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Celluloid Democracy. Cinema and Politics in Cold War South Korea

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CELLULOID DEMOCRACY

**CINEMA AND POLITICS
IN COLD WAR
SOUTH KOREA**



HIEYON KIM

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Celluloid Democracy

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Cinema and Politics in Cold War South Korea



Hieyoon Kim



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*For those who choose to imagine a different world
and to do what is within their power to realize it*

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

All Korean names and words that appear in this book are transliterated according to the McCune-Reischauer romanization system. An exception is made for the names of historical and cultural figures that are already known in different English spellings, in which case the existing transliteration is used. Unless otherwise noted, all English-Korean translations are mine.

Introduction

In 1965, Yi Manhŭi, a prominent South Korean filmmaker, was arrested for violating Anti-communist Law with his humanistic portrayal of North Koreans in *Seven Female POWs* (*Ch'irinŭi Yŏpŏro*), a feature about the Korean War. The censorship authorities required him to change the plot and refilm almost every scene before it could be released to the public. This unprecedented demand for a complete revision of the film—not to mention the director's imprisonment—sparked a debate among South Korean film workers about the country they lived in. How could this be a democracy, they wondered, when the state suppresses our constitutionally protected freedom of expression? This question burned with urgency, but it was not new. It had cropped up repeatedly in the field of cinema over many decades, from the institutionalization of representative democracy under the US occupation (1945–48) through a series of autocratic regimes until the late 1980s. During this period, various film workers reckoned with the gap between the judicial construction of statist democracy and their experience of the social fabric, and this reckoning powerfully informed their work. Individually and collectively, they asked: In a society in which democracy means only regular elections, what other qualities or visions of democracy could be, or should be, evoked through cinema? What possibilities might such renditions of democracy hold for a society currently experienced as undemocratic? How might cinema redefine the meaning and practices of democracy in South Korea?

This book examines a group of film workers who sought to answer such questions in their work, exploring visions of democracy that emerged through cinema in Cold War South Korea, roughly from the peninsula's liberation from Japanese rule in 1945 to the official end of the military control in 1987. Starting with the US occupation, with its purported goal of democratizing the former Japanese colony, successive political regimes portrayed democracy as a vague promise of national security and prosperity. Enlisting motion pictures as a conveyer of this obscure notion, powerful people and institutions circumscribed the medium

with anti-communist and nationalist mandates. The actors featured in this book took issue with cinema's alignments with authoritarian forms of state power and the ideologies of national security and modernization on which they rested. Through an array of cinematic expressions, methods, and practices, they reconfigured film as an arena through which democracy might be thought, experienced, and enacted differently from the norm. These actors included film critics calling for a more equitable system, teachers creating grassroots film networks, filmmakers reinventing the right to express themselves, women activating a new film language and platform against misogyny, and students changing the representation of the marginalized and the dispossessed. Inside and outside the limited domain of their industry, these film workers experimented with cinema as a means of struggling for what they believed was—or could be—democracy in action.

From their stories, this book theorizes a generative space that I call celluloid democracy. In South Korea, celluloid democracy embodied radical aspirations for cinema as an inclusive and just terrain. From urban theaters to classrooms and university campuses, it emerged out of the film workers' engagement with, and dynamic theorization of, two key issues that this book explores: representation and distribution. The film workers challenged the state's control of the media through both censorship and patterns of selective support that regulated what was representable on screen. The political rulers justified their power to regulate cinema by citing the necessity of building and protecting the nation. To the film workers, this power neither represented the citizens nor allowed citizens to represent themselves. Rather, the state's control repressed the medium's capacity to document the lives of all members of society and to bring them closer to each other. The film workers viewed the state's repression as a barrier to the imagining of a more open and inclusive realm of representation in cinema, and this reckoning informed their work. From making the un- and underrepresented visible in the public sphere to circumventing the state's censorship, they struggled to lift the restrictions on who could be represented and how. This effort to expand cinematic spaces coincided with South Korean film workers' push against the state's unilateral distribution of resources for film production and exhibition. Asking who determined what would be allocated to whom and why, they uncovered troubling patterns in the ways powerful leaders enforced certain protocols and rules to maximize their exploitation of cinema and govern the population. At times, they interrupted the normalized patterns of monopoly by bending the rules to their own ends. I argue in this book that celluloid democracy evolved as a mode of cultural practice anchored to ethical and aesthetic concerns that challenged undemocratic representation and distribution. This practice foregrounded a utopian vision of democracy in which the ruled could represent themselves and exercise their rights to access resources free from state suppression.

The radical potential of celluloid democracy was intertwined with South Korean film workers' reconfiguration of cinema as an ecology of social, technological, and discursive components that together constituted a dynamic system. This reconfiguration was vital in their challenge to the boundedness of the medium, which was ruled by the state and the market, two hegemonic powers that together tied the medium to their priorities, policies, and perspectives. The film workers studied in this book constructively examined and pushed back against the controlled borders of cinema as an instrument and the assumptions that enabled such control. In so doing, they developed a more capacious notion of cinema, one that encompassed not only moving images and the devices associated with them, but also people and their relations, as well as the diverse discourses that inevitably surrounded production, distribution, and consumption in the public sphere. Despite their differences in background and position, these film workers all refused to treat cinema as a closed and unchanging apparatus; instead, they considered it a medium that was expansive and constantly in the making. This new way of seeing cinema encouraged them to upend the hierarchies within it by building a more horizontal, network-based filmmaking practice and a dialogical relation between producers and viewers. Diverging from the dominant notion of cinema, this ecological conception was ultimately intended to generate an equitable and open community for all participants.

The ecological view of cinema was not crystallized in clearly written manifestos and highly sophisticated concepts. Rather, film workers groped their way gradually toward a deeper understanding of the conditions that determined what they identified as crises of cinema and democracy. In response to these crises, they enacted a diverse and resistant notion of cinema as an ecology, and through this enactment, the film workers attempted to change their own world from within the frames, spaces, and networks of celluloid. Their attempts might be seen as transitory and liminal. They might not have been inherently revolutionary. Yet, the imaginations and connections they sparked should be considered radical potentialities, capturing a sense of futurity during the trying time examined in this book. Stuart Hall writes:

No project achieves "hegemony" as a complete project. It is a process, not a state of being. No victories are permanent or final. Hegemony has constantly to be "worked on," maintained, renewed, revised. Excluded social forces, whose consent has not been won, whose interests have not been taken into account, form the basis of counter-movements, resistance, alternative strategies and visions . . . and the struggle over a hegemonic system starts anew. They constitute what Raymond Williams called "the emergent"—and are the reason why history is never closed but maintains an open horizon towards the future.¹

In the critical tradition of Hall and Williams, the responses of Korean film workers can be seen to have modeled practices that prioritized the process of becoming.

Following Hall, I argue in this book for the importance of recapturing cultural imaginings that reject the closure of history and invest in the struggle toward an open future. While the sense of futurity was not destined to endure during the lives of all the subjects in this book, their visions remain a vital resource, ripe for reuse and further cultivation.

. . .

Over the past two decades, scholars have examined many layers of Cold War South Korea to challenge the “official” narrative of the period as one of an ideological contest between capitalist and communist powers. They have turned their eyes to everyday experiences of the Cold War, from the country’s troubled decolonization bound up with the post-1945 global order to the Korean War and other forms of violence.² This attention to the everyday has revealed a dimension of struggle that extended across all corners of society. The armistice agreement in 1953 may have ended the three years of devastating war, but the national division backed by two superpowers continued to force Koreans to live with endless tension. South of the 38th parallel, a series of right-wing regimes with US support waged anti-communism as a political tactic to maintain their influence. Posing threats to the physical survival of individuals and the social survival of communities, their use of anti-communism magnified fear and anxiety via the mass media and information agencies, leading to the normalization of an array of surveillance systems across the country.³ Beyond South Korea’s transition to democratic polity and the “official” end of the Cold War, starting in the late 1980s, the division has thrust the country into a state of permanent conflict—not simply in border areas but also in daily life. Even at the time of writing, South Koreans continue to live with the remnants of authoritarian rule that persisted through democratization, from the antagonistic public discourse provoked by the powerful ultra-right wing’s corporate media groups to the effective anti-communist mandate.⁴

In approaching the complex and multifaceted experiences of Cold War South Korea, scholars have paid particular attention to culture as a battlefield that did not replace physical combat but was waged with “soft power.”⁵ Much of this discussion has uncovered links of patronage, popular culture, and coercion through which the United States sought to influence intellectual discussion and win the hearts and minds of Koreans.⁶ Despite these scholars’ extensive analysis of new archival sources and genres, they have tended to view culture as a supplementary ground on which powerful people advanced their goals and built support for specific visions of modernization, development, or freedom. Recent studies have expanded this limited definition of culture as a mere container of political ideologies instilled by the US and South Korean powers. Drawing on a range of literary works, audiovisual material, and understudied archival collections, these studies have illuminated how Koreans navigated the uneasy

relation between superpower conflicts and their home; experienced transnational cultural interactions; and undermined the prepackaged political, aesthetic, and ideological scripts.⁷

In what might be called the cultural turn in the study of Cold War South Korea, cinema is not uncharted territory. Yet the discussion of Cold War cinema, and of pre-1990s film generally, has focused narrowly on a small set of canonical texts, genres, and filmmakers, leaving other important aspects of film culture largely unexamined.⁸ Although the recent global success of Korean cinema has fostered newer scholarship in the discipline of film studies, which has long marginalized non-Western cinema, it has also exaggerated a tendency in the field to privilege so-called contemporary cinema. This gap has been addressed by scholars who reexamine the established texts and genres with fresh lenses or explore previously undervalued areas of interest. For instance, Steven Chung, in his work on the well-studied filmmaker Shin Sang-ok, has decentered the discourse of auteurship by tracing the transformation of film genre and industry vis-à-vis Cold War politics.⁹ Jinsoo An investigates the representation of colonialism in South Korean cinema from 1945 through the 1970s through the lens of shifting diplomatic relations with Japan and with a focus on newly developed genres.¹⁰ Bringing light to the 1950s as a rich site of cinematic tradition, Christina Klein, in her study of the postwar filmmaker Han Hyung-mo, examines how Han's distinct styles evolved through both encounter and struggle with the new cultural order of the Cold War.¹¹ Meanwhile, studies of a broad network of Cold War cinema have produced a new understanding of interactions not only between the US and South Korean governments but also among cultural producers, ambassadors, and consumers: most notably, Sang-joon Lee historicizes the rise and fall of networks of postwar film producers, policy makers, and entrepreneurs with regard to the US strategic expansion of cultural Cold War in Asia.¹² Taken together, these scholars have significantly stretched conventional definitions of Cold War cinema. Rather than seeing cinema as subjected to the political goals of the Cold War regimes, they look afresh at genres, styles, and networks as generative sites in which Koreans' agency emerged and evolved during this time.

Celluloid Democracy builds on and extends this recent work in three ways. First, it explores how South Korean film workers radicalized cinema as a means to change the status quo. I examine a wider spectrum of political configurations of cinema that reimagined the medium, intervened in the public sphere, and functioned as a catalyst to change the world. In so doing, I demonstrate that Cold War South Korea's geopolitical condition—in close alignment with the US and isolated from anti-colonial and anti-capitalist alliances—offers a different vantage point from which to define what “progressive” film discourse and practice means, and so to broaden the current understanding of film activism geographically, topically, and conceptually.

The use of cinema by political groups and movements has been well-documented in the context of the northern hemisphere. Most discussions have centered on certain kinds of producers (militant, anti-capitalist, workers' film), topics (amateur social issues film), media (portable cameras), or any other differences from the mainstream.¹³ When it comes to historical studies of film activism outside the West, however, little has been discussed beyond a few established topics such as third cinema, an anti-colonial and anti-capitalist film movement that thrived in 1960s and 1970s Latin America.¹⁴ The lack of discussion of non-Western film movements can be seen, for instance, in a comprehensive collection of film manifestos of all kinds that includes a section on decolonization but attends only to texts published under the broad influence of third cinema.¹⁵ While newer scholarship has increasingly diversified the geographical boundaries of the emergence and exchange of progressive film practices amid the digital turn in social activism, the study of film activism has developed, as Chris Robé and Stephen Charbonneau point out, in an “uneven” manner.¹⁶ The post-1945 history of the Korean film movement has rarely been examined in the Anglophone world, and when it is discussed, scholars have often privileged a group of student filmmakers in the 1980s whose practices were inspired by both the local prodemocratic movement and guerrilla filmmaking in Latin America.¹⁷ This book brings to light earlier endeavors to radicalize cinema that often go unnoticed. Although I spend the last chapter on the student filmmaking of the 1980s, this book reveals that several important ideas of the era—about cinema as an instrument of social transformation, the divergent aims of realizing a more just representation and a more just distribution, and revolutionary film aesthetics—had already been debated by other film workers and artists in the previous decades.

Expanding the scope of the history of film activism also demands a rethinking of how we define activism. Activism often refers to direct action in public spaces, such as sit-ins, strikes, riots, and other forms of civil disobedience. Almost none of the actors analyzed in this book engaged in such direct action on a regular basis, nor did they identify as activists. But the term activism is useful because, as Todd Gitlin explains, “It reminds us that the world not only is but is made.”¹⁸ The active making of the world involves an action geared toward something better than what one faces and inhabits; this action might not lead to the hoped-for difference, but without taking such steps it would be impossible to identify what such a difference could be and how to move toward it. Drawing on this notion of activism, this book turns to the wide spectrum of expressions through which Korean film workers pushed back against the status quo and articulated their aesthetic and political subversion. For instance, producers and audiences of the many cultural events that transpired during the Cold War interacted in new and transformative ways, beyond the rigid and narrow political aims of the state that regulated them. The cinematic discourses and practices by film workers discussed in the book underscore that there was rarely a “one-way transmission” of

superpower models (or authoritarian models) at the level of culture. Film workers did not meekly receive the top-down attempts to influence them, but rather deformed and reformed the models that were handed down, making them their own. Film programs for certain “official” purposes had unintended effects, as Korean filmmakers sought to reappropriate spaces and concepts offered by the US and its proxies on their own terms.

