Guest Editors' Introduction

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As recently as the early 2000s it was possible both to compile a comparatively short bibliography of publications on Korean cinema and to chart the central theoretical trajectories of research and writing on it. And this was a bibliography that would have included scholarship in Korean, English, and other languages. Indeed, the archival, political, and institutional limits placed on the study of Korean films until the early 1990s left room for only a narrow field with strengths in traditional cinematic historiography that was, for the most part, inward looking and conceptually orthodox. Since then, prolific transnational intellectual exchange, increased institutional flexibility, and the astonishing growth of the Korean film industry itself has conditioned the field's rapid flourishing. A revisionist history fever that began with the re-examination of filmmaking from the postwar period was given dramatic provocation by the "re-discovery," beginning in the mid-2000s, of a number of films of the late colonial and early postcolonial eras. The probing and reflective writing to which this gave rise supplemented active and ongoing critique of the "New Korean Cinema" and more recent and heterogeneous filmmaking to draw the more expansive and inclusive contours of a burgeoning research discipline. Simultaneously, the breadth of both the films under consideration and the social, political, and cultural problematics they posed demanded new critical and theoretical vocabularies for understanding—demands made more intense within the often astonishing speed and dynamism of Korean scholarly activity. Even a casual search now will net dozens of monographs, collections, and special issues as well as hundreds of articles touching on myriad aspects of Korean cinema through a variety methodological approaches that have grown out of the dispersed geographic and institutional forum in which Korean film studies has taken root.

The essays in this collection perfectly embody the diversity of this scholarly proliferation. The authors, based in Korea, the United States, and Denmark, draw on training in film, literature, history, and sociology as well

as on advanced linguistic proficiencies in Korean, English, and Japanese. Their research bridges a remarkable historical expanse—from one of the earliest extant films, *Sweet Dream* (1936), to works produced in the last several years—and pitches questions about filmmaking at a number of different registers—from the repetition and repurposing of narrative and aesthetic conventions to meta-critical discourses on the resources and boundaries of Korea cinema. Further, the essays articulate the heterogeneity that can be obscured under the umbrella of "Korean Cinema." On the one hand, they trace complex genealogies in Japanese, American, and Soviet cinemas and map them onto film production in North and South Korea. On the other, they delineate the concerted ideological suturing upon which a coherent Korean national subject is contingent—a suturing both strengthened and undermined in the films under consideration. In both of these ways, the very diversity of the essays, collected here with the support of KOVIC (Center for Korean Visual Culture) at Yonsei University, signal the intellectual health of Korean film studies. Rather than constituting a coherent whole, they both deepen historical knowledge and sharpen political critique of films while critically questioning the disciplinary parameters that tie them together.

The discovery of lost films produced in the colonial period propelled enthusiastic research during the last few years both inside and outside Korea, and Kelly Y. Jeong's paper contributes to these ongoing discussions on the late period's propaganda films. Taking up a wide variety of films, from collaborative works by Korean filmmakers (*Homeless Angels, Volunteers*) to educational films produced by government organizations after the Joseon Film Decree in 1940 (*Portrait of Youth, Suicide Squad at the Watch Tower,* and *Love and Vow*), Jeong reveals how the Korean subjects are rendered as pupils or metaphorical children, therein confirming the relationship between Japanese Empire and the colony as a unilinear, pedagogical one. Indeed, this educational process of learning to become like the Japanese Empire—"*hwangminhwa*" (becoming imperial citizen)—was the core of the colonial enlightenment.

Focusing on the intertwined issues of colonial enlightenment and propaganda, and reading them along the critical vectors of ethnography, censorship, and narrative strategy, Jeong argues that the Japanese colonial authorities' attempt at enlightenment via propaganda films ultimately failed. In spite of, or perhaps due to, the films' appropriation of popular generic

conventions (of melodrama and westerns, etc.), colonial spectators were more likely to be dazzled by its visual pleasure rather than agree with the films' intended lessons of imperial subjecthood.

