Special Feature

Narrating and Aestheticizing Liberation in *Hurrah! for Freedom* and *My Home Village*

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Introduction

Through subsequent processes of canonization that should be examined critically, two films have become emblematic of the liberation period (1945-1948) in South Korea and North Korea respectively: Choe In-kyu's *Hurrah! for Freedom* (1946) (henceforth, *Hurrah Freedom*) and Kang Hong-sik's *My Home Village* (1949). Because both films were produced before or contemporaneous to the establishment of the two Korean nation-states in 1948, they offer a glimpse into the emergent cultural and cinematic world of a postcolonial Korea that had yet to be fully engulfed by the communist and anti-communist politics of the Korean War and the Cold War. At the same time, each film also signals quite strongly which stories and images would come to define the collective past and collective origin of each nation-state's mass culture, particularly through their representations of the late Japanese colonial period (1931-1945). As postcolonial films that attempt to define the meaning of Korea's recent colonial past, they exhibit the power of cinema to construct historical memory on a mass scale. With their invention of narrative forms and visual metaphors that would become integral to Korean nationalism in each country in subsequent decades, they also projected new ways of relating to the colonial past that would endure throughout of the Cold War era (due in large part to their canonization and, in the case of *Hurrah Freedom*, its later transformation through restoration and censorship).

I would like to examine these two films with an attention to this temporality of representing the recent past while simultaneously projecting a future for the postcolonial nation-state. In order to examine them comparatively as emblems of the liberation period, I will focus on the particular political, aesthetic, and cinematic problem of "liberation." Although the actual history behind the two versions of national liberation presented in the films is significant, I am more interested in their formal and conventional aspects. In respect to film form liberation can be understood firstly as a narrative form. In order to represent national liberation one must first represent oppression, the negation of national identity, and the conflict between the imperial and colonial nations. Then the national people must be shown overcoming this state of oppression through the exercise of their political will. The ways that these films narrate liberation are related to the different views of colonial history that emerged under the U.S. and Soviet occupations. *Hurrah Freedom* began to establish in film the binary of resistance and collaboration as the primary way to

solidify Korean ethnic national identity, despite the uncomfortable connections with Japanese colonialism that many political leaders, intellectuals, and cultural figures had to negotiate. On the other hand, *My Home Village* inaugurated North Korean narratives of oppression at the hands of pro-Japanese large landowners, peasant partisan struggle leading to the end of colonial rule, and the unification of the Korean nation through the rhetorical, political, and visual hegemony of the anticolonial political party and its idolized leader, Kim Il Sung.

In addition to being a narrative form, liberation is also an aesthetic ideology. By "ideology" I do not mean to give liberation a negative connotation. I mean simply that the cinematic representation of liberation entails giving aesthetic form to a constellation of ideas concerning colonial rule and the postcolonial nation. *My Home Village*, for example, uses a romantic visual rhetoric of pictorial landscape combined with melodramatic realist depictions of suffering bodies in order to link sympathy for the oppressed characters with the struggle of the partisans and their party. The *telluric* character of this struggle is emphasized through uses of landscape, which I detail in the second part (Schmitt 2007, 20). *Hurrah Freedom* rather takes up the tendency of late colonial period films to incorporate techniques and conventions of classical Hollywood to depict conflict, suspense, action, and counterpoint. It does so in order to dramatize the psychological and political conflict between resisters and collaborators, which is at once an internal psychological conflict projected onto the female characters and an external political conflict between good and evil. Through close readings of a number of scenes of each film, it is possible to trace the development of the South Korean collaboration/resistance narrative and the North Korean partisan narrative as both storytelling structures and as aesthetic ideologies that employ visual conventions in order to express their differing versions of liberation. Such a comparison is significant for recognizing the power that the fictions of cinema had in the realm of mass politics and for the nation-building project immediately following the demise of the Japanese empire and throughout the Cold War era.

In order to reveal how each film relates to its past and its future, it will be useful to trace some of the activity of the directors and actors back into the colonial period. Particularly in the case of Choe In-kyu, the political content of *Hurrah Freedom* and his other films concerned with independence—*The Night Before Independence* (1948) and *Sinless Sinner* (1948)—is quite remarkable in light of the fuller picture we now have of the films that he directed only years

earlier, under the auspices of the Choseon Film Production Corporation of the Japanese empire. Choe's films of late imperial Japan, such as *Angels on the Street* (1940) and *Love and Vow* (1945), are not simply propaganda films, but they do express support for the idea of Japan's imperial project, even as they remain somewhat ambivalent or equivocal about its actual practices. The discovery and interpretation of these films in the 2000s forces one to reconsider the fairly clear distinctions that *Hurrah Freedom* established, only six years later, between collaboration and resistance. Considering that Kang Hong-sik worked closely with Choe, mostly as an actor, on these same late colonial films, it is also revealing to consider how the mass social movement of the North Korean revolution and the Soviet Occupation affected his approach to art and performance. It is also fascinating to see Mun Ye-bong take on the role of a Korean peasant conscripted into forced labor, when she had very recently been playing characters that voluntarily dedicate their labor and their bodies to the Japanese war effort. Of interest is not simply the hypocrisy or capriciousness of these individual artists. Nor am I interested in branding them "pro-Japanese." Of interest rather is how cinema can be repurposed for quite different political ends, while at the same time taking up common conventions of storytelling and the aestheticization of politics. This repurposing is related to the problem of the relation between the colonial and the postcolonial, which are never reducible to a period of oppression and a period of supersession through liberation, but are always tied up with the problem of repetition, whether at the level of state formation or in the micropolitics of film conventions.