It is crucial to attend to the variety of these expressions because taking an action could have different stakes for those who lived under the state’s strict regulation. Korean critics needed to work around notorious censorship practices to speak their minds (Chapter 1). Grassroots film networks had to operate under the guise of depoliticized book clubs (Chapter 2). Veteran and novice filmmakers alike faced threats, such as arrests, due to the decisions that they made (Chapters 3, 4, and 5). Because even what might be seen as “indirect” expressions of subversion could work against them, the actors considered in this book needed to find other relevant and creative ways to express themselves. Throughout this book, I emphasize the importance of understanding the emergence of such modes of expression, even when they appear “quiet,” as an engagement with unjust and precarious conditions—to see how people used their agency and invented expressions that would not be caught by the authorities but that nonetheless spoke.¹⁹

Second, this book captures a set of visions for democracy that emerged as film workers navigated and undermined the ideological and material constraints set by the US and the South Korean states. The subjects analyzed in this book devised ways of thinking about democracy that were bound neither to a political institution nor a prodemocratic movement. Breaking with the pervasive tendency to equate democracy with its superficial features—most prominently elections—they articulated democracy from within their experiences of injustice related to representation and distribution in the field of cinema at various junctures in Cold War South Korea. For instance, filmmakers and critics rejected the vague promise of democracy in their intervention in the American domination of local film markets and resources during the US occupation (Chapter 1). Against the South Korean state’s patronizing monopoly of cinema as its apparatus, teachers activated horizontal networks of audiovisual education to increase access to film materials and literacy (Chapter 2). Facing repression of the right to express themselves, veteran filmmakers refused to be fooled by the state’s arbitrary application of constitutional freedom (Chapter 3). Young filmmakers reinvented the modes of production and exhibition in the hope of creating a new cinema for women in a misogynistic society (Chapter 4) and of bringing the voices of the disadvantaged—especially poor urban workers and peasants—to the screen (Chapter 5).

These alternative visions for democracy through cinema have hitherto been ignored or dismissed as impotent in the historiography of South Korean democracy, which centers on institutional politics. Within and outside the country, South Korea has been widely celebrated as a latecomer that joined the so-called third

wave of democratization in the 1980s.²⁰ This narrative, however, has tended to measure South Korea's transition against a Western standard that emphasizes progress through representative governance, liberal civil rights, and certain forms of participatory engagement.²¹ This tendency has encouraged an abstract notion of democracy as either an imported political institution or a destination for collectively organized actions against authoritarianism.²² Particularly in the latter perspective, which has prevailed in recent years, the history of democracy has been coupled with the popular codification of an image of a homogeneously potent and resilient entity, collapsing the various groups of participants and their democratic visions into a singular national group.²³ These tendencies in the historiography of South Korean democracy have been challenged in various ways. For instance, Charles Kim reexamines the student movements of spring 1960—which are commonly called the April Revolution—and portrays them not as a messianic explosion of revolutionary youth but as a broad demand to address the precarious economic and social conditions of the postwar era.²⁴ Namhee Lee expands the scope of the prodemocratic movement to a wider imagination of the “minjung” (a term used to denote the “people”) by students and intellectuals from the 1960s to the 1980s.²⁵ The vitality of minjung, marked as a subject of history, gained currency not only in political rhetoric but also in music, art, literature, philosophy, and theology, which together generated vibrant visions of an equitable society.

With a focus on film, I join the growing chorus of historians who have disarticulated the seemingly coherent democratization movement. As the rest of the book reveals, many film workers sought out something different, a more just definition of the “democratic” terms bandied about by the US and South Korean states, like “freedom,” “equality,” and “development.” In a sense, their struggle revitalized radical politics through its capacity to put these terms into practice in counter-normative ways. This does not mean they always succeeded at upending the status quo—that is, the capitalist, nationalist, anti-communist, and patriarchal system. While some creators of celluloid democracy identified such inversions in their planning, their experiments with celluloid and democracy meant that the relationship between the ways these terms were realized within their space and the status quo was complex and multifaceted. I claim that the spaces of celluloid democracy were fruitful places from which to think differently and imaginatively about democratic terms when such thinking was oriented to changing the world.

Last but not least, this book considers how the archives and memories of film workers have been shaped by the Cold War and its ongoing impacts. The task of writing a Cold War history of Korean cinema involves the methodological challenges of accessing the lost materials and often ephemeral sites (e.g., unarchived film prints, production documents, periodicals, mobile theaters, and networks of film viewers). For instance, the film workers—the non-state actors—I write about are invisible in almost all the national archives of the United States and South Korea. Rather than writing against this invisibility as violence inflicted by people

in power against so-called ordinary film workers and their historical existence, I mine the absence by describing as fully as possible the conditions that produced it.²⁶ Writing with the absence involves a set of inquiries that this book addresses: What do the workings of the archives, particularly those of the state, tell us about society, the nature of its institutions, and the fabric of the relationships between the state and its citizens? Public access to state archives has been deemed a hallmark of “democratic” societies, but what does democracy mean here when these archives do not hold space for, or provide access to, “the demos”—the people? And how might an exploration of celluloid democracy enable a new understanding of Cold War archives or the production of new collections of knowledge?

In my response to these questions, I highlight that the absence of many of the figures traced in this book in official archives is an index of the vertical relationships enacted between the South Korean state and the population. In Cold War South Korea, political leaders sought to instill a patriarchal nationalism that normalized a hierarchical relationship between the leader and his people. Tapping into the anti-colonial sentiment of the public, Syngman Rhee (in office, 1948–60) branded himself the father of the nation (“*kukpu*”) whose life had been dedicated to its independence since the early colonial era.²⁷ Park Chung Hee (in office, 1961–79) diluted his militaristic background with a constant showcasing of his family as an ideal model in which he played the role of a resourceful and unpretentious father. This image of Park was reproduced by the print and audiovisual media, most notoriously in coverage of his site visits to factories and farming villages that depicted him as the leader of a nation of ancestral families.²⁸ The archive of the South Korean government features this patriarchal gaze of the state upon its population. This gaze is inscribed in the conditions of the absence at all levels: from its structure (organized by the bureaucratic ladder up to the president) to its content (proposals, reports, letters sent to higher authorities).²⁹

The absence of Korean film workers in official archives also proves the vertical relationships between the US and South Korea. The US archives contain a myriad of papers on how anti-communism and the evangelization of democracy fueled American action on Korea (or the Koreas); as the new hegemon of the so-called free world, the US regarded South Korea as an essential East Asian post that had to be “saved” from communist expansion. These archives reflect the fact that US hegemony in South Korea grew through a combination of imperial intervention and involvement in nationalist modernization projects. The Koreans’ reasons for working with Americans evolved as they sought external assistance in achieving internal and international political goals. Their interaction with the US power shows that American assistance at times—especially during the postwar era—did not deny their agency but rather recognized it. Nevertheless, it cannot be disputed that the hierarchies between nations structured the integration and interdependence that characterized the US-Korea relationship.³⁰ These hierarchies set up not only American action in Korea but also the absence of Koreans in the US archives:

the film distributors and exhibitors who operated under the American military government during its occupation, the teachers who worked with the American audiovisual education specialists in the early postwar era (1954–61), and so on.

By pressing at the limits of archival documents, I hope to elucidate the intricate connections between the archive and the Cold War construction of knowledge that dictate the official invisibility of the actors in my study. Grappling with their historical invisibility involves not so much restoring what is missing in the archive. Rather, it requires us to think outside, not just along, the borders of the institutional archives to imagine and amplify the strivings of the film workers.

Knowledge is often embodied rather than being an external material trace of the Cold War, belonging to what Diana Taylor has called the repertoire rather than the archive.³¹ Between 2017 and 2019, I conducted a series of in-depth interviews in South Korea in the hope of encountering the repertoire of film workers as cultural producers during the Cold War. This process threw into relief my limitations as a scholar of the northern hemisphere, where Eurocentric knowledge and methods have been normalized as ways of studying others in different parts of the world. In fact, my interview trips opened up a long journey of unlearning that has ignited my thinking about what Walter Dignolo terms “epistemic injustice” over the years.³² When asked to share their stories, none of my interlocutors believed at first that their ideas or actions in the past were interesting enough to be matters of scholarly concern, and many seemed to have trouble articulating themselves. It took me a while to recognize that I was using my own parameters of what counts as knowledge and how it should look while listening to them; within the limits of these parameters, their struggle to speak about the past was mistakenly seen as their difficulty. But what seemed to be their reserve or passivity was actually my own incompetence at understanding their reticence—including pauses and silences—as legitimate forms of expression.

Moreover, their reticence to speak was predicated on the particularities of my field site, where the “legacy” of the authoritarian era is not a cliché. After all, South Korea is one of the few places in the world where the anti-communist National Security Law is still in effect. Many of my older interlocutors often detoured, digressed, or whispered to me when speaking about things they deemed sensitive and subversive. During the interviews, I thus learned to position myself above all as a listener by abandoning several practices that are customary in academic oral history work. For instance, I brought no pre-scripted questions to the meetings so that the participants in the dialogue would not feel rushed to “provide” or help me “extract” allegedly useful “information.” I also tried to pay close attention to all the sequences and rhythms of their sounds, including silence; to their speaking traits; to their facial expressions; and to their construction (and destruction) of narratives. This practice helped me work against some of the formal processes of oral history—evaluating their capacity as “informants” and transcribing their words—that often operate under an assumption of the scholar’s position as a more

capable knowledge-producer. Simultaneously, it worked as a reminder that their eagerness to build an intergenerational dialogue has given life to this book. Without my interlocutors' willingness to translate the breadth and depth of their experiences, celluloid democracy would have been incomprehensible to anyone who, as I do, has long taken democracy for granted. Their stories can generate a sense of immediate and concrete copresence through which experiences of different times and spaces become accessible. In the chapters that follow, I highlight this sense of copresence by allowing the experiences of my interlocutors to enter the conversation in the present.

. . .

The book focuses on five junctures of celluloid democracy in which Korean filmmakers, distributors, and exhibitors reshaped cinema in radically empowering ways against the backdrop of political uncertainty. Although the following chapters move along a roughly chronological path marked by the critical phenomena of Cold War South Korea, they explore ideas and practices that exceed the limits of the statist notion of democracy and the cinematic medium.

The first two chapters consider how Koreans conceived democracy in a distinctively different way from the political power's configuration in the name of independent nation-building. Drawing on a range of sources, from American administrative records to Korean print media, Chapter 1 discusses how an array of film workers, especially filmmakers, critics, and bootleggers, assessed the US occupying power's faux promise of democracy. Their observation of US film policy and its governance blossomed into a new discourse that addressed the colonial violence reanimated by the US maintenance of the prewar Japanese system in Korea. I show how this discourse appeared in response to various forms of colonial violence that not only diverged from but also resembled the Japanese regulation of cinema, thus revealing the contradiction in American exceptionalism. In tandem with this discourse, Koreans' bootlegging also revealed the US monopoly on what the Koreans perceived as their infrastructure and resources. I demonstrate that their piratical activities redressed unrealized economic and political justice in the US occupation zone, intervening in the American approach to cinema as an instrument of social control. This chapter argues that Koreans conceived of democracy not through the American mission of democratization but through their experience of its ambiguous and even oppressive version of decolonization, which they contested through production of anti-colonial discourse and piratical distribution.

This critical take on the "origin" of Korean democracy as a mere American import leads into Chapter 2, which considers another iteration of Koreans' intervention in the abstract notion of democracy. The chapter contemplates a set of visions of democracy that emerged from postwar teachers who worked as primary media practitioners in the classroom. Although hitherto neglected in our production-centered history of postwar cinema, these teachers, on the front lines

of reforming education, realized the potential of audiovisual (AV) media for social empowerment and building community. I explore their work in the context of the broader instrumentalization of Cold War cinema by both American and Korean leaders. Unlike the political elites, who treated AV media mainly as a carrier of information, these teachers retooled cinema as a modality for forming new social relations and interactions in the classroom. They also built new local grassroots networks to increase the accessibility of AV media for other teachers. Counter to the government's unilateral distribution of film resources that denied equitable and inclusive access, their networks foregrounded a sense of collaborative, open community among local groups of teachers. Bringing these works together, I show how these teachers carved out spaces where democracy was seen not as a mere institution but as a set of values, sensibilities, and responsibilities that had to be cultivated in tandem with South Korean youth.

The remaining three chapters focus on filmmakers who actively responded to the conditions of constitutional autocracy that constrained what they believed to be democratic virtues. In Chapter 3, I use the scandalous censorship of *A Day Off* (*Hyuil*), a feature by Yi Manhüi (Lee Man-hee), to analyze the boundaries set around cinematic freedom by the Cold War state in the late 1960s. Whereas scholarship on this film has until now relied on the conventional dynamic of the “oppressed” and the “oppressor” in censorship, I consider the complexity of *A Day Off* within the context of the changing protocols and rules of censorship in the mid-1960s. The shift to a process that involved multiple reviews of scripts and films initiated a critical conversation among filmmakers and critics about whether the right to free expression was contingent upon the political regime's contradictory notion of democracy. Taking a cue from their acute sense of trouble in their world, I reassess the revision process for *A Day Off* and the choices made by the filmmakers. In close readings of its three available texts, I highlight, on the one hand, a dialogical relation of filmmakers and censors that not only regulated but also constructed what could be said and shown in cinema. On the other hand, I focus on the unprecedented decisions of the filmmakers in response to the constraints on their freedom: shooting ahead of the state's approval and withdrawing public release. By casting light on these acts, I demonstrate that the filmmakers invented new ways to rise above the confined terrain of alleged constitutional freedom; their circumvention of the state's protocols and rules may not have resulted in a more collective challenge to state power, but, I argue, it nonetheless called attention to, tested, and ultimately refused the state-sanctioned version of freedom and its undemocratic condition.