Lee Hwajin's essay examines the unique (dis)continuity of popular cinema screens between the late colonial and the early post-colonial eras through the lens of the (in)visibility of Hollywood in Korean theaters. The victory of the Allied Forces in WWII meant for the Korean film market the "Hollywood's return in glory" after an imperially mandated several years' ban during the Pacific War. Considering the fact that Hollywood films were the most popular among the colonized since 1916, while Japanese film screenings were limited to theaters for Japanese settlers until the mid-thirties, and further that one of the major issues surrounding the regulation of colonial cinema in wartime was the control of Americanism in everyday life as well as in theaters, it is not difficult to imagine that Hollywood's "return" had a provocative cultural effect in the "liberation" in post-colonial Korea.

Lee attempts to examine the South Korean cinema's ambivalence toward Hollywood in this complex transformative context. Given their experience of state-centered film production in the late colonial period as well as the market advantage they made of Japan's imperial expansion in Asia, South Korean filmmakers were eager to build a national cinema with the support of both the domestic state and the "liberator" US government. However, Hollywood's offensive maneuvers to regain its lost screens in the East Asian market caused widespread discontent toward the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) and its cultural policies, which included the maintenance of the colonial censorship system and the suppression of leftist ideologies and culture. Lee persuasively argues that, contrary to North Korea's successful nationalization of film production (which inspired many filmmakers to defect from South Korea), the South Korean project to create an authentic national cinema was inaugurated by criticism of the monopoly of Hollywood and The Central Motion Picture Exchange (CMPE), which were regarded both as "liberator" and intimate enemy.

Similarly casting a broad exploratory net over both the colonial past and the flows of global cinema, Travis Workman's article, "Narrating and Aestheticizing Liberation in *Hurrah! for Freedom* and *My Home Village*," unwinds a genealogy of the formal conventions and ideological contours of two of the most significant early postcolonial Korean films. Fluidly written and

rigorously organized, the essay highlights the sometimes perplexing repetition and repurposing of cinematic forms across the historical, ideological, and cultural divides that saturated "liberation" as both a political concept and a historical phase. Drawing resourcefully on a range of theoretical formulations and Korean film historiography, Workman advances a critical thesis: that the ideological differences between the two iconic films are most palpable not in the direct political messages to which they provide a platform but rather in the divergent means by which they appropriate and localize the conventions of precedent and adjacent cinematic traditions; namely, those of classical Hollywood, late imperial Japan, and Stalinist socialist realism.

Mapping the aesthetic politics of the two films in this way is consequential for thinking Korean cinema beyond the scope of the article partly because, as Workman argues, *Hurrah! for Freedom* and *My Home Village* established a set of narrative forms and visual metaphors that would be axiomatic in each of their respective national cinemas of the following decades. But such attention to the adaptation, re-coding and re-signification practices that structure the political character of films also brings the history of Korean cinema back to the inherently global ground of filmmaking and into dialogue with histories of other national cinemas. Simultaneously, it brings us closer to the specificities of a Korean history in which the colonial past is neither overcome by liberation nor resolved by division but rather continually transformed.

Hyun Seon Park's engrossing article, "Volatile Biopolitics: Postwar Korean Cinema's Bodily Encounter with the Cold War," vitally participates in the broad, interdisciplinary revision of what the Cold War was and meant in East Asia more broadly and Korea in particular. Succinctly, this revision shifts characterization of the Cold War from a defined historical period of "imaginary conflict" and "long peace" between superpowers to a diffuse and ongoing struggle within nation-states between acceptable and dangerous subjects, waged in manifold spheres of everyday life and culture. Park focuses this shift onto both the biopolitical realm and the field of cinematic representation where, she argues, "the biopolitical exclusion of improper bodies forms a parallel with the editing process of the cinematic apparatus and, furthermore, governmental censorship." And because her concern is with the force of biopolitics in everyday life, she turns her critical gaze away from the war and propaganda films that most transparently screen the Cold War antimonies and towards a handful of what she terms "exemplary" films produced across a range of genres from the

late 1950s through the early 1960s: *The Hand of Destiny, Aimless Bullet, Kinship,* and *The Devil's Stairway*.

