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Colonial Era Korean Cinema and the Problem of Internalization

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I. Introduction

From at least Frantz Fanon on, the problem of internalization has been central to discussions of colonialism and colonial societies. Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth* that

the colonialist bourgeoisie, by way of its academics, had implanted in the minds of the colonized that the essential values—meaning Western values—remain eternal despite all errors attributable to man. The colonized intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas and there in the back of his mind stood a sentinel on duty guarding the Greco-Latin pedestal. (11)

This internalization of the values of the colonizers in the mind of the colonized—a colonization of the mind in which the colonized come to guard themselves—can then be as crucial to the perpetuation of colonialism as the violence of legal or military force. In Ashis Nandy's words,

This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all. In the process, it helps generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds. (xi)

The status of this mind, of the internal state of the colonized subject, becomes a crucial matter. It is significant that Fanon prefers to use the term “epidermalization” over “internalization.” This has largely to do with the

fact that the internalized values he focuses on are racial; for Africans what is internalized is an issue of skin color, a contradictory condition that Fanon expressed in the title of his book *Black Skin, White Masks*. Their acceptance of racial inferiority is nothing other than the internalization of the epidermalization of value. But Fanon's concept is also related to the tendency of the "ontologization of whiteness," in Marilyn Nissim-Sabat's terms, to exclude the colonized from the being of humanity, and reduce them to a corporeal existence (45). With "no culture, no civilization, and no 'long historical past,'" their identity is only the mask of whiteness they are given—their only internal is therefore surface, skin-deep (Fanon, *Black Skin* 17). Internalization is then not simply an issue of the colonial values that are internalized, but also of the shape of that "internal" within colonial spatial dynamics, the mapping of the body and intersubjective relations.

In this paper, I will analyze some films produced in Korea during the era of its colonization by Japan, ones that I will pose interesting questions about the problem of internalization during this period. While on the one hand, these works can seem to present examples of Korean characters quite literally internalizing the voices or visions of Japanese authority, they can also problematize the assumption that there is a distinct subject with an established "inside" open to absorbing such commands. This is further complicated, I will argue, by the fact that the cinema of the Japanese metropole was itself often contradictory, despite and sometimes even because of its place in a colonial empire. These Korean films offer multiple examples of complex subjectivities crisscrossed by split subjectivities and intersubjective relations that render it difficult to clearly demarcate "internal" and "external." While the study of Korean cinema has long been hampered by a debilitating lack of extant films from the colonial era, the recent discovery of about a dozen films from the 1930s and early 1940s has finally enabled close research of texts from that era. Up to now, much of that research has been thematic or historical (Yecies and Shim; Chung), but I hope this paper will be one step in an effort to closely use stylistic and film analysis to consider the questions of colonial film and cultural colonization on the level of the cinematic text.

II. A Colonized Cinema

The model of a colonized film would, following the fears expressed by

Fanon or Nandy above, be a work that not only reflects colonial policy on the level of narrative and meaning, but that also internalizes the cinematic voice of the colonizer on the level of form and style. This is the kind of cinema opposed by such proponents of Third Cinema as Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, who tied the expansion of United States imperialism in a neo-colonial world system with the spread of Hollywood modes of filmmaking. Because to them “[t]he placing of the cinema within US models, even in the formal aspect, in language, leads to the adoption of the ideological forms that gave rise to precisely that language and no other,” they called for a cinematic alternative to that of the first (Hollywood) or second (European art) cinemas on the levels of form, production and distribution (51). Film style was thus a locus in the struggle between being colonized and resisting that colonization.