Chapter 4 turns to the first South Korean women's film collective, Khaidu (K'aitu), as a critical force that opposed the patriarchal and repressive culture of the 1970s under the rule of Park Chung Hee. As part of the crest of aesthetic and political movements of the 1970s, Khaidu's search for an alternative cinema—what it called “silhöm”—intervened in both conventional cinema and South Korea's

misogynistic society. The collective's silhöm tackled the dominant modes of mainstream cinema through its promotion of collaboration-centered production, nonnarrative cinema, and intermedial experiments. Simultaneously, its silhöm expanded to attend to the representation of women in cinema as a textual space and a field of labor. Through organizing a symposium and a performance that provoked a new conversation about women's cinema, Khaidu countered the structural suppression of women's voices and agency in public. By tracing the collective's two-fold objective and its realization, I reveal how the Khaidu filmmakers resisted a thoroughly masculine world as well as modes of democracy that were conducive to patriarchy. Their silhöm, I claim, articulated previously unheard ideas about cinema and feminism into practice and launched new forms of activism.

The last chapter studies how a college film club, the Seoul Film Collective (Söulyöngchwachipdan, SFC), combated a pervasive distrust of the media in the 1980s. The SFC members made and screened their films at a time when all media were rigidly regulated by the government and no criticism of government policy was ever approved for broadcasting. Like Khaidu, the SFC tackled the conventional mediascape but with a different concern: the media's under- and misrepresentation of the dispossessed—the workers and peasants—in a rapidly urbanizing and capitalistic society. This concern shaped their experimentation with film language and production modes to propose a “new cinema” that allowed diverse voices from the margins of society to enter the domain of representation. It also informed the way they innovated an independent network of film distribution and exhibition that would generate a sense of community. This network, despite its short life, disrupted the division of film production and exhibition, and ultimately the market-oriented, state-sanctioned distribution system. Taken as a whole, the SFC's work invites us to see how young filmmakers pushed back against the logics of the state and the market that shaped cinema as an instrument of these hegemonic powers.

To put together the terms “celluloid” and “democracy” is to seize upon a palpable conjunction in all the cinematic discourses and practices above. I end this book with a short note on two recent films that prompt a critical thinking of what such a conjunction means and can do in the so-called post-authoritarian South Korea. With the official end of dictatorship in 1987 and the transition to the first civilian rule in 1993, the country's democratization has widely been received as a success. This perspective has gained more currency in recent years with the Candlelight Movement (2016–17), which contributed to the unprecedented impeachment of the incumbent president via a democratic process. This successful removal from power has been added to the established narrative of democratization as a marker of the progress of South Korean democracy. I propose a pause to contemplate the danger of such triumphalism with two relatively recent films: *1987: When the Day Comes* (2017) and *Yongsan* (2010). The former, a success at the box office, provides a rigorous construction of the past struggle that contributed to the country's

democratic transition. Yet, its celebratory narrative tends to shut down any potential of celluloid democracy that might still be relevant for radicalizing democracy beyond the institutional realm. In contrast, *Yongsan* elicits questions about our pattern of representing democracy as a complete system, inviting us into a new space of celluloid democracy that pushes us to face our responsibilities: to refuse to repose in democracy as a mere institution and to reject the comfort of living in democracy when the monolithic power of the state and the capital are deeply fracturing our lives.

Celluloid Democracy is intended to open a conversation about what kind of world a group of South Korean film workers wanted to struggle for, and the roles they saw for cinema in this struggle. The creators of celluloid democracy chose to imagine a different world and to do what was within their power to realize it. Although this book's focus is on Cold War South Korea, the ideas and practices of film workers may help us reignite or reconnect with the urgency of radicalizing cinema and democracy. Virtually everywhere, we face government censorship, blockages of public expression and access to public resources, and institutionalized patriarchal and other hegemonic codes that appear natural and sensible. While we may be frustrated at the blatant hypocrisy of increasingly expansive autocratic rule in the guise of democracy, we need to attend to any spaces in which the different imagination of social fabric might be flourishing. This book brings a few such spaces from the past into our time in the hope that we will be able to learn from them how to tirelessly question the status quo and imagine how the world could be otherwise.

To Democratize Cinema

Filmmakers, Critics, and Bootleggers in the US Occupation

In late February 1946, a group of Korean filmmakers and critics organized a film screening in celebration of the upcoming anniversary of the March First Movement of 1919, one of the largest anti-imperial movements during the Japanese rule (1910–45). Meant to quench the Korean thirst for coverage of the shifting geopolitical circumstances during another foreign occupation, this time by the US and USSR, this screening offered several films from not only the two rival countries but also their allies. Its impressive turnout convinced the organizers to extend it to the ensuing week. However, their plan was suddenly interrupted when the American military government confiscated three Soviet newsreels about the victory of the allied powers. Rescinding its initial approval for public exhibition, the government seized these films right before the event.¹ Soon Koreans faced a complete ban on Soviet films in the American occupied zone, below the 38th parallel of the peninsula. The order forbidding Soviet films, once leaked to the public, fueled a growing Korean suspicion of the nature of the US occupier, which was claiming to “demilitarize” and “democratize” the peninsula.²

Shortly after the banning of Soviet films, another event confirmed the public suspicion of the purported goal of US rule. This time, Koreans faced the launch of Hollywood’s East Asian output, the Central Motion Picture Exchange (CMPE), in Seoul. Serving its parent organization, the Motion Picture Export Association (MPEA) in Hollywood, the CMPE had the exclusive right to distribute American films in Japan and Korea.³ While welcoming the reentrance of Hollywood cinema that had been banned during the late colonial period, Korean film workers, especially distributors and exhibitors, felt threatened by the CMPE’s installment in the American Military Government building. They suspected that the new Hollywood office worked exclusively for the occupation authority, despite what it

officially proclaimed to be its goal of “providing more entertainment to Koreans and helping nurture Korean culture.”⁴ Their suspicions proved valid; the CMPE soon mandated ninety-day rentals of Hollywood features that required those films to be shown on at least fifty-two days in Korean theaters. This condition meant, in reality, that the CMPE’s selected films could dominate Korean screens in the US occupation zone, even if some of their films were not popular enough to repay the rental fees.

To Korean film workers, these events stood in opposition to what Americans had boasted about their democracy. Upon his arrival in Seoul, John Hodge, the governor of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), presented his country as a democratic and benevolent one that extended its arms to Korea, an “unhappy nation.”⁵ In his first political leaflet, widely disseminated in English, Japanese, and Korean, he strongly urged Koreans to cooperate with American governance to ensure “happy living under democracy.” Hodge’s message was indicative of the USAMGIK’s tendency to preach democracy as abstractly as possible as a promise of happiness to Koreans who, in his view, had earned their freedom simply through the United States’ victory against Japan. Many film workers found themselves at odds with Hodge’s vague notion of democracy and the US’s unfair actions regarding film. Immediately after the CMPE’s implementation of the import requirement, an anonymous Korean critic condemned the US film policy in Korea as “more oppressive” than that of the Japanese. “Contrary to the USAMGIK official statement,” the writer argues, its policy has strangled Korean films in the face of a flood of Hollywood imports and strictly regulated what can be seen in theaters.⁶ This commentary represents Koreans’ palpable frustration not simply with the unjust policy on Korean film culture but also with the chasm between the ideal and the reality of “democracy” under US hegemony.

Korean film workers’ responses to the American occupation have been studied primarily through the lens of anti-imperial nationalism. Generations of (South) Korean writers—whether they had firsthand experience of colonial rule or not—have weighed in the oppositional discourse of the terms “nationalist” versus “anti-nationalist” and “capitalist” (“rightist”) versus “socialist” (“leftist”).⁷ Their work prioritizes a rearticulation of Korean cinema (“Hang’uk yŏnghwa”) that excludes both the purportedly “pro-Japanese” tradition and the traces of artists who went to the north during the first three years of partition. Despite their rigorous documentation of the multifaceted struggle of Korean filmmakers facing abrupt “liberation” from Japan and national division, the binary frame runs deeply across their construction of an ethnonationalist film history. Since the mid-2000s, this frame has been challenged by other inquiries into the gray areas in the colonial experience of filmmakers invigorated by their newly gained access to late colonial-era films and other relevant materials.⁸ Anchored in a critical reflection on the long-held equation of nation and cinema in historiography, recent discussions of the shifting boundaries of Korean cinema have also brought insight into a relatively

understudied topic: the film culture of early postcolonial Korea. By investigating new archival materials or reinterpreting the available films and other relevant texts, scholars have encouraged perspectives on the “end” of colonial rule as something other than a clean state for Korean culture. This effort to decentralize nationalist historiography presents a productive way to see early postcolonial Korea. As Ted Hughes stresses, new understanding of this era can only emerge when August 15, 1945—the “liberation” day—is no longer flattened as either a definitive historical rupture or a marker of continuous foreign domination.⁹

I join a growing group of scholars who have begun to disentangle the history of Korean cinema in the early postcolonial era. My discussion takes a cue from a critical yet underused lens through which we can look at this juncture: democracy. The immediate liberation era was filled with Korean discourse about democracy not only as an institution but also as a set of Korean aspirations.¹⁰ The local discourse of democracy emerged out of a peculiar condition of the occupation; American expansion, which had been to an important extent inspired by the desire to expand democracy to Koreans as part of the “free world,” continued to deny them sovereignty and freedom. The USAMGIK’s control of cinema might have set one example, but it pressed many film workers to envisage democracy on their own terms, not those of Americans. Rather than subscribe to a notion of American democracy defined substantially as an antonym to “communism,” they conceived of democracy in its absence. In particular, they reckoned with a critical gap between American democracy as a projected ideal and their experience under the occupation. It was in this gap that Koreans imagined a different configuration of cinema that would break from both US domination and Japanese colonial influence.

In this chapter, I explore the Korean aspiration to democratize cinema against the normative configuration of cinema as a singular apparatus in the service of the ruling power. Korean filmmakers, critics, and bootleggers challenged this construction of cinema as the state’s weapon while grasping other possible protocols and practices that would serve their goals. I pay close attention to two distinct ways Koreans negated the working of the US film policy and program under the guise of what Americans called democracy. First, I show how a sizable number of filmmakers and critics reckoned with their experience of the US rule through the lens of colonialism. As it developed into a discourse of film colony (“yŏnghwa sigminji”), their criticism highlighted how USAMGIK deliberately animated, rather than eliminated, the Japanese imperial norm of cinema and the rules that maintained this norm. Although short-lived due to the USAMGIK’s suppression of outspoken film workers, this discourse helps us understand how they called into question the denial of their autonomy and the enlistment of cinema as a tool of imperialism. Second, I consider how Korean bootleggers, tapping into their local knowledge, interrupted the operation of the US film program through piratical activities. Although these activities were documented as stealing by US officials,

I reinterpret the bootleggers' unauthorized use and sale of US films in relation to the exploitation and other inequality issues of the US film program. The Koreans' criticism and piratical activities might not qualify as full-blown resistance, but these two idiosyncratic responses set in motion celluloid democracy. Through the possibility of thinking and dreaming otherwise, filmmakers, critics, and pirates envisioned a more equitable and just film ecology, even in the stifling presence of the norms established by the US occupying force.

RUNNING FILM FOR "DEMOCRACY"

The end of World War II sparked a rapid reconfiguration of the United States as a democratic country among American policy makers. The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki caused both US and foreign citizens to doubt that the US was the democratic agent that so many had promoted as the key to wartime morale. In response, various American information agencies started to develop a carefully strategized maneuver to distinguish the US from other colonial powers.¹¹ In particular, the people in the new US-occupied territories—Germany, Austria, Japan, and Korea—added urgency to the need to develop an effective information program. Because these people believed that America was a "rich, tawdry, jazz-loving, unscrupulous lot" due to the "Axis propagandists," Loy Henderson, the director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs, anticipated that information activities would correct these stereotypes by showing America's "truth."¹² American policy makers also saw a pressing need to "bring somewhat into balance [the] picture of [the] USA available" to people in Germany and Korea, which they co-occupied with the Russians.¹³ Aware of the influence of Soviet propaganda, which highlighted only the negative aspects of America, they contended that a deliberately designed information program would be more than "essential" to "help" these people obtain "accurate" information about the US and democracy.¹⁴

These complex rationales for public information informed the US film program for the occupied areas. Based on the successful mobilization of cinema during wartime, American leaders had no doubt about the ability of film to teach people democracy in these territories, which had been "cut off from the democratic world for more than a decade."¹⁵ The Civil Affairs Division's Motion Picture Section (MPS) undertook the mission of mobilizing cinema for this purpose, focusing on conveying "the ways in which democracy actually functions" to the occupied. With a significant emphasis on cinema's "visual factors," they expected films to be "more directly and immediately effective" than any other media in convincing the audience of "the democratic processes at work." As Jennifer Fay reveals in her study of the film program in US-occupied Germany, this conviction provided a basis for the American approach to democratization; that is, a successful film programming and screening would

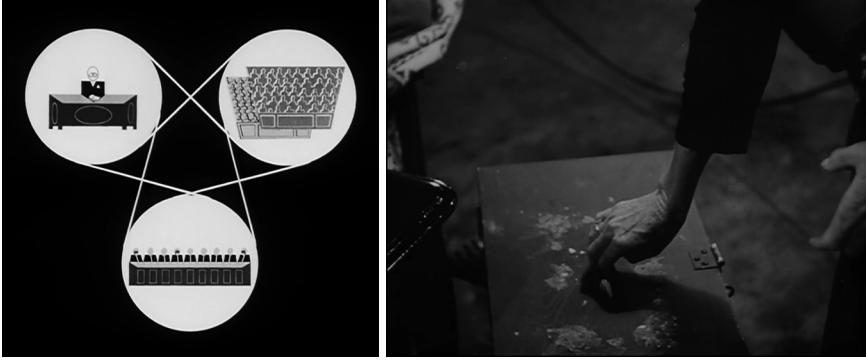


FIGURE 1. *Tuesday in November* (1945) not only uses found footage from Election Day but also includes an animation segment showing the voting process in detail. Credit: US Office of War Information.