The films span a complex and crucial moment in the transformation of the national body, emerging from both the regimentation and traumas of the late colonial period and the Korean War and into the developmentalist-militarist discipline of the Park Chung Hee regime. Park cogently demonstrates how the films, in their focus on the liminal and often troublesome bodies of North Korean refugees, spies, and prostitutes, expose the instabilities and contradictions that lay at the heart of the formative period's biopolitical project. For, on the one hand, the variously tragic or triumphant narrative twists of *Hand* and *Kinship* show how "the postwar Korean film discovered patterns of representation that centralize a healthy national body"—the precarious North Korean spy or refugee is killed or integrated into productive society. On the other hand, the films express fissures in those patterns, as in *Devil's* uncanny figuring of the hospital as a horrific site, haunted by the bodies of those excluded by ideological and patriarchal discipline. Park argues convincingly that these contradictions, given dramatic articulation in postwar cinema, continue to haunt a contemporary Korean visual and social landscape in which the Cold War never ended.

By analyzing a series of Korean blockbuster films—*Silmido* (2003), *TaeGukGi: Brotherhood of War* (2004) and *Shiri* (1998)—that most foreground South Korea's cinematic confrontation with its ethnic/national friend/enemy of North Korea, Ha Seung-woo discusses how each film works to respond to an encounter with the traumatic Other. The representation of the Other necessarily leads us, according to Ha, to raise the issue of ethics. The term "ethics" here refers precisely to Alenka Zupančič's notion of the "ethics of the Real," in which the subject redefines the mode of being in this encounter with the traumatic Real, thus becoming a true subject. Ha observes that one of the prevailing tropes of contemporary Korean film is the way in which the protagonist's suicide keeps utopian impulses permanently parenthesised through the logic of sacrifice, as demonstrated in *Silmido* and *TaeGukGi*. In contrast, *Shiri* opens up the inherent contradictions of all such ideas by revealing that the female protagonist maintains fidelity towards her own "acts" without being drawn into the logic of sacrifice.

What makes Ha's argument intriguing is that he focuses more on the North Korean female protagonist and her "act," rather than generalized male

protagonists' gesture of "sacrifice" or enervation, which has been ignored in major discussions on these representative Korean blockbusters. Ha tries to associate this unique cinematic solution with Jameson's idea of "cognitive mapping," concluding that it enables us to geopolitically imagine the unrepresentable totality of the current South Korean capitalist system.

Jacob Ki Nielsen's "The Return of the Returnee: A Historicized Reading of Adult Overseas Adoptees 'Going Back' in South Korean Cinema," departs from the thematic and methodological boundaries of the essays in this collection, and indeed of Korean film studies more generally, by examining the conspicuous but under-explored figure of the adoptee through a refreshingly straightforward mapping of narrative tendencies in their representation. Beginning with the basic insight that "the adoptee figure constitutes a near-perfect allegory for the divided nation and family separation," Nielsen demonstrates how, over a period of 60 years since the end of the Korean War, the adoptee in film has remained a durable sign of Korea's ideological self-fashioning—of the operation of a masculinist and nationalist discourse of Korean ethnic homogeneity. At the same time, through its exhaustive mapping, the article unveils the often dramatic transformations in the tropes by which the adoptee is symbolized, from their positive portrayal as cultural ambassadors in the early Cold War period to their figuration as victims of developmentalist asymmetries in what Nielsen calls Christian *minjung* filmmaking through to their high cultural and economic valuation in the post-IMF era of "turbo capitalism." Perhaps most fascinating here is that, at least until very recently, Korean cinema almost universally "abnegated family reassemblage"—a sign, Nielsen speculates, of conservative kinship ideology's view of adoption as irreversible rupture to the ethno-social Korean fabric.

While self-consciously narrowing its critical perspective on the films' plot conventions, which Nielsen calls "theme-complexes," the article connects cinematic expression to specific historical conditions and, further, contributes to a rapidly proliferating and transnational scholarship on Korean adoption. Further, while there have been a number of publications concerning the representation of adoption in Korean media, Nielsen's research introduces new linguistic and critical vocabularies to Korean film studies: that is, not only terms like "inter-country adoption," "bio-genetic parentage," and "transethnic casting," but also the broader problematics of race and ethnicity that have only recently become visible in the field.