Narrating Liberation

Both *Hurrah Freedom* and *My Home Village* hold significant places in their respective national film histories. In South Korea, *Hurrah Freedom* has been considered a quintessential *gwangbok yeonghwa*, or independence film (Kim 2001, 223). In addition to inaugurating South Korean national cinema through its creation of a national narrative of liberation, *Hurrah Freedom* also inspired mass interest in cinema again through its break from late colonial period film, its representation of the specificity of Korean history, and its differentiation from imported Hollywood films (Ho 2002, 86). Because it combines the conventions of *gwangbok yeonghwa* with melodrama and action, the film was also very well

received by audiences seeking both entertainment and cinematic reflections on Korea's recent past (Jeong 2007, 90). Despite this canonization and valuing of the film in national film history, in the last two decades film historians have also explored Choe's controversial colonial period career and the irony of his production of "pro-Japanese" films in the early 1940s. Even before the discovery and dissemination of Choe's colonial period films, Kim Su-nam (2002, 235-38) discussed them critically in relation to *Hurrah Freedom*. This essay is in the spirit of such post-Cold War work on the complexity of Choe's career. However, I would like to delve deeply into the repetition of narrative and visual conventions between Choe's films before and after 1945 in order to examine how *gwangbok yeonghwa* came to utilize aspects of colonial era films, even as they pointed to a new postcolonial future. Rather than staying within the frame of national cinema and national narrative, I am more interested in the general cinematic conventions through which national liberation could be represented in the late 1940s, on both sides of the emerging Cold War.

Any discussion of the narrative of *Hurrah Freedom* should begin by recognizing that the existing film was both damaged and edited severely at various points—the time of its production, during the Korean War, and when it was "restored" in 1975 (Kim 2009, 281-83). Kim Su-nam's research into the film documents, through comparison with the original screenplay, which scenes were left unfilmed at the time of the film's production, which were likely destroyed during the Korean War, and which were deleted for the 1975 version. The film is twenty-four scenes shorter than the original screenplay (Kim 2002, 234). Nearly forty minutes of the film were lost or deleted and the largest portion disappeared from the end of the film, including the heroic death scene of the protagonist Han-jung (Kim 2002, 234-35). In Kim Ryeo-sil (2009, 288-89)'s evaluation, the original film was much more ambiguous in its politics, and presented the possibility for a postcolonial unification of right and left nationalists; however, the 1975 version transformed the film into a national narrative suitable to the anti-communist nationalist perspective of the Yusin era Park Chung Hee regime. The fact that all of the scenes in which the actor Dok Eun-ki appears were deleted and his name taken out of the opening credits bears out Kim Ryeo-sil's assertion, as these scenes were removed simply because Dok went to North Korea after the release of the film. As Adam Hartzell points out in his review, these deletions detract from the quality of the film and its main dramatization of resistance and collaboration, because Dok played the

collaborationist Nam-bu. Nam-bu is the evil counterpart to the nationalist Han-jung, as well as his alter-ego and his competitor in love, and therefore his absence detracts greatly from the dramatic power and coherency of the narrative.

The extant version of *Hurrah Freedom* opens with a subtitle stating the date when the story begins: August 1, 1945 (two weeks before liberation). This subtitle loses some of its historical reference in comparison to the original screenplay, because the original scenario contains scenes of the U.S. atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Kim 2002, 233; Kim 2009, 292). In examining how the film narrates national history and liberation, this omission is significant, because such images would have asked the audience to consider the violence through which the U.S. contributed to the "liberation" of East Asia from Japanese colonial rule. The precise reasons for the omission of these scenes are unknown; it could have been due to a lack of availability of stock images or of the technical capacity to reproduce them. Kim Ryeo-sil speculates that the United States of America Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) may have demanded the deletion of these scenes in 1946. However, the situation in Korea was different from Japan (where the reasons for banning such images were more obvious) and there is no evidence that U.S. occupation authorities in Korea banned images of the atomic bombings.

More importantly for my purposes, even though we cannot know, it is important to consider the ambiguous reception Korean audiences may have of images of the atomic bombings within the framework of *Hurrah Freedom*'s national liberation narrative, particularly considering that ethnic Koreans were among the victims of the bombings. Would the inclusion of these scenes have marked *Hurrah Freedom* as a leftist, anti-American film critical of nuclear military violence or rather as a film celebratory of the U.S.'s role in Korean liberation? This ethical and political ambiguity of the atomic image is part of the complex story of *Hurrah Freedom* and narratives of South Korean national liberation more generally. This is the case for North Korea as well, which was eventually itself threatened by U.S. nuclear warfare. The source of the aerial bombardments and land invasions that ended World War II remains deliberately unnamed in *My Home Village*, although for a clear reason—the film must make the liberation of Korea solely an effect of the revolutionary movement of anticolonial partisans. In both film narratives, the exclusion of the U.S.'s role in defeating the Japanese empire facilitates the distillation of the national liberation narrative into different versions of a Korea vs. Japan conflict.

Other significant scenes that were left out at the time of filming *Hurrah Freedom* include many that would have served to deepen the love triangle story involving the protagonist Han-jung, the nurse Hye-ja, and Mi-hyang (who is at first the lover of the collaborationist Nam-bu and then falls in love with and attempts to aid Han-jung) (Kim 2009, 290-91). These scenes include a dream sequence in which Hye-ja imagines marrying Han-jung, as well as further scenes of her nursing him back to health. Further action scenes of Han-jung's escape from prison, and chase scenes that were to be filmed at night, were also left out due to technical and financial limitations. The various versions of *Hurrah Freedom*—from the original screenplay to the heavily censored 1975 version—tell one complex story of the cinematic representation of South Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule. Many of the omissions and deletions only affect the visual pleasure of the film and are not explicitly political. However, other erasures explicitly contribute to a further reduction of the narrative of the colonial conflict to one between those who remained loyal to the nation and those who betrayed it. The film does so despite the political complexity of the film artists' own past work during the colonial period.