permit the occupied to learn democracy through “mechanistic repetition of the body’s hardwired response to the state” rather than through a conceptual understanding.¹⁶ Underpinning the assumed “foreignness” of democracy to peoples of “totalitarian states,” the MPS purported to help “prepare the occupied peoples to use the tools of democracy in government, national life, and in their relations with all peoples.”¹⁷

It is not surprising, then, that these goals of US foreign policy and its agencies thoroughly structured the film program for Korea. When it came to film selection, the dominant themes among the imports, which had mostly been produced before and during World War II, served the US authority’s goal of projecting a positive image of America as diverse, egalitarian, and most importantly democratic.¹⁸ While the earliest batches of nonfiction films highlighted the American victory over Japan and its ascendancy as a global power, the MPS added more and more films on democracy that featured so-called average American citizens and their lives. For instance, the series *The City* features the modern, rational, and even happy lives of Americans everywhere, broadcasting the “great” virtue of democracy, defined as liberty and equality, to Koreans.¹⁹ Meanwhile, *Tuesday in November* (1945) draws on a dramatization of the voting process and archival footage of the 1944 presidential race to show how Americans made democracy work. Although the film details democracy as an institution, its emphasis is on energetic and hardworking people who decide their destinies. Another film, *Freedom of the Press* (1947), shows how a free and uncensored press functions in the US and emphasizes that it is concerned with “accurate reporting, instead of propaganda or slanted selection of news stories.”²⁰ As part of a broader international strategy of using films to rally foreign support for US economic and political plans abroad, this filmic propaganda blitz was meant to reinforce the image of the US as a champion of democracy in the postwar world order.²¹

Meanwhile, the MPS's choice of Hollywood features appears to have been less coherent than its selection of nonfiction films in terms of the content and message. In fact, the MPS never specified why certain features were chosen and sent to Korea. Sueyoung Park-Primiano suspects that the limited information about the selection reflects MPS's perception of these features as mere "bait" to draw audiences to see the government-produced nonfiction films.²² This factor alone, however, should not discourage us from seeing these features in relation to the US goal of projecting its ideal image. CMPE and USAMGIK often privileged features that were perceived as congruent with the US mission of reorientation. For instance, among the first fifteen imports, the American authorities chose *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (1940) to be the first Korean-subtitled film.²³ Among the batch, this film stands out as one that directly addresses American democracy, tracing the life of Abraham Lincoln from his departure from Kentucky until his election as president. The desire to project America as an epitome of democracy is palpable in this highly promoted film. It emphasizes the importance of representative polity for uniting the nation and achieving progress, and its inclusion of a series of historical debates with Stephan Douglas, Lincoln's opponent, highlights the power of open debate as a backbone of the country's freedom and plurality. But what is more deliberately stressed throughout the film is an idea of America as a land of such equal opportunity that any citizen may run for public office. From the beginning, the film features a particular image of Lincoln as a righteous and confident man from humble origins. In one scene, a young Abe, who has just arrived in New Salem, takes on a town bully without fear. For several minutes, the camera follows their fistfight, which leads Abe to be recognized for his courage and fair play, not simply his victory. Embraced as a "new champion" by the villagers, he soon emerges as a sensible leader of the town.

I am not suggesting that the Korean viewers received American films like *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* as expected by the occupation authority. In fact, it is almost impossible to reconstruct how Koreans understood the authority's public and symbolic goals via the Hollywood imports. One reason is that unlike in German and Japan, the primary theaters of reorientation, the US occupation force did not commission wide surveys of film audiences in Korea.²⁴ While reports about the Korean viewership in general were occasionally sent to Washington, they included little detail about how productive Hollywood cinema had been in reorientation work. Another reason is that most Korean print media sources related to film published under the US occupation were short-lived and addressed Korean cinema exclusively; the response to Hollywood cinema is far from comprehensive.²⁵

Despite these challenges in studying the Korean reception, a few extant periodicals give us a glimpse of how Korean viewers perceived the projected ideals of America in Hollywood cinema. For instance, *New Land (Shinchŏnji)*, a popular monthly magazine on culture, published a useful survey of fifteen viewers as part of its special issue on American cinema.²⁶ Notwithstanding the small number

of respondents, the survey conveys a sense of how Korean viewers—both professional and nonprofessional critics—viewed the Hollywood imports and their projection of American ideals onto Koreans. The survey results are riddled with general criticism of “low-quality” imports without proper Korean subtitles, but what also stands out is that Hollywood features did not seem to work in the way Americans had expected. Specifically, responses to two of the least favored films demonstrate that these films brought to Korea proved ineffective at teaching what American leaders aimed to impart.

One of the films that received a poor response was *No Time for Love* (1943), a romantic comedy directed by Mitchell Leisen. It traces the cross-class relationship of Katherine, a successful female photographer (Claudette Colbert), and Jim, a working-class man (Fred MacMurray). Leisen tweaks the typical dynamic of romance—bringing together a brainy girl and a brawny boy—while skillfully representing the disparity between the two protagonists. The film shows how a competent woman can win both a career and love, but more importantly for the present discussion, it depicts America as an egalitarian and classless society. In a scene in which Katherine and Jim dine at a fancy restaurant with Katherine’s colleague, Jim misunderstands the nuances of decorum and establishes a connection to the server rather than the colleague. He is not, however, portrayed as an underdog, but rather as an unpretentious and confident man who stays true to himself. The film shows the difference in Jim and Katherine’s social status but only in a way that alludes to its message, that is, that such difference means nothing in a democratic and pluralistic society. This message, however, held little appeal for the Korean viewers. Almost every commentator, except one who briefly mentioned the “sensational” aspect of the cross-class romance, condemned its “frivolous” love story “without any depth.”²⁷ The same qualities that caused the film to be acclaimed as “thoroughly ingratiating” in the *New York Times* rendered it a “failure” and a “reckless attempt to force American idealism” in the eyes of its Korean viewers.²⁸

Hold That Ghost (1941) was the other film that the Korean respondents most disliked. One of the popular prewar films featuring the comic duo Abbott and Costello, it is full of gags and dialogues performed by a bumbling pair of friends who inherit a gangster’s haunted house. Many scenes are peppered with classic bits of Chuck (Abbott) and Ferdie (Costello) dialogue. In one scene, while giving Ferdie suggestions on table etiquette, Chuck asks him, “You have got a tongue, haven’t you?” “Yes, but I can reach much farther with my hands.” Costello’s silent acting is perfectly paired with the lines of a brilliant female comic, Joan Davis. Tasting the soup, Camille, performed by Davis, declares, “Just like Mother used to make. It *stinks*.” The harmonious ensemble of these comics led to great market success in the US, where it was acclaimed as “a laugh-creator and audience-pleaser.”²⁹ This success was not replicated in Korea. As some respondents complained about the “awful translation” of the dialogue, we can assume that the language barrier played

a certain part in its failure.³⁰ But the bigger issue came from the film's excessive emphasis on the fight for the common good. Korean viewers saw it as too "awkward" and "poorly justified" to follow; they were particularly distracted by the ending of the film, in which the team dispatches the gangsters returning for the money hidden inside the house and then transforms the house into a health resort, thanks to the then-revealed therapeutic effects of its undrinkable water. Far from covering up organized crime in American society, *Hold That Ghost* seems to show that even ordinary people can fight for the common good, contributing to making society more livable. However, the Korean survey, alongside the film reviews, indicates that this message was not delivered. In one representative commenter's words, it was a "hodgepodge" of "pun play and slapstick" that "lack[ed]" depth.

Korean viewers, or at least the viewers represented in the survey, can hardly be said to have responded to the assumed capacity of Hollywood cinema to promote America's democratic images. The features, in their portrayal of the glamorous, wealthy, and pluralist aspects of the US, might have elicited curiosity among Koreans about the country, but the viewers selectively created their own image of America, rendering the calculated effect of the filmic projection unsuccessful. Imports were frequently criticized on the basis of their "shallowness" or "emptiness," and this often raised the question of why such films had been allocated for Korea. When Korean viewers occasionally saw contemporary American film magazines, Hollywood was portrayed as a powerhouse of many "good" films. "Then, why [are] the American films sent to Korea are all frivolous?" one anonymized commentator asked.³¹ Possibly ignorant of such criticism, a USAMGIK adviser interpreted the Korean perception of American imports quite differently. He doubted that most American films could successfully communicate with Koreans, who were "totally unacquainted with the most basic concepts of democracy."³² To him, the Koreans disliked or misinterpreted the films because of their lack of sophistication in matters of democracy. What appears to be a one-sided judgment led to his recommendation to import American films that would deal "simply and directly with the fundamentals of democracy" to educate the population.

As the Korean viewers in the survey show, however, the issue was not the audience's alleged ignorance of democratic principles. Rather, it was the failure of the ineffectively designed film program that catered only to the US perspective. At least to Korean respondents, the Hollywood imports lacked both critical perspectives on American society and an understanding of local situations. Quite literally, these films did not represent them or what they wanted to see. America, as the land of opportunity portrayed in these films, may have provided one model of life, but not for those whose experience of the occupation years hardly resonated with Hollywood films.

THE CONDITIONS OF THE “FILM COLONY”

The American propagation of democracy in Korea through cinema did not win the “hearts and minds” of the occupied. Rather, it planted more confusion about the meaning of “liberation.” From the first months of the US occupation, most Koreans perceived their circumstances under US rule to be similar to the colonial experiences that were in many cases a recent memory. For film workers, the resonance between the two foreign rules, particularly in their instrumentalization of cinema, was striking; both Japanese and American approaches to cinema dictated a heavy emphasis on the medium’s ability to teach and mobilize the population for specific political goals. From their perspective, the end of Japanese rule would allow a new configuration of cinema that would be untethered from such instrumentalization. Notwithstanding the degrees of their collaboration with the Japanese imperial power and its wartime mobilization of film, there was at least a desire for cinema—as at once a medium, an industry, and a theater—that was not dominated by the state. But their aspiration suffered as they parsed the legal and cultural position imposed by the US-led Cold War order, which not only denied their sovereignty but also dictated the active maintenance of most of the Japanese colonial system.

Consequently, spreading concerns about US control of cinema in southern Korea gave rise to a particular discourse that critiqued animation of colonial violence in the form of strict regulation of cinema. Crystallized most distinctively in the notion of film colony, this criticism was expressed most fiercely by left-leaning filmmakers and critics who prioritized fundamental economic and social reforms that would prevent the monopoly of the film industry and other resources by the ruling power.³³ Yet even those with a neutral stance on these reforms viewed the revival of many aspects of the prewar colonial system with extreme caution. For those who naïvely envisioned a clean state, the USAMGIK’s regulation of cinema was a source of what Albert Memmi, their contemporary in a different former colony, calls a “great disillusion” with national independence.³⁴

The earliest articulation of film-colony discourse emerged out of the immediate material conditions regarding the redistribution of extant infrastructure, property, and other resources (“chöksan”). Korean film workers believed that land and other infrastructure such as theaters and film studios should be handed over to Korea in compensation for the decades of colonial rule. The American government viewed Japanese properties in Korea as the external assets of a defeated enemy, pushing the decision to the inter-allied settlement on postwar reparations that was yet to come.³⁵ When the USAMGIK worked to place all vested entertainment under government management, Koreans expected that Americans would soon repatriate previously Japanese-owned properties, as the Russians had done; those in the US-occupation zone had already heard of the effective nationalization of theaters and film studios in the Soviet-occupation zone that had started even earlier in 1946.³⁶

This expectation was dashed with the USAMGIK-run search for interim Korean managers for theaters, meaning that no redistribution of what Koreans perceived as “national” or “public” resources was to be carried out as it had north of the 38th parallel. The limited transparency of the hiring process for managers confirmed their suspicion. The USAMGIK required applicants to provide three letters of recommendation, which permitted the procedures to be dictated by the personal connections of property-custody personnel and vested theaters.³⁷ As many Koreans suspected, in almost every case, the current employees were designated as the first state-hired managers; using their networks, they managed to get letters from senior officials and influencers to make their applications more competitive, and it was not rare for an assigned manager to be identified as a Japanese collaborator or profiteer with no previous experience in the film industry.³⁸ Seen as “dangerous” and “ineffective” at eliminating the “deep-rooted evil” of colonial systems, the hiring process warned Koreans that an American style of disposition would benefit only the “profit-seeking capitalists.”³⁹ For film workers, the whole process eroded the meaning of “liberation” in the south, preventing them from changing material conditions of cinema that had been determined predominantly by those in power.⁴⁰

The USAMGIK’s subsequent decision to maintain prewar censorship again forced Korean film workers to recognize themselves as colonized in what they had believed to be a “liberated” world.⁴¹ The first legal measure enacted under the USAMGIK’s control, Ordinance No. 68 required all motion pictures—both domestic and imported—to be reviewed prior to exhibition. This ordinance granted the American government the sole authority to issue a license after censorship, which ranged from alteration to complete elimination of the film. Another measure, Ordinance No. 115, mandated Korean producers to submit translations of all titling and sound dialogue in English to be considered for a certificate of approval. With the implementation of both codes, local films were policed during all phases of filmmaking, from preproduction to exhibition, as they had been under Japanese rule.