One could see this colonization possibly occurring in colonial era Korean films. Consider, for example, *Military Train* (*Gunyongyeolcha*), directed by Seo Gwang-Jae in 1938 and billed as the first pro-Japanese, government-supported film. In the film, Jum-Yong is a train engineer, whose best friend Won-Jin, who is also the boyfriend of his sister Young-Sim, gave information on military trains to spies. This is a film full of instances of internal voices, as when we see both Jum-Yong and Won-Jin in their bedding trying to get to sleep, but tormented by past voices and inner thoughts.¹ The layering is complex, as the film not only shifts from one voice to the next, but each individual’s inner thoughts may actually be quoting the dialogue of others or replaying the voices of others. Near the end, Won-Jin kills himself out of remorse and, as his suicide note is read, we again experience this shift in internal voices. We are once more inside Jum-Yong’s head as he recalls the suicide note and envisions Won-Jin apologizing,² but not only does his internal experience shift beyond the text of the note, to see and hear his pleading sister, but the episode ends with a Japanese voice.³ In contrast to the Korean voices expressing regret and doubt, this voice in Japanese is authoritative and certain. It is that of the railroad district chief, seemingly acting as the super-ego, one that ends Jum-Yong’s reveries, suppresses the cacophony of voices and pushes him towards action. Yet it is also an external voice, one that refers to Jum-Yong as “you” (*kimi*), but which still emerges from within Jum-Yong (enabled perhaps in part by the lack, in the

1. See Fig. 1.

2. See Fig. 2.

3. See Fig. 3.

Japanese—but not in the English subtitle—of a pronoun “I” serving as the enunciating subject). Perhaps this film is a narrative of the colonization of the mind, where the Korean colonial subject overcomes confusion by internalizing the language, the goals and finally the voice of the colonizer, even while still not being able to adopt the “I” of that voice.

While still problematic, this example of internalization seems to be echoed by moments in the narratives of other colonial era films. One could think of the innocuous adoption of military regimen and bowing to the emperor by the orphanage children in Choi In-Kyu’s *Angels on the Streets* (*Jipeopneun Cheonsa* 1941) (Yecies and Howson) or even the adoption of the dream of modernity—one centered in Tokyo—at the end of Lee Byeong-Il’s *Spring of Korean Peninsula* (*Bandoui Bom* 1941) as figures of colonization. An even more extreme example, produced under the different circumstances of the Pacific War and strengthening of language policies, could be the total displacement of Korean by the Japanese language in Park Ki-Chae’s *Straits of Chosun* (*Choseon Haehyeop* 1943) and Bang Han-Joon’s *Dear Soldier* (*Byeongjeongnim* 1944). Such scenes are to be expected in propaganda cinema, whose ostensible goal is the internalization of colonial values by spectators. The aim is to mold spectators who can not only identify with the properly colonized characters on screen, but also in effect project themselves onto the screen, fulfilling the film’s meaning. This was actually advocated in public discourse on wartime cinema in Japan at the time, as the film critic Mizumachi Seiji, for instance, suggested that the spectator as imperial subject should so internalize the regulation of meaning that he or she can establish their own “correct order of entertainment” even when the film was a poor one. Countering those who stressed that films, as weapons in the “film war” (*eigasen*), must not be an “unexploded bomb” (*fuhatsudan*), he highlighted the spectator’s role in completing the film.

For better or worse, films must be made. But in the case of cinema, an “unexploded bomb” can be impossible depending on the beliefs of the people. As long as a film exists here, we spectators can have the resolution to follow it as a splendid piece of entertainment. As long as we follow it, it cannot be an unexploded bomb, since we conceive that following a film can render our daily life an element in our service to the state. (62)

The model for colonized spectators was to effectively help produce state-sponsored cinema by putting their daily life and viewing in service to the state,

projecting within themselves propaganda films.

This might be visualized in the case of Chun-Ho in Ahn Seok-Young's *Volunteer* (*Jiwonbyeong* 1941). Chun-Ho, portrayed in the film as a victim of repressive traditional rural social structures, is shown sitting back in his room, envisioning himself entering a space that will allow him to freely use his talents—in this case, the space of the Japanese military.⁴ While his vision is preceded by him looking into space with his eyes open, it ends with his eyes closed, as if it ultimately became something he does not view externally with his eyes open, but sees from within.⁵ This supposed proof of immediate allegiance between the subject and the Empire, one ensured by cinematic technique (the point of view or vision structure, plus the dissolve) and the internalization of martial imagery, also seemingly transcends the rural communication network based on assumptions, stereotypes and misunderstandings that has been oppressing Chun-Ho. Not only the Army, but also this form of imagining in conjunction the state promises to set the hero free.