In the case of *Hurrah Freedom*, later censorship was only an aid to this simplification of the narrative of Korean liberation. In both the original screenplay and the extant version of *Hurrah Freedom*, there are a number of narrative conventions employed that suggest important continuities with colonial period filmmaking (including Choe In-kyu's own work), as well as with Hollywood and world cinema more generally. These formal qualities of the film's narrative of liberation are perhaps just as telling as the history of the film's censorship and transformation, because they speak to both the generally modern significance of cinema as a poetic and generative storytelling medium, and to the translatability of cinematic conventions across space, time, and political positions despite the historical particularities of every instance of liberation. Compared to *My Home Village*, *Hurrah Freedom* does not contextualize the anticolonial movement within the macropolitical historical events of the late Japanese empire, but rather individualizes the conflict and its resolution by contrasting the heroism of the male protagonist Han-jung (and his young and innocent female admirer Hye-ja) with other characters—the collaborator Nam-bu, the gradualist nationalists, and the politically and morally capricious Mi-hyang. In order to do so, it both divides and weaves together the personal and the political, integrating through linear causality the triangle between Han-jung,

Mi-hyang, and Hye-ja and the unfolding of Han-jung and his group's plotting of anticolonial violence.

In order to explore the translatability of cinematic conventions as they pertain to the politics of liberation, I would like to compare *Hurrah Freedom* to late colonial period films, with reference to classical Hollywood film form. It may seem ahistorical to compare with classical Hollywood, considering Hollywood films were banned in the Japanese empire between 1938-1945. However, as I have argued elsewhere, in the late Japanese empire narrative and formal techniques of Hollywood were explicitly appropriated, transformed, and employed in film melodramas supporting the Japanese empire (Workman 2014, 163-73).

> The classical Hollywood film presents psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or nonachievement of goals....
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> Usually the classical syuzhet presents a double causal structure, two plot lines: one involving heterosexual romance (boy/girl, husband/wife), the other line involving another sphere—work, war, a mission or quest, other personal relationships. Each line will possess a goal, obstacles, and a climax. (Bordwell 1986, 18-19)

Hurrah Freedom obviously does not adhere precisely to all of the narrational principles that Bordwell puts forward concerning "classical Hollywood cinema." However, this general formalist statement is a useful entry point for examining the narrative form of the film and for establishing some points of contrast and comparison with both colonial period films and North Korean productions such as *My Home Village*. I will focus on three aspects: individual psychology, linear causality, and the double causal structure of public mission and heterosexual romance.

The most psychologically defined individual in *Hurrah Freedom* is the main male protagonist, Han-jung. Played by the iconic Jeon Chang-geun, who also wrote the screenplay for the film, Han-jung is both the face of the film and its moral compass. His quiet demeanor and his intense dedication to the cause of anticolonial revolt give his expressed nationalism an aura of authenticity. He

ardently refuses to stop the violent revolts against Japanese colonialism, even though, as other nationalist leaders in the film point out during a conversation on the outskirts of Seoul, Japan is almost certainly nearing defeat. He is also attractive and compelling in his sincerity. So inspiring are his individual qualities that Mi-hyang, who is already disappointed with her relationship with the collaborator Nam-bu, falls in love with him almost immediately, eventually changing her perspective on the political situation. Han-jung's magnetic heroism leads her to make the foolhardy and fatal mistake of bringing information to the nationalists that she has collected from Nam-bu, leading the Japanese authorities to their hideout.

Han-jung's story of heroism is therefore told through the kind of double causal structure. Although the goal of national liberation is clearly his most urgent motivation, the heterosexual romance between the nurse, Hye-ja, and Mi-hyang is an important second plot line. The intertwining of these two plot lines ends up being crucial to the film's narrative causality and the most important source of political and social meaning. Such an intersection of heterosexual romance and the public mission is of course a common characteristic of the double causal structure. Although the male characters (Han-jung and Nam-bu) are pitted against one another in the fashion of melodrama—the naturally loyal Korean versus the evil collaborator—the female character Mi-hyang, with her overly sentimental and confused sense of love and politics, brings the two men together in conflict, and unwittingly causes injury to the hero despite her better intentions. In this way, the first half of the film articulates its political stance, that liberation is primarily a matter of distinguishing resistant Korean masculinity from collaborationist Japanese masculinity, by displacing all of the uncertainty about the political situation onto Mi-hyang and her vacillating female desire. Even as the good woman, Hye-ja, passes messages and helps Han-jung to escape from the hospital toward the end of the film, her primary motivation is not nationalism, but rather her love and respect for the hero Han-jung. In other words, the double causal structure is almost always accompanied by gender norms that allow for displacements between the public and private conflicts.

This use of a double causal structure to narrate liberation has a number of effects. The protagonist's correct political action becomes a matter of individual choice, character, and identity, rather than a response to material or historical conditions. The political conflict is in general abstracted from its socioeconomic

background and becomes primarily a conflict of naturalized national and gender identities. The narrative also hews closely to the normative gender roles and psychologies assigned by male nationalist discourse, because the danger of hybrid or ambivalent political positions is projected entirely onto the female character (particularly after anticommunism dictated the removal of the scenes in which the character Nam-bu appeared).

Such a politicization of individuality, linear causality, and the double causal structure is reminiscent of a number of films of late colonial Korea, and the continuities in filmmaking practices between the early and late 1940s is remarkable if one is able to look beyond the obvious shifts in political perspective concerning Japanese colonialism. How is it that Choe In-kyu directed *Angels on the Street* (1941), *Children of the Sun* (1944), *Children of the Kamikaze* (1944), and *Love and Vow* (with Imai Tadashi, 1945), with their blatant celebrations of the possibilities of Japanese empire and Koreans' place within it, only to make a film about underground nationalist revolutionaries one year later? This is a complex question with many layers and it needs to be approached from multiple angles. A full accounting lies beyond the scope of this article. However, I will suggest for the moment that this translatability of Japanese and Korean nationalism is related to the repetition of formal conventions of film narrative and visuality. As Benedict Anderson showed in the case of print capitalism, the "cinematic mode of production" also comes to represent the content of national imaginaries, or the historical references that create the illusion of national cinema, but through general forms with general characteristics, including the encompassing form that Etienne Balibar refers to as the "nation form" (Anderson 2006; Balibar 1990; Beller 2006). Just as the novel was the primary genre of print capitalism, however unevenly formed in different locales, short story narratives such as the double causal structure determine the representation of the nation in cinema across a wide spectrum of political positions and local histories. It is this generality of the nation form and national cinema that allows for the postcolonial repetition of colonial era film conventions.