What felt like the “revival” of colonial-style censorship outraged Korean artists and writers, leading them to publish a joint statement in 1946 criticizing the American “colonial policy” that not only repressed “freedom of expression” but also forced the translation requirement. On top of the labor and costs of translation, this demand appeared to be a clear sign of linguistic imperialism that took the language of the occupier as a norm.⁴² The critic Kim Namchŏn, in a separate statement, further accused the USAMGIK’s official endorsement of “freedom” as a mere gesture.⁴³ Its deliberate actions to oppress the “fundamental condition of democracy” took place not only through censorship but more importantly through the increased suppression of the right to assembly. Pointing to the Seoul Metropolitan Police Department’s emergency decree that granted them the power to regulate any anti-government protests in public spaces, he describes how this new

regulation disturbingly brought back the prewar surveillance system in which police attended every film screening in theaters. With this new measure, police attended rehearsals and performances to try to put themselves in the position of spectators and intercept any disorder, whether initiated by the viewers or the filmmakers in a coded way.⁴⁴ Witnessing these reinforced measures being put into place, Kim condemned the “colonial cultural policy” for turning Koreans into “slaves” in the ironically “liberated” land.⁴⁵

The USAMGIK’s regulation of cinema served the broader goal of building what Bruce Cumings calls “a containment bulwark” in the south. Using the police as the “primary weapon for pacifying the south” from the first months of occupation, Hodge and his advisers actively suppressed Koreans who challenged their policies, all the while building an alliance with the rightists.⁴⁶ Although these political actions certainly influenced the rhetoric of colonization among Korean film workers, their disarticulation of the “containment bulwark” took place most acutely in the face of Hollywood’s invasive domination of the Korean film market. It should be noted here that from the outset, Hollywood, in cooperation with Washington, had been attempting to seize formerly closed markets under the aegis of Axis power.⁴⁷ Despite the Korean market’s relatively small size at the time, Hollywood leaders were interested in investing in it with the hope of making it an outlet for more Hollywood content. Their cartel, the MPEA, installed the CMPE to negotiate distribution agreements for the release of pictures in Korea. American films were given exceptional preference in the Korean market under the CMPE’s operation in support of the occupation force. For instance, the CMPE was exempt from paying import duties on its films due to exchange restrictions, while all other foreign films required payment of a ten percent ad valorem tax.⁴⁸

This comparative advantage given to Hollywood imports turned out to be the tip of the iceberg. Soon Korean film workers found that America’s invasive domination of the Korean film market far outstripped the Japanese project. Relying on its bargaining power as the sole handler of American products, the CMPE imposed higher rental costs on local exhibitors and theaters. Traditionally, the rental fee of a Hollywood movie was fifteen to twenty-five percent of its box office return at the local market. However, the CMPE mandated a blanket fifty percent rental fee for all exhibitors—a rate that in the US was set only for special road-show screenings for prestige films such as *Gone with the Wind* (1939). On top of these unreasonable rental fees, the CMPE sold packages of twenty-six or fifty-two films without granting Korean exhibitors the right to choose the titles. This action made it possible for the CMPE to dump old Hollywood features in Korea as a way to help Hollywood studios eliminate the post-1945 debt they carried from the maximized mobilization of wartime cinema.⁴⁹ Although Hollywood’s old movies were gobbling up both the Japanese and Korean markets through a singular protocol, it was predominantly the Korean theaters that received interwar features.⁵⁰ With only a handful of exceptions released later in 1948, almost every feature sent to Korea was

from the 1930s or early 1940s, and most of the film prints were noted as overused and “rainy” (industry jargon for badly scratched due to overuse).⁵¹

The CMPE’s aggressive and monopolistic actions to accumulate profits agitated Korean film workers across the political spectrum, resulting in a few collective pushes against it during the first year of the US occupation. One move was a boycott of Hollywood films from the CMPE by three major theaters in Seoul in February 1947.⁵² Charles Meyer, the CMPE’s manager at the Japanese headquarters, came to Seoul to ease the tensions. But his visit proved to be a mere gesture, as confirmed by the lack of changes to the policy either then or during the rest of its operations until 1949. Up to this point, the USAMGIK had officially denied its alliance with the CMPE, but it was soon leaked to the public that the American officers called on the managers of theaters in protest, “intimidating” them into ceasing to oppose the government policy.⁵³ Under the American manipulation of local film business in this way, Korean theater owners and distributors had no choice but to sign the unfair contract, which mandated the screening of costly Hollywood imports that they had not selected for at least twenty-one to twenty-six days per month.

This strict control of the Korean market distressed even those who were less active in vocalizing the film-colony discourse. These were primarily the generation of film-makers and critics who had started their careers in the mid-to-late 1930s, when the Japanese colonial government reduced and eventually banned Hollywood imports. Although the government’s regulation aimed at enlarging the pie of Japanese exports and promoting Korean-language films that supported imperialization, in practice it protected Korean films from popular American imports, enabling more productions by Koreans.⁵⁴ The filmmaker An Chölyöng, who belonged to this generation, expressed his frustration at the USAMGIK’s film policy in a published travelogue on the US. In the midst of presenting a glorified image of Hollywood as a global powerhouse, he points to the unreasonable difficulty of rebuilding a Korean film industry in the face of the USAMGIK’s “serious lack of interest” in local culture.⁵⁵ His contemporary An Sökyöng similarly condemned the US monopoly of film resources and markets that “paralyzed” virtually all film industries, including the Korean one. Referencing the Soviets’ support of Korean filmmakers in building a national film studio, he called on US authorities to implement a “fair” import and distribution of raw films for new local production.⁵⁶

The USAMGIK’s regulation of cinema and resources and its domination of the local market, which were not in sync with the American gospel of democracy, exacerbated Koreans’ ambivalent perception of America. The USAMGIK’s actions affirmed, and in some cases exaggerated, a spreading sense of incomplete liberation, which in turn evoked a range of resistant reactions such as rallies and protests. In response, Governor Hodge published a statement that reaffirmed that the goal of the US occupation was “supporting a small and fragile country” rather than imposing an economic monopoly and exploiting Korea for the United States’ benefit.⁵⁷ Baffled at Hodge’s claim, the critic Ch’ae Jönggün sarcastically responded:



FIGURE 2. John Hodge’s statement on the front page of *Donga Ilbo* with the headline “The US has no interest in exploiting Korea,” September 1, 1946. Credit: *Donga Ilbo*.

“The USAMGIK extends extreme generosity to American companies by using their air force to bring film prints, while not allowing Koreans to import film equipment for Korean cinema. This must be what they call ‘liberal corporatism’! They claim no enforced trade between Korean theater managers and the CMPE. This could exemplify their spirit of ‘freedom of treaty’!”⁵⁸

Using the US’s own informational diplomacy language, he publicly denounced the hypocrisy of the US rule in the name of democracy. Ch’ae was not alone in voicing this criticism. Other writers and film workers, despite their varied rhetoric and tones, felt the lack of democracy in action and noted its contrast to what they had initially been promised: happiness. This promise became unthinkable as Koreans found they still held little to no power in deciding what could be shown in theaters and what resources could be distributed to whom. In this recognition that they dwelled in a film colony, they seemed to be left with few options: hanging onto the dream of establishing an “independent” government, moving to the north to continue their practice in what seemed to be a more autonomous ecology, or hijacking the system to ensure their survival.

PIRACY AS AN EFFECT OF INJUSTICE

The Korean criticism of the US film policy did little to influence American policy makers at home and abroad. Rather, it affirmed their dedication to information activity that would change Korean perceptions of the US and democracy. Motion pictures were still heavily enlisted in the project of containing the occupied, especially those in rural provinces that were inaccessible by rail.⁵⁹ In the middle of Korean theaters’ boycott of American imports, the MPS, the primary designer of the film program abroad, purchased hundreds of 16mm projectors as well as accessories and spare parts for mobile projection in Korea, followed by the shipping of five million feet of 16mm print, ten times more than the amount of 35mm film.⁶⁰ Compared to a conventional 35mm format, 16mm gauge had an advantage due to its affordability and transportability; it was also relatively easy to learn to use, which meant that American officials could save time and effort in instructing local practitioners and amateurs.

The very features of 16mm that Americans saw as advantageous at home, however, made it “dangerous” to at least some authorities abroad.⁶¹ As early as May 1947, the USAMGIK noticed a significant loss of American films due to “mishandling.” Alerted by an increased number of instances of bootlegging, an American adviser worried that this “violation” could lead to a termination of imports. They identified the “damage and loss” that were occurring due to the “carelessness of messengers in leaving film in unattended and unguarded vehicles.”⁶² A few months later, Hodge followed up on this report by writing to Washington. In this letter, he worried that the continued loss of film would lead Hollywood and MPS to curtail the number of films it sent to Korea and, in turn, “jeopardize” the entire film program operation.⁶³ Extremely distressed about the Koreans’ piratical activities, Hodge echoed the earlier report on the cause of the losses: due to the “carelessness” of distributors and exhibitors, films had gone missing “during the time [films were] picked up, run through the projector and returned to the designated source.” Seeing the “pecuniary value of these [American] prints,” he sought to order theater officers and others in the distribution and exhibition network to immediately “remedy this situation” by “guarding” and “securing” the prints more carefully.⁶⁴

These Americans considered piracy to be “theft,” a particular frame that has long been encouraged by the notion of copyright in the Western capitalist system. Even today, when an influx of freely exchanged information has created a wide gamut of creative media practices, mainstream discourse about piracy is still obsessed with the issue of copyright. According to Bhaskar Sarkar and Kavita Philip, this obsession is not uncommon even in a critical assessment of the conventional discourse.⁶⁵ For instance, in his influential study on piracy, Lawrence Lessing characterizes “good” piracy as “transformative uses of creative work,” in contrast to “bad” piracy, which involves “nothing but tak[ing] other people’s copyrighted content, copy[ing] it and sell[ing] it.”⁶⁶ This binarism has worked to define piracy in the Global South “as annoying and inconvenient for western business, but [a matter] that will inevitably be cleaned up with the coming of full-fledged modernity to backward nations.”⁶⁷ Decentering the Western-centric discourse of piracy, more recent discussions have articulated different ways to understand piracy as a cultural phenomenon, as “locally specific modes of medial production, consumption and distribution . . . within highly heterogeneous frameworks of ‘porous legalities.’”⁶⁸ Scholars such as Ravi Sundaram have reconceptualized piracy in a postcolonial context as an effect that undermines the dominant corporate media system while simultaneously diversifying media access for the dispossessed.⁶⁹ In responding to Sundaram’s interpretation with caution, Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz remind their readers that not all piratical practices in the Global South have aimed at a fundamental reconstruction of the media landscape.⁷⁰ Although this reminder is valuable, what is more relevant, at least in the context of occupied Korea, is the specific material conditions in which piracy is born, grows, and even thrives

despite legal and other constraints. If piracy is an effect that is irreducible to the notion of “theft,” can it be seen as a critical symptom of or even a response to the constraints set by the USAMGIK? Was it a mere coincidence that piracy’s emergence and recurrence happened in tandem with the USAMGIK’s failure to ensure at least a bare minimum of economic justice for film workers?

I am asking these questions neither to romanticize the actions of bootleggers nor to assume any ulterior motive behind them. Instead, I am writing to recognize their actions as an expression of agency, a choice of their own that appropriated the system of which they were a part. Although there is little evidence that all pirates were film workers by profession, it is obvious that they were quite familiar with motion pictures and their distribution system. The fact that none of them got caught by the police suggests that they were savvy. For instance, they knew that, compared to projectors that were not only heavier but also registered with the government, film strips and canisters were easier to transport and reuse. They might have wanted to fool the guardians of the film prints, which were, in the end, American property, but not to the extent of incurring serious consequences. These pirates were well-informed about what materials would be of use to them. They could simply destroy any film to reclaim the value that lay in the materials and chemicals the celluloid contained, a method dating back to the silent era. They could meet the practical needs of filmmakers, who were rarely given access to raw films other than for government-commissioned projects.⁷¹ Filmmakers, often using flyers to spread the word, desperately sought out pirates who could sell them new 16mm stock or reduction from 35mm prints on the underground market; pirates then could work as an unofficial channel through which filmmakers could secure raw stock.⁷² Theater owners and exhibitors could also benefit from pirated prints; in a situation in which they faced extreme difficulty in acquiring new films to run and were subject to the CMPE’s unfair rental fees and procedures, purchasing or borrowing older films from bootleggers was one way to fill dark hours with alternative programming.⁷³

Whether or not the piratical activities emerged as a survival mechanism for Koreans struggling in the extremely precarious economy, at least one thing seems clear: we would not have Hodge’s report at hand had pirates not disturbed the system and attracted official attention. Although they left no access to their own voices in the US archive that identified their action only as “illegal,” pirates made their way into the archive. They alarmed power holders to such an extent that American officials, including the governor himself, felt compelled to write about them. Otherwise, why would the authority have bothered about them?

It should be noted here that Hodge’s reaction to piracy arose from the troubled alliance between Hollywood and the occupation power at the time. Initially, Hollywood studios agreed to absorb the cost of prints, subtitling, and dubbing for the occupied territories in return for unregulated access to the occupied markets. Yet in reality they faced difficulty in collecting revenue from the occupied areas, where

the income from the rental of features and short subjects was held back by the occupation power.⁷⁴ When Hollywood studios finally filed a petition to recoup the revenue in late 1947, the Supreme Commander Allied Powers (SCAP) was determined to secure the profits from Hollywood imports for its reorientation program in Japan and Korea, a decision that led Hollywood studios to stop the shipment of new film prints and raw stock in June 1948.⁷⁵ This action impelled Washington to intervene, but the tension was not resolved until the occupation authority promised to return at least some portion of the profits from Hollywood imports.⁷⁶ Given this ongoing tension, Hodge viewed bootlegging as a threat that would exacerbate the crisis of corporatism between Hollywood and Washington, even though the damages inflicted by Korean pirates would be minimal.

