), *Farewell* (*Chal itköra*), and *Gold Fish* (*Kümbungö*). Producing

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<sup>12</sup> Yun Ki-jöng, “Ch'oegün munye chapkam” [Miscellanea on recent literature and arts], *Chosön chi kwang*, no. 74 (December 1927), 91-97.



about ten films a year on average, this “golden age” continued until around 1932, when the number of films produced dwindled to half.

This golden age, however, was ironically denied by the very filmmaker who was at the apex of his success. In 1930, Na Un-gyu deprecates himself by confessing in a short-lived film magazine *Popular Film (Taejung yŏnghwa)*: “If anyone stops me and asks [...] what is left in my hand, other than ‘insults and debt,’ I have no answer.”<sup>13</sup> Here, the phrase, “insults and debt” succinctly describes the personal circumstances for Na Un-gyu under the discursive as well as practical conditions of filmmaking in colonial Korea. As I will discuss, the debates between leftist critics and populist filmmakers regarding contemporary Korean films demonstrated the irreconcilable distance between two groups. The emerging film critics from the leftist cultural movement deployed sharp, militant and aggressive language against Na’s films. They were soon the target of great hostility from filmmakers like Sim Hun and Na Un-gyu, who took the leftist critique as personal attacks. Serialized in several different newspapers at the time, the debates developed into extreme sarcasm, disrespect, and even mutual slander. By “insults,” Na Un-gyu referred to this exchange, which left indelible scars on both sides.

The consequence of the debate was, in the end, hardly productive, with no tangible contribution to the reform of Korean cinema that both sides pursued. As I pointed out earlier, while cinema was among the burgeoning enterprises in colonial Korea, the disorganized industrial conditions in colonial Korea remained unchanged, despite sincere efforts. Industry mavericks and makers were still suffering from economic hardship, in addition to a basic lack of essential technical knowledge and support. The boom of Korean films rather invited more speculative capital that had no interest in building a proper film industry. Also, without any

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<sup>13</sup> Na Un-gyu, “Sinbyŏn sanhwa” [Idle talk of mine], *Taejung yŏnghwa*, no. 3 (May 1930), 17.

systematic training of film technicians and performers in place, Korean cinema had to contend with a small talent pool. Therefore under such conditions, suffice it say, filmmakers were all worn out, having to work too much with a limited number of people. Colonial censorship, of course, imposed another issue that filmmakers had to confront.

Rather than reforms in terms of industrial structure or cinematic aesthetics, these initial debates on Korean cinema were more concerned about the sociopolitical contexts that surrounded the film culture: the rise of modern masses in colonial Korea as evinced by *Arirang*'s commercial success, on the one hand, and the emergence of leftist cultural movements represented by the cultural organizations such as the Korea Artista Proleta Federatio (KAPF), on the other. In a broader sense, the modern masses were already emerging in colonial Korea with other political and sociocultural events such as the March First Independence Movement in 1919. Astonished by the massive protests against Japan's colonial rule that lasted throughout the spring of the year, the Government-General of Korea initiated the so-called "cultural policy" (*bunka seiji*) to assuage the resistance among Koreans against Japan's military rule, by allowing freedom of vernacular press, though limited, and opening some opportunities for public education.<sup>14</sup>

It was around this time that both Japan and Korea saw a burgeoning interest in leftist culture. In August 1925, two existing coteries of leftist intellectuals in colonial Korea, the Spark Society (Yōmgunsa) and PASKYULA, merged to form the Korea Artista Proleta Federatio, aiming at a more organized revolutionary movement in the cultural sphere.<sup>15</sup> While literature was at the heart of this cultural movement, the members of the KAPF—who were also the leading

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<sup>14</sup> Michael E. Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920-1925* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Sunyoung Park, *The Proletarian Wave: Literature and Leftist Culture in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015). See especially chapters 2 and 3.

cultural avant-gardists—did not neglect the value of cinema. In 1927, some KAPF members like Im Hwa and Kim Yu-yŏng organized a filmmaking organization, Korean Association for Film Art (Chosŏn Yŏnghwa Yesul Hyŏphoe), later followed by leftist film companies such as the Seoul Kino and the Ch’ŏngbok Kino. These companies produced feature films such as *Vagabond* (*Yurang*, dir. Kim Yu-yŏng, 1928), *Dark Road* (*Amno*, dir. Kang Ho, 1928), *Underground Village* (*Chihach’on*, dir. Kang Ho, 1930), and *Wheel of Fire* (*Hwaryun*, dir. Kim Yu-yŏng, 1931). It should also be noted that leftist film movements in colonial Korea exceeded the organized efforts by KAPF. For example, the Association for Film Art also included nonpartisan filmmakers such as An Chong-hwa and Yi Kyŏng-son. Although they soon withdrew from the organization when its leftist members decided to subsume it under the rubric of KAPF, they continued to collaborate with those leftists on different occasions. Kim Yu-yŏng and Sŏ Kwang-je, while sharing the leftist cause, remained outside of the KAPF when the Seoul Kino was incorporated as its subsidiary, and established another film company. Also, Kim Yŏng-hwan, a *pyŏnsa* (film narrator), famous for his performance of Na Un-gyu’s films, directed leftist-themed films such as *Wedding Engagement* (*Yakhon*, 1929); Chu In-gyu, an actor who had a close connection with Na Un-gyu, was in fact a labor activist in his hometown of Hamhŭng, an industrial city in the northern part of Korea; and Hwang Un, a director who purportedly studied filmmaking at UCLA, also produced *Pathetic People* (*Takhan saramdŭl*, 1932) together with Chu In-gyu.<sup>16</sup> Until 1934, when the disbandment of KAPF marked the end of the high-profile movement, there had been at least eight films produced with a clear leftist tendency, mostly feature films aiming at theatrical release.

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<sup>16</sup> Han Sang-ŏn, “Chu In-gyu wa chŏksaek nojo yŏnghwa undong 1927-1932” [Chu In-Gyu and the leftist labor union movement, 1927-1932], *Hyŏndae yŏnghwa yŏn’gu* 3 (2007), 195-218.

For those more activism-minded people around the leftist cultural movement, however, the production of film was never the sole purpose. Because of the popularity of “reactionary” films in colonial Korea, the movement had to also sharpen its critical edge toward the given film culture and lead the filmmakers to revolutionary filmmaking. Armed with socialist theories of art and politics, the KAPF members launched their film criticism around the year 1927. Yun Ki-jōng’s essay, “Miscellanea on Recent Literature and the Arts,” was one such early attempt to adapt the class-based theory of art to the critique of Korean film culture.<sup>17</sup> Among other general remarks on cinema informed by socialist theories around the time, Yun’s “Miscellanea” is particularly important because written under the platform of KAPF’s cultural movement, it manifested the role of cinema as a means to propagate communist ideas, and that of film criticism to guide cinema through such a revolutionary path. Against the conception of art that highlights its own autonomy separated from other sections of society such as politics and economics, Yun insists on the proletarian perspectives of art movements, as a way to recognize the entanglement of art, politics, and economics in a capitalist society. He writes,

Arguing for the autonomous system specific to art is a very deliberate action to separate the art movement from the movement of the entire property-less classes. If what claims itself to be an art of the proletariat does not join in the movement of the entire property-less classes, how could it be a proletarian art?<sup>18</sup>

For Yun—and his KAPF comrades—the proletarian art stands against the idea of natural and autonomous development of art into the revolutionary commitment. In order to serve the interest of the property-less class, it should be guided by a clear direction and purpose. In this sense, the

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<sup>17</sup> Yun, “Miscellanea on Recent Literature and Arts.”

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

art movement should not indulge in artistic autonomy, but participate in the larger political movement; art, in the end, is a tool for agitation and propaganda for progressive politics.

Under the conception of art committed to the political cause, Yun's essay reframes the general leftist platform to suit the Korean context. By directly aiming his critique at contemporary films, he asks for the first time how cinema could be relevant to Korean audiences and their lives. Korean film scholar Paek Mun-im identifies this essay as the first attempt to show how film criticism—which, until then, had been considered merely a promotional vehicle to draw more audiences to the theaters—established cinema's relationship to class and to suggest a way to lead cinema to serve the interest of the proletarian class.<sup>19</sup> For Yun, the purpose of film criticism is to expose cinema's relationship to class and suggest a way to lead cinema to serve the interest of the proletarian class.<sup>20</sup> Paek suggests that Yun's essay, as the first class-based analysis of Korean film culture, has historical significance in two regards. First, it identified American cinema, albeit short of a full-fledged analysis, as bourgeois propaganda, but at the same time questioning the degree to which American cinema “has any relevance to our [Koreans'] life.”<sup>21</sup> Secondly, Yun applied the same measure to his critique of Korean films released in 1927, such as *At Daybreak*, *Farewell*, and *Ox without a Horn* (*Ppul ppajin hwangso*, dir. Kim Tae-jin). He asserted that these films deviated from the proletarian demand for revolutionary arts, and that “this is not the time when we should be satisfied with the cheap

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<sup>19</sup> Paek Mun-im, “Chosŏn sahoejuŭi yŏnghwa tamnon ūi chŏn'gae” [Socialist film theory in colonial Korea], *Taejung sŏsa yŏn'gu* 22, no. 1 (February 2016), 227-64.

<sup>20</sup> Yun's argument has resonance with Iwasaki Akira's argument in his 1929 essay “Film as a Means of Propaganda and Agitation.” In the essay, Iwasaki explores various forms and contents of popular films by sorting them into different categories such as war films, religious films, epic films, etc. Iwasaki's taxonomy works towards the critique of cinema as a propagandistic tool for naturalizing capitalism in the consumerist society. See Iwasaki Akira, “Senden sendō shudan toshite no eiga” [Film as a means of propaganda and agitation], pt. 1, *Shinkō geijitsu*, no. 1 (February 1929), 19-30; pt. 2, no. 2 (March 1929), 33-46.

<sup>21</sup> Yun, “Miscellanea on Recent Literature and Arts,” 95.

tears” that these popular films evoked.<sup>22</sup> According to him, Korean film had to be driven by their own purpose—that is, to raise class-consciousness—to ultimately become what he called the “working-class cinema” (*kyegŭp yŏnghwa*).

Two months later in February 1928, Sim Hun, the director of *At Daybreak* published “On Film Criticism” in a monthly magazine *New World* (*Pyŏlgŏn ’gon*) to refute the leftist film criticisms that followed Yun’s provocation.<sup>23</sup> In the essay, Sim—in the capacity of both a film director who had just directed his debut film, and a film critic who regularly contributed reviews to newspapers—demanded that film criticism be based on its specific conditions for production. In his view, film is, rather than a high art, a “craft” (*kongyep ’um*) that not only utilizes the original material, but is also affected by the industrial conditions of the factory and the techniques of artisans. Because of a general lack in understanding such constitutive elements that contributed to a film’s production, Sim argued, Yun’s criticism fell short of what he called a “genuine film criticism.”

Interestingly, despite their differences, both Yun Ki-jŏng and Sim Hun argued for something genuine, while accusing one another of inauthenticity. Anticipating a true proletarian film, Yun discounted contemporary filmmakers’ efforts to represent the lives of the working-class; Sim’s defense of the filmmakers called for a “genuine” film criticism against the “fake” film critics. In their search for authenticity in film and film criticism, their languages became aggressive and inflammatory as they engaged in the more intensive debates that followed this brief exchange. Suffice it to say, Korean cinema was a battlefield of insults from the beginning of its golden age.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>23</sup> Sim Hun, “Yŏnghwa pip’yŏng e taehayŏ” [On film criticism], *Pyŏlgŏn ’gon* (February 1928), 146-50.

The debates about Korean films reached a crescendo in the summer of 1928, when Sim Hun offered an immediate rejoinder to leftist Han Sŏr-ya's "My View on Film Art," which was serialized in *Chungoe ilbo*.<sup>24</sup> Unlike the previous exchange between Yun Ki-jŏng and Sim Hun between late 1927 and early 1928, Sim Hun's refutation was soon challenged by other writers, which further deepened the antagonism between the two groups. A similar rancor repeated in 1930 when Na Un-gyu released his new film *Arirang Part II* (*Arirang hup 'yŏn*, dir. Yi Ku-yŏng) and *Iron Man* (*Ch'ŏrindo*, dir. Na Un-gyu). But this time, Sŏ Kwang-je launched the first salvo, and other filmmakers like Yi P'ir-u and Na Un-gyu waded in. The series of arguments and counterarguments were directly referring to one another. All the participants deployed derogatory language to reproach each other, repeated the same arguments, and made clear the issues of Korean cinema at hand. The debates, however, failed to narrow down the ideological chasm between the two groups.

The intensification of the debate, which in the end involved most leading filmmakers and critics of the time, was partly due to the media environment that allowed space for them to intensify their arguments. All major essays addressing the debate were serialized in the culture section of newspapers *Chungoe ilbo* and *Chosŏn ilbo*, while the previous essays by Yun and Sim were published in separate issues of monthly magazines, *Light of Korea* (*Chosŏn chi kwang*) and *New World* (*Pyŏlgŏn'gon*), respectively. While both of these latter publications claimed to be general interest magazines, each demonstrated a penchant for different ideological positions: *Light of Korea*, by 1927, was almost like the organ of the Communist Party of Korea, while *New World* was published by the Ch'ŏndogyo nationalist organization. Yun Ki-jŏng and Sim Hun, in

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<sup>24</sup> Han Sŏr-ya (Mannyŏnsŏl, pseudonym), "Yŏnghwa yesul e kwanhan kwan'gyŏn" [My view on film art], pt. 1, *Chungoe ilbo* (July 1, 1928), 3; pt. 2 (July 2, 1928), 3; pt. 3 (July 3, 1928), 3; pt. 4 (July 5, 1928), 3; pt. 5 (July 6, 1928), 3; pt. 6 (July 7, 1928), 3; pt. 7 (July 8, 1928), 3; pt. 8 (July 9, 1928), 3.

this sense, were addressing each other, and yet from a safe distance of their respective places. Meanwhile, when the arena of the debates was relocated on the same plane of the newspaper, the polemics quickly escalated. Also, unlike the monthly publications of magazines, the daily schedule of the newspaper enabled the contributors to immediately wade into the dispute. The readers, of course, followed the debates transpiring every evening with the publication of each new edition.

### *The Masses Reconsidered*

From the debates, we may extrapolate some key terms that determined the problematics of Korean cinema during the colonial period: masses and reality. While these issues were inseparable in each writer's argument, the focus of the discussion had been slightly different between the debates in 1928 and 1930. As I will discuss in detail, the 1928 debate laid out the problem of defining film audiences, whether they be called the "masses" (*taejung*) or "people" (*minjung*), whereas the 1930 debate, focusing more on individual films released that year, highlighted the issue of faithfully representing "reality" (*hyönsil*) as experienced by the colonial subject.

It was Han Sör-ya who had initiated the 1928 debate by serializing an essay entitled "My View on Film Art" in *Chungoe ilbo* between July 1st and 9th. Under a pen name Mannyönsöl (or Icecap), Han begins the essay with his doubts about the validity of what he terms, "the dialectics between quality and quantity"—that is, the ways in which "the simplicity and clarity in quality envisions the increase in quantity, which again leads to the qualitative improvement"—in the



colonial Korean context.<sup>25</sup> Han argues that “The fact that there are [a lot of films] is not in itself valuable. Why [those films] have to exist and their impact should be foremost of all the interests.” In other words, the focus of any discussion about Korean films should be their influence upon society and its people, in particular, the proletarian class. Viewed from this perspective, Korean films that do not contribute to nurturing society are nothing but rubbish (*taejak*) produced by a “troupe of foolish clowns” (*naltangpae*). The rest of his essay is devoted to analyses of how individual films have shunned any responsibility for cinema’s role in raising class consciousness while simply being preoccupied with providing entertainment. In his view, *Arirang*, because of its ambiguous illustration of lower-class lives, is full of vanity of the bourgeoisie; *Farewell* instigates hatred against the rich when its protagonist kills his bourgeois enemy, but suggests no radical solution to such a class contradiction; another film by Na Un-gyu, *Soldier of Fortune* (*P’unguna*, 1926), provides only entertainment by following “the most foolish Yankee films.” In sum, these films have distorted social reality either by depicting class contradiction as individual cases or by mimicking American films irrelevant to colonial Korean situations. The vice of Korean films as such leaves audiences wanting for nothing more than “some vague fantasy and dream,” while not grasping the social problems they are facing.

Naturally, Han’s provocation lured Sim Hun to the debate, not only because Han also targeted Sim’s directorial debut *At Daybreak*, but also because Sim had previously proclaimed his opinion against the leftist film criticism. Starting from July the 11th—just a few days after the serial publication of Han’s article—Sim Hun serialized the essay “What Movies Do Korean People Want?” in *Chungoe ilbo*.<sup>26</sup> Sim is doubtful about the contribution that leftist critics have

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<sup>25</sup> Han, “My View on Film Art,” pt. 1, *Chungoe ilbo* (July 1, 1928), 3.

<sup>26</sup> Sim Hun, “Uri minjung ūn öttöhan yöngghwa rül yogu hanün’ga rül non hamyö Mannyönsöl kun ege [To Mannyönsöl: What movies do Korean people want?], pt. 1, *Chungoe ilbo* (July 11, 1928), 3; pt. 2 (July 12, 1928), 3;

claimed to make. As he had previously argued in “On Film Criticism,” Sim takes issue with the lack of understanding of the specificity of film art in Han Sŏr-ya’s criticism, whose sole reliance on Marxist theories fails to address the complicated characteristics of cinema as a synthetic art. In fact, Sim Hun agrees to pursue the idea of proletarian films and the use of cinema in order to appeal to and educate broader audiences; However, under the draconian system of censorship in colonial Korea, which has effectively “slaughtered” all the existing films, Han’s claim for proletarian cinema seemed irresponsible and simply impossible, or to borrow Sim’s analogy, sounded like “a delusionist’s sleep-talking.” In such a situation in which one can “neither retract nor run towards” one’s ambition, he questions, “Isn’t it true that one can swing a wooden poker, if not a sword, only after he is allowed to move his body?”<sup>27</sup> This is Sim’s call for focusing on the given reality before entertaining an impossible ideal. In this vein, Sim turns the attention to the basis of filmmaking—the actual audience who enjoyed Korean films. He writes:

Too often, we use terms like *the masses* or *people*, which I think are all too ambiguous and obscure. These nouns encompass different class, gender, and age groups altogether. How can we delineate a specific type of audience from the motley group in the theater in order to make a work that can accommodate all their tastes?<sup>28</sup>

Sim Hun observes that in terms of “their living standards, levels of education, and general tastes,” those actually present in film theaters cannot be lumped together as “people,” and are in no way the proletarian masses that leftists envision. Based on the steep admission fee of 60 *chŏn* (0.6 *wŏn*) on average, he deduces that “You may not even find a shadow of peasants or workers,”

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pt. 3 (July 13, 1928), 3; pt. 4 (July 14, 1928), 3; pt. 5 (July 15, 1928), 3; pt. 6 (July 17, 1928), 3; pt. 7 (July 18, 1928), 3; pt. 8 (July 19, 1928), 3; pt. 9 (July 21, 1928), 3; pt. 10 (July 22, 1928), 3; pt. 11 (July 23, 1928), 3; pt. 12 (July 25, 1928), 3; pt. 13 (July 27, 1928), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pt. 5 (July 15, 1928), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pt. 10 (July 22, 1928), 3. My emphasis.

especially in the cities like Seoul.<sup>29</sup> Rather, those who dominated film theaters are “petty bourgeoisies of the leisured class” who are “far distant from what we call the masses or people.”<sup>30</sup> Filmmakers, thus, are responsible for satisfying the needs of these actual audiences seeking “a pastime on a boring night” or “a temporal escape from their painful daily routine.” The answer to the question “What movie do Korean people want?” is clear: Filmmakers should hold off their fantasy of utilizing cinema as a means to propagate a certain ideology, and instead make entertaining and comforting films for “the public who is ragged and starving, longing for pleasure.”<sup>31</sup>

Im Hwa—who would later become the general secretary of the KAPF—points to the contradiction revealed in Sim Hun’s reasoning of the role of cinema from the study of the actual constitution of audiences in colonial Korea. Im begins his “Liquidation of the Reactionary Petty Bourgeois Tendencies of Korean Cinema”—published from July 28th to August 4th in 1928—by refuting Sim’s take on film criticism.<sup>32</sup> While agreeing with Sim’s contention that film criticism should base itself on specific cinematic techniques, Im argues that in order for Korean cinema to contribute to the rise of the proletarian masses, it is much more urgent to develop a story that would have resonance with the proletarian lives. In other words, the subject matter of Korean films should thus be the main focus of film criticism in colonial Korea. As for Sim Hun’s

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<sup>29</sup> In the 1920s and 30s, urban factory workers were paid about 20 *wŏn* per month. For reference, a bowl of noodle soup at a restaurant was about ten *chŏn* (0.1 *wŏn*) and a monthly subscription of a newspaper was regularly one *won* per month. Compared to these, the admission of 60 *chŏn* was a high investment for a night for average workers. The cost of watching film would increase even higher if one had to take train or bus to downtown from the city outskirts.

<sup>30</sup> Sim Hun, “What Movies Do Korean People Want?” pt. 10, *Chungoe ilbo* (July 22, 1928), 3

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 11 (July 23, 1928), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Im Hwa, “Chosŏn yŏnghwa ka kajin pandongjŏk sosiminsŏng ūi malsal” [The liquidation of the reactionary petty bourgeois tendencies of Korean cinema], pt. 1, *Chungoe ilbo* (July 28, 1928), 3; pt. 2 (July 29, 1928), 3; pt. 3 (July 30, 1928), 3; pt. 4 (July 31, 1928), 3; pt. 5 (August 1, 1928), 3; pt. 6 (August 2, 1928), 3; pt. 7 (August 3, 1928), 3; pt. 8 (August 4, 1928), 3.

audience analysis, Im Hwa finds his position to be dubious: In his view, Sim, although acquiescing the need to make proletarian films, eschews the responsibility of carrying out the mission by simply calling it an impossible task and ridiculing Marxism and Leninism on which the KAPF members built their film theory. Im Hwa calls out the contradiction in Sim's argument between the necessity of proletarian films and the dismissal of the proletarian film movement: "If not grounded in Marxism, how could it assume the standpoint of proletarians and the people?"<sup>33</sup> Im Hwa identifies Sim Hun as a typical case of petty bourgeoisie, who, while having gestured toward the solidarity towards the property-less class, would just as easily abandon the cause to pursue his own interests. Also, censorship, while being a convenient excuse for filmmakers for such an evasion, does not impact cinema alone. All other art movements are subject to the limitation of artistic expression to a certain degree under colonialism as well as capitalism. A true proletarian artist, Im suggests, would seek creative ways to take advantage of loopholes within existing structures of law and order. Therefore, what counts is less a question of the (im)possibility of making proletarian films than the will to pursue this goal. If this were a wrongful accusation, Im argues, Sim should participate in the proletarian film movement; otherwise, Sim Hun's claim about the "people" is deceptive because it is tantamount to shirking the responsibility as a filmmaker to produce films that should encourage the people to pave their revolutionary way.

The conflict between Sim Hun and Im Hwa (and Han Sŏr-ya) stems from their different conception of "people" or "the masses." For Sim Hun, the masses refer to a phenomenological populace observed in film theaters. From the viewpoint of a filmmaker who relied on commercial venues, film audiences in colonial Korea were from the leisure class who could

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pt. 4 (July 31, 1928), 3.

afford the steep admission for an evening's entertainment. However, if considering cinema as a tool for education, state propaganda, or ideological struggle, one should take the broader public into his or her purview. Indeed, film audiences could not be reduced to those occupying film theaters. For example, the audiences in the rural areas were particularly important for the Government-General of Korea and its Motion Picture Unit which produced and circulated documentary films in every corner of the colony; newsreels were also rising as a more effective medium for journalism. Likewise, for communists like Im Hwa, the notion of "the masses" implied a populace much greater than moviegoers. And, indeed, it is they who constituted the people, the viewership of revolutionary cinema. Therefore the percentage of proletarian audiences in film theaters would not matter. The responsibility of filmmakers is, thus, to anticipate such a future audience in and out of the theater, by producing films that would sow the seeds of revolution. According to Im, the advent of the revolutionary masses evinced in the political and cultural events like the March First Movement in 1919 shows that his anticipation of a future audience was not a mere fantasy, despite Sim's criticism. Under such an "entire condition of the objective reality" (*kaekkwanjŏk hyŏnsil ūi che chokŏn*)—the rise of these potential audiences for proletarian films—the leftist film movement would push itself forward.<sup>34</sup> Such different conceptions of the masses by Sim Hun and Im Hwa bring to the fore different temporalities. When Sim Hun talks about the audiences present in the theater, Im Hwa anticipates new masses to come in the near future as the vehicle of revolution. This debate between the present and an imagined future is restaged two years later as to the notion of "reality" (*hyŏnsil*).

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., pt. 1 (July 28, 1928), 3.

### *Reality Between America and Russia*

In 1930, Na Un-gyu released two silent movies, *Arirang Part II* and *Iron Man*. These films fueled another rancorous controversy throughout the year. Upon the release of the sequel of the legendary *Arirang* in February 1930, Namgung Ok and Sŏ Kwang-je contributed film reviews to newspapers *Chungoe ilbo* and *Chosŏn ilbo*, reiterating their leftist doctrines. More than anything, both leftist critics saw *Arirang Part II* as a replication of its first movie in 1926. In *Part II*, Yŏng-jin, who was arrested for his murder at the end of the first *Arirang*, is now released from a prison. Then, a story similar to the first *Arirang* is repeated in a slightly different setting: Wandering in search of his lost father and sister, Yŏng-jin befriends a girl named Hae-sin. But when Hae-sin is arrested under a false accusation by Chae-man, Yŏng-jin kills Chae-man in madness like he did in 1926 *Arirang*. On the run he reunites with the family that he has pined for, but is eventually arrested once again for the murder. In *Arirang Part II*, Namgung Ok identifies Na Un-gyu's good intention to "illustrate our wretched reality and show it to people." But as a "shallow extension" of its 1926 predecessor, by putting its protagonist in the same predicament, the movie missed the opportunity to suggest how such a tragedy could turn around into a bright future.<sup>35</sup> Sŏ Kwang-je was more aggressive in his review published in *Chosŏn ilbo*: In his view Na Un-gyu's self-replication of his first *Arirang* evoked the same fatalistic and nihilistic visions about the reality of colonial Korea. For Sŏ, there was no demand among the proletarian masses for a film that shepherds people through an abominable fantasy. Thus, it was

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<sup>35</sup> Namgung Ok, "Arirang Hup'yŏn ūl pogo" [After watching *Arirang Part II*], pt. 2, *Chungoe ilbo* (February 19, 1930), 3.

important, Sŏ argued, for conscientious film workers to separate from the makers of such reactionary films.<sup>36</sup>

Immediately on the same page of *Chosŏn ilbo*, Yi P'ir-u, the cinematographer of *Arirang Part II*, offered a cutting rejoinder to Sŏ Kwang-je's essay, accusing him of ignorance of the painful reality of filmmaking in colonial Korea.<sup>37</sup> In an essay written in sarcastically honorific language, Yi mocks and debunks the leftist platform. He points to Sŏ's failures not only as a film critic who produces nothing but a "criticism for criticism's sake," but also as a filmmaker whose previous leftist feature *Vagabond* (1928) was severely criticized as well. At the end of the essay, he pleads with Sŏ to produce an example of what he means by proletarian films. Yi P'ir-u, identifying himself as the one "who cherishes an inch of advance more than a thousand words," clearly sets the boundary between filmmakers and film critics, and the arduous practices of filmmaking from the comfortable distance of theoretical discussion.

Previously in Sim Hun's case, such a distinction between filmmakers and film critics was rather ambiguous partly because this film director was at the same time actively writing as a film critic. Therefore, Sim's critique of the leftist attacks at least vouched for the important role of criticism in developing the nascent film culture in colonial Korea. However, filmmakers such as Yi P'ir-u were different. Much too attached to their own films, many interpreted the leftist critique about individual films as a personal attack, which is understandable given the harsh language that the critics employed. By this point, the discussion became too heated to proceed to any productive conclusion. Yi's discontent about film criticism brought Sŏ Kwang-je back to the

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<sup>36</sup> Sŏ Kwang-je, "Arirang hup'yŏn" [*Arirang Part II*], pt. 3, *Chosŏn ilbo* (February 22, 1930), evening edition, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Yi P'ir-u, "Sŏ Kwang-je ssi ūi Arirang p'yŏng ūl ikko" [After reading Sŏ Kwang-je's review of *Arirang*], pt. 1, *Chosŏn ilbo* (February 25, 1930), evening edition 5; pt. 2 (February 27, 1930), evening edition, 5; pt. 3 (February 28, 1930), evening edition, 5.

pages of *Chosŏn ilbo* to respond to Yi's criticism.<sup>38</sup> Then An Chong-hwa, who had once worked with leftists as a sympathizer of their movement, waded into the debate.<sup>39</sup> Despite taking the side of filmmakers by pointing out the “irresponsible and slanderous criticism” fired from Sŏ, An Chong-hwa tried to assuage the vitriolic contentions by also acknowledging that “Critics are pioneers, who have a grave responsibility to guide our cinema's advance and improvement.” Nevertheless, this apparently did not ameliorate the situation. At the end of March—when the arguments came to a momentary lull—Yi P'ir-u relocated the debate to *Chungoe ilbo* and serialized his essay with the combative title, “To Delusionists Who Babble About Cinema.”<sup>40</sup> This time, he deployed an even more bellicose language: “You crazy dogs, bark as you may. We love Korean cinema more than anyone; we are friends of the people.”<sup>41</sup> Yi's condemnation, though unequivocally aggressive, once again reveals how he conceived of the clear demarcation between film critics and filmmakers—while *they* simply preach without any contribution, *we*, the makers, have survived the limitations imposed upon our practice. But this distinction did not make any sense for Sŏ Kwang-je. “How do you think that makers and critics are under different circumstances? [...] Cinema cannot be improved only with filmmakers, and cannot be produced

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<sup>38</sup> Sŏ Kwang-je, “Sin yesul undong kŭp *Arirang* p'yŏng ūi pip'yŏng e tapham” [New film art movement: A response to the critique of my criticism of *Arirang*], pt. 1, *Chosŏn ilbo* (March 4, 1930), evening edition, 5; pt. 2 (March 5, 1930), evening edition, 5; pt. 3 (March 6, 1930), evening edition, 5.

<sup>39</sup> An Chong-hwa, “Yŏnghwa p'yŏng ūi sogam ch'oegŭn i sam p'yŏngga chessi ege” [My impression about film reviews: To film critics], pt. 1, *Chosŏn ilbo* (March 7, 1930), evening edition, 5; pt. 2 (March 8, 1930), evening edition, 5; pt. 3 (March 9, 1930), evening edition, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Yi P'ir-u, “Yŏnghwagye rŭl nonhanŭn mangsangbaedŭl ege chejakcha rosŏ irŏn” [To delusionists who babble about cinema: Words from a filmmaker], pt. 1, *Chungoe ilbo* (March 22, 1930), 3; pt. 2 (March 23, 1930), 3; pt. 3 (March 24, 1930), 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 3 (March 24, 1930), 3.



only with critics.”<sup>42</sup> Then Sō goes on to call Yi P’ir-u “a psycho [...] who pretends to be a nationalist” and “a crazy hunting dog of capitalism.”

The point here is not simply that they cursed at one another, but rather how such criticisms, beneath the harsh rhetoric, reveal different conceptions of *reality* (*hyōnsil*). Amid the fervor, on April 14th, a new film by Na Un-gyu, *Iron Man*, was released. Then, a few weeks later, Sō Kwang-je wrote a review, in which he criticized the film about small town bullies and their constant fights for being far removed from Korea’s reality.<sup>43</sup> At the level of storyline, the film exhibits their dog fight without providing any reason for their antagonism, and thus when the bullies shake hands in a decision to confront their common enemy, it does not make any sense that their personal conflict could be so easily resolved. On the other hand, the film, while set in the countryside, suddenly inserts shots filmed in Seoul, making its representation of rural lives in colonial Korea inconsistent. For Sō, these mistakes and problems stem from the film’s obvious commercial intention to satisfy the investors, instead of the interests of people situated in reality.

Na Un-gyu, the director of *Iron Man*, intervenes in the debate.<sup>44</sup> Against Sō’s claim that *Iron Man* is nonsensical, he argues that the film is primarily a satirical drama. While *Iron Man* is never a perfect film in any sense, he contends, the film’s exaggeration, if not distortion, of reality is meant to foreground the *real* social problems in colonial Korea. Na insinuates that the film should, indeed, be taken in such an indirect way under conditions of colonial censorship. It was

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<sup>42</sup> Sō Kwang-je, “1930 nyōn Chosōn yōnghwa ūi hyōn tangye, wae kūdūl gwa nonjōn hage toenūnga” [Korean Cinema’s current status in 1930: Why am I debating with them], pt. 3, *Chungoe ilbo* (March 27, 1930), 3.

<sup>43</sup> Sō Kwang-je, “*Ch’ōrindo pip’an*” [Critique of *Iron Man*], pt. 1, *Chungoe ilbo* (April 26, 1930), 3; pt. 5 (May 1, 1930), 3. Parts 2, 3, and 4 are missing.

<sup>44</sup> Na Un-gyu, “*Ch’ōrindo p’yōng ūl ikko chejakcha rosō ūi irōn*” [After reading *Iron Man* criticism: Words from a filmmaker], pt. 1, *Chungoe ilbo* (May 2, 1930), 3; pt. 2 (May 3, 1930), 3; pt. 3 (May 4, 1930), 3.

the ignorance about this circumstance and the film's genre that led the leftist film critics like Sŏ to overlook *Iron Man*'s critique of Korean society, which even a schoolboy would immediately grasp. Leftist critic, Yun Ki-jŏng, then, elaborates on Sŏ's criticism by analyzing Na's films.<sup>45</sup> According to Yun, *Arirang Part II* establishes a fatalism, asserting that Koreans should just accept the oppression and class conflict rather than blame others, as evinced in the lyrics of its theme song "Arirang." Similarly, the satire of *Iron Man* makes no critique of reality when the film suggests how the protagonists are fighting to win over the affections of a little girl named Maria. Such a narrative device, relying solely on personal motivation to carry the storyline of *Iron Man* shows, Yun argues, that the film merely depicts "selfish individualism" and the acts of "an extreme egoist," and thus could never be a satirical drama.<sup>46</sup> To reflect upon social issues, according to Yun, the film should have incorporated the contradiction among classes. It is the reality of colonial Korea, which, in turn, could only be captured through a thorough observation of class conflict. For leftist critics like Sŏ and Yun, such films are thus deserving of their criticism as examples of bourgeois films that are "oblivious to reality."<sup>47</sup>

However, for Na Un-gyu, it was the leftist film critics who ignored Korea's reality: "While you say that all Korean films—mostly my productions—are unrealistic, it's actually *you* who don't know the reality at all."<sup>48</sup> This situation in which both sides accuses one another of being "oblivious to reality" shows that for both sides "reality" meant different aspects of

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<sup>45</sup> Yun Ki-jŏng, "Chosŏn yŏnghwa ũi chejak kyŏnggyang ilban chejakcha ege koham" [The filmmaking trend of Korean cinema: My appeal to all filmmakers], pt. 1, *Chungoe ilbo* (May 6, 1930); pt. 2 (May 7, 1930), 3; pt. 3 (May 8, 1930), 3; pt. 4 (May 9, 1930), 3; pt. 5 (May 10, 1930), 3; pt. 6 (May 11, 1930), 3; pt. 7 (May 12, 1930), 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 6 (May 11, 1930), 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 5 (May 10, 1930), 3.

<sup>48</sup> Na Un-gyu, "Hyŏnsil ũl manggak han yŏnghwa p'yŏngjadŭl ege tapham" [My answer to film critics who forgot reality], pt. 1, *Chungoe ilbo* (May 13, 1930), 3; pt. 2 (May 14, 1930), 3; pt. 3 (May 15, 1930), 3; pt. 4 (May 16, 1930), 3; pt. 5 (May 18, 1930), 3; pt. 6 (May 19, 1930), 3.

experience in colonial Korea. For filmmakers like Na Un-gyu, colonial Korea's reality had much to do with the industrial conditions under colonial control. This reality is three-fold. First, in general, the process of filmmaking went through a lot of revisions from scriptwriting to casting, and to actual shooting. During the process, the original setting could change according to the human and technical resources available. For example, without adequate lighting equipment, the night scene was alternated with day scenes; when an actress was not available, her assigned role of a daughter could change to a son; or, in some cases, comedy could turn out to be better than the initial plan for a tragedy. A film criticism without an understanding of all the nuances in filmmaking until its release, Na argued, was superficial. Secondly, as noted on multiple occasions, colonial censorship imposes further "revisions" upon film production. While leftists suggested the 1930 Japanese film *What Made Her Do It?* (*Nani ga kanojo o sō sasetaka*, dir. Suzuki Shigeyoshi) as an exemplar of proletarian film despite censorship, Na retorted with a counter-example of Mizoguchi Kenji's leftist tendency film *Metropolitan Symphony* (*Tokai kōkyōgaku*) that was severely censored in 1929.<sup>49</sup> "Moreover," he wrote, "equating the standards of censorship [in Korea] that is under different conditions with those in Japan is a delusion that is not grounded in reality."<sup>50</sup> Lastly, filmmaking cost a huge amount of money, but affluent individuals were generally reluctant to invest. Even if not all necessarily pursue profit, filmmakers still had the financial duty to ensure that their film would not result in significant pecuniary loss to the investors. In this sense, "Films that are not commodities will not be produced; a film project will be rejected if it is not a commodity."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For the detailed historical account for Japan's censorship of proletarian and leftist-sympathetic films such as *Metropolitan Symphony*, see Makino Mamoru, *Nihon eiga ken'etsushi* [History of Japanese film censorship] (Tokyo: Pandora, 2003), 228-61.

<sup>50</sup> Na, "My Answer to Film Critics Who Forgot Reality," pt. 4 (May 16, 1930), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

The mission of film as a commodity was best carried out by American cinema, and as noted earlier in this chapter, Na Un-gyu's films relied on the popular tropes of American films writ large. For example, in 1936, Na himself acknowledged the influence of Hollywood upon his 1926 film *Arirang*:

I decided to make a film that is neither boring nor yawn inducing. To do so, the film should be thrilling and humorous. [...] *Arirang* was not a tedious film. It was funny. It wasn't a slow picture. Its tempo was fast and syncopated. This film that imitated foreign movies met the [demand] of Koreans at the time. [...] Times have changed; the audiences have changed as well.<sup>52</sup>

Korean filmmakers strategically imitated “foreign movies”—mostly Hollywood films—to accommodate Korean audiences who “stamped their feet” when watching films like Douglas Fairbanks's *Robin Hood* (1922).<sup>53</sup> *Arirang*'s audience broke into rapturous applause in reaction to its speedy tempo enabled by American cinema's editing technique. However, this was not merely an imitation: For Ko Han-sŭng who wrote a review of *Arirang* in 1926, it had “a different taste from the masterpieces of Western cinema.” Produced as a Korean film by local filmmakers with the depiction of lives akin to that of the colonized, *Arirang* proved that “The closer the film is to our own environment, the bigger the joy grows.”<sup>54</sup> Korean films made in spite of “reality” in Na Un-gyu's sense of the term would satisfy the expectation of existing audiences created by Hollywood movies. When they are combined with the Korean audiences' own lives and experiences, the films could truly offer the necessary comfort and entertainment, as Sim Hun also argued earlier.

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<sup>52</sup> Na, “When I Was Making *Arirang*,” 48-49.

<sup>53</sup> *Robin Hood* was released in Korea at the Chosŏn Theater in July 1924.

<sup>54</sup> Ko Han-sŭng (P'obing, pseudonym), “Sin yŏnghwa *Arirang* ūl pogo” [After watching new film *Arirang*], *Maeil sinbo* (October 10, 1926), 3.

Such a reality created by a Korean film, however, was one of the worst forms of deception for the leftist film critics. Americanism is problematic not only because of its capitalist ideology, but also because of Korean cinema's blind imitation of its themes and styles. For example, the popular thematic vehicles for Korean cinema in the 1920s included death, murder, and sentimentalism, all of which, for leftist film critics like Han Sŏr-ya, represented the vice of "[Koreans] addicted to the opiate of America," who "recklessly follow stupid Yankee movies."<sup>55</sup> As for Na Un-gyu's *Iron Man*, another reviewer, Sŏ Hang-sŏk, also found it strange to see an American-style tavern in the film set in a rural village in colonial Korea, not in America's Wild West.<sup>56</sup> American influence on Korean films, by distorting Korean lives as such, provided the colonial audience with a false fantasy, which merely served as a temporary respite from reality. While such an escape was taken seriously by filmmakers like Na Un-gyu, for leftist critics, it was an opiate that would debilitate the people from critically engaging in the revolutionary process.

More fundamentally, the distorted "reality" that filmmakers like Na Un-gyu created was even more problematic for the leftist critics, since that reality only undermines any potential that could contribute to the proletarian movement in colonial Korea. "Cinema's value will be acknowledged for the first time, but only when it works for the benefit of the people. Its value lies in the [representation of] reality that is inseparable from society and the people themselves," as Han Sŏr-ya pointed out in a 1928 statement—reiterated by many other leftist critics.<sup>57</sup> The practice of filmmaking and the theories of proletarian cinema are not severed in their movement's larger aim. Likewise, "reality" not only represented the painful experience of colonial rule, which filmmakers like Na sought to highlight, but also pointed to the potential to

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<sup>55</sup> Han, "My View on Film Art," pt. 8 (July 9, 1928), 3; pt. 4 (July 5, 1928), 3.

<sup>56</sup> Sŏ Hang-sŏk (Indol, pseudonym), "Ch'ŏrindo rŭl pogo" [Review of *Iron Man*], *Tonga ilbo* (April 16, 1930), 5.

<sup>57</sup> Han, "My View on Film Art," pt. 1 (July 1, 1928), 3.

conquer the very world. Colonial oppression could be turned to use for raising class-consciousness among the present masses. Cinema, as the most effective tool for agitation and propaganda, should serve as a catalyst to transform the masses into a reserve army for the revolution. In other words, reality was hardly static; for the believers of history's dialectical progress, it was in motion. In this reality, today's oppression and future liberation coexisted. Thus, leftist critics demanded that filmmakers confront whatever reality of filmmaking they had, rather than simply lament their conditions, by vividly portraying the lives of the working-class.

The leftist critics then sought to replace the vices of “Americanism” in Korean cinema with their foremost anticipation for “Russianism,” of which Sŏ Kwang-je, the most unrelenting judge of Na Un-gyu's films, was the most fervent supporter. In the 1929 essay “On Film Criticism,” he writes, “The life of workers and farmers—in other words, the life in Russia—is truly cinematic.”<sup>58</sup> His critical pen, which distinguishes “film criticism by literati” (*mundanin ũi yŏnghwa pip'yŏng*) and “film criticism by film people” (*yŏnghwain ũi yŏnghwa pip'yŏng*), also aimed at the Korean literati who have examined cinema from the guiding principles of literature and in doing so, have neglected cinema's particular characteristics. According to Sŏ, it was such a mode of sketchy criticism that greeted the so-called “era of deluge of filmmaking” and produced superficial film reviews in newspapers that pandered to the commercial needs of filmmakers, producers, and exhibitors. What Sŏ calls “film criticism by film people” has put forth a challenge to the “film criticism by literati” that purportedly colluded with commercial filmmaking. Unlike the filmmakers' contempt for criticism for criticism's sake, however, Sŏ's new film critique was not limited to the act of writing about released films, nor were “film

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<sup>58</sup> Sŏ Kwang-je, “Yŏnghwa pip'yŏng soron mundanin ũi yŏnghwa pip'yŏng esŏ yŏnghwain ũi yŏnghwa pip'yŏng ũro” [On film criticism: From film criticism by literati to film criticism by film people], pt. 4, *Chungŏe ilbo* (November 26, 1929), 3.

people” referring to only leftist writers and intellectuals. This new film critique could take written form, but it would also include films that he and his fellow communists would produce. What he terms “film people” thus includes all workers in the film industry as well as the leftist film activists like Sŏ himself.

The production of a leftist film, *Vagabond* (1928), provides a vivid example of such a mode of production as a critique. During the production, the investors kept meddling with the form and content of the scenario to profiteer from the film; and they tried to hold up the shooting schedule by withholding the necessary funds for production as well as salaries. The production crews then revolted against the investors, took control of filmmaking, and revised the script collectively for their own ends. Of course, Sŏ admits that *Vagabond* was by no means a perfect film. But the film brought forth a different mode of production similar to the soviets in Russia where workers and farmers collectively decide on the production and distribution of necessary goods for themselves. A proletarian film produced as such would in itself be a critique of the existing capitalist mode of film production. United film workers who participate in this process, Sŏ anticipates, are already critics of Korean cinema. They will carve out a future not only for Korean cinema, but also for the entire working class in colonial Korea.

### *Korean Cinema as a Feeble Cinema*

The Korean cinema debates that unfolded between 1928 and 1930 did not come to any reconciliation between two different understandings of cinema’s role in society, but rather continued to deepen the enmity among filmmakers, producers, and critics. Those participants in the debates, however, suggested a way to define Korean cinema as an ethnic cultural entity in the Japanese cinema, and, by extension, as a national cinema. As I have discussed, the central

questions of Korean cinema evolved around two controversial terms, “the masses” and “reality.” These analytical terms, on the one hand, identify the audience group that Korean cinema had to address, and on the other hand, determine what to depict in order to fulfill the mission for its audience. In this sense, the controversies I discussed in this chapter were the first national cinema debate in Korea. Filmmakers and critics in this debate critically engaged with questions of their national audience, which was represented through *Arirang*’s imitation of American films as well as its own take on Korea’s colonial reality. While looking at different aspects of the masses and reality, both filmmakers and leftist critics tried to envision a future for Korean cinema.

Visions for a future, of course, involved a painful acknowledgement of the past and the present. Na Un-gyu, who defended the value of popular films in colonial Korea, admitted that “the films we have made so far are not cinema proper, but toys that mimic cinema.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, it was his responsibility to elevate this toy to cinema. On the one hand, his yearning for “cinema” and filmmaking practices by adopting advanced techniques from Hollywood evokes the discussion in early 1910s Japan regarding what then-young film enthusiasts had called “pure film” (*jūn eigageki*). Newly emerging film critics and filmmakers encamping in coterie magazines such as *Kinema Record* (*Kinema Rekōdo*) criticized existing Japanese cinema for relying heavily on theatrical elements such as *onnagata* (female impersonators) and *benshi* (silent film narrators). The proponents of the Pure Film Movement, such as Kaeriyama Norimasa, called for adopting “cinematic” techniques and elements, including actresses, intertitles, close-ups, and screenplays differentiated from play scripts, to make Japanese cinema

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<sup>59</sup> Na, “My Answer to Film Critics Who Forgot Reality,” pt. 4 (May 16, 1930), 3.



what they felt was more cinematic and purer. The idea of “pure film” challenged existing mode of film production, partially embraced by emerging film studios such as Shōchiku.<sup>60</sup> As much as film style in Japan transformed, however, the reforms of Pure Film Movement were also “an effort to redefine cinema, not simply through promoting the practical application of formal and narrative devices deemed properly cinematic, but also [...] through the rearticulation of cinema,” as Aaron Gerow has argued.<sup>61</sup> By expressing his wish to turn toy-like Korean films into cinema proper, Na might have gestured toward the rearticulation of cinema in a similar sense of the Pure Film Movement.

On the other hand, in late 1920s colonial Korea, elevating this toy-like cinema to cinema proper was already challenged by the highly politicized notion of cinema as a weapon. In his foundational essay entitled, “Toy, Weapon: Movie Camera,” Sasa Genjū—the leading critic in Japan’s proletarian film movement—argued for the re-appropriation of available cinematic machines, such as Pathé Baby cameras, for producing proletarian films.<sup>62</sup> Widely used by amateur filmmakers, the 9.5 mm film Pathé Baby system was considered an extravagant toy for the leisure class. By enjoining filmmakers to transform this toy into a weapon for their class warfare—as the title of the essay suggests—Sasa changed the entire perception and the platform of the proletarian film movement in Japan: At a low cost, these activists in Japan could produce films such as newsreels, animated films, reportage, as well as feature-length fiction films.<sup>63</sup> Although Korean leftists, at least around the late 1920s and early 30s, did not arm themselves

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<sup>60</sup> Daisuke Miyao, *The Aesthetics of Shadow: Lighting and Japanese Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 23.

<sup>62</sup> Sasa Genjū, “Gan’gu buki satsueiki” [Toy, weapon: Movie camera], *Senki* (June 1928), 29-33.

<sup>63</sup> Markus Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film: From Meiji Era through Hiroshima* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). See especially chapter 2.

with toy cameras, the decree to turn the bourgeoisie's toy into a proletarian weapon resonated with the general aim of the Korean leftist film movement. Indeed, cinema itself was at the service of capitalism; it was part of the process of communist revolution to utilize cinema for the proletarian cause.

The distance between Na Un-gyu's wish to turn "toys" into "cinema" and the leftist vision of appropriating "toys" as "weapons" is measured against the gap between Americanism and Russianism. In either case, however, both aspirations still belonged to the colonial situation, and to this end, Na Un-gyu's statement is poignant:

This is Korea. We are Koreans. Not Russia, not XX. Not whites born under a lucky star, not XX people who at least have XX.<sup>64</sup>

Na Un-gyu once again criticized how the leftist vision for Russianism would be nothing more than a delusion. Soviet Russia existed as a foreign country, despite the leftists' belief in the futurity of what happened there in October 1917. However, America, which filmmakers like Na would idealized as a model for Korean film production, also remained distant. They could imitate some techniques, only within the limits of their colonial as well as industrial situation. Moreover, for Korean filmmakers, American films were not only their unattainable dream, but also the practical and obviously powerful enemy for Korean films since they still dominated

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<sup>64</sup> Na, "My Answer to Film Critics Who Forgot Reality," pt. 6 (May 19, 1930), 3. The Xs in the text are the redaction marks called *pokcha* (*fuseji* in Japanese), which show the effect of censorship in the Japanese empire. *Pokcha* (Xs, Os, or asterisks) were sometimes used to delete the words that the censors marked as inappropriate—such as "revolution" and "colony"—but in many cases, writers voluntarily used it to avoid trouble beforehand. However, as Nornes argues, this cannot be reduced to an act of self-censorship, because, "[a]fter all, everyone knew how to read most of these Xs" (Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film*, 47). As for the effective and productive use of *fuseji* in Japan's "redactionary" literature, see Jonathan E. Abel, *Redacted: The Archives of Censorship in Transwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 143-93.

Korean movie theaters. They were a constant reminder of Korean cinema's relative weakness and existence as a feeble entity that was always in need of external succor.

## CHAPTER 2

### Talking (About) Korean Films: From Sound Cinema to Corporatized Cinema

#### *Challenges to Korean Cinema in the 1930s*

Korean cinema began facing new challenges as soon as its popularity began to grow after *Arirang*'s release in 1926. All the chronic problems of the feeble Korean cinema were already identified during the Korean cinema debate in the late 1920s and early 30s. As seen in the previous chapter, popular filmmakers like Na Un-gyu, Yi P'ir-u, and Sim Hun lamented their limited access to financial and technological resources under the period's haphazard industrial practices, which relied solely on speculative investments with no intention to nurture the industry itself. The downturn was immediately stated in figures: During the five years between 1927 and 1931, ten Korean films were released per year on average; however, in the years immediately following, between 1932 and 1934, the number dropped to four films per year.

If money and equipment were persistent issues on the industry side, censorship posed yet another challenge in filmmaking. Coincidentally, in 1926—the year *Arirang* was released—the Government-General of Korea enacted the Motion Picture Film Censorship Regulations

(*Katsudō shashin fuirumu ken'etsu kisoku*, hereafter, “Censorship Regulations”).<sup>1</sup> Centralizing the existing municipal censoring processes, which sometimes yielded different results for the same films, the Censorship Regulations set the boundaries of desirable filmic expressions. Yet, like most other censorship rules, the criteria determining the desirable and the undesirable were unclear.<sup>2</sup> Oftentimes this led to a cumbersome process in which filmmakers had to go back and forth between their production sites and the censorship office. The changes to the title of Na Un-gyu’s 1928 film constitute one such case. During its production stage, its initial title was *Across Tumen River* (*Tuman’gang ūl kōnnōsō*), which for the censors could imply colonial Koreans’ escaping the peninsula by going across the river on the northern borders. Na revised the title, omitting the specific place name, to *Across the River* (*Chō kang ūl kōnnōsō*); however, the censor nixed it once again due to the apparent spatial index. In the end, Na Un-gyu settled on a completely new title, *In Search of Love* (*Sarang ūl ch’ajasō*). Writing contemporaneously, Sim Hun expressed his grave concern about the consequences that such strict censorship would bring about:

“Mountain” is dangerous, “river” is disquieting, and then “peninsula” (*pando*) shall soon be avoided. The time is near when we have to change the name of this land from “Chosōn” [Korea] to XX.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Chōsen Sōtokufurei dai 59 go: Katsudō shashin fuirumu ken’etsu kisoku” [GGK Ordinance No. 59: Motion Picture Film Censorship Regulations], *Chōsen Sōtokufu kanpō*, no. 4162 (July 5, 1926), 41-42.

<sup>2</sup> As censorship scholars have oftentimes noted, the vaguer the standard, the more effectively cultural producers internalize the censorship even during production. In other words, much of the goal of institutionalized censorship is meant to bring about self-censorship. Such a creation of a self-censoring subject would accord with a paradox that the goal of censorship is to create a society that will not necessitate it in the first place.