Without attempting to exhaustively chronicle all of the analogies and disparities between colonial period film narrative and Hurrah Freedom, there are a few comparable aspects that speak to the latter's individual-centered representation of national liberation and heterosexual romance. Although the former communist Im Hwa wrote the original story for Choe's *Angels on the Street*, its utopian dimension is very much based on the idea that individuals

have the power to solve social problems through their heroic actions. The protagonist Bang Seong-bin (Kim Ilhae) takes in orphans and with the help of his brother-in-law An In-kyu (played, coincidentally, by the future director of *My Home Village*, Kang Hong-sik) he is able to construct a rural orphanage where the orphans train their bodies and characters through tough manual labor. Bang is a philanthropist who resolves economic and social problems through his voluntarist efforts, an ethos which gains a direct connection with national community in the tacked-on final scene in which all of the characters salute Japan's imperial flag.

Bang rescues the main orphan character Yeong-il from a group of criminals who later attack the orphanage at the climax of the film. Therefore, the film uses the devices and characterizations of the melodrama mode to establish the moral innocence and goodness of Bang and his mission, and to contrast these to the enemies who must be defeated in order to save the individual and the community. Bang achieves the goal of protecting the orphanage and thereby proves his worth as an imperial subject, whereas Han-jung in *Hurrah Freedom* is killed—at least in the original screenplay—and only the national community achieves liberation. Nonetheless, in each of the narratives, the liberation of the collective subject is brought about through the voluntarist acts of heroic individuals pitted against forces of evil, both of which are largely abstracted from the socioeconomic conditions that constitute colonial, class, and gendered exploitation. In *Angels on the Street*, poverty is transformed largely into an issue of individual morality; rather than ask why there are so many homeless orphans in the streets of Seoul under Japanese colonial rule, the film instead contrasts the ideal philanthropy and rural communitarianism of the orphanage (and eventually, by analogy, all of Japanese imperial space) against the urban criminals who threaten to corrupt the orphans. Choe later codirected *Love and Vow* with Imai Tadashi, another film whose main theme is the orphan's attempts to improve his moral character (Fujitani 2011, 321-23). While this later film integrates the narrative of imperial subjectification more fluidly with that of the orphan, Leo Ching's statement about cultural representations of imperial subjectification in Taiwan—that they "displaced the concrete problematic of the social and replaced it with the ontology of the personal"—pertains to both of these films (Ching 2001, 126). Interestingly, this ontology of the personal, focused as it is on the problem of individual identification rather than of social context, was well communicated through narrative forms translated from

classical Hollywood cinema—individual psychology and action, linear causality, and the double causal structure of public mission and heterosexual romance.

While heterosexual romance is present but not emphasized in *Angels on the Street* and *Love and Vow*, Pak Gi-chae's *Korea Strait* (1943) explicitly uses the double causal structure to tie together the male protagonist Seong-ki's decision to volunteer with his pursuit and his eventual attainment of a marriage his family can support. Along the way, his love interest Geum-suk becomes an acceptable future spouse through her own dedication to the imperial economy, even though Seong-ki's family initially deems her immoral due to their illegitimate child. In terms of narrative form, Seong-ki's pursuit of his public mission, which also becomes his means for subjective liberation, is intertwined with his pursuit of a normative heterosexual relationship. At the climax of the film, cross-cutting and sound bridges move between Japan proper, where Seong-ki fights the invading Allied forces and is wounded, and Korea, where Geum-suk's exhausts herself in textile production. The national mission and the heterosexual romance intersect through the aesthetics of sublime sacrifice, as each becomes a proper imperial subject. The narrative of *Hurrah Freedom* is reminiscent of *Korea Strait*, because Han-jung establishes his heroism through unwavering patriotism and Hye-ja becomes a proper female subject by way of her dedication to and identification with the male national hero.

It could be said that *Hurrah Freedom* reverses *Angels on the Street*'s coding of the morality of Japaneseness, replacing the criminals from Seoul with Japanese colonizers, but many of the basic elements of the storytelling remain the same—the melodrama binaries, the moral vacillation of women and/or children, the authenticity and essential innocence of the male protagonists, etc. Choe and his colleagues clearly continued many of the late colonial narrative conventions when they determined to manufacture their tale of underground nationalist heroism. Although prints of *Children of the Sun* and *Children of the Kamikaze* are no longer available, one wonders how these films employ the moral problems of melodrama to more explicitly propagandistic ends compared to *Angels on the Street*. It can be said, however, that Choe's understanding that liberation through Japanese national subjectivity was a matter of individual identity and willpower is very much consistent with other representations of imperial subjectification in the Korean film industry in the early 1940s.