Hodge did not mandate an immediate enforcement of the ban on piracy, but he clearly dictated its “illegal” violation of the contracts with various American agencies, ordering the Korean workers to be on guard against bootlegging.⁷⁷ Although no documents in police or trial records indicate any legal action against pirates, the act of bootlegging itself certainly carried the risk of punishment. In other words, piratical activities embodied a decision to take the risk of penalty: on the grounds of not complying with the USAMGIK mission of protecting US property and mobilizing cinema in accordance with rules and protocols, pirates could have been criminalized. Yet bootlegging did not disappear even after Americans officials took action. At first, it would have been convenient for them to blame the clumsiness of the individuals involved in the film distribution and exhibition. Such temporary convenience, however, did not prevent what they identified as the “danger” in the consistency of piratical activities.⁷⁸

Here the recurrence of piracy alludes to a possibility of interpreting it as more than a mere technical error by several workers. For instance, the inherent problem in the network of film distribution and exhibition that ran the US film program could warrant the inadequate protection of American property. In theory, the USAMGIK oversaw their network that single-handedly controlled films from various American channels, including the MPS, the CMPE and the Office of Civil Information (OCI) of United States Armed Forces in Korea (USAFIK).⁷⁹ Yet it was practically impossible to trace the whereabouts of *all* films. Motion pictures were shown in a wide variety of settings, including US information centers, libraries, civic clubs, and other locations whose primary purpose was not film exhibition. This was particularly the case in small- and mid-size towns and in the countryside, where mobile film units were the only source of films. Even in large cities with more electrical and other facilities, the USAMGIK-sponsored exhibition of nonfiction films expanded through various public places such as schools, hospitals, and churches. The local branches of the US information agencies were often used as a regional clearinghouse from which registered distributors and exhibitors could borrow film prints.⁸⁰ Instead of relying on formal contracts, shipping, and a well-maintained tracking system, staff at these agencies worked within loosely

established local networks of face-to-face contracts and disorganized loan processes. Moreover, many of them traveled alone and operated under pressure to meet the USAMGIK's demand that they add ever more screenings in their assigned area, a condition that made it almost impossible for them to keep their eyes on property in every screening site.

The persistent appearance of pirates alludes to a structural problem that the USAMGIK had not addressed in any way since its ruling. Whether the very heart of this problem lay in the working conditions within the film network or in the unfavorable market for Koreans, pirates never ceased to speak for themselves.⁸¹ They took advantage of the elusive network based on their local knowledge for their own benefit. Their actions—of breaking protocol and taking the film prints—were not necessarily aimed at systemic, *de jure* change. As Bhaskar Sarkar reminds us, they “would rather have a stable welfare state providing them with the basic affordances that citizens expect. The act of exit, of rebellion, happens by default, as disenfranchised groups seek simply to survive, to make do, to improvise a way of living in spite of all the official strictures that block them.”⁸² Korean bootleggers lacked the power to completely deconstruct the government's film program or the network that maintained the program. Nonetheless, pirates took the risk of withdrawing from complete compliance with the USAMGIK's rules and conventions that had sustained its instrumentalization of cinema below the 38th parallel. The effect of their actions—not their intention—destabilized the political power's instrumentalization of film insofar as these actions troubled and slowed down the optimal operation of the US film program. Precisely through this effect of troublemaking and slowing down, pirates intervened at least temporarily in the normative configuration of cinema as it was conscripted for the USAMGIK's political goals. Rather than waiting for the authority to reform the system, those who were involved in piratical activities acted based on their own recognition of unrealized economic justice, pushing through the film network that had not been built for them.

. . .

Koreans' encounter with the cinematic medium informed the way they parsed the contradictory norms of “democracy” in the structures enabled by the US occupying force. As their discourse of the “film colony” and piratical activities demonstrate, they attested to the contradictions in the American notion of democracy by calling into question both the insufficient reform of the local film industry and Hollywood films' domination of Korean screens. It was in their critical evaluation of the US as a colonial and monopolistic power, not through the USAMGIK's democratic mission, that Koreans shaped their sense of democracy. They denounced the authority that decided what could be shown in theaters and what resources were distributed and how, and ultimately whose interests this authority represented. Their criticism might not have involved a permanent change to the topographies of power,

but this fact should not obscure the very real successes that, in turn, came to signify the failure of the USAMGIK and its mission. Despite the US authority's effort to change the Korean perception of America, its faux promise that democracy equaled happiness ultimately delivered nothing but American exceptionalism. The filmmakers, critics, and pirates discussed in this chapter at least refused to give full assistance to those who failed to deliver political and economic justice under the occupation.

Toward the end of the US occupation, Korean criticism of American hegemony became visibly marginalized by the USAMGIK's anti-communist suppression and its enforcement of a separate election below the 38th parallel. As Ted Hughes illuminates, this marginalization of critical voices—speaking not only about American power but also about colonialism as a whole—fundamentally restructured the cultural field. With the departure of many vocal critics to the north and the erasure of their traces in the years to come, the decolonial imagination of cinema lost most of its force.⁸³ Moreover, the rhetoric about democracy, which had previously stressed the task of undoing inequality and injustice, pivoted to the hegemonic discourse of anti-communism and national security. This move was crystallized in the essentially ultranationalist slogan of Syngman Rhee, soon-to-be leader of the First Republic (1948–60): “United we live, divided we die.” Notwithstanding its emphasis on an absolute “equality” of all, the country's new guiding principle, the One People Doctrine (“Ilminjuui”), placed national unity above all other values.⁸⁴ Despite the regime's ostensible support of “democracy,” the One People Doctrine justified the undemocratic suppression of any dissident ideas and activities that were deemed an existential threat to the nation. In this shifting political landscape, the imperative of democratizing film culture came to be diluted by a more nationalistic notion of development and zeal for the modernization of the film industry. Yet this does not necessarily mean that Koreans stopped shaping democracy according to their own visions. The next chapter turns to a periphery of 1950s film culture from which we can see individual and collective actions against this development-oriented configuration of cinema.

In Search of Democracy

Cinema in the Postwar Classroom and Its Grassroots Network

“Democracy has to be dreamed up every day.” The elderly woman, whose name I had yet to learn, spoke slowly, as if in a new language. We were sitting next to each other at a café attached to the National Library in Seoul. A half hour before, she had been several feet away, occasionally eyeing me reading postwar newsletters published by the Korean Audiovisual Education Society. “Pardon me,” she finally said, approaching my table. “I couldn’t help but notice that you’re reading something I might have written.” Within minutes, our conversation about old papers had evolved into a meditation on how we make sense of democracy, or the lack thereof.

“Democracy has to be dreamed up every day,” she repeated, as she turned her eyes to the magnolia trees outside. The woman’s name is Yi Chŏnghŭi. Born in Incheon and a graduate of Teacher’s College at Ewha, she became one of a handful of female, college-graduate teachers in 1956, at a time when her country was still struggling with the scars of the Korean War (1950–53). The postwar years hit almost every Korean hard, leaving them to sink or swim with meager resources amid rampant poverty.¹ Even though Yi secured stable work as a teacher, she was not spared the harsh economic realities of the time. She had to count herself fortunate to work in a school building equipped at least with the very basic necessities, such as blackboards and desks. In her first year of teaching, the limited resources in the school turned out to be less bothersome than the remnants of Japanese imperial education, or what she calls “slave education.”² Having grown up in a classroom structured in a rigid hierarchy, where lecturing was the primary mode of teaching, she noticed that these remnants were continuing to prevent students from owning their learning. “The kind of education shut down the power of the voice in everyone,” she said. Yi was not the first vocal critic of this type of

education.³ Few aspiring teachers, however, sought to abolish it through their everyday work as she did.

Interestingly, Yi was one of the early practitioners of “sichönggakkyoyuk,” literally translated from the American term “audiovisual (AV) education.” Introduced by American educators during the US occupation (1945–48), AV education had been known only to a tiny circle of Korean elites who appreciated American progressive education as child-centered and innovative.⁴ The term was still novel to most Korean teachers and educational administrators. It was only in her last semester of college that Yi experienced audiovisual aids as a means to facilitate learning in the classroom. She wanted to explore more so that she could eventually apply these new methods to her own teaching. The lack of school supplies constrained her efforts, but she soon figured out what she could do: with a camera borrowed from a reporter friend, she started to create and use a set of images in her teaching. As a junior teacher working in a vertical school structure, this required courage: “The principal often scolded me that I spent more time taking pictures of birds and bugs in the field than sitting at a desk, but students loved seeing these detailed pictures rather than the poor illustrations in the textbook.”⁵

My conversation with Yi Chönghui evolved into a series of dialogues in 2017 and 2018 with other courageous postwar teachers. Yi introduced me to two alumnae of Ewha, Cho Ünsuk and Chöe Yunok, who began their teaching careers at Kyodong and Namsan Elementary Schools in Seoul, respectively. One of Cho’s church members put me in contact with Kim Yönggün, who first landed at Daegu Middle School. Kim introduced me to his old friend from high school, Yi Sanghyön, and to Yi Hyönggün, whom Kim befriended at a teachers’ conference. I became acquainted with Kim Chaehui through a family friend. Born between the mid- and late 1930s, these seven teachers survived through the end of colonial rule, the immediate national division, and the Korean War. They graduated from Teachers Colleges (or the equivalent two-year teacher’s training), where they first had a quick taste of AV education. Their interest in AV education significantly expanded through teacher-training workshops led by Americans from the George Peabody College for Teachers—a hub of progressive educationalists and AV education advocates—in the late 1950s. These events helped them use cutting-edge tools of AV education, but also led them to find themselves at odds with their teaching environments. During the formative years in their careers, from the mid-1950s to the early 1960s, the Korean government implemented new curricula under an educational reform intended to render classrooms homogenous.⁶ Facing a restrictive and nationalistic curriculum, these teachers sought out any chances they could find to democratize their classroom and pedagogy.

These teachers worked as primary media distributors, exhibitors, and programmers who designed classrooms with new film-mediated discussion practices and built a grassroots network of AV educators. They were by no means professional film workers, yet their efforts with the cinematic medium present the

possibility of reconfiguring the industry-centered history of postwar cinema in a way that illuminates an important dimension of celluloid democracy. The dominant historical narrative has focused on the so-called golden age of Korean cinema that took off with the reconstruction of the film industry and a new generation of filmmakers in the mid-1950s; it has traced the decade-long dramatic growth of commercial cinema not only in aesthetic terms but also in relation to socioeconomic phenomena.⁷ It has nonetheless yielded a limited view of the “industry,” excluding a rapidly expanding network of cinema that encompassed film distributors, commissioners, and exhibitors, including those who combined film with education. The inclusion of these players is key; many of them worked on both the national and transnational levels to shape not simply postwar cinema but also South Korea as part of the US-led “free world.”⁸ Their work involved and authorized distinct kinds of institutions, audiences, and varied modes of viewing that arose alongside commercial cinema and its conventions during the era.⁹ Expanding the earlier information activities that I described in the previous chapter, Americans and pro-American Korean elites continued to work in the belief that AV media should be deployed to implant “democracy” in South Korea as an US ally. Portable projectors at schools, churches, and town halls operated under the celebratory premise that the motion picture was a vehicle of mass education.¹⁰ The teachers examined in this chapter critically evaluated this premise while reconfiguring cinema as a democratic medium for social empowerment and community building. Their work reveals the interplay of competing visions of postwar cinema, modernity, and the Cold War democracy.

The aspirations of these teachers are not documented in the state archives or in the historiography, and the silences in both sites are closely connected. The records of the Ministry of Education in the Korean national archive are filled with the voices of the powerful: lawmakers and policy makers. Their names and ideas are printed in letters, reports, and memos. Some of those higher up on the bureaucratic ladder are more present than others in that their existence is well-documented in signatures, pictures, and videos. Compared to the overwhelming presence of bureaucrats, the invisibility of teachers like Yi is striking. Because they were appointed by the central and local governments under the Civil Servant Law, teachers were, on paper, part of this bureaucracy. Their absence in the archive means something: to me, it reflects how the eyes of the state looked at the ordinary teachers as mere cogs in the system. Similarly, these Korean teachers are invisible in the records of American AV education specialists who collaborated with Koreans. Located at the US National Archives and Records Administration, the documents of these Americans are evidence of the time they devoted to their work in postwar Korea, time that they spent *with* Korean teachers.¹¹ The Korean teachers, who also existed in that time, remain absent or appear only briefly as targets of the US educational reconstruction program. “Because it [my story] isn’t important enough? I don’t know,” Yi Chônghŭi said when asked why her experience has never been

documented. What does it mean to be “important enough” to be heard and written? I am writing this chapter to share the stories of postwar teachers and their experiment with portable cinema in the classroom, but at the same time, I am compelled to recognize that the logics of national archives (and therefore historiography) have disqualified it as “not important enough” to be written.

In what follows, I present the stories of seven teachers with an emphasis on their relationships to democracy and cinema’s potential. Both US and Korean administrators highly valued AV media, particularly cinema, as a universal language that could contribute to the building of the anti-communist and democratic world. Korean teachers critically assessed this notion of cinema and the gospel of democracy through their participation in the Peabody workshop, in the ways they applied AV educational practices to Korean classrooms, and in their creation of a grassroots network of AV educators. In these works, teachers treated democracy not as a political institution but as a set of sensibilities that needed to be cultivated in themselves and in children through deliberate cinematic practices. In so doing, they enacted a relationship between cinema and democracy in which cinema was no longer weaponized to preach state ideology and depoliticize the population. Not bound to the simplified function of showing and viewing films, their work substantiated celluloid democracy. Through their engagement with cinema in ways that encouraged creative adaptation and community building in and beyond the classroom, the teachers ultimately reclaimed democracy as something to be felt and dreamed in their lives and in the lives of those they taught.

