Parameters of Disavowal

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Parameters of Disavowal: Colonial Representation in South Korean Cinema.
INTRODUCTION

1. In the mid-1970s, Im decided to make “honest” films instead of churning out more popular genre films. In many interviews, Im downplays the artistic integrity of the genre films that he directed in the early years of his film career. Though he debuted in 1962 with Farewell to Tumen River (Tumangang ch’arigôra), he regards Weed (Chapcho), the 1973 film on which he collaborated with the screenwriter Na Hanbong, as the first of his “honest” films. There nonetheless is continuity between the supposed two phases of his career. His authorial preoccupations with questions of nation, nationalism, and national culture are often manifest in his early genre works. To be sure, his thematic preoccupations changed in the 1970s, but these changes can be read as a gradual shift in focus regarding the issue of national history and culture rather than a wholesale redirection of his thematic concerns. For Im’s interview and analysis of The Genealogy, see articles in David E. James and Kyung Hyun Kim, eds., Im Kwon-Taek: The Making of a Korean National Cinema (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2002).

2. The film marks a rare instance in which the adaptation of a Japanese literary source was openly acknowledged. Chapter 2 examines the widespread practice of unacknowledged borrowing from Japanese narrative sources that occurred in the Korean film industry in the 1960s.

3. The film depicts Sŏl undergoing a series of ordeals as the head of the clan, all from the viewpoint of Tani. The relationship Tani develops with Sŏl makes him increasingly dubious about the efficacy of the coercive policy, and his growing sympathy and affinity with Sŏl make clear the film’s moral indictment of Japanese colonial domination. As Kyung Hyun Kim points out, Tani’s privileged “outsider” position carves out a potential space for mutual understanding between the colonizer and the colonized by portraying the two men’s shared appreciation for Korea’s tradition and beauty—an appreciation that transcends ethnic

4. This aesthetic theme finds its most rigorous visual expression in Sŏl’s funeral sequence. It features the funeral procession on a distant hill, with Tani, observing from afar, in the foreground within the frame. The composition frames and organizes the event from his privileged standpoint. The sequence echoes the film’s recurring theme of the appreciation for Korean aesthetics that both men share, imbued with a sense of sorrow and fatalism. Tani comes to his fullest understanding of the tragic beauty of Korea through the landscape view, which in turn leads to his resounding indictment of and pessimism regarding Japanese colonial rule. In effect, the sequence uses the spectacle of ritual to visualize and materialize a particular culturalist discourse on colonial Korea.

5. The image also deviates from the meticulous visual design and rigor of Sŏl’s grand funeral procession at the end of the film. In that scene, Im adroitly uses the widescreen format to generate a nostalgic sense of the Korean countryside, and Tani’s view is framed in such a way that it not only focuses on the funeral procession as object but also “withdraws” (to borrow W. J. T. Mitchell’s term) the viewer to see the gestalt of the scene. See Mitchell’s *Landscape and Power*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), vii–viii.

6. According to the director, Im, the artificial appearance of the image was in part the result of an artistic compromise he had to make during the film’s production. Using a large photograph as the backdrop of the scene was too costly, so he was forced to resort to a more economical option. To compensate for the uncanny effect of a painting, Im made an effort to add a sense of geographical authenticity to the sequence by locating the viewpoint in the actual government office where Tani would have worked: the historical site of the Kyŏnggi Provincial Office. He constructed the vista from the seat of the old Kyŏnggi Provincial Office, looking at the Government-General Building in the distance. Im Kwont’aek, telephone interview by author, September 9, 2013.

7. By *exceptional*, I refer to the fact that the film’s visualization of the building as a site of colonial power is a rare instance in South Korean cinema, however artificial the rendition may be. No other South Korean film, as far as I know, has explicitly shown the building as the icon of colonial rule while it was extant. Its association with colonial rule has been rendered invisible in cinematic production. Instead, South Korean films show the building as the center of South Korea’s political authority. Kang Taejin’s film *The Coachman* (*Mabu*, 1961) is a good example. In it, a lower-middle-class family that has undergone a series of troubles and hardships is suddenly on the threshold of great prosperity and upward mobility because the eldest son has passed his bar exam. This moment of jubilation takes place in front of the government building gate where the official announcement of the bar exam results is posted. The building serves as a site of melodramatic upheaval where the personal, familial, and political all coalesce in a moment of euphoria.

8. The major events include the inauguration of the Constitutional Assembly, the establishment of the South Korean state and government, and the first national presidential election and inauguration, as well as the South Korean army’s recapture of the capital, Seoul, during the Korean War. One of the most memorable historical moments of South Korea’s modern history and of the Korean War in particular is captured in the photo image of two South Korean army soldiers raising the national flag, T’aegukgi, on the flagpole in front
of the building. Later, the building was used from 1986 to 1995 as the National Central Museum, housing over 120,000 archaeological finds and national treasures.

9. The conservationist camp had argued for the building’s historical associations and its service as a political symbol of the South Korean government since its establishment in 1948. But by employing the traditional geomantic rhetoric of p’ungsu (propitious space) to argue for the building’s demolition, the administration promoted a new scenario of nation, departing from old discursive models based on anticommunism and developmentalism. For a detailed survey of the controversies surrounding the building’s demolition, as well as its discursive impact on the official narratives of the nation, see Jong-Heon Jin, “Demolishing Colony: The Demolition of the Old Government-General Building of Chosŏn,” in Sitings: Critical Approaches to Korean Geography, ed. Timothy R. Tangherlini and Sallie Yea, Hawai’i Studies on Korea (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, Center for Korean Studies, 2008).

10. The administration pushed for demolition as a way to symbolically sever its relations not only to the colonial legacy but also implicitly to the authoritarian regimes that had long sustained the troubling legacies of the colonial past. See Kal Hong, Aesthetic Constructions of Korean Nationalism: Spectacle, Politics, and History, Asia’s Transformations (New York: Routledge, 2011), 102.


12. During the colonial period, historic photographs underscored the building’s magnitude, molding the public’s perception of the building and its historical and political identity. But the new postcolonial photos entailed a unique temporal, that is, historical, density that set them apart from the old colonial-era photos. While the former tend to feature solely the building itself, underscoring its magnitude in colonial Korea, the postcolonial photos principally emphasize historic moments in the narrative of the independent nation-state. Such images were circulated and disseminated through various distribution channels such as newspapers, magazines, government documents, and textbooks. The new images became the visual repository of the nation’s official history, and the building’s association with national history in turn displaced its anterior link to the colonial grandiose. Parallel to this recontextualization and historicization was the gradual but clear withdrawal of the colonial photos of the building from circulation. See Theodore Hughes’s Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom’s Frontier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 2, which discusses how South Korea has formed its postcolonial culture and identity on the basis of three major forms of disavowal, one of which is specifically concerned with the postcolonial treatment of colonialism: an “institutionalized forgetting” of the collaboration of Korean elites in the propagation of the imperialist project during the late colonial wartime mobilization period.

13. The critical concept of landscape helps us approach the ideological construction of the view or way of seeing the building. W. J. T. Mitchell approaches the representation of landscape as a signifying practice that functions as cultural power through a particular ideological effect. Such imaging of a landscape “naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site.” A critical inquiry into landscape traces how the image becomes naturalized through the erasure of its own “readability” and

14. In this light, Choi Donghoon’s 2009 fantasy film *Woochi* (*Chŏn Uchi’i*) is a rigorously reflexive text that treats the subject of the colonial past as the image itself. The illusory and artificial facade of the movie set in the film stands in for the “historical real” in postcolonial cinema. See the “Coda” to this book for discussion of the film.

15. Many contemporary Korean filmmakers are keenly aware of the disavowal of colonial subject matter in cultural representation. In his 2006 interview with Ian Buruma, South Korean filmmaker Park Chan-wook points out that South Korean filmmakers would not face any serious censorship in the era of liberal democracy, with the exception of one taboo subject: the favorable depiction of Japanese colonial rule. He quips, “You could never say that the Japanese occupation of Korea had been beneficial. That would create more hostility than a movie praising North Korea. It would be like telling Jews that the Holocaust didn’t exist.” The interviewer, Buruma, ponders the feasibility of Park’s analogy as he points out the material benefits that the colonial rule brought to Korea. He subsequently points out how the “cherished myths of nationalist history” remain unquestioned in liberal South Korean filmmaking. See Park Chan-wook, “Mr. Vengeance,” interview by Ian Baruma, *New York Times Magazine*, April 9, 2006, 34.

16. I make an exception to discuss the horror film *Epitaph*, which was made in 2007. The film is included for its distinct notion of historical return and subconscious nostalgia for the Japanese Empire in South Korean cinema. While sharing the theme of resurgence of the repressed with the 1960s horror and revenge films, *Epitaph* takes the question of history and memory to a new level. For analysis of the film’s unique significance, see chapter 5 on revenge horror films.

17. This pedagogic type of filmmaking is most evident in the filmic depiction of the patriotic heroes. The films of the postliberation era and the biopic films of the 1950s are examples of this cinematic tradition. I explore the filmic rendition of anticolonial nationalism in the next chapter.

18. According to the Korean Film Archive database, 208 narrative feature-length films are grouped under the keyword *ilche* (Japanese imperial/colonial era). In 1945–50 there were eleven such films; in 1951–60, eighteen; in 1961–70, fifty-eight; in 1971–80, fifty-five; in 1981–90, twenty-three; in 1991–2000, sixteen; in 2001–10, eighteen; and in 2011–16, nine.

19. It is thus hardly surprising that in subsequent decades these films have typically garnered adjectives such as *anticolonial* or *anti-Japanese*—designations that refer to a film’s overall adherence to a resistentialist myth of nation, according to which most Korean people suffered from the violence of colonial rule but also resisted and struggled against it. I have drawn the notion of the resistentialist myth from Koen de Ceuster’s work on South Korea’s historiography. See his “The Nation Exorcised: The Historiography of Collaboration in South Korea,” *Korean Studies* 25, no. 2 (2001): 207–42.

20. This is especially the case since nationalist discourse and historiography have decidedly shaped the ideal of Korean cinema. The case of the colonial film *Arirang* is a prime example. Even though this lost film does not feature a manifest anticolonial theme, historians and critics have valorized it as the epitome of the nationalist filmmaking practice. For a fuller exploration of the nationalist appraisal of Korean film history, see Lee Sunjin, “Yŏnghwasa sŏsul-gwa kusulsa pangbŏmnun” [Film historiography and the methodology
of oral history], in *Hanguk munhwa, munhak-kwa kusulsa* [Korean culture, literature and oral history], ed. Tongguk daehakkyo muchuwon han'gukmunhak yŏnguso (Seoul: Tongguk taehakkyo chulpambu, 2014), 79–118.