III. The Problem of “Japanese” Cinema

A closer look at these films, however, may also show us complications in these narratives of internalization. First, even if some of the last films of the colonial era like *The Straits of Chosun* seemingly embody the internalization of the Japanese language, ones manifested amidst Korea's further insertion into the imperial war effort, we can still ask whether we also see the internalization of Japanese film language or style, especially in films produced before the start of the Pacific War. Certainly Japanese cinema of the time must have exerted some influence on Korean production, if only because many of this generation of Korean directors trained in Japan. Park Ki-Chae worked at Tōa, Bang Han-Joon at Shōchiku Kamata and Lee Byeong-Il at Nikkatsu. Japanese studios were sometimes involved in the production of these films. Tōhō co-produced *Military Train* and two of Shōchiku's famous directors, Shimazu Yasujirō and Yoshimura Kōzaburō, were involved with Ahn Chul-Young's *Fisherman's Fire* (*Eohwa* 1939). One could even see the name of the influential Japanese film

4. See Fig. 4.

5. See Fig. 5.

critic, Iijima Tadashi, in the credits of *Angels on the Streets*.⁶ Beyond such direct connections, one can sense echoes of the Nikkatsu Tamagawa studio style in *Military Train*, with its stark lighting, working class locales and camera distance. The use of amateur children on location in *Angels on the Streets* can also remind one of the proto-neorealist work of Shimizu Hiroshi, who himself had earlier filmed children on the streets of colonial Korea in the short *Friends* (*Tomodachi* 1940). Yet such connections with studio and authorial styles do not necessarily entail internalization of the colonizer's cinema. Some might see similarities to 1930s Japanese film in the lack of close-ups, the longer takes, the violations of the 180 degree rule, or even in the occasional decorative flourishes— aspects of contemporary film style pointed out variously by Noël Burch and David Bordwell—but such generalizations about Japanese cinema itself are tenuous at best. The fact that Burch and Bordwell can have such divergent accounts of Japanese prewar film style—the former seeing it as counter to the classical Hollywood mode; the latter largely in line with it—underlines the problems of speaking of one Japanese film language (Gerow, “Nation” 409–10).

One difficulty of talking about colonial era Korean cinema in terms of the internalization of Japanese film style is the fact that even Japanese officials, filmmakers, critics and audiences during the war could not always agree on what Japanese film was or was supposed to be in terms of cinematic style. Darrell Davis has written about the monumental style of films like Mizoguchi Kenji's *The Loyal 47 Ronin* (*Genroku Chūshingura* 1941–42) as a conscious attempt to construct Japaneseness through aestheticizing the nation (131–80), but that film bombed at the box office. Film critics as well had a hard time delineating what was properly “Japanese” about Japanese film. The prominent critic Hazumi Tsuneo, for instance, when pressed to explicate the unique qualities of Japanese cinema, could note its slow pace and how that accorded with national character, only then to express in his next breath the desire that film would pick up the tempo (17–47). As Peter B. High argues, debates in print between government officials, film critics and filmmakers over what constituted a “national policy film” never really reached a conclusion. His account of the “internalization of control” in wartime Japan focuses less on

6. Iijima Tadashi also co-wrote the screenplay for *You and I* (*Kimi to Boku* 1941) with Hae-Young (known in Japanese as Hinatsu Eitarō), who directed the film. Only the script remains of this coproduction between Shōchiku and the Korean Military Information Division. See Baskett p.85–87.

the unquestioned acceptance of film policy, than on a practically paranoid condition in which self-control and self-censorship stemmed from confusion over what films would be approved, in which producers would play it overly safe because they did not know where the boundary between safe and unsafe was (322–42).

Debates continue on the effectiveness of propaganda in the media. Scholars such as Louise Young or Brian Yecies and Richard Howson have argued for the role of media in changing public opinion or helping shape hegemonic opinion through “common sense” with regard to Manchuria or Korea, while other scholars, such as Nicholas Reeves, have argued that “the myth of the power of film propaganda was, in reality, incomparably more powerful than the film propaganda itself” (241). Interestingly, Japanese film authorities were well aware of the fact that spectators could and did reject or misread propaganda films. That is why one of the central shapers of Japanese film policy, the Information Bureau’s Fuwa Suketoshi, argued for the need to “train” spectators, recognizing that propaganda required amenable or cooperative audiences to work (Gerow, “Tatakau” 140). It was perhaps because of this awareness that cinematic meaning was determined not just by content, but also by form, spectatorship, exhibition, industrial structure and context that wartime film policy could be so complex, if not confusing.