<sup>3</sup> Sim Hun, “Uri minjung ūn ōttōhan yōnghwa rŭl yogu hanŭn’ga rŭl non hamyō Mannyōnsōl kun ege” [To Mannyōnsōl: What movies do Korean people want?], pt. 7, *Chungoe ilbo*, (July 18, 1928), 3.

Sim Hun's nationalist anxiety over the identity of Korean cinema highlights the destructive effects of colonial power that seems to have aimed to expunge even the proper noun for the colonized country. However, as recent scholarship has argued, censorship should also be understood as productive power.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, we have found many historical instances in which such regulation stimulates the affected cultural producers to create new methods to evade its ubiquitous power while gesturing to conformity. However, more importantly, censorship took its productive effect by setting the very boundaries of creativity and defining what cinema should be under its direction.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, colonial cinema policies in Korea did not rest on regulating potential harms of films but developed as a more productive force to encouraging cinema's social function in the colony. In 1934, the Government-General of Korea announced the Rules for the Regulation of Motion Picture Cinema (*Katsudō shashin eiga torishimari kisoku*, hereafter "Cinema Regulations") as a separate legal institution.<sup>6</sup> The Cinema Regulations not only reaffirmed the effectiveness of the Censorship Rule but also oversaw the entire process of a film's production, circulation, and exhibition. As Pak Hye-yōng precisely points out, while the Censorship Regulations concerned the production of "film" as a text with physicality—such as its format and length, as well as the inscribed images—the Cinema Regulations took control of the entire life of

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<sup>4</sup> Takashi Fujitani and Nayoung Aimee Kwon, introduction to "Transcolonial Film Coproductions in the Japanese Empire: Antinomies in the Colonial Archive," Special issue, *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 2, no. 1 (May 2013), 1-9.

<sup>5</sup> Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Jonathan E. Abel, *Redacted: The Archives of Censorship in Transwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Daniël Biltreyst and Roel Vande Winkel, eds., *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship Around the World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> "Chōsen Sōtokufurei dai 82 go: Katsudō shashin eiga torishimari kisoku" [GGK Ordinance No. 82: Rules for the Regulation of Motion Picture Cinema], *Chōsen Sōtokufu kanpō*, no. 2273 (August 7, 1934), 49-50.

a film beyond the material.<sup>7</sup> Noteworthy among its stipulations about the distribution and exhibition of films at large was its protectionist plan to regulate the length of “foreign films” (*gaikoku eiga*) to be shown in order to encourage the screening of “domestically produced films” (*kokusan eiga*) in colonial Korea. Its rules for cinema operation required that the total length of the film reels of foreign films shown in a given month not exceed three quarters of the length of the reels of all films screening in that month by the end of 1935; this proportion should be reduced year by year so that after 1937, foreign films should comprise no more than half the length of a venue’s monthly film program.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the Cinema Regulations were first drafted as the “screen quota law” (*jōei eiga wariate hō*), according to a report from 1933.<sup>9</sup> While the colonial authorities aimed to support Japanese films that were not as popular as foreign films—particularly American films—its terms affected Korean films as part of the “domestically produced films.” As I will show later, this colonial regulation also opened up chances for Korean films to secure more screening venues than before, prompting contemporary discourse and practices among Koreans aimed at reorganizing their film industry.

As such, the factors that caused Korean cinema’s downturn in the early 1930s may have brought on the period that prepared filmmakers and producers for this later development. A new generation of filmmakers, performers, and entrepreneurs emerged. And once the industrial problems were spotted, despite the slump, Korean cinema’s feeble industrial conditions would no

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<sup>7</sup> Pak Hye-yōng, “Haeje 1926 nyōn Hwaltong Sajin P’illūm Kōmyōl Kyuch’ik 1934 nyōn Hwaltong Sajin Yōnghwa Ch’wich’e Kyuch’ik ūl chungsim ūro” [From 1926 Censorship Regulations to 1934 Cinema Regulations: A commentary], in Korea Film Archive, ed., *Singminji sidae ūi yōnghwa kōmyōl 1910-1934* [Film censorship in the colonial period, 1910-1934] (Seoul: Korea Film Archive, 2009), 113-23.

<sup>8</sup> “Chōsen Sōtokufu kankyōnandōrei dai 20 go: Katsudō shashin eiga torishimari kisoku shikō saisoku” [Hamgyōngnam-do Ordinance No. 20: Rules for Operation for the Cinema Regulations], *Chōsen Sōtokufu kanpō*, no. 2301 (September 8, 1934), 62-63.

<sup>9</sup> “Chōsen Sōtokufu kokusan eiga wariate hō shikō” [Government-General of Korea to implement screen quota law], *Kinema shūhō*, no. 176 (October 27, 1933), 10.

longer stay the same. New film companies were proposed, organized, and tested by gradually equipping themselves with financial as well as technological resources.

At the core of these multiple tasks undertaken by people in the colonial film industry was the “emancipation from the silent era,” as Im Hwa wrote in his 1941 historiography of Korean cinema.<sup>10</sup> In the late 1920s, sound film technology ushered in a new era in popular entertainment globally, and colonial Korea was no exception. However, for the filmmakers who had just managed to produce silent films with the paucity of resources available, the advent of sound cinema felt like “laying a heavy burden upon a toddler.”<sup>11</sup> It was quite difficult for Korean filmmakers to develop their own domestic sound technology; the production costs would have doubled or even tripled, so that recouping costs would take much longer than before, making most feeble companies bankrupt. Filmmakers also had to begin thinking about more complicated procedures with censors if their films were to start speaking. However, from a different perspective, all this was an opportunity for change: Filmmakers could accept the challenge of developing new technologies, and in doing so, they might industrialize the feeble Korean cinema by organizing new capital. If the Korean market was too small to be profitable, Korean sound films could look further to a larger market within the empire. This could be supported by the government’s film policies to protect domestic films, despite their role as a regulatory power, as stipulated in the Cinema Regulations.

This chapter examines such efforts by people in the colonial film industry to reform Korean cinema during the decade between 1930 and 1940. Largely driven by anxiety over Korean cinema’s feebleness and the challenges posed by sound cinema—often called “talkies” at

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<sup>10</sup> Im Hwa, “Chosŏn yŏnghwa paltal sosa” [A little history of the development of Korean cinema], *Samch’ŏlli* 13, no. 6 (June 1941), 203.

<sup>11</sup> Na Ung, “Ch’uryŏnja ūi notū” [An actor’s note], *Chosŏn yŏnghwa*, no. 1 (October 1936), 117.



the time—they attempted to single out Korean cinema’s identity not only within the limited spatial boundaries of Korea but as actively communicating with the larger entity of the Japanese empire. Naturally, industrial reform accompanying technological development involved continuing political negotiation with the empire’s changing film policies. By cross referencing the regulations governing what counted as desirable cinema with Korean filmmakers’ ways of securing any position within such demarcations, I will show how the formation of Korean cinema in the 1930s was catalyzed by the gaze of the empire.

### *The Unspeakable Stories of Korean Talkies*

It was in the mid-1920s that sound cinema was first introduced in colonial Korea. On the 28th of February in 1926, the *Maeil sinbo* newspaper held the first public exhibition of sound films produced with Lee de Forest’s Phonofilm system at the Seoul Town Hall (Kyōngsōng Konghoedang).<sup>12</sup> The next day, the Umigwan Theater also showed another 16 of de Forest’s films over two days.<sup>13</sup> The screenings took place three years after the first commercial screening of de Forest’s sound films in New York and less than a year after their first Japanese screening at the Shinbashi Theater in Tokyo on July 1, 1925. As a sound-on-film system that recorded sound onto photographic film as optical signals, de Forest’s Phonofilm integrated sound with the film frames, unlike the then-competing method called sound-on-disc, which required separate recordings to synchronize with film projectors. While the sound fidelity was better with audio provided separately on a disc, the sound-on-disc system came with difficulties in editing,

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<sup>12</sup> “Kwahakkye ūi kyōngi palsōng hwaltong yōnghwa ch’ullae” [Wonder of science, talking pictures to come], *Maeil sinbo* (February 24, 1926), 2.

<sup>13</sup> “Malhanūn hwaltong sajin Kwanchōltong Umigwan esō ch’ōūm sangyōng” [Speaking motion picture to show for the first time at Umigwan in Kwanchōl-dong], *Tonga ilbo* (February 28, 1926), 5.

distributing, and synchronizing, as it always required two different sets of machines at all stages. The sound-on-film technology, while having lower fidelity sound, was desirable in that sense, but the technology had to be more complicated in order to transform sonic signals into optical ones, and vice versa. De Forest's Phonofilm, patented in 1919, was one of the first commercially successful sound film technologies. Later, in Japan, Minagawa Yoshizō, who assisted in Phonofilm's Japan screening, purchased the patent rights and produced films under a new brand name, Mina Talkie.<sup>14</sup> Around the time Phonofilm was introduced in Japan in July 1925, sound cinema was already in the news of the daily *Chosŏn ilbo*.<sup>15</sup> It was followed by a series of similar articles that signaled the advent of the sound era,<sup>16</sup> but this early media coverage of sound cinema largely focused on its technological novelty, as Chŏng Chong-hwa has noted, rather than popular entertainment genres.<sup>17</sup>

It did not take much longer for sound cinema to prove its commercial value in colonial Korea. The competition among film theaters in Seoul to take the lead in featuring sound films began in 1930. On January 27th, Tansŏngsa and Chosŏn Theaters, two of the largest in Seoul, screened Pathé's "Phonophone" [sic] films and Paramount's MovieTone films respectively. The two theaters began competing fiercely to capture the films from distribution agencies.<sup>18</sup> The

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<sup>14</sup> Minagawa's first production, *Daybreak* (*Reimei*, dir. Osanai Kaoru) was shown in Korea at the aforementioned Umigwan Theater in January 1928.

<sup>15</sup> "Palsŏng yŏnghwa hwaltong sajin'gye ūi taebalgŏn" [Talking films, new invention in motion picture world], pt. 1, *Chosŏn ilbo* (July 3, 1925), evening edition, 3; pt. 2 (July 6, 1925), evening edition, 3.

<sup>16</sup> "Injeya wansŏngdoen malhanŭn hwaltong sajin" [Speaking motion picture finally complete], pt. 1, *Tonga ilbo* (October 8, 1927), 3; pt. 2 (October 9, 1927), 3; "T'oki kwangsŏn ūl ūmhyang ūro pyŏnghwan" [Talkie, transforming optical signal to sound], pt. 1, *Tonga ilbo* (October 20, 1929), 4; pt. 2 (October 22, 1929), 4; pt. 3 (October 23, 1929), 4; pt. 4 (October 25, 1929), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Chŏng Chong-hwa, "Singminji Chosŏn ūi palsŏng yŏnghwa sangyŏng e taehan yŏksajŏk yŏn'gu" [A historical study of sound film exhibition in colonial Korea], *Yŏnghwa yŏ'ngu*, no. 59 (March 2014), 314.

<sup>18</sup> "T'oki sidae Kyŏngsŏng edo palsŏng yŏnghwa" [Age of talkie to arrive in Seoul], *Tonga ilbo* (January 24, 1930), 5; "Munje manhŭn palsŏng yŏnghwa p'ilgyŏng Kyŏngsŏng edo ch'urhyŏn" [Troublesome sound cinema to appear

competition also involved refurbishing the theaters as a legitimate venue for sound cinema. Just a couple of years later, the Chosŏn Theater purchased an RCA sound film projector, which cost 8,000 *won*; the Tansŏngsa immediately responded by regularly programming sound films, although still having to rent the sound film equipment along with film reels.<sup>19</sup>

The censorship records also testify to sound cinema's growing popularity. According to a survey conducted by the Book Department of the colonial government, the length of sound films submitted to the censorship chamber in 1932 comprised 20 percent of the entire submission. The number had increased to about 37 percent by December 9, 1933.<sup>20</sup> Finally, in 1934, the Book Department spent 3,000 *won* to purchase a sound film projector for the censorship chamber in order to cope with the "films flooding the censor board."<sup>21</sup>

As compared to the swelling popularity of sound films in theater, the domestic production of Korean talkies began relatively late. The first talkie was released in 1935. This was *The Tale of Ch'unhyang* (*Ch'unhyangjŏn*), directed by Yi Myŏng-u and using the recording device developed by his older brother Yi P'ir-u. Having worked as a projectionist in film theaters in Osaka, Japan, Yi P'ir-u picked up the skills of cinematography and film processing at the Kosaka Film Studio of Teikoku Kinema. Upon his return to Korea after the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, Yi participated in early film productions as cinematographer as well as editor. Not only a

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in Seoul soon], *Tonga ilbo* (January 27, 1930), 4. The "Phonophone" films for the Tansŏngsa Theater might be a typographical error for the RCA-developed "Photophone," which was used for Pathé's sound filmmaking.

<sup>19</sup> "Chosŏn Kŭkchang kwa Tansŏngsa ūi hŭnghaengjŏn" [The competition between the Chosŏn and the Tansŏngsa theaters], *Samch'ŏlli* 4, no. 4 (April 1932), 50; "Tansŏngsa edo palsŏng yŏnghwa" [Tansŏngsa to show sound film, too], *Chosŏn ilbo* (March 19, 1932), evening edition, 5.

<sup>20</sup> "Yŏnghwa kŏmyŏl man yŏ kwŏn chung t'oki ich'ŏn kwŏn" [2,000 reels of talkie out of 10,000 reels submitted to censor], *Chosŏn chungang ilbo* (April 13, 1933), 2; "Chŏngwŏl e hŭnghaenghal yŏnghwa ka swaedo t'oki man 337 kwŏn" [337 reels of talkie among programs in January], *Tonga ilbo* (December 14, 1933), morning edition, 6.

<sup>21</sup> "T'oki kŏmyŏlgi Tosŏkwa e pichi" [The Book Department furnished with talkie projector], *Chosŏn chungang ilbo* (March 4, 1934), 2.

film technician, Yi P'ir-u was avid about developing domestic film technologies. As for sound cinema, he also designed a sound film projector called the P.K.R. system, although it was never deployed on a commercial scale.<sup>22</sup> His efforts to develop a domestic sound film system hark back to 1930, when talking pictures started gaining public attention in Seoul. At the time, he was collaborating with the director Na Un-gyu to produce Na's next project as a sound film, under the working title of *Unspeakable Stories (Mal motal sajǒng)*.<sup>23</sup>

Around March 1930, Yi visited Japan to meet with Minagawa Yoshizō, the holder of Japanese rights to de Forest's Phonofilm, and made a contract for the transfer of the Mina-Talkie system to Korea. Soon, however, the contract was rescinded because Yi could not pay the deposit by the agreed-upon due date. In fact, Yi was supposed to receive money from Na Un-gyu, who should have raised the funds by releasing *Arirang Part II* in February; but instead of sending the promised money to Tokyo, Na took the risk of investing the profits in another of his films, *Iron Man*, released in mid-April.

As bringing Japan's talkie technology to Korea had become impossible, the two filmmakers had to find another way to continue their first talkie project. According to Yi's oral history, Yi and Na were traveling in southern Korea and happened to watch together Paramount's sound films released with sound-on-disc. As mentioned earlier, unlike the sound-on-film technology such as RCA Photophone and Fox's MovieTone, the sound-on-disc method would be more accessible once filmmakers found how to synchronize a film projector with the separate unit of a record player. Also, since theaters in colonial Korea had not yet been furnished

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<sup>22</sup> "Yōnghwa palsǒng changch'i PKR sik ch'urhyōn" [Sound film projector PKR System invented], *Tonga ilbo* (July 26, 1933), morning edition, 4.

<sup>23</sup> Rumor had it that Na Un-gyu's sequel of his legendary *Arirang* (1926) was to be made with sound, but no record has been found to testify to any substantial attempts. Na's *Arirang Part II* was released in February 1930.

with sound film projectors, releasing with sound-on-disc would be more conducive to distributing their first talkie. *Unspeakable Stories* would thus be produced with the sound-on-disc technology.<sup>24</sup>

However, the hopeful project for “the First Korean Vitaphone-Type Sound Film”<sup>25</sup>—as announced in the pre-production advertisement for *Unspeakable Stories* relayed in daily newspapers almost every day between April 19 and September 1 that year—never materialized into an actual film for unknown reason, leaving only the SP records released in 1931.<sup>26</sup> Although his “talking” *Unspeakable Stories* was marked as yet another failed attempt, Yi P’ir-u was resolute in his efforts to realize a domestic talkie. In an earlier article in which he manifested his determination to make *Unspeakable Stories*, Yi wrote,

When [its production] abroad has not been complete yet, a talkie requiring large capital cannot easily be produced in Korea. Therefore, [it] is close to a fantasy. But it would be silly to simply despair and leave it behind before even studying what it is and how to make it readily. We cannot just stare at the imports of the foreign films (sound films) these days. Let us look into what it is. After that, we may decide on whether [talkie production] is possible or impossible. It is a filmmaker’s duty and responsibility to make an effort.<sup>27</sup>

Even after *Unspeakable Stories* ended up “unspoken,” Yi P’ir-u continued his study of sound technology. Traveling to places where he could pick up any relevant information, he sought to collaborate with Japanese technicians as well. Later, he visited Osaka once again where

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<sup>24</sup> Han’guk Yesul Yŏn’guso, ed., *Yi Yŏng-il ūi Han’guk yŏnghwasa rŭl wihan chŭngŏnnok* [Yi Yŏng-il’s collection of oral histories for Korean cinema], vol. 1: Yu Chang-san, Yi Kyŏng-son, Yi P’ir-u, and Yi Ch’ang-gŭn (Seoul: Sodo, 2003), 238-249.

<sup>25</sup> Vitaphone is a representative sound-on-disc system developed collaboratively by Warner Brothers and First National.

<sup>26</sup> Released by Columbia Records, its audio drama is available as SP records (serial numbers: Columbia 40205 and Columbia 40206). They are the only remaining resources that recorded Na Un-gyu’s voice acting.

<sup>27</sup> Yi P’ir-u, “*Mal motal sajŏng ūl pakhimyŏnsŏ*” [Producing *Unspeakable Stories*], pt. 2, *Chosŏn ilbo* (April 18, 1930), evening edition, 5.

he asked for help from Tsuchihashi Takeo, whose sound recording system was used for Japan's first feature-length talkie, *The Neighbor's Wife and Mine* (*Madamu to nyōbō*, dir. Gosho Heinosuke, 1931), and Nakagawa Takashi, who with Tsukagoshi Seiji developed the NT sound system. Upon hearing that a news film crew from Fox had arrived in China, Yi even went to Shanghai to simply get a glimpse of Hollywood's advanced sound film production. After the trip, he made a report to Nakagawa, who agreed to assist him in developing Korea's domestic talkie production system. According to Yi's oral history, the report contributed to the improvement of Nakagawa's system. While the claim about Yi's contribution may have lacked historical accuracy, the collaboration with Nakagawa was certainly crucial for Yi's 1935 production of the first Korean talking picture, *The Tale of Ch'unhyang*. Its advertisements purported that the film used a domestically developed sound film production system named the Chosŏn-phone (Chosŏnp'ŏn), which film historians consider to be a variation of Nakagawa's NT system.<sup>28</sup>

### *Talkies: Pros and Cons*

Until the Korean talkie's "unspeakable stories" finally found their voice in 1935, the prospect of producing sound film in colonial Korea was not without dissonance. Despite the efforts by technicians like Yi P'ir-u, who assumed his "duty and responsibility" as a filmmaker, skepticism was aroused regarding questions of technological feasibility. For example, in his posthumous essay in 1936—that is, after the release and partial popular success of *The Tale of*

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<sup>28</sup> As to Nakagawa's collaboration, film historian Yi Hwa-jin makes an interesting speculation about the industrial situation in Japan. According to Yi, Nakagawa would have transferred the NT system to Korea as his Kyōto-based Etona Films closed its business around 1935. See Yi Hwa-jin, *Sori ūi chŏngch'i singminji Chosŏn ūi kŭkchang kwa cheguk ūi kwan'gaek* [Sound politics: Theaters in colonial Korea and audience of the empire] (Seoul: Hyŏnsil Munhwa, 2016), 125.

*Ch'unhyang*—Sim Hun expressed his concern that Korean cinema was still too immature to embark on producing sound films.<sup>29</sup> This opinion was pervasive during the early 1930s. In 1931, Yi Kyu-hwan, then working as an assistant at Japan's Teikoku Kinema, noted in a rather informational essay about sound cinema that Korean theaters may not be well-equipped with sound film screening facilities, alluding to the meaninglessness of producing Korean talkies.<sup>30</sup> Earlier in 1929, Pak Wan-sik had even requested that “[Korean filmmakers] forgo any production of sound films for now” and “deploy our film movement merely with silent films.”<sup>31</sup>

As a leftist critic, Pak Wan-sik's argument was based on his judgment about the possible problems that sound cinema could pose for colonial Korea. For Pak, the issue lay beyond the technological lack and lag in colonial Korea. First of all, as Korean filmmakers had not yet fully learned the aesthetics of silent cinema, he advised them not to be swept by the “fad” for producing sound films. In order for sound cinema to fulfill its artistic mission in colonial Korea, he wrote, filmmakers should first lay a foundation by putting their efforts into improving the making of silent films. Secondly, financing would be a more fundamental problem for producing a talking picture, as its production cost involved a twofold increase from that of silent film production. Since filmmaking in colonial Korea, without any established infrastructure for film production, still relied on single project-based investments, raising the funds for the much more costly sound film production was improbable. Lastly, from the view of a leftist film critic, once its production had been completed, sound films would not be malleable enough to respond to

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<sup>29</sup> Sim Hun, “Chosŏn sŏ t'oki nŭn sigisangjo da” [Talkie is too early for Korea], *Chosŏn yŏnghwa*, no. 1 (October 1936), 84-86.

<sup>30</sup> Yi Kyu-hwan, “Palsŏng yŏnghwa e kwanhayŏ” [On sound cinema], pt. 1, *Chosŏn ilbo* (September 8, 1931), evening edition, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Pak Wan-sik, “Palsŏng yŏnghwa ũi kuksan munje” [On localizing sound cinema], pt. 3, *Tonga ilbo* (December 27, 1929), 5.

ensorship, unlike silent films whose redacted parts could be supplanted by spontaneous explanations by the *pyŏnsa*. Pak wrote, “In silent film screening, [*pyŏnsa*] explanation can still manage to connect [the missing parts], but in the case of talkies, such a misconnection [due to the censoring] would bring about an effect rather inferior to a silent film.”<sup>32</sup> In silent film screening, in other words, viewers could connect one shot to another with the assistance of *pyŏnsa*. But if spoken words by characters in a sound film were cut on the desk of the censor, how would the film—in particular, one with an aim of leftist enlightenment—effectively deliver its message to people? This was Pak’s grave concern.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, as the revision order from censors leads to additional costs to re-edit the film, filmmakers would likely operate a self-censorship machine in order to avoid any unpredictable increases in their production costs.

Partly responding to the opposition to sound cinema, its supporters claimed it was necessary to adjust to the changing economic and political conditions of Korean cinema in the 1930s. Sŏ Kwang-je—who had also translated the statement on sound cinema by Soviet filmmakers Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandrov<sup>34</sup>—noted that when sound cinema drew more audiences than before, “producing silent films would not help rebuild Korean cinema.”<sup>35</sup> If “all-talkie”—meaning sound-on-film technologies—was not readily available, Sŏ argued, filmmakers

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Pak once again published the same essay in *Chosŏn ilbo* a month later with some revision. Note, however, that the revised essay includes not only Pak’s addition but also the censor’s redaction. Particularly, the revision of the above-quoted words include the *pokcha* Xs on the original word of “censorship” (*kŏmyŏl*). See Pak Wan-sik (Hyŏnhae, pseudonym), “Palsŏng yŏnghwa e taehayŏ” [On sound cinema], pt. 1, *Chosŏn ilbo* (January 31, 1930), evening edition, 5; pt. 2 (February 1, 1930), evening edition, 5; pt. 3 (February 2, 1930), evening edition, 5. As for *pokcha* (*fuseji*), see note 63 in Chapter 1.

<sup>34</sup> Sŏ Kwang-je, trans., “T’oki e kwahan sŏnŏn” [A manifesto on talkies], pt. 1, *Tonga ilbo* (October 2, 1930), 5; pt. 2 (October 3, 1930), 5; pt. 3 (October 7, 1930), 5.

<sup>35</sup> Sŏ Kwang-je, “Yŏnghwa yesul ponjil ũi p’aak kwa kisluchŏk chŏnhwangi” [The nature of cinematic art and technological transformation], pt. 1, *Chosŏn ilbo* (June 10, 1934), special edition, 2.



could choose sound-on-disc systems instead.<sup>36</sup> Having already been attempted by Yi P'ir-u, as mentioned above, Sō's more practical solution was based on the still-nascent stage of the industrial development of Korean cinema in 1934. Regardless of the actual feasibility of sound-on-disc systems, his suggestion reflects a certain perception about the visceral reality of the colonial film industry. The development of a sound cinema system should accompany the industrial rationalization of the film business. For this, Sō argued, one must first understand the "nature" (*ponjil*) of cinema as an art of both technology and capitalism. He thus made three suggestions: (1) to establish a research institute for advanced film technology; (2) to build film studios where technology turns into cinematic art; and then (3) to secure a distribution network to circulate the produced films. Here, the distribution network connects one place with another not only on the Korean Peninsula, but extending as far as the borders of the Japanese empire, including Japan's metropolises, Manchuria, and China. Then again, this imperative of an expanded market might translate to the need of Korean sound cinema, and vice versa: In order to appeal to the world market, where talkies already dominated, Korean cinema should not remain silent. Making sound films could create a healthy industrial cycle by garnering revenue from the overseas markets.

The technological development, production, distribution, and exhibition of Korean talking films was no longer limited solely to a technician's problem. It had a profound connection with the problem of restructuring the Korean film business, which was affected by the policy-making process. One of the policy developments in 1930s colonial Korea came with the announcement of the 1934 Rules for the Regulations of Motion Picture Cinema (*Katsudō*

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pt. 2 (June 12, 1934), 2.

*shashin eiga torishimari kisoku*).<sup>37</sup> Introducing a proactive (*sekkyokuteki*) approach of controlling film cultures, the Cinema Regulations were also known as “the first screen quota regulation in the entire Japanese empire.”<sup>38</sup> However, as film historian Yi Hwa-jin has aptly pointed out, the screen quota system was not necessary in Japan, where the domestic film industry took up the lion’s share of the market. Rather, this “first” enactment of a protectionist policy was under a highly particular condition in colonial Korea where, for colonial bureaucrats like Shimizu Shigeo, “the needs for cinema control were greater than in the mainland [Japan].”<sup>39</sup> Drafting the Cinema Regulations at the Book Department of the Government-General of Korea, Shimizu recognized first and foremost how Koreans’ consumption of films was largely governed by “delicate ethnic emotions,” which made them prefer foreign films while avoiding Japanese films. With the growing popularity of cinema in colonial Korea, he argued, “[one] could not leave cinema in the hands of censorship—a regulation based merely on the policing perspective.”<sup>40</sup> For Shimizu, promoting the assimilationist idea of “the Harmony of Japan and Korea” (*Nai-Sen yūwa*) required regulation of the import of foreign films—Hollywood films—while making more screening opportunities for Japanese films. In this sense, the first screen

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<sup>37</sup> “Chōsen Sōtokufurei dai 82 go: Katsudō shashin eiga torishimari kisoku” [GGK Ordinance No. 82: Rule for the Regulation of Motion Picture Cinema], *Chōsen Sōtokufu kanpō*, no. 2273 (August 7, 1934), 49-50.

<sup>38</sup> Yi Hwa-jin, “Tu cheguk sai p’illūm chōnjaeng chōnya Ilbon ūi yōnghwa cheguk kihoek kwa singminji Chosōn ūi sūkūrin k’wōt’ōje” [On the eve of the film war between two empires: Japan’s national film policy and colonial Korea’s screen quota system], *Sai* no. 15 (November 2014), 50. Taiwan film historian Misawa Mamie noted that colonial Taiwan also regulated the screening of foreign films—in Taiwan’s case, mostly Chinese films—through the Foreign Exchange Management Law (*Waiguo weiti guanli fa*, 1933), which though was not specifically about films. See Misawa Mamie, *Teikoku to sokoku no hazama shokuminchiki Taiwan eigajin no kōshō to ekkyō* [Between the empire and the fatherland: The negotiation and border-crossing of colonial Taiwan filmmakers] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2010), 54. That the Cinema Regulations were the first kind in the entire Japanese empire was also noted in the contemporary reports. See “Ippō saki ni Chōsen de eiga tōsei” [Colonial Korea to control cinema for the first time], *Kinema shūhō*, no. 198 (May 11, 1934), 10.

<sup>39</sup> Shimizu Shigeo, “Chōsen ni okeru eiga kokusaku ni tsuite” [On national film policy in colonial Korea], *Keisatsu kenkyū* 6, no. 5 (1935), 21-40.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

quota system was concerned less with the protection of the empire's mainland film industry than with the social function of cinema as a means of education and propaganda in the colony.

Despite being a screen quota regulation, the Cinema Regulations did not rest on a strict definition of what constituted “domestically produced films” (*kokusan eiga*), unlike other similar policies at the time in the UK, Germany, and France. Shimizu noted that this was in fact considered at the drafting stage but was later waived due to “some issues of legal articulation (*rippō kijutsu*).”<sup>41</sup> Whatever the reason was, such a loose definition certainly allowed for the possibility that Korean films would belong to what the Regulations defined as “domestic films” in the Japanese empire. An economist, Ch'oe Il-suk, later claimed that the Cinema Regulations' economic implications affected the growth of both Korean and Japanese films,<sup>42</sup> and Shimizu Shigeo also noted the promotion of the film industry in colonial Korea as one of the Regulations' purposes. Additionally, under the subsidization system stipulated in the Cinema Regulations, Korean filmmakers could also receive support from the colonial government once their films had been recognized as “films of excellence” (*yūryō eiga*). Beyond the policing methods, the Cinema Regulations signaled a new idea of cinema control with which to supervise all the sectors of the film business by more proactive measures. Korean filmmakers apparently considered it an opportunity: Newly produced Korean talkies could fill the gaps that Hollywood films would leave. The question became, then, how to really organize a film company properly to supply the potential needs for “domestic films,” or more precisely, Korean sound films.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>42</sup> Ch'oe Il-suk, “Chōsen eiga kigyō no gen jōtai” [The present state of film companies in Korea], *Eiga hyōron* 19, no. 1 (January 1937), 103-7.

*Art as Technology, Capitalism as Art: From Talkie to Corporatization*

At a roundtable discussion in 1943, when Korean cinema came fully under the control of the colonial government, Yi Ch'ang-yong reminisced, “[T]he control of film companies in the mainland [Japan] was, of course, affected by the Film Law, but actually done through the strength of capital, as they have developed in a capitalist way. I think the Korean case [of film control] began by consolidating technicians (*gijutsusha*) before they advanced as capitalist [companies].”<sup>43</sup> Yi Ch'ang-yong's comment is generally true, as film companies in colonial Korea were more or less groups of filmmakers, technicians, and performers without specifically industry-minded people.

However, Korean cinema had been going through a gradual change since the 1930s. Filmmakers and critics all suggested the so-called *kiōphwa* as the most desirable solution to Korea's feeble film industry. Meaning “to rationalize film business by establishing film corporations,” *kiōphwa* may be smoothly translated as “industrialization,” but I render it as “corporatization” instead for two reasons. First, the *kiōphwa* did not specifically aim to rebuild the entire industrial structure in colonial Korea. Korean filmmakers were more concerned with the organization of individual film companies. Second—and more importantly—the corporatization discourses and practices, while having begun with industrial concerns, later evolved into the political project of the colonial government around the time of the 1940 Ordinance of Korean cinema, as I will discuss in the next chapter. “Corporatization” as a translation of *kiōphwa* would highlight the corporate statism in which the desires of the

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<sup>43</sup> “Zadankai Chōsen eiga no tokushūsei” [Roundtable: The particularity of Korean cinema], *Eiga junpō*, no. 87 (July 11, 1943), 10.

colonized and the colonizers were entangled, and which yielded two government-sponsored film corporations in 1942.

In the context of the 1930s, corporatization was one of the crucial factors for the success of making the first sound film in colonial Korea, in addition, of course, to Yi P'ir-u's passion for the development of the necessary domestic technology. After the failure of *Unspeaking Stories*, Yi P'ir-u must have been keenly aware that without any strong capital backing, further attempts on his part would end up in more failures. While a product of his own study of technology, *The Tale of Ch'unhyang* as Korea's first talkie also required the support of an organized film company with stable financial sources. Indeed, behind the production of the film lay the Kyōngsōng Studios, a film company founded by Japanese businessperson Wakejima Shūjirō in 1934, who was also running the Kyōngsōng Theater. Yi Hwa-jin makes the very acute point that “the technique of a filmmaker like Yi P'ir-u, who was dexterous in handling cameras and film materials, was how he moved people, such as investors like Wakejima Shūjirō and Hong Sun-ŏn, who would be willing to put capital into such a risky attempt to produce the first sound film.”<sup>44</sup> During two and a half years of business between 1934 and 1937, Wakejima's Kyōngsōng Studios released nine films; among them, the six films produced after *The Tale of Ch'unhyang* were sound films.

Leading Korean cinema's transition to sound cinema, the Kyōngsōng Studios proved to offer the business model that had been imagined and discussed by Korean filmmakers thus far, encompassing all that Sō Kwang-je had described in 1934 as an ideal film company: A technological research institute, a studio, and a distribution network. Such a vertically integrated business structure made possible the Studios' stable supply of films. First, while not having a

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<sup>44</sup> Yi, *Sound Politics*, 126.

research institute, the Studios had Yi P'ir-u, who was one of the finest technicians in colonial Korea. Second, by the time of *The Tale of Ch'unhyang*'s production, Wakejima had authorized the establishment of Kyōngsōng's own film studio. According to a monthly *Samch'ōlli*'s report, its studio "was not parallel to such buildings of Nikkatsu and Shōchiku in Tokyo and Kyōto, but its barracks were at least a semi-permanent facility" even equipped with soundproofing.<sup>45</sup> Lastly, the Kyōngsōng's films were distributed by the Koryō Film Distribution Agency not only in the Korean Peninsula, but also to Japan's metropolises.<sup>46</sup>

Kyōngsōng's films were popular in general and profitable enough to sustain its business; however, the responses from critics and other filmmakers were relatively negative. They identified some technical problems, such as the lower quality of recording technology, as well as the crude performances of actors and actresses never trained in sound cinema acting. More problematic for critics was the question of whether the company's films would contribute to the artistic development of Korean cinema—most of the company's films dramatized folk tales such as *Ch'unhyang* and *Hong Kil-tong* were a facile choice of subject matter that simply relied on the predictable popularity of the stories without any consideration of their contemporary implications or any artistic innovation.<sup>47</sup> Film director Pak Ki-ch'ae was even more severe in

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<sup>45</sup> "Ch'unhyangjōn paginūn kwanggyōng" [A peek through the *Tale of Ch'unhyang* production], *Samch'ōlli* 7, no. 8 (September 1935), 123.

<sup>46</sup> The Koryō Film Distribution Agency was founded by Yi Ch'ang-yong who later established a production company, Koryō Film Association, which I will discuss shortly. Some of the representative films of the Koryō Film Association will also be examined in Chapter 5. Two of Kyōngsōng's films, *The Tale of Two Sisters* and *Hong Kil-tong Sequel* (both 1936), were released in Osaka by the Japanese agency San'eisha that had collaborated with the Koryō Agency. When *Hong Kil-tong Sequel* was released, the Osaka police suddenly ordered the cessation of the screening for a week in July 1936. While this is beyond the scope of this chapter, I would like to note the reason behind the police command. According to the report, the Special Higher Police (*tokkō*) argued that "Korean [films] would hamper the campaign for the assimilation of mainlanders," while the Security department also took issue of the hygiene of film theaters. See "Chōsen eiga Ōsaka de jōei kinshi" [Korean film screening banned in Osaka], *Kinema shūhō*, no. 582 (July 21, 1936), 6.

<sup>47</sup> As for the criticism of *The Tale of Ch'unhyang*, see An Sōg-yōng, "Chosōn t'oki Ch'unhyangjōn ūl pogo" [After watching Korea's first talkie, *Tale of Ch'unhyang*], pt. 1, *Chosōn ilbo* (October 11, 1935), evening edition, 4; pt. 3,

evaluating *The Tale of Ch'unhyang* as “a box-office-driven film pandering to film fans with vulgar taste.”<sup>48</sup>

Historian Yi Hwa-jin surmises two reasons behind the Kyōngsōng Studios' production strategies. First, the criticism against its films for pandering to vulgar taste would not matter at all, since that might have been exactly what the Studios had intended. As Yi has suggested, during the early talkie screenings, foreign sound films were accessible to only those who could speak foreign languages or at least read Japanese subtitles, while not to most other audiences illiterate even in Korean. Making the already popular stories into films, thus, could be a strategy to “address such neglected people as the films' audiences.”<sup>49</sup> Secondly, Yi P'ir-u, the central member of the company, was after all a technician, not necessarily identifying himself as a film artist; except for a few films in the late 1920s, he never directed a film while working as a cinematographer or an editor. As the company depended largely on his guidance—the company dissolved in 1937 when Yi left it—its products would have focused more on novel technologies than any artistic cinematic mission.

Note that one of the severe criticisms had come from Pak Ki-ch'ae who had just debuted as a director with a silent film, *Spring Breeze (Ch'unpung)*, in 1935, the year of the first Korean talkie. Belonging to a new generation, Pak had different perspectives from the previous generation of filmmakers like Yi regarding talkies, technology, and cinema in general. For Pak,

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(October 13, 1935), evening edition, 5 [second part missing]; Sō Hang-sōk (Indol, pseudonym), “Chosōn ch'oech'o ūi palsōng yōnghwa *Ch'unhyangjōn* ūl pogo” [Upon watching Korea's first sound film, *Tale of Ch'unhyang*], 3 parts, *Tonga ilbo* (October 11, 1935), evening edition, 3; (October 12, 1935), evening edition, 3; (October 16, 1935), evening edition, 3; Sō Kwang-je, “Chosōn yōnghwa ūi il nyōn” [Past year of Korean cinema], *Sin tonga* 5, no. 12 (December 1935).

<sup>48</sup> Pak Ki-ch'ae, “Yōnghwa il nyōn ūi kaegwanjōk hoego” [Looking back last year's Korean cinema], pt. 1, *Chosōn ilbo* (December 21, 1935), evening edition, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Yi, *Sound Politics*, 160.

cinema should be understood as art; it was from this basic understanding that he addressed the question of the relationship between sound cinema and silent cinema: Is sound cinema merely an extension of silent cinema? Or does it represent a separate artistic realm, predecessor new art form in its own right? Pak Ki-ch'ae sees both questions as unjustly conflating cinema's artistic growth with its technological development.<sup>50</sup> According to him, the transition from silent cinema to sound cinema is a technologically continuous development, much as the development from photography to silent cinema was a technological evolution. But at the same time, just as silent cinema that captures movements differs from photography that relies on still images, sound cinema as a technique of audiovisual representation is a fundamentally different form from cinema without sound.

Of course, Pak's understanding of sound cinema as art is also found among those of the older generation. From a different perspective from Pak Wan-sik's previous warning against sound cinema, leftist critic Ch'u Chŏg-yang highlighted the importance of filmmakers' self-awareness as artists for broadening sound cinema's artistic possibilities.<sup>51</sup> Another leftist actor, Na Ung, also argued for the necessity of studying new techniques of performing arts corresponding to the advent of talkies.<sup>52</sup> However, these contentions mark differences from Pak Ki-ch'ae, since what they conceive of as art comes from their leftist notions on the one hand, and more importantly, those people still belonged to an older generation who discussed Korean cinema in terms of its popularity among Koreans in the late 1920s. Unlike the leftist filmmakers who argued for filmmakers' artistic self-awareness under the precautions against cinema's

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<sup>50</sup> Pak Ki-ch'ae, "Yŏnghwa ūi yesulchŏk sŏngjang kwa kisulchŏk palchŏn" [Cinema's artistic growth and technological development], *Chogwang* 2, no. 12 (December 1936), 198-202.

<sup>51</sup> Ch'u Chŏg-yang, "Chosŏn ūi yŏnghwa sukche palsŏng yŏnghwa ch'urhyŏn e chehaya" [The task of Korean cinema: On the advent of sound cinema], *Chosŏn yŏnghwa*, no. 1 (October 1936), 110-11.

<sup>52</sup> Na Ung, "An Actor's Note," 117.



subsumption into capitalism, the new generation filmmakers such as Pak Ki-ch'ae, who studied filmmaking abroad, believed that cinema should be founded in a capitalist society. Yet, he did not blindly endorse the necessity of capital, as another branch of the older generation filmmakers had argued.<sup>53</sup> Pak was among the avid champions of corporatization in 1935 when he was making his debut film,<sup>54</sup> but as the transition to sound cinema was almost complete in the late 1930s, he started worrying about films being “nothing but a celluloid commodity.”<sup>55</sup> Given that he argued against confusing technological achievement with artistic development, his concern seems to gesture to the problem of cinema's artistic quality being overcome by commercialism. Arguing for the “artistic turn of film capitalism,” Pak wrote,

Filmmakers in the peninsula give a nod [to the capitalists] for their investment in the corporatization of cinema, a stepchild-like industry. For the capital they invested, therefore, they deserve all the credit! Speak bluntly, make a profit! But our advice is to not to hurl oneself headlong on the path of distorted profits, the path one should never take.<sup>56</sup>

Seemingly resonating with leftist warnings against capitalism, Pak makes it clear that the suggestion is “to not put industry and art in conflict, but to rationalize film capitalism.”<sup>57</sup> The rationalization of film capital is to facilitate the ecology of the film industry. As another of the new generation, director Yi Kyu-hwan, wrote, “A certain film assumes a form of art until it is

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<sup>53</sup> Notable arguments from such older generation filmmakers include An Chong-hwa, “Taejabon ūi chinch'ul i sŏn'gyŏl chokŏn” [The large capital as the prerequisite], *Chogwang* 5, no. 1 (January 1939), 97-98; Yun Pong-ch'un, “Chabon, yesul, paeu” [Capital, art, actor], *Chogwang* 5, no. 1 (January 1939), 109-113.

<sup>54</sup> Pak Ki-ch'ae, “Kiŏp ūroso ūi yŏnghwa saŏp kwa kuch'ean” [A concrete plan for film business as corporation], *Chosŏn ilbo* (July 6, 1935), supplement, 12.

<sup>55</sup> Pak Ki-ch'ae, “Yŏnghwa kamdok ūi ilgi” [A film director's diary], *Tonga ilbo* (May 7, 1938), evening edition, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Pak Ki-ch'ae, “Yŏnghwa yesul ūi chabonhwa” [Capitalist turn of cinematic art], *Pangmun*, no. 2 (November 1938), 21.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

created by a technician. When it's released and shown to the masses, it should be treated as a commodity by a businessperson, whose maneuvering of it feeds back to the technician as production costs."<sup>58</sup> Considering that Yi Kyu-hwan's "technician" (*kisulcha*) is commensurate with Pak Ki-ch'ae's "artist" (*yesulga*), what Pak called the "artistic turn of film capitalism"—that is, "the rationalization of film capital"—would generate the feedback loop between artists and businesspeople as Yi envisioned. This feedback loop had thus to be based upon a mutual understanding: Film artists should not forget how cinema as a popular entertainment is grounded upon capitalism, as much as film entrepreneurs should understand cinema's artistic vision of producing "meaningful films." With a thorough understanding of this dual purpose of cinema, the development of cinematic art would go hand in hand with the increase in profits.

#### *Corporatization: Chosŏn Films and Koryŏ Films*

Who mediates the dual task of artistic development and corporatization? This is where the role of the producer emerges; in fact the producer was positioned at the center of the corporatization discourse in the late 1930s. A film producer, as claimed by director Sin Kyŏng-gyun, would "supervise each sector of film production while encouraging large capital to make an investment."<sup>59</sup> Pak Ki-ch'ae noted that two types of producers sit between investors and filmmakers: One whose choice of the project is based on its marketability; the other who takes artistic values seriously.<sup>60</sup> Of course, Pak's ideal producer takes the golden mean. This producer

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<sup>58</sup> Yi Kyu-hwan, "Yŏnghwa kusŏng kwa kiŏpka" [Film composition and businesspeople], *Tonga ilbo* (August 19, 1937), morning edition, 6.

<sup>59</sup> Sin Kyŏng-gyun, "Kiŏpka wa ihaeja" [Businessperson who understands], *Chogwang* 5, no. 1 (January 1939), 113-14.

<sup>60</sup> Pak Ki-ch'ae, "Chosŏn p'ŭrodyŏsŏ e taehan hŭimang" [Hopes for Korean producers], *Sahae kongnon* 4, no. 7 (July 1938), 133-35.

will have profound understandings of both art and industry in order to negotiate with investors about capital while helping a film director develop a film's scenario both in terms of profitability as well as artistic achievement.

Accommodating the demand, those who would be called producers rose to the occasion in the late 1930s. Yi Chae-myōng and Yi Ch'ang-yong were two of these figures who played key roles in establishing new film companies—respectively, the Chosŏn Film Company (Chosŏn Yŏnghwa Chusikhoesa, hereafter “Chosŏn Films”) and the Koryŏ Film Association (Koryŏ Yŏnghwa Hyŏphoe, hereafter “Koryŏ Films”). With these two respected film producers, both companies emerged as leaders of the corporatization of the colonial Korean film industry in the late 1930s.

However, the two companies revealed different orientations in terms of the ways in which they were organized. Establishing Chosŏn Films in 1937, Ch'oe Nam-ju—a film lover who had made a great fortune by developing mines—recruited as its producer Yi Chae-myōng, who had worked in the Directors' department at P.C.L. in Japan.<sup>61</sup> As part of the effort to systematize film production, Ch'oe also planned to guarantee housing and benefits to his company's working staff as well as performers, which marked his ambition for the film business.<sup>62</sup> Chosŏn's producer Yi Chae-myōng designed and supervised the film projects under Ch'oe's tutelage; however, the company ended up yielding only three films—Pak Ki-ch'ae's *Heartless* (*Mujŏng*, 1939), Yi Kyu-hwan's *New Start* (*Sae Ch'ulbal*, 1940), and Kim Yu-yŏng's

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<sup>61</sup> It was already in 1936 that Ch'oe Nam-ju was taking necessary steps to establish the company. According to a report in August 1936, Chosŏn Films would be capitalized at 500,000 *won* and its shares had already been sold out. The company set the plan to build a studio around the Oryu-dong reservoir in the outskirts of Seoul. “Hantō e tanjōsuru Chosŏn Yŏnghwa Chusikhoesa” [Chosŏn Film Corporation to appear in the peninsula], *Kinema junpō*, no. 584 (August 11, 1936), 6.

<sup>62</sup> “Sinin ūi pobu, Chosŏn Yŏnghwa Chusikhoesa Ch'oe Nam-ju pangmungi” [A rookie's ambition: Interview with Ch'oe Nam-ju of the Chosŏn Films], *Samch'ŏlli* 10, no. 12 (December 1938), 173-75.

*Narcissus* (*Susŏnhwa*, 1940). There are two major reasons. On the one hand, Ch'oe did not get involved in anything related to film production, focusing rather on his mine business, and, on the other, Yi was a relatively less business-minded producer.<sup>63</sup> In contrast to Yi Chae-myŏng, who had studied film directing in Japan, Koryŏ's producer-cum-president Yi Ch'ang-yong was already famous for his entrepreneurship. A veteran film distributor for the Koryŏ Film Distribution Agency, who even exported Korean films by Kyŏngsŏng Studios while mediating the import of European films via Japan's Tōwa Shōji and San'eisha, Yi Ch'ang-yong had more practical experience of film business, ranging from each stage of film production to film distribution and exhibition. Thus, Yi was able to utilize his broad connections across the Japanese empire to effectively market Koryŏ's productions such as *Tuition* (dir. Ch'oe In-gyu and Pang Han-jun, 1940) and *Homeless Angels* (dir. Ch'oe In-gyu, 1941) to overseas audiences in Japan and Manchuria.<sup>64</sup>

Despite their differences, both companies did respond to the challenges posed by corporatization. For example, Chosŏn Films' merger with Sŏngbong Films was intended to acquire Sŏngbong's existing human resources—such as actors, actresses, and technicians—and, most importantly, its studio.<sup>65</sup> Koryŏ Films likewise took over the facilities of Kyŏngsŏng Studios, which had succeeded in producing the first Korean talkie. Just as notable as these efforts to fulfill the necessary industrial conditions was the companies' careful approach to distribution networks. As noted, the Korean Peninsula might have been too small to sustain the ecology of

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<sup>63</sup> XYZ, "Chosŏn yŏnghwa kiŏpcharon" [On film businesspeople in Korea], *Samch'ŏlli* 13, no. 6 (June 1941), 221-22.

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter 5 for Yi Ch'ang-yong's strategies to appeal to Japanese audiences by advertising Korean cinema as a child of Japanese cinema.

<sup>65</sup> In the 1941 survey, the Chŏsŏn Films retained the Sŏngbong's previous property in Ŭijŏngbu. See, "Satsuei rokuon genzōsho sōran Shōwa 16 nen 6 gatsu chōsa" [The list of film studios, recording studios, and film laboratory: Survey in June 1941], *Eiga junpō*, no. 18 (July 1, 1941), 138.

the film industry. Newly established film companies, thus, needed to look to a broader market encompassing the Japanese empire and beyond.

The necessity of an expanded film market led to the deployment of two strategies which Yi Kyu-hwan's Söngbong Films had adopted for the 1937 film *The Wanderer* (*Nagŭne*). Later they were borrowed by both Chosŏn and Koryŏ. First, *The Wanderer* was successful in utilizing the so-called "local color"—images of Korea that might appeal to audiences abroad—to receive critical acclaim from Japanese film critics even before its Japan release. This strategy of introducing exotic images of Korea to Japanese audiences in order to maximize Korean cinema's marketability was partly adopted by Chosŏn Films, which announced its plan for another *Tale of Ch'unhyang* by inviting Murayama Tomoyoshi to be its director. As is well-known, Murayama had staged a version of *The Tale of Ch'unhyang* with his Shinkyō Theater, based on Chang Hyök-chu's adaptation, in 1938, which had brought on a debate over the exploitation of Korean local color.<sup>66</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the "local color" strategy was not necessarily welcomed by all Koreans. As a matter of practicality, exotic images of Korea would merely end up as a one-time consumption, and there were a few more critically-minded opponents who warned about self-Orientalization as a pitfall for Korean cinema as art. Partly due to such criticisms, Murayama's *Tale of Ch'unhyang*, one of Chosŏn's most ambitious projects, was never produced as a film.

The second strategy adopted in the making of *The Wanderer* was co-production. The film was co-directed by Yi Kyu-hwan and his former teacher in Japan, Suzuki Shigeyoshi, whose collaboration brought the technical resources of Japan's Shinkō Kinema. Upon its partial

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<sup>66</sup> Serk-Bae Suh, *Treacherous Translation: Culture, Nationalism, and Colonialism in Korea and Japan from the 1910s to the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Nayoung Aimee Kwon, *Intimate Empire: Collaboration and Colonial Modernity in Korea and Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

success, Yi Kyu-hwan's company Sŏngbong again opted for coproduction when making *Military Train* (*Kunyong yŏlch'a*) with Tōhō in 1938. In the late 1930s, Koryŏ Films diversified the coproduction strategy. Its *Long Road to the Land of Happiness* (*Pokchi malli*, 1941) was made together with the Manchuria Film Association, while another project entitled *Lights, Forever* was to be a collaboration with Japan's Shōchiku, with Shimizu Hiroshi as director. More than anything, Koryŏ's close connection with Japan's distributors such as Tōwa Company helped them export *Tuition* and *Homeless Angels* to Japan. These examples show how Korean cinema in the age of sound cinema could not have been reproduced under the previously existing industrial structure. The business model needed to be revamped as a more rationalized company, and the new companies had to be based on a larger market.

Talking pictures brought the urgency of corporatization to Korea, and in order to make the film corporations sustainable, their films needed to be able to address a broader audience across the Japanese empire. As Yi Hwa-jin has noted, "Korean cinema in the talkie era had a clear vision to expand the pool of its audience both domestically and abroad."<sup>67</sup> Yet as long as the profitability of Korean films depended on creating a larger audience, that very vision was to be constituted through the gaze of others. So-called "local color" and coproduction were strategies used by Korean film companies to address such demands from without. As we will see in Chapters 4 and 5, they will reshape the idea of Korean cinema—not with Sim Hun's question in 1928 about what *Korean* people demand of cinema, but with a broader industrial problematic about what audiences *worldwide* would want to see from Korean cinema.

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<sup>67</sup> Yi, *Sound Politics*, 178.

## CHAPTER 3

### Corporatization as Imperialization:

#### From the Ordinance of Korean Cinema to Nationalized Film Corporations

##### *Change Corporatized*

With new visions for revamping the existing industrial structure in colonial Korea, Chosŏn Films and Koryŏ Films ambitiously embarked on the path to Korean cinema's corporatization. Yet in 1940, critic-cum-filmmaker Sŏ Kwang-je was not satisfied. For him, Chosŏn Films was still a “non-film-corporate organization” and Koryŏ was nothing more than a “filmmakers' club”<sup>1</sup> Chosŏn's producer Yi Chae-myŏng was not sufficiently capable of running the company as a business organization proper since he had never been trained in business. For this reason, the company was not as productive as it intended to be. Meanwhile, Koryŏ Films was not as financially stable as Chosŏn, and thus without any people with real money as backers, it could easily have ended up being simply a coterie of filmmakers. Therefore, Yi Ch'ang-yong still had to ask around for investment.<sup>2</sup> “These two film companies,” Sŏ observed, “have

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<sup>1</sup> Sŏ Kwang-je, “Kŏnsŏlsŏng kwa ch'ujinnyŏk Chosŏn yŏnghwa ūi chonjaesŏng” [Constructive momentum: Korean cinema's ontology], pt. 3 *Maeil sinbo* (October 5, 1940), morning edition, 4.