21. This area of critical neglect comes into sharp relief when we compare the canon of South Korean cinema to that of North Korean cinema. The canon of North Korean cinema overwhelmingly favors colonial-themed films.

22. Even colonial-themed films made by renowned Korean film directors have not fared well with critics. For instance, directors like Kim Kiyong, Shin Sangok, Yu Hyŏnmok, and Yi Manhŭi all made films set in the colonial period. Yet these works have received little attention from film critics. The case of Kim Kiyong’s 1978 *Soil* (*Hŭk*) would be good example. Despite its fascinating depiction of the connections between cultural nationalism and a conjugal relationship, *Soil* has rarely been discussed as part of the auteur’s oeuvre.

23. I am borrowing Christina Klein’s insights into the importance of middlebrow culture here, as they offer a productive avenue for thinking about the workings of ideology and sentiment in the global order of the Cold War. According to Klein, ordinary Americans were able to relate affectively and intellectually to the Cold War’s polarizing politics because of the works of middlebrow cultural producers and intellectuals. Despite the dismissal of sophisticated intellectuals, the new middlebrow cultural formation fostered the perception of the growing US power in Asia as the development of a new relationship and affinity with Asian peoples. See her *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 7–8.

24. Postcolonial societies experienced the tensions and the tumultuous processes of nation building during this seismic shift toward the new global order. Kwon claims that neglecting the impacts of this transition led to “dehistoricization” of the very object of inquiry that postcolonial criticism aspires to examine and understand. Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War*, Columbia Studies in International and Global History (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 127–29.

25. Tonglin Lu reminds us of the structural misalignment between the reference of Japan and the formation of a new national identity in former colony states. He writes that “the colonial history of Japan, the only Asian empire builder of the modern period, serves as an important reference point for its former colonies as they reconfigure national identities” but that this reference point is unstable, “constructed through often-contradictory projections of the collective imagination” and “ultimately . . . characterized by inconsistency. Indeed, perceptions of the colonial past have little to do with historical realities, and more with current political needs.” Drawing on Slavoj Žižek’s notion of “parallax,” Lu describes how “Taiwan’s colonial past, viewed from various political angles and historical moments, has been portrayed ‘parallactically,’ as it has been incorporated into different political realities.” Tonglin Lu, “A Cinematic Parallax View: Taiwanese Identity and the Japanese Colonial Past,” *positions* 19, no. 3 (Winter 2011): 764.

26. The March 1st Movement of 1919 galvanized Koreans to protest against the brutal treatment of Koreans by the Japanese authorities. The colonial government subsequently modified its policy so that Koreans could exercise relative autonomy in the area of cultural activities and productions. The new film boom reflects the changing milieu of urban culture, as it paralleled and complemented the general growth of popular culture in the colonial Korea. For the cultural renaissance of the 1920s, see Michael Edson Robinson,
Korea’s Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 56–75.

27. The first homegrown talkie film, Ch’unhyangjŏn, premiered in 1935. The deferred development of sound film meant the prolonged production and circulation of the silent film, which had already garnered popular attention through the accompanying live performance of the pyŏnsa, who provided voices and narration for the featured film.

28. Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyoung Shim aptly state: “In this way, cinema in Korea was ‘occupied’ by economic, political, industrial, and cultural constraints brought to the peninsula by outsiders and then negotiated internally.” See Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyoung Shim, Korea’s Occupied Cinemas, 1893–1948, Routledge Advances in Film Studies (New York: Routledge, 2011), 5.

29. Most of these “collaborationist” films were recently discovered in various film archives outside Korea and “repatriated” back to the Korean Film Archive. They filled a gap in the archive of Korean cinema but also fueled controversies because of their outright pro-Japanese message, which had been largely glossed over in prior film history books. The issue of collaboration obviously has assumed a central significance in the new critical discourse of colonial Korean cinema. Moreover, these films have inspired a new direction in Korean film history scholarship by spurring reflection on the troubled question of colonial modernity.

30. For example, the effort by Korean film producer Yi Ch’angyong to comply with the state guidelines for pro-Japanese films did not translate into a business opportunity in the larger film markets of the metropole and other occupied areas. See O Sŏngji et al., Koryŏ yŏnghwâ hyŏphoe-wa yŏnghwâ sinch’êje, 1936–1941 [The Korea Film Association and the new filmic system, 1936–1941] (Seoul: Han’guk Yŏngsang Charyowon, 2007).

31. A substantial body of scholarly works has offered nuanced readings of the contradictory dimensions of Korean identity caught in the state machinery of “assimilation” propaganda: that is, how the Korean person’s path to salvation is repeatedly rendered comprehensible in terms of voluntary conversion into an imperial subject. Notable examples include Kim Ryŏsil, T’usihanŭn cheguk, tusahanŭn singminji [The imperial gaze and the colony on display] (Seoul: Samin, 2006); Yi Yöngjae, Cheguk Ilbon-ūi Chosŏn yŏnghwâ [Korean cinema at the end of the Japanese Empire] (Seoul: Hyŏngsil Munhwâ, 2008); Kyung Hyun Kim, the chapter “Viral Colony” in his Virtual Hallyu: Korean Cinema of the Global Era (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 55–80. For a rigorous reading of the symptom of melancholia in the Korean male body in An Sŏkyŏng’s Volunteer Soldier (Chiwonbyŏng, 1940), see Yi Yöngjae’s chapter “Hyŏpnyŏk-ŭi Simchŏng” in her Cheguk Ilbon-ūi Chosŏn yŏnghwâ, 45–115.

32. Kyung Hyun Kim, “Viral Colony.”

33. The aforementioned criticisms tend to dwell on the moments of “hesitation” or “ambivalence” of Korean characters in order to muster the film’s allegorical meanings. They help us gain insight into the structural instability of the state ideology itself, just as the transitory and contingent nature of the Korean identity also comes into fuller understanding vis-à-vis the dominant yet distant political power.

34. It must be noted that the empire in this context is not portrayed in association with coercion, or in the form of a force intruding on an individual’s psyche. Missing from the picture is the negative depiction of colonial power as a surveillance mechanism that
postcolonial cinema would later take as the basic premise of historical representation of the colonial past. The atmosphere of film settings, e.g., the dark and ominous and claustrophobic atmosphere of a police state portrayed in postcolonial anticolonialist films as compared to the luminous and expansive realm of empire in colonial collaborationist films, therefore offers a point of comparison between two historically and politically divided cinemas that served two opposite ideologies.

35. Takashi Fujitani writes succinctly: “The drive to incorporate the Korean people into Japan’s imperialist war unleashed a massive machinery of institutions and agents that sought to make all the people visible to power, and then worked to turn them into usable Japanese subjects.” Takashi Fujitani, Race for Empire: Koreans as Japanese and Japanese as Americans during World War II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 293; also cited in Kelly Y. Jeong, “Enlightening the Other: Colonial Korean Cinema and the Question of Audience,” Review of Korean Studies 18, no. 1 (2015): 26.

36. The image of the Korean in distress, which stands for the colonial subject’s genuine interiority, functions as a new visual and visible component or trope in the taxonomy of the empire’s visual registers—an image similar in effect to the trope of Korea as a local site in the service of the colonial gaze. On Korea as the object of the exotic gaze of the Japanese colonizer, see E. Taylor Atkins, Primitive Selves: Koreana in the Japanese Colonial Gaze, 1910–1945 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

37. Michael Baskett reminds us that Japanese-sponsored films featured Japan’s own narcissistic imperial projections on the screen. For instance, the images of new Japanese-built bridges, factories, or trains in colonies like Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria were integral to the “construction of an attractive modernist vision of empire, where indigenous populations were presented as living in co-prosperity, ethnic harmony, and material abundance.” See Michael Baskett, The Attractive Empire: Transnational Film Culture in Imperial Japan (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008), 8. Emphasis mine.

38. Here I draw upon the idea of connection from Yi Yongjai, Cheguk Ilbon-ŭi Chosŏn yŏnghwa, 32, 255.

39. I am indebted to the insight of Jini Kim Watson, who discusses the primacy of spatial themes in postcolonial cultural productions: “I suggest that there is a kind of postcolonial historical development whose primary process is spatial and architectural transformation, a process most clearly registered in the figures and displacements taken up in various fictional texts.” Jini Kim Watson, The New Asian City: Three-Dimensional Fictions of Space and Urban Form (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 8.

40. This spatial feature of postcolonial films accords with visual metaphors and tropes evoked in the nationalist scenario of history. Nationalist discourse on colonialism typically resorts to negative spatiotemporal metaphors such as “dark times” (ilche amhŭggi) to render and signify the oppressive aura of colonial rule in Korea. Such descriptions give the generalized impression of the era as a rupture or void in the nation’s history. Yi Yongjai, Cheguk Ilbon-ŭi Chosŏn yŏnghwa, 212.

41. Michel de Certeau’s concepts of strategy and tactic are helpful in framing the question of the construction of colonial space from the viewpoint of the ex-colonized. Both strategy and tactic are defined by their relations to power, with different “spatial” orientations and effects. What distinguishes them are the “types of operations and the role of spaces: strategies are able to produce, tabulate and impose the controlled spaces, when those
operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate and divert these spaces.” Strategies signify the manipulation of power relations that institutions or organizations exercise through their will and might: that is, the occupation and ownership of places. In contrast, the concept of tactics helps us come to terms with the condition of possibility of the colonized, who are deprived of their own space of political representation or autonomy but possess the unique subversive potential of actions. One of the key features of a tactic is its problematic location. As de Certeau writes, “[A] tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy.” See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 30, 37.


43. It is not too difficult to imagine the cultural logic behind such a draconic measure of suppression. The Japanese policy to assimilate Koreans into Japanese during the height of militarism created intense resistance and enmity among Koreans, which then found its channel of expression in the form of cinematic censorship after the liberation. The erasure of Japanese linguistic and literary references subsequently led to the stereotyping of Japanese in postcolonial Korean cinema. The actors who played Japanese characters had to speak their dialogues in Korean but with slight linguistic traits that alluded to Japanese Otherness, including intonation or accent variations. Particular headgear, such as the flat cap, was often used as a convention to register the wearer’s pro-colonial Japanese ethnicity.

44. Even when films feature modern transportation sites like train stations, they often lack the aura of novelty or uniqueness commonly associated with modern technologies. A comparison of two of Shin Sangok’s films helps us understand these contrasting characteristics. Both *The Houseguest* and *My Mother* (*Sarangbang sonnim-gwa ᄠᆞᆫ뫼니*, 1961) and *The Remembered Shadow of the Yi Dynasty* (*Ijo changyŏng*, 1967) feature the parting of lovers on and near a train station platform. The former film, which is set vaguely in postcolonial Korea, registers the resignation and sorrow of the male protagonist through the domineering presence of the train. The latter film, set in the colonial period, gives the train no such emotive charge. The station setting is devoid of emotional ambiance here; it is as alienating as any place in urban Seoul under the surveillance of the colonial power.