The existence of the colonies and occupied territories also sparked intense debates and anxieties over not only what Japanese films should show there, but also eventually what Japanese films should be. Some like Mori Iwao, first a film critic and then an executive at Tōhō, thought the films should be easier to understand, and thus more Hollywood in style (5); others such as Tsumura Hideo, arguably the most enthusiastic supporter of the war amongst film critics, demanded Japanese films must work to wean the colonized off of Hollywood cinema (21). Kawakita Nagamasa, who was the main importer of European art cinema into Japan in the prewar and who became head of occupied Shanghai’s film industry, argued that local spectators did not have the tools to understand Japanese films, and thus that, at least at the start, local staff should produce films under Japanese supervision (6–7). The fact was that most Japanese authorities and intellectuals found Japanese cinema to be of poor quality, and a potential source of national shame, especially when presented to audiences in countries like the Philippines, where audiences were well-versed in Hollywood film. To others, however, showing it in the colonies could, on the contrary, provide the impetus to reform Japanese films, as they had to improve their

effectiveness in order to support national policy and work with these other spectators. As I have argued, the cinematic relationship between colonizer and colonized in imperial Japan was not simply one way, as the colonies were used by reformers as a stimulus for modernizing Japanese film (Gerow, "Tatakau" 142–44). This was actually also the case with the Japanese language as well, as Lee Yeoun-Suk has pointed out how exporting Japanese to the colonies prompted calls to change Japanese itself.

The results in cinema could sometimes be contradictory, however, as Washitani Hana has pointed out with regard to Makino Masahiro's *The Opium War* (*Ahen Sensō* 1943), a *kokumin eiga* or "national film" that did well in Asian territories such as Hong Kong and the Philippines, but was also criticized for being based on a David Llewelyn Wark Griffith film and featuring Hollywood style musical numbers (69–74). Much of these contradictions stem from the fact that discussions of domestic and colonial film policy were often concerned as much with aporia in Japan as with perfecting the use of cinema in the empire, paradoxes that in many ways embodied Japan's own contradictory position vis-à-vis the West, striving in the manner of the colonized to emulate Western modernity while also working to become a colonial master itself. The liberal political theorists, Hasegawa Nyozeikan, for example, could celebrate the relaxed tempo or atmospheric line (*jōcho no sen*) of Japanese film, but then criticize the most popular form of Japanese film, the *jidaigeki*, or period film, for "lacking the morality that constitutes the internal condition of Japanese aesthetic sense." To him, and many others, the majority of Japanese filmmakers and audiences still had the need to "cultivate Japanese life" (95). The contradictions behind Japan's relationship to Europe and Asia were sometimes projected onto the existence of insufficiently "Japanese" Japanese. In effect, Japanese cinema and Japanese film policy had to work to colonize the minds of Japanese as much as to colonize the minds of those in the actual colonies. As I have stated elsewhere:

Such conflicts over the cinematic articulation of the nation reveal that the struggle in wartime Japan was not simply over how to use the cinema to represent the nation, but over what nation the cinema should represent, and how to place Japan in the oppositions between universal and particular, East and West, and tradition and modernity. ("Narrating" 198)

IV. Intersubjective Korean Cinema

The condition of wartime Japanese cinema requires us to consider carefully the complex positioning of Korean and other colonial filmmakers and audiences. If they are supposedly internalizing Japanese cinema as a modernized, colonial cinema, one superior to that of the colonies—a vision offered in films like *Spring of Korean Peninsula*—they are doing so with a cinema that most Japanese in power did not think was modern, one that was at best ambiguously “Japanese.” To put it more bluntly, they were internalizing a cinema that Japanese authorities themselves had not internalized as sufficient to represent the modern Japanese empire.