<sup>2</sup> In 1940, Yi Ch'ang-yong had a plan to expand his company with the investment from Kawakita Nagamasa from Tōwa and Negishi Kan'ichi (former head of Nikkatsu studio) from Manchuria Film Association. “200 man wŏn yŏnghwa hoesa sŏllipsŏl” [Rumor about 2,000,000 wŏn film company], *Samch'ŏlli* 12, no. 10 (December 1940), 18.

hampered any production of better Korean films, while sometimes becoming a cancer-like element [for Korean cinema].”<sup>3</sup>

However, Sō’s harsh criticism of the young film companies was not necessarily pessimistic. Beyond pointing to the failures of Korean film companies, Sō foregrounded as a critical point of corporatization the problem of the so-called “New Order” (K. *sinch’eye*; J. *shintaisei*), introduced with the empire’s 1939 legislation of the Film Law (*Eigahō*) and the subsequent promulgation of the Ordinance of Korean Cinema (K. *Chosŏn yŏnghwaryŏng*; J. *Chōsen eigarei*) in August 1940. The New Order announced the reorganization of the entire film culture in colonial Korea, in other words, “Whether Chosŏn [Films] or Koryŏ [Films] would disappear or would merge into one company doesn’t matter any longer.”<sup>4</sup> One needed instead to ponder the more fundamental issue of how corporatization would correspond to the political changes pronounced in the Film Law and the Ordinance of Korean Cinema. By this time, corporatization in the film world was overdetermined by political movements in the Japanese empire. Now the issue of corporatization was no longer about rationalizing individual film companies; it evolved around the state corporation stipulated under the colonial government’s plan, as it laid out in the Ordinance, to “promote the qualitative betterment of cinema and facilitate the sound development of film business.” Soon, in 1942, all the film companies in colonial Korea would close in favor of two new corporations—the Korea Film Production Company (K. Chosŏn Yŏnghwa Chejak Chusikhoesa; J. Chōsen Eiga Seisaku Kabushikigaisha) and the Korea Film Distribution Agency (K. Chosŏn Yŏnghwa Paegŭpsa; J. Chōsen Eiga

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<sup>3</sup> Sō, “Constructive Momentum: Korean Cinema’s Ontology,” pt. 3 (October 5, 1940), 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 2 (October 4, 1940), 4.



Haikyūsha)—that would be established with much stronger subsidies from the colonial government.

This chapter narrates the story of how the so-called New Order in colonial Korea fulfilled its mission of the imperialization (*kōminka*) of Korean cinema—making Korean cinema serviceable to the greater cause of the empire, which was ever growing throughout the Asian Continent and the Pacific Ocean. Unlike postcolonial historians’ judgmental commentaries about the “darkness” it brought to Korean cinema, however, people in the colonial film world did not consider imperialization as necessarily a dire situation. As mentioned above, despite his discouraging manner toward the current efforts by new Korean film companies, Sō Kwang-je seemed rather hopeful for the future that the New Order would bring to Korean cinema. Indeed, the government-sponsored film companies that were its consequence were widely accepted as a chance for filmmakers to ground their production upon the better conditions offered by the colonial authorities. The longstanding yearning of the colonized for external succor was finally about to be fulfilled by Japanese imperialism. In this sense, the story of Japan’s imperialization of cinema is profoundly entangled with another story of the colonized. In this chapter, I will weave the joys, concerns, and frustrations felt by hopeful filmmakers in the colony with the contentions and negotiations involved in the development of the imperial film policies. Through this, I will show how Korean cinema, which had just started looking away from its small audience in the peninsula, finally faced both the possibilities and limitations prescribed by the empire. Ironically, as I will argue, the encounter would return Korean cinema to where it initially belonged, the Korean Peninsula.

## *Into the New Order*

What was this New Order in the Korean film world? According to Katō Atsuko, the New Order meant the tightening web of cinema control, heightened through three steps during the peak of war mobilization in the late Japanese empire.<sup>5</sup> First, the Film Law came into effect in October 1939. It was the first piece of cultural legislation in the empire that put cinema under state control. Second, as the private film companies were still in competition despite the Law, the empire's Home Ministry turned to the New Film Order (*eigashintaisei*) in September 1940 to actively control their production and distribution activities. The Home Ministry now exercised more power to determine the number of films to be produced and to distribute the rights for film production. In addition, under the New Film Order, the importance of culture films and news films was further emphasized.<sup>6</sup> Third, government control over cinema was reinforced in September 1941 when the Information Bureau of Japan's cabinet decided not to distribute any film stock to private companies as a gesture to the restructuring of Japan's film industry. As a result, in 1942, all the existing film production companies were consolidated into three large conglomerates, Shōchiku, Tōhō, and Daiei.<sup>7</sup> Katō calls this regime the Combat-Ready System for Film (*eigarinsentaisei*). According to Katō's periodization, what Sō Kwang-je referred to as the New Order may correspond to the New Film Order. Sō wrote an exceedingly awkward passage about his own definition of the New Order:

Needless to say, the New Order implies that the ancien régime impeded the leadership of

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<sup>5</sup> Katō Atsuko, *Sōdōin taisei to eiga* [General mobilization and cinema] (Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 2003), 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 84. In fact, it was in September 1941 that the Home Ministry ordered the consolidation for the first time. As a result, three companies absorbed existing small companies and their resources. The merge of Nikkatsu, Daitō, and Shinkō—three relatively mid-sized film companies—produced Daiei in 1942.

the entire Japanese nation in an extended sense in building New East Asia, as well as the sound development of the lives of people along with government authority. In order to break such an old tradition and create [communicative routes] from the bottom up and top down, the New Order emerged, not as a spontaneous generation, but under a clear, purposeful direction.<sup>8</sup>

Here, the mission to create a regional block called “New East Asia” has been assigned to “the entire Japanese nation *in an extended sense*.” Such a designation of the principal agent for the New Order underscores the commonality “in an extended sense” rather than racial and ethnic differences among the Japanese, Koreans, Manchurians, and Taiwanese. With the arrival of the New Order, Korean cinema’s overseas market and the ideological space for Japan’s imperial expansion overlapped with one another as “New East Asia” (K. *Sin tong-A*; J. *Shin tō-A*)—the precursor of the so-called Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere (*Dai tō-A kyōeiken*).

According to Japanese film historian Makino Mamoru, it was around December of 1941 that the term “Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere” first appeared in the Japanese film magazine *Eiga junpō*.<sup>9</sup> But from earlier articles in October 1941 about Korean cinema in the same magazine, Korean film scholar Yang In-sil finds an almost identical term, “East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, these terms, denoting a political and economic entity that extended from Japan, China, and Manchuria to Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, began circulating in 1940 with the platform of the second cabinet of Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro (July 1940-October 1941); even earlier, in 1938, Konoe’s first cabinet (June 1937-January 1939) advocated

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<sup>8</sup> Sō, “Constructive Momentum: Korean Cinema’s Ontology,” pt. 1 (October 3, 1940), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Makino Mamoru, “*Kinema junpō* kara *Eiga junpō* e rinsenka no eiga zasshi tōsei” [From *Kinema junpō* to *Eiga junpō*: Wartime control of film periodicals], *Shiryō senjika no media dai 1 ki tōseika no eiga zasshi Nihon eiga Eiga junpō*, vol. 32 (Tokyo: Yumani Shobō, 2004), 513.

<sup>10</sup> For example, “Hantō eiga o meguru futatsu no mondai” [Two problems regarding the peninsula cinema], *Eiga junpō*, no. 29 (October 21, 1941), 6. See Yang In-sil, “Yōnghwa sinch’eje wa *Eiga junpō*” [New Film Order and *Eiga junpō*], in vol. 3 of *Ilbonŏ chapchi ro pon Chosŏn yŏnghwa* (Seoul: Korea Film Archive, 2012), 303.

the “New Order of East Asia” (*Tō-A shin chitsujo*) as a political elaboration of pan-Asianism. Notable, however, is that while the discourse about the empire’s spatial expansion was drawn to emphasize the geographical importance of Korean cinema in Japan’s advance into the “continent” (*tairiku*) through northern China, the idea of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere after December 1941 was much more attuned to the “South Seas” (*nan’yō*).<sup>11</sup> With the reorientation of Japanese imperialism toward Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, Korea was comparatively less interesting in terms of the New Film Order. This relative indifference to Korean cinema brought about skepticism regarding Korean cinema’s utility in the Japanese empire—namely, the futility (*muyō*) of Korean cinema. As I will discuss, this aroused the anxiety of Korean filmmakers as well as colonial bureaucrats over the *raison d’être* of Korean cinema when they claimed the necessity of film policies specific to colonial situations.

While coming fully into effect with the legislation of the 1939 Film Law in Japan, the so-called “film mobilization system” (*eiga sōdōin taisei*) had been developing even before that.<sup>12</sup> As is well known, the Film Law was promulgated in the context of the 1938 National Mobilization Law (*Kokka sōdōin hō*), whose purpose of marshaling all human and material forces was necessitated by the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937. This militarization of the Japanese empire harks back even further to the rise of the military authority in Japan after the

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<sup>11</sup> As for Japanese cinema’s interests in the South Seas see Michael Baskett, *The Attractive Empire: Transnational Film Culture in Imperial Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 93-105. In terms of the Chinese connections in Japanese cinema, Yan Ni traces the political and aesthetic changes of the so-called “continent films” (*tairiku eiga*). For such a change under the empire’s redirection toward the South Seas, see Yan Ni, *Senji Nitchū eiga kōshōshi* [The film history of wartime collaboration between Japan and China] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2010), 110-17.

<sup>12</sup> Aaron Gerow also argues for seeing the Film Law as “a continuation of the effort begun in the 1910s to purify, modernize, and massify (‘nation-alize’) the motion picture industry by emphasizing the script in the sphere of production, stemming overproduction, and encouraging the production of more prints.” Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 225.

Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923 and, needless to say, the Manchurian Incident in 1931. In this sense, rather than limit Japan's military mobilization to the Second World War in the 1940s, some historians identify a more far-reaching development of Japanese militarization extending back to 1931, if not further, using terms like the Asia-Pacific War (*Ajia Taiheiyō sensō*) or the 15 Years' War (*jūgonen sensō*).<sup>13</sup>

Within this broader sweep of military mobilization, the necessity of national film policy (*eiga kokusaku*) was brought up in the early 1930s. This was the time when the League of Nations was embroiled in a dispute over the legitimacy of Japan's 1931 invasion of Northern China, which eventually saw Japan withdraw from the League in February 1933. Witnessing the dispute at the Geneva Conference in 1932, Iwase Ryō, a member of Japan's House of Representatives, realized the important role of Japanese films in delivering better images of his country to international audiences. To fulfill the mission of Japanese films, cinema should no longer be subjected to rules and regulations, but should be nurtured as a means of propaganda and education, he decided. Upon returning to Japan, Iwase drafted "The Proposition for Establishing National Policies for Film" (*Eiga kokusaku ni kan suru kengian*).<sup>14</sup> In March 1933, Japan's House of Representatives passed the proposition, which called for research about new legislation for cinema control.<sup>15</sup> Iwase's proposal was intended to protect and foster Japanese

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<sup>13</sup> For a collective effort among Japanese historians, see *Iwanami kōza Ajia Taiheiyō sensō* [Iwanami Lecture Series: The Asia-Pacific War], 6 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2005-2006). In his book about Japanese cinema's historical development into the war, film historian Peter B. High adopts the 15 Years' War. Peter B. High, *The Imperial Screen: Japanese Film Culture in the Fifteen Years' War, 1931-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Iwase Ryō, "Eiga kokusaku ni kan suru kengian ni tsuite" [On the Proposition for Establishing National Policies for Film], *Kinema shūhō*, no. 143 (February 10, 1933), 19.

<sup>15</sup> "Eiga kokusaku juritsu no tame no naikaku chokuzoku eigakyoku jitsugen no kiun semaru" [Cabinet to establish film bureau for national film policy], *Kinema shūhō*, no. 156 (May 19, 1933): 7.

cinema as both a domestic cultural industry as well as a means for international propaganda. And as discussed, part of the proposal materialized in colonial Korea's Cinema Regulations in 1934.

Like the 1934 Cinema Regulations, the Ordinance of Korean Cinema promulgated in 1940 was closely connected to Japan's legislative development.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Okada Jun'ichi—who worked at the Book Department of the colonial government in 1941—explained, “The provisions of the Ordinance were a transplanted of the mainland's Film Law effective for the mainland's own concerns.”<sup>17</sup> The Ordinance of Korean Cinema reads as follows: “The production, distribution, and screening of films and other subjects are in accordance with the Film Law except for Article No. 19. However, the Imperial Order (*Chokurei*) [in the Film Law] should be the Governor-General's Order (*Chōsen Sōtokufurei*) [in the Ordinance], and the Governor-General of Korea is designated as the competent minister.” Article No. 19 of the Film Law stipulated the establishment of the Film Committee (Eiga Iinkai), which would facilitate communication among the involved administrative authorities such as the Home Ministry, the Education Ministry, and the Welfare Ministry. In other words, except for some specific matters regarding colonial administration, the Film Law was imported into the Ordinance as it stood. Thus, it may not be a huge conflation between the two to accept analyses of the provisions of the

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<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that the Ordinance was enacted as a *Chōsen Sōtokufu seirei* (legislative ordinance), the highest legal institution, which had the same effect as the laws in the empire's mainland. Legislating a *seirei* required more complicated processes until its actual promulgation—in particular, the communication with the Imperial Cabinet and the final sanction by the Emperor—than other types of rules and regulations, which could simply be initiated and enacted under the authority of the Government-General. The 1934 Cinema Regulations, according to its drafter Shimizu Shigeo, was first aimed as a *seirei*, although it had to be announced as a *Chōsen Sōtokufurei*, or in short, *furei* (colonial government's order) due to the time constraint. See Marie Seong-Hak Kim, *Law and Custom in Korea: Comparative Legal History* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 153-54.

<sup>17</sup> Okada Jun'ichi, “Chosŏn yŏnghwaryŏng kaesŏl” [The Summary of the Ordinance of Korean Cinema], *Munjang* 3, no. 3 (March 1941), 116.

Film Law as also applying to the Ordinance.<sup>18</sup>

### *Defining Cinema in the Colony*

As soon as it came into effect, the Ordinance consolidated all the existing regulations regarding cinema, including the Censorship Regulations (1926) and the Cinema Regulations (1934), which were immediately abolished. Accordingly, it displaced the screen quota regulations and the regulations about screening venues while including more active stipulations for screening “excellent films” selected by the colonial authorities.<sup>19</sup> However, at the time of its promulgation, most attention was paid to its provision about the permit system for the film business, which would “turn free companies (*chayu kiōp*) into controlled companies (*t’ongje kiōp*) in order to preclude meaningless competition and help them develop as sound businesses.”<sup>20</sup> This was interconnected with the license system for film directors, performers, and cinematographers. While the Ordinance prohibited any unlicensed filmmakers from making movies, it also bestowed a sense of privilege on filmmakers, who felt they were working for the state’s greater cause.

The newly introduced film policy, according to the Ordinance, was governed by its own intent to “contribute to the progress of [Japanese] national culture (*kokumin bunka*) by promoting

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<sup>18</sup> Okada Jun’ichi’s commentary essay reflects the similarity between the Film Law and the Ordinance by simply calling the Ordinance *pōp* (law), although as mentioned in the previous footnote, it was technically different from the Law in terms of the legislative procedures.

<sup>19</sup> While feature-length fiction films were also eligible, “the government recognition” was largely aimed at so-called culture film (K. *munhwa yōnghwa*; J. *bunka eiga*). As for how the Film Law contributed to the production and screening of documentary films, see Chapter 3 of Markus Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film: From Meiji Era through Hiroshima* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). As Nornes discusses, the Film Law can be seen as a government action to define what documentary film should be through the notion of culture film.

<sup>20</sup> Okada, “The Summary of the Ordinance of Korean Cinema,” 117.

the qualitative betterment of cinema and facilitating the sound development of film business,” as articulated in its first article. Interpreting this purpose, Okada Jun’ichi reiterates what Shimizu Shigeo has said about the 1934 Cinema Regulations. “In the past, the State assumed the passive attitude of policing films by enforcing censorship in terms of public safety and customs control, while lacking a plan to actively control and promote them.”<sup>21</sup> Instead, the newly introduced notion of “cinema control” involved proactive government intervention, not only to regulate undesirable films, but also to endorse desirable films. In this sense, as Aaron Gerow argues, this aim of the film policy cannot be readily dismissed as a “hypocrisy of power” but should be examined as an “idea of cinema that should be—and was thought to be—realized” during the height of the Japanese empire. In other words, we may consider the Film Law—and the Ordinance—as a film theory (*eigaron*) which “rather than articulate the essence of the existing cinema, attempts to guide cinema to what has been thought to be the essence (like many other film theories),” as Gerow puts it. It was “a discourse as a practice, which is to carry out the vision of cinema through legislation.”<sup>22</sup>

This intent was reflected in the introduction of pre-production censorship, what Okada called “the proactive approach to censorship” (*kōmyōl ūi chōkkūkhwa*), which forced filmmakers to submit shooting scripts to censors at least ten days before the start of filming.<sup>23</sup> As Okada explained, this was to make censorship more aggressive by sifting out anything that would not contribute to the state’s cause. For the purposes of pre-censorship, new regulations were set about three inadmissible categories: (1) That which would produce a misunderstanding about

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>22</sup> Aaron Gerow, “Eigahō to iu eigaron” [The Film Law as film theory], in Makino Mamoru ed., *Eigahō kaisetsu/dai 74-kai teikoku gikai eiga hōan giji gaiyō*, vol 8 of *Nihon eigaron gensetsu taikai, dai 1-ki: senjika no eiga tōseiki* (Tokyo: Yumani Shobō, 2003), 590.

<sup>23</sup> Okada, “The Summary of the Ordinance of Korean Cinema,” 120.



national culture; (2) that which would hinder the advancement of national culture; and (3) that whose production techniques were extremely inappropriate. While still vague as regulatory categories, the purpose of “the proactive approach to censorship” was clear, with its emphasis on cinema’s significant contribution to the culture in the empire and the state’s interests in the qualitative development of cinema. From the very early stage of pre-censorship, the Ordinance was to determine what cinema should be.

The Ordinance’s vision for cinema lay in its improvement and development, which would result in the “Japanization of people’s lives” (*taejung ūi saenghwal ūl Ilbon kungminhwa*).<sup>24</sup> According to this vision, cinema should be revamped as the “nation’s cultural assets” (*kungmin munhwajae*). In Japan’s case, however, if the goal was making cinema conducive to the public good, the law exposed a critical question regarding, in particular, its actual application—that Japan in fact did not nationalize the entire film business. Of course, the Film Law provided the grounds for nationalizing the production and distribution of news films and culture films by creating unified institutions; but in the case of commercial film productions, the government authorities had to rely on controlling the supply of film stocks to consolidate the existing film companies.<sup>25</sup> Aaron Gerow suggests that this contradiction between the ideal and the practice of the Film Law was more or less based upon the perception of cinema as “a negative number” (*fu no sonzai*), a lowly popular entertainment without any cultural leadership.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>25</sup> While the consolidation was under the directive of the Home Ministry for its administrative convenience for control, it also gave rise to three large film conglomerates. See Gregory J. Kasza, *The State and the Mass Media in Japan, 1918-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 242-48; Katō, *General Mobilization and Cinema*, 95-94. Given those companies continued their business well after the dissolution of the Japanese empire—notably, Shōchiku and Tōhō are still two of the dominant forces in today’s Japanese cinema—the Film Law lay the foundation on which, as Gerow writes, “the industry structure survived the war and eventually developed into the dominant culture industry of Japan.” Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity*, 232.

<sup>26</sup> Gerow, “The Film Law as Film Theory,” 598.

This view must have necessitated legislation to make such a useless entertainment more serviceable to imperial projects. Granted, a completely opposite case is found in Japan's puppet state in Northern China. In 1937—two years prior to Japan's similar legislation—Manchuria enacted the Manchuria Film Law (C. *Manzhou yinghuaafa*; J. *Manshūkoku eigahō*), which prescribed the establishment of the Manchuria Film Association (C. Manzhou Yinghua Xiehui; J. *Manshū Eiga Kyōkai*). Then, if the necessity for film control at the higher level of government came from the very perception of cinema as a vulgar entertainment, how can we understand the attempt to nationalize film production in a colony like Manchuria?<sup>27</sup>

*Freedom as Shackles, Control as True Freedom*

The process in colonial Korea from the Ordinance to the creation of two state corporations shows how the same provisions of the law can have different effects in different contexts. For example, unlike other countries such as the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, Japan had earlier rejected the nationalization of the film industry as a strategy for cinema control, when Iwase Ryō's 1933 Proposition was drafted. Public intellectuals resisted the idea of nationalization at the time. Tanaka Jun'ichirō, who was then running the weekly *Kinema shūhō*,

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<sup>27</sup> I want to note the differences between Japan's official colonies, Korea and Taiwan, although this goes beyond the scope of this chapter. Colonial Taiwan also attempted to promulgate a law similar to the Ordinance of Korean Cinema, which in the end did not materialize. While some scholars argued Japan's 1939 Film Law affected cinema control in colonial Taiwan, Misawa Mamie outrightly refuses to accept this by contending that the import of foreign films was a matter of much more concern in colonial Taiwan. However, as to this, Lee Daw-ming raises questions whether, if rules about film censorship had been promulgated in 1939—such as the Rules and Regulations for Motion Picture Film Censorship (*Huodong xiezhen yin pian jianyue guize qu ban guiding*)—they could have had any effect similar to Japan's 1939 Film Law. Although Lee does not provide any definitive answer, this opens up a new avenue for historical inquiry. Misawa Mamie, *Teikoku to sokoku no hazama shokuminchiki Taiwan eigajin no kōshō to ekkyō* [Between the empire and the fatherland: The negotiation and border-crossing of colonial Taiwan filmmakers] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2010), 53-54; Lee Daw-Ming, "Zhimin shiqi Taiwan dianying yu Chaoxian dianying zhi chubu bijiao" [A preliminary comparison between Taiwan and Korean cinema during the colonial period], Paper presented at the Second International Conference on the Film Histories of Taiwan and Asia (Taipei: October 2016).

insisted that nationalization was simply impossible; economist Ishimaki Yoshio also noted that “except for such places as Soviet Russia, cinema control has been treated, not as a problem of possession (*shoyū*), but as that of supervision (*kanri*). [...] Nationalization may be followed by the evils of bureaucracy, making the development of film culture difficult.”<sup>28</sup> Under such circumstances, Japan’s Home Ministry had to clearly announce that it “didn’t seek to nationalize cinema by unifying private film companies,” since it was not feasible with the current government’s budgets to buy out all the companies as Nazi Germany would have done by 1942, on the one hand, and because pursuing unified efforts between public and private sectors would yield better products, on the other.<sup>29</sup> From early on, there was a certain degree of resistance to state corporatism, which may have affected the contradiction between what the Film Law purported to do and its actual results.

Interestingly, the Ordinance of Korean Cinema—the colonial iteration of Japan’s Film Law—generated quite different responses among the colonized, kindling discussion around the consolidation of existing film companies under the direction of the colonial government. It should be noted again that the development of the New Film Order in colonial Korea culminated with the establishment of two film companies, the Korea Film Production Company and the Korea Film Distribution Agency, in 1942. These two companies—each representing a key sector of the film business—were directly administered by the colonial government. Thus, while organizationally semi-independent entities of “corporation” (K. *sadan pōbin*; J. *shadan hōjin*) in terms of their legal registration, in reality, they were state corporations. Unlike Japanese film

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<sup>28</sup> Tanaka Jun’ichirō, “Eiga kokusaku ni kan suru sho mondai” [Problems of national film policy], *Kinema shūhō*, no. 161 (June 30, 1933), 7-9; Ishimaki Yoshio, “Jissenteki eiga kokusaku hihan” [Practical critique of national film policy], *Kinema shūhō*, no. 199 (May 18, 1934), 20.

<sup>29</sup> “Eiga kokusaku juritsu no tame no naikaku chokuzoku eigakyoku jitsugen no kiun semaru” [Cabinet to establish film bureau for national film policy], *Kinema shūhō*, no. 156 (May 19, 1933), 7.

industry in which the organization of three large private companies was based on their existing infrastructure, the colonial Korean cinema's reform had to start with its industrial feebleness. Indeed, the nationalization of the film industry would represent one of the solutions for the bitter reality of Korean cinema that filmmakers, producers, businesspeople, and critics had all struggled together to overcome.

As already seen from Sŏ's discontent with the existing companies and sense of expectation about what the Ordinance would bring to Korean cinema, the desire for a nationalized film company was first articulated by filmmakers and critics in the colony. Kim Chŏng-hyŏk, for example, identified the problems of the Korean film world as springing from its "laissez-faire commercialism" (*sangŏpchŏk chayu pangim*). Far from enjoying the "freedom of cinematic art," he continues, it added up to "improperly pandering to the masses while not gaining the capital security for corporatization."<sup>30</sup> If cultural control fundamentally led to control over economic structure as stated in the policies, Kim argued, that very control would "rationalize Korean film companies to lessen the unnecessary worry of artists and anoint them with abundant funds."<sup>31</sup> Kim's acrobatic logic that interpreted previous freedoms as shackles and the coming control as providing real freedom was obviously based on his own expectation for the active involvement of the colonial government as manifested in the Ordinance. The "freedom" under "laissez-faire commercialism" had also perpetuated the dire situation of Korean filmmaking. The urgent issue was to secure a stable source of money that would "lessen unnecessary worry." Koreans' enduring yearning for corporatization seems to have finally found a source in the colonial government. Hence, for people who conceived of the government as a

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<sup>30</sup> Kim Chŏng-hyŏk, "Yŏnghwaryŏng ūi silsi wa Chosŏn yŏnghwagye ūi changnae" [The implementation of the Ordinance and Korean cinema's future], *Chogwang* 6, no. 9 (September 1940), 256.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 256-257.

savior, calls for a state corporation were the natural conclusion. Film director Pang Han-jun argued for the urgency of the “merger” (*hap tong*) of the companies in Korea. And Sō Kwang-je proposed even more specific plans to divide the production department into three branches by the genres of productions such as newsreels, culture films, and feature films.<sup>32</sup>

On the 10th of December in 1940, the Korea Film Producers Association (Chosŏn Yŏnghwa Chejakcha Hyŏphoe) was established as an organization of the film companies under the direction of the colonial government. Nine active film production companies participated as its inaugural members,<sup>33</sup> and the government officials in the departments involved were included as advisors. The Association was formed merely as a consultative body for the implementation of the Ordinance, and therefore could not make any decision as to Korean cinema’s future on its own. However, during the first year after the Ordinance, the Government-General—the authority that would have to issue orders on specific plans for Korea’s cinema control—left it unclear how it would reorganize the film business with no plan to establish any government-sponsored film companies. At a roundtable discussion held right after the announcement of the Ordinance, for example, the dramatist Yu Ch’i-jin asked Shimizu Shōzō, then-administrative director (*rijikan*) of the Book Department, if the government had any program as to support for film companies, or if it aimed to organize a “semi-governmental” (*pan’gwan panmin*) corporation like the Manchuria Film Association—to which Shimizu replied, “We don’t have such a plan yet.” He continued that the government envisioned that film production would be based on “the activities

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<sup>32</sup> See the roundtable discussion, “Chwadamhoe Chosŏn yŏnghwa ūi sin ch’ulbal” [Roundtable: Korean cinema’s new departure], *Chogwang* 8, no. 1 (January 1942), 144-51.

<sup>33</sup> Its members included Chosŏn Film Company (Ch’oe Nam-ju), Koryŏ Film Association (Yi Ch’ang-yong), Myŏngbo Film Co. Ltd (Yi Pyŏng-il), Hanyang Film Company (Kim Kap-ki), Keijō Film Studios (Yanamura Kichizō), Chosŏn Kugwi Films (Furuhata Seizō), Chosŏn Entertainments (Sō Hang-sŏk), Chosŏn Culture Film Association (Tsumura Isamu), and Kyŏngsŏng Sound Film Studios (Takashima Kinji). In parentheses are the presidents of the companies.

of utterly private companies and film people,” while the role of authorities would remain at the level of sponsorship.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the Ordinance as based on its original reference, the 1939 Film Law, did not specify any such plan to organize a state corporation but merely stipulated the licensing system.

The lack of clarity as to the actual implementation of the Ordinance then led all members of the Producers’ Association to seek their own ways to come to terms with the impending New Film Order. As Takashima Kinji noted in his 1943 *History of Cinema Control in Korea*, the first half of the year 1941 was, indeed, the “period of groping in the dark” (*anchū mosaku jidai*): “Still the production companies were all groping in the dark, making plans for the future based on their self-interest; [everything] looked peaceful on the surface, but in fact each company was hectic with preparing for emergency measures to break through the current state of affairs.”<sup>35</sup> Some relatively stable companies, like Chosŏn Films and Koryŏ Films, sought to complete their infrastructure to stay ahead of the game under the New Film Order, while other weaker companies hurriedly secured funding to make them sustainable under the registration system. Some others speculatively submitted their business registration even before organizing their companies, expecting some form of subsidy from the government.<sup>36</sup> All these activities converged on the very purpose of the Ordinance, that is, to “promote film culture” in colonial Korea. In other words, their different agendas for corporatization were, either purportedly or whole-heartedly, advocated by the idea manifested in the Ordinance.

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<sup>34</sup> “Yŏnghwa munhwain kandamhoe chŏlbak Yŏnghwaryŏng i silsidoenda” [Filmmakers’ roundtable: The Ordinance coming in effect], *Maeils sinbo* (February 10, 1940), evening edition, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Takashima Kinji, *Chōsen eiga tōseishi* [History of cinema control in Korea] (Keijō [Seoul]: Chōsen Eiga Bunka Kenkyūsho, 1943), 17.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-25.

However, in the view of Korean filmmakers and critics, these efforts at corporatization were fraught with corrosive competition for resources that did not yet exist.<sup>37</sup> Facing this problem, An Chong-hwa demanded that filmmakers “give up their self-interest” in favor of the imperatives of “totalitarianism” promised by the New Order.<sup>38</sup> According to him, for the purpose of greater unity, each company should abandon the goals set for itself and immediately take steps forward to selflessly work with the government’s direction. Corporatization in this sense no longer implied the “transformation of Korean cinema from its feudal forms to a capitalist company” as people like Yi Ch’ang-yong had envisioned in the late 1930s.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, it should accompany “the exit of the barbaric uncultured people” for the purpose of elevating the cultural standards of Korean people (*Chosŏn ūi mindo*).<sup>40</sup> In other words, corporatization after the Ordinance also involved the issue of the edification of those in the film industry, which exemplified the larger project of making the colonized the imperial subject, namely, imperialization.

Yet, the project of imperialization never simply operated at the level of the individual psychology of film people; it had to be embodied in the physical form of film companies. After a long competition against one another, the members of the Producers’ Association finally reached

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<sup>37</sup> Often corrosive competition was related to a cultural essentialism that Koreans had a penchant for schism. Given that the film businesspeople also included Japanese residents in Korea, this view introduces a highly racist definition of the colonized. It should be noted that such views were more often than not articulated by colonizers. For example, Kim Chŏng-hyŏk tells a story of his meeting with Iwasaki Akira, who visited Korea and before the visit was warned by Suzuki Shigeyoshi to be careful because “Korean film people tend to backstab one another.” Kim Chŏng-hyŏk, “Parak ūi ch’ŏngsan kwa chichŏk hyangsang e” [Liquidating atrocity toward an intellectual development], *Chogwang* 5, no. 1 (January 1939), 107.

<sup>38</sup> An Chong-hwa, “Sinch’eje e sunŭng hanŭn Chosŏn yŏnghwa ūi changnae” [Korean cinema’s future by adjusting to the New Order], pt. 1, *Maeil sinbo* (September 13, 1940), morning edition, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Yi Ch’ang-yong, “Chŏsen eiga no shōrai” [Korean cinema’s future], *Kokusai eiga shinbun*, no. 252 (August 1938), 4.

<sup>40</sup> Kim Chŏng-hyŏk, “Yŏnghwa wa punwigi” [Cinema and atmosphere], *Inmun p’yŏngnon* (February 1942), 79; Kim Chŏng-hyŏk, “Chosŏn yŏnghwa kiŏmnon” [On film corporations in Korea], *Maeil sinbo* (January 4, 1940), evening edition, 4.

an agreement in the summer of 1941 to nullify all the existing film entities and create a centralized company. Announcing this plan at a press conference in Seoul on July 20, 1941, the companies began drafting a proposal for a unified film production company, which was submitted in early September. The proposal included the details of the new company's organization, the number of films to be produced, and the yearly budget, on which the government had the authority to make a decision. However, the most crucial issue was the total demand for film stock (*nama firumu*), which had up to this point been under the control of Japan's Information Bureau. The colonial government immediately sent a delegate to Tokyo to confirm the quota of film stock for colonial Korea, according to which the members of the Producers' Association revised the proposal in October 1941. After a week, the colonial government decided to hand over the equipment of its Film Unit to the new company as a gesture of its support for the new establishment.

The process was relatively smooth, though it ceased for a couple of months due to a change in the leadership of the government's Book Department. From late April 1942, the government began calculating compensation to the film companies for transferring their existing equipment and facilities, which was finalized on May 30. In the meantime, Tanaka Saburō, the vice chair of the Seoul Chamber of Commerce (*Keijō Shōgyō Kaigisho*), was elected as the company's first president; and in June 1942, Nakada Haruyasu, who had run the Nikkatsu Studios, arrived in Seoul to assume the position of executive director. As the Korea Film Production Company finalized all the paperwork for getting its production license granted by the government in September, all the previous production licenses were nullified. In October 1942, the Korea Film Producers' Association, which had fulfilled its mission for the state corporation, was finally dissolved.



### *The Futility of Korean Cinema*

From the beginning, the Government-General of Korea must have expected the outcomes of the Ordinance to differ greatly from those of Japan's Film Law, as it maintained the particularity of Korea as a reason for separate legislation in the colony. As journalist Kumagaya Masami said with much doubt, the Ordinance "had to be different, because of the different situations."<sup>41</sup> If this was the case, why did the colonial government not make any substantial change to the Film Law when promulgating its Ordinance? The issue, however, seems to lie in the "how" more than the "why." As noted, it took less than a year after the Film Law for the Ordinance to be implemented in Korea. The speed with which the colonial authorities went through the legislative process might have reflected a certain degree of anxiety that the Ordinance should be enacted as quickly as possible.

The anxiety of the authorities had partly come from, of course, the urgency of film policies in colonial Korea. Cinema, the most popular entertainment and one with huge impact upon the colonial masses, should immediately serve as the catalyst for imperialization. It is in this sense that the Ordinance exerted its productive power over Korean cinema's reform as much as it accompanied the suppression of existing practices while reshaping them to serve as propaganda machine. Filmmakers, critics, and businesspeople in colonial Korea were not alone in their hopes of revamping the feeble industry—the colonial government joined them in envisioning a new cinema in colonial Korea. The Ordinance arranged the minimum conditions under which Korean cinema would respond to the rapidly changing cultural politics in the empire.

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<sup>41</sup> "Zadankai Chōsen eiga no zenbō o kataru" [Roundtable: Everything about Korean Cinema], *Eiga hyōron* 1, no. 7 (July 1941), 56.

But we hear stories that testify to another source of the urgency for the Ordinance. On June 24 in 1942, Nakada Haruyasu, a veteran producer of Japanese cinema, arrived in Seoul to become the executive director of the newly established Korea Film Production Company. On the day of his arrival, he stated his ambition for Korean cinema's development, pointing to the particular necessity of cinema independently administered in colonial Korea.

Some people in Japan insist on the futility of Korean cinema (*Chōsen eiga muyōron*), which is armchair talk that comes from their ignorance of the local conditions. No art can retain [cultural] leadership without consideration of the ethnicity and ways of thinking grounded in the local area. At all times, films should be rooted in their locality. In this sense, past Korean cinema needs a great transformation, but it is never futile.<sup>42</sup>

As his first comment as the executive director, Nakada debunked the idea among the Japanese regarding the “futility of Korean cinema,” making a defensive remark for the necessity of local culture. It is strange, however, that few people in Japan's discourse about Korean cinema spoke of its futility, at least in the discourse printed in journals and periodicals of the time. In fact, Japanese commentators such as Hazumi Tsuneo, Iijima Tadashi and Uchida Kimio had some knowledge and information about Korean cinema and thus sympathized with its significance, at a minimum. This does not mean that Nakada's statement was setting up a strawman. As we can imagine, Korean cinema as an *independent* entity would contradict the purported unity of Asian nations under the ideological banner of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere. Thus, the notion of the futility of Korean cinema had been so pervasive in Japan that it only appeared in the form of the counterargument, to which the Japanese authorities might not even feel the need to respond. As Nakada noted, it was ignorance that enabled such “armchair talk” about the futility; but then, since Korean cinema was considered to be futile,

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<sup>42</sup> *Dōmei tsūshin*, June 24, 1942; quoted from Takashima, *History of Cinema Control in Korea*, 96.

ignorance was forgiven. This vicious syllogism regarding Korean cinema was widespread among all kinds of people in Japan, from critics and filmmakers to policymakers and bureaucrats. That very pervasiveness meant that the Government-General of Korea had to struggle to persuade the authorities in Japan, and that Korean cinema had to continuously prove itself to the empire.

The futility of Korean cinema was not just a pervasive idea. In fact, it actually affected the specific policies in Japan as to the empire's New Film Order. From early on, colonial cinema had almost always been out of sight during decision-making, but by 1941, when the film world in colonial Korea was groping in the dark for a suitable path, the colonial government became active in debating about Korea's share in the cinema of the Japanese empire. One of the notable disputes between the authorities of Japan and the colony concerned the establishment of colonial Korea's independent distribution agency.<sup>43</sup> Having run its own mobile film units to show films in every corner of the colony, the Government-General of Korea believed that distributing films was as important for maximizing the educational function of cinema as producing the films. Hence, while it initially did not have any specific plan regarding film production, the proposal for a government-administered film distribution was conceived from early on. In September 1941, the colonial government presented to the Ministry of Colonial Affairs in Japan its plan to establish a distribution agency administered independently from Japan by merging existing distributors in Korea. However, very soon the Information Bureau of Japan's cabinet set its policy to allow only one public service corporation to distribute films in the empire. The colonial government was insistent on pushing ahead with its plan and published the prospectus for the tentatively named Korea Film Distributing Association on October 19. Only two days later, the

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<sup>43</sup> Takashima, *History of Cinema Control in Korea*, 141-65.

Information Bureau held its council meeting, which commanded that Korea follow the national policy determined at the Bureau to centralize film distribution in a single state agency in Japan.

In opposition to the Bureau's refusal to deliberate on its program, the colonial government detailed the need for an independent distribution agency in Korea once again on November 4. Three reasons were presented: First, unlike Japan, colonial Korea had only about 140 film theaters, which would entail different considerations for film distribution such as mobile film screening. Second, in order to promote film production in colonial Korea, a distribution network specifically organized for Korean films was essential. Third, since distribution and exhibition were interconnected, the sector of distribution should not be separately administered under the umbrella of Japan's company, while the exhibition matters remained in the hands of the colonial government. As a counteroffer, the Information Bureau suggested that the new distribution agency open a Korea branch that would be run under the supervision of the Governor-General of Korea. But the colonial government immediately resisted the proposal. As both sides were stubborn, the Ministry of Colonial Affairs now had to arbitrate between the two. The standoff between the metropolitan government and the colonial government that had simmered for months finally came to a conclusion in favor of the colonial government in January 1942. By signing a contract with Japan's new Film Distribution Agency (Eiga Haikyūsha), the Korea Film Distribution Agency started its business in April 1942.

In the meantime, the Information Bureau and the Government-General of Korea were at odds on another matter. On January 9, 1941, the Bureau, which had just taken control of the production and circulation of film stock from Fuji Photo Film Company, established the Committee for Film Stock Control (Nama Firumu Tōsei Kyōgikai). The Committee was to determine the amount of film stock to be supplied to each film production company as well as to

distribution agencies, and obviously, film production in Korea also depended heavily on its decision. In the Committee, however, “there was no competent authority from the Ministry of Colonial Affairs who could talk about Korean cinema,” even though it included all the leading members of the government from the Home Ministry, the Education Ministry, and the military authorities from the Army and the Navy.<sup>44</sup> It took half a year for the Committee to allow a person from Colonial Affairs to attend the meetings.

In September 1941, when Korean film companies finally drafted the proposal for the new film company, it became even more crucial to have a voice of the Korean film world represented on the Committee for Film Stock Control. The Book Department of the colonial government immediately sent its officer Murakami Masatsugu to Tokyo to attend the committee meeting. Korea’s Producers Association, too, assigned Yi Ch’ang-yong as a delegate to represent its voice. Together with deputy director Iijima of the Colonial Affairs Ministry, they insisted that “Korea’s demand was the minimum requirement, which [they] can’t bargain on.”<sup>45</sup> But the decided supply was set at 8,000 feet each for negative and sound film and 30,000 feet of positive film. This number was much lower than the initial request of 210,000 feet of both negative and sound film and 830,000 feet of positive film. Korean film producers had to revise the entire plan for the new company in accordance with this supply of film materials that fell far below their minimum.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 48.

### *Particularity and Universality*

In engaging in the debates with the authorities in Japan—mostly from the Information Bureau—the colonial bureaucrats asserted the particularity of Korean cinema as their rationale. Even after they had succeeded in organizing the local system for production and distribution of cinema in colonial Korea, they had to continue to insist on Korean cinema's importance. In July 1943, Japanese film magazine *Eiga junpō* invited people from colonial Korea to hold a conference about Korean cinema.<sup>46</sup> As evinced in its title, “The Particularity of Korean Cinema,” all participants—mostly Japanese colonial bureaucrats and military officials with only one Korean, Yi Ch'ang-yong, under his Japanese name Hirokawa Sōyō—highlighted the distinct conditions and characteristics of colonial Korea. Offering the principle tenets for cinema control in colonial Korea, Shimizu Shōzō from Korea's Censorship Chamber remarked that “Talking about Korea's particular situation in spite of the call for ‘Japan-Korea One Body’ (*Nai-Sen ittai*) may seem contradictory, but when pondering over the matter, that procedure is quite natural.”<sup>47</sup> On the one hand, the particularity of Korean cinema resulted in part from the vice of the “laissez-faire” mode of film production of the past. As discussed earlier, Korean film critics also shared the view that “freedom” had hindered the rationalization of the film business. On the part of the colonial bureaucrat, this was much more problematic in terms of having the existing film culture advance to aid the imperialization project. Therefore, as Domoto Toshio—the head of the colonial government's Information Department—argued, the focus of imperial film policy

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<sup>46</sup> “Zadankai Chōsen eiga no tokushūsei” [Roundtable: The particularity of Korean cinema], *Eiga junpō*, no. 87 (July 11, 1943), 10-15.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

should be laid “much more on the Korean side than Japan’s mainland” in order to come to terms with Korea’s feeble industry.<sup>48</sup>

As the executive director of the Korea Distribution Agency Okada Jun’ichi noted, however, the authorities in Japan tended to forget the importance of Korea. Okada reiterated Shimizu’s previous point that Koreans comprised one third to one fourth of the entire population of the Japanese empire. Domoto echoed it: In order to lead such a large number of people, colonial Korea needed a different political approach to promote local cultural standards (*mindō*) rather than simply forcing Korean theaters to screen films from Japan. He argued for the need for independent power on the part of the colonial government, saying, “In Korea, everything should flow from the Government-General’s political decisions.”<sup>49</sup> Film production too should be supervised by the colonial government.

According to Domoto Toshio, the colonial government’s supervision of film production in colonial Korea largely utilized two methods—“making films suitable for Korea, and helping raise Korea.”<sup>50</sup> The latter implies the development of Korea’s local color as aesthetic expression, which was strategically adopted by filmmakers in the late 1930s. However, Domoto suggested local color as a way to make films more appealing to Koreans. It represented Korean identity (*Chōsen no dokujisei*), which would be much more attuned to the local audience than those in Japan and elsewhere. The Korea Film Production Company’s films were screened in theaters in Japan’s metropolises, but that was not the prime concern of the colonial government. Ultimately, the need for domestic films in colonial Korea corresponded to the need to produce films circulated and screened for Koreans. The particularity of Korean cinema should largely remain

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 13.

within the Korean Peninsula, as Korean cinema itself was acknowledged only as a provisional administrative necessity under the universal cause of the empire. This led to a bold statement by Keijō Imperial University professor Karashima Takeshi, with which Nakada Haruyasu immediately agreed.

Karashima: Radically speaking, the Korea Film Production Company exists to liquidate itself. That's what I'd like to say.

Nakada: I agree. I hope our ceaseless efforts will lead us to a state of freedom so that we won't have to worry about anything, and then to the elevated level of the jubilation of the Great Japan.<sup>51</sup>

While the comments by Karashima and Nakada do not directly invoke the futility of Korean cinema—especially considering that Nakada had once spoken against it just a year before—they certainly determine a limited term of validity for Korean cinema's particularity before it would dissolve into the unity of "Great Japan." There were a few, such as Takai Kunihiko, the advisory board member of the Korean Army's news department, who maintained that films for Koreans should be planned, shot, and produced in Korea by the hands of Koreans. However, generally colonial bureaucrats' views echoed Karashima and Nakada's more radical ideas about the eventual obsolescence of Korean cinema. Domoto also mentioned that his claim for Korean cinema's particularity was not necessarily to "speak from the position of Korea" but to "take the perspective of an Imperial Japan that propels itself into Greater East Asia." He continued, "[a]lthough we say that we have particular concerns about Korean cinema's current status, we are actually speaking in a broader sense."<sup>52</sup> As Shimizu Shōzō highlighted, "the idea

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 14.



of ‘Japan-Korea One Body’ and Korea’s particular situation are related like parents and children, brother and sister. They are connected so closely that [we] cannot separate them”<sup>53</sup>—a reminder of how the particularity is always defined by its relationship with the universality.

At this point, however, I would like to note to whom those government officials were speaking. In other words, who was the intended audience for their discussions? The conference referred to above was held by a film magazine, *Eiga junpō*—a magazine created under government order to unify existing periodicals in Japan. The discourse was to be read by film people as well as by imperial bureaucrats, and accordingly, the voices from the colonial government were attuned to such a readership. It was an effort on the part of colonial officials to prove how important their administration of Korean cinema would be, at least until the colonized finally enjoyed the jubilation of being fully incorporated into the Greater Japan.

The same people who spoke for the symbiotic relationship between the universal idea of “Japan-Korea One Body” and the particular state of Korea, however, changed their tune when speaking to Koreans. Shimizu Shōzō, for example, highlighted cinema’s “mission as national policy” (*kukch’aekchōk samyōng*) at a symposium held in Korea right after the announcement of the Ordinance. He said,

Of course, culture is international. But this internationality cannot be achieved by ignoring nation-ness (*kukkasōng*). After all, the essence of a culture lies in the nation-ness. For example, American movies deliver a cheerful mood, while German movies are ponderous and composed. In other words, they express their own nation-ness. [...] I want to ask you, all leading people of the film world in the peninsula, to bear this in mind and do your best to express Japanese nation-ness.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>54</sup> “Filmmakers’ Roundtable: The Ordinance Coming in Effect,” *Maeil sinbo* (February 10, 1940), evening edition, 5.

This “nation-ness” never referred to the ethnic Korean identity, as Shimizu qualified it with “Japanese” at the end of the speech. The pursuit of the universality of the empire would be found in his statements to a Japanese readership, but that belonged to the context under which colonial bureaucrats emphasized the importance, though provisionally, of Korean cinema. To a Korean readership, Shimizu did not make any gesture toward the identification of audiences in colonial Korea as particularly Korean. Without arguing for the particularity of Korean cinema for Koreans, his ideas immediately resonated more with Karashima’s radical vision for Korean cinema as a temporary entity that would eliminate itself in the near future. In this sense, Korean cinema assumed a dual task—imperializing the colonized and imperializing itself, both of which, as with Leo Ching’s provocative question, defined becoming Japanese as dying as Japanese.<sup>55</sup>

### *Cinema of the Empire Returns to Korea*

The views of the colonial bureaucrats might have well been reflected in the film *Portraits of Youth* (*Wakaki sugata*, 1943), which traces how colonial boys determined to become imperial soldiers. The film was an ambitious project to propagate the idea of military conscription, soon to be enacted in 1944 in colonial Korea, reminding us of the dual tasks of imperialization of Korean cinema: Koreans, who could become soldiers only by volunteering, seemed now fully incorporated as legitimate citizens of the empire with the implementation of general conscription, while Korean cinema would embellish becoming soldiers as embodying the Japanese nation-ness in order to fulfill its self-imperialization mission. The newly established Korea Film Production Company initially planned this film as its first production, but the

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<sup>55</sup> Leo Ching, *Becoming Japanese: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

shooting was done in July 1943—already a month after the release of another film *The Strait of Chosŏn* (K. *Chosŏn haehyŏp*; J. *Chōsen kaikyō*, dir. Pak Ki-ch’ae, 1943).<sup>56</sup> However, that its production took more time than the company had expected shows the aspiration invested in *Portraits of Youth*. The film was directed by a veteran Japanese filmmaker, Toyoda Shirō; and it included a spectacular ski scene that was shot in Japan’s snowy mountains. In order to achieve its goal of mobilizing Koreans, the film had to be entertaining as well.

As such, the film was carefully planned through collaborative efforts among the Korea Film Production Company, the Government-General of Korea, and the Korean Army’s News Department. In fact, their collaboration took an institutional form in a newly initiated Council for Film Projects (Eiga Kikaku Shingikai), organized “in order to maximize cinema’s effect under conditions of limited supply.”<sup>57</sup> Joined by government bureaucrats, military officials, personnel from the new state film corporations, and public intellectuals from non-government cultural organizations, the Committee supervised the film projects of the Korea Film Production Company. By now, what Okada Jun’ichi called “the proactive approach to censorship,” which was the purpose of the Ordinance of Korean Cinema, went beyond the realm of censorship and entered into the total control of cinema with a system to produce what the government perceived as desirable and ideal. As Yi Hwa-jin has argued, the Council was a materialization of colonial power that “transformed from the surveillant of cinema (the censor) to the manufacturer (the producing agent).”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> In fact, prior to *The Strait of Chosŏn*, two other films were released in April 1943 under the name of the Korea Film Production Company—*Look Up the Skies* (*Aoge oozora*, dir. Kim Yŏng-hwa) and *Suicide Squad at the Watchtower* (*Bŏrŏ no kesshitai*, dir. Imai Tadashi), both of which were already being produced by the previous private film companies before the establishment of the Korea Film Production Company.

<sup>57</sup> Takashima, *History of Cinema Control in Korea*, 126.

<sup>58</sup> Yi Hwa-jin, “1943 nyŏn sichŏm ūi Chosŏn yŏnghwa pŏbin Choyŏng ūi Chŏlmŭm Mosŭp chejak kwajŏng ūl chungsim ūro” [Korean cinema in 1943: The production of *Portrait of Youth*], *Han’guk kŭk yesul yŏn’gu*, no. 26 (October 2007), 183.

However, what was considered ideal did not necessarily yield an ideal consequence: Despite the massive effort invested in the film—deliberating from the project stage, inviting a renowned Japanese filmmaker, carrying out location shooting in Japan—*Portraits of Youth* not only came out to the public late. Moreover, its box-office results were lower than those of *The Strait of Chosŏn*, a film produced relatively independently of the colonial government, which had poured its energy into *Portraits*. *The Strait of Chosŏn* was a melodrama about a woman who had to manage her life alone with a newborn baby as her husband went out to war. However, its popular success did not align with its critical response. The film was largely criticized for its potentially reactionary aspects as a tearjerker, a shameful production pandering to vulgar taste.<sup>59</sup> In any case, the popular success of *The Strait of Chosŏn* makes us reconsider the effectiveness of propaganda, a point Takai Kunihiro from the News Department of the Korean Army raised at the 1943 conference published in *Eiga junpō*, resisting Karashima's idea about Korean cinema as fated to be liquidated.

As you all know, cinema belongs to people. If a film doesn't touch those people's hearts, it means nothing. Films that will touch Koreans' hearts cannot be made by revising films from elsewhere. I believe, in the end, such films shall be planned in Korea and made by people working in Korea.<sup>60</sup>

With the box office records of the two films staring them in the face, the Korea Film Production Company could not look away from the success of *The Strait of Chosŏn*. Unlike *Portraits of Youth*, Korean filmmakers took the lead in later films such as *The Tale of a Big*

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<sup>59</sup> Kim Ki-jin, "Chosŏn Haehyŏp ūl chungsim ūro" [Focusing on *The Strait of Chosŏn*], *Maeil sinbo* (August 8, 1943), 2; Sushida Masao, "Chōsen Kaikyō no genjō" [The phenomenon of *The Strait of Chosŏn*], *Kokumin bungaku* 3, no. 9 (September 1943), 40-41; Yi Ch'un-in, "Kakpon yŏnch'ul yŏn'gi Chosŏn Haehyŏp ūl pogo" [Script, directing, and acting: Afterthoughts on *The Strait of Chosŏn*], *Chogwang* 9, no. 9 (September 1943), 79-82.