46. Colonial films like *Sweet Dream* (*Mimong*; Yang Chunam, 1936) demonstrate all the hallmarks of urban modernity—its fascination with the novelty, movement, and spectacle of urban experience. In contrast, postcolonial cinema displays hardly any signs of interest in the perceptual mode of modernity under the colonial regime.

47. Most of the actions of resistance fighters occur around these places at nighttime, but their presence there is essentially transitory, so that we have no sense of the space as fully occupied.

48. The neighborhood space also characteristically lacks the aura of proximity or interaction among city dwellers. In fact, back alleys in traditional residential districts like the Chongno district of Seoul rarely feature local residents, passersby, or onlookers. The austerity and deadness of these places sharply contrasts with the aura of nostalgia and sensory stimulation often found in literary works. For instance, the Japanese novelist Kajiyama
Toshiyuki offers a vivid and lively sensory description of the shabby tavern in the back alley of Chongno in one of his novellas, showing the Japanese fascination with the Korean exotic: “Such a small shabby tavern would be one of the best places in which to enjoy typical folk food and drink. The environment in any alley was entirely different from that of the main street with its trams. The humid air in the dark, winding, narrow alley stank of filthy gutters and stale urine.” Kajiyama Toshiyuki, The Clan Records: Five Stories of Korea, trans. Yoshiko Dykstra (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 117.

49. In South Korean postliberation cinema, the depiction of negative space in terms of dark, drab, empty, and anxiety-producing urban microspaces, such as back alleys, naturally suggests stylistic and thematic similarities to an American film genre, film noir (though I would submit that South Korean films’ rendition of negative space is far more artificial in ambiance, since it includes no onlookers or neighbors in the vicinity of the action). The striking resemblance reminds us that film noir may be understandable as a part of the global visual matrix of Cold War culture, rather than just as an intranational US phenomenon.

1. UNDER THE BANNER OF NATIONALISM

1. For instance, the Korean Film Alliance (Chosŏn Yonghwa Tongmaeng) submitted to USAMGIK a request for approval of the release of the documentary film Chosŏn Ťuiyŏldan (Ŭiyŏldan of Korea), which featured Kim Wonbong, a charismatic leader of the militant anarchist organization Ťuiyŏldan. USAMGIK rejected the request. The Korean Film Alliance criticized USAMGIK’s decision and mobilized public opinion to oppose USAMGIK’s stringent regulation over film exhibition. “Yŏnghwa sangyŏng hŏgaje chŏlp’yerŭl” [Calling for the abolition of film censorship by USAMGIK], Chosŏn Ilbo, October 23, 1946, 2.

2. In particular, the transfer of “enemy property” (chŏksan) theaters and the direct distribution of American films became the most contentious issues in the postliberation film scene in Korea. See Cho Hyejŏng, “Migunjŏngi yŏnghwa chŏngch’aek-e kwanhan yŏngu” [A study on American occupation era film policy] (PhD diss., Chungang University, 1997), 28–71.

3. In 1944, the colonial government in Korea consolidated the existing film companies into a single body called Chosŏn Yonghwasa. After liberation, all the properties of Chosŏn Yonghwasa were transferred to the new authority of USAMGIK. The productions of Chosŏn Yonghwasa were severely restricted as well, limited to a small number of newsreels and culture films. Han Sangŏn, Haebang konggan-ŭi yŏnghwa, yŏnghwain [Films and filmmakers in the space of liberation] (Seoul: Iron-gwa silchŏn, 2013), 23–30.

4. According to Chŏng Kŭnsik and Kyeonghee Choi, USAMGIK made a substantial effort to censor not only the press but films, reflecting a keen awareness of their propaganda effects. The organization was also aware of the political activism of leftist filmmakers in postliberation Korea. It is noteworthy that USAMGIK’s regulation on moving pictures was declared in April 1946, preceding the regulation on newspapers and other regular print media in May 1946. See Chŏng Kŭnsik and Kyeonghee Choi, “Haebang hu kŏmnŏl chŏje-ŭi yŏngurŭl wihan myŏkkaji chilmun-gwa kwaje: Singminji yusan-ŭi chongsik-kwa chaepŏnsai-esŏ (1945–1952)” [A few questions and issues on the study of the postliberation censorship system: Between the closure and the continuity of the colonial legacy (1945–1952)], Taedong Munhwa Yŏngu 74 (2011): 7–70.
5. According to An Sŏkyŏng, a renowned colonial-era filmmaker, liberation resulted in systemic difficulties for Korean filmmakers as their film stock, development chemicals, and other filmmaking resources from Japan were suddenly cut off. See his oral account in “Yŏnghw-ŭi chajenan, chŏngch'i munhwa-wa tongsi haegyŏl” [Shortage of film facilities should be solved along with the political and cultural problems], Kyŏnghyang Sinmun, December 15, 1946, 2.

6. The splitting of Korea into two inimical states led to a divergence in the anticolonial discourse of their films. As Travis Workman argues, the type of nationalist discourse that South Korean director Ch'oe In'gyū illustrated in his films of the liberation era like Hurrah! For Freedom is very different from that in early North Korean films such as My Home Village. See Travis Workman, “Narrating and Aestheticizing Liberation in Hurrah! For Freedom and My Home Village,” Review of Korean Studies 18, no. 1 (June 2015): 77–102.

7. These postwar years also witnessed the rise of a popular culture and film industry that paralleled and contributed to the spread of the Cold War logic and order in South Korea. Steven Chung argues that the popular films and discourses of 1950s South Korea show complex trajectories of interaction and dialogue with the global popular culture. See chapter 2 of Split Screen Korea: Shin Sang-ok and Postwar Cinema (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 47–81.

8. For an illuminating account of Shin’s career in the 1960s, see chapter 3 of Chung’s Split Screen Korea, 88–106.

9. Among these works only two films, Hurrah! For Freedom and The Night before Independence Day, are still in existence.

10. Two production companies, Kyemong Yŏnghwa Hyŏphoe and Koryŏ Yŏnghwa Hyŏphoe, made most of the films that purveyed this anticolonial nationalism. Kyemong Yŏnghwa Hyŏphoe financed the production of biographical historical films such as The Chronicle of An Chunggŭn; The Chronicle of March 1st Revolution; Yun Ponggil, the Martyr; and Yu Kwansun. Koryŏ Yŏnghwa Hyŏphoe, on the other hand, produced the nonbiographical nationalist films directed by Ch'oe In'gyū. The prominent film historian Yi Yŏngil points out that the senior filmmakers with a nationalist orientation played a decisive role in creating the cinematic rendition of anticolonial history. See his Han'guk yŏnghwa chŏnsa [A general history of Korean cinema], rev. ed. (Seoul: Sodo, 2004), 218–19.

11. I acknowledge that the historic partition of Korea makes the use of the term Korea or South Korea murky and complicated here. To be sure, political conflict and polarization had been brewing since liberation, which resulted in partition in 1948 and civil war in 1950. Such time lines make it difficult to discern the state origins of those films made before 1948. Hurrah! for instance, would be a Korean film but not a South Korean film according to this logic. The film was made during the incipient nation-state era under American military occupation (1945–48).

12. Travis Workman’s article is a remarkable exception to the interpretive insulation surrounding Hurrah! It is the most sustained and nuanced reading of the film in recent years. Comparing this work to the first North Korean film, My Home Village, Workman brings attention to the historical specificity of two films by calling attention to their differing aesthetic constructions of liberation. See his “Narrating and Aestheticizing Liberation.” My reading here builds upon his insights, particularly on the intensive use of melodramatic and gendered tropes of romance.
13. For instance, the film’s male protagonist, Hanjung, is killed at the end according to the film script and other secondary sources, but his death is never depicted or shown in the damaged final film reel, and the sequence in which Hanjung (Chŏn Ch’anggŭn) and Mihyang (Yu Kyesŏn) talk about their relationship is so fragmented that it is nearly impossible to decipher the substance of their conversation. The damage to the film prints led even the prominent film historian Yi Yongil to misconstrue the basic story of the film in his magisterial Han’guk yŏnghwa chŏnsa (A general history of Korean cinema), where his summary (217–18) pays attention only to the interaction of the male protagonist Hanjung (Chŏn Ch’anggŭn) with the kisaeng Mihyang, overlooking Hanjung’s important romance with the other female protagonist, Hyeja (played by Hwang Ryŏhŭi), and her crucial contribution to the nationalist struggle.


15. Workman, “Narrating and Aestheticizing Liberation.”

16. The film ends with Hanjung and Hyeja running away from the hospital. This account of Hanjung’s death is drawn not from the film but from other secondary sources. According to various secondary sources, Hanjung is shot and killed at daybreak on the day of the liberation.

17. Contrary to the convention of romance in popular film in which the woman is often the object of desire, Hanjung appears as the male subject of the female gaze, signaling an implicit link between having political authority and being the focus of women’s desiring gaze.

18. Hence, the film departs from the typical scenario in popular cinema where the fulfillment of heterosexual romance parallels the resolution of the main conflict. I have in mind here the conventional norm of Hollywood, but in other commercial cinemas as well a heterosexual romance functions as a parallel story. See David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013).

19. It should be noted that kisaeng are not portrayed negatively in subsequent films. Im Kwont’aek’s films in particular show the transformation of kisaeng for the nationalist cause. See chapter 4 on kisaeng and gangster films.

20. Mihyang later provides money to the nationalist camp in an effort to exonerate herself. But her effort to bring the “tainted” money to the revolutionaries enables Nambu to trace her to the nationalist camp and find Hanjung there. Thus Mihyang unintentionally brings trouble to the revolutionaries. In the police raid, Hanjung is taken captive and Mihyang dies in the crossfire. The film thus punishes Mihyang for her prior involvement with a collaborator and illustrates the negative representation of money in early films about the colonial period. For an examination of the changing meanings of money in the colonial representation, see chapter 3.


22. Workman points out that this domestic space of Hyeja is apolitical. My view is that while it appears to be apolitical, it is also the site of mobilization of female labor and devotion for the nationalist cause. See Workman, “Narrating and Aestheticizing Liberation,” 93.
23. This theme, as I will illustrate, tends to resonate more strongly in biographical films of the late 1950s.

24. I would like to point out that Korean leaders were well aware that Japan had lost the war and were even contacted by the Japanese government regarding the transfer of power. For instance, Song Chinu, a moderate nationalist with untainted credentials, was approached by the Government-General between April 9 and 13 to be in charge of an interim administrative committee to secure law and order. He declined the offer, and on the morning of April 15 it was made to Yŏ Unhyŏng, who accepted. See Carter J. Eckert et al., Korea Old and New: A History (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1990), 329–30.