COLD WAR DEMOCRACY AND CINEMA

From the outset of the US occupation, the American construction of Cold War democracy mobilized cinema extensively in Korea, operating under the assumption that cinema could instruct Koreans in democracy in an efficient way. Still, South Korea was a low priority in America’s postwar foreign policy until the outbreak of the Korean War. As the peninsula became a testing ground for the competition between “democracy” and “communism,” a new urgency drove the American claim that cinema must be used to provide a rapid mass exchange of information at home and abroad.¹² The educationalist Edgar Dale, one of the influencers who framed this sense of urgency, warned: “We must have worldwide free and open communication of ideas or we shall have a worldwide disaster.”¹³ The American idea of building a “free” and “democratic” world brought forth a range of new AV media projects to maximize the flow of information, and South Korea was one of the emergent postcolonial countries that, according to Dale, had to be protected from “the hand of tyranny” with the help of AV strategies.¹⁴ During the early postwar era, US aid in various forms flowed into South Korea. From the US administration and its information agencies to nonprofit organizations such as the Asia Foundation, Americans invested in building a new film studio, training AV media specialists, and hiring Koreans to produce and exhibit films.¹⁵

Administered through a range of US governmental and private agencies, often in cooperation with the South Korean administration, various programs served to realize what Christina Klein calls the “enmeshment of South Korea into an array of Free Asian and Free World networks.”¹⁶

Education emerged as one of the main sites where the increased role of cinema in promoting Cold War democracy became pronounced. Roughly from 1954 to 1961, the so-called Peabody team put substantial effort into transforming Korean students’ learning with the aid of AV media, with the conviction that its work was in the service of democratizing South Korea.¹⁷ Under contracts with the International Cooperation Agency of the US State Department and the Korean Ministry of Education, the group of American educators, including Harold R. W. Benjamin, Winfield D. Armentrout, and Willard E. Goslin, headed a range of programs to train teachers and provide basic resources.¹⁸ In one of its earlier works, titled *Curriculum Handbook for the Schools of Korea* (1956), the Peabody team suggested that AV media, especially films, would be transformative for students’ learning; by using their senses to comprehend the learning materials, students would be able to cultivate “an experimental attitude, an inquiring mind, and a flexible willingness,” and when these traits were fostered, democracy in Korea would be “stronger, broader, and more enduring.”¹⁹ The Peabody’s emphasis on the efficacy of cinema became more palpable in later years under the leadership of Goslin, who was sent to Korea as “one of America’s ablest and best-known school administrators and as a battler for freedom and democracy.”²⁰ During these years, American educators not only developed a dozen model institutions, where they were dispatched to give hands-on instruction for AV education, but they also organized workshops to introduce the benefits of AV education to Korean teachers. Hundreds of Korean administrators and thousands of schoolteachers participated in these programs.

Through these workshops, Americans endorsed film as a new teaching instrument that, when properly used, would help students understand what they regarded as aspects of democratic life, including the ability to think critically, a commitment to compassionate action, and a desire to actively participate in political life by engaging in local decision-making processes. Using instructional films, they tirelessly associated cinema with what were claimed to be democratic behaviors and mindsets.²¹ One such film is *Manners in School* (1958), which features “Chalky,” a cartoon character, teaching Larry about good manners. As Larry ignores his responsibility to clean the blackboard, disrespects his teacher, and hurts other people’s feelings, Chalky invites him to consider his behavior from the third-person perspective. In this review, Chalky details how each of Larry’s actions “negatively” impacts others in the classroom. After realizing the consequence of his inconsiderate behavior, Larry promises Chalky that from now on, he will be a “good” member of the class. By setting limits on attitudes that are “bad” and “irregular,” the film defines the expected standards of social conduct for children. Larry’s assessment is self-led, not directed by a teacher, resulting in new action that will improve both him and his community.



FIGURE 3. Chalky, a cartoon character, teaches Larry about “good” manners in school. *Manners in School* (1958). Credit: McGraw-Hill Books.

To maximize film as a teaching instrument, Americans suggested that post-screening discussion under the guidance of an expert was even more crucial than showing a film.²² They diffused this idea by having Korean teachers engage with films that showcased classroom discussion in America. One of these films, *New Tools for Learning* (1951), presented a successful example of the method. In a scene where students engage with an educational film on democracy, the camera patiently attends to each student, using zoom-ins and close-ups. In this way, the film highlights the role of each student as an active participant who contributes to the classroom conversation. When the debate gets too heated, the teacher gently reminds his pupils of the learning objective for the day, and upon a student’s request that the class rewatch a portion of the film for a more productive discussion, he lets the entire room decide. Like other films in this category that flourished in the postwar US, *New Tools for Learning* brings to light the advantages of technological development: the portable projector’s playback capability enables learners to do the close analysis of audiovisual material. Still, the overall emphasis is placed on the post-screening discussion encouraged by a teacher nurturing a cooperative and egalitarian ethos—what the Peabody team wanted to instill in Koreans as the spirit of democracy.²³



FIGURE 4. *New Tools for Learning* (1951). Credit: University of Chicago AV Center.

To a certain extent, the Peabody team's showcasing of democracy in the classroom inspired Korean teachers seeking to change the dominant way their students were taught. But it also prompted them to see the chasm between what they had learned about democracy and what they were experiencing. While the active participation of students in discussion seemed fascinating, Kim Yōnggūn doubts it could be realized in the Korean context, where teachers were expected to "direct" the classroom culture. Kim's skepticism about the applicability of the "American way" sprang at least partly from systematic problems in Korean education. In the late 1950s, most classes remained centered on teachers and textbooks, with lecturing, oral recitation, and rote memorization as the norm. Kim and the six other teachers worked under the first Education Law, which regulated every aspect of education as strictly and uniformly as the colonial state had done. In the name of "democratic nationalistic education," the law not only regulated courses and class hours, but also granted sole authority to the government to publish all the textbooks used in primary schools and the key textbooks for secondary schools, including those for Korean language and literature, Korean history, and civil ethics.²⁴ Coined by An Hosang, the country's first minister of education, the term "democratic nationalistic education" signaled the Korean state's utilitarian vision

of education, which was to serve as an “instrument for producing loyalty to the state.”²⁵ This view motivated the Korean authorities’ investment in AV education through the Peabody team. An’s successor Ch’oe Chaeyu signed the contract with the Peabody, proclaiming that democracy would be achieved “only by infusing the democratic national spirit into the throbbing veins of the youths throughout their process of growth.”²⁶

However, Kim Yōnggūn’s observation conveys more than a critique of systemic problems in his country. It reveals that the Peabody’s importation of American-style democratic education was carried out with little to no consideration of how it might land in the Korean context, as he comments: “The American way of discussion might shake the existing dynamic up if it indeed succeeds at enacting a different social relation. But such change has to happen in the everyday lives of Korean students and teachers, not in the heads of Korean and American administrators. Students and teachers should be convinced of the value of democratizing the classroom, not forced to adapt the American tool.”²⁷ This situation indicated, at least to these teachers, that Americans’ primary interest lay in the dissemination of film as a mere vehicle rather than in its reception. As Kim points out, in the program that seemed to demarcate Korean teachers as passive receivers of the American way, Americans were far less interested in activating the meaning of democracy as a process than in spreading their own ideas. “If the audience was assumed to merely receive the messages of the film, then how would that be different from prewar education [under the Japanese rule]?” he asks.²⁸ Kim Chaehŭi also does not believe that the Peabody’s program was progressively democratic, not only because it was organized unilaterally by the Americans, but also because it was run under the hierarchical assumption that Koreans were meant to learn from the higher-up Americans. She remarks: “Americans were rushed to complete their task, there was so much pressure on their side that they should be able to implant the ‘American way,’ but why is it that the Korean way was meant to be an import of an American way in the first place? What is democratic about that?”²⁹

While rebuking both the Korean and American authorities, Kim Yōnggūn turns his frustration inward as well. He confesses that he had neither a “clear pathway” for democratic education nor the capacity to reform the system. He was not alone in this struggle. When asked what concrete practices were in use to transform the classroom into a democratic space, other teachers could not answer right away. Their responses, often followed by a long pause, show that various practices were implemented to improve students’ classroom experience, as I will soon discuss in more detail: using more AV materials for discussion, incorporating discussion into lesson plans, cultivating horizontal relationships, and so on. Yet they often found themselves torn between adhering to the norms and rebelling against the school system. This predicament was hardly their fault. From the implementation of the first education reform in 1955 to its revision in 1963, education essentially became

a developmental strategy used by the state to reinforce nationalistic ideology and vocational training.³⁰ Under these circumstances, teachers who envisioned the possibility of democratizing their world were forced to reconcile their vision with reality to some degree. But it was also from this impasse that teachers came to grasp more palpably the barriers to realizing democracy in their everyday space. Their realization of the contradictions in Cold War democracy then prompted, on the one hand, a commitment to cultivating what they saw as democratic feelings in the classroom; on the other, it led them to build grassroots networks of teachers in the pursuit of expanding access to AV education resource in their local areas. In these works, they intervened slowly but surely in the American gospel of importable democracy and the belief in cinema as a vehicle for this purpose.

FEELING DEMOCRACY

The seven teachers I interviewed had grown up learning about democracy as a form of government at its best. In high school textbooks, chapters on democracy provided an understanding of the liberal democratic system by covering an array of topics, including popular sovereignty, the separation of powers, and the electoral process. Democracy had been thus conceived as an objectifiable mode of politics, one that could be defined by a fixed set of attributes. What often overwhelmed this perception of democracy was the curricula's underlying emphasis on an anti-communist, developmental morality. As Charles Kim reveals in his analysis of postwar education ideologues, textbooks for subjects such as history and ethics instilled in students a "staunch state nationalist orientation"; they presented an abridged narrative that highlighted the stark contrast between democratic forces and those in opposition, such as feudalism, totalitarianism, and communism, to legitimate the Republic of Korea and its political system, as well as to elevate the capitalist over the communist bloc.³¹ Fully integrated into the postwar curricula, this Cold War notion of democracy influenced the ways the seven teachers made sense of themselves and their nation to a certain extent. They nonetheless felt acutely that something was wrong with this state of affairs. Regardless of the institutionalized electoral democracy, they found their government under the leadership of Syngman Rhee rather "undemocratic." None of the teachers can elaborate instantly on why this was the case, but they are distinctly aware of the gap between what they had learned democracy was and what they actually *felt* in society.

For instance, Yi Sanghyŏn confesses his discomfort with the self-proclaimed "pro-democratic" Rhee and his Liberty Party, which held an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly. For him, it all went back to the 1954 general election, when he witnessed the regime-backed police arresting other parties' candidates during their campaign. Confident in its impunity, the Rhee regime ignored the constitution. Its revision of the constitution to permit Rhee a third term in office

was indeed “undemocratic” to Yi. While Rhee received one vote short of the necessary two-thirds majority in the national assembly, he pushed through an amendment to allow him to run for the 1956 presidential election at the age of eighty-five. Rhee also mobilized all the possible networks of state power to ensure that he and his party won the race.³² It was evident that the election was rigged when Yi saw plainclothes police officers disrupt the speeches of the candidates of the Democratic Party. The unexpected death of Sin Ikhüi, a popular Democratic presidential candidate, before an election day seemed too timely for Rhee’s victory. Yet Yi went out to vote for Sin, whose name was still printed on the ballot. Yi comments: “It was very difficult to sense democracy in action when elections failed to represent people like me [against impunity]. . . . If holding elections meant what democracy was, it hardly felt like I was living in a democratic country then.”³³ Yi’s discontent with state power was by no means exaggerated: about twenty percent of voters threw their votes to Sin Ikhüi, which made their ballots ineligible. The fact that an independent politician, Cho Pong-am, earned thirty percent of the eligible votes confirmed the strong oppositional voice of the citizenry against the ruling power. In their response to Rhee’s narrow victory, commentators and minority party leaders, including the Democrat Cho Pyöngok, declared “the people’s victory over the political authority.”³⁴

Yi Sanghyön’s criticism of elections expresses more than his frustration at the then-incumbent president. It indicates that he distinguishes democracy as specific, lived experiences from an institutionalized polity determined by the rulers. This perspective was rarely encouraged by those in power at the time. As the 1956 election approached, popular dailies published numerous articles to boost voter participation. These articles predominantly presented democracy as realized only in the form of competitive elections featuring multiple parties. While commentators regularly listed what they perceived as basic principles of democracy, such as freedom of speech, their notion of democracy remained tied to the abstraction of electing a “good” president to “govern” the country.³⁵ And such qualities certainly did not extend to schools or to their populations of younger citizens. The imaginary of democracy backed by the state, to Yi, simply reinforced the idea that people were subjects of the president and his leadership, not citizens of a state that must be accountable to them. As Yi sharply points out, that alone contradicted the second article of the constitution on the people as sovereign: “The sovereignty of the Republic of Korea shall reside in the people, and all state authority shall emanate from the people.” The undemocratic nature of the power being exercised upon the people brought Yi to an acute recognition that democracy should enact new social relations between the leaders and the people, and in turn, this recognition influenced his work in the classroom.

How could such relations be realized in a society where the relationship between the state and the individual was fraught with massive power inequalities? Although teachers may have differed in their articulations of what democracy as a

mundane experience should be, they agreed that a deliberate integration of cinema into the classroom helped them challenge the normative dynamic in school. This consensus does not necessarily mean an unconditional approval of the Peabody team's faith in the greater educational capacity of AV media compared to other teaching tools. Korean teachers saw this capacity not as inherent in the media but as something that had to be activated by teachers and students, using American films and methods with caution.

Ch'oe Yunok often realized that the American films on a given topic were "less valuable" than she thought they would be. When planning a lesson on "cooperation" for her civics class, for instance, she found that these films and their emphasis on individual responsibility and sense of community contradicted the familial and national values that Korean textbooks sought to promote. Rather than abandon the American films or reiterate the norms of the textbook, she designed a guided, customized discussion that inspired students to assess the world outside their country and value systems other than their own. In her classroom, this type of discussion proved helpful for making sense of the world, encouraging students to imagine different ways of living while also instilling critical media literacy. Because both Korean curricula and textbooks replicated many aspects of imperial education that dismissed the capacity of children as active learners, Ch'oe wanted her students "not to be overwhelmed by what they 'must be' or 'should do' from an early age," as she had been. She adds: "This required me to figure out how to cultivate different mindsets in students, and I used more open-ended questions to have students reflect on themselves than other teachers."³⁶ She saw the benefit of cinema in democratizing the classroom when it provoked students to ask new questions and be curious about solutions other than those dictated in textbooks.