<sup>60</sup> "Roundtable: The Particularity of Korean Cinema," *Eiga junpō*, no. 87, 14.

*Whale* (K. *Kōgyōngjōn*; J. *Kyogeyden*, dir. Sin Kyōng-gyun, 1944), *Mr. Soldier* (K. *Pyōngjōngnim*; J. *Heitaisan*, dir. Pang Han-jun, 1944), and *Children of the Sun* (K. *Taeyang ūi aidŭl*; J. *Taiyō no kodomodachi*, dir. Ch'oe In-gyu, 1944). However, whether the Korean movie would liquidate itself in the future (Karashima) or would continue to speak to Koreans (Takai), we find Korean cinema's corporatization at this point to have concluded with an historical irony: The corporatization once conceived as looking ahead to the larger market in the empire now returned to the very region that it aimed to escape. The purported assimilationist operation of the imperialization project, in effect, staked out the cultural difference of the colony, confining its culture to the peninsula.

## **PART II**

### **For a Feeble Cinema**

## CHAPTER 4

### **Imperial Ethos, Colonial Pathos: On Limits of the Trans-Colonial Coproduction**

#### *Feebleness in Different Senses*

Filmmaking was a difficult enterprise in colonial Korea. As discussed in Part I, filmmakers suffered from Korean cinema's privative industrial conditions: Korean cinema was a feeble entity that was always in need of external succor. Furthermore, Japanese colonial rule imposed other constraints, such as censorship and regulations. Around the early 1930s when Japan began preparing for war, cinema became a cultural weapon for disseminating its ideological platform and making imperial subjects serviceable to its colonial expansion. The development of colonial film policies, from the Censorship Regulations to the Ordinance of Korean Cinema, is a testimony to how cinema, since the 1930s, no longer remained the target of policing and became a vehicle for creating a community in Asia, of which Japan assumed leadership.

Korean filmmakers and producers viewed the colonial government as an ambivalent force. While taking control, the colonial government's turn to a more proactive approach to film policies in the 1930s offered an opportunity for Korean cinema to transform its feeble industrial structure. As we have seen in the previous chapters, the Korean film world was reorganized with

the establishment of two state film corporations in 1942, the Korea Film Production Company and the Korea Film Distribution Agency. From the 1920s to the 1940s, Korean cinema, a feeble colonial entity, was marching toward corporatization.

However, this seemingly monolithic narrative unfolded multiple projects on how to come to terms with Korean cinema's feebleness. Grounded in Korean cinema's industrial feebleness, corporatization involved industrial practices, representational strategies, and theoretical interventions. In subsequent chapters, I will focus on three responses from colonial Koreans about the feebleness of Korean cinema. First, to reform the feeble film industry, Korean filmmakers began working with Japanese filmmakers. Coproducing Korean films with Japanese filmmakers was one of the early solutions to obtaining necessary support. Second, some Korean producers utilized feebleness as a marketing strategy to appeal to Japanese audiences who might have paternalistic compassion for colonial films. Third, there was a theoretical project to envision a cinema that embraced feebleness as an aesthetic uniqueness, which would not entirely be incorporated into corporatization. These projects redefined colonial Korean cinema by reworking its feebleness on the levels of industry, artistic quality, and mode of address. Working with and against the centrifugal flow of imperialism, these centripetal projects from the colony show how Korean cinema could also reappropriate its own feebleness as opportunities and creative energies.

As an opening of Part II, this chapter returns to the late 1930s to examine two cases of “transcolonial film coproduction”—*The Wanderer* (K. *Nagŭne* a.k.a. *Journey* [J. *Tabiji*], dir. Yi Kyu-hwan and Suzuki Shigeyoshi, 1937) and *A Long Road to the Land of Happiness* (*Pokchi malli*, dir. Chŏn Ch'ang-gŭn, 1941)—in light of how this mode of production revolved around the cinematic articulation of Koreanness. Coined by Aimee Nayoung Kwon and Takashi



Fujitani, the term “transcolonial film coproduction” encompasses diverse practices of collaboration in filmmaking in the Japanese empire, from early coproduction among Koreans and Japanese in the peninsula to larger industrial partnerships between Korean and Japanese film companies, and to Korean filmmakers’ production of wartime film propaganda in concert with the colonial government.<sup>1</sup> According to them, the term—which attempts to sever colonial cinema history from a retroactively imposed nationalist view—works toward the reconstruction of colonial power and control. In this sense, Kwon and Fujitani propose to delve into the productive effects of colonial control. Disengaging us from the binary between collaboration and resistance, their notion of transcolonial film coproduction helps us better understand the complexity of the colonial regime.

However, as Kwon also notes, the term “coproduction” is a “misnomer [...] that euphemistically veiled the fundamentally violent and coercive nature of the colonial system itself.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, foregrounding the productive effects of colonial control, such as censorship and regulations, may run the risk of merely reaffirming the malleability of colonial control, rather than accounting for different concerns and visions over colonial realities, representations of which were under suppression in that flexible regime. I would like to note that “dissonance, contradictions, fissures, incompleteness, different texts and readings of the same film and [...] the ‘multiple, schizoid, and self-conscious’ perspectives of those involved in filmmaking” are not only the product of colonial power and control, but also of Koreans’ experience of colonial

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<sup>1</sup> Takashi Fujitani and Nayoung Aimee Kwon, introduction to “Transcolonial Film Coproductions in the Japanese Empire: Antinomies in the Colonial Archive,” special issue, *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 2, no. 1 (May 2013), 1-9.

<sup>2</sup> Nayoung Aimee Kwon, “Collaboration, Coproduction, and Code-Switching: Colonial Cinema and Postcolonial Archaeology,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 2, no. 1 (May 2013), 22.

reality.<sup>3</sup> If we are to “rethink and reassess what coproduction *fails* to mean in the hierarchical, coercive, and violent context of empire,”<sup>4</sup> I argue that it is crucial to begin with the conflicting ideas over Korean cinema itself and their differentiation: On the one hand, what I call “imperial ethos” was imposed as an imperative for the cultivation of an imperial subject, but on the other hand there was an affective dimension that I call “colonial pathos,” which could not be captured through the articulation of colonial power. In order to lay out the contestation and negotiation, this chapter traces how cinematic images of Korea devised for coproduced films created tension between imperial ethos and colonial pathos.

This chapter begins by investigating the critical discourses in Japan and colonial Korea regarding one of the earliest coproduced films, *The Wanderer* (1937), to examine the effectiveness of the so-called “local color” as an effective representational strategy for exporting Korean films to Japan. Korean film critics were concerned about the pathos-ridden representation in Korean local color films, which might have been considered undesirable when the Japanese empire, looking ahead to a “brighter future” of Asia, encouraged more cheerful rhythms and tones in cinema. However, despite the concern based on the imperative of the imperial ethos, the affective reality of the colonized continued to be projected onto colonial screens. I turn to Im Hwa’s discussion of another coproduced film, *A Long Road to the Land of Happiness* (1941) to examine how Korean cinema still addressed colonial experiences even when it was under the demand of expanding its own audiences—that as Im Hwa envisioned, the colonial pathos gestured toward feeble audiences on the peninsula.

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<sup>3</sup> Fujitani and Kwon, introduction to “Transcolonial Film Coproduction,” 3.

<sup>4</sup> Kwon, “Collaboration, Coproduction, and Code-Switching,” 15.

## The Wanderer's Journey into the Empire

In 1937, *The Wanderer* signaled a watershed moment in trans-colonial film coproduction. At the earliest stage of the production, the director Yi Kyu-hwan pulled his connection with film companies in Japan to make a contract with Shinkō Film Company to coproduce the film. In October 1936, Suzuki Shigeyoshi, under whom Yi had apprenticed during his years in Japan, came to Korea as the film's co-director to begin on-location shooting in the Nakdong River basin. Of course, Suzuki was not alone; he was accompanied by a group of skilled Japanese film technicians equipped with film supplies with much better performance than those previously used for films of colonial Korea thus far. Then in January 1937, Korean actors, actresses, and production crews relocated to Tokyo to film on Shinkō's studio set and to finalize the post-production.<sup>5</sup> As I will discuss, the coproduction of *The Wanderer* proved to be a successful strategy to draw more audiences to theaters as well as to improve Korean cinema's artistic quality with better image and sound.

On the heels of *The Wanderer*'s commercial success in Korea, this mode of film coproduction came into vogue in the late 1930s Korean film industry. Yi Kyu-hwan's Sōngbong Film Company immediately launched another coproduction project with Tōhō to produce *Military Train* (*Kunyong yōlcha*, 1938, dir. Sō Kwang-je). An Ch'ōr-yōng's *Fisherman's Fire* (*Ŏhwa*, 1938) was re-edited by Shōchiku's renowned director Shimazu Yasujirō for release in Japan's theaters. Some film companies with further ambitions to systematize film production had also experimented with the idea of coproduction: An enthusiastic film businessman Yi Ch'ang-yong at Koryō Films embarked on a collaboration with the newly established Manchuria Film

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<sup>5</sup> "Mun Ye-bong ilhaeng to-Dong *Nagūne* setū ch'waryōng" [Mun Ye-bong's party arrive Tokyo for shooting *The Wanderer*], *Chosŏn ilbo* (January 17, 1937), evening edition, 6.

Corporation to produce *A Long Road to the Land of Happiness* (*Pokchi malli*, 1940, dir. Chŏn Ch'ang-gŭn); Chosŏn Film Corporation announced that its new film *Tale of Ch'unhyang* would be directed by Murayama Tomoyoshi, who had previously staged the beloved eponymous Korean folk tale in both Japan as well as colonial Korea, although the film was not produced in the end.

In fact, the collaboration among Koreans and Japanese in film production was hardly a novel enterprise in Korean film history. As Chonghwa Chung [Chŏng Chong-hwa] has noted,<sup>6</sup> since the 1920s, Japanese participation in film productions in Korea ranged from producers, distributors, and exhibitors to directors, performers, actors/actresses, and *benshi*, and was particularly crucial in shaping early Korean cinema: Many of the film theaters were under contract with, or became part of the distribution network of Japanese film companies like Nikkatsu and Shōchiku; Chosŏn Kinema Production, one of the earliest film companies, was established by Yodo Torazō who owned a hat shop in Seoul; actors and actresses who were Japanese residents in Korea appeared in Korean films, albeit under Korean names for a few; and a recent historiographical debate over whether Korean cinema's phantom classic *Arirang* (1926) was directed by a Korean Na Ungyu or a Japanese Tsumori Shūichi represents yet another example of how entangled the early Korean film history was among the Japanese and Koreans. Neither a secret nor unknown in the 1920s, it was, however, never overtly acknowledged in public that Japanese residents in Korea, or *zaichō Nihonjin*, took a significant part in Korean film productions.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of the extent of Japanese involvement, most of these films were

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<sup>6</sup> Chŏng Chong-hwa (Chonghwa Chung), "Negotiating Colonial Korean Cinema in the Japanese Empire: From the Silent Era to the Talkies, 1923-1939," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 2.1 (May 2013), 139-69.

<sup>7</sup> For the Japanese residents' involvement in filmmaking in colonial Korea, see Hoshino Yūko, "Kyŏngsŏngin ūi hyŏngsŏng kwa kŭndae yŏnghwa sanŏp chŏn'gae ūi sangho yŏn'gwansŏng yŏn'gu" [The relationship between the formation of Japanese Seoulites and modern film industry] (Master's Thesis, Seoul National University, 2012).

presented as purely “Korean films,” or *Chosŏn yŏnghwa*, by both the audiences and critics in colonial Korea, and thought to be the creation of “Korean” filmmakers. The *zaichō Nihonjin* contributions to filmmaking in colonial Korea have not only been omitted in today’s scholarship in film history, but they also receded from the scene at the time.<sup>8</sup>

Following the successful debut of *The Wanderer* in the 1930s, however, the collaborative partners from the mainland (*naichi*) were now more clearly visible than their predecessors. The film coproductions after *The Wanderer* are distinct in two ways. On the one hand, the coproduction in the late 1930s was part of a strategy to create a better production system in colonial Korea while breaking through the volatile circumstances of filmmaking, which led to the discussions of and aspirations for corporatization, or *kiŏphwa*, as discussed in Chapter 2. Since its very early stages, filmmaking in colonial Korea had always depended on one-time investments by speculative capital. Hence, any attempt to establish a stable and systematic production system had come to naught due to such lack of stable and secure access to resources. Yi Kyu-hwan’s venture into the collaboration with Shinkō to coproduce *The Wanderer*, however, raised great expectations that the chronic fiscal problems facing Korean film productions might be resolved. The coproduction would help produce a better film in colonial Korea by employing a masterful film director who would oversee the entire production, skilled technicians who would help capture better image and sound, and gain access to advanced technologies and studios. As demonstrated by *The Wanderer*, coproduction was presented as the answer to such problems, where filmmakers in colonial Korea would learn by experience how to restructure the entire system of film production.

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<sup>8</sup> Chŏng, “Negotiating Colonial Korean Cinema,” 140.

On the other hand, coproduction in the late 1930s was not merely about renovating the film production system in colonial Korea; it was also about the issue of who the audience for Korean cinema would be and how that audience was to be addressed. It was around this time that Korean cinema sought to broaden spectatorship in Japan, Manchuria, China, and even possibly the West. First released in Seoul on April 24, 1937, *The Wanderer* also saw its release in Tokyo just a few weeks later with a different title, *Tabiji*, or *Journey*. Shinkō was granted distribution rights worldwide except for Korea, China, and Manchuria, where Yi's Korean company Sōngbong held the rights. In order to cater to audiences in a broader market, both companies had initially planned to produce subtitles not only in Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and English, but also in German and French.<sup>9</sup> Whether all these versions were actually produced remains unknown, but it is certain that there were at least two language versions—Korean and Japanese. Its first release in colonial Korea in April was held at two locations in downtown Seoul. According to newspaper reports, the Umigwan Theatre, located in the *pukchon* area (literally, the northern quarter) and mostly patronized by Koreans, released the Korean version, whereas the Meijiza Theatre in the Japanese residents' entertainment district of *namchon* area (the southern quarter) screened the film with superimposed Japanese subtitles. The latter version became the international version, which was most likely the one shown in Japan a few weeks later.

This imagination of a larger film market is not unrelated to the problem of profitability that sound film technologies had presented to the Korean film world. First introduced in colonial Korea in the early 1930s, sound film was at the center of the debates over not only the technical issues of performances, recording technologies, and projection facilities, but also fundamental

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<sup>9</sup> “Shinkō no Chōsen tōki eiga *Tabiji* kansai” [Shinkō's Korean sound film *Journey* to complete], *Kinema junpō*, no. 602 (February 21, 1937), 34; “*Nagūne* ūi haeoe chinch'ul” [*The Wanderer*'s foreign release], *Maeil sinbo* (April 1, 1937), evening edition, 8; “*Nagūne* ch'ōt pongjōl” [*The Wanderer* first release], *Chosŏn ilbo* (April 25, 1937), evening edition, 6.

financial concerns since production overhead was higher than silent film. Regardless of the controversies surrounding this new medium's popularity, artistic possibilities, and industrial problems, by the mid-1930s it was taken for granted that films would be equipped with sound. Under such pressures imposed by sound films, it was crucial to secure a larger market for Korean films. In order to make ends meet, Korean films needed to look towards the expanding terrain of the Japanese empire as well as the established distribution network already put in place by the Japanese companies. By collaborating with Japanese film companies, Korean films could navigate through existing distribution network at least in Japan as well as Manchuria.

The imperative to open up a new international market coincided with the geopolitical change in the Japanese empire in the later 1930s when its borders were expanding under the banner of the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. Korean cinema also needed to secure its position within the growing Japanese empire and in tandem with its project of the "construction and creation of Asian cinema." In other words, to venture into the market in the Japanese empire would mean to participate in creating the East Asian film network during the height of the Asian-Pacific War. With this urgency to reassure its position in the empire and cater to an "international" audience, Korean cinema had to appeal to the gazes of the others to which it had to accommodate; this, then, involved a redefinition of Korean cinema according to this changing milieu.

### *Korean Color*

The release of *The Wanderer* in colonial Korea was a "sensation in the entertainment world," according to the daily *Chosŏn ilbo* report on April 29th. The report continued, "On the 25th, the second day of *The Wanderer*'s release, the Meijiza Theater set a new record since the

theater's opening [in 1935], even having huge trouble dealing with a flood of the audience. Also, the night screenings at the Umigwan Theater drew a full house every night, setting an unprecedented record."<sup>10</sup> But when it was released in the famous Denkikan in Asakusa, Tokyo on May 6th under a different title *Journey (Tabiji)*, the film was far less popular than in colonial Korea. In fact, the film's commercial value proved to be no different from many other Korean films that were previously screened in Japan. Like many other films released in the Korean quarters, *The Wanderer* saw only partial success in industrial districts with notable ethnic Korean populations like Kōtō in Tokyo and the Kansai region.

The tepid response of Japanese audiences to *The Wanderer* was, however, offset by its critical reception among film critics in both colonial Korea as well as Japan. The film was named the best Korean sound film at the Chosŏn Ilbo Film Festival held in 1938. Later in 1941, Im Hwa also acclaimed *The Wanderer* as a “work of excellence that has no match among Korean films since the talkie era.”<sup>11</sup> The film impressed Japanese film critics as well and was ranked the 12th best movie in *Kinema junpō*'s annual “Best Ten Japanese Movie” list announced in 1938. After *The Wanderer*, no Japanese film critics forgot to talk about the film whenever it came to the issue of Korean cinema.

Though favorable in general, the critical reception of the film was not uniformly laudatory. At the time of its release in colonial Korea, two reviewers were at odds about the film. Namgung Ok wrote in *Maeil sinbo* in favor of *The Wanderer* and Korean filmmakers' effort to complete a film worthy enough to show audiences outside Korea, while Sŏ Kwang-je's review in

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<sup>10</sup> “*Nagŭne ch'o sŏnghwang*” [*The Wanderer* boom], *Chosŏn ilbo* (April 19, 1937), morning edition, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Im Hwa, “Chosŏn yŏnghwa paltal sosa” [A little history of the development of Korean cinema], *Samch'ŏlli* 13, no. 6 (June 1941), 205.



*Chosŏn ilbo* harshly criticized the film, claiming that its sophisticated style and techniques overwhelmed the whole drama.<sup>12</sup> For *Sŏ*, the film's representation of poverty in rural Korea was too extreme to suggest diverse and vital aspects of colonial Korea. However polarized in both tone and attitude, the two reviews converged on two crucial issues related to the film. First, both reviewers agreed that the film's production quality was higher than previous Korean films. Again, this was without a doubt a noted benefit from Japanese participation. Secondly, and more importantly, they shared the same criterion for judgment—that is, whether or not the film was worth exporting abroad. Namgung Ok based his acclaim on the film's technical achievement, which he believed would stand comparison with foreign movies. In contrast, *Sŏ*'s issue with *The Wanderer* aligned with substantial concerns raised by the prospect of *The Wanderer*'s overseas release. He argued, “we have to think seriously about Korean culture as *The Wanderer* will be released overseas.”<sup>13</sup>

The critical response in Japan shows an interesting reversal of Korean writers' rhetoric. On the one hand, unlike the Korean critics, they did not think *The Wanderer* was technically advanced despite the participation of an adept director, Suzuki Shigeyoshi. For them, it was “unsophisticated,” “boorish,” and “vulgar” and suffered from a lack of logical necessity in the dramaturgy.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, they placed more emphasis on the fact that it was a Korean film, or *Chōsen eiga*, a distinction that may have appealed more to highbrow intellectual taste

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<sup>12</sup> Namgung Ok, “Chosŏn yŏnghwa ūi ch'oegobong *Nagūne* rŭl pogo” [After watching Korean cinema's monument *The Wanderer*], pt. 1, *Maeil sinbo* (April 22, 1937), evening edition, 8; pt. 2 (April 24, 1937), evening edition, 8; pt. 3 (April 25, 1937), evening edition, 8; *Sŏ Kwang-je*, “Yi Kyu-hwan chak *Nagūne*” [Yi Kyu-hwan's *The Wanderer*], pt. 1, *Chosŏn ilbo* (April 24, 1937), evening edition, 6; pt. 2, (April 25, 1937), evening edition 6; pt. 3, (April 27, 1937), evening edition 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Sŏ Kwang-je*, “Yi Kyu-hwan's *The Wanderer*,” pt. 2 (April 25, 1937).

<sup>14</sup> “*Tabiji gappyō kariji shinema*” [Journey: Joint review], *Kinema junpō*, no. 290 (May 21, 1937), 26-33.

that favored foreign art cinema.<sup>15</sup> For example, even while he argued that the film was subpar, Ishida Yoshinori stated:

There's still something we can acknowledge, which is the sincerity and efforts of the filmmakers in the peninsula. Furthermore, the tone of the peninsula's language [in the film] presents us for the first time with what the peninsula is like. We anticipate that their next work will be made by the hands of people in the peninsula. And [we] hope that [filmmakers] will find the subject matter from the daily lives of people of the peninsula, rather than dealing with some happenings and events. For we have great interest in their lives.<sup>16</sup>

As gleaned in Sō's critique, this issue of Koreanness was central to the discourse over *The Wanderer* and Korean cinema in general. In his short review published in *Teikoku daigaku shinbun*, Chang Hyōk-chu, one of the Korean writers whose Japanese-language novels attracted critical attention in Japan, argued that the film's script was fraught with flaws and demonstrated a fundamental problem of exaggerating "Korean color" (*Chōsen shoku*). He gives an example from the movie: "The wife who is waiting for her husband counts down the days until his return by counting out red peppers of the same number [one for each night of his sojourn]—Doesn't she look barbaric? There is no way that a woman who can write a letter doesn't even know [how to read] the calendar. Every farmer would have a daily calendar pad on his wall."<sup>17</sup> For Chang, the detailed description of lives of Korean peasants in *The Wanderer* is not only misleading but also downplays modern development in rural colonial Korea.

Responding directly to Chang's outrage, Inagaki Kazuho wrote in *Eiga hyōron* under his pen name Kijima Yukio that *The Wanderer* still expressed a beautiful sentiment about Korea, an

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<sup>15</sup> Ōta Tsuneya, "Chōsen eiga no tenbō" [Prospect of Korean cinema], *Kinema junpō*, no. 644 (May 1, 1938), 12-13.

<sup>16</sup> Ishida Yoshinori, "Tabiji" [*Journey*], *Nihon eiga* (July 1937), 104.

<sup>17</sup> Chang Hyōk-chu (Chō Kakuchū), "Tabiji o mite kanjita koto" [What I felt after watching *The Wanderer*], *Maeil sinbo* (May 28, 1937), evening edition, 2; originally published *Teikoku daigaku shinbun* (May 10, 1937).

affect with which the Japanese could also sympathize. Inagaki draws an interesting analogy from Lafcadio Hearn's depiction of Japan in one of his stories. In that story, Hearn, who was famous for his collection of Japanese folk tales and also notorious for exoticizing Japan, recalled a scene at a train stop in Hakata where a woman was sending off her husband who had been arrested by a police officer. Carrying a baby on her back, she looked deeply sorry to part from her husband, but did not resent her husband for committing a crime. Hearn wrote of this parting as a moment of "beautiful compassion for the Japanese," rather than passing judgment. For Inagaki, Hearn's position as a distant observer who could find beauty in Japan even in such a miserable and ugly situation could also apply to the Japanese "observer" who would watch *The Wanderer*. In his view, the Japanese audiences could not fail to feel pity at the film's sad ending. Even when the wife in *The Wanderer* uses the primitive method of counting red peppers to keep track of the days, the Japanese audience—or, in his words, "we the mainlanders" (*wareware naichijin*) will not consider Koreans as ignorant and inferior, but rather identify with the beautiful sentiment that the film delivers. Then Inagaki became more provocative: "With all due respect, I wonder if Chang Hyök-chu has become so Japanized that he can shut his eyes to the beauty of his homeland." He continues, "I think a Korean who feels ashamed and doesn't love this beautiful homeland is not a genuine Korean. What do you think?"<sup>18</sup>

A few months later in September 1937, An Chŏl-yŏng, a film director who had just returned from Germany after his training at UFA, laid out a sharp critique against both Chang and Inagaki. While fully understanding Chang's acute critique, An still saw it as insufficient to counter Inagaki's argument. The issue at stake was not the weak original script that misrepresents details, but rather what he called "conceptualized Korea (*kaenyŏmhwan*)

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<sup>18</sup> Inagaki Kazuho (Kijima Yukio, pseudonym), "Tabiji" [Journey], *Eiga hyōron*, no. 136 (June 1937), 113.

*Chosŏn*)” and the ways in which the cinematic medium conceptualizes Koreanness. For An, “the real aim of filmmaking is not to intoxicate the audience with artful tricks, but to address the interests and demands of people’s daily lives and lead such themes of real society to the most progressive worldview.” Inagaki’s view of Korean cinema, then, ends up being just another fairy tale or a legend. Despite its partial success in advanced filmmaking techniques, *The Wanderer*, according to An, is a mere exploitation of the “use value that will be welcomed in the Japanese market,” rather than working toward a rigorous and sincere study of colonial Korean culture.<sup>19</sup>

As many writers of the time had also pointed out, such a conceptualized Korea was employed in coproduction projects like *The Wanderer* as a self-exoticizing strategy to accommodate foreign expectations. A 1936 remark by Ch’oe Nam-ju, the president of Chosŏn Film Company, demonstrated exactly this: “If we can describe Korea’s local color (*hyangtosaek*) or its atmosphere at its best, our expansion to the world film market will be full of hope.”<sup>20</sup>

However, as Yi Hwa-jin has argued, this self-exoticization, or self-orientalism, is not simple.<sup>21</sup> The beauty of Korea that Inagaki found in *The Wanderer* may actually resist such a voyeuristic violence by its very self-exhibitionism, as Rey Chow notes in her discussion of Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou’s self-orientalism. “(Mis)construed by many as mere self-display (in the spirit of airing one’s dirty laundry in public), this exhibitionism—what we may call the Oriental’s orientalism—does not make its critique moralistically or resentfully. Instead, it

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<sup>19</sup> An Ch’ŏr-yŏng, “Such’ul yŏnghwa wa hyŏnsil: Chang Hyŏk-chu Kijima Yukio ssi ūi *Nagŭne* p’yŏngnon ūl ikko” [Exporting cinema and our reality: Reading *The Wanderer* reviews by Chang Hyŏk-chu and Kijima Yukio], *Tonga ilbo* (September 11, 1937), morning edition, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Ch’oe Nam-ju, “Chosŏn yŏnghwa ūi saengmyŏngsŏn” [The lifeline of Korean cinema], *Chosŏn yŏnghwa*, no. 1 (October 1936), 43.

<sup>21</sup> Yi Hwa-jin, *Sori ūi chŏngch’i singminji Chosŏn ūi kŭkchang kwa cheguk ūi kwan’gaek* [Sound politics: Theaters in colonial Korea and audience of the empire] (Seoul: Hyŏnsil Munhwa, 2016).

turns the remnants of orientalism into elements of a new ethnography.”<sup>22</sup> This cinematic ethnography will then identify the ruptures and dissonance between Japan and colonial Korea only to reveal the antinomies of the colonial slogan such as “Japan-Korea One Body (*naisen ittai*).” The urgency for Korean cinema in this sense was then to find an answer to the question, “how to translate Koreanness into a visual language [...] when the audiences for Korean films [...] were no longer limited to Korean speakers.”<sup>23</sup> This is the question shared by many other national cinemas “created around the very contradictions of culture and commodity, of (self-)expression value and (self-)exhibition value.”<sup>24</sup>

### “Cheerfulness” as Imperial Ethos

Critic Sŏ Kwang-je’s judgment against *The Wanderer*’s misrepresentation of Korea extended to his concern over Korean cinema in general. Just a few months after his review of *The Wanderer*, the prolific writer asks in his essay on the issue of original scripts, “For what reason does a Korean produce a Korean film, which is more brutal than Korea’s realities? [...] Will a Korean film not be produced without such a brutality that village people kill each other for a hunk of change as in *The Wanderer* [...]?” Such a violent representation of murder, rape, and arson in Korean films was highly problematic, not only because of cinema’s strong influence over social morality, but also because it created a misleading impression about Korea. He continued, “the producer of *The Wanderer*, who purportedly introduced rural lives in Korea,

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<sup>22</sup> Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 171.

<sup>23</sup> Yi, *Sound Politics*, 156.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 302; quoted from Yi, *Sound Politics*, 156.

showed instead such abominable cruelties. How could a foreigner consider the Korean rural people, who are actually meek and naive, as any less cruel?”<sup>25</sup>

Sō’s concern was borne out in a roundtable discussion published in the daily *Chosŏn ilbo* on its New Year special pages in 1940. At the roundtable, actor Sim Yŏng recalled how his Manchurian friend became afraid of Koreans after watching a frightening murder scene in *The Wanderer*. For Sō, this was no longer a problem specific to the film, but rather of Korean cinema in general. He grumbled, “Truly Korean cinema is too *dismal* (*ŭmsan*). It should be a bit more *cheerful* (*myŏngnang*),” to which Im Hwa retorted in a rejoinder, “Well, real life is *not cheerful*, and experiences are *dismal*. It can’t be helped.”<sup>26</sup> While both Sō and Im agree that the mood of Korean cinema is somewhat gloomy, they remain at odds about how to evaluate it. Sō considers the dismal mood of Korean cinema an obstacle to be overcome, whereas for Im, it is not necessarily possible to just remove it from Korean films altogether if the filmmaker is committed to representing Korean realities. As I will argue by exploring this wordplay between cheerfulness (*myŏngnang*) and dismalness (*ŭmsan*), their conflicting ideas reveal the ways in which the former was institutionalized alongside the project of imperialization and how the latter was conceived as something to be driven out in favor of a new ethos for the multiethnic empire.

Korea’s local color, which was initially welcomed, then became the target of criticism due to its association with such a dismal mood. Nishiki Motosada also saw Korean cinema’s dismal mood as a problem. What he labeled as “Yi Kyu-hwan’s pessimism” had pervaded all the Korean films. According to Nishiki, most of the films since Yi Kyu-hwan’s earlier silent film *A*

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<sup>25</sup> Sō Kwang-je, “Yŏnghwa ŭi wŏnjak munje” [The problem of original film script], *Chogwang* 3, no. 7 (July 1937), 324-25.

<sup>26</sup> “Chonghap chwadamhoe sin’gŭk ūn ōdiro kanna Chosŏn yŏnghwa ŭi chaech’ulbal” [Roundtable: New theater’s direction, Korean cinema’s new departure], *Chosŏn ilbo* (January 4, 1940), New Year’s special edition, 2. Italics on me.

*Boat without an Owner* (*Imja Ōmnŭn Narutpae*, 1932) dealt with unhappy love stories. “These films that are saturated with the banal sentimentalism of resignation are in no way [for] the New Order.”<sup>27</sup> Such an assessment of Korean cinema, again, is not unrelated to the new question of how to make Korean cinema more cheerful, and thus more appropriate for the bright future of the empire.

It is noteworthy that Nishiki wrote the script for *Homeless Angels* (K. *Chip ōmnŭn ch'ōnsa*; J. *Ie naki tenshi*, dir. Ch'oe In-gyu, 1941), a film that brought up the controversy over the position of Korean cinema in the empire. Passing initial censorship on July 1941, *Homeless Angels* was set to release in Japan in October 1941. At first, its release seemed promising with the Ministry of Education's recognition as a Recommended Film, but things became suddenly complicated when the Home Ministry demanded that some portions of the film be cut out. The filmmakers revised *Homeless Angels* following the redaction order; as a consequence, according to *The Film Censorship Bulletin*, 219 meters was cut from the original. This resulted in the virtual withdrawal of the recognition by the Ministry of Education, simply because the revised version was not the same as the version it had acknowledged as a Recommended Film. With a great deal of historical speculation over the reasons behind this, such as its use of Korean language, Hieyoon Kim points that it may not be unrelated to the film's lack of cheerfulness as well. “Being neither a representation of daily lives under the Japan-Korea One Body slogan, nor an exhibition of ‘what is Korean,’ Korean cinema as bright and cheerful clearly marked the newly ordered position of Korean cinema in the East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere in the era of

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<sup>27</sup> Nishiki Motosada, “Chōsen eiga no sozai ni tsuite” [On Korean films' subject matters], *Eiga hyōron* 1, no. 7 (July 1941), 53.

the Film New Order.”<sup>28</sup> As some had claimed after watching the film around the time, *Homeless Angels* had to “first become Japanese” before representing colonial Korea’s dismal reality.<sup>29</sup>

*Myōngnang*, or cheerfulness, in this sense was not a simple strategy to accommodate the gaze of the other, nor just another mode of representation. It was rather a cultural imperative or what I call *imperial ethos*. The conceptual constellation around the term cheerfulness shows how it was clustered with other relative terms such as “vulgarity” (*t’oepye*) and “dismalness” (*ūmul* or *ūmsan*). According to Pak Suk-cha and Kim Chi-yōng’s studies, it is under the New Order in force since the 1930s that the meaning of “cheerfulness,” which had been used to refer to weather or climate, started being associated with personal characteristics.<sup>30</sup> Pronounced as *meirō* in Japanese using the same Chinese characters, *myōngnang* was redefined for political purposes in late colonial Korea. Especially when Minami Jirō, the Governor-General of Korea, released a public letter that urged cultural producers in Korea to “cultivate a more cheerful personality by making speech and action conform to one another,” the cheerfulness was no longer limited to individuality; it was now “a discipline as well as ethics.”<sup>31</sup> Here, by “making speech and action conform to one another” (*irōn ilhaeng ch’iil*), the Governor-General was speaking about the popular use of national language (*kokugo*)—Japanese language. Of course, a more cheerful

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<sup>28</sup> Kim Hui-yun (Hiyeon Kim), “*Chip ōmnūn ch’ōnsa* ūi Ilbon kaebong kwa Chosōn yōnghwa ūi wich’i” [The Japan release of *Homeless Angels* and the position of Korean cinema], in Korea Film Archive ed., *Koryō Yōnghwa Hyōphoe wa yōnghwa sinch’eye 1936-1941* [Koryō Film Association and the New Film Order] (Seoul: Korea Film Archive, 2007), 236.

<sup>29</sup> “Gūk kwa yōnghwa, mōnjō Ilbonin i toeōra” [Theater and film: First, become Japanese!], *Koryō Film Association and the New Film Order*, 161. Originally this article is from the scrapbook compiled by Tōwa Company, which is now part of the collection of Kawakita Film Memorial Foundation.

<sup>30</sup> Pak Suk-cha, “Tongk’wae esō myōngnang kkaji singminji munhwa wa kamsōng ūi chōngch’ihak” [From “great pleasure” to “cheerfulness”: Colonial culture and the affective politics], *Hanminjok munhwa yōn’gu*, no. 30 (August 2009), 213-38; Kim Chi-yōng, “Myōngnang ūi yōksajōk ūmiron” [The historical semantics of “cheerfulness”], *Hanminjok munhwa yōn’gu*, no. 47 (January 2015), 331-67.

<sup>31</sup> “Minami ch’ongdok i Yun Ch’i-ho ege songhan sō” [Governor-General Minami’s letter to Yun Ch’i-ho], *Pyōlgōn’gon* (December 1938), 12; Pak, “From Pleasure to Cheerfulness,” 225.



personality is, then, a subject who “affirms and conforms to the regime and proactively takes the initiative in fulfilling the demand of the system.”<sup>32</sup>

On the very opposite side of “cheerfulness” lay the negativity of “vulgarity” (*t’oepye*) and “dismalness” (*ŭmul* or *ŭmsan*). Often coupled with sentimentalism, individualism, femininity, and consumerist capitalism, these became the terms with which to stigmatize an excess of social mores such as the anti-social, apolitical, and anti-establishment. What followed was efforts to redress such social ills deemed vulgar and dismal in a broad range of cultural phenomena. The Book Department of the Government-General of Korea reinforced regulation and censorship, aiming to reform folk songs, popular novels and magazines, as well as theaters and films in healthier and more cheerful ways. This movement against so-called displays of vulgarity went beyond regulation of cultural products to a wholesale condemnation of the consumption culture that was reframed as vulgar and promiscuous.<sup>33</sup> What should be remembered here is that this movement, based on a value judgment, was not simply to drive out undesirable affect, now deemed dismal and vulgar; it was more about initiating a new mode of subjectivity that internalized an imperial ethos of cheerfulness.

### *Colonial Pathos*

Ch’oe In-gyu, the film director of *Homeless Angels*, once made it clear that he also aimed to produce more cheerful films. Yet the question remained: “[Regardless of] How many bright and cheerful films we want to make, there are some cases that delimit the possible subject-matter; I wish [the colonial government] would relax some of these [regulations]. [We need]

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<sup>32</sup> Kim, “The Historical Semantics of ‘Cheerfulness,’” 342.

<sup>33</sup> Kwŏn Myŏng-a, *Ŭnnan kwa hyŏngmyŏng* [Obscenity and revolution] (Seoul: Ch’aeksesang, 2013).

something more appropriate for cinema rather than the current dark and hard laws and regulations. I want to make a more cheerful film. I can make a more cheerful film if that can be done.”<sup>34</sup> This may resonate with Im Hwa’s previous response to Sō Kwang-je’s grumble: “Well, real life is *not cheerful*, and the experiences are *dismal*. It can’t be helped.”<sup>35</sup> What Ch’oe and Im are referring here may differ according to their position—Ch’oe was a filmmaker who had to work within the confines of regulations that even complicated his own film’s release in Japan, while Im was merely a film critic who could distance himself from such constraints. However, they converged on the single point that Korean cinema was dismal because all the circumstances that shaped it were so. From here, Im Hwa’s own conception of Korean cinema began diverging from the discourse on the imperial ethos of cheerfulness.

Im Hwa’s vision for Korean cinema did not involve attempts to secure a position for Korean cinema within the empire as did his contemporaries. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, while reappropriating the same language and logic of the time, he anticipated a different future for Korean cinema that had yet to come. He took realism as a technique to articulate Korean cinema’s own singular aesthetics. The goal of realism for Im Hwa, however, was not to capture an objective reality, but a specifically colonial reality that was hidden under the imperial disciplinary system. For Im Hwa, cinema should represent affective realities of the colonized that de-form and reorganize their bodies. In his 1941 essay, Im considered Na Un-gyu’s legendary *Arirang* (1926) as a great film, not because it was a representative of cinematic resistance against colonial rule, as postcolonial film historians have reconstructed; rather, for him, the film’s value

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<sup>34</sup> “Zadankai Chōsen eiga no zenbō o kataru” [Roundtable: Everything about Korean cinema], *Eiga hyōron* 1, no. 7 (July 1941), 60.

<sup>35</sup> “Roundtable: New Theater’s Direction, Korean Cinema’s New Departure,” *Chosŏn ilbo* (January 4, 1940), New Year’s special edition, 2. Italics on me.

lies in how it “grasped, though crudely, a body of feeling, ideas, and lives singular to Korean people, expressed the mood of the era that embraced the time, and was saturated with *pathos*, one of the Korean people’s longstanding feelings.”<sup>36</sup> Im also attributes the success of *The Wanderer* to its realist approach in its pursuit of “the truth of life.”<sup>37</sup> That Im Hwa picked these two films as Korean cinema’s realist representatives may lend his notion of realism to the longstanding cantus over the triumphant tradition of realism in Korean film history. However, realism for Im Hwa was not the telos of Korean film history, but a technical element that would help redeem such “truth of life” via an affective reality.

The realism of Im Hwa, a literary critic, was central to the debate over Korean literature of the late 1930s, which Im Hwa diagnosed as bifurcating into the novel of interior reflection (*naesŏng sosŏl*) and the novel of manners (*saetae sosŏl*). He saw the former as being too immersed in the psychology of its protagonists, while the latter as only unfolding the details of the outer world. The two tendencies, while pointing to different directions, in fact hinged on a more fundamental “split between what to tell and what to depict,” which he paraphrased as “the split in the author’s creative psychology and the loss of artistic harmony in the works.”<sup>38</sup> Such a critique against the modernist novels of the 1930s came from his political concern about his own historical moment of the late colonial period, which was, as Janet Poole suggests in *When the Future Disappears*, marked by “an inability to imagine the future other than as a relentless repetition of the present.”<sup>39</sup> The novel of manners and the details that it describes appeared as a

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<sup>36</sup> Im Hwa, “A Little History of the Development of Korean Cinema,” 201.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>38</sup> Im Hwa, “Setae sosŏllon” [On the novel of manners] in *Im Hwa munhak yesul chŏnjip* [Complete works of Im Hwa], vol. 3 (Seoul: Somyŏng Ch’ulp’an, 2009), 275-76; originally published in *Tonga ilbo*, April 1-6, 1938.

<sup>39</sup> Janet Poole, *When the Future Disappears: The Modernist Imagination in Late Colonial Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 17.

trace of the “era of helplessness.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, all the visions that colonial intellectuals had for a future had disappeared as the Japanese empire embarked on all-out war beginning in the 1930s. As described earlier in the chapter, the expansion of the empire enabled a mobility that rendered all things susceptible to total mobilization. “When the future disappears” for colonial intellectuals, Im Hwa finds in the writers’ indulgence in the unruly details produced with their camera-like eyes “a certain psychology of retaliation for the invisible world that has weakened their existence.” “It is malicious,” he continues, “like a pair of tongs with which [one] picks up filth, so filthy realities to take them one by one into the novels and humiliate them in front of the public.”<sup>41</sup>

Such a discussion of novels of manners reveals their affinity with motion pictures, in that both entertain and distract people with dense and exquisite detail. On the photographic description of a colonial middle-class man by Ch’oe Myōng-ik—a modernist novelist whose work must have been under Im Hwa’s scrutiny—Janet Poole points out that Im’s concern about the unruly details captured by novelists’ camera-eye reflected a conception of the cinematic “as a series of static images—of photographs.”<sup>42</sup> Such a descriptive method that reduces the cinematic to fragmented frames of photographic images, in turn, resulted in the “set of detailed descriptions like grains of sand.”<sup>43</sup> Instead, Im Hwa argues that even though originating from modern techniques of visual art such as painting, photography, and cinema that lend themselves to fragmentation, realism unfolds itself in a true sense by “distinguishing what is important in real

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<sup>40</sup> Im, “On the Novel of Manners,” 288.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>42</sup> Poole, *When the Future Disappears*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Im, “On the Novel of Manners,” 286.

life from what is not.”<sup>44</sup> For Im, realism involves a process of selecting what matters more for the author’s worldview rather than an indiscriminate gleaning of all that is available to her. In other words, instead of enumerating all the fragments of reality, it should function as a narrative technique for making surface urgent yet hidden issues. Then, realism is more about the representation of crucial contradictions embedded in the mode of production than a presentation of modern experience obscured in the mode of consumption.

Im Hwa’s definition of realism becomes clearer with his discussion of film realism. In his 1943 “The Dramatic and the Documentary of Cinema,” the only essay where he postulates film realism, Im brings to the fore the very issue of the camera’s realist faculty and addresses the use of realist technique in service to the organic structure of the entire film.<sup>45</sup> In the essay, Im begins with an inquiry about cinema’s popular appeal in his time, seemingly ascribing the phenomenon to the medium’s affordability or its inherent allure of urbanity. Im, however, purported that the popularity is above all due to the “cinema itself,” which allowed “people, who identified what they saw on screen as real life,” to recognize what they are in the lived world of everyday life. “Anyone who has seen a hen would find a hen when it appears on screen.” He continues, “In this sense, the advent of cinema removed the bar of required knowledge that had estranged people from art thus far.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, cinema’s accessibility endowed by its verisimilitude or visual representability (*sigakchŏk sasilsŏng*) of the real world ushered in a kind of democracy to the appreciation of art and led itself to the throne of the most popular entertainment in his day.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>45</sup> Im Hwa, “Yŏnghwa ūi kŭksŏng kwa kiroksŏng” [The dramatic and the documentary of cinema], *Ch’unch’u* 3, no. 2 (February 1942), 102-10.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 103-4.

In fact, this essay was primarily about a specific film, *A Long Road to the Land of Happiness*. Im Hwa finds the film deserving favorable attention as the filmmaker made an effort to understand cinema in its fullest capacity, that is, in terms of visual representation since it employed documentary elements to depict the fate of drifting people of the colony. As much as visual representability is inherent in the cinematic medium, Im Hwa has no doubt that a vivid description of the seen, which in a novel may just yield to trivialism, could uphold its artistic quality. According to Im, however, the film failed to take full advantage of the documentary (*kiroksǒng*) in its drama, leaving the documentary images fragmented. The scenes of lumbering and farming and the landscapes of Japan and Manchuria, Im argues, are interesting enough to record and depict, but unconnected to the development of its theme that should have been unfolded along with its drama. Here, Im Hwa interestingly relegates cinema's inherent ability to visualize the world to merely one of the methods for artistic expression. He writes, "Realistic representation of the object by every means for different art genres would be no more than one of the means of expression, and the same is true for cinema, too: The visual representability—cinema's visual photographic quality is, in fact, a mechanical photographic quality—will not have more significance than other modes of cinematic expression."<sup>47</sup> In other words, the documentary mode (*kiroksǒng*) is crucial for a film as long as it is limited to its role in helping a film tell its entire story, or, for that matter, *history*, effectively. Im Hwa demands that cinema's visual representability serve both the organization of the documentary as well as the dramatic.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>48</sup> It should be noted that here Im Hwa does not talk about documentary film, or cultural film, the term denoting the former, but he discusses primarily on fiction film. While his attitude about the documentary genre itself seems quite ambivalent, Im in many places insinuates his concern about documentary genre, which was considered at the time of the early 1940s as representing the essence of cinema.

With this argument, Im Hwa seeks to highlight the organic relationship between the documentary (*kiroksǒng*) and the dramatic (*kǔksǒng*), that is, what to depict and what to tell. He contends that the two types of elements, while not entirely identical, are nevertheless inseparable, much like Homer's epic poetry, which can simultaneously impart history and become a novel and a play, or Balzac's novels that can also be read as a cultural history of the bourgeois class in France. The possibility of cinema lies in a form of epic poetry, which depicts the fate of a community while marrying the documentary to the dramatic. But for *A Long Road*, Im Hwa argues that the story of the journey of Korean people has more significance as a historical documentary than as drama: "This work would have revealed one characteristic of an epic poem if it had been expressive of their itinerary as fate. It stands to reason that films with such a theme take as a means of expression the documentary of history and cultural climate."<sup>49</sup>

Given that "The Dramatic and the Documentary of Cinema" was written primarily to explicate the failure of *A Long Road to the Land of Happiness*, we can read the piece as the writer's yearning for the quality of an epic poem—that is, the synthesis of the dramatic and the documentary, a drama and a historical record—to translate into cinema. In Im Hwa's analysis, film's failure is two-fold. First, *A Long Road*, a migration-themed movie, lacked the verisimilitude in its description of the different reasons for the characters' predicament. Without relaying the "bitter circumstances" under which characters had to leave their places, Im Hwa argues, the film failed to capture the truth of their lives. The film still gave a glance at such a moment: "The scene in which one takes a ferry boat to leave Mansan for the other side of river is one of the most touching moments in *A Long Road*. To make it even more touching, it was

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<sup>49</sup> Im, "The Dramatic and the Documentary," 106-8.

indeed required to depict their profound *pathos* despite their seemingly cheerful faces (...) yet this was exactly where the author has failed to do.”<sup>50</sup> Second, the failure to depict and animate the “profound pathos” resulted from the film’s formulaic mode of characterization. For Im Hwa who believed in animation of characters through idiosyncrasies in each character, it was highly problematic that in the film the singularity of each character was subsumed under the collective. The characters’ everyday lives should have animated them as living human beings, instead, they ended up being merely episodic elements, unincorporated into the larger dramatic arc of the entire film. In short,

The fundamental flaw of *A Long Road to the Land of Happiness* lies in the fact that it buries individuality under collectivity, instead of expressing the collective through each personality. I think the filmmaker failed to fulfill this mission [of the film]—which would be difficult to express (maybe it was impossible to describe).”<sup>51</sup>

With the first sentence confirmed, which recapitulates the intrinsic issue of the filmmaker’s negligence, what draws my attention is the second one, where Im Hwa insinuates an extrinsic condition that would have contributed to such a failure: When taking issue with the insufficient description of each character’s motives for drifting, Im Hwa quickly adds in parentheses, that “maybe it was impossible to describe.” While the impossibility of delineating the motives for drifting remains quite vague, this statement—together with the quoted phrase, “the intent which has not a little difficulty”—alludes to the political constraints under the colonial rule, for example, censorship.

In this sense, while pointing to the fundamental problems that *A Long Road* has with its misuse of the documentary, Im Hwa also acknowledges colonial violence, both explicit and

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 110.



implicit, that would not have allowed a colonial filmmaker to visualize the devastating living conditions of the colonized. Nonetheless, this critical position also gestures toward the constitution of a counter-position that encourages the filmmaker to dive into the “ordeal” and contend with the fact so as to discover a “sincere spirit of culture,” even though it may not necessarily promote high-profile resistance against imperialism.<sup>52</sup>

The chance would be created with what Im Hwa termed “life” (*saenghwal*). In 1938, he wrote in “Recognizing the Fact Anew,” “In order to shape what is literary, one needs to come down from politics to thought (*sasang*), from thought to psychology (*simni*), and then from psychology to living (*saenghwal*).”<sup>53</sup> This life, he continues, is “not life as an unavoidable world that imposes itself in place of reality, but life which has to be cherished—life which needs to be affirmed as is.”<sup>54</sup> To Im Hwa’s eyes, the scene of the laborer Sim’s wedding night in *A Long Road* reveals one such moment in which daily life becomes vividly depicted. Im Hwa urges us to “not forget how impressive were the grim faces of the old couple who, despite the boisterousness outside, sat quietly in their room.”<sup>55</sup> What becomes clearer, then, is that by “life” Im Hwa did not mean images of the quotidian, but an affective reality that exists within the psychology of the colonized.

If cheerfulness was required for Korean cinema as the ethos of Asian cinema in the Japanese empire, then it is the *pathos* of the colonized Im Hwa sought to bring to the fore. Indeed, visually representing the colonial condition, or the fact of devastation in the daily lives of

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<sup>52</sup> Im Hwa, “Sasil ūi chaeinsik” [Recognizing the fact anew] in *Complete Works of Im Hwa*, vol. 3 (Seoul: Somyōng Ch’ulp’an, 2009), 113; originally published in *Tonga ilbo*, August 24-28, 1938.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>54</sup> Im Hwa, “Saenghwal ūi palgyōn” [The discovery of life] in *Complete Works of Im Hwa*, vol. 3 (Seoul: Somyōng Ch’ulp’an, 2009), 267.

<sup>55</sup> Im, “The Dramatic and the Documentary,” 109.

the colonized, belonged to the realm of impossibility; however, there remains the affective reality that keeps surfacing despite the imperatives of total mobilization in the late colonial period. It was this pathos that Im Hwa had called for in *Arirang* and *The Wanderer*, in a few scenes in *A Long Road*, and more importantly, in the new Korean cinema that would come.

Im Hwa begins “The Dramatic and the Documentary of Cinema” as follows:

It may not be so simple [to understand] how moviegoing became a social custom. Some will choose a movie theater to meet with friends, and some may have their feet lead them to the theater just for distraction. The latter explains the crowdedness in the movie theater on Sundays. The numbered seats and extended passages in the movie theater are there to satiate the needs of the former type. Even I, myself, go to the movie for the former reason rather than the latter. Is a movie theater, then, only a social club or an entertainment hall?<sup>56</sup>

Such an inquiry about moviegoing seems too general and vague as a review of a specific film *A Long Road*. However, it also shows how the essay does not limit its discussion to an individual film, but aims to investigate a larger issue related to colonial Korean cinema manifested through a film’s failure. Prominent from this opening passage is how the essay works as a vehicle for the argument about cinema’s inherent faculty of visual representation. Put differently, it is crucial to note that in order to discuss the visual representability and realism of cinema, Im Hwa begins with a series of speculations about film audiences who have elevated cinema to be the most popular entertainment of the time, instead of taking a more abstract position to discuss cinema as a photographic device. On the one hand, this discussion of cinema’s effect upon its audience is continuous from his earlier Marxist contention about cinema as a means to uphold people’s class consciousness, as well as his contemporary discourse about film propaganda which prevailed throughout the globe at that time. In relation to Im Hwa’s

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 102.

conception of realism, on the other hand, such an opening of the essay shows how much the lived experience of the audiences matters for Im Hwa's cinema, and how crucial it is for cinema to engage audiences' emotions: I call his notion of realism, in this sense, affective realism.

Of course, as Janet Poole has written in light of the modernist novelist Ch'oe Myŏng-ik's investigation into the everydayness, it is true that Im Hwa was afraid of such a realm of an everydayness "that he saw as somehow not incorporated into national revolutionary time."<sup>57</sup> As Poole observes, Im took issue with the everydayness in cultural productions that gradually displaced the disappearing nation." Yet, it is only half-true: Im Hwa was indeed afraid, and that was why he called for a confrontation with affective reality in colonial Korea. Despite the demands for cheerful images—a cinematic embodiment of the ethos of the Japanese empire—Korean movies could not help but reveal the colonial pathos. From this, Im believed, Korean cinema could redeem its own singularity. Envisioning the singularity of Korean cinema and waiting for it to come into fruition in a different temporality was, in this sense, an imagination of a new subjectivity.

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<sup>57</sup> Poole, *When the Future Disappears*, 48.