25. The film's damaged prints make it difficult to assess the details of the quarrel. However, they suggest that Hanjung apologizes for criticizing his fellow revolutionaries.

26. It would be possible, then, to read Hanjung's decision to continue fighting, which results in his unnecessary self-sacrifice, as a reflection of the filmmaker Ch'oe's overcompensating act of apology for his collaborationist work during the colonial period. More importantly, Ch'oe formulates a credo that far exceeds its utilitarian purpose. By fashioning nationalist resistance as individual, adventurous, excessive, and overtly uncompromising, Ch'oe manufactures tropes of nationalism that are reactionary in nature, limited in scope, and unfeasible in practice.

27. The active role of two filmmakers in the early years of filmmaking in postcolonial Korea deserves special consideration. Both Yun Pongch'un and Chŏn Ch'anggūn started film careers in the colonial period but dropped them in order to avoid mounting pressures for collaboration toward the end of the colonial years. Chŏn in particular had been known in the industry for having personal contact with the prominent resistance leader Kim Ku of the provisional government-in-exile in Shanghai. And Chŏn later became the proselytizer of Kim Ku's nationalist politics after Kim's assassination by a South Korean military officer in 1949. As close friends in private life, both Yun and Chŏn played crucial roles in promulgating the nationalist view of colonial history in cinema through the practice of biographical filmmaking. Furthermore, they, along with their close associate film historian Yi Yongil, created the conceptual framework for a nationalist historiography of Korean cinema through their personal and firsthand accounts of colonial-era filmmaking and its culture. Yi later formulated his historical argument on realism as the foundation of Korean cinema, which is itself based on Yun's ideas of colonial cinema. The body of biographical films occupies a central place in the earnest and didactic mode of filmmaking that nearly achieved the status of official national history.

28. The list of nationalist heroes does not include radical leftist activists of the colonial period; these figures were structurally disavowed as subjects of filmmaking in South Korea.

29. Yun Pongch'un, the director who also contributed to the nationalist historiography of South Korean cinema, directed the first three films on the resistance leader Yu Kwansun in 1948, 1959, and 1966. Yu's ascendancy to the status of leader of the March 1st Movement hence derives in part from Yun's passionate advocacy for the cinematic treatment of Yu's heroism. Of the three versions, Yun's 1959 film received the highest critical acclaim.

30. Of the three versions, the 1959 film by Chŏn Ch'anggūn, who also stars in the eponymous role, has become the canonized version.
31. The list of late 1950s biographical historical dramas includes Yu Kwansun (Yun Pongch’un, 1959), which focuses on the March 1st Movement of 1919. These films clearly show how South Korean cinema rehearsed the history of the Korean Empire to support the nationalist view of the colonial period that immediately ensued.

32. Though most biographical films focus on the heroic struggle of national leaders, Kim Kangyun’s Nameless Stars (Irŭmŏmnŭn pyŏldŭl, 1959) is an exception. The film depicts the 1929 Kwangju student protest with an emphasis on the collective struggle of young people.

33. Im Hwasu, the film’s producer, was arguably the most powerful and controversial figure in the film and entertainment business in the 1950s through his close association with Rhee’s repressive political machine. He effectively functioned as Rhee’s henchman and ideological mouthpiece in the culture industry. Im’s positions include the presidency of the National Theater Association and the presidency of the Film Producers’ Association. He also intimidated actors in the Anti-Communist Artist Association into giving speeches for Rhee’s elections campaigns. His violent behavior toward actors, including an attack that resulted in the hospitalization of the then-leading comic actor Kim Hŭigap, was widely publicized in newspapers and caused public outrage.

34. The actual amount was 40 million hwan, and the matter was later discussed at a cabinet meeting of the Rhee administration. “Ch’ŏngnyŏn Rhee Syngman chejak, kongbosilsŏ sachŏnmanhwan” [For production of Young Syngman Rhee, Division of Public Information provided 40 million hwan], Chosŏn Ilbo, May 18, 1960, 4.


36. This collaboration does not mean, however, that everything in the film is historically correct. As Lee Sunjin aptly points out, Rhee’s subjective memories show inconsistencies with the key features of the film. In fact, the film helped turn the president’s subjective account into an accepted truth. See Lee, “Hanguk chŏnjaeng hu,” 98.

37. The Office of Presidential Security also gave film production various historical artifacts, props in the office’s armory, to enhance the aura of historical authenticity. See Lee Sunjin, “Pak Haengch’ŏl,” in Yŏnghwaii koyangŭl chajasŏ [In search of the home of cinema] (Seoul: Korean Film Archive, 2003), 121.

38. The film features virtually every major and minor actor of South Korean cinema in the late 1950s.


40. In the late 1950s the average number of screenings of a domestic film was somewhere between three and six. Lee, “Hanguk chŏnjaeng hu,” 81.

42. The rigged presidential election of March 15, 1960, created widespread civilian protest and unrest. In the following month, the April Revolution of 1960 brought down the Rhee regime.

43. The dire circumstances of the war led filmmakers to produce documentary or news-reel films in support of the state’s war effort. The personnel, technologies, and distribution channels of filmmaking had to rely heavily on the government’s funding and support. Furthermore, the military information division of the US military played a key role in ensuring the continuation if not the stability of the filmmaking industry during the war and its aftermath.

44. The film was also a part of the larger promotional spectacle events of the late 1950s that emphasized the greatness of the current leader. These propaganda events included an exhibition (Unam chŏnsihoe), a play (Pungun), and news reels (such as one for the eighty-second birthday celebration of President Rhee) that all came out in 1957. These productions typically showcased Rhee as an exceptional leader of diplomatic skills during the colonial period. Lee, “Hanguk chŏnjaeng hu,” 83.

45. Furthermore, Independence Association and other biopics of the era allude to a contemporaneous view of Chosŏn Korea very different from the colonialist appraisal of the premodern state and its failure. On the surface, the films appear to share the Japanese historical perspective on Chosŏn Korea as a stagnant, corrupt, and incompetent polity. However, I argue that Independence Association reframes its failure as a stage in a broader trajectory of growth, both for political leaders and for citizens who develop a keen historical consciousness.


47. For an understanding of Shin Sangok’s popular film aesthetics as well as his devotion to filmmaking, see Chung, Split Screen Korea, 129.


49. Prasenjit Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

50. The fact that home never becomes the site of marriage or procreation shows the subordination of the domestic realm to a larger political purpose. This pattern of showing virtuous characters who sacrifice the joys of home and family to a greater political aim persists in movies about the colonial period in South Korean cinema in general.

51. At one point, Rhee brings all his earnings from his Korean language tutoring to his mother. However, the money hardly fills the emotional void that his impending departure creates. The scene underscores the moral integrity and sacrifice that Rhee’s devotion to the nation entails.

52. Lee Sunjin argues that this conceptualization of Russia, rather than Japan, as the archenemy of Korea is a sign that the film transposes Cold War bipolar politics into the pre-colonial period. See her “Siguk yŏnghwa ttonŭn kinyŏmbi yŏnghwa” [A current affairs film or epic film], booklet in Kuhannal sidaegŭk [Historical films about the Korean Empire], DVD boxed set (Seoul: Hanguk Yŏngsang Charyowon, 2012), 15.
53. After the queen's assassination, the conservative faction seeks revenge on Kim Hong-gijip for his close association with the Japanese. Facing death, however, Kim does not resist or defend his position. Rather, he embraces their retribution. The film depicts Kim as a man of solemn demeanor, who in his last words quietly expresses his loyalty toward the king. Hence, the film brings out the pro-Japanese reformer's patriotic intentions rather than simply condemning him for his political miscalculation and ambition. That Rhee had developed the close ties with the pro-Japanese reform faction remains curiously downplayed in the film's depiction of his activities during this crucial period.

54. The Independence Gate (Tongnimmun) was established in 1897, after the first Sino-Japanese War, to celebrate Korea's independence from its previous status as tributary to China.

55. This middle segment of the film portrays a court torn apart and rendered ineffectual by political infighting. It focuses on the Kapshin coup, a failed three-day coup in 1884 that nearly toppled the monarchy. The coup, led by a group who wanted Korea to emulate the progressive reforms of Meiji Japan, included Kim Okkyun (1851–94) and Pak Yonghyo (1861–1939). It was quickly suppressed by a Chinese garrison in Korea, a development that led to the Chinese domination of Korea from 1885 to 1894. The film depicts the struggle over the reinstatement of Pak Yonghyo (1861–1939), the coup's alleged mastermind, who had fled to Japan. Rhee makes a strong appeal for pardoning Pak and his affiliate Sô Chaepil. But others vehemently oppose Rhee's request and accuse him of fomenting the culture of subversion. When the debate reaches an impasse, the king intervenes to break the deadlock. In real life the king at this point purged the group associated with Pak and Sô, but in the film the nature of the resolution is never specified and the issue is simply dropped from the narrative. As a result of this ellipse, the thorny question of Rhee's political loyalty to the monarchy remains unaddressed. The sequence illustrates how the film is structured around a series of blockages, distortions, and ellipses, all of which effectively obscure Rhee's affiliations in the volatile political contentions of his time. In particular, what is disavowed in the frame is the staunch pro-Japanese orientation of Pak's coup. Rhee's connection to the group of pro-Japanese reformers who backed the coup is downplayed in the film's depiction of court politics. This connection would have complicated, if not undermined, Rhee's later reputation for being a staunch anti-Japanese nationalist, which was central to his statesman image in postcolonial South Korea.

56. The newspaper even misreports his death in prison, turning him into a distant memory in the public mind. In short, Rhee is living on “borrowed time” at this point.

57. Liberation-era films are successful in focusing on the plights and struggles of individual characters, but they are not effective in constructing the complex image of the nationalist agent or leader who finds his worth among the people. That is, these films lack the communicative matrix of political orientation and authority that structure and naturalize the hegemonic status of anticolonial nationalism and the role of distinguished individual within it. Instead, they tend to dramatize and emphasize the anticolonial struggle of a more isolated and alienated male protagonist, set against a backdrop of a society in which many do not embrace or share his political creed. He acts to prove his faith in the nationalist cause. Hence, he is not automatically endowed with the aura of moral authority or power that later biographical films give their male protagonist. This aura is clearly related to the increasing use of such exceptional symbolic capital in Korean politics.
58. I owe this insight to Travis Workman, who argues that liberation, depicted through the “temporality of representing the recent past while simultaneously projecting a future for the postcolonial nation-state,” is the central thematic feature of two postliberation films: *Hurrah! For Freedom* (1946) and *My Home Village* (1949). Differences in the depictions of liberation in the two films, he astutely points out, are linked to “the different views of colonial history that emerged under the U.S. and Soviet occupations.” Workman, “Narrating and Aestheticizing Liberation,” 2, 78. I value his insight into the primacy of liberation in these films, and slightly shift Workman’s focus on the configuration of the political crisis in general to bring attention to the question of leadership in colonial or precolonial times of political crisis.