It is not my assertion that *Hurrah Freedom* and these colonial period films assert the same political position or follow precisely the same narrative

conventions. Nonetheless, as *My Home Village* shows, there were many different possibilities for telling the story of national liberation after 1945. It is not surprising that in this moment of an opening for politics, Choe In-kyu, Han Hyeong-mo, Jeon Chang-geun, and the other major figures in South Korean film who were involved in the production of *Hurrah Freedom* turned to the conventions and practices of the recent past to imagine the relationship between liberation, the heroic individual, and the nation. In doing so, they had to manufacture a completely new historical past through the repetition of narrative forms, inventing the subject position of the urban, anticolonial, male protagonist through some of the same ideas, set-ups, and scenarios that they had previously used to depict Japanese imperial subjectivity. Of course, this was a repetition with a difference. It is clear that the filmmakers' attempts to develop a postcolonial perspective on the colonial past were reduced to the illusory binary of resistance and collaboration under circumstances beyond the control of the filmmakers—U.S. occupation, anticommunism, and eventually the Cold War and Park Chung Hee's dictatorship. In this sense, while Kim rightly questions the status that the film has maintained in South Korean film histories, the film text and its history contain something of the ambiguity of the idea of national liberation in South Korea, which remained haunted by the repetition of past colonial structures (including "collaboration") and the continuation of colonial rule, albeit in a different form, under U.S. occupation and the Cold War system.

Through both its emphasis on authoritative historical documentation and the broader political scope of its narrative and visuality, North Korea's *My Home Village* is in many ways a more successful national epic than *Hurrah Freedom*. It aestheticizes mass politics much more forcefully, conveying to the audience a sense of being immersed in the historical mass movement for liberation, shown to involve every oppressed subject in the northern part of Korea in the early 1940s. The film's narrative was no doubt influenced by early Soviet cinema and socialist realism, which were introduced into North Korea during the Soviet Occupation (1945-1948). However, the "realism" of its depiction of history is as questionable as that of *Hurrah Freedom*'s more traditionally melodramatic mode, as well as that of the late Stalinist films imported during the occupation (Armstrong 2004). The use of superimposed titles throughout *My Home Village* gives the film an air of pedagogical and documentary authority, but the one intertitle that appears at the climax evidences how clearly mythic North Korean

cinematic realism was from the outset. A title shows the date August 15, 1945, some bombs drop on the village from an anonymous source, and the explosion disrupts the party of the evil large landowners. The intertitle that follows states, "[t]he unrivaled patriot General Kim Il Sung, at the end of a fifteen year armed struggle against the Japanese, overthrew Japanese imperialism and liberated the Motherland." Later, when the film shows, through a mix of live action and stock footage, Kim Il Sung's return to Korea from the Soviet Union on October 14, 1945, it is not explained how he was able to use guerrilla tactics to topple the Japanese empire while in exile. Therefore, from the beginning, the North Korean film industry inherited many of the conventions of late Stalin-era Soviet films (1945-1953), which tended to depict every historical event, including the end of World War II, to be an effect of Stalin's will and military acumen (*Fall of Berlin*; Youngblood 2007, 55-106).

Despite the mythical portrayal of Kim Il Sung's successes as an anticolonial guerrilla revolutionary, which would of course remain significant throughout the history of North Korean film and literature, *My Home Village* does provide much more of a historical and social contextualization for revolution and liberation compared to the resistance versus collaboration narrative of *Hurrah Freedom*. The most obvious difference is that *My Home Village* represents Japanese imperialism not only as an issue of national identity, but as a system that perpetuates exploitative class relations. While it certainly employs the simplistic binaries of melodrama in the depiction of the noble, impoverished peasants and the evil, rapacious large landowners, this is done to highlight a number of economic problems that have historical reference—the exploitative taxation of tenant farmers by landowners, the propping up of these landowners by the Japanese colonial state, the brutality of the Kwantung Army and colonial police, the partisan activities of revolutionary peasants (including the sabotage of factories and railroads), and the forced conscription of male and female Koreans into labor camps or the military (*gangje jingyong*). Rather than stripping away as much of the historical context and class politics as possible in order to individualize and psychologize the national identity conflict, *Home Village* focuses instead on the macropolitics of history.

In this regard, the narrative's differences from the double causal structure are apparent in that the male protagonist, Gwan-pil, has no love interest. His experiences in prison and his formation into an effective partisan make up the first half of the film, and the second half cross-cuts between circumstances in his home

village and his partisan actions against the factory and trains. As the film nears August 15, 1945, the sister Ok-dan (Mun Ye-bong), the mother, and depictions of exploitation in the village carry the narrative through to its climax, rather than Gwan-pil and his mission. He is absent during the liberation and returns only months later in the final scene. On the one hand, Gwan-pil's character and his partisan actions have to make way for the introduction of an even more ideal partisan subject, Kim Il Sung; on the other hand, at the climax primacy is given to mass revolution rather than to the individual hero. Stock footage of huge masses of people, gathered to listen to Kim Il Sung's speech (he appears in one shot), are insinuated where the protagonist's ambiguous achievement of his public mission appears in the original script for *Hurrah Freedom*.

The director of *My Home Village*, Kang Hong-sik, was a theater and film actor who played the part of An In-kyu in Choe In-kyu's *Angels on the Street* (Kim 2006). In comparing with his work during the colonial period, when Soviet films were rarely viewed and it was impossible to represent the type of class revolution depicted in *My Home Village*, it seems logical to speculate that Kang was a quick study in the styles of Soviet montage and socialist realism during the Soviet Occupation. As I will discuss in the next section, there is a theatrical quality to many of the film's scenes that reflect his earlier career, but there are also dramatic uses of close-ups of faces and long shots of masses of people that certainly echo Eisenstein and early Soviet film. Just as significantly, the film takes up two important narrative aspects of later Soviet socialist realism—a new emphasis on maintaining narrative continuity (for the sake of "popularization") and the figuration of the party leader as the primary source of narrative and visual causality (particularly at the climax). As for the actors and their earlier careers, it is fascinating to see Mun Ye-bong play the victimized younger sister Ok-dan, who is liberated from forced labor by the anti-Japanese revolution, just years after her roles in *Love and Vow* and *Korea Strait*. In the latter film she plays Geum-suk, a young woman who proves her moral worth and becomes a good mother by following her ex-lover Seong-ki's lead in volunteering herself for the war effort and transforming herself into a Japanese imperial subject.