## CHAPTER 5

### Boys Written In, Girls Written Off:

#### Korean Cinema in the Homosocial Empire

*Homeless Angels* is a film that shows imperial Japan's mainland audiences how vagrant children can become loyal Japanese citizens if they receive good education.

—Film producer Yi Ch'ang-yong [Hirokawa Sōyō]

Children are not essentially bad even if they're urchins, I think. Any child can be successful with a proper environment and education. More than anything, children are pure angels since they were born. Our vocation is to cultivate that purity.

—Pastor Pang's line in Nishiki Motosada's original scenario of *Homeless Angels*

#### *Colonial World of Boys*

It is a colonial world that sets the backdrop for boys in Korean films in the early 1940s. In *Tuition* (K. *Suŏmnyo*; J. *Jugyōryō*, dir. Ch'oe In-gyu and Pang Han-jun, 1940) the protagonist Yŏng-dal lives alone with his grandmother while his parents are away to earn money. His world is bilingual. He speaks Japanese at school, but in his shanty home he converses with his sick grandmother in Korean. In *Homeless Angels* (K. *Chip ŏmnŭn ch'ōnsa*; J. *Ie naki tenshi*, dir. Ch'oe In-gyu, 1941), orphaned boys are rescued by a philanthropist named Pastor Pang from the sinful city of Seoul and brought to the countryside. A self-sustained communal life in the orphanage with no worries of hunger awaits them, but they are still vulnerable to the lure of

material culture in the city. Their future is connected to Eiryū, the young protagonist in the 1945 film, *Love and Vow* (J. *Ai to chikai*, dir. Ch'oe In-gyu and Imai Tadashi, 1945). This once-orphaned 16-year-old boy now finds himself adopted into the family of Shiraishi, but still feels unattached as he gropes for the fleeting memories of his lost sister.

The world of colonial boys is divided: between Korean as a colloquial ethnic language and Japanese as the official and disciplinary language; between the unruly life of the city and the disciplined life of the countryside; between the families of the forgotten past and the promise of a new one in the empire. Hence the stories of colonial boys would trace their struggle as they come to terms with the divisions. The worlds divided in two languages are united by mutual efforts among the Japanese and Koreans to communicate beyond language; children tempted by urban vices are nurtured through physical labor to build a communal life in the countryside, and eventually pledge to imperial Japan's national flag; and, lastly, a wayward boy will heed the call by the Emperor and serve the nation by volunteering as a kamikaze pilot. Through such narrative developments that suture this fractured world, the boys of colonial films successfully transform their immature selves into adults.

As both Takashi Fujitani and Dafna Zur have pointed out regarding *Love and Vow* and *Homeless Angels*, respectively, colonial films about children share the narrative conventions of the *bildungsroman*, or novels of formation, in which “the protagonist overcomes the uncertainties of youth and develops into mature and civilized adulthood.”<sup>1</sup> The narratives of *bildungsroman*—which “trace the psychic development of young protagonists in time from an undesired past [...] and present [...] toward a desirable future that is open and forward looking”

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<sup>1</sup> Takashi Fujitani, *Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans During World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 319.

—culminates in the discovery of a “home” where the protagonists eventually integrates the divided world.<sup>2</sup> The meaning of maturity has already been determined by orders and norms of a given society, represented by the idea of “home.” In this case of the world of colonial boys, that home should be sought in the Japanese empire. Particularly since the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and the legislation of the National Mobilization Law (*Kokumin sōdōinhō*) in the following year, each and every sector of society, from industries to public organizations, came under government control. Moreover, existing forms of subjecthood were reshaped in the service of the National Spiritual Mobilization Movement (*kokumin seishin sōdōin undō*). In this milieu, children of the total war grew up to become not simply adults; they would become the future soldiers of the empire with sound mind and strong body. The narratives of molding children’s immature bodies into national bodies represent a project for the future of the empire.

But during the height of the total war, young men were not the only ones responsible for building a stronger national body for the empire’s cause; it was also a crucial task for colonial Korea’s film business. As discussed in the previous chapters, filmmakers in colonial Korea endeavored to expand their film market into the greater territory of the empire in order to make ends meet in the age of sound film with its increased production costs. Yi Ch’ang-yong (Japanese name, Hirokawa Sōyō) was one of the rising film producers who had a keen eye for film business. Yi, who was one of the major film distributors in colonial Korea, established the Koryō Film Association (Koryō Yōnghwa Hyōphoe; Koryō Films, hereafter) to produce films

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<sup>2</sup> Dafna Zur, “Landscape of the Heart in *Homeless Angels* and *Hometown of the Heart*,” *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 7, no. 1 (2015), 12.

under a more stabilized and rationalized system.<sup>3</sup> His first production in 1936 was supposed to be *Evergreen (Sangnoksu)* based on the acclaimed enlightenment-themed novel of the same title, but due to the sudden death of its assigned director Sim Hun, the project failed to materialize. A few years later in 1938, Yi launched another project to produce *A Long Road to the Land of Happiness (Pokchi malli, dir. Chŏn Ch'ang-gŭn)* in collaboration with filmmakers in Japan and Manchuria. But when the production of *A Long Road* was protracted due to its massive scale and location shootings, he undertook the cinematization of an award-winning essay written by a school boy with the title *Tuition*, which came to fruition in 1940. Owing to the film's success in Korea, Yi Ch'ang-yong's Koryŏ Films produced another film centered on children, *Homeless Angels*, in 1941. Like other producers in colonial Korea at the time, Yi Ch'ang-yong had a clear ambition to make his films successful not only in the domestic market, but also beyond the Korean Peninsula. What makes him distinct from other filmmakers of the time is his effort to “[harmonize] a film's entertainment quality as well as public interests in the war regime,” as Yi Hwa-jin has aptly pointed.<sup>4</sup> If a film's entertainment quality is forged through genre effects, particular styles, or spectacle, its conformity to public interests—especially during the total war—can be guaranteed by accommodating the ideological position of the state. Indeed, from *A Long Road* and his aborted project *Evergreen* to *Homeless Angels*, Yi Ch'ang-yong deliberately chose material for films that could serve the purpose of edification or enlightenment of colonial masses, while simultaneously communicating with authorities of the colonial government as well as film moguls in mainland Japan.

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<sup>3</sup> Yi Hwa-jin, “Taedong-A rŭl kkumkkuŏttŏn singminji ūi yŏnghwa kiŏpka Yi Ch'ang-yong” [Yi Ch'ang-yong, film entrepreneur who dreamt the Greater East Asia], in Korea Film Archive ed., *Koryŏ Yŏnghwa Hyŏphoe wa yŏnghwa sinch'eje 1936-1941* [Koryŏ Film Association and the New Film Order, 1936-1941] (Seoul: Korea Film Archive, 2007), 196-209.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

This chapter explores three films that narrate the development of colonial boys: *Tuition*, *Homeless Angels*, and *Love and Vow*. While *Love and Vow* was produced by the Korea Film Production Company (K. Chosŏn Yŏnghwa Chejak Chusikhoesa; J. Chōsen Eiga Seisaku Kabushikigaisha) unlike other two films made by Koryō Films, these films share the fundamental assumptions of the colonial *bildungsroman*. A line by Pastor Pang from the scenario of *Homeless Angels*, though not actually included in the extant film, succinctly summarizes the shared assumptions: “Any child can be successful with a proper environment and education,” Pang continues, “Children are pure angels. [...] *Our* vocation is to cultivate that purity.”<sup>5</sup>

Who does this “we” entail? While in the film the “we” refers to social workers like Pastor Pang, it may apply to a designated social stratum that bears the responsibility of all adults for children’s development. In a roundtable talk hosted by a Japanese film magazine on Korean cinema, Yi Ch’ang-yong—appearing under his Japanese name Hirokawa Sōyō—expands on this line to posit a wider implication in the context of the film market in the Japanese empire: “*Homeless Angels* is a film that shows [audiences in imperial Japan’s] mainland that with the right education, vagrant children can become loyal Japanese citizens who salute the national flag.”<sup>6</sup> Implicit within Yi’s statement about his ambitious plan to promote Korean films in the Japanese market is the significance of Korean cinema in general within the realm of Japanese cinema. Much like those orphaned children in the film *Homeless Angels* who need care and education from a responsible adult, colonial Korean cinema, if recognized as a child of Japanese cinema, must be nurtured and raised under the guidance of its fatherly Japanese cinema. It is in

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<sup>5</sup> Nishiki Motosada, *Ie naki tenshi* [*Homeless Angels*], film script (1940), booklet in *Palgul toen kwagō Ilche sigi kūk yŏnghwa moim* [Unearthed past: Collection of colonial era fiction films] (Seoul: Korea Film Archive, 2007) DVD, 40. Italics on me.

<sup>6</sup> “Zadankai Chōsen eiga shintaisei juritsu no tameni” [Roundtable: For establishing the New Order for Korean cinema], *Eiga junpō*, no. 30 (November 1941), 16.



this chain of metaphors that colonial Korean cinema operates as part and parcel of imperial Japanese cinema at large.

The paternalistic imagination about the relationship between cinemas of the colonizer and the colonized calls for bilateral efforts. On the one hand, it involves a certain kind of discursive formation that develops a sense of responsibility among the Japanese for Korean cinema as a child of Japanese cinema. On the part of Korean cinema, on the other, it is crucial to demonstrate its merits and potential as worthy of being part of the imperial film culture. This two-way process of embracing each other in terms of a desirable boyhood is accompanied by the exclusion or substitution of other subjectivities—in this case, the experiences of colonial girlhood.

With these issues in mind, this chapter explores the desires of Korean cinema projected upon and mediated by the representation of colonial boys and girls. The aim of the chapter is three-fold. First, I begin by discussing how Korean cinema was conceived as a childlike cinema in the film discourse in early 1940s Japan. By examining promotional materials produced by Tōwa Trading Company (Tōwa Shōji; Tōwa, hereafter) that distributed *Tuition* and *Homeless Angels*, I argue that the conception of colonial Korean cinema as a child of Japan was Korean filmmakers' deliberate strategy to secure its position in the developmental discourse that necessitates new subjectivities in the expanding empire. Development as such, however, demands recognition by others *as* development. Thus, secondly, in order to understand how boys' growing-up becomes identified through the recognition of adults, I move to *Love and Vow* as a mature form of the colonial *bildungsroman*. In my analysis, I single out writing as mediation of subjectivity between the protagonist's past self and his future image.

The final part of the chapter problematizes the connection between a boy's development and the recognition by adults as a highly gendered process that neglects experiences of girls in favor of fostering growth in boys. While my discussion in the first half of the chapter follows a chronological order from *Tuition* (1940) and *Homeless Angels* (1941) to *Love and Vow* (1945), the last part of the chapter reverses the order from *Love and Vow* back to *Tuition* as an attempt to find some vestiges of forgotten stories of girls in these films about boys. At the end of this reverse chronology, I will argue that the moments in which girls disappear in colonial films about children mark the emergence of a homosocial empire in the regime of the total war.

#### *Tuition and Yi Ch'ang-yong's Ambitions*

*Tuition* was Koryō Films' second production after *Deceived by Love, Crying for Money* (*Sarang e sokko ton e ulgo*, dir. Yi Myōng-u, 1939), a tragic melodrama coproduced with the popular Tong'yang Theater. But in terms of producer Yi Ch'ang-yong's strategy to expand his business, the film may safely be said to have been the company's first film. The film's production proceeded in a heartbeat. In March 1939, *Keijō nippō*, a Japanese-language newspaper based in Seoul, published the top two essays that received the Government-General Awards in the school children's writing competition. "Tuition" (*Jugyōryō*) by a fourth-grader U Su-yōng was awarded second place. This essay—which Miyamoto Wakichi, professor at the Keijō Imperial University, praised for "having literary sense as well as talent"—was quickly picked up by filmmakers in colonial Korea.<sup>7</sup> Nishiki Motosada, an advisory board member of the colonial government's Book Department, proposed to Yi Ch'ang-yong that he adapt U's essay

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<sup>7</sup> Miyamoto Wakichi, "Shinsa no mokuhyō wa kodomo rashii hyōgen ni" [The focus of evaluation was on childlike expressions], *Keijō nippō* (March 19, 1939), evening edition, 4.

into film. For its scriptwriting, Yi liaised with Yagi Yasutarō, one of the most acclaimed writers in Japan known for his script for *Spring in the Small Island* (*Kojima no haru*, dir. Toyoda Shirō, 1940). He also selected child actors among amateurs, while inviting Susukida Kenji from Japan for the role of the protagonist boy's teacher. In June, director Ch'oe In-gyu started filming.<sup>8</sup>

The production of *Tuition* was, however, not without its share of troubles: When the filming was inching toward the finish line in September, director Ch'oe suddenly fell ill and was hospitalized. In October, Pang Han-jun came on board as a co-director to finalize the film. To make things worse, the film's negative prints were found missing after being sent to Tokyo for editing and sound-mixing in November. It was only after two months that the prints were finally recovered. Bedridden until then, Ch'oe In-gyu returned to work in January 1940 on the post-production.<sup>9</sup>

After many ups and downs, Koryō Films held the press preview of *Tuition* in the Tairiku Theater (formerly, Tansōngsa) on April 18th, 1940. Four days later, Meijiza, a film theater located in the Japanese district in Seoul, hosted a preview screening for the public before the official release. The screening was successful in spite of its admission charge, drawing attention from film exhibitors in both Korea and Japan.<sup>10</sup> *Tuition* was finally open to the public on April 30th in both Tairiku and Meijiza theaters. The screening was initially scheduled for a week until

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<sup>8</sup> “*Suōmnyo* chejak ōrini yōk tasu mojip” [Recruiting child actors for *Tuition*], *Maeil sinbo* (May 17, 1939), morning edition, 4; “*Suōmnyo* e ch’uryōn ch’a Susukida Kenji nae Kyōng” [Susukida Kenji coming to Seoul for *Tuition*], *Chosōn ilbo* (June 14, 1939), morning edition, 4; “Koyōng *Suōmnyo* chejak sūt’aep kyōlchōng” [Staffs decided for Koryō’s *Tuition*], *Chosōn ilbo* (June 15, 1939), morning edition, 4; “Yōnghwa *Suōmnyo* ūi chuyōk” [Main roles in film *Tuition*], *Maeil sinbo* (July 1, 1939), morning edition, 3.

<sup>9</sup> “*Suōmnyo* Ch’oe In-gyu kamdok wabyōng ūro Pang Han-jun kamdok i taeyōk” [*Tuition*’s director Ch’oe In-gyu in sick-bed, Pang Han-jun to direct instead], *Chosōn ilbo* (October 4, 1939), morning edition, 4; “Yōnghwa *Suōmnyo* punsil” [*Tuition*’s print lost], *Chosōn ilbo* (December 29, 1939), morning edition, 4; “Haebang pulmyōng ūi yōnghwa *Suōmnyo* palgyōn” [*Tuition*’s missing prints recovered], *Chosōn ilbo* (January 7, 1940), morning edition, 2.

<sup>10</sup> “Keijō no wadai” [Topics in Seoul], *Kokusai eiga shinbun*, no. 269 (May 1940), 45.

the 4th of May, but the film proved to be so popular that the Tairiku Theater had to extend the program for another week.<sup>11</sup>

However, the producer's ambition exceeded its success in the limited Korean market. From the outset, Yi Ch'ang-yong wanted *Tuition* to appeal to a larger audience base. In fact, Yi's original plan was to have its world premiere in Tokyo, the capital of the empire, rather than in the colonial capital. According to a newspaper report in February, the press screening of *Tuition* was arranged for March 15th in Asahi Hall in Tokyo, then for the 17th in Seoul.<sup>12</sup> When the public release was delayed for unknown reasons, Koryō Films re-scheduled the press preview, again, to be held first in Tokyo on the 23rd, then in Seoul on the 25th.<sup>13</sup> Although the film's world premiere ended up in Seoul, the plan itself attests to how Yi had prioritized the Japanese market over Korea. In terms of production, Yi took a dual approach to fostering collaboration between Japanese and Korean filmmakers, hiring a Japanese writer for the script while delegating the directing to a Korean. This strategy was, in part, a response to growing concerns among filmmakers of the time regarding the quality of Korean films: the lack of adept scriptwriters in colonial Korea, on the one hand, and the issue of exoticism exploited by Japanese film directors, on the other hand.

The strategy also took into account the marketability of Korean films, which had not been successful in Japan thus far. In a roundtable discussion hosted by Japan's film magazine *Nihon eiga*, *Tuition*'s scriptwriter Yagi Yasutarō, claiming himself to be “one of those who have been

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<sup>11</sup> See the theater's advertisement in *Keijō nippō* (May 5, 1940), evening edition, 2. The tag-line reads, “Overwhelmingly favorable reviews! The film of sensation in the entire city of Seoul continues to run!”

<sup>12</sup> “*Suōmnyo* sisahoe 3 wōl 17 il ro kyōlchōng” [Premiere of *Tuition* on March 17th], *Chosōn ilbo* (February 24, 1940), morning edition, 4.

<sup>13</sup> “Koryō Yōnghwa *Suōmnyo* wansōng” [Koryō Films *Tuition* completed], *Maeil sinbo* (March 15, 1940), morning edition, 4.

in collaboration with Korean cinema,” raises the issue of language in Korean films: “The use of Korean language only brought an industrial potential [in the Korean market]. But the times have changed. The use of Japanese language will provide [more] possibilities to form a business.”<sup>14</sup> Given that the roundtable discussion was held in August 1940 when the shooting of the film had already begun—and of course, with its scenario also completed—Yagi’s point as such might have resonated with Yi Ch’ang-yong who, in consideration of the Japanese market, argued that “the film project should be designed according to changing circumstances, not a fixed conception of Korean cinema.”<sup>15</sup> Of course, *Tuition*, when it was completed, was not limited to Japanese as it appears in Yagi’s screenplay; rather, children in *Tuition* speak both languages, Japanese in school and Korean at home.<sup>16</sup> Such a way of reflecting the linguistic reality of colonial Korea was, in fact, a “moderate” suggestion made by film critic Iijima Tadashi at the same roundtable. Later, Yi asked Iijima to supervise the film’s “Japanese version” (*kokugoban*)—probably meaning Japanese subtitles for Korean dialogues—in order to get confirmed if the film’s use of dual language was appropriate.<sup>17</sup> It was in this way of closely working with Japanese writers and critics—reconciling the different opinions regarding, for example, the issue of language—that *Tuition*’s producer Yi Ch’ang-yong sounded out Korean cinema’s success in the Japanese film market.

Yi Ch’ang-yong, who was a skillful film distributor in colonial Korea, had a close connection with San’eisha, through which he distributed Korean films in Japan as well as

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<sup>14</sup> “Zadankai hōkoku Chōsen eiga no genjō o kataru” [Report on roundtable: Talking about Korean cinema’s current state], *Nihon eiga* (August 1939), 126.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>16</sup> Yagi Yasutarō’s screenplay was published in *Eigajin* in April 1940. *Eigajin* was the monthly bulletin of the All Japan Filmmakers Federation (Zen-Nihon Eigajin Renmei).

<sup>17</sup> “Report on Roundtable: Talking about Korean Cinema’s Current State,” *Nihon eiga* (August 1939), 126.

imported European films to Korea. However, starting from *Tuition*, Yi worked with Tōwa Company, which was a relative latecomer as a Korean film distributor whose first official distribution was *Han River* (*Han'gang*, dir. Pang Han-jun, 1938) in 1939.<sup>18</sup> The reason why he turned to Tōwa instead of San'eisha is, though unspecified, hinted by two companies' different target audiences in the Japanese market: San'eisha brought Korean films such as *Tale of Hong Kil-tong Part II* (*Hong Kil-tong chŏn hup'yŏn*, dir. Yi Myŏng-u, 1936) to regions with large Korean populations such as Osaka and Kyōto, whereas Tōwa planned to release Korean films in its art film circuit aiming at the general public in Japan. Regardless of the degree of its success, Tōwa's strategy of marketing Korean films as art cinema must have reverberated with Yi Ch'ang-yong's plan. Later in 1941, regarding *Homeless Angels*, Yi explicitly made a remark that "Our purpose of making the film was not to show it to Korean laborers in the mainland [Japan]."<sup>19</sup> For Yi, Tōwa might have seemed a better partner that would assist his ambition toward a larger spectatorship.

Starting from early May, on the heels of *Tuition*'s premiere in Korea, Tōwa began advertising the film in Japanese magazines and newspapers, attesting to their efforts to elevate not only the visibility but also the significance of Korean cinema.<sup>20</sup> Before examining the discourse around Korean films in Japan, I want to make clear that the following analysis is less

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<sup>18</sup> Chŏng Chong-hwa presumes that Tōwa's involvement with Korean films may have been earlier in 1937 when it assisted *The Wanderer*'s Japan release. See Chŏng Chong-hwa, "Chosŏn yŏnghwa nŭn ōttŏke pando yesul yŏnghwa ro homyŏng toeŏnnŭn'ga *Han'gang* ūi Ilbon paegŭp ūl chungsim ūro" [How was Korean cinema called as art cinema?: *Han River*'s Japan release], *Sai*, no. 20 (2016), 179-210.

<sup>19</sup> "Roundtable: For Establishing the New Order for Korean Cinema," *Eiga junpō*, no. 30, 16.

<sup>20</sup> I base my analysis of Tōwa's promotion of *Tuition* and *Homeless Angels* on the sourcebook published by Korea Film Archive, entitled *Koryŏ Yŏnghwa Hyŏphoe wa yŏnghwa sinch'eje 1936-1941* [Koryŏ Film Association and the New Film Order, 1936-1941] (Seoul: Korea Film Archive, 2007). Most sources such as photos, notes, advertisements, as well as film reviews come from a scrapbook provided by the Kawakita Film Culture Foundation, which was established in commemoration of Kawakita Nagamasa and Kashiko, who ran Tōwa Company. There are many sources included in this scrapbook without any clear citation. The advertisements are quoted from newspapers and magazines I identified; but in case I cannot locate the original source, I rely on the pagination of Korea Film Archive's sourcebook.

about how Korean films were received by general audiences in Japan, than about how Korean filmmakers as well as their Japanese partners wanted Japanese audiences to receive Korean films. While many film historians have simply accepted the critical success of *Tuition* and *Homeless Angels* in early 1940s Japan as a given, that purported success was not unrelated to the conscious efforts by intellectuals as well as film marketers in Japan to raise awareness about Korean films as part of Japanese cinema. Particularly as all Korean films, including *Homeless Angels*, were commercial failures in the Japanese market, the critical acclaim given to such films should be understood less as an appreciation of their cinematic artistry than as a strategy calculated either for commercial or ideological reasons. The Tōwa promotional materials I examine in this chapter show how the company tried to avoid any possible misinterpretation from Japanese readership. For example, the materials that Tōwa collected for its promotional strategy include film director Inagaki Hiroshi's hand-written note about *Tuition*. On Tōwa's office paper, Inagaki submits a generally favorable response composed of two sentences, the latter part of which, however, points out that "[the film] felt like an imitation of [Shōchiku] Ofuna [studio's] style."<sup>21</sup> This comment, which could have led to the doubts about *Tuition*'s originality, was never used in an actual advertisement for the film. Given this, it should be acknowledged that the materials that seemingly attest to Korean cinema's critical success were produced with a clear purpose, that is, advertisement. It is in that sense that I trace the ways in which the discursive and ideological environment for Korean films in early 1940s Japan was formed under such commercial concerns.

As mentioned above, Tōwa's strategy was targeted specifically at art film fans in Japan. First of all, advertisements of *Tuition* drew on an analogy to other artistically acclaimed films

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<sup>21</sup> *Koryō Film Association and the New Film Order*, 76.

about children such as *Composition Class* (*Tsuzurikata kyōshitsu*, dir. Yamamoto Kajirō, 1938), *The Red Head* (dir. Julien Duvivier, 1932), and *The River* (*Řeka*, dir. Josef Rovenský, 1933). In particular, *Tuition* is repeatedly designated as “*Composition Class* from the peninsula” (*Hantō no Tsuzurikata kyōshitsu*) mainly because the film was based on a child writer’s essayistic work like *Composition Class*. Chiba Shūn’ichi, an employee of Tōwa Company’s Institute for Cinematic Science (Eiga Kagaku Kenkyūsho), notes that “Given the deep impression that *Composition Class* has made on the [Japanese] public, advertising *Tuition* as ‘*Composition Class* from the peninsula’ may be easier [for them] to understand [the film].”<sup>22</sup> By relying on the critical success of *Composition Class*, Tōwa wanted to set up an audience expectation for a relatively unfamiliar film to be on par with Japanese cinema. Following this, an earlier advertisement in *Kinema junpō* explicitly begs for such a comparison by insisting that, “This is a cinematization of the Government-General Award-winning essay. Could you please compare [this] with our *Composition Class*?”<sup>23</sup>

In a similar vein, Tōwa employed more authoritative voices from Japan’s literary establishment in order to assure an appreciation of *Tuition*’s artistic achievement. For example, an advertisement in the August 21st issue of *Kinema junpō* includes comments from Yokomitsu Ri’ichi and Hibino Shirō; in an advertisement a week later, it features endorsements by Niwa Fumio and, most notably, Toyoda Masako, the writer of *Composition Class*. Their comments targeted those potential audiences who would appreciate insights imparted by such literary figures, unlike the Korean advertisements for *Tuition* that simply relied on empty rhetoric such as “an immortal work” and “the best masterpiece.”

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<sup>22</sup> Unidentified source included in the Tōwa scrapbook; cited from *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>23</sup> Advertisement from *Kinema junpō*, no. 714 (May 1, 1940), 8.



With its *leisurely mood in destitution* (*kyūhaku shita nodokasa*), the film provides viewers room to reflect on their own happiness or misery. (Yokomitsu Ri'ichi)<sup>24</sup>

I couldn't help but cry. [...] My heart was deeply moved by this work's sense of *purity* [...]. (Hibino Shirō)<sup>25</sup>

Touched by *honesty*. I have rarely been moved this much [by a film] [...] (Niwa Fumio)<sup>26</sup>

The honest heart of children and the beauty of friendship have knocked my heart. (Toyoda Masako)<sup>27</sup>

In the comments by literary figures, *Tuition* is framed through terms like “honesty,” “purity,” and “naiveté.” With such attributes of children, *Tuition* is conceived as a film *like* a child as much as a film *about* children. The advertorial published in both *Kinema junpō* and *Kokusai eiga shinbun* around the same time draws on a similar rhetoric:

Born with lack of capital and poor equipment, Korea is still a first grader of cinema (*eiga ichinen-sei*). [Korean cinema] may seem childish; yet it has unexhausted innocence (*suretsukarasarenai junshinsa*). Some say Korean films are like Czech films. Films cultivated from that soil exude the mood of simplicity.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Advertisement from *Kinema junpō*, no. 725 (August 21, 1940), 8. My emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. My emphasis.

<sup>26</sup> Advertisement from *Kinema junpō*, no. 726 (September 1, 1940), 10. My emphasis.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> *Kinema junpō*, no. 724 (August 11, 1940), 17; *Kokusai eiga shinbun*, no. 276 (August 1940), reprint, vol. 66, 183. This passage curiously makes a connection between Korean cinema and Czech cinema. It is beyond my scope to actually compare Korean films with Czech films around the time. Suffice it to remind us that the latter was an usual reference in the 1930s discourse about Korean cinema. Czech cinema—neither an industrial hegemon like American cinema nor an artistically established film production such as French and German cinema—was being received as an exemplar of how a relatively small national cinema could rise in the international market by developing its own aesthetics and styles. As for *Tuition*, *The River* (*Řeka*; Japanese release title, *Flow* [*Nagare*]), which was one of three Czechoslovakia films shown at the 1934 Venice Film Festival's feature film competition, appears in Japanese advertisements several times. There are certain moments in *Tuition* evocative of the lyrical cinematography of a boy's everyday life and the landscape in *The River*. In this context of advertising *Tuition* as a Korean film, conjuring up an analogy between Korean and Czech cinemas was Tōwa's attempt to position *Tuition*—as well as other Korean films that Tōwa planned to distribute in Japan—safely within the arthouse film fandom. Like films from a country that had been marginalized by the large film empires, Korean films with its unruly yet fresh aesthetics, Tōwa was to suggest, would be a discovery for those who take cinema seriously as an art form. For a discussion about lyricism as a unique aesthetic of Czech cinema including *Ecstasy* (*Extase*, dir. Gustave Machatý, 1932), *The River* (*Řeka*, dir. Josef Rovenský, 1933), and *The Earth Sings* (*Zem spieva*, dir. Karel Plicka, 1933), see Peter Hames, *Czech and Slovak Cinema: Theme and Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

The above passage, inserted among a variety of information about the film *Tuition* as well as the reprint of its original award-winning essay by U Su-yōng, provides its readers with a guideline to interpret *Tuition* in the larger context of Korean cinema. At the same time, by consistently referring to “Korean cinema” as the main subject, the passage also makes a leap from the aesthetics of a particular film to that of Korean cinema in general. *Tuition*, a film about children, is treated as a metaphor of *childlike* cinema of colonial Korea. It is figured as an unsophisticated “first-grader,” much like the little boy who appears in the film.

*For whom*, then, does this cinema from a colony seem childlike? Such a rhetoric of discerning a relatively backward cinema becomes possible from the position of those who have already achieved a certain level of development. By lowering the position of Korean cinema as a childlike one, Tōwa’s advertisement triggers the sympathy of Japanese audiences who have been exposed to more sophisticated and advanced films. In a collective review held by Tōwa on November 5th in 1940, Yasuda Toshikazu, who was active in building children’s culture during the wartime producing films like *Children of the South Seas* (*Nankai no kodomo*, 1940), makes a point about such a positionality: “This film takes a children’s position and appeals to adults.”<sup>29</sup> Risking simplification it might be possible to associate “adults” and “children” as a metaphor—notably the favorite metaphor—of paternalistic colonialism, in which colonization is justified as a means to disseminate modern institutions and ideas and to enlighten the uncivilized. By reproducing assumptions of the hierarchy between cultures of the colonizer and the colonized, advertising a Korean film in such a way solicited pity from the fatherly Japanese audiences.

Defining Korean cinema as a child-figure of Japanese cinema is a form of Orientalism as much as it relies on an assumed cultural hierarchy; but this Orientalism operates on yet another

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<sup>29</sup> Unidentified source from the Tōwa scrapbook; cited from *Koryō Film Association and the New Film Order*, 85.

level that situates Korean cinema as a bearer of innocence that Japanese cinema has long lost. However, unlike the Orientalist project of setting its others in timelessness, this way of shaping Korean cinema foregrounds Korean cinema's difference *in itself*, rather than exoticize the difference of Korean cinema *from* Japanese cinema. For example, in the previous promotional tag-lines, Niwa Fumio says he has “not been moved this much”; Toyoda Masako, who does not shed tears when watching movies, confesses that she wept loudly.<sup>30</sup> These comments share that *Tuition* gives an impression rarely found in Japanese films. *Tuition*'s straightforward aesthetics was considered as rather refreshing than awkward, and as unique than strange. In other words, *Tuition* was not advertised as an exotic cultural product that came from Japan's colony; nor was this its producer, Yi Ch'ang-yong's intent. The strategy to highlight the so-called “local color” with exotic representations of Korea had already failed several times already in the late 1930s, as discussed in the previous chapter. *Tuition* should be different. Tōwa and Koryō thus wanted to present the film not only as a milestone for Korean cinema's development but also as part and parcel of Japanese cinema.

### *Defining Korean Cinema as Childlike Cinema*

From September in 1940, however, Tōwa Company ceased advertising *Tuition*, as its Japan release was being delayed. It was only in February 1941—after the Korean premier of *Homeless Angels*—that advertising for *Tuition* resumed. But compared to the efforts and attention given to the new Korean film *Homeless Angels*, interest in *Tuition* had largely

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<sup>30</sup> Advertisement from *Kinema junpō*, no. 726 (September 1, 1940), unpaginated.

evaporated. In fact, *Tuition* was never officially released in Japan with the exception of a few one-time screenings. The reason is unknown.

Whatever the reason, the failure to release *Tuition* in Japan might have frustrated both Koryō and Tōwa's ambitions. Their next project, *Homeless Angels*, thus required a more careful promotional strategy. Tōwa's scrapbooks for Korean films include a document entitled "How to Advertise *Homeless Angels*."<sup>31</sup> This document painfully acknowledges that Korean films were not successful in Japan other than "some special areas," by which it meant the Korean neighborhoods in Japan's big cities, and yet, it remains hopeful since "times have changed." Although it was still hard to tell to what extent the marketability of Korean films had improved within less than a year since both Tōwa and Koryō worked to release *Tuition*, there certainly had been some noteworthy moves such as the Japanese Army's involvement in the production of a Korean film called *You and I* (*Kimi to boku*, dir Hinatsu Eitarō [Hō Yōng], 1941) and the Ministry of Education's recognition of *Homeless Angels* as its 14th Recommended Film. The document thus suggests with discretion that "the scope of Japanese cinema has been widened," and, at the same time, "the awareness toward the peninsula cinema has more or less advanced."

In the document, Tōwa identified two selling points. First, the promotion of *Homeless Angels* would follow a "two-pronged strategy" (*ryōmen sakusen*), which on the one hand, would emphasize the film's critical success, having been awarded the Ministry of Culture's Recommendation to target those who are fond of Koryō Films, while mobilizing "special fans of the peninsula films"—meaning, Koreans residing in Japan, on the other hand. Tōwa believed that this strategy would enable Korean cinema to expand its audience base in Japan. Second, the social problem of "street urchins" would be highlighted as a pressing issue that had rarely been

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<sup>31</sup> *Koryō Film Association and the New Film Order*, 158-60.

taken up in other Japanese films thus far. If the first strategy was about identifying the existing target audience, it was the second point that Koryō Films, which was, as much as Tōwa, troubled over the delay of *Tuition*'s Japan release, wanted to highlight when producing *Homeless Angels*.

*Homeless Angels* centers on a real orphanage, Hyangninwŏn, founded by a philanthropist named Pang Su-wŏn. As the story became a national topic in the summer of 1940, Koryō Films quickly initiated its cinematization. Nishiki Motosada, who had joined in producing *Tuition* as a creator of the project, was assigned as the film's scriptwriter, and developed a narrative set around orphaned boys who are rescued by Pastor Pang Sŏng-bin, a fictional character modeled after Pang Su-wŏn. Once his scenario was approved by the censors on July 17th, Ch'oe In-gyu set about shooting the film starting from the 22nd. After half a year, Koryō Films held the press preview of *Homeless Angels* in January 1941, inviting journalists, filmmakers, film critics, as well as the orphans of the real Hyangninwŏn and its founder, Pang Su-wŏn.<sup>32</sup>

Unlike *Tuition*—which dealt with a boy's poverty as an individual experience that is gradually connected to his community—the project of *Homeless Angels* made it clear from the beginning that the film would address a social problem. Its production was partly supported by social clubs such as Seidankai (or Ch'ŏngdamhoe, in Korean), which was among the major sponsors of the real Hyangninwŏn.<sup>33</sup> Koryō Films also closely worked with the founder of the orphanage Pang Su-wŏn, who helped film production by mobilizing the children of his orphanage as extras in exchange for securing left-over materials from sets for his

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<sup>32</sup> “Koyōng sinjak *Chip ōmnŭn ch'ōnsa* 22 il put'ō kŭraenkŭ kaesi” [Filming Koryō's *Homeless Angels* to start on 22nd], *Maeil sinbo* (July 20, 1940), morning edition, 4; “Ie naki tenshi ga *Ie naki tenshi* ni namida” [Homeless angels shedding tears to *Homeless Angels*], *Keijō nippō* (January 30, 1941), morning edition, 5.

<sup>33</sup> “Koyōng sinjak *Chip ōmnŭn ch'ōnsa* 22 il put'ō kŭraenkŭ kaesi” [Filming Koryō *Homeless Angels* to start on the 22nd], *Maeil sinbo* (July 20, 1940), morning edition, 4.

Hyangninwŏn.<sup>34</sup> Just before the release of *Homeless Angels* in Seoul, newspaper *Keijō nippō* serialized a roundtable discussion about the orphan problem in four parts. Under the title, “*Homeless Angels* and Social Problems,” the roundtable discussion hosted those active in social services—such as the colonial government officers and their wives—to discuss with Pang Su-wŏn and the filmmakers of *Homeless Angels* the issues raised by the film.<sup>35</sup> While the topic varied from the film’s tranquil representation of the orphanage located in the countryside to the difficulties in rehabilitating wayward colonial boys, the focus of this roundtable discussion lay in using the film as an opportunity to raise consciousness of the serious problem in the colonial capital where more than 500 orphaned children roamed the streets. Effectively echoing the words of the orphanage’s director Pang Su-wŏn, the participants also confirmed the film as a faithful description of the orphans’ life in Hyangninwŏn, albeit with some fictional additions. According to the panel, the social project that the film represents, however, did not stop at delivering poor children into warm helping hands; the film’s representation should contribute to “[making] all the unfortunate children in Korea disappear, and come back to us as sturdy imperial subjects (*takumashii kōkoku shinmin*).”<sup>36</sup>

The last scene of *Homeless Angels*, which shows children chanting the Oath of Imperial Subjects (*kōkoku shinmin seishi*), neatly corresponds to the ultimate goal of such a social project in the Japanese empire by visually enacting what achieving maturity would mean in a colonial

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<sup>34</sup> Pang Su-wŏn, *Ie naki tenshi* [*Homeless Angels*], ed. Muraoka Hanako (Tokyo: Tokiwa Shoten, 1943), 78-94. The relationship between filmmakers of Koryō Films and Pang Su-wŏn continued afterwards. Even after Korea’s liberation in 1945 when the re-established Koryō Films was producing its first liberation film *Hooray for Freedom* (*Chayu manse*, dir. Ch’oe In-gyu, 1946), Pang Su-wŏn participated in the film’s production as a co-producer.

<sup>35</sup> “*Ie naki tenshi* to shakai mondai” [*Homeless Angels* and social problem], pt. 1, *Keijō nippō* (February 11, 1941), morning edition, 8; pt. 2 (February 12, 1941), morning edition, 6; pt. 3 (February 13, 1941), morning edition, 8; pt. 4 (February 14, 1941), morning edition, 8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 1, *Keijō nippō* (February 11, 1941), morning edition, 8.

world. In front of the Japanese national flag, orphans of Hyangninwŏn shout in unison as any other children in colonial Korea would in their school meeting:

We are the subjects of the Great Japanese Empire.  
We are loyal to His Majesty the Emperor with one accord.  
We endure hardship and train ourselves to become full-grown and strong national subjects.

If the first two lines affirm the children's identity as the "subjects of the Great Japanese Empire" as well as their loyalty to the imperial body (*kokutai*), the last line—"enduring hardship and training oneself" (*ninku tanren*)—provides a code of conduct to reach their goal to achieve such an identity. In this sense, the implication of the Oath of Imperial Subjects in *Homeless Angels* is two-fold. First, the Oaths verbalize the scenes of discipline and training in *Homeless Angels*. In Hyangninwŏn, boys live a well-regulated life. They perform each assigned task to produce noodles that financially sustains their community. The scene of boys' plowing the fields is not only a visual testament to their highly organized labor, but it also works to aestheticize their communal life and self-discipline. Such scenes of physical labor are then signified as the very embodiment of the words, "enduring hardship and training oneself." Second, by showing the scene of the Oaths, the film *Homeless Angels* effectively renders the social problem of orphans into the imperialization project. Visualizing the collective declaration of their achievement as the goals for colonial street gamins, the film situates itself as conforming to the colonial order whose project is to transform the unruly colonized into well-behaved imperial citizens.

The scene of children reciting the Oath of Imperial Subjects shows *how* colonial cinema is to associate itself with the empire, but it also concerns *what* colonial cinema has to be. In other words, while the visualization of bodies and their transformation is about colonial cinema's

methodology, the positioning of a film as a means for enlightening the colonized people problematizes the ontology of cinema as a social construct. This was the bitter lesson learned from the misplaced efforts to release *Tuition* in Japan: Both Tōwa and Koryō no doubt realized that it was not enough to simply represent Korean cinema as a child. If this child of Japanese cinema is to become more than a mere exotic object that reminds Japanese audience of their lost innocence, it has to prove itself as a worthy heir to the future of Japanese cinema, and moreover, to the Japanese empire.

Therefore, the advertisement of *Homeless Angels* in Japan, while still in keeping with the tone set previously for *Tuition* as a childlike film, reshaped the significance of Korean cinema in the Japanese empire. *Kokusai eiga shinbun*'s advertisement describe *Homeless Angels* as “the definitive advancement of Korean cinema that clearly responds to social problems.”<sup>37</sup> On the one hand, *Homeless Angels* is represented as more advanced than its precedents; on the other hand, this noted feat is made possible by its serious concerns with social problems. With the acrid fumes of total war permeating Japan's theaters, this great leap by a Korean film may not only “represent the courageous ambition of the peninsula cinema.”<sup>38</sup> It also indicates a clear path forward for Japanese cinema. The advertisement of *Homeless Angels*, while making the case for Korean cinema's development as “a wing of Japanese cinema,” also suggests that its definitive feat lies in illuminating “new perspectives and ambitions” for Japanese cinema, which in turn demands attention from Japanese audiences.<sup>39</sup> Some slogans for *Homeless Angels* go further to

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<sup>37</sup> *Kokusai eiga shinbun*, no. 279 (October 1940), unpaginated.

<sup>38</sup> Tōwa's invitation to the preview screening of *Homeless Angels*; cited from *Koryō Film Association and the New Film Order*, 138.

<sup>39</sup> Advertisement from *Eiga junpō*, no. 6 (March 1, 1941), unpaginated.



state that, “The passion of peninsula cinema [has] overwhelmed mainland cinema.”<sup>40</sup> According to another advertisement, the film “has surpassed so many Japanese films.”<sup>41</sup>

The development exhibited by *Homeless Angels* is also confirmed by renowned film critics. Iijima Tadashi wrote for an advertisement that the film’s technical deficiencies were well compensated by “a freshness lacking in mainland cinema.”<sup>42</sup> Such was also part of the rhetoric in *Tuition*’s advertisements. However, according to another critic, Murakami Tadahisa, *Homeless Angels* does not rely on the previous strategies of appealing to our pity for childlike Korean cinema; rather, it successfully attests to the “strength of Korean cinema” in its own right.<sup>43</sup> In the *Eiga junpō* advertisement, Ōkuro Tōyōshi notes the Japanese audience’s lack of understanding and interest, and cautions that, “we should not brutally crush [Korean cinema] in the bud.” He continues, “Japanese cinema, which produces mediocre works even under much better conditions, should repent in front of this single work. The fresh sprouts [of Korean cinema] [...] have to be nurtured into fruition.”<sup>44</sup> Calling for Japanese audiences to develop an interest in Korean cinema, the advertisements for *Homeless Angels* reiterate Korean cinema’s significance as part and parcel of Japanese cinema, and emphasize the responsibility of the imperial audience for nurturing its potential.

However, the justificatory claims for its significance were not enough to actually attract the general public to the theater of Korean films. Released in the second week of October in 1941, *Homeless Angels* proved to be a failure in Japan’s theaters. Suzuki Yūkichi diagnoses the

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<sup>40</sup> Advertisement from *Eiga hyōron* 1, no. 3 (March 1941), unpaginated.

<sup>41</sup> Advertisement from *Eiga junpō*, no. 11 (April 21, 1941), unpaginated.

<sup>42</sup> Advertisement from *Eiga junpō*, no. 27 (October 1, 1941), unpaginated.

<sup>43</sup> *Koryō Film Association and the New Film Order*, 102.

<sup>44</sup> Advertisement from *Eiga junpō*, no. 28 (October 11, 1941), unpaginated.

problem: “Despite the great impression of this film, [...] films from the peninsula are not trusted by audiences in the mainland, and the exhibition of a [Korean] film cannot get out of red. Thus, it is hard for this film to mobilize audiences of Japanese films who are accustomed to melodramatic styles; the failure [of the film] in the Shōchiku-line theaters is an expected result.”<sup>45</sup> The commercial failure of *Homeless Angels* once again exposed all too clearly the painful reality that haunted Korean films, that “[s]howing this film assumes the risk of losing regular customers of the theater.” Suzuki concludes that the film should rather aim at a limited range of audiences such as “the intellectual class who has interests in the culture of the peninsula” or “the people from peninsula.” In a similar vein, a writer under the pen name Momotarō weighs in on the issue of profitability of Korean films, which, from an exhibitor’s point of view, “lack both credibility among audiences as well as so-called entertainment quality.” For this very reason, however, Momotarō argues that film theaters in Japan should still show Korean films with “cultural intention despite the sacrifice” to “make the Japanese fond of watching Korean films and encourage filmmakers from the peninsula to devote themselves to cinema for their homeland and the mainlanders.”<sup>46</sup>

Later in 1942, Mizui Reiko, a film correspondent from colonial Korea, wrote in sympathy for Korean cinema: “In Korea, cinema cannot exist purely for the purpose of commercialism. [Cinema in Korea] is surrounded by various restrictions. But this is a good thing. Within the restrictions, only good works are allowed to develop. The director Ch’oe In-gyu cultivated the sprouts of happiness out of restriction.”<sup>47</sup> Sympathetic as it may, this argument is in stark

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<sup>45</sup> Suzuki Yūkichi, “Fūkiri eiga kōgyō kachi *Ie naki tenshi*” [Commercial value of released films: *Homeless Angels*], *Eiga junpō*, no. 30 (November 1, 1941), 52.

<sup>46</sup> Momotarō, “Hantō eiga no tame ni” [For the cinema of the peninsula], *Eiga hyōron* 1, no. 4 (April 1941), 47.

<sup>47</sup> Mizui Reiko, “Chōsen eiga seisakukai o kaeri mite” [Reflection upon the filmmaking world in Korea], *Shin eiga* (November 1942), 94.

contrast to Yi Ch'ang-yong's industrial ambition for Korean cinema's commercial success in the Japanese empire. But faced with the indifference and the constant failure in Japan, advocates of Korean cinema had to resort to a tautological claim for its significance: the Japanese audience *should* watch and love Korean films because Korean films are worthy of viewership and adoration. It is through such a tautology that Korean cinema identified its *raison d'être*. However, this last resort was already defined from the outset when Yi and his Koryŏ Films sought to accommodate the Japanese market by embracing what Mizui had called "restrictions." To accommodate the Japanese market meant, under the increasing militarization of imperial society, to accommodate state ideology.

### *Boys Becoming Soldier: Writing as Development*

In 1945, Ch'oe In-gyu, the director of both *Tuition* and *Homeless Angels*, directed another film about a boy's development into maturity, *Love and Vow* with Japanese co-director Imai Tadashi. Although the film was not a Koryŏ Films production—which was dissolved after Korea Film Production Company was established in 1942—*Love and Vow* echoes similar issues and themes of *Tuition* and *Homeless Angels*. On the one hand, the coming of age story of a boy that anchors *Love and Vow* repeats the logic of Korean cinema's self-positioning as a child of the Japanese empire. The film pushes this theme further by internalizing the state ideology to transform colonial boys into fulfilled imperial subjects. On the other hand, *Love and Vow* draws on the project of *Tuition*, which was based on a child's essay, to include the act of writing by none other than its young protagonist as a key element of the filmic narrative.

*Love and Vow* centers on the story of an orphaned boy named Eiryū who, after losing his sister during the Shanghai Incident, overcomes his tragic circumstances to develop into a full-

fledged citizen of the Japanese empire. Eiryū is adopted by the respectable Shiraishi, a chief editor of *Keijō shinpō* newspaper; but having difficulty settling in, he frequently runs away from his new foster home. Eiryū's emotional distance from his foster family festers, erupting into conflict, which, in turn, makes him more anxious about his own orphanhood. Cultural historian Takashi Fujitani reads Eiryū's troublemaking as deriving from "abandonment neurosis," following Franz Fanon's diagnosis of Jean Veneuse, who, as a black man was plagued by the psychological fear of being deserted by his white lover. Like Fanon's patient who causes problems that lead to his most feared result, abandonment, "Eiryū wishes to be loved by his foster parents and needs their constant affirmation of his worth, yet all his actions seem to be driven by the desire to prove his unworthiness."<sup>48</sup> However, it is important to note that there is also a performative aspect to symptoms of abandonment neurosis. While Fujitani bases this orphan's psychology in his lack of self-esteem and feelings of insecurity, such a seemingly inherent quality of an orphan's psychology has actually been naturalized in the normative discourse about children. At one point in the film, Shiraishi's junior staff Okumura advises Mr. Shiraishi that children from the streets like Eiryū tend to have wanderlust. As if to prove Okumura right, this 16-year-old boy enacts that desire: Motivated by vague memories of his lost sister, Eiryū performs his orphanhood by running away from his foster family. Furthermore, it should be noted that Eiryū's self-identification as an orphan comes out of his frustrated attempt to find security within the Shiraishi family. Throughout the film, Eiryū is never endowed with the surname of his foster family: He remains as Kin Eiryū (Kim Yōng-nyong per the Korean pronunciation), a name that denies his kinship to the Shiraishi family. As such, Eiryū's orphaned mind is forced to seek security elsewhere.

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<sup>48</sup> Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 320.

In *Love and Vow*, Eiryū's search for familial bonds and kinship transpires through the trope of Eiryū's becoming a symbolic younger brother to Lieutenant Murai Shin'ichirō, which I analyze in what follows.<sup>49</sup> Opening with Lieutenant Murai's visit to Shiraishi at his newspaper office, the film seems to place more emphasis on this revered war hero who would die in a kamikaze attack than on its protagonist Eiryū. Shiraishi brings Murai to the building's rooftop, where he notices Eiryū stealing glances from a corner. Embarrassed, Eiryū quickly hides himself in the corner but is pulled out by his foster father. Murai asks him to take a photo together. Standing nervously before Shiraishi's camera, Eiryū is photographed next to Murai and then leaves the premises abruptly as if he were escaping. This first encounter between Eiryū and Murai foreshadows the path that Eiryū will take at the end of the movie—like Murai, Eiryū, too, will volunteer to join the navy—and yet, at this instance, the photograph captures only the contrast between Murai's resoluteness and Eiryū's diffidence. In the portraits, Murai is presented as a young man who is willing to die for the empire's greater causes: He gazes up in the sky, imagining how it is connected to the battlefield. He looks ambitious and determined. (Figure 5.1)

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<sup>49</sup> I consider Murai Shin'ichirō as a Korean volunteer soldier who might have been modeled after many Korean soldiers who died in kamikaze attacks. However, it should be noted that the racial line between Koreans and the Japanese is complicated in *Love and Vow*. For example, Fujitani interprets that the film hints that Eiryū's adoptive father Shiraishi may actually be a Korean. As Fujitani points, Shiraishi, played by Takada Minoru, remembers how he has spent his orphaned childhood in the same town that Murai has lived. (See Fujitani, *Race for Empire*, 322) Though not specified in the existing film, the synopsis released in the newspapers of the time suggests that Murai's father was Shiraishi's teacher in the past as well. (The "film story"—or *eiga monogatari*—was serialized in *Keijō nippō* for three days between May 25 and 27, 1945.) While these elements do not necessarily point to Fujitani's contention that Shiraishi is set as a Korean, they certainly make it complicated to pass him as Japanese as well. The racial identity of the characters in *Love and Vow* is even more confusing, given that while Lieutenant Murai is played by a Korean actor Tok Ūn-gi, his father is acted by Shimura Takashi, another renowned Japanese performer who also appeared in a lot of Kurosawa Akira's films as well as *Godzilla* (*Gojira*, dir. Honda Ishirō, 1954). However, given that all these actors were very well-known—especially the fact that Takada Minoru was already introduced to audiences in colonial Korea with his role of a Japanese police officer in *Suicide Squad at the Watchtower* (*Bōrō no kesshitai*, dir. Imai Tadashi and Ch'oe In-gyu, 1943)—the complicated racial line on the level of story may have been not so much complicated in spectatorship. Audiences, especially in colonial Korea, could have recognized their ethnicity as well as different Japanese accents and pronunciations that linguistically mark their ethnic origin. Although there still remains a doubt regarding Shiraishi's ethnicity, it seems probable that colonial audiences could have at least identified the character of Lieutenant Murai Shin'ichirō as a Korean.

On the contrary, slouching Eiryū refuses to make eye contact, and instead, fixes his gaze on the ground. He seems to shrink and become daunted when standing next to the great Murai. With his shoulders collapsed, he slouches when he walks. (Figure 5.2) From the outset, *Love and Vow* visualizes the development of a wayward 16-year-old boy: the evolution from a cowering body to a confident figure.

Eiryū's slouched body is present in contrast to another young man of his age, Sō Keimei, a native of Murai's hometown who is slated to soon join the navy. Hiring Eiryū as an errand boy in his office, Shiraishi sends the young boy on a mission to visit Murai's hometown and cover a story for the children's section in the newspaper. Having been welcomed warmly by the village people as well as Lieutenant Murai's bereaved family, Eiryū becomes very fond of the town. Moreover, the film infers that Murai's wife Eiko, having also lost her younger brother named Eichū, could likely be Eiryū's missing sister. This town is where Eiryū finds himself at home; it is the site of Eiryū's biggest conflict, but also where he finally comes into possession of the trope of becoming Murai's symbolic younger brother.