2. FILM AND THE WAESAEK CONTROVERSIES


3. A major popular magazine, *Arirang*, assigned translation of postwar Japanese literary works to young prominent Korean writers. Its release was advertised in the major newspaper *Tonga Ilbo*, and it garnered substantial attention, as its project represented the first major translation of Japanese literature in the postcolonial period. For details of this literary event, see Chŏn, “1960’ŭn wae ilbon muhwarul choaehaesulkka,” 517–25.


6. “Uri yŏnghwa taeil such’ul kyehoe, chehyŏpsŏ hŭimang chakp’ŭm chŏpsujung” [Producers’ Association plans to export films to Japan, now gathers the list of films], *Han’guk Ilbo*, May 16, 1960, 4.

7. The notion of archipelago is drawn from Bruce Cumings’s concept “archipelago of empire” in his book *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 393–96. The Asia-Pacific Film Festival was initially called the Southeast Asian Film Festival and later the Asian Film Festival. For more information on the early history of the film festival, see Lee Sangjoon, “The Emergence of the Asian Film Festival: Cold War Asia and Japan’s Re-entrance into the Regional Film Festival in the 1950s,” ed. Daisuke Miyao, *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 226–44.

8. Even though the government showed no signs of changing its policy, four of eleven items in the petition list were directly related to the (future) importation of Japanese films. “Pŏlssŏ ilhwa suipkwon nirigo honmihanŭn yŏnghwagyŏ, chehyŏp yŏngbaega ch’ungdol” [Film industry shows signs of disarray over Japanese film importation as KFPA and distributors’ association collide], *Han’guk Ilbo*, June 1, 1960, evening edition, 4.
9. The outright business calculation was only too apparent to film critics, importers, and distributors. Some articles expressed indignation that some sectors of the domestic film industry had failed to show contrition regarding their compliance with the propaganda campaign of the Rhee administration. See “Yŏmch'i ŏmnŭn sanghon” [Shameless commercialism], Tonga Ilbo, June 14, 1960, 4.

10. “Kwan-ŭi kömyŏlje p'yeji dung chehyŏpsŏ könuisŏ kolja” [Key ideas of the KFPA include the revision of government-led film censorship], Kyŏnghyang Sinmun, May 28, 1960, 4.

11. I was not able to track which four minutes were excised from the film.

12. The Hollywood films on the waiting list for review and release included The Barbarian and the Geisha (John Huston, 1958), Sayonara (Joshua Logan, 1957), and House of Bamboo (Samuel Fuller, 1955).

13. To be precise, the film is set in Okinawa Japan during the US occupation. A US captain Frisby is sent to Okinawa after World War II to promote democracy by establishing a school. The local people, however, want to have a teahouse instead.


17. “Kyoyuk kachi ittaedo ilhwa suip pparŭda” [Even with educational merit, release of Japanese films is not allowed], Han'guk Ilbo, September 27, 1960, 3.

18. For instance, Leni Riefenstahl’s 1938 documentary Olympia Part One: Festival of the Nations garnered an enthusiastic response from Korean film audiences because it showcased the triumph of the Korean athlete Son Kijŏng in the marathon. The film was released twice in Korea: during the late colonial period (1940) and after liberation (1946). Its commercial success led to the release in subsequent years of culture films that featured international sports events. Hence, the sports-themed culture film was one of the most effective vehicles for conveying ideas and ideals of nationalism to film audiences. The release of The Torch was an attempt to benefit from the general commercial success of sports films. For details on the reception of Olympia, see Sim Hyeagyŏng, “Han'guk sports minjok chuŭi-ui han kiwon” [A source of Korea's sports nationalism], in Chiwŏnjin Han'guk yŏnghwasa: Munhwa yŏnghwai an'gwa pak [Erased Korean film history: Inside and outside the culture film], ed. Lee Sunjin et al. (Seoul: Han'guk Yŏngsang Charyowon, 2014), 187–227.


23. One anonymous critic went so far as to claim that the contemporary encroachment of Japanese film represented a cultural resurgence of Japan’s late imperial ideology of the Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

24. The most dramatic case would be the lopsided commercial success of Shin Sangok’s Sŏng ch’unhyang over Hong Sŏnggi’s Chunhyangŏn. Both films were released almost simultaneously for the Chusŏk holiday, but Shin’s film triumphed partly because of the appropriate color correction he applied to the film. Shin had to send the film prints to Japan for proper postproduction work.


26. The real practice of smuggling as well as the metaphor of smuggling appears frequently in the characterizations of the disreputable but uncontrollable cultural traffic between Japan and South Korea during the 1950s and early 1960s. “Meari” [Echo], Han’guk Ilbo, May 5, 1960, evening edition, 1.

27. “Kil t’ŭinŭn hanil yŏnghwa kyoru” [Opening the path for Korea-Japan film exchange], Tonga Ilbo, September 3, 1962, 5. Apparently, this shooting trip to Japan was a grueling task for cinematographer Chŏng Ilsŏng, as he and the director Kim had to use a midnight movie theater for lodging to cut expenses. See Yi Yŏnho, Chŏngsol-ŭi nakin [Signature of a legendary filmmaker] (Seoul: Han’guk Yŏngsang Charyowon, 2007), 32–33.

28. The Ministry of Information was also criticized for allowing the release of another “Japanese color” film, The Bridge on the River Kwai. An anonymous reporter criticized the board for overlooking the effect of antiwar ideology on Korean viewers, given the importance of military preparedness for waging a war against communism (Pangong imchŏn’taese). “Panghwa-e sŭmyŏdŭn Ilbonsaek” [Japanese color in Korean cinema], Kyŏnghyang Sinmun, November 24, 1962, 8.


30. The censorship documents housed at the Korean Film Archive show the injunction to eliminate images of “Japanese color.” They are mostly urban scenes of Tokyo and images of Japanese dancers. “Kuksan yŏnghwa haenbokhan kodok sangyŏnhŏga” [Permission for release of the Korean film Haengbokhan kodok], in “Haengbokhan kodok kŏmyŏl sŏryu” [Censorship records of Haengbokhan kodok], 1963, in Han’guk Yŏngsang Charyowon kŏmyŏl sŏryu [Korean Film Archive censorship records] Korean Film Archive, Seoul.

31. Three more South Korean films set in contemporary Japan were slated for review and release: Kim Sŏngmin’s Black Glove (Kŏmŭn changgap, 1963), Hong Sŏnggi and Pak Ch’ans’s Tokyo Elegy (Tongkyŏng piga, 1963), and Chang Ilho’s The Bridge over Hyŏnhaeta’an Strait (Hyŏnhaet’an-ŭi Karŭmdari, 1963).

33. It is noteworthy that the problem of Japanese color was discussed in conjunction with other targets of film regulation, most notably the depiction of communism, and that restrictions on communism in film were one aspect of wide-ranging Cold War legislation against communist activity in Korea. The previous censorship board (the national committee on film ethics, from the Second Republic period [1960–61]) had already formalized subjects of prohibition: procommunist themes, materials harmful to public morality, and Japanese color, defined in terms of story line, physical background, and actors. (Language was not specified, although the general prohibition of Japanese color would have included prohibition of the Japanese language.) In 1962, in response to the growing complexity of the definition of Japanese color, the Ministry of Information promised flexible application, claiming that it would honor the regulations from the previous regime but carry out a “case-by-case” approach for each film under review. “Ŏesaek yŏnghwasa suip ch’uchŏn-e malssŏng.”

34. Much of my account of the contention surrounding Happy Solitude is drawn from the “Ilbon saekch’ae-wa yŏnghwagye” newspaper article.

35. That said, the only permissible ground for Korean films’ portrayal of Japanese people was a setting in Korea during the colonial era. This was why the ideal interethnic scenario came from Japanese literary works that visited the colonial period, such as Kajiyama Toshiyuki’s The Remembered Traces of Yi Dynasty and The Genealogy, both of which were turned into films.


37. “Muŏsŭl makŭlkŏsin’ga.”

38. A newspaper reporter noted that all the screenplays of dubious or “nationless” origin in South Korean films were de facto Japanese works. See “Hyŏpsang 14-nyŏnmane noin hyŏnhaet’an-ŭi kagyo” [The bridge over Hyŏnhaet’an Strait that took fourteen years to build], culture section, Sŏul Sinmun, November 20, 1965, 1.

39. Both Yu Hanch’ŏl and Yu Hyŏnmok’s views are drawn from the “Muŏsŭl makŭlkŏsin’ga” article.

40. Shin Sangok was not the director of the film. That title belongs to two directors: Im Wonsik and Na Ponghan. However, given the film’s stature and scale, it would be safe to assume that Shin played a decisive role in its overall outcome. Shin also had a habit of assigning the title of directorship to his assistant when a finished film did not meet his expectations.

41. The film never received an approval for release. The year 1965 thus refers to the production year, not the release year.


43. Michi Kanako entered South Korea with a visitor’s visa, worked on the film’s shooting for forty days, and returned to Japan. “Hangukul nŏmbonun Ilyŏnghwa,” 7.

44. For instance, in 1956 Shin Sangok started discussions with a Japanese film company and TV station about making The Remembered Traces of Yi Dynasty. This effort bore fruit
in 1967 with the film’s release. Ibid., 7. *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samgukchi*) was also slated for coproduction. See Yi Yŏngil, “Chisang t’oron,” 5.

45. The South Korean government kept stringent restrictions on civilian travel until 1989. Travel to foreign countries, including Japan, was allowed only for diplomatic, business, or education purposes.

46. Critics also noted the lack of dramatic verisimilitude in location films. The Korean characters act in exaggerated ways when they are set in a Japanese-location sequence, as if they are country bumpkins newly venturing into the dizzying urban space. See “Panghwake sŭmyŏdŭnŭn Ilbonjo” [The Japanese trend ingrained in Korean cinema], *Taehan Ilbo*, September 10, 1966, 5.

47. Another Zainichi actress, Yu Sumiae, appeared in Yu Hyŏnmok’s 1963 film *Dreams of Youth Will Be Splendid* (*P’urŭn kkumŭn pinnari*).


50. The release of the 1963 film *Happy Solitude* was still being blocked for violating film regulations (i.e., featuring a Japanese actor) when *Lonesome Goose* was in production in 1966.

51. “TBC-ŭi Tonggyŏng Nagŭne, ilbon hyŏnji chwaryŏng chungjir’yŏng” [Tokyo Vagabond of TBC Station is ordered to stop filming], *Chungang Ilbo*, December 3, 1966, 5.

52. In the case of *Lonesome Goose*, the filmmaker never saw its completion and the Korean Film Archive database shows no trace of its production history whatsoever. It was completely erased from the official records of Korean film history. However, negative film prints and the screenplay of *Happy Solitude* are stored in the vault of the Korean Film Archive.