In terms of the future of the film's narrative conventions, it is remarkable the degree to which *My Home Village* prefigures the whole history of classic North Korean cinema and theater, particularly its most canonized and well-known films and operas of the late 1960s and early 1970s—films such as *Sea*

of Blood (Choe Ik-kyu 1969) and *The Flower Girl* (Choe Ik-kyu and Pak Hak 1971). Firstly, the story relies on a primary contrast between a large landowning family and an impoverished tenant farming family. It depicts the landowning family eating large feasts (including meat), enjoying the luxury of fine clothes, playing Go, dancing, and plotting with Japanese authorities. The family also relies on the colonial police to suppress peasant rebellions. The film contrasts the landowners to the tenant farming family, which suffers physically and spiritually because of the landlord's unfair taxation, the Japanese state's appropriation of rice, its forced conscription of laborers, and the sexual harassment of Ok-dan by a soldier. As in the later films, the landowning family also degrades and insults the mother of the farming family, in this case when the young son spits at her feet when she comes to discuss the dire food situation and, later on, when she is beaten. The spitting incident sets off the main events of the plot—Gwan-pil retaliates and is imprisoned, and then escapes with a partisan leader to the mountains to join the guerrilla revolutionaries. This structure—in which the landowning family injures or kills the innocent mother and daughter of the tenant family, who are then redeemed by the oldest brother, the revolution, and Kim Il Sung—is repeated in the later films.

As a narrative of national liberation, *My Home Village* transforms the conventions of melodrama belonging to colonial period film, via Soviet socialist realism, to create a North Korean film aesthetic focused on the particularities of the country's emergent national myth, which includes partisan struggle against Japanese colonialism, the unity of the nation reflected in and by the unity of the revolutionary peasantry, and the guerrilla party and its leader as the subjects of history. Because such filmmaking was based in ideas about history that were foreign to the productions that could appear within the colonial Korean film industry, *My Home Village* was unprecedented, and marks a clearer break from past representations of political subjectivity in the context of Korean film. This new film aesthetic seems to offer a truer sense of liberation from the past, rather than the more obvious repetitions and continuities that can be seen in *Hurrah Freedom*. On the other hand, the film also adumbrates the repressive dimension of this liberation and its cinematic representation, because in showing the overturning of class relations, liberation from the colonial state, and the freeing of national subjectivity, it also suggests a new visual regime and a new aestheticization of politics, within which the collective mass movement for revolution is reduced to an expression of the will of its leader.

Aestheticizing Liberation: Interiors, Landscapes, and Close-ups

A number of qualities of *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, editing, and sound differentiate the aesthetic ideologies and visual rhetorics of *Hurrah Freedom* and *My Home Village*. I will focus on three: the relation between spatial interiors and exteriors, the use of facial close-ups, and depictions of landscape.

In keeping with the double causal structure of its narrative, *Hurrah Freedom* uses the interior of buildings in order to emphasize both the division between and the dangerous interpenetration of public and private life. We first encounter Mi-hyang in her small urban apartment, where she has just fought with the collaborationist Nam-bu and where her neighbor visits and consoles her. The apartment is well lit and conveys stability and a lack of imminent danger, despite Nam-bu's visit. In the manner of a domestic melodrama, the two women speak of their relationships and a medium close-up captures her weeping and lamenting her difficulties with Nam-bu. When Han-jung escapes to her apartment later on, he comically hides from the neighbor under the covers of Mi-hyang's bed, with his shoes noticeably sticking out of the covers.

While Mi-hyang's apartment might still be dangerous, despite such light-hearted comedy, the home of the younger Hye-ja is presented as a completely safe haven from the political conflict. One of the more formally interesting scenes is Han-jung's visit to her home. It begins with a two shot in which Hye-ja states her sympathy for another arrested revolutionary and a close-up of her expressing fear that Han-jung sees her only as a little girl. This is followed by shots of Han-jung studying and Hye-ja lying down and writing in her journal before bed with the presence of her sister providing a buffer. The page reads, "[h]e isn't my brother or my teacher. Then what is he? He's so brusque and he didn't even see the flowers I brought him. His awareness…" At that moment Han-jung notices the flowers and interrupts her to thank her for them; she crosses out the thoughts on the page and rips up the paper. The camera lingers on her bowed head and although she does not speak, she lifts her head and expresses a mix of love and pain, a mute desire and repression common to melodrama. The presence of her mother in the house, and their intimate conversations, highlight her innocence and her morality, in opposition to Mi-hyang's life as a single woman with conflicted desires. This scene establishes Hye-ja's family house as an apolitical space where moral goodness and feminine affection protect the hero from the dangers of his public mission.

Thus, despite its national allegorical claims to epic political conflict, the aestheticization of liberation in *Hurrah Freedom* adheres to the gendered spaces of genre films of the time. The other primary interior, the house and hideout of the nationalist revolutionaries, is coded as entirely masculine. Besides Mi-hyang's dangerous appearance there, only men inhabit it. It is also filmed with low-key lighting and appears darker and more clandestine; it is always under the direct threat of political adversaries. The national revolutionaries guard the inside of this building with guns and secret codes, in scenes more at home in a crime drama or *film noir*. Han-jung attends a meeting outdoors with the intellectuals and activists who prefer a gradual approach, but his authenticity and willingness to die are established upon his return to the dark space of the hideout and his report to his compatriots. The space of the women's houses, on the other hand, mark the feminine sphere as separated from political conflict by its association with the private travails of love and the apolitical sentimentality of feminine emotion. These homes and the scenes that occur there would be at place within any middle class family melodrama unconcerned with the public mission of national liberation; they are domestic spaces that are unavailable to the political imaginary of *My Home Village*.