The night before Eiryū's return to Seoul, the town was filled with excitement as it prepared to send off Sō Keimei to the navy. But Eiryū, captured by his desire to prolong his sojourn, removes the gas from the only bus that will take him to the train station the next day. This impedes Eiryū's departure as planned, but this also delays Keimei's joining the navy. Unable to wait until the bus is fixed, Keimei determines to run a mile to the station not to miss his train to the camp. He dashes from the town and the village people run alongside cheering him on. Watching this painfully from a distance, Eiryū reproaches himself and confesses to Eiko that he was the culprit, but did so because he didn't want to return to Seoul. He confides his wish to be Eiko's lost brother, but Eiko is angered by what he has done. "My younger brother must also

be Lieutenant Murai's younger brother. Even if my younger brother were alive, I wouldn't love him if he were not an admirable brother (*rippana otōto*).”

In this statement, Eiko connects her own brother with Murai's brother and then with an admirable man, creating a chain of meaning that advances from a narrow definition of familial tie to its significance in broader terms of heroic service to nation and empire. In this sense, it is Sō Keimei, the respectable young man in the town, who has already achieved the status of Murai's symbolic younger brother. Cheerfully running through the mountains and valleys, Sō Keimei advances to a new territory enabled by Japan's warfront, just as Murai did; whereas Eiryū, trapped in his wish to secure himself within the narrow meaning of family, simply wanted to remain in the small town. If the previous contrast between Eiryū and Murai exhibits the difference between anxious boyhood and civilized adulthood, the juxtaposition of Keimei's squared posture and Eiryū's cowering posture brings to the fore the difference between the former who has achieved such a symbolic brotherhood and the latter who remains stunted in his orphanhood. Eiryū, hiding his head in shame, must have learned what it entails to find his own “family.”

Returning from Murai's hometown, Eiryū starts writing the article assigned by Mr. Shiraishi. It reflects upon what he has done, both right and wrong, and documents the lessons from his visit. In *Love and Vow*, Eiryū's writing of a report for Shiraishi's newspaper is not only a vehicle for the film's story as it brings him to Murai's hometown; as a means to edify children to reflect on themselves as little national subjects of the empire, the process of writing mediates the transformation of Eiryū's unmanly features into manhood. His writing is a process in which he struggles to reconcile his split psychology between the performance of orphanhood, on the one hand, and his aspiration for brotherhood, on the other hand. The film details the painful

moments of writing. Through the night Eiryu writes and then crumples up one sheet of manuscript paper after another. “I can’t write even half of what I thought!” Feeling pathetic about himself, he bolts out of the room and takes off for the streets again. In the scene of his wandering, we see Eiryu dragging his feet; what also stands out here is his shadow, which vividly outlines the contours of his crooked and slouched posture. (Figure 5.3) His gait, then, comes to a stop alongside another person, Shiraishi. We do not see any facial expressions, but only their feet and the shape of Eiryū’s shadow in its entirety. Shiraishi asks Eiryū: “Where are you going?” Eiryū responds, “I can’t write, I can’t!” An angry Shiraishi strikes the boy on his head. Eiryū falls onto his shadow, merging his own slouched frame with its shape. (Figures 5.4 and 5.5) Conceding he would never force Eiryū to write if it is too difficult, Shiraishi reprimands Eiryu for his lack of determination (*shōne*). “What did you learn from your visit to Murai’s home? How could you fail to grasp any of the spirit of the Special Attack Unit?” Eiryū sobs, lying over his shadow. Shiraishi takes Eiryū back home where Mrs. Shiraishi, as she awaited for the two to return, read through Eiryū’s crumpled manuscript. Impressed by what she found, Mrs. Shiraishi, along with her husband, sit together with Eiryū to encourage him.

The part of the manuscript that had impressed Mrs. Shiraishi the most—where Eiryu articulates his strong will to become one of the thousands of Murai Shin’ichirō’s symbolic younger brothers—was, in fact, composed before he bolted out of the room. In this sense, Eiryū was agonizing not because of the difficult progress of his writing, but because he was unsure of whether his creation would satisfy others, most importantly his foster parents. His writing is not simply about self-reflection; it is about realizing the meaning of an orphan’s quest for a family, cleaning up his own past, and communicating this desire to others. His writing thus requires



recognition from others as much as it is about his development into adulthood—a process whose meaning has already been determined by a given society.

When the essay is successfully published in Shiraishi's newspaper and receives favorable reviews, Shiraishi acknowledges Eiryū's talent as a writer and suggests that he pursue a career in journalism. Eiryū, however, finds himself wanting to submit to the greater cause of the empire and decides to become a soldier, just like Murai. When declaring his determination, Eiryū looks Shiraishi directly in the eyes, standing upright with his shoulders squared. (Figure 5.6) This is followed by a full recognition of Eiryū as a proud and manly citizen of the empire: "In the last three to four days, you have become entirely an adult (*sukkari otona ni natta*)!" exclaims Shiraishi with great pleasure. It is an acknowledgment that Eiryū has been seeking: The recognition of his worthiness as a responsible adult who is willing to sacrifice himself for the Japanese empire. Through such recognition, his yearning to *be* Murai's brother in the future allows Eiryū to overcome his past as an orphan.

In the essay, Eiryū relies on the trope of Murai's brotherhood to convey his will to become a proud soldier. Note that this was first suggested by Murai's wife Eiko when she admonishes Eiryū for causing trouble on the day of Sō Keimei's departure. It was Eiko's words that would inevitably dictate Eiryū's fate as an imperial subject. Eiryū then internalizes Eiko's words by transcribing them in his essay as well as echoing them in his head. When Eiryū sat together with the foster parents in an earlier scene, Mrs. Shiraishi inquired about the possibility of Eiko being his sister. Eiryū responded, "I don't know. But I'll be fine even if I'm not [her brother]. I would be happy just by thinking of myself as Lieutenant Murai's younger brother."

In the last scene, Eiryū reiterates this trope of being Murai's symbolic brother once again as he makes his way to the Navy camp, his gait exuding pride. Unlike in his past, this new Eiryū

looks hopeful under the cherry blossoms, raising his head to the sky and walking proudly. He says, “I think of myself as Lieutenant Murai’s younger brother. But it is not myself alone.” The shot then cuts to his close-up. “In the peninsula there must be a countless number of Lieutenant Murai’s younger brothers.” Eiko’s words now become Eiryū’s own as he expands their implication to all the young men in colonial Korea. The film ends by highlighting the propagandistic message that fills the screen against the background of a flying military aircraft: “Divine Eagles (*kamiwashi*) sink the enemy one by one to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. Who continues this mission to destroy enemies? It is you! You will carry it out!”

### *Disappearing Girls*

In *Love and Vow*, the young protagonist writes his fate by relying on the trope of a symbolic family tie with a revered soldier. The writing process, as I have analyzed, entailed internalization of the words of Murai’s wife, Eiko. Speaking differently, the fate of this colonial boy is articulated through Eiko’s words. Seen from this perspective, Eiryū’s internalization of the trope of becoming Murai’s symbolic brother is a process of removing Eiko’s influence by reiterating her words in Eiryū’s voice: Recall that Eiryū says without hesitation that it does not matter whether Eiko is his sister. Now, what is at stake is not the relationship between a brother and a sister, but Eiryū securing his position within the male bonding and the structuring of the symbolic family of the empire. And this empire of brotherhood is sustained through the disappearing agency of women who remain trapped in both time and space.

The last scene of *Love and Vow* vividly illustrates how the building of a national body in the late colonial era was a highly gendered process. Eiryū marches to the navy training camp with his foster mother and Murai Eiko in tow. The scene ends at the gate of the camp, where

Eiryū will part from Eiko and Mrs. Shiraishi. Although *Love and Vow* does not display their farewell, we know for certain that when the boy walks through the gate, two women will be left outside of this portal to the battlefield. The film skips the scene of what would be an emotional moment because of its possible anti-propaganda effect; but, by not showing their separation, the film also conceals the spatial segregation between women in the rear ground and young men on the warfront, that is, how women's role in the wartime mobilization discourse is spatially bounded while male subjects are encouraged to advance into the frontier.

In fact, women's limited space was named the "home-front" (K. *ch'onghu*; J. *jūgo*) as if they were endowed with the same breadth of space as men. Cultural historian Kwōn Myōng-a notes that this spatial distribution of subjectivities also generated a well-defined hierarchy structured according to one's proximity to the emperor. "While 'youth' (J. *seinen*; K. *ch'ōngnyōn*) signifies a crack soldier at the forefront," Kwōn writes, "'home-front woman' (J. *jūgo fujin*; K. *ch'onghu puin*) is meant to literally [be in] the rear ground and 'little national subjects' (J. *shōkokumin*; K. *sogungmin*) occupied a position as the next generation in the hierarchy."<sup>50</sup> Given that the "little national subject" is already a gendered subjectivity who will develop into young male subjects in the course of time, the place for women during the total war is, instead, frozen in time. Children, mostly boys in colonial films, are the premature figures of young men who fight on the warfront and, at the same time, the future soldiers of the empire. They will eventually make the territorial advance from the rear ground to the forefront; this is also a process that comes as time passes. However, home-front women, whose spatial advance is strictly limited, are not given any temporal development. Bound to provide boys with care and

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<sup>50</sup> Kwōn Myōng-a, *Yōksajōk p'asijūm cheguk ūi p'ant'aji wa chendō chōngch'i* [Historical fascism: Imperial fantasies and gender politics] (Seoul: Ch'aekesang, 2005), 65.

education, and assist them to achieve manhood, they remain as someone else's mother, wife, or sister. They are never represented as a pathfinder of their own fate, unlike the boys in colonial films. Then how can we save their stories from these highly male-centered narratives of development? When did this exclusion of female development begin? How are they structured in cinematic forms of films about children? In order to examine these questions, I will return to *Tuition* (1940), the first representation of colonial children, and trace how a boy's narrative of development has taken its form through male-bonding. By doing so, I will argue that the origin of colonial boyhood in films comes at the expense of disappearing girls.

Before we begin searching for traces of girlhood in *Tuition*, I want to note the different roles played by the actress Kim Sin-jae, who plays Murai Eiko in *Love and Vow* and Myōng-ja in *Homeless Angels*. As noted above, her role in *Love and Vow* as Eiko is overdetermined by her relationship with other male figures: She is the wife of a deceased soldier; she might have been the biological sister of a young trouble-maker; and, as she is reminded by the final message from her husband, she is a mother, responsible for successfully rearing their son. Unlike Eiryu who agonizes over his own uncertain origins, she is not given any story of her past that overwhelms her present, nor is she projecting her own future path other than to raise her husband's son. Kim's role in *Love and Vow* is confined to a domestic space that remains outside of time.

In *Homeless Angels*, released four years earlier than *Love and Vow*, Kim Sin-jae played Myōng-ja. Though a peripheral character in the film about orphaned boys and their development, Kim's character in *Homeless Angels* is given more narrative weight than Eiko in *Love and Vow*. Early in the film Myōng-ja is separated from her brother Yong-gil as he runs out of the gang's den. While searching for her brother who is picked up by Pastor Pang in Hyangninwōn, she finally turns to Dr. An In-gyu and starts working for him as a nurse assistant. The reunion of the

siblings is arranged towards the end of the film when Myōng-ja, along with Dr. An, visits a patient in Hyangninwōn; the patient turns out to be her brother Yong-gil. When Yong-gil recovers, Myōng-ja tells him that she will pursue the study of medicine under Dr. An.

The figure of Myōng-ja who carves out her own future has an obvious connection to the discourse of new women and the “modern girl” in the 1920s. Named differently according to specific cultural contexts—such as new woman, flapper, modern girl, or *moga* per the abbreviation of the Japanese term *modan gāru*—this female figure embodied a novel subjectivity under the global contemporaneity of modern culture. On the one hand, “new women” were a product of modern idea of equality. Raising consciousness as women suffering under patriarchal society, these highly educated women represented the frontier of modern ideas. On the other hand, the new figure of the “modern girls” was associated with the vices of modern consumerism—qualified with all the adjectives that have female implication, such as frivolous, volatile, promiscuous, and lavish. In attempt to understand this dual nature of modern female subjects by interweaving the issues of male gaze, female representation, and complex desires, Korean sociologist Kim Su-jin has argued that the figure of new women in colonial Korea was not simply an index of modernity but rather an “excess of modernity” which might have both fascinated and threatened male intellectuals of the time.<sup>51</sup> The discursive field initiated by male intellectuals created stereotypes of women who were placed in the modern milieu. On the representational level the discourse on “new woman” is, Kim argues, a metonym that projects the anxiety and schizophrenia of colonial intellectuals onto female bodies, embodying the perception of modernity in colonial Korea.

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<sup>51</sup> Kim Su-jin, *Sinyōsōng kŭndae ūi kwaing singminji Chosōn ūi sinyōsōng tamnon kwa chendō chōngch'i* [New women as excess of modernity: New women discourse and gender politics in colonial Korea] (Seoul: Somyōng Ch'ulp'an, 2009), 471.

In a similar vein, Japanese historian Miriam Silverberg explores how what she terms the “Modern Girl” (with capital letters) became the “most predominant Japanese cultural heroin” after the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923. The discourse on the Modern Girl tried to capture such an elusive female figure that transgressed boundaries of gender, class, and culture. While such a discourse has imaged this new Japanese woman as “free-floating and depoliticized,” Silverberg turns her attention to the social change that the Modern Girl was documenting with regard to the “history of working, militant Japanese women.” She writes, “the obsessive contouring of the Modern Girl as promiscuous and a political (and, later, as apolitical and nonworking) can be understood as a means of displacing the very real militancy of Japanese women.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, the Modern Girl was a discursive production in response to, and partly as a means to repress, newly emerging figures of young women in the 1920s.

Films in the Japanese empire have captured this multivalence of the new woman. As Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano observes, woman’s films in the 1920s and 30s “[allow] the figure a degree of autonomy while simultaneously disarming her threatening aspects and linking her to the prevailing middle-class consumer culture of the 1920s.” In films like *A Burden of Life* (*Jinsei no onimotsu*, dir. Gosho Heinosuke, 1935), for instance, whose story is led by male characters, the story of women that “presents the mundane actions and gestures of their daily lives” brings about the contestation of narratives by effectively decentering the narratives of male bonding. This subversive effect of autonomous female figures is then resolved in the final scene that depicts “the women returning home, where the father and son are waiting.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 69.

<sup>53</sup> Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, *Nippon Modern: Japanese Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 101.

The films' desire for control over subversive female figure sometimes involved a form of punishment for her promiscuity and lavishness. *Sweet Dreams* (*Mimong*, dir. Yang Chu-nam, 1936), one of the oldest extant films of colonial Korea, shows how its female protagonist, who abandons her home to pursue her own desires like Nora in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, ends up endangering her daughter's life. Driving the woman named Ae-sun to extreme, hedonistic consumerism, the film does not leave any margin for celebrating her agency, having her wallow in guilt and ultimately suicide. In *Sweet Dreams*, Ae-sun is located exactly at the opposite end of the state ideology of "good wife and wise mother" (J. *ryōsai kenbo*; K. *hyōnmo yangch'ō*) that emerged around the 1930s, and is ultimately punished in the discourse about female subjectivity.

In this context of discursive and cinematic representation of women, Myōng-ja in *Homeless Angels* signals the last glimpse of ambivalent modern girl figures of the early era. As Kim Sin-jae who was once the ambitious Myōng-ja in *Homeless Angels* was transformed into Eiko in *Love and Vow*, the figure of transgressing new women became domesticated as home-front women. When she leaves her brother to pursue her dream of being a doctor at the end of the film, Myōng-ja leaves the scene with all such young female characters who once had the power to lead their own fate.

#### *Tuition Reconsidered: An Uppity Girl's Destiny*

*Tuition* was a carefully planned film aiming at a Japanese market on the heels of the success of other films about children, such as *Composition Class* whose original story is also written by a young writer. Despite the similar leitmotifs, such as children's experience of poverty and the setting of classrooms, the two films differ in that it is a little girl who leads the story of *Composition Class*, while *Tuition* centers on the experience of a boy named Yōng-dal.

Interestingly, the film *Tuition* adds a young female character Chǒng-hŭi to the storyline, diverging from the original essay written by a schoolboy. In what follows, my analysis of *Tuition* considers the figure of Chǒng-hŭi in the same vein as one of the past of the roles played by Kim Sin-jae: Eiko in *Love and Vow* and Myǒng-ja in *Homeless Angels*. By reading the film from the perspective of a marginalized character, I will argue that the disappearance of modern girls in later films has been cinematically structured in favor of boys' successful incorporation into the world which no longer necessitates the development of modern girls, such as Chǒng-hŭi.

An Chǒng-hŭi, the smartest girl in class who is also from a poor family like the protagonist Yǒng-dal, is placed at the core of Yǒng-dal's network of friends in *Tuition*. The film opens with a little fuss between the two that foregrounds Chǒng-hŭi's character even before introducing Yǒng-dal. During recess between classes, a ball rolls to two girls standing at the edge of the schoolyard and Chǒng-hŭi kicks the ball away. Yǒng-dal, who was running toward the ball gets angry, and yells, "Why did you kick the ball?" "Because I have legs," replies Chǒng-hŭi. Yǒng-dal threatens to slap and kick her, but Chǒng-hŭi does not recoil. The heightened tension between the two is temporarily halted as the school bell signals the beginning of next class.

Throughout the first half of *Tuition* the relationship between Yǒng-dal and Chǒng-hŭi unfolds from tension and conflict to mutual understanding and help. One day, Yǒng-dal and Chǒng-hŭi find themselves skipping school both having unable to pay tuition by the due date. Hanging around by a stream, they notice each other from a distance picking up twigs to be used as firewood. Little by little they come closer to one another and soon, begin to quarrel over a twig that they had both eyed. The conflict dissipates when Chǒng-hŭi discovers minnows in the water. Joining together to catch the fish, Yǒng-dal and Chǒng-hŭi eventually open their hearts to



each other and play together. As the only kids in class who cannot afford tuition, both Yǒng-dal and Chǒng-hŭi finally understand that they have more in common than meets the eye. The two kids sit side by side under a tree and make up for their missed classes by reading and doing exercises together. The film culminates with the “friendship box (*yŭjō bako*)” where Yǒng-dal’s classmates and teachers chip in to help him pay tuition, and it is alluded that Chǒng-hŭi was the one who initiated such an idea.

Despite the crucial role Yǒng-dal’s friendship with Chǒng-hŭi plays in his development, *Tuition* is curiously indifferent to Chǒng-hŭi’s personal life. We know from Chǒng-hŭi’s words that she and her family live in poverty, but the film does not include a single shot that portrays her poverty, which would allow the audience to gain access to her own story. Unsurprisingly, then, she is omitted from the plot entirely in the latter part of the film. Film critic Sǒ Kwang-je raised this very issue in a review published around its release in May 1940. He writes, “It is a huge mistake on the part of the scriptwriter and the director that there was no scene of An Chǒng-hŭi’s family life. [...] Without any presentation of her personal life, the film ends up with a lame representation.”<sup>54</sup> For Sǒ, the “lame representation” of Yǒng-dal’s experiences in *Tuition* results from what he termed “the poverty in the expression of life.” In his view, by limiting their attention only to Yǒng-dal, the film fails to vividly capture the full scope of living conditions that surround the poor boy in a rural village in colonial Korea. Such an economic approach to highlight only Yǒng-dal, according to Sǒ, flattens what should have been a more colorful and complicated representation of a poor boy’s experiences.

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<sup>54</sup> Sǒ Kwang-je, “Koyǒng ūi *Suǒmnyo rŭl pogo*” [Review of Koryǒ Films’ *Tuition*], pt 2, *Chosǒn ilbo* (May 2, 1940), morning edition, 4.

It should be noted, however, that Sŏ's discontent lies in the film's general lack of interests in Yŏng-dal's interactions with his surroundings, not specifically the lack of Chŏng-hŭi's stories per se. In Sŏ's criticism, Chŏng-hŭi's experience is only one element that forms the wider "expression of life" of Yŏng-dal. As her story remain ancillary to the driving plot, she can easily be replaced by others such as his classmates, village people, their families, and the rural community at large. Here, Chŏng-hŭi's stories are considered not in her own rights, but as a means to animate Yŏng-dal's life. Although *Tuition* did not satisfy Sŏ Kwang-je's critical eyes without having invested in Chŏng-hŭi's stories, the way in which the film utilizes her character accommodates Sŏ's view: Chŏng-hŭi, while indispensable for adding colorful expressions to Yŏng-dal's life, is only a disposable and replaceable character.

As mentioned, Chŏng-hŭi disappears from the plot by the time the film reaches its climax when Yŏng-dal embarks on the 15 miles of walking travel to visit his aunt in P'yŏngt'aek to seek financial help. As the most beautiful scene in *Tuition*, it evokes all kinds of emotions from joy and happiness to fear and loneliness. With all its elaborate detail this sequence was the product of the film director's meticulous revision of the original essay in order to "flesh out [the film] with a new content."<sup>55</sup> According to film historian Chŏng Chong-hwa's comparative analysis among four different versions of the film's story—the original essay, Yagi Yasutarō's scenario, the film, and its novelization—the film focuses on Yŏng-dal's journey while U Su-yŏng's original essay highlights the "friendship box." If the latter stands for mutual aid and cooperation, the former highlights the boy's solitary experience of poverty. On his way to P'yŏngt'aek, Yŏng-dal looks over the fences at children playing in the school yard, feeling optimistic about coming

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<sup>55</sup> Ch'oe In-gyu, "Yŏnghwa kamdok ūi ch'angjak ūiyok *Suŏmnyo* eŭi ch'ohon" [A film director's creative ambition: Invoking spirits for *Tuition*], *Chogwang* 5, no. 9 (September 1939), 186.

back with money to pay the tuition and playing again with his schoolmates. But at the same time, as Yǒng-dal stands on the other side of the fence, the scene also heralds a long solitary walk that he has to carry out alone without being accompanied by anyone else. In the film, Yǒng-dal bursts into tears as he sings to himself to alleviate the loneliness of the journey, which according to Chǒng's reading, "describes the scene differently from the sentiment [invested] in the scenario."<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, emotion is highly controlled in the original essay. In the essay, any possible emotional moment is replaced by a didactic revelation. The boy writes, "In the beginning I walked very cheerfully. But as I was half-way through, my feet hurt so much that I could not walk any more. However, I realized that this was what the teacher meant by 'enduring hardship and training oneself' (*ninku tanren*). Then I was able to keep on walking."<sup>57</sup> Like the orphans in *Homeless Angels* who chanted parts of the Oaths of Imperial Subjects in verbatim, this writer-boy also associates his own physical hardship with his own development as a respectable citizen.

Despite the emotional register that the film version adds to the original essay, it may be hasty to affirm, as Chǒng argues, that Yǒng-dal's tears demonstrate "how the ideological effect of 'enduring hardship and training oneself' has by accident faded from the film version."<sup>58</sup> Rather, I would point out that the tears he sheds on his way to P'yǒngt'aek better reinforces such an ideological effect with another tearful moment in the film. As Yǒng-dal returns to school with the tuition, his Japanese teacher, Mr. Tashiro, pats Yǒng-dal on the back and tells him that

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<sup>56</sup> Chǒng Chong-hwa, "Chosǒn yǒnghwa *Suǒmnyo* ūi yǒnghwahwa kwajǒng kwa teksütü pigyo yǒn'gu" [The cinematization of *Tuition* and the comparison of multiple texts], *Yǒnghwa yǒn'gu*, no. 65 (September 2015), 227.

<sup>57</sup> U Su-yǒng, "Jugyōryō" [Tuition], in Keijō Nippōsha Keinichi Shōgakusei Shinbun ed., *Zen-Sen senbatsu shōgaku tsuzurikata sōtoku-shō mohan sakubunshū* [Collection of Government-General Composition Award-Winning Children's Essays] (Keijō [Seoul]: Chōsen Tosho Shuppan Kabushikigaisha, 1939), 181.

<sup>58</sup> Chǒng, "Cinematization of *Tuition*," 227.

poverty is not something to be ashamed of but should be endured until he can ultimately overcome it. Yǒng-dal bursts into tears again. These tears are the reminder of the tears he has shed alone in the woods, and of his solitary journey, but they also represent how his tears in the past are elevated as a moment of enlightenment. In other words, contrary to Chǒng's interpretation of tears as a crack within the film's propagandistic messages, I would suggest that the recognition from his Japanese teacher turns the tears into a symbol of the boy's personal ordeal that is connected to the grand slogan of the empire. Yǒng-dal sheds tears in Mr. Tashiro's arms, which forms a teacher-pupil bond, but more importantly, it functions as a male bonding between a colonizer and a young colonized. Mr. Tashiro brings the friendship box to Yǒng-dal on behalf of the entire class. While it represents a collective effort to help out a poor classmate, all other agency is expunged when this token of good will is presented via Mr. Tashiro's authority. We know that four years later in *Love and Vow*, this Japanese teacher's words will be echoed in Mr. Shiraishi's acknowledgement of Eiryū's development, as will Yǒng-dal's tears find renewed hope in Eiryū's squared and proud posture.

Inserted in this scene of the moment in which Yǒng-dal's hardship acquires meaning in the broader world are the shots of two girls peeping into the classroom. Given the story's previous emphasis on the interaction between the boy and the girl, we may guess that one of the two bearing witness to Yǒng-dal's turning point might be Chǒng-hǔi. And yet, Chǒng-hǔi is nowhere to be found. Chǒng-hǔi is, instead, replaced by hitherto unknown girls who do not even utter a single line. From this point, we may go back to Chǒng-hǔi's last appearance in the movie: In Yǒng-dal's absence, Mr. Tashiro asks her if she knows of anything. Chǒng-hǔi slowly shakes her head. The screen cuts to Mr. Tashiro's face betraying a look of concern. From the exchange between shots of Chǒng-hǔi's look of confusion and the concerned Mr. Tashiro, we see that Mr.

Tashiro has replaced Chǒng-hŭi as the provider of emotional support and now offer words of comfort to Yǒng-dal. And since this moment, Chong-hui's presence becomes negligible as if she did not exist in the first place. The film's shift in focus from the friendship box to Yǒng-dal's solitary walk to P'yǒngt'aek marks the boy's successful incorporation into the world of Mr. Tashiro's recognition. This world is, however, without Chǒng-hŭi; though she may have been a pivotal figure previously, Chong-hui is eventually removed in order to emphasize Yong-dal's emotional attachment to the generous teacher.

While Chǒng-hŭi is treated as a disposable character, it is hard not to notice Chǒng-hŭi's perseverance in her own struggle for recognition. At the same time, we can also see how the film structurally refuses to acknowledge her efforts. On the one hand, as the smartest girl in class Chong-hui's aplomb drew envy and ire from others, especially boys including Yǒng-dal in the earlier part of the film, calling her *namaiki*, or cheeky. The Japanese term *namaiki* is, in fact, one of the qualifying adjectives of the Modern Girl in the 1920s Japan, according to Miriam Silverberg. "The connotations of this word are not violent, but they are certainly aggressive and transgressive. [...] The symbol of a *namaiki*, uppity Modern Girl, who crossed boundaries of gender, class, and sexual mores, may indeed have spoken to those who demanded expanded social, economic, and sexual liberation for both women and men." As discussed above, this trait of the Modern Girl posed a threat to the patriarchal society and the ideological figure of "good wife and wise mother" (*ryōsai kenbo*).<sup>59</sup> The discursive context under which such a "threatening" and "aggressive" female figure becomes a target of attack, *namaiki* functions as a derogatory term. In *Tuition*, the name-calling marks a rejection of Chǒng-hŭi's intelligence. And as such,

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<sup>59</sup> Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense*, 69.

when boys repeatedly talk about giving her “a lesson,” they are calling to tame Chǒng-hŭi’s *namaiki*, her “uppitiness.”

On the other hand, the discounting of her intelligence is organized by the ways in which the camera, following teachers’ preference of boys over girls, keeps relegating Chǒng-hŭi to the secondary position. In a scene early in the film, the teacher Mr. Tashiro draws a map of the Japanese empire on the blackboard. Facing his pupils again, he asks, “Does anyone know where our town Suigen [Suwŏn, in Korean] is on this map?” As no one volunteers to answer, he marks a dot in the middle of the map and asks, “What is this place called?” Most female students sitting on the left side of the classroom raise their hands, while only a few hands among the boys are seen on the right. (Figure 5.7) The camera, moving down the aisle between the two groups, slowly turns to the left where the girls are seated. Mr. Tashiro, who is standing slightly closer to the left, then points to a boy on the right. “Yŏng-dal, you may answer.” (Figure 5.8) As the camera promptly turns to Yŏng-dal on the right, the shot cuts to the students. Chǒng-hŭi is seated at the center of the shot but is immediately brought to the background as Yŏng-dal rises from his seat. (Figure 5.9) “It is Keijŏ [Seoul].” As he speaks, the camera zooms out only to completely obscure Chǒng-hŭi behind Yŏng-dal. (Figure 5.10) Intelligent as Chong-hui may be, she is a girl whose presence has been literally eclipsed by a boy.

A similar situation is repeated in another scene of a class held outdoors. Students are gathered on the school farm to examine various plants and vegetables. The biology teacher throws a question about the shape of cucumber flowers and the function of the stem. Again, it is mostly girls who want to participate, but the teacher immediately turns his attention to a boy. This time, the process involves a physical contact that discourages a girl to take the lead. At the center of the shot of girls is Chǒng-hŭi who raises her right hand up high while clutching a book

under her other arm. (Figure 5.11) The teacher comes into the frame from the left to the girls on the right, but passes by female students to approach the boys at the back. But he is not passively bypassing all the enthusiastic girls holding their hands high; he puts down Chǒng-hǔi's raised hand as if it was obstructing his path to where the boys stand. (Figures 5.12-5.14) The spatial dynamic in both scenes is clearly divided along the gender-line. Teachers move from space of girls to space of boys. The camera too follows the teacher's preference, eventually bypassing girls to shift its focus on the boys.

In other words, both scenes prioritize boys, not simply by centering on their voices, but by simultaneously silencing the girls. Of course, Chǒng-hǔi is eventually granted her chance to answer the questions, but only after boys take the first lead. In order to participate in the class dynamic that always prioritizes the relationship between a male teacher and his male counterpart, she must stand out, even at the expense of being labeled *namaiki*. She must exude confidence, holding both her head and her hand high at all time. But for this very reason, she is forced into silence and remains simply an uppity girl who overestimates herself—according to boys—“despite being only a woman” (*onna no kuseni*).

### *Homosocial Empire and Colonial Cinema*

In her analysis of *Peter Pan*, Jacqueline Rose points out that children's fiction is more about the desires of adults than about the readership of children. According to Rose, it “builds an image of the child inside the book” in order to “secure the child who is outside the book.”<sup>60</sup> This way of anchoring children in reality to the fictional image—or a “form of seduction” in her

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<sup>60</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or, the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 1-2.

words—resonates with the very act of colonialism that creates and disseminates the image of a colony as a child. Likewise, Korean cinema is conceived of as unsophisticated and immature, much like the children of the empire. However, unlike children’s literature that is apparently composed by adult writers from their adult perspectives, it was the colonized filmmakers who authored the films I discussed in this chapter. They voluntarily created the image of Korean cinema as childlike by collaborating with Japanese filmmakers and distributors. The difference in authorship between children’s literature written by adults and Korean cinema produced by childlike filmmakers brings to the fore the manifest desires of the colonized. Reproducing the paternalistic imagery between the mainland and a colony was part of their efforts to position Korean cinema safely within the realm of Japanese cinema. Much like the recognition of the boy-writer U Su-yŏng’s essay by the colonial government, and Eiryū’s for his development through writing of his own in *Love and Vow*, Korean cinema too yearned for such approval by its superiors—that it has earned citizenship in the cultural empire of Japan.

However, it should be acknowledged that the recognition bestowed upon these boys at the end of their journey—gained by “enduring hardship and training themselves (*ninku tanren*)”—is, in essence, the product of male-bonding. Traversing miles through a thick forest, Yŏng-dal in *Tuition* sings aloud a war song entitled “The March Song of the Beloved Horse” (*Aiba shingunka*) to overcome his feelings of fear and loneliness. In the last scene of *Homeless Angels*, a row of orphans chants the Oath of Imperial Subjects (*kōkoku shinmin no seishi*) in unison. In *Love and Vow*, Eiryū embarks for the navy camp, saying that he has a strong will to follow Lieutenant Murai’s path. Be it through songs, oath, or sheer will, the young male protagonists in colonial films are always already connected to a male adult. In *Tuition*, Yŏng-dal is consoled in the arms of his Japanese teacher who reassures him that poverty is not a shame. In



*Homeless Angels*, it is Pastor Pang who leads the wayward orphans into the greater world as proud members of society. As if to substantiate Pastor Pang's good deed, Doctor An, at the end of the film, gloats about their successful development. It is such affirmation Eiryū of *Love and Vow* seeks from his foster father through writing, which becomes the epitome of his emotional and physical journey.

While boys pave their roads into becoming imperial subjects by embodying the slogan, girls are either excluded from the storyline or simply disappear. In a similar vein, literary scholar Eve Sedgwick has analyzed the representation of male-male relationships in terms of "male homosocial desire."<sup>61</sup> According to her reading of a typical love triangle depicted in English literature, the competition between two men over a woman always poses a threat to men's life—a symbolic danger that threatens to reveal fractures within a male-centered society. Therefore, as the logic goes, women should be incorporated into society by marrying one of the men in order to prevent conflict between men. The relegation women to objects of exchange in the realm of homosocial economy, while repressing the erotic desires between men and reinforcing heteronormativity, not only preserve the integrity of male-bonding, but also serves to perpetuate the patriarchal system. While Sedgwick's conceptualization of homosociality is considered as a continuum of homosexuality, with the former devised to repress the latter, her analysis still finds resonance with the male-bonding narratives of the Japanese empire. When marriage becomes central to the film's plot, such as in *You and I* (*Kimi to boku*, dir. Hinatsu Eitarō [Hō Yōng], 1941), a woman is exchanged between a Japanese man and a Korean man as if she is a prize for a colonized who is successfully assimilated as an imperial subject. Meanwhile, girls who are not

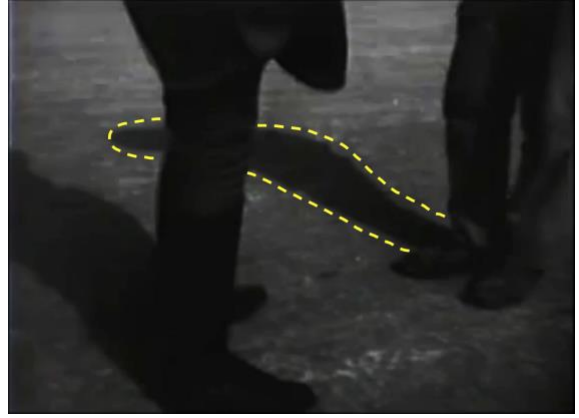
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<sup>61</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (Columbia University Press, 1985).

domesticated within the homosocial economy are either dismissed as insignificant beings or disappears from the plotline to effectively suppress female narratives altogether. Positioning itself as a child of Japanese cinema, colonial cinema endeavored to appeal to a homosocial empire. Fraught as it may be, this was the world that colonial Korean cinema was eager to call home.



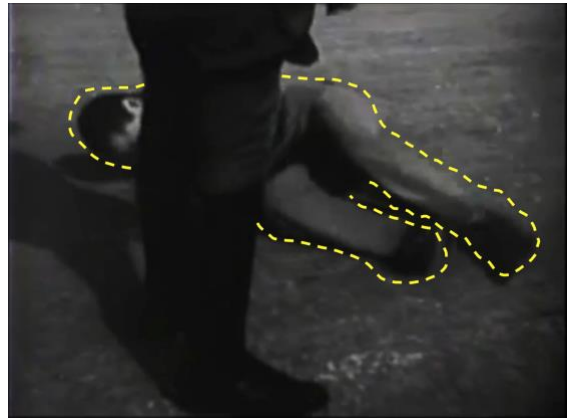
*Figure 5.1 Murai Shin'ichirō in Love and Vow*



*Figure 5.4 Eiryū's shadow*



*Figure 5.2 Eiryū's slouched posture*



*Figure 5.5 Eiryū's shadow*



*Figure 5.3 Eiryū's shadow*



*Figure 5.6 Eiryū by the end of Love and Vow*



*Figure 5.7 Class Scene in Tuition*



*Figure 5.10 Class Scene in Tuition*



*Figure 5.8 Class Scene in Tuition*



*Figure 5.11 Outdoor Class Scene in Tuition*



*Figure 5.9 Class Scene in Tuition*



*Figure 5.12 Outdoor Class Scene in Tuition*



*Figure 5.13 Outdoor Class Scene in Tuition*



*Figure 5.14 Outdoor Class Scene in Tuition*

## CHAPTER 6

### Cinema that Has (Yet) to Come:

#### Im Hwa and the Theory of Korean Cinema

As a healthy person has one's own way of maintaining life, the physiology of a feeble person is also singular in itself.

—Im Hwa, “Treatise on Korean Cinema” (1942)

#### *Im Hwa at His Desk*

During the last decade of the Japanese empire, cultural critic Im Hwa was sitting at his desk writing essays on Korean cinema. This image of a writer shut in his study may not seem so unfamiliar; yet, Im Hwa was hardly a reclusive writer until the mid-1930s. As a leader of KAPF (Korea Artist Proletaria Federatio), he was actively organizing proletarian movements of literature, theater, and culture. Among them, cinema was particularly crucial for Im Hwa, like all other young avant-gardists who rose in mid-1920s colonial Korea. Not only did he write many essays on cinema during his career, but this good-looking young Marxist—his nickname was “Korean Rudolph Valentino”—also appeared in some of the leftist films including *Vagabond* (*Yurang*, 1928), *Murky Street* (*Hon'ga*, 1929), and *Dark Road* (*Amno*, 1929). Even when Im crossed the water to Tokyo in July 1929, his purported reason was to further study film and theater. Upon his return the following year, he re-appeared in KAPF's new film, *Underground*

*Village (Chihach'ŏn*, dir. Kang Ho, 1931). But if “cinema left a profound trace throughout Im Hwa’s whole life,” as literary scholar Kim Yun-sik has noted, it would be less about cinema per se than about the political and artistic movement that cinema embodied; it was about the movement that this new medium records and displays as a reorganization of time and space and, more than anything else, a movement that generates new publics.<sup>1</sup> When filmmaking was no longer a viable option under the harsh colonial censorship of the mid-1930s, he organized a theater group called New Construction (Sin Kōnsōlsa) to stage such movements at every corner of the country. Up until 1935, when, as general secretary of the KAPF, Im Hwa had to sign the letter of KAPF’s disbandment, his activity was all about the mobility that cinema could best represent.

Years later, the film activities of this once leading figure of the leftist cultural movement were confined to the paper on his desk. Although he was associated with Yi Ch’ang-yong’s Koryō Film Association as an adjunct committee member, Im Hwa hardly saw himself as a legitimate member of the Korean film world. No longer filmmaker, producer, or actor, Im called himself an “outsider” in his essays on cinema published between 1941 and 1942. Indeed, compared to Im’s relative immobility during the time, everything else in Korean cinema was in motion. The colonial government announced the Ordinance of Korean cinema in 1940 following Japan’s 1939 Film Law. Korean film producers actively sought for trans-colonial film coproduction. Films travelled within the circuit of the empire’s distribution network. New film policies were hyped as an opportunity for Korean cinema to be revamped under the auspices of the colonial government. Looking ahead of the establishment of new film companies, filmmakers and critics alike were expecting a fresh start. As seen in Chapter 3, their dreams partly

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<sup>1</sup> Kim Yun-sik, *Im Hwa yŏn’gu* [A study of Im Hwa] (Seoul: Munhak Sasangsa, 1989), 161.

materialized with the establishment of two state film corporations in 1942. Im Hwa's writings on Korean cinema sit right in the middle of such changes in colonial Korean cinema.

This chapter examines Im Hwa's theorization of colonial Korean cinema during an era that he—and of course, other colonial Koreans—did not realize would be the last years of the Japanese empire. In the early 1940s, Im Hwa was never as prolific a film critic as others of the time, publishing only four essays—"A Little History of the Development of Korean Cinema" (1941),<sup>2</sup> "A Treatise on Korean Cinema" (1941),<sup>3</sup> another "Treatise on Korean Cinema" (1942),<sup>4</sup> and "The Dramatic and the Documentary of Cinema" (1942).<sup>5</sup> All these essays notably articulate Korean cinema's new direction, testifying to how Im Hwa sought desperately to make an intervention into the contemporary discourses and practices of colonial Korean cinema. Why, then, did Im Hwa repeatedly position himself as an outsider who was not involved with any movement of contemporary cinema in the Japanese empire? In fact, this question should be revised to acknowledge Im Hwa's scrutiny of the status quo in Korean cinema. From what cinema did Im Hwa distance himself? What did he mean by "outside"? And how did he justify an "outsider" legitimacy to discuss Korean cinema? From these inquiries into Im Hwa's critical immobility as an outsider, this chapter investigates Im Hwa's critique of the contemporary state of colonial Korean cinema. As I will show, Im Hwa remained external to that which he criticized; yet he was an outsider who aspired to reach for another horizon, envisioning a new

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<sup>2</sup> Im Hwa, "Chosŏn yŏnghwa paltal sosa" [A little history of the development of Korean cinema], *Samch'ŏlli* 13, no. 6 (June 1941), 196-205; hereafter, "A Little History."

<sup>3</sup> Im Hwa, "Chosŏn yŏnghwaron" [A treatise on Korean cinema], *Ch'unch'u* 2, no. 10 (November 1941), 82-91; hereafter, "1941 Treatise."

<sup>4</sup> Im Hwa, "Chosŏn yŏnghwaron" [A treatise on Korean cinema], pt. 1, *Maeil sinbo* (June 28, 1942), morning edition, 2; pt. 2 (June 29, 1942), morning edition, 2; pt. 3 (June 30, 1942), morning edition, 2; hereafter, "1942 Treatise."

<sup>5</sup> Im Hwa, "Yŏnghwa ūi kŭksŏng kwa kiroksŏng" [The dramatic and the documentary of cinema], *Ch'unch'u* 3, no. 2 (February 1942), 102-10; hereafter, "The Dramatic and the Documentary."



Korean cinema to come. In this chapter, I will theorize colonial Korean cinema as a cinema that has yet to arrive by redeeming Im Hwa's unrealized dream of Korean cinema evidenced in his critique: *a visionary cinema of and for the feeble*.

*“Taksang Iron”: Deskbound Theory in the Era of Mobility*

Before groping around in darkness for Im Hwa's visions for colonial Korean cinema, we need first to re-examine his *choice* to be an outsider surrounded by everything in motion. In fact, however critical his essays were, the idea of Im Hwa stuck at his desk readily evokes the image of an armchair critic—one who takes his privileged position for granted, enjoying the hierarchy between an observer and the observed. However, Im's immobility is associated with the dynamics of colonialism. In the case of Im Hwa as armchair critic, the colonized takes the position of an observer, while colonizers—and their colonized sympathizers—call for taking steps into the very scene being observed. Reluctant to put himself in the very picture, Im remained at his desk as a distant critic.

What is rather problematic here is the use of critical approach to cinema, namely the use of film theory. This issue was raised in 1931 when the proletarian film movements were peaking both in Japan and colonial Korea. Sō Kwang-je, then a prolific leftist writer, wrote a review of Iwasaki Akira's new book *Film and Capitalism* (*Eiga to shihonshugi*) which had just been published in Tokyo.<sup>6</sup> Regarding Iwasaki's impressive capacity for theorizing proletarian cinema from the position of high-profile activism, Sō lamented the contrast between Iwasaki and incompetent Korean leftists who merely spoke of “idle utopian theory on the desk” (*t'aksang*

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<sup>6</sup> Sō Kwang-je, “*Yōnghwa wa chabonjuūi Iwasaki Akira chō*” [Iwasaki Akira's *Film and Capitalism*], *Tonga ilbo* (August 24, 1931), 4.

*iron*) that made no contribution to the development of the film movement, of which Sō himself was also part.

All the Korean cineaste have nothing but deskbound theory, while Iwasaki's *Film and Capitalism* is a product of praxis of the veterans in the proletarian film movement in today's Japan as well as of their cultural and theoretical activities. His lines of theories shall thus lead to another praxis.<sup>7</sup>

What occupies Sō here is “a sense of immobility and a distance between theory and practice in colonial [Korea],” as film scholar Soyoung Kim has noted.<sup>8</sup> This sense, as Kim argues, summons a haunting image of the colonizer's civilization superimposed onto its sister monument built in the colony;<sup>9</sup> however, it should be noted that Sō's concern was also with incomparability, more than comparability, between the leftist movements in Japan and colonial Korea. While filmmaking was in itself difficult due to the lack of financial and technological resources and a censorship that was even more brutal in the colony, such (in)comparability would conjure up how the leftist film movement in colonial Korea came up painfully short of being commensurate with global currents in the proletarian cultural movements. Indeed, other than the “theory on the desk,” there was nothing in colonial Korea similar to its counterpart in Japan. The sense of immobility found in what should have been highly mobile was conditioned by both material and discursive absence—the absence of filmmaking, resources, and of course, film theory based on such practices. Without any practice to support and develop it, a theory that

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Soyoung Kim, “Comparative Film Studies: Detour, Demon of Comparison and Dislocative Fantasy,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (March 2013), 44-53.

<sup>9</sup> Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (New York: Verso, 1998).

never leaves the desk is of no use: Film theory in that sense approximates non-existence in colonial Korea.

Absence as a determinant for non-Western film theory resonates with what Aaron Gerow has called the “theory complex,” which is pervasive in the existing discourse on Japanese film theory. According to Gerow, “the compulsion in Japan to fret over the existence of film theory” has been attuned to the forgetfulness of what might have once existed in lieu of film theory.<sup>10</sup> It is under such a sense of absence—the anxiety over its (non-)existence—that the notion of “film theory” has been conceived in both Japan and Korea; but, for Sō Kwang-je who was fascinated by Iwasaki’s theorization of proletarian cinema and, because of that, reminded of colonial lacks and lags, the empire’s metropole still seemed to have presented a more advanced filmic discourse despite its own theory complex. For Sō, what postwar film scholars in Japan would be reluctant to admit as film theory was already interpreted as a cutting-edge film theory. The absence of film theory in colonial Korea is doubly structured in the absence of Japanese film theory.

Another instance of structured absence can be found in a roundtable discussion on Korean cinema printed in pages of *Eiga junpō* in 1941, where Japanese film critics asked Yi Ch’ang-yong (Japanese name, Hirokawa Sōyō) to name Korean film critics.<sup>11</sup> Yi, a then-emerging entrepreneur in the film industry, responded with regret that there was no one who he would consider a film critic “in a true sense,” except for a few prolific writers like Sō Kwang-je. Note that Yi pronounced this regrettable acknowledgement in front of Hazumi Tsuneo and Iijima

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<sup>10</sup> Aaron Gerow, “Introduction: The Theory Complex,” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 22 (December 2010), 1-13.

<sup>11</sup> “Zadankai Chōsen eiga shintaisei juritsu no tameni” [Roundtable: For establishing the New Order for Korean cinema], *Eiga junpō*, no. 30 (November 1941), 15-22, 46.

Tadashi, two of the most renowned film critics of the time. In Satō Tadao's postwar history of Japanese film theory—Gerow's prototype for the “theory complex”—both Hazumi and Iijima belong to an era when Japanese cinema did not yet have a film theory. It was an era, in Satō's understanding, with no systematic knowledge production on cinema, but of sporadic film criticism and oral transmission of filmic techniques.<sup>12</sup> In this context, Yi's statement was not a mere lamentation of the absence of the film critic, but rather a statement on the imperial stage meant for an audience of film critics in the metropole. In this scene, a colonized film producer confesses to the absence of film criticism in the realm of the colonizer's film discourse that would later be considered as lacking theorization. In colonial Korea, the absence of film theory—or even film criticism—*was* a dual absence. The theory complex thus becomes more complicated in colonial Korea than in Japan, which colonial filmmakers would find to be theoretically advanced. From the vantage point of the colonized, it becomes clear that the theory complex emerges out of the sense of (in)comparability, based on a sense of inferiority—a colonial reiteration of Japan's lagging behind the Euro-American developments—ultimately leaving Koreans to yearn for theoretical and practical achievement commensurate to Japanese film criticism. Thus, in such countries as Japan and Korea, “film theory” as a series of principles abstracted from existing cinematic practices has always been assessed from a set of criteria determined by a superior system of knowledge production that comes from without.

The theory complex is problematic in two senses. First, film scholars captivated by the theory complex often forget the historicity of theories, their historically specific responses to the very era that gave birth to them. While any in-depth discussion regarding this goes beyond the

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<sup>12</sup> Satō Tadao, “Does Film Theory Exist in Japan?” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* 22 (December 2010), 14-23; originally published in Satō Tadao, *Nihon eiga riron shi* [History of Japanese film theory] (Tokyo: Hyōronsha, 1977), 7-21.

scope of this chapter, I would like to note recent scholarship about East Asian cinema that attempts to historicize film theory.<sup>13</sup> For example, in his history of Chinese film theory, Victor Fan suggests that *pinglun*, whose literal translation would be “criticism,” was more frequently used in filmic discourses in China between the 1920s and 40s than *lilun*, which is now rendered as “theory.”<sup>14</sup> Yet according to Fan, *pinglun* and *lilun* in the Chinese film discourses were not mutually exclusive but in close contact with one another, creating a different system of knowledge production. Aaron Gerow’s diagnosis of the “theory complex” may also resonate with such a call for historicization: Instead of quickly dismissing what may not seem to be as systematic as that produced in the West, one redeems a film theory that was situated in a zone of multiple contacts with cinema.

Sŏ Kwang-je’s lamentation over deskbound theory encapsulates theory’s problem of practicality. Indeed, the works of colonial Korean film critics—or, film theorists, if I may—seem to have been detached from cinematic practices. Moreover, if the task of theorization implies a process of sublation from description to abstraction, from the individual to the universal, then theorizing Korean cinema might result in a few instances that might be deemed inferior. When there are not enough films to be analyzed, any attempt to critically engage with colonial Korean films falls easily into the same lamentation as Sŏ’s in 1931.

However, a similar dilemma is not uncommon for film theorists who pursue the essence of the cinematic medium. In a sense, the so-called classical film theorists have also anticipated cinemas that have not yet materialized—like André Bazin’s notion of total cinema, Kracauer’s

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<sup>13</sup> The Permanent Seminar on Histories of Film Theories held a conference in Ann Arbor with a specific theme of East Asian film theories in 2012. This was one of the events that sparked the interest in the historicization of film theory in East Asia and beyond.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Fan, *Cinema Approaching Reality: Locating Chinese Film Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

cinema redeeming physical reality, or Walter Benjamin's cinema that aestheticizes communist politics.<sup>15</sup> In hindsight, Benjamin may be wrong about technological reproduction, and Bazin's vision might have to be revamped for the transformation of media in the digital era. However, based on their contemplation of what existed before their eyes, film theories have often been about describing visions for what has yet to come. In other words, as much as it is an analytic mode of knowledge production about cinema, film theories of the past can manifest the theorists' historical imagination in pursuit of an ideal cinema. Likewise, Im Hwa's discussion of colonial Korean cinema, while grounded by the specifics of his own time, needs to be examined as a vision, or a potential future he envisioned for colonial cinema.

In this sense, I read Im Hwa's "deskbound theory" as a prescription for colonial cinema. In so doing, I follow China historian Tani Barlow's suggestion to revisit the historical in the future anterior tense. As Barlow puts it, "Reopening the future in a specific past helps to destabilize the assumptions historians may be making about the way past, present, and future flow in endless transition. [...] [T]he future anterior tense invokes the horizon that people in another world confronted."<sup>16</sup> Articulating the past in the future anterior tense would then employ the "perspective we possess from the onetime future of past generation or, more pithily, from a former future."<sup>17</sup> This "former future" for Korean cinema anticipated at Im Hwa's desk was indeed *mirae*, a Korean term for "future" meaning "things that have yet to come." The different

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<sup>15</sup> For groundbreaking examples of the historicization of classical film theories, see Dudley Andrew and Herve Joubert-Laurencin, eds., *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Jaeho Kang, *Walter Benjamin and the Media* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014); Johannes von Moltke, *The Curious Humanist: Siegfried Kracauer in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Tani E. Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 11.

texture of temporality that *mirae* reveals refuses to conceive of the past as complete and foreclosed by what has followed it, but instead takes the past as filled with different horizons of expectation. Of course, the visions embraced by historical actors may or may not be part of the historical consequences as we know them. But as Japanese historian Yasumaru Yoshio has argued, inquiries into such a different horizon of expectation help us better understand the “breadth of potentialities” (*kanōsei no haba*). In turn, these open up a new methodology for evaluating the past as a contestation of different ideas, rather than mere causal relations induced by the dominant factors. “History, at any rate, is unfolded through people’s conscious movement. Thus, by reading how the autonomous movement of people was affected by their own thoughts, [we] will re-discover manifold potentialities which, though they did not come to fruition, will surely present [a better explanations about] the historical phenomena of today.”<sup>18</sup> I will show that when Im Hwa’s essays are read in the future anterior tense, they bring to the fore what Korean cinema will have been, rather than what it used to be. In this chapter, I will not simply rest on Korean cinema’s “state of being” in the Japanese empire, but connect Im’s diagnosis of contemporary cinema problems with his vision for a different future. In doing so, I hope to redeem colonial Korean cinema from a fate that remains shadowed within the darkness of colonial domination, and to give it a “name for potentiality.”<sup>19</sup>

### *Criticism in the Century of the Facts*

Historicizing Im Hwa’s writings on cinema as a “former future” for Korean cinema requires a re-examination of the conditions that gave birth to such an imagination, as well as

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<sup>18</sup> Yasumaru Yoshio, *Hōhō to shite no shisōshi* [History of thought as method] (Tokyo: Azekura Shobō, 1996), 44.

<sup>19</sup> Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, 3.