We should consider how this affects the phenomenon of internalization. What I wish to consider is less whether there was internalization of Japanese cinema or not, than the shape of the “internal” within colonial spatial dynamics. The issue is what the cinema tells us about the fraught nature of internalization itself, about how the boundaries between internal and external are demarcated or rendered ambiguous, about the construction or deconstruction of internalized subjects, and at the most basic level, about the contradictions of representing internal states through external means like cinema. My hypothesis is that, if colonial era Korean cinema seems often concerned with internal states (and it seems to be given these examples), it is less because it is opening up a space that will then be subject to internalization by colonial forces, than it is exhibiting in complex and ambiguous ways the cracks and contradictions in internalization itself and the problems of colonial subjectivity.

I am particularly interested in the number of stories where gazes mattered, but which were often presented without point of view structures, or through point of view editing or eyeline matches that are considered wrong according to the rules of classical Hollywood cinema. Consider this scene from *Fisherman's Fire* where Chun-Seok views through binoculars his girlfriend In-Soon, pressed into financial dire straits by the debt her dead father owed, sitting on the shore with Cheol-Soo, the son of the money lender. Chun-Seok is first looking screen left⁷ and then, after a curious shot of the waves, is shown looking screen right.⁸ The editing thus crosses the axis between the two sides. This is a violation of the 180 degree rule in classical cinema which demands the camera stay on

7. See Fig. 6.

8. See Fig. 7.

the same side of the axis when cutting between characters, a rule formulated under the belief that this enables audiences to maintain a clear sense of space and focus on the narrative. Both shots suggest that the two shots of the couple seen inside the binocular frame are his subjective vision—although the first one comes before him looking and the second after—but the editing almost makes it seem as if he has turned and is looking somewhere else, complicating the effort to claim this shot structure as entirely subjective. The shots of the waves can also suggest his internal agitation, but only if we see this as an expressionist use of Soviet-style montage (note that Ahn Chul-Yeong studied in Germany), one that does not produce the kind of clarity demanded in classical Hollywood montage.

Note also In-Soon's subjective moment after receiving a letter from Cheol-Soo. After she finishes the letter, her face turns away from the camera and the film cuts to a waterfall, Chun-Seok, waves, Chun-Seok again (facing in a different direction), the waterfall, and Chun-Seok in close-up, before returning to In-Soon in the same position. The vision is difficult to tie to her not only because we do not see her face⁹—as we would if this was classically edited—but also because we see the same waves as before, elements that were seemingly tied to another character's subjectivity. The sequence actually structurally resembles that of Chun-Seok's previous subjective moment by repeating the same violation of the axis, but the cloaking of her face—perhaps in a display of feminine modesty—suggests a different, gendered construction of subjectivity. The internality depicted here either takes advantage of a trans-subjective visual vocabulary, or it is intersubjective itself.

One can find similar cases of intersubjective “subjective” visions with Seiki's “memory” of Kinshuku in *Straits of Chosun*. Taking a break from training after joining the Japanese Army, Seiki reads a letter from his sister that wonders about the woman he would marry. Lying down on a grassy knoll, Seiki looks up in close-up. This is followed by a shot of the sky, and then a camera movement back of Kinshuku, the common-law wife whom his parents have not recognized, in her home.¹⁰ The normal presumption is that this is Seiki's subjective moment. But there is then a dissolve to Kinshuku in the same space looking screen left, which leads to a camera movement to Seiki's overcoat hanging on the wall. There is then a cut to Kinshuku, now in different attire, taking the coat down

9. See Fig. 8.

10. See Fig. 9–11.

and, as the camera moves back, putting it on Seiki who has appeared in the foreground.¹¹ What was supposedly clearly marked as one character's subjective moment—Seiki remembering the wife he has effectively abandoned to make amends to his family and join the army—has suddenly become that of another: his wife recalling their past together. And while the film does return to Kinshuku in the “present” after her flashback, it does not with Seiki. His subjective vision is left in limbo, or is effectively hijacked by another in a gendered reversal, but not without undermining the status of subjective moments by betraying audience expectations. This does prepare the audience for the final scene, in which Kinshuku's voice is seemingly able to literally cross boundaries—the titular Chosun Strait—but in a melodramatic geography in which such fortuitous connections are the only means of bringing together a couple that are never seen together in the narrative present throughout the film.¹²