In a rather obvious assertion of gender norms, it is Mi-hyang's crossing of the threshold between these two interiors that is the primary threat to the male protagonist's public mission. She steals Nam-bu's information and goes to the hideout, admitting her past evilness to Han-jung; however, at the same time she leads the Japanese colonial police to the revolutionaries. If in this film liberation is primarily a matter of purifying ethnic identity, psychologically and morally, its interior spaces convey the gendering of this process. In the shot/reverse-shot capturing his final conversation with Mi-hyang, Han-jung maintains his authenticity and his stoicism by looking away from her with little expression and declaring his willingness to die. In contrast, Mi-hyang weeps uncontrollably as a close-up captures the bodily expression of her guilt and regret for previously supporting the Japanese empire through her love for Nam-bu. The colonial police then kill her and Han-jung is hospitalized.

The spaces through which *My Home Village*'s represents the cause of liberation are very different. As Kim Seon-a points out, the film begins and ends with two fairly long montages of pictorial landscape images—shots panning across the river that runs through the village or the deep space of the agricultural valley, shots capturing the still beauty of nearby lakes and mountains and trees

blowing in the wind, and also some pastoral glimpses of farmers and farming equipment. For a film that both turns to the recent past and points to the future of the DPRK nation-state, these landscape images are utopian in a dual sense. After the montage at the beginning, the film immediately cuts to the mother of the family pleading with the landowner, suggesting that these landscape images refer to a collective origin that has been broken by colonialism and class differences. By the montage at the end of the film, those same shots suggest that this origin has been returned to its proper state through the revolution. The home village is again integrated into its natural landscape.

Not surprisingly considering Kang Hong-sik's background in the theater, the scene of the mother pleading with the landowner, which follows the first landscape montage, appears very theatrical in its *mise-en-scène* and blocking, with the landowner seated inside with his tax books and the mother looking in through a square window, her lower body invisible, as though she were kept neatly outside of the interior of the house through the capture of a picture frame. This scene establishes relations of domestic interior and exterior landscape that continues throughout the entirety of the film. The distinction between interior and exterior is not a matter of gender, the way the spatial dichotomies of *Hurrah Freedom* function, but rather a matter of social class. The landowners' home is the site of wealth, entertainment, and connivance, and as in all North Korean films set in the 1930s or 1940s the tenant farmers cannot enter the house until the revolutionary climax. The homes of the farming families are dark and marked by suffering; they are also gradually emptied as Gwan-pil goes to prison and then flees to the mountains and then the majority of the village is conscripted into forced labor.

During Gwan-pil's process of becoming a partisan, most of the significant "domestic" scenes, including a remarkable flashback to his childhood when he recounts his thwarted desire to attend school, occur around a campfire at night, surrounded by male and female cadres. Therefore, *Home Village* centers on a family, but a family whose domestic space is broken and who is dispersed into the natural and industrial landscapes, only returning home eventually by means of the revolution. All of the interior spaces of the film—the landowner's home, the inside of the train, the inside of the factory or prison—are coded as spaces of ownership and power, whereas the rural partisan is able to gain a romantic connection to both community and to land through his displacement, finding in the nationalized natural landscape inspiration for the telluric struggle. If

these North Korean aesthetics of liberation create a sense of *national* interiority distinct from *Hurrah Freedom*'s gendering of private and public space, it is perhaps, as Kim Seon-a suggests, through the use of pictorial landscape itself. If the first and last scenes of the film refer to an origin and a return to origin, this origin is presumably that of a delimited group of people, an oppressed and then liberated political community defined by their historical experience of colonialism and their shared aesthetic experience of emerging from and returning to the same landscape. Therefore, the final montage begins with a shot of Ok-dan and Gwan-pil embracing after his heroic return, but then pans to the left, following the line of Gwan-pil's gaze, attributing to the images a perspective that has lost and then regained (through national liberation) the landscape of the home village. An earlier scene of train passengers arriving home from the distant locales of their forced labor presents the same idea through more social realist, and less romantic and metaphysical, images of reunion.

Another brief montage that occurs at the moment of liberation conveys this latter sense of human community through a series of close-ups of the faces of humble villagers smiling and shouting "Manse!" Although the montage begins with images of characters, including the mother, the subsequent series of faces borrows from Soviet practices of typage; they do not appear to be hired actors, but rather regular citizens. This montage begins a sequence that ends with Kim Il Sung's return to Korea and stock images of massive crowds, creating analogies between the liberation of the home village—the montage is followed by the villagers tying up and punishing the landowners and collaborators—and the liberation of the nation. Because the series of close-ups occurs as the villagers are beginning to use their popular power to overturn the class structure, and because it includes non-actors, it is one of the more powerful and referential scenes in the film. It also most blatantly calls upon the viewer to identify with the characters and action.

In an analysis of the close-up that spans many theories, Mary Ann Doane encapsulates the different use of the close-up that Eisenstein assigned within Soviet cinema. Although she warns against blanket descriptions of Hollywood aesthetics, her reading of Eisenstein is useful for the present comparison:

> As opposed to the American cinema's use of the close-up to suggest proximity, intimacy, knowledge of interiority, Eisenstein argues for a disproportion that transforms the image into a sign, an epistemological

> tool, undermining identification and hence empowering the spectator as analyst of, rather than vessel for, meaning. (Doane 2003, 107)

In comparing this series of close-ups in *My Home Village* with those that appear during Mi-hyang's visit to Han-jung in *Hurrah Freedom*, a few telling differences can be identified. In *Hurrah Freedom*, the close-ups provide "proximity, intimacy, [and] knowledge of interiority." As an "affection-image," Mi-hyang's face expresses her reflection on an interior psychological state, particularly her guilt and regret for her late coming to nationalism (Deleuze 1986, 87-90). Because they are overflowing and irrational, her emotions contrast with Han-jung's close-up, which conveys single-mindedness and impassive determination. The close-ups do more than maintain the gender binary, and they are not merely a continuation of the individuation of the characters in the narrative action. As Deleuze (ibid. 103) argues, "affects are not individuated like people and things, but nevertheless they do not blend into the indifference of the world. They have singularities which enter into virtual conjunction and each time constitute a complex entity." The affection-image has a virtual quality; it has the power to abstract itself from space and time to and thereby bring singularities into relation with the whole. Therefore, it is not set off from the rest of the narrative and images like a "partial object." The facial close-up is rather an affective moment that "suspends individuation" and concentrates the complexity of the action, narrative themes, and political ideology (ibid. 100). It is not surprising, therefore, that Choe's most dramatic use of facial close-ups intensifies the qualities of the diegesis—its reflection of the collective in the psychological individual, its gendered moral economy, and the double causal structure of public mission and heterosexual romance.