Im's own position within the discursive milieu. In conjunction with contemporary political affairs such as the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War in the summer of 1937, late colonial Korean cinema was in the midst of transformation (*chǒnghwangi* or *chǒnhyǒnggi*). For Korean intellectuals, however, the term “transformation” did not refer to “a transition on the linear time-axis, but a state in which multiple temporalities coexist,” as Ch'a Sǔng-gi has noted.<sup>20</sup> As Ch'a argued:

The “transformational period” around the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War was represented as an anomie where existing perceptions and customs have collapsed, a state in which the dead were resurrected and the living became inert, and a situation in which “the residual,” “the dominant,” and “the emergent” have come into conflict with one another. [...] This *may* be depicted as a state of undecidedness where no direction [for future] is prevailing while possibilities, along with crises, would be found from all directions.<sup>21</sup>

However, the “undecidedness” of the state of emergency in “the colonial/imperial regime” (*singminji-cheguk ch'eje*)<sup>22</sup> remained only as possibility, as evinced in Ch'a's use of the auxiliary verb “may.” My aim too is to reflect upon the terms of possibility in the fraught era of Japanese imperialism, although it is still crucial to acknowledge that the “presentiment of violence” prevailed despite the purported undecidedness.<sup>23</sup> As previously seen in Chapters 2 and 3, Korean filmmakers, yearning for a more rational and stable ground for filmmaking, tried to reform the feeble industry by co-producing films with Japanese film studios, cultivating overseas

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<sup>20</sup> Ch'a Sǔng-gi, *Pisangsi ūi munpǒp singminji cheguk ch'eje ūi sam munhak chǒngch'i* [The grammar in the state of emergency: Life, literature, politics under the colonial/imperial regime] (Seoul: Kŭrinbi, 2016), 113

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-19. My emphasis.

<sup>22</sup> Ch'a Sǔng-gi coins the term “the colonial/imperial regime” (*singminji-cheguk ch'eje*) to conceptualize the social constructs entangled among the empire's center and its colonies. In this power relation, each of them exerted power on one another to have forced itself to transform accordingly. On the one hand, it takes issue with the understanding of colonizers' coercion as the sole force of historical changes, while revealing the anxiety of the colonial power that led into the reforms in the very center, on the other.

<sup>23</sup> Tomiyama Ichirō, *Bōryoku no yokan Iha Fuyu ni okeru kiki no mondai* [The presentiment of violence: Iha Fuyu's problematics of crisis] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002).



markets in the empire, or asking for support from the colonial government. Meanwhile, the colonial government initiated new policies to take control of Korean cinema, moving beyond suppressive means such as censorship and policing to actively involve itself with Korean film projects to make them conducive to wartime mobilization. This shifting notion of “control” (J. *tōsei*) came under the larger umbrella of the empire’s project of Asian cinema as an antithetical entity to Euro-American—or, to be more exact, Hollywood—cinema. Whither should Korean cinema go? The direction seemed quite clear in the Japanese empire. The ways in which Korean filmmakers and critics identified the problems of Korean cinema and devised solutions had been already oriented by the empire’s project for Asian cinema, while generating such a dissonance in the discursive field among different voices.

In that sense, the search for possibilities “from all directions” resulted from the loss of a definitive path that was previously presented before the eyes of colonial Koreans as, for example, communist revolution. The leftist cultural movement came to a decisive end after massive arrests of KAPF members and the subsequent dissolution of the organization. The failures of Im Hwa’s activities in cinema and theater illustrate the frustration of the leftists’ “former futures.” First was the failure of a film *Underground Village*, in which Im Hwa appeared as a supporting actor. The film was intended to be a narration of class warfare in a ghettoized factory town in the colonial capital’s outskirts. The film was extensively covered in the media, which publicized every detail of the production even before its release. Soon, however, the movie caught the eye of colonial police as well. A final report indicates that the film was set to be released in March 1931 in the Tansōngsa Theater, but no further record remains to testify to its actual release. In fact, the film triggered a police raid on KAPF members in August that year. Four years later, a long newspaper article mentions that the film “disappeared into darkness,” as all of its reels were confiscated by

the colonial censor just a few days shy of its release.<sup>24</sup> It is noteworthy that the last news story referring to *Underground Village* was actually a report of another massive arrest of the KAPF members—the police raid of the KAPF’s theater group, New Construction (Sin Kõnsõlsa), which eventually led to the disbandment of KAPF in 1935. Former activists were either put behind bars or renounced their belief in the communist revolution in colonial Korea. So too was the vision they had cherished in spite of suppression by colonial police. The leftist critique of imperialist capitalism was the antithesis of the status quo, yet it was based upon their vision for a proletarian future, for which leftist avant-garde culture was literally looking ahead. It was the future that colonial Koreans would have achieved through their relentless struggles. If the leftist movement was all about organizing a new public and making it visible to demonstrate its collective power, it was this very visibility that ironically summoned the attention of colonial police and resulted in the destruction of the movement and its proletarian future: The crackdown on leftist cultural production brought a halt to such visions. As best encapsulated in the title of Janet Poole’s study of modernist writers, colonial Koreans were living in the era “when the future disappears” before their eyes.<sup>25</sup>

After the future disappeared, the “century of the fact” (*sasil ũi segi*) followed. The “century of fact” is the name that colonial Korean intellectuals gave to their contemporary times to describe the atmosphere in late colonial Korea, especially between the late 1930s and early 1940s. A reference to French philosopher Paul Valéry’s notion, *sasil*, or the “fact,” refers to the overwhelming historical events that had determined colonial Korea’s direction. Valéry had witnessed the intellectual crisis in Europe in the aftermath of the First World War, whose

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<sup>24</sup> “Sin Kõnsõlsa sakõn kongpan” [Final trial of Sin Kõnsõlsa], *Tonga ilbo* (October 28, 1935), 2.

<sup>25</sup> Janet Poole, *When the Future Disappears: The Modernist Imagination in Late Colonial Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

breakdown mirrored late colonial Korea's aforementioned crackdown on leftist activism, the empire's militarization starting with the outbreak of imperial wars since the 1931 Manchurian Incident, and legal initiatives to mobilize all resources everywhere the empire's power could reach. Everyday news about the war fronts poured in through both images on screen and text on paper, delivering the "facts" of what had taken place politically in East Asia and beyond. *Sasil* as an objective reality overwhelmed colonial Koreans with pessimism for the approaching shadow of war. To a degree, it was a euphemism of the coming fascist regime, when colonial intellectuals were limited in the words they could use to express concern about the contemporary political and cultural crises.

Anxiety over the defeat of intellect—over not being able to be “free to doubt what is doubtful and to maintain what is not”<sup>26</sup>—prevailed in Korea. But the bigger problem for colonial intellectuals had already been decided by historical events: Their limited access to this objective reality, or *sasil*. Indeed, those who were still in the colony—or, in the terms of the war regime, “the rear ground”—did not have any big picture but only knew the facts filtered through images and texts released in the colony. When similar images and texts of war propaganda were reiterated, colonial intellectuals had to face their “inability to imagine the future other than as a relentless repetition of the present,”<sup>27</sup> thus reinforcing their sense of colonial inferiority. As Ch'a argues, “The world deluged with ‘facts,’ rather than as a sheer chaos or a state of undecidedness was re-organizing the lives in the rear ground by jolting them into the nontransparent ‘facts’ from the warfronts: [These facts were] the products processed by the political-semantic apparatus

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Valéry, *History and Politics*, trans. Denise Folliot and Jackson Mathews, vol. 10, (Princeton University Press, 1971), 3; cited from Christopher P. Hanscom, “Matters of Fact: Language, Science, and the Status of Truth in Late Colonial Korea,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 3, no. 3 (2014), 132.

<sup>27</sup> Poole, *When the Future Disappears*, 17.

of the front/rear-ground regime; that which left unknown the ‘factual’ grounds on which the imperial sovereign power would make a decision; and thus that in which the destiny of the lives in the rear ground remains unpredictable.”<sup>28</sup> In such chaos brought on by the “state of emergency,” colonial intellectuals endeavored to extrapolate from the “facts”—which compared to the pre-existing world-view seemed aberrant—new orders and principles of the new era to come. But their efforts to retrieve order from chaos was governed by what Ch’a Sŭng-gi calls “the grammar in the state of emergency,” an “always already” mediated by imperial sovereign power that has “always already” determined the lives in the colony.

Like his contemporaries who endeavored to articulate new orders in a new era, Im Hwa also proposed to discover the “logic of the new facts,” which bore the “source of the intellect.”<sup>29</sup> However, Im resisted a hasty defense of the intellect—whose defeat Paul Valéry lamented in the face of the cultural crisis in Europe after the First World War—and instead suggested an “[acknowledgement of] the facts” as they differed from their immersion into the realm of objectivity governed by the rhetorics of emergency. First of all, he highlighted how anachronistic it was to apply blindly Paul Valéry’s binary between fact and intellect, since that stemmed from Valéry’s limited experience in 19th-century Europe.<sup>30</sup> For Im, the defeat of intellect in the 20th century was qualitatively different in as much as “today [in Korea], the unity of fact and intellect is theoretically conceded, while practically denied. The problem lies not in the downfall of intellect, but in the defeat of body.”<sup>31</sup> Clearly in Im Hwa’s trajectory, “the defeat of body”

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<sup>28</sup> Ch’a, *The Grammar in the State of Emergency*, 132.

<sup>29</sup> Im Hwa, “Sasil ūi chaeinsik” [Recognizing the fact anew] in *Im Hwa munhak yesul chŏnjip* [Complete Works of Im Hwa], vol. 3 (Seoul: Somyŏng Ch’ulp’an, 2009), 112; originally published in *Tonga ilbo*, August 24-28, 1938.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 109. Im wrote, “We should not forget that Valéry was born in the 19th century, was educated in the 19th century to learn morals of the 19th century. [...] For Valéry, the 20th century is a foreign world as much as he would think of talkie as nothing but an art of incomprehensible noise.”

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

primarily designates a series of crackdown of KAPF in the mid-1930s, and by extension, “body” would refer to a physical condition for the transformation of subjectivity in colonial Korea. In this sense, his call for studying the facts took issue with making concessions to the orders of the facts—articulated under the “grammar in the state of emergency”; instead he advocated—but to “taking liberty in grilling the facts (*sasil ūl chayuropge yori*) and reconstituting the cooked facts (*yoridoen sasil*) for *one’s own purpose*.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, Im Hwa argued for wrestling with the facts to keep from not being consumed by them, and thus to restore a subject position that would hold its sovereignty over writing its own fate.

Given that, it will not come as a surprise that Im Hwa spent most of his energy in cultural criticism on calling for the restoration of subjectivity—or autonomy in cultural production. We find several instances in which he reprised his emphasis on the significance of criticism, such as in the roundtable discussion on “Korean Cinema’s New Departure” held by the monthly cultural magazine *Chogwang* in January 1942.<sup>33</sup> Around the time, the Korean Film Producers Association had already drafted the proposal for a new film production company. As all the participants in the roundtable were waiting for a response from Tokyo, the roundtable exuded high anticipation for the new film corporation, with some lingering concerns raised about the implementation of government policy. Coming late to the meeting, Im Hwa remained rather silent until the very end, when he modestly brought up the issue of criticism that no one had raised thus far.

Scouting for new faces, training people of talent, and [the need for] film producers are all very urgent issues. But in my understanding, Korea ought to have film criticism as well. It is odd to assume that a [new] director will emerge solely among a flock of assistant

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 111. My emphasis.

<sup>33</sup> “Chwadamhoe Chosŏn yŏnghwa ūi sin ch’ulbal” [Roundtable: Korean cinema’s new departure]. *Chogwang* 8, no. 1 (January 1942), 144-51.

directors, for how a company evaluates its employees should differ from the way in which outsiders evaluate them with a critical eye. In other words, sober critique from a third party will lead to the improvement of [Korean cinema's] level. So, we should not be remiss of the importance of film criticism, however much the organization of the company itself matters.<sup>34</sup>

By criticism, Im Hwa did not refer to a simple act of passing judgement about the aesthetics or techniques of individual films; nor was his emphasis on the importance of film criticism meant to insert distance from the film world and preserve a safe and secured place as an outsider. A few years before, Im Hwa had once expressed his dissatisfaction with what he sardonically called “the age of criticism” (*pip’yǒng ŭi sidae*). Despite its seeming abundance, literary criticism in the late 1930s, according to Im, “has been reduced to a series of techniques of literary analysis.” He lamented that the age of criticism “might well be the age of genuine criticism’s silence, or criticism’s hibernation period.”<sup>35</sup> While a technically more elaborate literary criticism would offer a better understanding of the given texts and their authors, Im questions, “could criticism function appropriately only with knowledge about texts and authors?”<sup>36</sup> For Im, “genuine criticism” serves its social function, and in order to do so it should stand at its own altitude (*kodo*), a higher ground that allows a critic to distance herself from the unruly details within the text. Thus, Im contends that the bird’s-eye view that the critic is endowed with will help her “overcome the blockage and obstruction far and near to secure a broad range of vision.”<sup>37</sup> By taking a vantage point from above, in other words, a critic should

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>35</sup> Im Hwa, “Pip’yǒng ŭi sidae” [The age of criticism], in *Complete Works of Im Hwa*, vol. 5 (Seoul: Somyǒng Ch’ulp’an, 2009), 95; originally published in *Pip’an* (October 1938), 77-79.

<sup>36</sup> Im Hwa, “Pip’yǒng ŭi kodo” [The altitude of criticism], in *Complete Works of Im Hwa*, vol. 3 (Seoul: Somyǒng Ch’ulp’an, 2009), 557; originally published as “Munye sip’yǒng” [Comments on current literature], *Chosǒn munhak* (January 1939).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 555.

situate artworks within their social and cultural context. Hence, when Im Hwa problematizes the silence of criticism—that is, the loss of criticism’s bird’s-eye view as part of the cultural crisis in late colonial Korea—it was the “loss of social, political, or philosophical height” in criticism.<sup>38</sup>

Given that, what Im Hwa meant by “sober critique from a third party” in the roundtable foregrounds the figure of a film critic. She is not directly involved with the film company or its process of filmmaking, distribution, and exhibition; but her critical altitude will contribute to bringing the film industry back to its broader societal context. As a film critic, Im Hwa too seeks to intervene in current affairs as a film critic positioned outside the industry practice. The discussions regarding the new film company did not seem to allow anything other than the purportedly practical issues such as the structure of the company, the number of films to be produced, the recruitment of new talent, and so on. For Im Hwa, such a discussion about the industrial reform of Korean cinema should be paused even momentarily. Film criticism was a call for stopping the self-reinforcing feedback loop generated in the discourse of corporatization. As mentioned earlier, Im repeatedly called himself an “outsider” (*kugoeja*) to the film world, not because he was an outsider in a real sense—he was affiliated with the Koryŏ Film Association as mentioned—nor because he intended to make a gesture of intellectual modesty. Rather, for Im, this position of outsider was located at an altitude that enabled the critic to identify how the discussion about Korean cinema had been reduced to the issues of industrial reforms, policy-making, and thus imperialization.

Unfortunately, the participants at the forum for “Korean cinema’s new departure” seemed indifferent to Im Hwa’s call for film criticism. After Im’s remark, the roundtable discussion quickly returned to the issue of the new film company without even giving him another chance to

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 557.

present his vision articulated through film criticism. This is only one instance of what might have frustrated Im Hwa: From around 1943 until Korea's liberation in 1945, Im Hwa wrote less and less than he had in his most prolific years in the late 1930s, a period that culminated with an 800-page volume, *Logic of Literature (Munhak ūi nollŭ)* in 1940. His advocacy for film criticism at the roundtable discussion constituted one of the last moments in which he voiced his concern over the imperialization of Korean culture. Here, we see another failed attempt by a colonial intellectual to bring attention to his own vision.

Why were his contemporaries not even listening to Im Hwa? It was not because they noticed he dissented from the contemporary debate about the Korean film industry, nor because they wanted to resist the necessity of film criticism. Certainly, his suggestion to invest in film criticism would sound less attractive to those attuned to the establishment of a new film company in colonial Korea. The problem would be that while they sought anything serviceable to their practical purposes, Im's call was far too idealistic to be put into practice. Such an idealism had determined Im Hwa's general attitude to his cultural critique. As Ch'a Sŭng-gi has noted regarding Im's notion of "authentic novel" (*ponkyŏk sosŏl*)—another ideal form of Korean novel—his visions belonged to "impossibility at least in the reality and literature in Korea in Im Hwa's era." Such an ideal "was far from any specific method of artistic production," but "was meant to regulate 'abnormality' in colonial Korea."<sup>39</sup> Im Hwa himself acknowledged this problem: "[...] I am afraid my argument cannot infuse writers' creative pens with new blood."<sup>40</sup> When everything was laid under the given frame of imperialization, such an argument as Im's

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<sup>39</sup> Ch'a, *The Grammar in the State of Emergency*, 160-61.

<sup>40</sup> Im, "Recognizing the Fact Anew," 106.



claim for film criticism or an authentic novel would remain merely a “theory on the desk,” which once again brings us to the problem of the practicality of theory and criticism.

However, the discontent with useless theory stems from the concept of theory as pontificating about the abstract structure of things. Im Hwa’s call for critical altitude does not take for granted the higher ground on which one opines on the level of superstructure, since literature—and art in general—is rooted in the experiences of its readers and audiences. As discussed in Chapter 4, critical engagement with art and culture should mean for Im Hwa to “come down from politics to thought (*sasang*), from thought to psychology, and then from psychology to living (*sanghwal*).”<sup>41</sup> In this sense, Im’s claims about colonial culture—while seemingly too worldly to be exquisite and too radical to be pragmatic—are to provide a guiding principle for the reconciliation between “the mystery of creation and the agony in practice”—that is, between abstract ideals about artistic production and the practical problems thereof.<sup>42</sup>

Then, criticism as such would be less specifically about a journalistic establishment tied to the film industry than about creating a discursive space where critics challenge the existing notions of Korean cinema to renew them. Hence, his writing on cinema does not have to take the form of a genre of film criticism in which individual films are examined thoroughly in aesthetic, technological, and industrial terms. Instead, Im engaged in historical as well as theoretical examinations to bring forward a different vision that would not conform to the ones that were in circulation. The examination of his vision does not disregard the “practical” challenges that Korean filmmakers faced, nor does it elevate Im Hwa’s position as more ethical than anyone who ended up collaborating with Japanese imperialism. Examining this vision is to acknowledge

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 107.

and remember the possibility of a theory that halts the path of Korean cinema in an era fraught with mobility—at a time when cinema was appropriated by the empire for war mobilization—and re-orient it as a vision of a different kind of cinema that has yet to come. What, then, was Im Hwa’s vision projected through his theories about colonial Korean culture, or colonial modernity in general?

### *Writing the History of Transplanted Culture*

As mentioned, Im Hwa was by no means an outsider of the film world in colonial Korea. In fact, he was working as an adjunct board member of Yi Ch’ang-yong’s Koryŏ Film Association, and was involved in at least two film projects there. One is the famous *Homeless Angels* (1941), for which Im translated the Japanese dialogue from Nishiki Motosada’s original script. But as Sŏ Chae-gil has shown, Nishiki’s early script reveals a great difference from the film rediscovered in 2005 that has been made available today,<sup>43</sup> and the extent to which Im Hwa’s early rendering affected the film’s later stage of production is quite uncertain.<sup>44</sup> Largely—but not only—because of that, *Homeless Angels* is considered to be its director Ch’oe In-gyu’s film, or producer Yi Ch’ang-yong’s product, as I have discussed in Chapter 5. Or more radically, some may view the film as Japanese scriptwriter Nishiki Motosada’s project, but rarely as embracing Im Hwa’s cinematic vision.

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<sup>43</sup> Sŏ Chae-gil, “*Chip ōmnŭn ch’ōnsa wa singminji yŏnghwa kŏmyŏl*” [*Homeless Angels* and colonial film censorship], *Hallim Ilbonhak*, no. 27 (2015), 113-39.

<sup>44</sup> Im Hwa’s early translation of Nishiki’s scenario has recently been reprinted as part of the booklets for *Homeless Angel*’s DVD. Sŏ Chae-gil sees the version as an earlier draft for submission to the censorship board, while there is another scenario which is so much closer to the existing film that Sŏ believes it to be a shooting script.

Meanwhile, Im Hwa conducted preliminary research for another Koryŏ project, *The Tale of Kim Ok-kyun* (*Kim Ok-kyun chŏn*), a biopic of an early modern reformer of the Chosŏn dynasty during the late 19th century.<sup>45</sup> For unknown reasons, the project never turned into a film, but the figure of Kim Ok-kyun evolved around Im Hwa’s study of the early modern history of Korea, a project he began exploring after the disbandment of the KAPF in 1935. At first, the research took the form of a genealogical project to identify the origin of leftist cultural productions as part of the formation of modern culture,<sup>46</sup> and later extended to the study of what he called the “new literature” (*sin munhak*) of the early 1900s. His interest in the early modern sensibility has been found in many different forms. For example, his contributions to “The Glossary for Modern Literature and Arts”—the feature in monthly *Inmun P’yŏngnon* in which the colonial literati wrote individual entries for a variety of keywords of their interests—included entries for historical terms like “the Kapsin Reform” (*Kapsin chŏngbyŏn*, the 1884 political coup staged by Kim Ok-kyun), “enlightenment” (*kaehwa*), “*The Independent*” (*Tongnip sinmun*, an early Korean newspaper published between 1896 and 1899), and “new literature.”<sup>47</sup> This range of Im’s entries in the “Glossary” reflects his then-ongoing project, *The History of New Literature in Korea*, serialized in multiple periodicals for about one year and a half between 1939 and

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<sup>45</sup> “Koryŏ Yŏnghwasa *Kim Ok-kyun chŏn yŏnghwahwa*” [Koryŏ Films new project *Tale of Kim Ok-kyun*], *Chosŏn ilbo* (November 9, 1939), morning edition, 4; “Koryŏ yŏnghwasa esŏ ch’waryŏngso rŭl kŏnsŏl” [Koryŏ Films to build film studio], *Tonga ilbo* (January 31, 1940), evening edition, 5; Nishiki Motosada, “Chŏsen eiga no sozai ni tsuite” [On Korean films’ subject matters], *Eiga hyŏron* 1, no. 7 (July 1941), 52.

<sup>46</sup> Im Hwa “Chosŏn sin munhaksa ron sŏsŏl” [Introduction to the history of new literature in Korea], in *Complete Works of Im Hwa*, vol. 3 (Seoul: Somyŏng Ch’ulp’an, 2009), 373-439; originally published in *Chosŏn chungang ilbo*, October 9-November 13, 1935. Literary scholars have noted that this was part of Im’s efforts to justify from history the communist cause that he still held despite the defeat of his leftist cultural activism. See Kim Yun-sik, *Im Hwa wa Sin Nam-chŏl Kyŏngsŏng Chedae wa sin munhaksa ūi kwallyŏn yangsang* [Im Hwa and Sin Nam-chŏl: Keijŏ Imperial University and New Literature History] (Seoul: Yŏngnak, 2012).

<sup>47</sup> “Modŏn munye sajŏn” [The glossary for modern literature and arts], *Inmun p’yŏngnon* 2:1 (January 1940), 97-116. Other entries include “(Kantian) reason” (by philosopher Sŏ In-sik), “Rastignac (in Balzac’s novel)” (by novelist Kim Nam-chŏn), and “fiction” (by literary critic Ch’oe Chae-sŏ).

1941.<sup>48</sup> As Im's *History* situates the rise of "new literature" within the context of the formation of colonial modernity, however, it cannot be reduced to solely the genre of literature. Rather, Im's identification of "new literature" as the epitome of modern sensibility demonstrates his ambition to encompass the history of modern Korea in general as well as his own view of historiography itself. And the way in which Im historicized Korean literature prescribed an analytic framework for his cinema history, as in "A Little History of the Development of Korean Cinema" (1941). Im Hwa wrote in a methodological essay as follows:

It is not an exaggeration that new literature has been formed by employing Western literary genres—specifically free verse and modern novel—and literature in all eras has consistently been stimulated and influenced by foreign literatures which it imitated; as such, the history of new literature is the history of *transplanted culture*.<sup>49</sup>

The passage above has been highly contentious among postcolonial scholars of modern Korean literature and history, as they saw Im's argument as overemphasizing the constructive power of the foreign force—colonial force, in particular—while discounting the autonomous development of modern culture in Korea.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, Im Hwa's thesis of transplanted culture, or *isik munhwa*, seems to resonate with the notorious theory of colonial modernization (*singminji*

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<sup>48</sup> Related publications include: "Kaesŏl sin munhaksa" [Summary for the history of new literature], *Chosŏn ilbo*, September 2-October 31, 1939 (total 43 parts); "Sin munhaksa" [The history of new literature], *Chosŏn ilbo*, December 8-27, 1939 (total 11 parts); "Sok sin munhaksa" [The history of new literature part 2], *Chosŏn ilbo*, February 2-May 10, 1940 (total 49 parts); and "Kaesŏl Chosŏn sin munhaksa" [Summary for the history of new literature in Korea], *Inmun p'yŏngnon*, November 1940-April 1941 (total 4 parts). Although he had further plans to continue this history writing, which did not take place any longer. Literary scholars Im Kyu-chan and Han Chin-il have compiled and reprinted the total 107 runs of his serial publication into a volume under the title *Im Hwa sin munhaksa* [Im Hwa's history of new literature in Korea] (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1993). It is reprinted as the second volume of *Complete Works of Im Hwa*.

<sup>49</sup> Im Hwa, "Sin munhaksa ūi pangbŏp" [Methodology for the history of new literature], in *Complete Works of Im Hwa*, vol. 3 (Seoul: Somyŏng Ch'ulp'an, 2009), 653; originally published in *Tonga ilbo*, January 13-20, 1940.

<sup>50</sup> Among them, see Kim Yun-sik and Kim Hyŏn, *Han'guk munhaksa* [The history of Korean literature] (Seoul: Minŭmsa, 1973); Cho Tong-il, *Kungmunhak yŏn'gu ūi panghyang kwa kwaje* [The orientation and tasks of national literature studies] (Seoul: Saemunsa, 1983); Pak Hŭi-byŏng, "Im Hwa ūi isik munhak ron pip'an" [A critique of Im Hwa's theory of transplanted literature], *Han'guk munhwa*, no. 22 (December 1998), 85-112.

*kūndaehwa ron*). But as postcolonial scholars have pointed out, the positivist approach to colonial modernization oftentimes highlights the role of colonial power in the modernization of Korea to the degree that it is appropriated to potentially justify claims for Japan's exploitation of the colonized. Likewise, Im Hwa's transplanted culture might have approximated such a colonialist theory that attributed the development of Korean literature solely to foreign influences, while dissociating modern Korean literature from its older traditional forms. Kim Yun-sik, one of the early critics of Im Hwa—who therefore becomes one of the most careful readers of Im's thesis—argues that such a tendency to disengage modernity from the lineage of national literature is already apparent in Im Hwa's unique historiography. For instance, Im marks the watershed of modern literature at the turn of the century, not in the year 1910 when Japan officially annexed Korea. If his history were to be divided in 1910, Kim speculates, Im's history of Korean literature would accordingly portray a trajectory from the loss of cultural sovereignty to “the retrieval of national literature, in other words, the national subjectivity,” seeking an alternative modernity.<sup>51</sup> Yet, Im Hwa's analysis rests on the earlier moments from the late 1890s to the early 1900s, as a consequence of which the significance of the year when Korea became Japan's official colony becomes minimized. By constantly returning to the question of what constituted modernity for Korea, Im Hwa committed himself to the study of the era when Kim Ok-kyun staged a political coup and failed, and when a new political and cultural sensibility emerged in the form of new novels. At the core of Im's critique of colonial Korean culture lay an insistence upon the problems of modernity, not those of nationhood.<sup>52</sup> For Im Hwa, whether

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<sup>51</sup> Kim, *Study of Im Hwa*, 524.

<sup>52</sup> It should not be mistaken that Im Hwa disregarded the problem of coloniality; rather, as much as later scholars would identify his works as problematic, he was to make it clear that modernity in Korea was colonial modernity. To repeat his controversial statement: “the history of new literature is the history of transplanted culture.” Indeed, behind Kim Ok-kyun's rebel against Korea's monarchy in 1884 lay Kim's own scrutinization of Japan's Meiji

Korea could have taken an alternative path of autonomous development into modernity even prior to the advent of the Western (and Japanese) culture and technology was out of the question: Modernity in Korea was transplanted from without.

However, Im Hwa's argument about the formation of modernity does not end by reiterating foreign influence; nor does it approve Japanese colonialism's positive contribution to Korea's modern development. Rather than such a unilateral influence from the West and Japan, Im Hwa's thesis of transplanted modernity is a nuanced unfolding of the process of modernity's development in colonial Korea. As recent scholarship has argued, Im Hwa's concept of transplantation does not dismiss all the old forms but integrates them into a dialectical process that creates new culture.<sup>53</sup> In his "Methodology for the History of New Literature in Korea" (1941), for example, Im stresses the agency of the pre-existing cultural foundation that he called "tradition" (*chǒntong*): "The cultural exchange between all Oriental countries and the West may seem to conclude with the formation of a history of transplanted culture, but internally it entails another process that dismantles the transplant. In other words, the more heightened the transplantation of culture becomes, the more mature the creation of [new] culture from within."<sup>54</sup>

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Restoration as well as the support from Japanese scholar Fukuzawa Yukichi who later wrote "Escape from Asia" (*Datsu-A ron*) in response to Kim's failed attempt at reform. Like Kim Ok-kyun brought the idea of modern civilization to Korea from Japan that had also received the idea from the West, Korea's modern culture too was under heavy influences of the Western culture translated and imported through Japan. However, what complicates the formation of modern culture in Korea, for Im Hwa, was the compressed historical process through which Korea was under pressure to reach the achievement parallel to that which had been accumulated over hundreds of years in the West, or 100 years in Japan. "Transplanting" what took centuries to develop elsewhere onto Korean soil then becomes a crucial practice to adopt and adapt modernity.

<sup>53</sup> Sin Sŭng-yŏp, "Isik kwa ch'angjo ūi pyŏnjŭngpŏp" [The dialectics between transplantation and creation], *Changjak kwa pip'yŏng* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1991), 173-97; Im Kyu-chan, "Im Hwa sin munhaksa ūi olbarŭn ihae rŭl wihayŏ" [For an appropriate understanding of Im Hwa's literature history], in Im Kyu-chan and Han Chin-il eds., *Im Hwa's History of New Literature in Korea*; Ha Chŏng-il, "Isik kŭndae t'alsingmin" [Transplantation, modernity, postcoloniality], in Munhak Sasang Yŏn'guhoe ed., *Im Hwa munhak ūi chaeinsik* [Revisiting Im Hwa's literature] (Seoul: Somyŏng Ch'ulp'an, 2004), 64-89.

<sup>54</sup> Im Hwa, "Methodology for the History of New Literature," 656-57.

Transplantation here is described as a dialectical process in which a cultural import becomes engaged in negotiation with existing forms, which then renovate themselves under the impact of the transplant. Thus, transplanted culture, for Im Hwa, refers to a phenomenon during the transitional period (*kwadogi*)<sup>55</sup> in which the old regime was losing cultural control while the new cultural regime had not yet emerged. In case of *fin-de-siècle* Korean literature, writings in vernacular Korean gradually replaced preexisting forms of Sino-Korean literature written in classical Chinese, combining the latter with new forms and modalities imported from elsewhere. In that era, as Im Hwa sees it, neither foreign culture nor the existing tradition was particularly dominant; both reshaped each other in the creation of something new. Out of the relationship between the transplant and the pre-existing forms—at once constructive and destructive—new modern culture emerged. The power of colonialism, thus, is not entirely decisive in Im Hwa’s notion of transplantation as previous scholarship has claimed; it was Korean cultural producers who actively mediated multiple influences to participate in the formation of colonial modernity.

As for cinema, without doubt a foreign import, his notion of “transplanted culture” may have more explanatory power than for literature, which at least had a previous tradition. In his “Little History of the Development of Korean Cinema,” Im Hwa introduces the distinction between “the age of motion picture” (K. *hwaltong sajin*, J. *katsudō shashin*) and “the age of cinema” (K. *yŏnghwa*, J. *eiga*), which was also made by Japan’s Pure Film Movement in the late

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<sup>55</sup> Im Hwa uses the term *kwadogi* in a very strict sense as different from *chŏnhwan’gi* or *chŏnhyŏnggi*, although both can be translated into “transitional period.” In his view, the former represents a period characterized by a chaos among the old and the new in which “the victory of either has not been confirmed,” whereas the latter is a regime of Bonapartism in Marxist sense. Im hints that the time when he was writing the very history of new literature—the 1940s—cannot be called *kwadogi* but rather *chŏnhwanggi* in the sense that the dominant path for the future has already been identified, while not solid enough to overthrow all the existing regime. See *Complete Works of Im Hwa*, vol. 2: *The History of New Literature* (Seoul: Somyŏng Ch’ulp’an, 2009), 132-33.

1910s and 20s.<sup>56</sup> Sharing Japan’s early film reformers’ teleological notion of cinema (*eiga*) as qualitatively different from early motion pictures (*katsudō shashin*), Im Hwa reiterates that the history of cinema should tell a story of an art liberating itself from other artistic and traditional genres. Granted, such a division between motion picture and cinema cannot be validated in Korean film history, according to Im, since there was no film production in Korea during the so-called age of motion picture. “The West and Japan went through what is called the age of motion picture in the history of world cinema by producing [films] a bit, while we Koreans did nothing but watch them. Therefore in a strict sense, the age of motion pictures in Korean film history did not exist. [...] The age of motion pictures [for Korea] is a prehistory of cinema, and nothing but an era during which we were utterly audiences.”<sup>57</sup> With this premise, Im Hwa discusses film history after 1919, when the first *yŏnswaegŭk* (J. *rensageki*)—a mixed form that combined screen projection and stage play—entitled *Righteous Vengeance* (*Ŭirijŏk kutu*, dir. Kim To-san) was released in the Tansŏngsa theater.

With that in mind, however, Im Hwa did not intend to discount the significance of histories prior to the first film production. In his 1941 “Treatise on Korean Cinema,” published about half a year after “A Little History,” Im calls this non-existent age of motion picture—the two-decade period before the first *yŏnswaegŭk*—“the age of mere appreciation” (*kamsang man ũi sidae*), in the sense that, again, Koreans were merely watching movies while not producing any. This long age of mere appreciation resulted partly from the lack of an existing “tradition” to adopt and adapt cinematic art for colonial Korea, unlike other artistic genres such as literature

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<sup>56</sup> Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). Also see my Chapter 1 for a discussion of the Pure Film Movement in relation to the debates on Korean cinema in the 1920s.

<sup>57</sup> “A Little History,” 197.



and theater that developed into modern forms immediately after the introduction of the Western culture. Note, however, that Im Hwa named the era in terms of what Koreans *did* as an audience, not what they *did not do*. “The age of mere appreciation” was not about any lack or incapability but potentiality. Cinema was already being produced in a different sense. He writes,

The transplantation of literature, music, theater, and fine arts involved the imitation of [their Western forms], whereas cinema was transplanted just by appreciating [foreign movies]. In other words, since [they are marked by] the passive reception of modern culture, there is no difference between the history of cinema and that of other art forms. Thus, there was no difference among them in the sense that during the era, [Koreans] were prepared for creative awareness and the coming age of film production. As a transitional phase, [the age of appreciation] gave birth to a new spirit.<sup>58</sup>

In the fundamental sense that all those genres including cinema were products of the process of transplantation, the noticeable lateness of cinema’s development in Korea reveals no essential difference.

But, why did Korean cinema have to wait through such a long period of “mere appreciation” before it could transplant new cultural forms? Im Hwa suggests two reasons. First, cinema was not considered an art proper at the time of its introduction. This was not specifically a Korean situation, Im contends; cinema elsewhere in its early stages also struggled to secure its status as a form of fine art. Second, if cinema was universally looked down on as a vulgar form of popular culture, cinema in Korea was compounded by the very local situation in which Koreans did not have any existing “tradition” to negotiate with this foreign novelty. Unlike cinema, other genres like literature and theater at least had commensurable elements in the Korean tradition, which mediated the introduction of Western forms on their own terms, and cultural producers could create new cultural modes by revamping these older forms. Cinema,

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<sup>58</sup> “1941 Treatise,” 86.

however, was entirely a novelty, and Korea did not “accumulate its own culture” before cinema’s introduction.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, other advanced capitalist countries had established commercial institutions, which provided cinema with a basis to be produced, circulated, and shown. Moreover, popular theaters in those countries would have also helped nascent forms of motion pictures segue into full-fledged cinema. In Japan, for example, the existing forms of kabuki theater helped the popularization of cinematic forms, and the advanced capitals sought to use the novelty for advertising their goods. However, in Korea, commercial institutions had not adequately developed, and where they existed, they were initiated by mostly Japanese merchants and therefore on the whims of the colonizers. Popular theater too remained in a developing stage, as it requires capitalist development.

Seen from those two factors of delayed development, Korean cinema’s earliest stage served a dual task, on the one hand, as a cultural import that sought a place within the cultural, social, and economic milieu in colonial Korea, and, on the other, as a non-art that needed to secure artistic-minded people who would later yield its vernacular form. For Im Hwa, the two tasks converge on his defense of Korean cinema’s artistic quality (*yesulsǒng*). In “A Little History,” the development of Korean cinema as art goes hand in hand with the problem of cinema’s corporate quality (*kiǒpsǒng*), especially when Im Hwa’s contemporary era was fraught with the concern about state film corporations. Based upon these artistic and corporate qualities, Im Hwa theorizes Korean cinema. This theorization shares thematic goals with early Japanese film reformers to free new forms of cinematic art from existing popular entertainments like kabuki theater. But as I will show in the following section, the freedom Im seeks to achieve exceeds the intent to unshackle cinema from the constraints of other artistic genres; for Im, future

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 87.

Korean cinema would be unfettered from the constraints of cultural, social, and political institutions.

### *Korean Cinema as Art*

In the face of the transformation of Korean cinema under the pressure of cinematic imperialization, Im Hwa begins his 1942 “Treatise on Korean cinema” with two common questions from the time: What is Korean cinema to become? And where is it going? For him, the two questions, stemming from anxiety over Korean cinema’s future, should be understood in separate terms: The former is about being (*chonjae*), whereas the latter is about movements (*tongtae*). Since “the problem of being precedes the problem of movements,” Im argues, one should contemplate Korean cinema’s existence before talking about the direction that it should take for the future.<sup>60</sup> This split between Korean cinema’s current existence and future path is re-emphasized at the tail end of the “1942 Treatise”:

[...] I think that what we will get from the birth of the new company has been obvious from the policy of the government authorities, and the path of national art (*kungminjŏk yesul*) already taken by various fields of art [has been suggested] as an extremely general guideline. National cinema (*kungminjŏk yŏnghwa*), like any other art, is not an already determined category, but an unfamiliar area looming with a new world [we are] to create; Korean cinema’s excellence as a *particular national art* would thus further become a serious issue [to delve into]. The transformation [of Korean cinema] would be valuable only when we inquire into this, and those who have put their heart and soul into Korean cinema are all responsible.<sup>61</sup>

In this seemingly tautological yet carefully crafted ending, Im Hwa reiterates his emphasis on the question about the “what” instead of the “where.” Government authorities had

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<sup>60</sup> “1942 Treatise,” pt. 1 (June 28, 1942).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pt. 3 (June 30, 1942). My emphasis.

already provided “extremely general guidelines” for a future Korean cinema. This demonstrates the subtle point that imperialization was already been determined as Korean cinema’s destination, an inevitable direction for Korean cinema. Meanwhile, the “question about the certainty of [Korean cinema’s] existence” that “reflects the current atmosphere surrounding Korean cinema”<sup>62</sup> remains unexplored, and is therefore a duty for “those who have put their heart and soul into Korean cinema.”<sup>63</sup>

What then should Korean cinema become? The phrase, “a particular national art” (*t’ŭksuhan kungminjŏk yesul*) appears in the above passage, and its implications are too dense to offer any concrete sense of Korean cinema’s being in the world. The problematics embedded in the notion of “particular national art” are twofold. First, defining Korean cinema as art was one of Im Hwa’s theoretical stakes. It establishes cinema’s place as a legitimate category of colonial Korean culture. Secondly, Korean cinema is situated within the tension between the particular and the national. Here, the term “nation” (K. *kungmin*; J. *kokumin*) used in the colonial era refers to the subject of the empire rather than a sense of belonging to an ethnic and racial subgroup in the empire.<sup>64</sup> Given that, we may well consider the dynamics of the relationship between Korea as a locality in the empire and Japan as the imperial center—that is, between the particular and the universal. Korean filmmakers’ anxiety over the “certainty of existence” of Korean cinema stems from its obscure status caused by the binary. In discussions of the “futility” of Korean cinema, as seen in Chapter 3, anxiety grew over efforts to have authorities in Japan endorse the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pt. 1 (June 28, 1942).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pt. 3 (June 30, 1942).

<sup>64</sup> The term “nation” is also conflated with the ethnic or racial entity, which is rendered in Korean as *minjok* or in Japanese *minzoku*. “Nation” in this chapter, however, denotes an imperial entity, unless otherwise noted.

necessity of Korean cinema. In this sense, the corporatization issue revolved around the security of Korean cinema's position within the empire's cinema project.

Contrary to all the more practical concerns over Korean cinema's existence, Im Hwa's claim for art as Korean cinema's way of being would be seen as too idealized and romanticized in an era fraught with politics. Later in 1946 when the Japanese empire had collapsed, Im Hwa made an apologetic account for the apolitical tenor in his wartime discourse: "[...] characteristically during the era, the claim for apolitical literature retained a degree of political implication. In other words, it was a negative means for literature to refuse to become a propaganda tool for Japanese imperialism."<sup>65</sup> This statement, of course, should not be taken at face value, since it was enunciated in a postcolonial context in which pro-Japanese collaboration during the colonial period was being reassessed, castigated, and even investigated and tried. Furthermore, Im Hwa was one of the few colonial Koreans who insisted on the inseparability of art and politics, which contrasted with the position of his peers. Therefore, it would be more productive to view his claim for art as a highly political gesture than hastily to accuse Im Hwa of romanticizing art. As for cinema, whose development depends so much on industrial infrastructure—the problem that preoccupied colonial filmmakers during the late colonial period—the notion of artistic quality (*yesulsǒng*) cannot be severed from the notion of corporate quality (*kiǒpsǒng*). Of course, understanding cinema's dual identity as both art and industry is common among global scholars and critics of cinema.<sup>66</sup> But late colonial Korean cinema was

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<sup>65</sup> Im Hwa, "Chosǒn minjok munhak kǒnsǒl ūi kibon kwaje e kwanhan ilban pogo" [Building national literature in Korea: a general statement for its principles], in *Complete Works of Im Hwa*, vol. 2 (Seoul: Somyǒng Ch'ulp'an, 2009), 502; originally published in Chosǒn Munhakka Tongmaeng ed., *Kǒnsǒlgi ūi Chosǒn munhak* [Korean literature in the age of nation-building] (Seoul: Paegyandang, 1946).

<sup>66</sup> Jean Epstein, "On Certain Characteristics of *Photogénie*," in *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations*, ed. Sarah Keller and Jason N. Paul, trans. Tom Milne (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 292-96; Iwasaki Akira, *Eigaron* [On cinema] (Tokyo: Mikasa Shobo, 1936).

involved in a more political issue, since cinema as industry was overdetermined by the corporatization discourse combined with the imperialization project.

[This] is the current problem of Korean cinema: Whenever we discuss the issue of the artistic restart [of Korean cinema] and the progress toward corporatization, every issue incessantly circulates around a certain center. At a glance, the issue of the new film company looks like the center because the corporatization discourse has been prioritized over the issue of art, on the one hand, and the organization of the company lies at the center of today's transformation, on the other. Accordingly, it should be remembered that the issue of the new company should be characterized as the issue of the synthesis of art and corporation—of the corporatized art (*kiöpchök yesul*)—not the conventional ideas of large capital investment or the merger of companies.<sup>67</sup>

Im Hwa's statement has often been interpreted as situating Korean cinema's development within the very coordinates established by the universal cinematic norms of the Japanese empire. For example, Paek Mun-im's study, *Im Hwa's Cinema*, highlights Im Hwa's uniqueness during the colonial period. Paek considers Im Hwa's dialectical understanding of cinema as "the synthesis of art and corporation."<sup>68</sup> She argues that, particularly in face of the corporatization problem, the dialectic between art and industry overlaps with that between national cinema (K. *kungmin yöngghwa*; J. *kokumin eiga*) and Korean cinema. Given that "nation" here denotes an imperial subject, the latter dialectic can be further extended to that between the imperial regime and the colonial entity. In Paek's understanding, Im Hwa presented the notion of cinema's artistic quality (*yesulsöng*) as an antithesis to its corporate quality (*kiöpsöng*) to examine Korean cinema's role as a local manifestation of the cinema in the empire. Korean cinema as "corporatized art" would then be a product of the synthesis between the universal and the particular. In this reading, the "corporate quality" is not purely industrial in its implication, but

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<sup>67</sup> "1942 Treatise," pt. 3 (June 30, 1942).

<sup>68</sup> Paek Mun-im, *Im Hwa üi yöngghwa* [Im Hwa's cinema] (Seoul: Somyöng Ch'ulp'an, 2015).

also profoundly tied to the political milieu of the time. In other words, Im Hwa's notion of art was at the heart of the political economy that shaped Korean cinema during the height of Japanese imperialism.<sup>69</sup> She argues, "[Im Hwa's contention about] 'the artistic quality and the corporate quality' grasps the core of the discourse on Korean cinema since the late 1930s to debunk the established argument that [cinematic] art would be possible only after the completion of the corporatization."<sup>70</sup> Korean cinema's artistic quality, or *yesulsŏng*, was "a mediating concept to stress the momentum of the *particularity* of Korean cinema that would possibly confront the generalizing issue of national cinema (*kungmin yŏnghwa*) at a specific juncture of the early 1940s."<sup>71</sup>

The interpretation as such, however, conflates Im Hwa's vision for "cinema that should be made from now on" with other existing claims toward imperialization. If we accept his claim for "corporatized art" at face value, Im's vision is trapped in a binary operation between Japan's imperial project for national cinema and the manifestation of Korean locality within the mapping of the Japanese imperial project—the symbiotic relationship between universalism and particularism, which Naoki Sakai has described as "never in real conflict; they need each other and have to seek to form a symmetrical, mutually supporting relationship by every means in order to avoid a dialogic encounter that would necessarily jeopardize their reputedly secure and harmonized monologic worlds."<sup>72</sup> However, Paek's reading of Im Hwa as such returns Im Hwa

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<sup>69</sup> I want to stress again that my rendering of the term *kiŏphwa* as "corporatization" is to differentiate it from a seemingly more economically independent term "industrialization" in order to highlight that the issue of the film company—a rationalized film business—was always already incorporated into the empire's imperialization project. See Chapter 2.

<sup>70</sup> Paek, *Im Hwa's Cinema*, 149.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 131. My emphasis.

<sup>72</sup> Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity: On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 163.

to the middle of the collective enthusiasm for corporatization despite Im's purported claim for to avoid it. In other words, if the dialectic between artistic and corporate qualities leads to "the issue of designating the position of Korean cinema in the general direction of national cinema" as Paek suggests,<sup>73</sup> Im Hwa's claim will be a mere reiteration of the logic of the corporatization discourse that justified developing cinema for the purpose of imperialization. Then how different was Im's vision from the discourse and practice of his contemporaries? Where can we find "Im Hwa's cinema"?

Here, I return to the above passage to read against the grain for the message. Im Hwa writes that "whenever we discuss the issue of the artistic restart [of Korean cinema] and the progress toward corporatization, every issue incessantly circulates around *a certain center*," which, as he tells his readers, is obviously the problem of the new film company.<sup>74</sup> Here, he assumes corporatization to be the centripetal force that ingurgitates all other possibilities of colonial Korean cinema. Such a frenzy about the new film company has reduced the artistic quality, drawing it into the frame structured by the imperialization project. In this situation where corporatization is widely favored, Im Hwa's dialectic between artistic and corporate qualities may function as a "stick-bending" strategy with which to introduce another radical transformation to adjust and re-orient the biased discursive space. It was more than a mediator between Korean cinema and national cinema. The dialectic called for self-reflection about the current situation, pushing the discussion to contemplate on the artistic quality of Korean cinema.

Im Hwa reiterates this point in the passage I have quoted from the end of the "1942 Treatise." There, he implies how the path to national art has been determined by an "extremely

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<sup>73</sup> Paek, *Im Hwa's Cinema*, 149.

<sup>74</sup> "1942 Treatise," pt. 3 (June 30, 1942). My emphasis.



general guideline” offered by the government authorities. Im Hwa struggles to urge his contemporaries to think of creating “a new world” in the face of issues over the corporate quality of colonial Korean cinema. For him, inquiries into Korean cinema’s artistic quality will drive the generation of the coming Korean cinema because interrogating the artistic quality of Korean cinema cannot be resolved through film policies, specific plans to establish a film company, or, ultimately, the imperialization of Korean cinema.

Also, strictly speaking, the dialectic between artistic quality and corporate quality is not a static state but a historical process in motion, in which both constitute one another. It reflects the historically specific conditions under which Korean cinema’s industrialization would translate into “corporatization” as part of the imperialization project. Also, if the imperial project were to create another “corporatized art,” its artistic quality would no longer take the same form as the previous Korean cinema. What he referred to as cinematic art of Korea, in this sense, should be posited in the mutually constitutive process as such, rather than designating the final destination of the movement. In its fluid form and shape, Korean cinema as art would become an entity different from either Japanese or Hollywood films, and, more than anything, different in and of itself. That is what he would mean by “singular” (*koyu*) Korean cinema. The “particularity” of Korean cinema, understood in terms of its troubling collusion with the empire’s universalism, thus requires a more nuanced understanding in such terms. He writes:

[Korean cinema’s aesthetic and industrial inferiority] should not be blamed at all: As a healthy person has one’s own way of maintaining life, the physiology of a feeble person is also singular in itself.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pt. 3 (June 30, 1942).

Here he uses the metaphor of physiology to characterize the helplessness of Korean cinema. While a rationalized film industry in Japan and the US has its own system for producing, circulating, and exhibiting films, history shows that such an industrial structure is not the only way to sustain cinema's ecosystem in places like colonial Korea. Of course, such industrial structures can serve as a target for developing cinemas to achieve the purportedly global norms of film industry. Im Hwa does not deny his statement's "self-justificatory implication" since "the value of the feeble life would be entertaining when it gains in health after all." However, Im Hwa goes on to criticize that "all the detailed excuses about the current slump and downturn [of Korean cinema]"—that is, what orients the discourse to the centripetal force of corporatization—is a "truly crude view," from which he urges readers to take distance. What he claims through such a double negative rhetoric is that the healthy state of the film industry should not be taken for granted as a goal for Korean cinema. Instead of searching desperately for a panacea for feebleness, he argues, Korean cinema should embrace its own feebleness as a creative condition. Given that, the notion of artistic quality offers an opportunity to reflect upon such a feeble industrial ground and to turn into a singular aesthetics. Im Hwa delves into the ways in which Korean cinema has nurtured its own life despite and through its own feebleness.

[E]ven if 149 Korean films out of 150 turn out to be rubbish, one needs to be fair in her observation to view the fundamental motivation for Korean cinema thus far as based [on Korean filmmakers' creative ambition]. Such a situation, though not a happy one, was still quite suited for the pursuit of art. By making rubbish and by repeating failures over and over, they participated in the growth of Korean cinema. To say it differently, these artists were able to express their intention with little interruption from a third party, despite the poor production and the failures as a consequence.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> "1941 Treatise," 89.

Undeniably, Korean cinema's poor quality was a consequence of the given industrial conditions. If it is easy to discern what impoverished Korean cinema, it is equally evident that Korean filmmakers were motivated by creative ambitions. To be fair, in addition, he argues that recognizing that the lack of the "interruption from a third party" can be alternatively understood as an opportunity for Korean filmmakers to "express their intention." He continues, specifying what he means by "the third party": "We should note that Korean cinema's internal development was not supported by capital, but in turn, neither was it damaged by capital."<sup>77</sup> With this, Im inverts the logic of lack—which dictated Korean filmmakers' yearning for a healthy industry—and redefines it as "freedom." "This freedom," he continues, "has singularized Korean cinema to a certain degree, leading to creating films more distinct than our neighboring Japanese cinema."<sup>78</sup> It is the moment at which a history of rubbish films—in a broader sense, a history unappreciated in the world of film auteurs and artisans and their masterpieces—is rearticulated as a history of freedom. Evaluating the past as such would introduce a different path to be taken, although Im stopped short of suggesting any concrete project. However, clearly his message was that Korean cinema should not necessarily join in the given path to imperialization in order to secure its position within the coordinates of Japan's project for Asian cinema. The very existence of Korean cinema, he suggests, lies in an understanding of Korean cinema's artistic quality that comes to terms with its singular conditions.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 91.

### *Toward Colonial Cinema's Universality*

Im Hwa had a keen sense of the political implications of participating in the economically-oriented discourse. In his view, Korean cinema should not be reduced to the empire's project, nor to Korean cinema's local position within the purported universality of the former; Korean cinema needed to learn from its own past in which it has developed by embracing its own feeble conditions as a creative opportunity: That would pave a path for its singular future. This way of Korean cinema was theorized at Im Hwa's desk, not in the studio saturated with the political change in the Japanese empire. Instead of participating in the mobility, he took a critical distance in order to contemplate the conditions that Korean filmmakers were working under. It was to pause the movement and envision a different aesthetics Korean cinema would have achieved.