53. Chang Ilho’s 1966 film *International Gold Robbery* (*Kukche kŭmgwe sagŏn*) also conveys an anticommunist message by showing espionage activities on behalf of North Korea in modern Japan.

54. Park Chung Hee took this position in his “Hanil hoedam t’agyŏl-e chūumhan t’ŭkpyŏl tamhwamun” [Special address on agreement of normalization between South Korea and Japan], June 22, 1965, www.parkchunghee.or.kr/#!/detailed/analect/96.

3. **THE MANCHURIAN ACTION FILM**

3. Ibid., 27.
9. Ibid., 230.
10. Sin Ch’aeho and Chang Chiyŏn were not the only historians who shared the irredentist dream for Manchuria. Many nationalist historians who fled into exile in Manchuria during colonial times agreed on Manchuria’s significance to Korea’s national history as a whole. See Kim Kisŭng, “Pak Ŭnsik,” in Cho, Han, and Pak, *Han’guk-ŭi yŏksaga-wa yŏksahak*, 2:100; Chŏn Uyong, “Kim Kyohŏn, Yi Sangryong,” in Cho, Han, and Pak, *Han’guk-ŭi yŏksaga-wa yŏksahak*, 2:118–19.
12. For more on Mansenshi, see ibid., 246–49.
15. Yi Hoeyŏng’s life, for instance, exemplifies the hardships endured by anticolonial resisters in Manchuria. Born into one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the late Chosŏn period, Yi liquidated his enormous family fortune to procure resources for the resistance movement when Chosŏn was annexed into Japan. He then moved to Manchuria to establish a military school for resistance guerrilla forces. He subsequently spent all his family fortune for the nationalist cause and faced extreme material hardship as a result. For an account of his tumultuous life, see Yi Tŏkil, *Anak’isŭtŭ Yi Hoeyŏng-gwa Chŏlmun Kŭdŭl* [Anarchist Yi Hoeyŏng and the young patriots] (Seoul: Ungjin Tatk’ŏm, 2001).
17. The preamble of South Korea’s constitution makes clear this political heritage.
18. It should be noted that this interethnic romance is never actually shown in the film but is conveyed in the conversation between the Japanese higher official (future
father-in-law) and the Korean man (future son-in-law). The exclusion of the Japanese woman is not unusual in Manchurian action films, which showcase conflicts between men. In particular, the figuration of Japan and the Japanese as a military force in these films simply leaves little room for visibility of Japanese women.

19. This mode of adoption, in which marriage and adoption are conflated, is a clear violation of the immutable law of Korean family in two ways. First, it collides with the Korean rule of adoption whereby adopting a son with a different surname is prohibited. Moreover, the Korean family system treats an adopted son as a biological son. Consequently, the new adoption system would mean, in the eyes of Koreans, the permission of an incestuous relationship. Such practices met with fierce criticism and resistance from the Korean people.


20. Baek Moonim points out that *kisaeng* characters in popular colonial narratives often appear as the embodiment of traditional values, despite their dubious sexual reputations, and as the allegorical representation of the Korean nation. And because they represented violated corporal integrity, *kisaeng* women were often subject to abjection and abandonment by patriarchal and national authority. See her *Ch’unchyang’-ŭi taldŭk: Han’guk yŏsŏng-ŭi panjokchhari kyebohak* [Daughters of Ch’unhyang: The incomplete genealogy of Korean women] (Seoul: Ch’aeaksesang, 2001), 96–98.

21. Kim Soyoung advances a similar argument regarding action films. She contends that the performativity of physical action exceeds the narrative logic and demonstrates some potentials of subversion to the dominant social ideology. See her “Genre as Contact Zone.”


24. Instead of using the generic term *Korean War film*, South Korean critics and filmmakers have historically used the catchall category of *anticommunist film* (*pan’gong yŏnghwa* in Korean) to signal a generically varied body of films that strictly comport with state politics. *Anticomunist film* signals cinematic terrain far broader and more representationally diverse than films narrowly featuring imagery of Korean War battles. It encompasses genres such as espionage, action, melodrama, film noir, musical, and children’s animation. David Scott Diffrient aptly labels it an “umbrella genre” that not only corresponded to the ideological mandates of the authoritarian regimes but also entailed a greater degree of “genre intermixing.” See David Scott Diffrient, “‘Military Enlightenment’ for the Masses: Genre and Cultural Intermixing in South Korea’s Golden Age War Films,” *Cinema Journal* 45, no. 1 (2005): 23.

25. Han Hyŏnmo’s *March of Justice* (*Chŏngŭiŭi chin’gyŏk*, 1951) and Yun Pongch’ŭn’s *The Western Front* (*Sŏbu chŏnsŏn*, 1951) and *Footprints of the Barbarian* (*Orangkaeŭi paljach’wi*, 1951) are among the earliest cases of government-sponsored filmmaking. These films were designed to propagate the moral and political justification of the fight against North Korean aggression. *March of Justice* was, moreover, the first official documentary film on the Korean War to be produced by the Ministry of Defense. Lee Sunjin points out the film’s significance on several registers. It was the first filmic attempt to chronicle the events of the ongoing Korean War, and it offered a cogent account of the war effort against communist aggression. The film also stresses the Korean War’s international dimensions, which

26. South Korea’s capitalist mode of imagining anticolonial history becomes clear when it is juxtaposed against North Korea’s cinematic rendition of the anticolonial struggle. Although the issue of money does appear in North Korean films, it never rises to the level of principal concern in the anticolonial campaign. Nor does it function as the irreplaceable kernel of the nationalist narrative. Rather, North Korean films are mainly preoccupied with the formation of national unity. The political enemy is located not only externally, that is, in the form of the Japanese enemy other, but also internally, in the form of factional strife and divisive infighting. The latter is often conceived as a more serious threat to the nationalist campaign. Much of North Korean cinema’s narrative impetus is about overcoming divisive internal politics and forging a unified front for the struggle. Multivolume film series like *Star of Korea* (*Chosŏnŭi pyŏl*, Ôm Kilsŏn, Cho Kyŏngsuk, 1980–87) and *Nation and Destiny* (*Minjoggwa unmyŏng*, numerous directors, 1991–) illustrate this thematic convention most clearly. In Shin Sangok’s North Korean film *Salt* (*Sokŭm*, 1984), the female protagonist undergoes unending destitution and hardship. The abject poverty she suffers brings about the tragic disintegration of her family. Yet, despite the pressing economic issue, the film takes a dramatic turn at the end, underscoring her renewed class consciousness and determination to participate in the anticolonial struggle.


29. This aspect of Manchurian action films reminds us of the problematic neglect of local history and experiences that Heonik Kwon points out in his study of the Cold War discourse and imaginary. See his *Other Cold War*, 122.

30. In *The Good, the Bad, the Weird* (*Chotŏnnom nappunnom isanghamnom*, Kim Jeeun, 2008), Yun T’aegu, the “weird” character played by Song Kangho, gives a forceful articulation of this scavenging logic. Placed in fierce competition with two other men, that is, the good and the bad, in pursuit of the treasure map, Yun states that even thieves should respect others when it comes to stealing. He reasons that those who take action first, referring to himself, should claim ownership of the property.

4. IN THE COLONIAL ZONE OF CONTACT

1. Although I use the adjective *generic* to refer to an aggregate of films that share recurring tropes, imagery and narrative, and thematic conventions, my use of the term *genre* includes the more historically specific development of the film cycle. I elaborate on this dimension of film terminology in more detail later.

2. In this regard, the South Korean gangster film differs from its American counterpart, although the two do seem to share thematization of the individual struggle for success in times of political turmoil and social crisis. In the case of classic Hollywood gangster films, the archetypical films emerged during the Great Depression.

3. The colonial discourse of the *kisaeng* courtesan takes us into quite different historical implications. The *kisaeng* effectively became an icon of colonial Korea through modern
technologies of image reproduction. Under colonial rule, the image of kisaeng proliferated in many visual materials, particularly in tourism promotions, and inculcated particular ways of perceiving the figure of female entertainer as an object of fascination and desire for the beholder. Often featured against a backdrop of landmark architecture of the bygone era, such images of kisaeng naturalized and privileged the colonizers’ modern subjecthood through the colonialist gaze. Yet the early gangster films seem to counteract the colonialist view of the kisaeng, often by pairing her with the agile and muscular Korean protagonist.

For the kisaeng as icon of Korean culture and as object of colonizers’ fascination, see Atkins, *Primitive Selves*.

4. Though these kisaeng films are set in the colonial period, the 1960s and 1970s saw a surge of kisaeng-themed films set in postcolonial, contemporary settings, such as *Mother Kisaeng* (Ŏmma Kisaeng; Pak Yun’gyo, 1968), *I Demand No Condition* (Na-ège chogŏnŭn ᐈpta; Kang Taesŏn, 1971), *Although We Are Now Strangers* (Chigŭmŭn namijiman; Cho Mun-jin, 1971), and *Live Well, My Daughters* (Chal saradao nae ttalŭra; Kim Sŏngyŏng, 1972).

5. The dramatic arc of the latter group is similar to that of a subset of social problem films in Hollywood called the “fallen woman” film cycle of the silent and early talkie film era. These films typically salaciously thematized the subject of female prostitution and its moral and social consequences. See Lea Jacobs, *The Wages of Sin: Censorship and the Fallen Woman Film, 1928–1942* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

6. To be precise, the heyday of kisaeng films predates that of gangster films. Manchurian action films and swordplay films (muhyŏpmul) are antecedent action films (hwalguk) of the mid-1960s and 1970s. In the case of Manchurian action films, the theme of nationalist struggle against the colonial forces is explicit and central.

7. In contrast, the gangster is not the destined mate for the kisaeng character in kisaeng films. The heterosexual couple consists of an upper-class man of the Korean elite and a kisaeng, a disparity that results in her eventual demise.


9. Ibid., 150, 152.

10. Ibid., 153.

11. Ibid.

12. Most notably, I owe an intellectual debt to Heonik Kwon, whose comprehensive critical overview on the epistemological contours of the modern bipolar political order called the Cold War shaped my approach to filmic representation of colonialism as a part of the South Korea’s cultural production of the Cold War. See Heonik Kwon, *Other Cold War*.


16. Indeed, this intersection in my view remains woefully underexamined in Korean film studies. The political rhetoric and discourse of the dominant-imaginary Cold War have
always permeated and affected the local memories of violent political upheavals, although those local memories have maintained a contrarian integrity and voice.

17. It is through the subordination and adjustment of local knowledge to the larger schema of global politics that the dominant Cold War political agenda holds great discursive efficiency and sway over the population. As Heonik Kwon repeatedly reminds us in Other Cold War, the modern reality of the Cold War comes into full view only through dialectical understanding of two seemingly incompatible visions: the global construction of it in the West and local experiences of it in the postcolonial world.