Choe's use of the close-up is more comparable to D.W. Griffith in Deleuze's contrast between Griffith and Eisenstein, because he gives preeminence to the "reflexive face" (as in Mi-hyang's self-reflection) rather than to the "intensive face" that was Eisenstein's preference for the transformation of image into sign (Deleuze 1986, 91-92). While no hard and fast rules are applicable, the most effective use of close-ups in *My Home Village* does suggest that Kang Hong-sik's Soviet-influenced film tends toward the virtuality of "intensive faces" that draw together the singularities of the narrative and themes in a manner similar to Eisenstein:

> Eisenstein's innovation was not to have invented the intensive face, nor even to have constituted the intensive series with several faces, several close-ups; it was to have produced compact and continuous intensive series, which go beyond all binary structures and exceed the duality of the collective and the individual. (ibid. 92)

At the climax of *My Home Village*, when the revolution begins, the action contrasts strongly with the types of spectacular chase scenes that make up the ending of *Hurrah Freedom*. The film becomes a long series of "complex and continuous intensive series," from the initial rapturous joy of the villagers, to the stock footage of Kim Il Sung's return, to the final landscape shots. The series of close-ups of mostly anonymous people shouting "Manse!" begins this long series. If the spectator can identify with this intensive series, it is not through the melodramatic invoking of sympathy with the pained or controlled body, but rather in the way the sequence "transforms the image into a sign," particularly the sign (or idea) of the nation-state. The egalitarian expression of patriotism is certainly emotional, but this emotion is not presented as psychological interiority, and the close-ups do not make one feel more intimate with the characters. Instead the intensive series abstracts the external object of the faces' affection (the nation-state) from space and time, transforming it into a virtual possibility.

Through the intensive series, the community of faces is elevated from an imagistic object to a sign. Each face is not connected to the next through personal psychology or spatiotemporal continguity, in the manner of objects. One can no longer speak of a binary of individual and collective, because the community is not a community of individuals in spatiotemporal relation with one another, but rather an organic whole held together by an idea. Unfortunately, as the history of North Korean film develops, this empty offscreen space will be filled more and more transparently by the figure of the sovereign leader, but in 1949 such a scene could still empower analysis, or perhaps a popular will to imagine a postcolonial future whose form was yet to be decided.

Conclusion

The differing employments of the close-up in *Hurrah Freedom* and *My Home Village* speak to the two Cold War political systems that were already beginning

to develop in North and South Korea in the immediate aftermath of World War II. On the one hand, a film steeped in the liberal humanism of psychological individuals and their struggles against clear obstacles. On the other hand, a film that gradually deemphasizes the role of the everyday individual in history and imagines the nation-state as an organic whole held together by an idea. However, the difference is perhaps overstated, because cinema is never simply a reflection of its political and historical contexts, nor does it itself poetically create that context. Cinema is bounded by conventions of rhetoric, storytelling, visuality, and sound that in many ways belong to the medium itself. The continuities and discontinuities between film styles is more a matter of degree and porosity rather than clear demarcations.

The cinematic representation of national liberation concerned narrating and aestheticizing a political, social, and historical process that was unprecedented. However, the process itself could not change the technologies and conventions of cinematic storytelling and aesthetics. Therefore, representing liberation in film required a break with previous narrative and aesthetic regimes, but it also entailed a repetition of some of those former regimes' basic qualities. This is why it is important in interpreting these films to look simultaneously to late colonial period filmmaking, to classical Hollywood, and to Soviet cinema, in order to recognize that while the historical experiences of Korean national liberation were certainly specific and incomparable, their cinematic representation was connected in various ways to cinema as a global cultural form.

This connection to world cinema is significant also for thinking the colonial and the postcolonial differently from the traditional understanding of national liberation and its representation. The form of the films and their places in the history of their respective film industries support the consensus that Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule was from the beginning an incomplete process, due to American and Soviet imperialisms and the dictatorial regimes that were soon founded. At the same time, the ways that the films repeat past narrative and aesthetic forms while inventing new subject positions and new political possibilities also suggests that they play out a generally modern problem of the retrospective-projective temporality of liberation, in its complex relation to both storytelling and aesthetics, a problem which means that the colonial can never be entirely superseded in history by the postcolonial through total liberation, but only rendered differently through a repetition, and therefore a transformation, of past forms.

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Abstract

This article examines two films that have become canonical representations of national liberation in South Korea and North Korea: *Hurrah! for Freedom* (*Jayu manse*, Choe In-kyu, 1946) and *My Home Village* (*Nae gohyang*, Kang Hong-sik, 1949). Taking the liberation period (1945-1948) as a postcolonial moment before the complete entrenchment of the Cold War system and its attendant conflicts and ideologies, it analyzes how the films look to the recent past of Japanese colonialism and how they prefigure the dominant national narratives and aesthetic ideologies in each Korean nation-state, particularly in relation to national liberation. In addition to examining how each film represents the colonial period, the article also relates the narratives and visual conventions of the films to colonial period filmmaking, as well as to Hollywood and Soviet cinemas. It is organized into two sections. The first section discusses the narrative forms of the two films and the second discusses their aesthetic ideologies through an attention to the dynamics of interior and exterior, depictions of landscape, and the effects of close-ups.

Keywords: national liberation, Korea, film, narrative, aesthetics

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