Yet, the problem still remains regarding the impossibility of his vision, as we know by now what had already happened. It was an era "when the future disappears"; Im Hwa's suggestions did not reverberate with his contemporaries; the empire advanced the discourse and practice in favor of its project of imperializing cinema. More seriously, Im Hwa, while alluding to going beyond the imperialization project, also failed to present any specific forms for Korean cinema to follow in the future. His visionary cinema ultimately remained on his desk, amorphous and fluid. To borrow Koselleck's irony, his future past was on the horizon "which retreats as one approaches it."<sup>79</sup> How could Korean cinema reach the "horizon" that is by definition unreachable? Where should Im Hwa's cinema be sought? If it exists, how do we know Im Hwa's cinema to be singular after all?

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<sup>79</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 261.

At a glance, Im Hwa's theoretical stakes may resonate with film historian Yi Yŏng-il's retrospective evaluation of colonial-era Korean cinema:

And now, looking back to the entire story of Korean cinema during Japan's colonial rule makes us feel ineffable desolation. How could a plant grow freely on a steep hill with its roots cut? Even so, [the history] left nothing but a poor legacy. [...] However, we discover from such a poor legacy a vein of the spirit that Korean cinema shall carry on. Considering the relationship between a nation and its art, such is a potential and we cannot replace it with anything. That [era] prepared Korean cinema's tradition, which would develop further in the next stage of history. Seen as such, the poor legacy is more valuable than any rich legacy elsewhere. For we don't know any other nation than Korea where the art of suffering and resistance could survive under such a long colonial rule.<sup>80</sup>

As Im Hwa suggested during the late colonial period, Yi Yŏng-il as a postcolonial historian in the late 1960s proposes to discover from "ineffable desolation" a potentiality of Korean cinema. And instead of filmmakers who collaborated with Japanese imperialism, Yi finds potentiality from those who refused to work with the government or simply ran away from the industry.<sup>81</sup> Preserving their resistant "spirit" (*chŏngsin*) even though they could not make any films, this film historian living in the era of postcolonial nation-building draws a lineage of the history of South Korea's national cinema—of course, this "nation" in Yi's era is overdetermined now with decolonization, division, war, and authoritarianism. It was nothing else than "spirit" that Yi highlights in narrating such a poor history. But the very poor legacy, surviving from the tragic past of modern Korea, is reassessed as the force that maintained the Koreanness defined in terms of South Korea's 1960s.

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<sup>80</sup> Yi Yŏng-il, *Han'guk yŏnghwa chŏnsa* [Complete history of Korean cinema], revised edition (Seoul: Sodo, 2004), 210-211.

<sup>81</sup> In Yi's story, such filmmakers include Chŏn Ch'ang-gŭn who simply left the industry, Yi Ku-yŏng who started a theater troupe instead, Yi Kyu-hwan who moved to Manchuria only to work at construction sites, and Yun Pong-chun who secluded himself in a countryside and tutored Korean. However, Yi's postcolonial history depended much on oral testimonies by the very filmmakers he considered resistant, as well as Yi's own nationalist frame of history. Later, scholars have discovered their hidden trajectories of collaboration by positioning them in the context of making Japan's war propaganda, instead of considering them as heroic defectors.

At a glance, Im Hwa's claim seems to resonate with Yi's postcolonial evaluation. Both emphasize the artistic and creative spirit that made Korean cinema different. However, unlike Yi Yŏng-il, whose story has been saturated with the imperative of South Korean nation-building—an isomorphism of Japan's empire-building—Im Hwa's "spirit" neither eulogized the vocation of cinematic artists, nor called for engaging in war against imperialism. As I discussed regarding his notion of transplanted culture, Im Hwa was interested in a very specific development of modernity, more than articulating any nationalist genealogy of Korean culture. Rather than originating in the imperatives of resistance, the "spirit" of Korean filmmakers was rather rooted in their experiences, including failure and frustration as well as their efforts to communicate with their audiences. As noted in Chapter 4, at the heart of Im Hwa's understanding of the cinematic medium lay its capacity for intuitive visual communication with its viewers. For him cinema would develop through expanded networks not due to the essentially political commitment of its producers, but by the way in which it connected people to generate a new public. In other words, cinema is important since it grows as a singular manifestation of people by representing their visceral experiences of reality.

Such a view can be identified in Im Hwa's reevaluation of Na Un-gyu's films, about which he once was critical in the late 1920s. In particular, Im names Na's 1926 film *Arirang* as a "monument for Korean cinema's silent era."<sup>82</sup> Considering that his films were among the critical targets of KAPF-affiliated critics during the late 1920s, this is an obvious change from his past view of Na Un-gyu.<sup>83</sup> I would like to note, however, that earlier debates about Korean cinema evolved around different ideas of the newly emerging public—as film audiences on the one

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<sup>82</sup> "A Little History," 201.

<sup>83</sup> See Chapter 1.

hand, and potentially revolutionary publics on the other. In this regard, Im Hwa's reassessment of *Arirang* would be less a change of opinion than a logical conclusion drawn from his consistent interest in the relationship between cinema and the masses. If that relationship was evaluated as to the 1920s Korean films' lacking capacity to organize a proletarian mass, Im Hwa in 1941 was asking a question that he did not raise a decade ago: What made *Arirang* a Korean phenomenon? Im Hwa writes in retrospect,

This film grasped, though plainly, a series of emotions, ideas, and lives that are singular to Korean people. It expressed the atmosphere that surrounded its own era, as well as Korean people's pathos as the film's basis.<sup>84</sup>

The power of *Arirang*, and the Korean cinema that it represents, lay in its potential dialogue with experiences shared among Koreans. By devoting itself to the "emotion, ideas, and lives that are singular to Korean people," a cinema becomes truly Korean regardless of its country of origin or the nationality of its producers. Such a view of "national cinema" resonates with Paul Willemen's theorization of "the national" which he defines as "mode of address."<sup>85</sup> As a cinematic mode that interpellates a collective audience under a shared sense of belonging, "national cinema" should address the issues that are singular to that community. Of course, it is a category that is oftentimes conflated with nationalist cinema. According to Willemen, however, *nationalist* cinema develops a confrontational, yet sometimes collaborative, conversation with the international challenges like Hollywood cinema, or in the case of colonial cinema, the empire's cinema; on the other hand, what he defines as *national* cinema rather seeks to bring forward the shared experiences of the community to initiate conversations between cinema and

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<sup>84</sup> "A Little History," 201.

<sup>85</sup> Paul Willemen, "The National Revisited," in Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen, eds., *Theorising National Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2008), 29-43.

its audiences. And such a cinema “which seeks to engage with the questions of national specificity from a critical, non- or counter-hegemonic position is by definition a minority and a poor cinema, dependent on the existence of a larger multinational or nationalised industrial sector.”<sup>86</sup> In this sense, Im Hwa’s Korean cinema, the cinema that he envisioned as the one engaging with the singular experiences of Koreans, differs from the lineage of Korean cinema’s resistant spirit that is said to have stood against the international politics of Japanese imperialism. And more importantly, it refuses to become part of the transnational movement initiated by the Japanese empire. Korean cinema in Im Hwa’s vision urged filmmakers to make efforts to join Korean people in their dialogues by creating a space mediated by screens to remind them of the visceral reality that they shared.

Im Hwa’s call for a cinema to come, while theorized in terms of colonial Korean contexts, addresses a more universal experience of colonial reality and cinematic companions in global colonialism. Of course, Im’s theory of colonial culture begins with the acknowledgement of the skewed relations of exchange between the West and the East, and Japan and Korea; in culturally underdeveloped countries like Korea, the formation of modernity is often a transplantation of what is considered culturally superior. However, Im does not reaffirm this cultural hierarchy in his theory of transplanted culture. In his *History of New Literature in Korea*, Im allocates a passage, seemingly longer than necessary, to describing the formation of transplanted modernity in other countries like China, Japan, and even other native communities in the “Orient” (*tongyang*) and the Pacific. He offers “a comparative colonial history informed by the general path taken by the non-Western society”<sup>87</sup> in order to show how the seemingly

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>87</sup> Hwang Ho-dök, “Iron tisk’ auntü Asia esö iron hagi” [Discounting theory: Doing theory in Asia], *Munhak kwa sahoe* 30, no. 3 (August 2017), 159.



unique development of Korean modernity was actually universal in terms of the shared paths taken by colonized nations. In other words, modernity is universal, but not in and by itself; as Hwang Ho-dök has argued, “modernity for Im Hwa was the universality of transplantation.”<sup>88</sup> Rather than reaffirming the cultural superiority and victory of the hegemons in the fraught era of imperialism, his theory of colonial modernity brought to the fore the universality of the colonial experience, namely the visceral reality of lagging development that constantly reminds the colonized of the impossibility of autonomous modernization. Rather than the glamor of modern culture and its technological advances, modernity finds its universality in these delayed temporalities experienced in colonized cultures.

Turning colonial cinema’s particularity into universality, Im Hwa theorizes a way to invert the logic embedded in history into one full of success. It is in the history of failure where he finds all the lacking conditions to have facilitated freedom for Korean cinema; where Korean cinema’s said inferiority would be rendered into its own artistic singularity. This logic of inversion challenges our notions of Korean cinema—by extension, national cinema as a poor cinema—and compels us to inquire into its futures past. For us, this process of historicization renews our understanding of what has not been realized in terms of what would have been its singular potentialities.

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

## CONCLUSION

### Colonial Cinema's Past Lives, Archives of the Indeterminate Futures

In Seoul on May 24, 1945, audiences gathered at the Meijiza Theater to see *Love and Vow*, which would be the last Korean film produced under Japanese colonial rule. Perhaps appropriately, the film presented a mature form of film propaganda, unfolding the story of a Korean boy who challenges his fate as an orphan by advancing to the war front as a respectable soldier. In the film, this orphaned boy's successful coming of age becomes possible, as we have seen with other films in Chapter 5, through the love and care of his foster parents as well as his sense of imaginary brotherhood with a deceased Korean kamikaze soldier. All of these elements, which narrated the family state of the Japanese empire, created a form of colonial *bildungsroman*, in which the immature colonized would eventually grow up as fulfilled citizens under tutelage of mature and civilized colonizers.

Not only did this paternalist colonialism operate on a metaphoric level in the narrative, it was also clearly pronounced in the mode of production of *Love and Vow*. The film's opening credits—often considered a mere attachment to more noteworthy film contents—allude to a harmonious collaboration between colonizers and colonized before taking the audience to the journey through the orphaned Korean boy's story. The first thing we know from the opening credits of *Love and Vow* is that the film passed the censorship screening by the Navy Ministry

(*Kaigunshō*), which also provided support for the film production along with the Government-General of Korea. (Figures 7.1-7.3) The film production was also “guided” (*shidō*) by the Imperial General Headquarters (*Daihon’ei*), which coordinated military efforts between the Imperial Army and the Imperial Navy during wartime. (Figure 7.4) Of course, this series of title cards shows the unabashedly propagandistic efforts put into the production of *Love and Vow*, while we should also remember that this institutional support from colonial and imperial establishments materialized the dream of Korean filmmakers—and Japanese colonial administrators—to reorganize Korean cinema under more stable industrial conditions. As we have seen in Chapter 3, this was a dream they achieved through contestations and negotiation with the futility of Korean cinema, while constantly calling for cinema created in the colony to receive the attention it deserved. Just as the growing up of the boy in the film was confirmed through his foster father’s recognition, the production of a Korean war film was finally admitted by the Japanese empire.

Next in the opening credits, we see the emblems of the two companies that were actually involved in the process of film production—Tōhō Company and the Korea Film Company.<sup>1</sup> (Figure 7.5) This shows that the national support for the production of *Love and Vow* led to a practical collaboration between film companies in Japan and colonial Korea. In the title, two rings intersect with one another. On the left is the famous logo of Tōhō Company, the one the company still uses today. On the right is that of the Korea Film Company, which like Tōhō’s emblem has the company’s name inside a circle, yet one more ornamented, with thorns around the ring. The text behind the rings specifies the role of each company: the Korea Film Company

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<sup>1</sup> The Korea Film Company (K. Chosŏn Yŏnghwasa; J. Chōsen Eigasha) was established in 1944 by consolidating the Korea Film Production Company and the Korea Film Distribution Agency.

*produced* (*seisaku*) this film, and Tōhō *sponsored* (*ōen*) the production. However, Tōhō's role was more than that of a sponsor. Along with Ch'oe In-gyu, the Korean director, the film was co-directed by Tōhō's veteran filmmaker Imai Tadashi, who had previously directed another Korean film, *Suicide Squad at the Watchtower* (*Bōrō no kesshitai*, 1943). Yagi Ryūichiro, a Tōhō writer famous for a colonial film in the Philippines, *Dawn of Freedom* (*Ano hata o ute*, dir. Abe Yutaka and Gerardo de León, 1944), wrote the script for *Love and Vow*. In addition, Tōhō's actors and actresses, such as Takada Minoru, Takehisa Chieko, and Shimura Takashi, appeared in the film in supporting roles. Although not clarified in the scarce historical resources, one can also assume that the scenes of flying aircraft may have been crafted by Tōhō's special cinematography team led by Tsuburaya Eiji, the creator of *Godzilla*. With this high-level support, Tōhō was another producer of the film, rather than just a distant cheerleader for a colonial film production. Given this, the image of two logos represents the harmonious collaboration successfully programmed between two film companies across the Strait of Korea, through which the younger film company in the Korean Peninsula has managed to produce films under the tutelage of the more mature film company on the empire's home island. Behind the typographic feature on a single slide lay the desires and aspirations of most Korean filmmakers that I have discussed thus far in this dissertation—for the transformation of the feeble industry into a mature and healthy cinema. The addition of the ornament to the Korean ring may represent a similar dream for their cinema to bloom.

However, those who created this image of the productive collaboration, like the audiences in the Meijiza Theater in 1945, might have not known that the paternal relationship between Korea and Japan would be broken as soon as Japan declared its defeat in August 1945. Broken too would be the two emblems that had overlapped one another. Like these broken ties,

the promise of the harmonious multiethnic empire would be separated into multiple promises of postcolonial nation-states in East Asia. The layer of Tōhō's emblem was repatriated to Japan, as all the Japanese had to leave Korea after their country's defeat, while the Korean company's layer remained on the peninsula now occupied by the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK, hereafter).

The fates of the two companies diverged accordingly. After Japan's defeat, Tōhō retained its name as well as the famous emblem. Despite upheavals such as the film workers' strikes between 1946 and 1948,<sup>2</sup> the company has continued to thrive as one of the powerhouses of Japan's film industry to this day. Such was not the case for the Korea Film Company. Under the USAMGIK, everything owned by the Japanese—from state property to private property such as film theaters—was claimed as “enemy property” (*chōksan*).<sup>3</sup> This included the facilities and equipment of the Korea Film Company, together with its name—either Chosŏn Yŏnghwasa in Korean or Chōsen Eigasha in Japanese—that now turned into the name of an enemy property. Unlike the Japanese company Tōhō, the Korea Film Company's legacies, along with its name and logo, were now to be expunged in the new regime in the Korean Peninsula after liberation.

The historical discontinuity before and after 1945 can be found everywhere in the so-called “liberation space” (*haebang konggan*). Following the USAMGIK's designation of Japanese-owned properties as “enemy property,” film theaters run by the Japanese in the recent past were assigned Korean managers. Then film theaters, all of which had been closed on August

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<sup>2</sup> Kyoko Hirano, *Mr. Smith Goes to Tokyo: The Japanese Cinema Under the American Occupation, 1945-1952* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institute, 1992). See especially Chapter 6.

<sup>3</sup> The USAMGIK assessed the entire property of the Korea Film Company, which included the film and recording studios in the Namdaemun area, two barracks for equipment in downtown Seoul, and two company housing facilities, as worth \$238,000.

15, resumed their business about ten days later.<sup>4</sup> As the Governor-General of Korea was officially dismissed on September 12, films from the US and the Soviet Union that had long been banned were brought back to these theaters, although it was mostly Korean vaudeville shows and musical performances that covered for the generally lacking supply of film programs during the early times. Audiences had to wait until the fall of 1946 to see first feature-length films produced in liberated Korea—*The Adventure of Ttolttori* (*Ttolttori ūi mohōm*, dir. Yi Kyu-hwan) and *Hooray for Freedom* (*Chayu manse*, dir. Ch'oe In-gyu). But in the meantime, Korean filmmakers managed to provide a series of news films entitled *Liberty News* (*Haebang nyusŭ*, 1945-46) by utilizing the Korea Film Company's remaining film stocks and equipment.<sup>5</sup> Film director Yi Pyōng-il proudly remembered the production of this series of news films for the decolonized public as follows:

On August 16, we broke into the warehouse of the Korea Film Company to take out the cameras and started shooting our *Liberty News*. We recorded all the news including the rallies and marches in the Sōdaemun Prison, the Seoul Station Plaza, the streets of Chongno, as well as the school field at the Hwimun High School. That was the first time I felt being a filmmaker to be rewarding.<sup>6</sup>

Yi's recollection vividly illustrates how quickly Koreans' enthusiasm for "liberation" replaced the fervor for the empire's colonial wars. Yi Pyōng-il and his colleagues might have been so thrilled as to take the enemy-property camera to film the newly emerging public all

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<sup>4</sup> "Yōnghwa yōn'gŭk orak tūng 25 il put'ō chaegae" [Film, theater, entertainment facilities to resume on the 25th], *Maeil sinbo* (August 24, 1945), 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Liberty News* was also exported to Japan and the US for overseas Korean audiences. For the diaspora Korean spectatorship of Korean news films, see Kim Han-sang, "T'alsingmin kukka hyōngsōnggi chaeoe Chosōnindŭl ūi chongjok sangsang" [Self-imagined ethnicity of the Korean diaspora during the postcolonial state formation], *Asea yōn'gu* 59, no. 3 (2015), 206-239.

<sup>6</sup> Yi Pyōng-il, "Na ūi yōnghwa pyōllyōk" [My itinerancy of filmmaking], *Yōnghwa* (October/November 1977); cited from Han Sang-ōn, *Haebang konggan ūi yōnghwa yōnghwain* [Films and filmmakers in the liberation space] (Seoul: Iron kwa Silch'ōn, 2013), 22.

across the liberated country.<sup>7</sup> These filmmakers organized the Headquarters for the Construction of Korean Cinema (Chosŏn yŏnghwa kŏnsŏl ponbu; hereafter, “HCKC”) between August and September in 1945.<sup>8</sup> One of their missions was to produce the *Liberty News* series, the first episode of which was shown on October 21 at the Kyŏngsŏng, Naniwakan, and Meijiza Theaters. Distributed widely around the Korean Peninsula, *Liberty News* was also released in Japan and the US for Korean audiences there, creating diverse senses of Korean ethnicity during the period of postcolonial state formation.<sup>9</sup>

However, what Yi Pyŏng-il’s statement about seizing the “enemy property” to reappropriate it for the greater cause of Korean independence does not tell us is that the facilities which he and his fellow filmmakers broke into on August 16, 1945, had in fact been their workplace until the day before. During its early phase, the HCKC was led by film producer Yi Chae-myŏng, who was the head of the former Korea Film Company’s Cinematography Department. Yi Pyŏng-il himself was employed as a film director in the company. As film historian Han Sang-ŏn notes, these filmmakers did not even have to trespass to access the prohibited area of the company’s storage: Before returning to Japan, the Japanese executives had offered the Korean employees severance pay and transferred the management authority along

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<sup>7</sup> “Nyusŭ yŏnghwadae kakchi e p’agyŏn” [News film crew dispatched all over the country], *Maeil sinbo* (September 2, 1945), 1.

<sup>8</sup> The exact date of its establishment is still in question due to conflicting testimonies. This goes beyond the scope of this dissertation’s conclusion, but I would like to note some of the key arguments regarding the issue. According to Yi Hyo-in’s early study, the HCKC was established on August 19, 1945. This has been the most widely accepted conjecture based on Sŏ Kwang-je’s 1947 note in the almanac. Still, Han Sang-ŏn argues that the HCKC was not yet organized until late August, as one of its key members, O Yŏng-jin, was not even in Seoul by then. Interrogating multiple resources that testify on the process of organizing the HCKC, Han concludes with the date of September 24, 1945. However, this interestingly contradicts Han’s earlier suggestion about the early phase of the HCKC chaired by Yi Chae-myŏng on September 1, 1945—the date backed by his finding from the daily *Maeil sinbo*. See Yi Hyo-in, “Haebang chikhu minjok yŏnghwa undong yŏn’gu” [National film movement after liberation], *Haebang chŏnhusa ūi chae’insik*, vol. 4 (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1989), 466; Han Sang-ŏn, *Films and Filmmakers in the Liberation Space*, 44-47.

<sup>9</sup> Kim Han-sang, “Self-Imagined Ethnicity of the Korean Diaspora during the Postcolonial State Formation.”

with 100,000 *yen* as temporary operating costs.<sup>10</sup> In September 1945, the Korea Film Company's property fell under the control of the USAMGIK, but the military government soon endowed the HCKC with special rights for filmmaking using the former colonial state company's resources.<sup>11</sup>

The dark past of Korea's film world cast a deeper shadow over the new management of enemy-property film theaters. The USAMGIK assigned the enemy-property theaters to Korean businesspeople such as Yi Ch'ang-yong and Hong Ch'an. Yi Ch'ang-yong was a veteran film producer, and as noted in the previous chapters, his contribution during the late colonial period played a crucial role in establishing two government-sponsored film corporations. Hong Ch'an had also worked in the Korea Film Production Company as a production manager; in the liberation space, as the manager of the Wakakusa Theater—later renamed the Sudo Theater—he became the chief director of the Seoul Theaters Association (Hansŏng Kukchang Hyŏphoe) in December 1945. Keen on political affairs, Hong maintained a close connection with the right-wing politicians supporting Syngman Rhee's regime, which enabled him to grow as a theater mogul during the 1950s and 1960s.

Their theaters, which were put under the USAMGIK's direct control, were the constant source of the disputes regarding Japanese colonial legacies. For example, during the brief period of the vacuum in film programs, before new American films were imported starting in April 1946, film theaters had to rely on their inventory of films from the colonial era, which included not only some Japanese films, but also Korean war propaganda films.<sup>12</sup> Among them, the revival

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<sup>10</sup> Han Sang-ŏn, *Films and Filmmakers in the Liberation Space*, 23-30.

<sup>11</sup> "Haebang Chosŏn segiijŏk kirok yŏnghwa Chosŏn Kŏnsŏl Ponbu ch'aksu" [Liberated Korea, centennial documentary film to be made by the Headquarter for Building Korean Cinema], *Maeil sinbo* (September 2, 1945), 2.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that foreign films shown in 1945 since August were mostly those produced in the 1930s, that is, the films imported before the colonial government began restricting the release of foreign films in colonial Korea.



of the 1938 film *Military Train* (*Kunyong yŏlcha*) under a different title *Youth under the Sunset* (*Nagyang ūi chŏlmŭnidŭl*) at the Seoul Theater was so scandalous that the daily *Sŏul sinmun* spared a large portion of its pages to deliver the voices of outraged people, who assailed such programming as a despicable act of profiteering.<sup>13</sup> But who was responsible for this return of the “shameful past”? Those who would be immediately accused were film distributors, who were seen as “profiteers in the culture industry (*munhwa moribae*) who betray[ed] the entire nation to seek immediate gains.” The HCKC had taken charge of the former Korea Film Company’s vault, which must have contained some of the colonial-era Korean films, but its interim chief of the exhibition and distribution section, Sŏng Tong-ho, shifted the blame to the individual exhibitor’s self-interest, in which, according to him, the HCKC was not involved. Sŏng alleged that those films were taken from the theaters’ own garages and that it was the theater managers’ duty to get rid of the “shameful films.” However, the problem did not occur simply because of individual acts of profiteering. Leftist film activist Ch’u Min also held the USAMGIK accountable for the film having passed muster. He argued, “The American military authorities have relied on some opinions from certain people, while almost neglecting the consensus of film people, when implementing film policies.”<sup>14</sup> For Im Hwa, on the other hand, the USAMGIK’s film policies should not repeat “the bureaucratic suppression under Japanese rule by revamping censorship.”<sup>15</sup>

Despite Im Hwa’s wish for “democratic self-governance” in the Korean film world, the USAMGIK’s film policies largely reiterated those of the Government-General of Korea. The military government started with censorship. On April 12, 1946, the USAMGIK announced

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<sup>13</sup> “Ilche ūi kukch’aek yŏnghwa kiman sangyŏng ūro mori” [Theaters profiteering by showing national policy film during colonial period], *Sŏul sinmun* (March 4, 1946), 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

Ordinance No. 68, entitled “Control of Motion Pictures.” While this ordinance announced the repeal of the colonial government’s provisions about film censorship, it did not necessarily abolish the “inspection and control of motion picture films” itself.<sup>16</sup> What the ordinance stipulated was largely about the change of the concerned office from the Department of Police to the Department of Public Information (or Kongbobu; hereafter, “DPI”), rather than aiming for any fundamental change in the application of preexisting censorship rules. In other words, Ordinance No. 68 virtually retained the colonial order that it purported to eliminate. For Koreans, the ordinance was considered rather worse due to the DPI’s requirement to attach English translations of all the submitted material in writing. As a newspaper article pointed out around that time, “In Korea, where English has not been widely disseminated, this would bring about a heavy burden of administrative work [in the film companies and theaters], which will then cause the rebuilding of impoverished Korean cinema immense inconvenience.”<sup>17</sup> As Hwajin Lee (Yi Hwa-jin) has put it, “Just as censorship was one of the most symbolic forms of colonial cultural oppression during the Japanese Occupation, Ordinance No. 68 was yet another systematized vestige of colonial oppression in liberated Korea.”<sup>18</sup>

Later in October, the USAMGIK promulgated another ordinance.<sup>19</sup> This time, the ordinance revoked the colonial government’s 1940 Ordinance of Korean Cinema, providing that “this ordinance is not intended and shall not be construed to reenact any laws, orders, ordinances,

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<sup>16</sup> Office of the Military Governor, “The Ordinance Number 68 Control of Motion Pictures,” *Official Gazette* (April 12, 1946), unpaginated.

<sup>17</sup> “9 kükchang hyugwan sangtae chaego yŏnghwa ūi kŏmyŏl munje ro” [The closure of 9 film theaters due to film censorship], *Sŏul sinmun* (May 5, 1946), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Yi Hwa-jin (Hwajin Lee), “Liberator or Intimate Enemy: On South Korean Cultural Circles’ Ambivalence toward Hollywood,” *Review of Korean Studies* 18, no. 1 (2015), 52.

<sup>19</sup> Office of the Military Governor, “The Ordinance Number 115 Licensing of Films,” *Official Gazette* (October 8, 1946), unpaginated.

regulations, directives, instructions or measures repealed by any of the provisions of laws or measures herein repealed.” However, as its title, “Licensing of Films,” suggests, what lay at the core of this new ordinance was the military government’s measures of control over film-related business in Korea. Anyone who would produce, distribute, or exhibit films in Korea was required to get the DPI’s approval on the basis of individual films involved in her business, and any films “unlawfully distributed or exhibited shall be seized and confiscated,” according to the ordinance. The effect of this film policy was thus brought into doubt: “Although the Ordinance of Korean Cinema, the legal tool for imperialist propaganda during Japanese rule, was repealed, [the new ordinance] is practically film censorship. More than anything, it doesn’t have any provision about the import of foreign films, nor any policy about the support for Korean film production—both of which have been of our [Koreans’] interest.”<sup>20</sup> Filmmakers in the Korea Film League (Chosŏn Yŏnghwa Tongmaeng)—a unified front between the HQKC and the leftist Korea Proletarian Film League (Chosŏn Puroletaria Yŏnghwa Tongmaeng)—demanded that the USAMGIK revoke the licensing policy, arguing that its ambiguous provisions about the standards for approval and licensing would bring about “general decline, or at least impediment to the construction of Korean cinema.”<sup>21</sup> In order to respond to this, Major General Archer L. Lerch, under whose name the ordinance was announced, held a press conference to explain that the ordinance’s prime purpose was to remove the undemocratic policies enacted during Japanese rule.<sup>22</sup> Lerch mentioned that the military government might consider a revision of the ordinance if necessary, which, however, turned out to be a tokenistic gesture to assuage Koreans’

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<sup>20</sup> “Yŏnghwa ūi hŏgaje silsi” [Licensing of films enacted], *Tongnip sinbo* (October 19, 1946), 2.

<sup>21</sup> “Yŏnghwa hŏgaje ch’ŏlp’ye yomang” [Demands for the repeal of licensing of films], *Tongnip sinbo* (October 20, 1946), 2.

<sup>22</sup> “Yŏnghwapŏp kwa kŭkchang munje ro Rŏ changkwan kwa kijadan hoegyŏn” [Major General Lerch’s press conference about film law and theater problems], *Tongnip sinbo* (October 30, 1946), 2.

resistance: What followed until 1948, when the Republic of Korea was established, was a series of crackdowns on leftists, who were relatively more vocal about the repeal of censorship.

Certainly, the USAMGIK seemed to have more interest in controlling film screenings than in assisting the development of Korean film production. Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim argue that this was in part due to the short period of US occupation of South Korea, which did not give the US much time for designing and actually implementing any policies.<sup>23</sup> However, compared to the US's highly strategized policies in Japan, the film policies in Korea were more based on a lack of understanding of Korea's specific film culture. Hwajin Lee identifies from the film policies of the US military regime, which were heavily attuned to the exhibition business, a "dualism" of neglecting the development of the Korean film industry and promoting a monopoly of Hollywood films in the occupied territory. On the one hand, the general lack of cultural policy shows, as historian Charles K. Armstrong has argued, the USAMGIK's apathy towards Korean culture—it basically treated Korea simply as part of the former Japanese empire, and thus the defeated nation, rather than a formerly colonized country that had a distinct culture and industry.<sup>24</sup> For example, the Central Motion Picture Exchange (CMPE hereafter)—a distribution agency established by Hollywood film studios in order to distribute their films in the territories

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<sup>23</sup> Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, *Korea's Occupied Cinemas, 1893-1948: The Untold History of the Film Industry* (London: Routledge, 2012), 148.

<sup>24</sup> Charles K. Armstrong, "The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945-1950," *Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 1 (February 2003), 74. Armstrong also tells us the interesting story of Ely Haimowitz, a low-ranking official in the USAMGIK Department of Education, who dedicated himself to helping Korean musicians organize orchestras and music teaching institutions. "Along the way," Armstrong writes, "Haimowitz encountered numerous frustrations and obstacles, not the least of which was the arrogant philistinism of the U.S. occupation forces that was exacerbated by official occupation policy, which discouraged fraternization, forbade Koreans from performing in the 'American' theater (which had been the best theater in Seoul before liberation), and did not allow Koreans to be entertained in American billet." This led to the alienation of Korean intellectuals and artists who, out of their disillusionment about the US occupation, eventually defected to the jurisdiction north of the 38th parallel. For example, as Haimowitz recounted, Ch'oe Sŭng-hŭi, one of the most highly acclaimed modern dancers, was seeking help from the USAMGIK in establishing her own dance school, but with no response, she went to the Soviet zone a few weeks later. See in particular page 77.

occupied by the Allied Powers—showed many American films with Japanese subtitles while not bothering with translating them into Korean.<sup>25</sup> This not only “offended the policy of the educational authorities,” which were putting much effort into promoting the Korean language, but was also “a plain exhibit of the indifference of the CMPE toward the cultural background of South Korea, as well as South Korea’s situation that still connected it to the former imperial Japan through the allied occupation.”<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, the American military occupation helped the CMPE have a monopoly on film exhibition in South Korea. The aforementioned ordinance’s lack of clarity on the standards for censorship brought about a doubt as to whether American films distributed through the CMPE were under looser censorship; not only that, the CMPE, the sole distributor of American films, practically wielded power enough to control the film theaters in South Korea. In December 1946, for example, the CMPE required two weeks as a minimum screening period for its film *Madame Curie* (dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 1943), an unusually long run to request in the film theaters in Korea thus far.<sup>27</sup> Intellectuals immediately resisted the demand, stating that “the long run of American films is not only a suicidal act of our home country’s theaters, but also America’s colonial policy.”<sup>28</sup> The theaters also refused to accept the request, since the minimum two-week screening of an American film would limit their freedom in the programming of other

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<sup>25</sup> The CMPE was established as the distributor of nine major American film companies in the occupied territories. It was an outpost for the Supreme Commander of the Allied Power; but with the deep involvement of the legal cartel, the Motion Picture Exchange Association, it also functioned as representing the American film industry’s interests in the occupied zones. Its business in East Asia began in Tokyo in February 1945, then in Seoul in April. In this chapter, the “CMPE” refers to the Korea branch of the CMPE, which Koreans called at that time “Chungbae,” an acronym of Chungang Yŏnghwa Paegŭpso. See Hiroshi Kitamura, *Screening Enlightenment: Hollywood and the Cultural Reconstruction of Defeated Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Yi, “Liberator or Intimate Enemy,” 58.

<sup>27</sup> “Miguk yŏnghwa 2 chu sangyŏng munje ro sinae ilgŭp pongjŏlgwan iltae sŏnpung” [Scandals in downtown film theaters due to the 2-week minimum requirement of American films], *Tongnip sinbo* (December 4, 1946), 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

shows such as Korean films, theaters, and musical performances.<sup>29</sup> The USAMGIK announced that the theaters had the right to accept or refuse the CMPE's request, since "the CMPE was a private establishment, not the military government's agency."<sup>30</sup> But during the era when "South Korea had not officially commenced commercial relations with other countries," as Hwajin Lee suggests, "the 'temporary expedient' through 'supervision of the military government,'" which was applied only to the CMPE, clearly evinced the USAMGIK's support for its monopoly.<sup>31</sup>

In this circumstance, the artistic quality of Hollywood films imported through the CMPE also came into question, since rather than promoting the new values of democracy as it purported, those films were geared toward "cheap" amusement, having a penchant for "magic, gambling, advertisement, nonsense, and eroticism," all of which merely created the "time of illusionment."<sup>32</sup> This equation of Americanism, Hollywood cinema, and cheap entertainment, while having a long history beginning in the 1920s leftist discourse that I have discussed in Chapter 1, led to the vilification of American cinema as a whole, to the extent that the CMPE was defined as a "monster" (*yogoe*).<sup>33</sup> What was considered worse was Hollywood's domination of Korean screens; while fewer than 100 foreign films—including both American and European films—had been imported during the last decade of the colonial period, more than 400 American films were released in Korean theaters in the three years from 1945. This evoked concern about

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<sup>29</sup> "Kukto kŭkchang esŏdo changgi sangyŏng ūl kŏbu" [Kukto Theater refusing long run], *Tongnip sinbo* (December 8, 1946), 2.

<sup>30</sup> "2 chu sangyŏng munje sangsŏlgwan ch'ŭk chayu da" [Two-week screening depends on theaters' free decision], *Kyŏnghyang sinmun* (December 20, 1946), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Yi, "Liberator or Intimate Enemy," 50.

<sup>32</sup> Yi T'ae-u, "Miguk yŏnghwa rŭl ottŏke pol kŏsin'ga" [Views towards American films], *Kyŏnghyang sinmun* (October 31, 1946), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Ch'ae Chŏng-gŭn, "Amerika yŏnghwa chapkam" [Miscellanea on American films], *Sinch'ŏnji* (January 1948), 140.

the development of Korean cinema. Some would repeat the old song about the feebleness of Korean industry. “The reality is,” as one reporter wrote in 1948, “that more than 20 film production companies, which sprang up everywhere, go bankrupt after releasing one film.”<sup>34</sup> Korean cinema’s “moribund state” was considered to be due to the “importing [of American films] without pondering over our country’s actual situation and autonomy to be achieved.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, Korean cultural intellectuals, along with theater managers, requested the military government to limit the imports of foreign films. On the one hand, this reminds us of the colonial government’s implementation of a screen quota law in 1934. On the other, they began discussing how to achieve “an enlightening art based on our country’s tradition and customs,” which again revived the discussion about Koreanness from the 1930s.<sup>36</sup> As film scholar Han Yǒng-hyǒn has argued, the critique of American cinema was suggested as “a method to seek out a way to defend Korean cinema from American films’ monopoly when [filmmakers] did not have ‘capital’ and ‘technology’” to articulate the notion of “national film art” (*minjok yǒnghwa yesul*).<sup>37</sup>

The project of rebuilding Korean cinema then revolved around the issue of the so-called “nationalization of cinema” (*yǒnghwa kugyǒnghwaron*), which could be understood as a reiteration of the colonial discourse about “corporatization.” In support of the nationalization of cinema, Ch’u Min, the leftist leader of the film movement in liberated Korea, wrote as such:

During Japan’s past rule of Korea, cinema was the most defamed and repressed among other cultural areas. Moreover, [the colonial government] took advantage of cinema’s

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<sup>34</sup> “Kuksan yǒnghwa ūi wigi” [Crisis for domestic films], *Sǒul sinmun* (April 23, 1948), 4.

<sup>35</sup> “Kuksan ūl yuksǒnghal kil ūl ch’atcha” [To find ways to promote domestic films], *Sǒul sinmun* (October 17, 1948), 4.

<sup>36</sup> “Kuksan yǒnghwa ūi wigi” [Crisis for domestic films], *Sǒul sinmun* (April 23, 1948), 4.

<sup>37</sup> Han Yǒng-hyǒn, “Haebanggi Amerika yǒnghwaron kwa t’alsingmin munhwa kihoeok” [Discourses on American films and the postcolonial cultural project during the liberation period], *Taejung sǒsa yǒn’gu* 19, no. 2 (December 2013), 592.

weakness that disenabled it to be an independent corporation, by controlling it in the disguise of government support. This eventually caused cultural or economic damage [to Korean cinema]. Cinema, by nature, requires enormous capital. Its productivity becomes healthy only on the basis of the industrial structure as well as scientific research [of its technology]. These [problems] have to be resolved at the level of the nation-state.<sup>38</sup>

As Theodore Hughes has pointed out, “The early attempts to articulate a new postcolonial present and future entailed a ‘return’ to the past and the colonial-period literary debates shut down by the Government-General in the mid-1930s.”<sup>39</sup> First, with the return of the leftist activists, anti-Americanism thrived in the discursive sphere as a key to establishing new Korean cinema. Second, the understanding of Korean cinema’s feeble industrial structure came under scrutiny again as an acknowledgment of the given reality. And last but not least, the discourse of corporatization has reiterated in the form of the nationalization of cinema a way to overcome such feebleness of Korean cinema. While Koreans must have wished for a “new life” (*sinsaeng*)—a discontinuity—in their building of the postcolonial nation-state, it was also true that “[t]here was no fresh start or blank slate in 1945, only a reorganizing of the cultural field, a reworking of ideas and representations, ways of thinking, writing, and seeing that had emerged in the first half of the 20th century.”<sup>40</sup>

In this sense, the prefix “post-” for “postcolonial” may rather signal, at least in the Korean contexts, another prefix, “re-” —return, resuscitation, and reiteration of colonial cultural constructions. The way in which Korean cinema was articulated during the colonial period has lingered in the peninsula even after the dissolution of the multiethnic empire, whose harmonious co-prosperity was pronounced in the above-mentioned opening credits of *Love and Vow*. Just as

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<sup>38</sup> Ch’u Min, “Yŏnghwa chŏngch’aengnon” [On film policies], *Tongnip sinbo* (May 9, 1946), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Theodore Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom’s Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 63.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.



the images were photochemically inscribed onto film materials, the colonial practices of coming to terms with crisis, progress, development, and construction were engraved in the minds of Koreans when they now had to envision a future without a formal empire. In this way, the multiple projects toward Korean cinema during the colonial period constitute the archives for national cinemas in the Korean Peninsula.

As I have discussed in this dissertation, these archives of colonial Korean cinema are full of failed attempts at handling the indeterminate future. Korean cinema, conceived as a feeble industry, yearned for external succor, which the colonial administration offered in the guise of paternalism but in practice under the project of imperialization. The project, however, was manifold because of the multiple agencies involved. While it is easily discerned how obedient the colonized were in following the direction of the empire, the desires toward the empire's cinematic project diverged to create multiple enterprises, as seen in chapters of Part II. Upon becoming conscious of the gaze from the outside, Korean filmmakers began experimenting with how Korean cinema as a local cinema would present a unique cultural identity in the empire. "Local color," as it was then called, was an effort to locate colonial cinema within the coordinates of the empire's cinematic network, although that was criticized, on the one hand, as self-exoticization, and on the other, for being too dismal to present Korean cinema as a vibrant participant in the cheerful world that the empire had to create. However, as some argued at the time, the dismalness of Korean cinema could also develop as Korean cinema's way of engaging with the experience of the colonized. The continuing appearance of feeble figures in Korean films seemed rather to manifest the significance of a cinema that would represent the affective reality of the colonized, while addressing colonial pathos.

Or, the representation of the feeble figure could also be utilized as a strategy to appeal to a broader audience in the Japanese empire, as I have discussed in Chapter 5. The representation of Korean boys infantilized Korean cinema itself, but it was to appeal to the sense of paternalism from the mature people on the empire's home islands. The extent to which the strategy was successful enough to get attention from imperial audiences is questionable; but the bigger problem of the strategy lay in the way in which it took Korean cinema into the homosocial empire, while reducing female subjectivities to the domestic realm behind the battlegrounds.

All this trial and error, however, should not necessarily be considered doomed, as we know of the historical consequences. The febleness of Korean cinema—the very source of all the projects that seemed to eventually lead to wartime collaboration—could also be the source of a different imagination. Im Hwa's call for reconsidering Korean cinema's febleness as an aesthetic singularity, his bold inversion of the history of rubbish films into a history of freedom, for example, tells us that the cultural crisis in the late colonial period does not essentially designate imperialization as its unavoidable fate, but may open up an opportunity to think upon different futures for and despite the colonial world. Indeed, the futures for colonial Korean cinema were indeterminate and fluid. These multiple enterprises of the feeble had lingered in the articulation of Korean cinema well beyond the colonial period. In other words, colonial Korean cinema would become our archives, where we redeem different futures of a cinema that comes to terms with its own vulnerability. Such a caring for its own febleness would not be the self-indulging creation of nationalism, but the preservation of diverse bodies in spite of the monolithic world, which, as in Audre Lorde's aphorism, would be "an act of political warfare."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Life* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1988), 131.

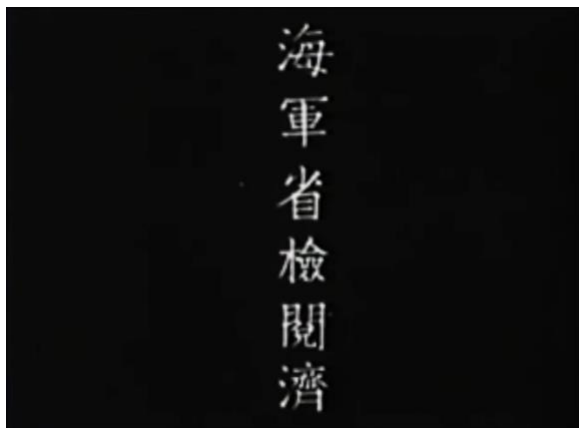


Figure 7.1 Opening credits in Love and Vow

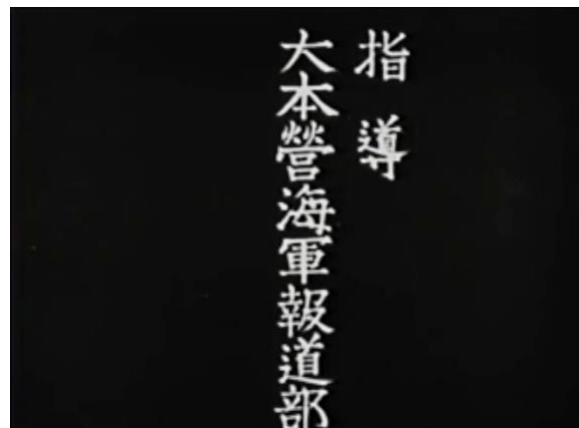


Figure 7.4 Opening credits in Love and Vow

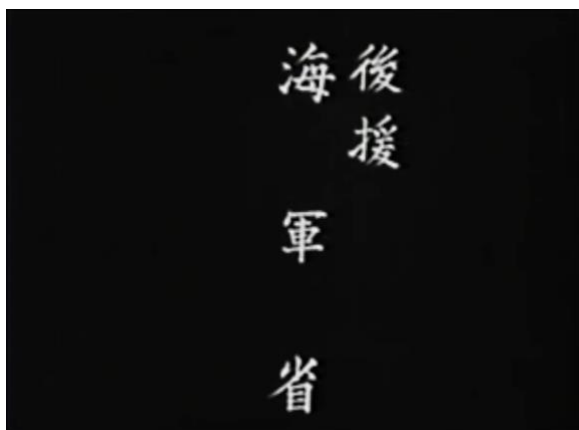


Figure 7.2 Opening credits in Love and Vow

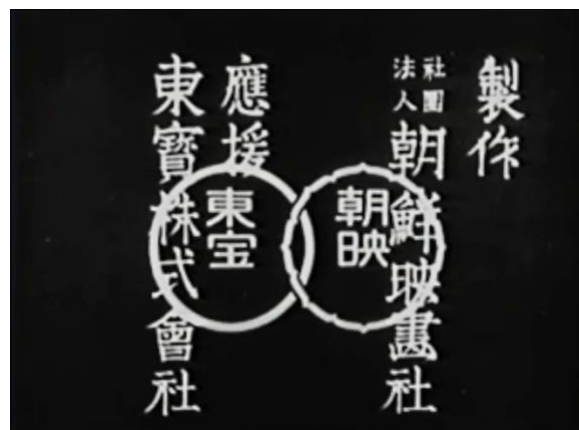


Figure 7.5 Opening credits in Love and Vow

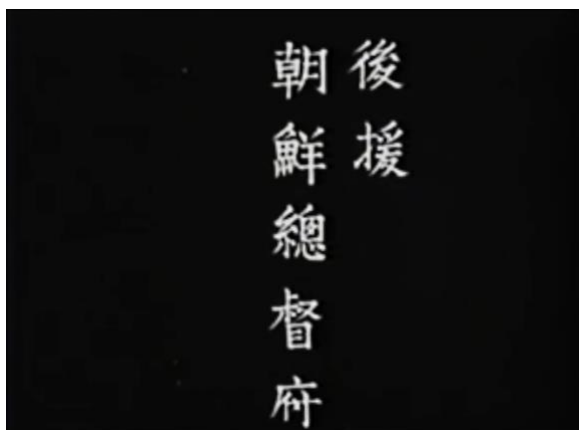


Figure 7.3 Opening credits in Love and Vow

## AFTERWORD

### Takahata Isao and the Unmade Films

Alexander Kluge once said, in a conversation with Klaus Eder. “What hasn’t been filmed criticises what has.”<sup>1</sup> Here, Kluge suggests that only three percent of workers go to the movies. As the industry produces films aimed toward those who do go to the movies, those who don’t will not be taken into the form of films. This creates a vicious cycle: Since they don’t appear in the films, filmmakers have no idea of how to represent them.

This critique by Kluge, or the critique of “what hasn’t been filmed” (*das Unverfilmte*), becomes an important departure for our film history. We, film historians, only talk about films that have been made. But if we could take into account the films that haven’t been made—the imaginary films which remained in the filmmakers’ minds, the phantasmagoric films which didn’t even emerge in the filmmakers’ minds, or the rubbish films actually made but considered virtually unmade—how would the historiography of film change? Are we ready to revise film history according to the spectral existence of “what hasn’t been filmed”?

At the time of finalizing this dissertation, I heard the saddening news of Japanese animation pioneer Takahata Isao’s passing. Upon the news of Takahata’s death, I was reminded

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Kluge and Klaus Eder, “Debate on the Documentary Film: Conversation with Klaus Eder, 1980,” translated by Robert Savage, in *Alexander Kluge: Raw Materials for the Imagination*, edited by Tara Forrest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 199.

of one of his unfilmed projects, entitled *Border 1939: In Search of Myself* (*Kokkyō bōdā 1939: boku o sagashi ni*).<sup>2</sup> It was the story of a Japanese boy named Akio, who was a college student at the Keijō Imperial University in the colonial city of Seoul. One day, Akio becomes surprised to learn that his friend Nobuhiko, who died in an unexpected accident at the Manchuria Military Academy, has actually been alive. Akio travels to Manchuria to look for his friend's trajectory. In the meantime, he gets to know a mysterious girl named Akiko, who has full command of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and English. In fact, Akiko is Mongolian; to Akio's surprise, Nobuhiko, his friend, also turns out to be a descendant of the Mongolian royal family. A Japanese military officer, who thought Nobuhiko's royal pedigree might be useful in the future, had put Nobuhiko up for adoption to a Japanese family in Seoul, colonial Korea. When Nobuhiko learned the secret of his birth, he left for the Manchuria Military Academy, where he became disillusioned with Japanese imperialism and joined in an anti-Japanese resistance. In order to cover up this fact, the Military Academy disguised Nobuhiko's defection as his accidental death—this was why Akio had believed his friend Nobuhiko had passed away. Now, Akio is with two Mongolian anti-Japanese fighters, Nobuhiko and Akiko, and helps the anti-Japanese struggle despite his identity crisis as a Japanese person. The three traverse the Asian continent, breaking through Japanese surveillance.

Takahata's *Border* was not made into a film. Coincidentally, he submitted the film proposal on April 17, 1989—just a year after the release of his acclaimed film *Grave of the Fireflies* (*Hotaru no haka*, 1988), which narrated a tragic story of children in defeated Japan. Over that year, *Grave of the Fireflies* had enjoyed success; yet Takahata himself was critical

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<sup>2</sup> Takahata Isao, "Kokkyō 1939 boku o sagasini" [Border 1939: In search for myself], *Eiga o tsukuri nagara kangaeta koto* [What I considered when making films] (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 1991), 456-459.

about his own film. Departing from the critics' praise, he never considered *Grave of the Fireflies* as an anti-war film. Whenever he had a chance, he repeatedly said that the film fell short of being truly anti-war because it merely portrayed the tragedy of wars. Watching television news would suffice to realize how catastrophic wars could be. According to him, an anti-war film should radically confront what lies behind the tragic consequences of wars: To begin with, it was Japan that brought about the horrors in the countries that it invaded, colonized, and exploited. A Japanese anti-war film, Takahata argued, should contemplate such a past on top of the Japanese experiences before and after the defeat.

In this way, the unmade *Border 1939* critiques the made film, *Grave of the Fireflies*. In a statement of purpose, Takahata added that *Border 1939* would take the genre of boy's adventure, which he gently criticized for fleeing to an unrealistic time and space, back to historical reality. At the core of the adventure lay "the contact with others,"<sup>3</sup> which in contemporary Japan would summon the Japanese memories of being a colonizer. If *Grave of the Fireflies* was a critique of a postwar Japanese society that became numb to the pain of others—which eventually led to the deaths of two children in the film—*Border 1939* would expand the notion of others of the Japanese into "what hasn't been filmed," that is, the vulnerable lives under Japan's colonial rule. *Border 1939* would have become the most gloomy action adventure film in the history of Japanese animation, or the colonial cinema that this dissertation has sought. For colonial cinema is one of the names for things that haven't been filmed, films that haven't been made.

In the spirit of Takahata Isao (1935-2018).

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 459.

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TITLE	PERIOD	PLACE / LANGUAGE
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<i>Chosŏn chi kwang</i> (1922-1932)	Monthly/Weekly	Korea / Korean
<i>Chosŏn chungang ilbo</i> (1933-1937)	Daily	Korea / Korean
<i>Chosŏn ilbo</i> (1920-present)	Daily	Korea / Korean
<i>Chosŏn yŏnghwa</i> (1936)	Monthly	Korea / Korean
<i>Chungoe ilbo</i> (1926-1931)	Daily	Korea / Korean
<i>Eiga hyōron</i> (1926-present)	Monthly	Japan / Japanese
<i>Eiga junpō</i> (1941-1945)	Thrice-monthly	Japan / Japanese
<i>Inmun p'yŏngnon</i> (1939-1941)	Monthly	Korea / Korean and Japanese
<i>Keijō nippō</i> (1906-1945)	Daily	Korea / Japanese
<i>Kinema junpō</i> (1919-present)	Thrice-monthly	Japan / Japanese
<i>Kinema shūhō</i> (1930-1939)	Weekly	Japan / Japanese
<i>Kokumin bungaku</i> (1941-1945)	Monthly	Korea / Japanese and Korean
<i>Kokusai eiga shinbun</i> (1927-1940)	Bi-weekly	Japan / Japanese
<i>Kyŏnghyang sinmun</i> (1946-present)	Daily	Korea / Korean
<i>Maeil sinbo</i> (1910-1945)	Daily	Korea / Korean and Japanese
<i>Mansŏn ilbo</i> (1937-1945)	Daily	Manchuria / Korean
<i>Munjang</i> (1939-1941)	Monthly	Korea / Korean and Japanese

<i>Puroretaria eiga</i> (1930-1931)	Monthly	Japan / Japanese
<i>Pyŏlgŏn'gon</i> (1926-1934)	Monthly	Korea / Korean
<i>Samch'ŏlli</i> (1929-1941)	Monthly	Korea / Korean
<i>Shin eiga</i> (1930-1944)	Monthly	Japan / Japanese
<i>Shinkō eiga</i> (1929-1930)	Monthly	Japan / Japanese
<i>Sŏul sinmun</i> (1945-present)	Daily	Korea / Korean
<i>Taejung yŏnghwa</i> (1930)	Monthly	Korea / Korean
<i>Tonga ilbo</i> (1920-present)	Daily	Korea / Korean
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