18. Out of six films he directed in 1967, four directly or indirectly deal with the theme of colonialism. These colonial-themed films are I Yearn to Go, Youth Theater, Kang Myŏnghwa, and Miracle of Gratitude (Po’u’-ūi kijŏk).

19. Examples of kisaeng films set in the colonial era include The Lady of Myŏngwŏlgwan (Myŏngwŏlgwan ass; Pak Chongho, 1967), Blue Light, Red Light (Chŏngdŭng hongdŭng; Yi Hyŏngp’yo, 1968), Jade Hairpin (Okpinyŏ; Kang Taejin, 1968), Goodbye Seoul (Sŏuryŏ annyŏng; Chang Ilho, 1969), and A Camellia Blossoms and Falls (Tongbaekkot p’igo chigo; Chŏng Chinu, 1970). Kang Myŏnghwa was also noteworthy for catapulting the little-known actress Yun Chŏnghŭi, who played the title role, to stardom. She subsequently ended up playing the female lead in over thirty films by the end of the decade.

20. Yi Yongil criticizes reactionary sinpa melodramas for their inattention to contemporary social change and cultural developments and compares them unfavorably to early 1960s family melodramas, in which present conflicts between social values and individual agency come into clear view. I would note, however, that this criticism does not properly consider the late 1960s resurgence of films portraying colonial culture. Kisaeng films should be viewed as reacting against the previous film depictions of the colonial era, which mostly did not assess colonial culture. See his Han’guk yŏnghwa chŏnsa, 353–54.


22. According to Kwon Bodurae (in ibid.), Chang did not commit suicide for love immediately after Kang’s death. Rather, he led a life of debauchery for nearly a year before he committed suicide. There are different accounts of his death in subsequent popular narratives. A 1927 novel by Yi Haegwan recounts it as a ghost story in which the resentful ghost of Kang brings about Chang’s downfall. An anonymous 1935 version of the tale portrays his death as the result of his abysmal despair over the loss of love. The film version is closer in spirit to the later version, which emphasizes the couple’s enduring bond of love.


24. An image of student youth being rowdy presupposes implicit social tolerance and sanction, which register the unique and stable terrain of urban culture in cinematic representation. That is, the highlighted enjoyment of social privilege presupposes the lack of a nationalist consciousness or concerns for reclaiming sovereignty and independence. Instead, the focus has shifted to a reality where colonial rule is now firmly established.

25. In films such as Nameless Stars (Irŭmŏmnŭn pyŏldŭl) or Evergreen (Sangnoksu), students embody ideal types of leadership: devoting oneself to the cause of the nation and embracing the dire consequences of doing so. In other words, they emerge as icons of an enlightenment project that captured the imagination of many intellectuals in the early years.
of the colonial period. For a more detailed articulation of the enlightenment in Korean cinema, see Chung, *Split Screen Korea*.

26. It should be noted that in previous films about the colonial era the nighttime urban streets are sterile and empty, and there is no sense of neighborly connection among Koreans (or with the Japanese). Neighborly social interaction itself is largely missing from filmic representations of the colonial past.

27. There is, of course, an opposite case as well. *Evil Flower Pae Chŏngja* (*Yohwa Pae Chŏngja*; Yi Kyuung, 1966) features the notorious historic female collaborator Pae Chŏngja, who makes herself available only to powerful Japanese figures. Her sexuality is one of the most explicit markers of Otherness that incites the anger and indignation of Koreans.

28. Myŏngwŏlgwan is a renowned Korean-cuisine restaurant in Seoul that frequently appears in *kisaeng* narratives. It has become a metonym for all *kisaeng* houses in cinematic representation. Instead of using fictitious names, *kisaeng*-themed films frequently invoke this restaurant, turning it into a near-iconic brand of the business. According to records, the dance performances of *kisaeng* were the main attraction at Myŏngwŏlgwan. During the colonial period, *kisaeng* houses like Myŏngwŏlgwan were one of the main attractions for Japanese tourists in Korea.

29. In many postcard photos from the colonial era, *kisaeng* do not register this visual misalignment. They are discursively constructed to embody Korea’s passive femininity. Often juxtaposed with nostalgia-inducing images of Korea’s past such as palaces and other premodern landmark sites, the imaged *kisaeng* gaze back at the anonymous viewer in order to anchor, stabilize, and naturalize the colonial observer’s fascination with the colonized body. The aura of melancholia associated with the *kisaeng* image has to do in part with this particular positioning of passivity, which the film *Kang Myŏnghwa* largely dispels in the *kisaeng* house sequence here. For a detailed examination of the *kisaeng* image in colonial photography, see Yi Kyŏngmin, *Kisaengŭn ottŏkke mandŭrŏjŏnnŭn’ga* [How *kisaeng* was constructed] (Seoul: Sajin Akaibŭ Yŏn’guso, 2004).

30. We find a similar instance of a female entertainer forced to pour a glass in Im Kwon’aek’s *Sopyonje*, in which a young girl, Songhwa, who is ignorant of the act’s sexual implications, complies with the elderly men who press her to do so. Songhwa’s father Yubong intervenes, only to face humiliation by the unruly male clients. Yubong later violently punishes Songhwa for thoughtlessly submitting to the men’s pressure.

31. The imagery of this leisurely nighttime stroll once again dispels the aura of danger and surveillance that other films in a colonial urban setting habitually depict. Instead, it echoes and adheres to visual tropes of romance in other postwar Korean melodrama films, most notably *Drifting Island* (*P’yorudo*; Kwon Yŏngsŏn, 1960), which uses the serene streets in the vicinity of the old palace as the principal space of romance.

32. Their most cherished plan for their daughter’s future is to marry her off to a wealthy man as a concubine.

33. The couple ultimately return to the same room in the resort to commit double suicide.

34. This sense of new possibility is accentuated by the reversed domestic gender roles of the honeymoon couple: Chang prepares dinner to please his wife Kang.

35. How did this positive depiction of Japanese life pass the watchful inspection of film censors? As it turned out, the censorship board ordered the removal of the sequence and the production company complied. The existing film print at the Korean Film Archive shows
the sequence intact because the film prints archived there are often early versions that have not yet undergone their prerelease review and censorship by state authorities. That said, the existing film prints at the Korean Film Archive are not the actual release in many cases. Cases of disparity between the release prints and archival prints are too numerous to list. Notable examples include such prominent works as Shin Sangok’s Romance Papa (Romænsũ ppappa, 1960), Kim Kiyoung’s The Housemaid (Hanyo, 1960), and Yu Hyŏnmok’s Spring Dream (Ch’unmong, 1965). Problematic dialogues and scenes have been removed from the original prints. Spring Dream is one of the most extreme cases, for the film was excessively censored and the director faced criminal charges for violating obscenity rules on the screen. The archive’s print, however, shows no signs of excisions by authorities.

36. The most renowned film example would be Shin Sangok’s 1967 film The Remembered Traces of the Yi Dynasty (Ijojanyŏng).

37. For elaboration on this conceptualization of money, see chapter 3 on the Manchurian action film.

38. The failure of the colonial police is later compounded by their complicity with the local Japanese gang as a supplement to the state apparatus to conquer and dominate the hidden enclave of Koreans.

39. This performative feature reminds us of the role that the prologue character plays at the beginning of many films. A prologue character appears as someone outside the diegetic world of drama, often telling the audience what to expect from the ensuing dramatic presentation. The central dynamic here is how the prologue character leads the audience to suspend disbelief in the dramatic events that follow.


41. Na Kwanjung is the best-dressed gangster in the film. His poise and charisma are signaled by the immaculate Western suit he wears. As in many gangster films, the suit connotes mature masculinity and urban material aspiration.

42. It is revealing that the meeting takes place at a Western-style tavern. The place registers social activities and cultural interactions distinct from those of the kisaeng house. The latter functions as the indigenous site of local ritual and custom, as it has the aura of a private home in the film.

43. She is also an orphan, like Tuhan is. Later, she represents the moral principle of uncompromising resistance to Japanese aggression and violence.

44. After being humiliatingly defeated by Shinmajŏk’s attack, Tuhan takes refuge at a remote Buddhist temple, where the film chronicles his speedy recovery and his subsequent physical training for combat. Tropes of martial arts films are unmistakable in this sequence. Tuhan appears as a martial artist who retreats from public life for training after witnessing the successful attack against of his training school. The film builds anticipation for Tuhan’s revenge, not only through his strenuous exercise, but also through the moral encouragement of his kisaeng girlfriend Sŏlhwa and his student subordinate Sŏngmin. Sŏlhwa practically functions as a wife, tending to him as he recovers and trains to perfect his art. She is also the voice of absolute moral principle, as she demands that Tuhan take righteous revenge. Hence, even in the absence of Na, Tuhan’s education continues, and the student subordinate Sŏngmin bears witness to this moral teaching.
45. The wedding indicates how this gangster film is preoccupied with the staging of social rituals. Despite the series of crises in which he is embroiled, Tuhan is able to participate in ritual events, restoring to the Koreans an ambiance of everyday social life, internal order, and a sense of continuity that is typically impossible in the conventional imagination of films set in the colonial situation. It should be noted that the wedding itself is totally anachronistic, for it does not offer even a minimal sense of historical authenticity. It is the performative dimension of the social act that is important here. Rather than bringing attention to realistic details of the wedding as a social event in the colonial era, the film emphasizes the ideological effects of ritual. The wedding is also the occasion of social cohesion in that the beggars also join in the celebration.

46. The Japanese boss is quite clear about his intention: his sexual violence against Sŏlhwa is designed to anger Tuhan. This is a barbarous act that changes the very nature of the resistance struggle. Because the damage that the Japanese inflicts is grossly excessive, it cannot be reciprocated in exact terms. Nor can any meaningful value be drawn from the retribution. The subsequent action by Tuhan’s forces is not about avenging the dead, but about appropriating the event of Sŏlhwa’s rape and murder for the agenda of defeating the rival Japanese gang. This dilemma characterizes many of the rape-themed revenge films of the 1970s that are set in the colonial era.

47. In fact, Sŏlhwa’s death results in part from her giving advice to her husband on propriety regarding a death. When Tuhan is engulfed in the anger over the death of his subordinate and brother-in-law, Sŏngmin, she asks him to postpone taking action and instead to visit Chiyŏng, a young widow who is grieving over the loss of her beloved husband. Tuhan follows her advice, but his departure leaves Sŏlhwa completely vulnerable to the Japanese assault.

48. However, Shinmajŏk dies in the battle at the end, an outcome that seems to underscore the nationalist ideology that the figure of dual affiliations should be eliminated.