In light of these examples, we could revisit *Military Train* and *Volunteer* and find them to be less model in how they internalize the colonial. The voice of the district chief may appear to suppress the intersubjective voices in Jum-Yong—in which he sees/hears his sister even though it is Won-Jin's letter—but that voice itself can be just a continuation of that crisscrossing of the boundaries between subjectivities, between the internal and the external, yet this time without a sounding body—except for perhaps the train itself, a machine which certainly ties Jum-Yong's subjectivity to the empire's, but in a more external fashion (a point aligned with the fact the voice appears after the camera has abandoned Jum-Yong's internal screen and begun to view him from outside). Even if Jum-Yong has internalized that voice, it is one that refers to himself as “you,” splitting his subjectivity and rendering the external in his internal self incompletely within him. Chun-Ho's vision in *Volunteer* may seem more straightforward in its seer-vision-seer structure, but the overlaying of that vision on his face through the dissolve—in addition to a possible change in his expression¹³—may also suggest this is a projection on him, not

11. See Fig. 12–13.

12. One could connect this parade of internal voices, mismatched gazes, and intersubjective moments to the conventions of Korean melodrama. Further study is needed in this regard, but given the connections between Korean *sinpa* and Japanese *sinpa* melodrama, the relative lack of such forms in the latter is significant.

13. Some audiences to whom I have shown this scene have read his expression as less ecstatic than consternated. That might have stemmed from the fact they had seen the clip out of context.

just a projection by him. This might indicate that the textual multiplicity of the film, which Jaekil Seo explains in the form of possible multiple versions of the film, may also be partially woven into currently existing text itself.

I hesitate to label such complications in the presentation of internality or internalization “resistance,” at least at first. Prewar Japanese cinema was not without examples of films breaking the rules of continuity editing or complicating subjective structures, with the most famous example of the latter being Kinugasa Teinosuke’s avant-garde *A Page of Madness* (*Kurutta Ichipeiji* 1926). To Bordwell, however, most of these are flourishes, decorative elements added to a base that essentially follows the classical mode. These moments of intersubjectivity in colonial era Korean films, however, although found in a sample of films that have survived in part through luck, seem more fundamental, not only because of their seeming prevalence, but for how they persistently raise the question of subjectivity in an historical conjuncture in which internalization was a core issue.

To a certain degree, these are an effect of what Kwon Nayoung Aimee calls the “polyphony” of these films, where, to her, “[t]he simultaneous coexistence of the perspectives of the colonizers and the colonized in these films makes it impossible to delineate a neat separation at a highly advanced stage of imperial assimilation” (22). They can also be a manifestation on the level of style of the contradiction Kim Kyung-Hyun sees in the character of Young-Il in *Spring of Korean Peninsula*, whose “tuberculosis-ridden body [...] could be both hailed as an allegory of anticolonial struggle [...] and condemned as a complicit, feeble and demasculinized undertone,” one which “redefines the boundaries between pure and impure, between healthy and infectious, and between a community and its exterior” (57–58).

The depictions of internality in these films, I suggest, may similarly redefine the boundaries between the subjective interior and its exterior, evincing how colonialism is an issue not only of the content of psychology, internalized from the external colonizer, but also of its form and its representation—of the shape of interiority, the boundaries between subjectivities and the contradictory possibilities of intersubjectivity. Colonial era Korean films may then both embody the contradictions of internalizing coloniality as well as represent how the struggle over colonialism may occur not as a narrative of a given internalized subjectivity resisting external forces, but in the turbulent seas between subjectivities, fighting over the very definition of that internality itself. These films may also inform us of the aporia of constructing interiority through

cinema in a colonial situation, especially when the colonial power was, like Japan vis-à-vis the West, itself subject to neo-colonial contradictions. If Japanese authorities themselves had difficulty defining their own colonizing cinema, creating a cinema that itself exhibited its own intersubjective contradictions, then Korean cinema of the colonial period may have experienced that doubly so. This perhaps explains why it was so consumed by problems of inner voices coming from without, of subjective moments or gazes that belong to others and of inner visions that are external, all the while complicating those divisions. There may be further nuances to explore, especially with regard to periodization—i.e. whether films after the start of the Pacific War exhibited different forms of intersubjectivity—and gender—for example, whether female visions tended to be shaped by a “masculine hegemony” (Yecies and Howson)—, though the lack of extant texts makes such precise distinctions difficult to pursue. At the same time, it is intriguing that intersubjectivity itself seems to cross such temporal and gender boundaries as well, though likely in unequal ways.