5. HORROR AND REVENGE

1. The film’s release year (1966) immediately followed the normalization treaty between Japan and Korea in 1965, which had a profound impact on the subsequent filmic representation of Japan as the former colonizer. The fact that Yeraishang sets its drama against the backdrop of the April Revolution of 1960s further complicates the renewed urgency for decolonization that seems to pervade the films of the postnormalization period.

2. Epitaph is the only film outside the general range of the period that this manuscript covers, which is from 1945 to the 1970s. I justify its inclusion in part because as a horror film it holds a unique place in the constellation of colonial representation in South Korean cinema. In addition, the film’s portrayal of a fascination with and nostalgia for an alluring colonial order offers a stark contrast to the subversive theme of memory and violence in Yeraishang.

3. The film is the story of a female protagonist, Wŏlhyang, whose dual devotion to her brother (a nationalist resistance fighter) and her husband (a successful businessman) leads her to choose the life of a kisaeng courtesan. This decision later stigmatizes her, and a series of destabilizing events, including her husband’s betrayal, her exposure to a murder scheme, and poor health lead to her unjust death. Wŏlhyang then resurfaces as a vengeful ghost, going after individuals responsible for her suffering and death. Refashioning the motif of the
traditional ghost narrative, the film presents the female ghost as a vengeful but essentially moral figure whose pent-up resentment of injustice demands the repentance of others. The film’s ending offers the fulfillment of the dramatic premise, as the husband now regrets his wrongdoing and pledges in front of her grave that he will honor her sacrifice and look after their child’s upbringing.

4. For instance, Paek Munim argues that the female ghost has been an important motif in popular cinema to thematize the complex problem of colonial experience. Kyung Hyun Kim points out that the female protagonist Wŏlhyang possesses a surprising agency and power as a vengeful figure despite her initial position as nui tongsæng (sister) to others. See Baek Moonim, Wŏlha-ŭi yŏgoksŏng: Yŏgwiro ingŭn Han’guk [Scream under the moon: Reading Korea through the figure of the female ghost] (Seoul: Chaeksesang, 2008); Kyung Hyun Kim, Virtual Hallyu, 73, 74.

5. The film makes clear its linkage to the horror genre early on by showcasing semantic properties of the genre even prior to the appearance of the monster narrator. By semantic properties, I am referring to the vista of the cemetery, the high-pitched theremin sound, the floating will-o’-the-wisp, and the high scream of a woman that make up the brief opening credit sequence.

6. Public Cemetery belongs to a low-budget horror film cycle of the late 1960s that was based on a provincial network of film production, distribution, and exhibition, in contrast to high-budget film productions, which typically were financed by investment capital drawn from greater Seoul-area theater chains. The limited budget in part explains the film’s resort to the receding but resilient sinpa form.

7. From the 1950s, sinpa drama and pyŏnsa narration, in particular, were continuously criticized and devalued. The sinpa mode has been criticized for its overt sentimentalism and its embrace of a fatalistic worldview. Critics often regarded (social) realism as a politically sound corrective to the corrupting influence of the sinpa mode.


10. The conventional historical account of the April Revolution tends to focus almost entirely on the merit of the narrowly defined political achievement, that is, the democratic victory that ended a corrupt and authoritarian regime. Because the reactionary coup in 1961 eclipsed the revolution within a year, the revolution was narrowly characterized as a student-led rebellion of youthful energy and untainted innocence but also as the wellspring of subsequent social disarray, confusion, and corruption.

11. To understand the illustrious career of Chung Chang Wha as a master of the action genre in Korea and Hong Kong, see Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park, “Restoring the Transnational from the Abyss of Ethnonational Film Historiography: The Case of Chung Chang Wha,” Journal of Korean Studies 16, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 249–84.

12. The film Yeraishang is based on a daily radio drama of the same title by Kim Sŏkya. The series aired during evening prime time on TBC Radio in 1965. The title Yeraishang is a Korean rendition of the Chinese pronunciation of the word for night-blooming jasmine (yè lái xiāng 夜來香), an evergreen woody shrub known for its powerful nocturnal fragrance. In the film, it is a nickname of the female protagonist, a nightclub waitress.

14. This does not mean, however, that all social malice and problems are eliminated by the revolution. The film diverges from the historicist frame of reference by setting the entire arc of diegetic events in the prolonged ambiance of revolution.

15. The pattern of their courtship illustrates how the film resorts to the ideology of national unity typically found in films of militant anticolonial struggle, most notably Manchurian action films. Films such as Farewell to Tumen River and Continent on Fire underscore the utility of woman’s labor, specifically the type of labor visible in the pleasure quarters of society, in forging a nationalist coalition to fight against colonial oppression. According to this scenario, the female character working outside the domain of traditional domesticity is not denigrated for her disreputable profession. If anything, these films regard her ability to lure enemy men as a valuable intelligence asset to the larger nationalist cause. Concurrently, there is no equivocation on the virtuousness of her character, as she remains completely faithful to the Korean man she loves. It is her unwavering support and loyalty that distinguishes the Korean men who are in competition with other ethnic men. Yeraishang hence restages the gendered configuration of the anticolonial struggle in its valorization of the romantic relationship. See chapter 3 above on Manchurian action films.

16. Once again, Arirang illustrates the workings of this gendered pattern of the nationalist imaginary par excellence. The antagonist Kiho’s sexual assault on Yonghui, which subsequently triggers the violent retaliatory response of the protagonist, Yongjin, is almost always understood as an allegory of the nation according to which the nation’s subjugation to colonial rule takes a distinctively gendered, that is, feminized, form. Im Kwont’aek’s film Sopyonje (1993) replicates this gendered pattern of the nationalist imaginary through a story of the traditional art of pansori singing in decline.

17. See chapter 3 above on Manchurian action films for an analysis of the significance of money.

18. For an illuminating discussion of colonial collaboration and its social and historiographical dimensions, see De Ceuster, “Nation Exorcised.”

19. After the fall of the Rhee administration, Park immediately senses the drastic change. He orders his right-hand man to send money, which was originally designated to bribe corrupt politicians, to a relief fund. He also makes sure that his “humanitarian” endeavor receives full press coverage. His actions illustrate the successful modus operandi of an ex-collaborator businessman: opportunism, bribery, and public relations.

20. Korean horror films are typically released during summer to appeal to the young teenage audience. Epitaph was one of five horror films to appear in the summer of 2007. Perhaps because of fierce competition, the film did not do well at the box office but received highly favorable critical reviews. Despite the film’s poor commercial performance, an audience campaign led to the film’s re-release, a phenomenon that testifies to the film’s exceptional quality and the existence of a core audience group. It is now considered one of the finest films of 2007.

21. For close analysis of aesthetic strategies in A Tale of Two Sisters, see Jinhee Choi, The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 160–63.
22. For a treatment of all three episodes, see Kyung Hyun Kim, *Virtual Hallyu*, 75–79.

23. She is a benevolent manager-owner whose Japanese ethnicity never becomes an issue among Koreans working in the hospital. Despite her ethnic difference, Korean doctors and nurses alike show respect toward her, and she reciprocates with expected civility toward her employees.

24. In contrast, the Japanese female monk who officiates the ritual is clearly shown to viewers but with a strange sense of unfamiliarity and uncanniness.

25. In the second episode, the modern method of psychoanalysis fails to figure out the root cause of a child’s trauma, whereas the last episode similarly emphasizes the downfall of a couple who do not know the origins of their suffering.

26. Although striking in its bold expression of interethnic romance, this sort of unabashed consummation is not the first instance in the history of South Korean cinema. Maverick filmmaker Kim Kiyoung, who is known for his “diabolic” imagination in the domestic horror thriller genre, first foregrounded this theme in his 1961 film *Over Hyŏnhaetanŭn* (*Hyŏnhaetanŭn algo itta*; aka *The Sea Knows*). In Kim’s film, the Korean male protagonist chooses marriage with a Japanese woman over the nationalist call to join the resistance army to fight the Japanese Empire.

27. Here I am relying on the psychoanalytic notion of fantasy as the possible answer to the impossible question and demand of the unfathomable Other.

28. For instance, he is excluded from the funeral ceremony that the Japanese monk was officiating, even though he is working at the morgue.

29. I am borrowing the notion of perversion that Slavoj Žižek elaborated with regard to the big Other, i.e., the symbolic order that offers and regulates the meanings of one’s existence. According to Žižek, the pervert is the person who identifies himself with the symbolic Law and further imagines himself as its instrument, all because he attempts to evade the nonexistence of the big Other. “Perversion is a double strategy to counteract this nonexistence: an (ultimately deeply conservative, nostalgic) attempt to install the law artificially, in the desperate hope that we will then take this self-posited limitation ‘seriously,’ and in a complementary way, a no less desperate attempt to codify the very transgression of the Law.” See Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 53.

30. Aoi’s tears can be read as genuine sympathy from the true victim toward the subject (Chŏngnam), who fails to confront or understand the cause of the historic injustice.

31. There seems to be an implicit understanding that recent films that dramatize the colonial experience are revisionist in orientation, as they foreground the lure of the urban attractions associated with colonial modernity. The case of *Epitaph*, however, informs us otherwise: it stages an intransigent, perverse desire for the eternity and permanence of the Japanese Empire at the heart of the ghost narrative.

**CODA**

1. The film faithfully follows the “aesthetics of verticality”—a distinctive feature of CGI-dominated Hollywood blockbuster films in which the individual’s agency to overcome the physical laws of nature through vertical movement, i.e., flying through the air and levitating, finds its most distinctive manifestation. The film’s action climax hence testifies to the global circulation of Hollywood blockbuster aesthetics through its imaginative appropriation by


3. Here I am referring to the publication of such books as Kim Chinsong’s *Permit Dance Halls in Seoul* (*Sŏul e ttansŭhorŭl hŏhara*), which galvanized public interest in the popular and urban culture of the colonial period. This “cultural turn” toward the colonial period also triggered a continuing debate on the nature of colonial modernity, significantly challenging the nationalist historiography. Kim Chin-song, *Sŏul e ttansŭhorŭl hŏhara: Hyŏndaesŏng ŭi hyŏngsŏng* [Permit dance halls in Seoul: The formation of modernity] (Seoul: Hyŏnsil Munhwa Yŏngu Yŏngusil, 1999).

4. I made an exception to include the 2007 film *Epitaph* in the main body of this book because of its unique status within horror film. As I explained in the main section of chapter 5, horror and revenge drama is preoccupied with the distinctive thematic convention of “the return,” which straddles the epistemological divide between the colonial past and the postcolonial present. Although *Epitaph* shares some of the key characteristics of the post-2000 films on the colonial past, its thematic resonance with pre-2000 films needs to be underscored. That is, the genre film’s stringent adherence to the question of unaddressed past injustice through the theme of a “return of the repressed”—as well as to perverse desire and nostalgia for the Japanese other—sets *Epitaph* apart from its contemporary works.