To return to Fanon, we might be seeing a different form of epidermalization here. It is interesting that films like *Military Train* were called “yellow” films for collaborating even before the 1940 Film Law enforced such collaboration (Yecies and Shim 118). While this did not necessarily refer to skin color, the neo-colonial condition of the colonial power Japan reminds us that that the white vision of the yellow race is not irrelevant here. But given these films, this is less *Yellow Skin*, *White Masks*, or even *Yellow Skin, Japanese Masks*, than skin as a moebius strip, in which masks are both inside and outside the skin, masks masking masks, with the skin becoming a complexly layered boundary both internal and external. More research is needed to see how these recently discovered colonial era films intersect with other forms of contemporary cultural production in revealing and embodying colonial identity, but the films themselves embody these problems in their very form, making the shape of cinema a fruitful space for interrogating the shape of colonial subjectivity.

Colonial Era Korean Cinema and the Problem of Internalization Figures



Fig. 1. *Military Train*: Won-Jin and his internal voices

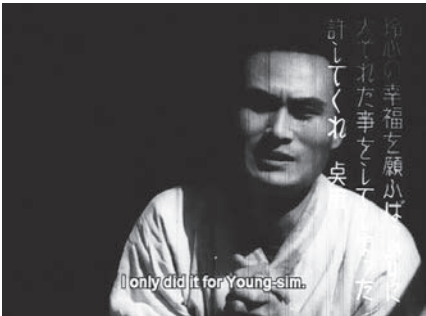


Fig. 2. *Military Train*: Won-Jin appealing to Jum-Yong

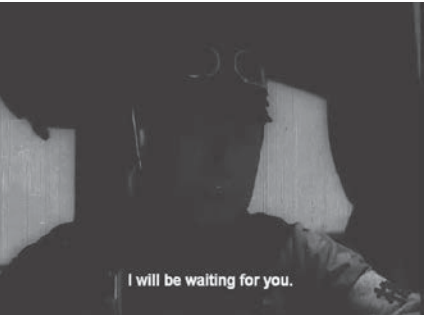


Fig. 3. *Military Train*: The Japanese voice beckoning Jum-Yong



Fig. 4. *Volunteer*: Chun-Ho's dream of joining the Imperial Army



Fig. 5. *Volunteer*: The end of his reverie: marching feet and closed eyes.



Fig. 6. *Fisherman's Fire*: Chun-Seok looking left



Fig. 7. *Fisherman's Fire*: Chun-Seok now looking right



Fig. 8. *Fisherman's Fire*: In-Soon looking away from the camera



Fig. 9. *Straits of Chosun*: Seiki looking up



Fig. 10. *Straits of Chosun*: What he is supposedly looking at



Fig. 11. *Straits of Chosun*: Cut to camera movement back of Kinshuku



Fig. 12. *Straits of Chosun*: After a dissolve, a camera movement from her to his coat



Fig. 13. *Straits of Chosun*: A cut brings us into her memory

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Abstract

This paper analyzes several films produced in Korea during the era of its colonization by Japan that pose interesting questions about the problem of internalization, or colonization of the mind. While on the one hand, these works can seem to present examples of Korean characters quite literally internalizing the voices or visions of Japanese authority, they can also problematize the assumption that there is a distinct subject with an established “inside” open to absorbing such commands. This is further complicated, I will argue, by the fact that the cinema of the Japanese metropole was itself often contradictory, despite and sometimes because of its place in a colonial empire. These Korean films offer multiple examples of complex subjectivities crisscrossed by split subjectivities and intersubjective relations that render it difficult to clearly demarcate “internal” and “external.” This paper will be one step in an effort to use close stylistic and film analysis to consider the questions of colonial film and cultural colonization on the level of the cinematic text.

Keywords: internalization, colonialism, cinema, Korea, Japan, intersubjectivity

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