Meanwhile, Yi Hy'ongg'ün often mediated the cultural difference shown in American films, turning it into an opportunity to spark a new discussion on what were perceived as democratic principles in his classroom. He recalls:

One of the Americans [in the Peabody team] asked me why Koreans are so shy about talking about their opinion. I explained that it is because our culture prioritized modesty and respect for others. But I also thought, though not being able to say this back then, of fear . . . fear of speaking up. I read about people getting arrested on the allegation of being communist when they criticized the Rhee administration. . . . I should have said that my sense of freedom as a Korean is different from yours as an American. In Korea, what could be freedom or not was . . . determined by the people in power.³⁷

Aspiring to address the peculiar condition of freedom in Korea, Yi used American educational films to teach a lesson on freedom. He had students watch, for instance, a Korean-dubbed American film on class discussion in which the American children were not afraid of asking questions and speaking up. Before the screening, he guided students to put together a list of factors that produced their reluctance to speak in the classroom. The sources of reluctance varied, but the fact

that each student had a voice pushed him to initiate a conversation about freedom. Like Ch'oe, he also prepared prompts to facilitate self-reflective discussion in smaller groups. Many students were able to articulate how their fear of saying something wrong prohibited them from being active participants in class; they were afraid of disagreeing with others, especially authority figures such as teachers. In the momentum produced by this exercise, Yi encouraged students to confront the limits on freedom of dissent, and though the conversation was not always productive, it offered a chance for the students to practice the freedom in question. Allowing more diverse conversations to enter the classroom through the strategic use of AV media helped Yi nurture the students' capacity to think and speak in a collective setting, which, to him, was the first step toward democratic education.

What these efforts show is that the teachers creatively appropriated and intervened in the process by which new technological infrastructure and American methods penetrated the classroom. This reflected their approach to cinema in the classroom as a means in the making, not in the completion. Displacing the focus on AV technology as the singular force of change in the classroom, the teachers cultivated a space for the medium to evolve in dialogical relation to other components of the setting, such as viewers, ideas, and the curriculum. In so doing, they encouraged more horizontal relations between teachers and students as well as between students. Contrary to the norm that the teacher dominated the discussion, film-mediated discussion in small groups enabled a new dynamic. When students could talk to each other and discuss class topics, the teacher became less the main focal point of the room than a guide.

The fact that these teachers were a minority should not lead us to evaluate their work as impotent. The temptation to diminish their work gets in the way not only of our ability to listen to the robust experience of the teachers but also, more glaringly, of our powers of imagination. Here I am reminded of Édouard Glissant's reflection on the decolonial imagination and its effects: "No imagination helps avert destitution in reality, none can oppose oppressions or sustain those who 'withstand' in body or spirit. But imagination changes mentalities, *however slowly* it may go about this."³⁸ Teachers may have failed to dismantle the education system, but they were committed to bringing specific changes to their everyday space via the imagination of democracy as new sensibilities and relations. This imagination could not happen all at once; it demanded that teachers dedicate themselves to making democracy in action. And this imagination of what might be called tangible democracy was, to Yi Ch'onghŭi, "different from what politicians would look for." She goes on: "Their notion of democracy felt like floating clouds that I should look up and could not reach. When students disagreed with me, when they worked as collaborative groups rather than competitors to each other, when their eyes were filled with curiosity, not fear, that made me *feel* democracy."³⁹ These teachers proved that feeling democracy had to begin with a

series of changes in themselves, their relation to students, and their ways of learning with students and collaborating with other educators.

REALIZING GRASSROOTS NETWORKS

At the end of the 1950s, Korean administrators concluded that the Peabody program had made little impact on technical and vocational training, which to them was the most important project of postwar reconstruction. The Peabody's focus on academic curriculum reform and AV education did not seem to address their pressing need.⁴⁰ By the time the first cutback to the program was made in 1959 (it was closed in 1961), the Ministry of Public Information had become the regime's most powerful organ, influencing the making, censoring, and screening of motion pictures.⁴¹ This ascendancy was manifested when the Korean administration and the US State Department announced a new contract with AV technicians from Syracuse University to train Korean public information officials. This new group of American AV "utilization specialists" came to provide "technical advice" to Korean officials on establishing a state-run motion picture studio and laboratory.⁴² Even the administration of these institutions, a project initially under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, was handed over to the Ministry of Public Information.

The closure of the Peabody program alarmed the teachers who saw cinema's capacity for democratizing classrooms. The increasingly didactic tone of the state-commissioned films, for instance, validated their suspicion that the political authorities were interested in cinema exclusively because they wanted to propagate their self-legitimizing message. Having witnessed the government's aggressive mobilization of cinema as a state weapon, the teachers committed themselves to expanding what they saw as democracy. Crucial to their commitment was the creation of a grassroots network to share AV resources in response to community teaching needs.

For instance, in April 1958, Yi Chŏnghŭi formed the Seoul Woman Teachers' Association (Sŏulyŏkyosakonghoe) with four others who aspired to experiment with AV education. At the time of its launch, its members—female teachers working in the same district—anticipated building a mutual support group. The first few meetings centered on discussion of Korean books on AV education, but over time the reading activity became less central, and their function as producers and providers of film information rose to become their core activity. Yi describes it this way: "We were encouraged to use a film projector or a slide reader in our schools, but there was very little information about how to use the equipment, what films could be shown, and how these films benefit the learners. The bureaucrats never cared about how to make these resources more accessible."⁴³ A new initiative her group undertook addressed this issue of access for teachers in their district. Yi and other members wrote and circulated pamphlets to help

others in finding and acquiring educational films. In these pamphlets, they shared information about the films (length, synopsis, language, etc.) that they were able to use in the classroom, and also commented on each film's level of difficulty for students. While updating their research on available films over the next few years, the group also led a slide-bank initiative that encouraged teachers to share creative ideas about slides and to lend their slides to those in need. Yi was particularly excited about this project, as she could help others who could use her botany slides for Grade 3, while using someone else's slides on, for instance, math for Grade 3. This mutually beneficial exchange through the local network not only saved individual teachers the time it took to prepare materials for multiple subjects but also strengthened the connections among them.

Likewise, Kim Yönggün organized a network of teachers in his region after recognizing a significant gap between Seoul and other cities in AV resource distribution. In 1956, at least two Seoul-based organizations held a weekly screening of educational films, whereas no such program existed in his town, Daegu, a midwestern provisional hub. This regional difference prompted him to find other teachers in his area who were seeking to innovate in their classrooms.⁴⁴ In summer 1957, Kim founded a study group with a handful of Daegu-based teachers, and the group began a new initiative to compile a list of AV education resources. To do so, the teachers researched the available projectors and films at local churches and a local branch of the US Information Services (USIS). After sorting out about two dozen films that would be suitable for children, they put together a catalog that included brief information on each film. The first catalog was published and circulated in schools in an urban area, with aid from two local churches that also agreed to loan their projectors to teachers in need. The group members quickly established themselves as local AV education specialists and acted as a clearinghouse of information on accessible resources. Over the next few years, the goal of making AV more accessible to local teachers sustained their work, and the members came to see their community-based work as a civic responsibility.

The commitment to grassroots networks extended to the organization of local events that combined discussion and screenings with the aim of holding public conversations about democracy and education. Yi Sanghyön programmed a quarterly screening for other teachers and audiences, and it often helped him communicate with others who remained skeptical about AV education. Rather than persuade them with his words, he showed these audiences what his classroom felt like: the attendees were not merely instructed on the topic but also expected to participate, familiarizing themselves with the idea of free expression in which different ideas could be encountered and exchanged in participatory forums.⁴⁵ One day, he showed an animated film on Admiral Yi Sunsin, an educational film by the Center for Korean Instructional Film, with a prompt for discussion.⁴⁶ Previously, he had used the film in his history class on the Japanese invasions of Korea in the sixteenth century, and this experience had yielded suspicion regarding whether

the film's message would be effective for learners. In the absence of considerable background information about history, the film seemed to excessively glorify Yi's victory over the Japanese navy. While redoing the screening and discussion in order to receive feedback from a different audience, he and the participants debated the film's strengths and weaknesses. This type of conversation led his peers to offer honest feedback on the teaching materials in use. But what was most rewarding to Yi was feeling a growing consensus on the power of the interactive discussion that could be facilitated by films. Yi says: "I wrote down all opinions about the films and then invited the audience members to look at all different ideas and feelings. 'Look, we interpreted the film in many ways. Compared to our textbook, an educational film can be useful to create an environment where students could be encouraged to think and speak more freely.'"⁴⁷ Initially envisioned as a temporary gig, Yi's film programming continued for several years because he noticed a few peers who used to be conservative about new teaching tools become regular contributors to those events.

Kim Chaehŭi also coordinated a regular screening of educational films at her school attached to Seoul National University of Education, which the Peabody team used as one of its home bases starting in May 1957.⁴⁸ When an American specialist asked her to proofread the Korean subtitles of American films, she secured, in return, a promise that these films would be screened informally in her school. Her interest in sharing these films with her peers generated a monthly screening during the academic year, starting in March 1958. Kim's knowledge of the Korean curriculum shaped her program in a way that helped other teachers consider applying AV materials more directly. Although the programming required significant work, Kim felt more linked to other peers: "There had been no connection among teachers in the same district other than the fact that we were hired by the government and that we could be moved to other posts at any time in our career by those in power. But the screening program offered an opportunity to find not just practical but moral supports."⁴⁹ This opportunity inspired her and a few others to form an AV education study group in September 1960. After the closure of the Peabody program, the group members continued to use their platform by organizing showcases to introduce new Korean educational films to teachers.

Through these works, the teachers themselves emerged as the foremost authority of AV education while forging horizontal networks that linked the educators, districts, and regions of South Korea. It is difficult to overestimate the ways their work catalyzed a paradigmatically new way of thinking about democratic values. By selecting, curating, and presenting films and their relevant materials for community members, these teachers created an environment in which anyone could show, access, and discuss a film. While their work evolved unevenly and slowly, they took up AV media in ways that encouraged creativity, connection, and occasionally subversion of the officially sanctioned media content. Tapping into the power of technological infrastructure, such as portable projectors and the films

that played on them, they contributed to multiplying the locations of cinema outside the highly centralized commercial industry. Often presented to small audiences and private individuals in community, these forms of viewing also invited more dynamic interactions among participants.

The teachers' community-oriented work stood in stark contrast to the state's development-oriented approach to AV education and resource distribution. The government installed a set of government-run AV education institutes, first in Seoul in 1959 and then in Busan and Gwangju in 1961. These institutions assumed responsibility for maximizing teachers' capacity to run projectors, publish and circulate film catalogs, and persuade the public of the benefits of AV education. From the outset, their program showed no concerns about equity—that is, about making these resources accessible to all with few to no barriers and building a more inclusive decision-making process for teachers. The administrators were instead preoccupied with celebrating their first-year program as a “success,” which was measured only by the number of teachers receiving their training, the number of copies of pamphlets in distribution, and the size of the audiences that came to their events.⁵⁰ Their obsession with these numeric development metrics overpowered any concern about how their program practically benefited students and teachers.

The work of teachers also distinguished itself from that of the technologically invested, American-educated elites who championed the place of AV media in the future of modern society. For instance, Wŏn Hŭnggyun, a well-known advocate for AV education, declared in a 1956 article for a popular daily, *Donga Ilbo*, that AV education had become standard practice.⁵¹ As one of the early adopters of AV education in teaching, he proudly celebrated how the school where he served as head had modernized students' learning through slides, films, and radio broadcasting. In his observation, students were much more eager to engage with learning when taught with the AV aids. Wŏn thus suggested that both educational administrators and teachers be proactive in applying these technologies instead of maintaining the traditional pedagogy. For educators like him, the adoption of film and other media technologies in classrooms was inextricably tied to social and technological change that could only be accommodated by modernizing schools with more technology. They often referenced the American AV education of the 1950s, which centered on a national network of schools, libraries, and film clubs under the auspices of the National Education Association and the Film Council of America.⁵² Inspired to create a similar Korean network, these elites often urged educational administrators to import cutting-edge American practices into the Korean classroom while underscoring the gap between the two countries.⁵³

To teachers, this elitist approach appeared to be as problematic as the governmental one because it too neglected the agency of students and teachers in imagining democratic education. Even when elites characterized educational films as crucial for spreading the gospel of democracy, most teachers believed that their

ulterior motive was “being able to compete with or catch up with the American standard of life.”⁵⁴ This impetus, in their eyes, would further enrich elite, urban spaces without addressing the broader need for more accessible resources. Moreover, the elitist approach seemed unrealistic to many teachers who were already exhausted by other structural difficulties: a high student-teacher ratio, limited resources, and bureaucracy. In an op-ed, an anonymous teacher denounced educational administrators and elites for failing to understand the pressing issues in the classroom and burdening teachers with unreasonable expectations such as that they learn new AV tools. The writer called for a fundamental transformation, warning that “simply bringing a film projector to the classroom would never solve the existing problems.”⁵⁵ The seven teachers in my interview agree with this writer’s view. Despite their continuous work against barriers in AV education, they recognized that the structural issues had to be solved before technological infrastructure was added to the classroom.

It should not surprise us by now that these teachers anticipated that the collapse of the Rhee regime in 1960 would bring some change to education—and more broadly to the relation between the people and state power. Mass protests throughout the spring of 1960, or what has been called the April Revolution, called for an end to anti-democratic rule. Teachers witnessed how the growing momentum of the protests enabled many students to articulate their frustration and anger over the regime’s abuses of power and corruption. The outburst culminated in Rhee’s resignation on April 27, and until the military coup by Park Chung Hee on May 16, 1961, a new imagination of society flourished in many public spaces. During these thirteen months, teachers saw the possibility of democratizing schools by making their voices heard in the policy-making process and holding the government accountable. While not everyone joined the new teachers’ union in May 1960, many teachers felt seen when local chapters of the union quickly grew across the country. In just two months, about twenty thousand teachers, twenty-two percent of the total number, joined the union in an attempt to gain labor and political rights.⁵⁶ Although the union aimed primarily at liberalizing the school system, not the curriculum per se, its rapid expansion helped these teachers anticipate how systematic change would enable them to innovate in their classrooms and community work. In the eyes of the state administrators, however, the union’s expansion provoked a crisis in education to be resolved through nondemocratic means. Laws such as the Labor Union Law, the National Public Servants Act, and the National Security Law were made to ensure that teachers could not form collective groups or speak out about their circumstances. The national assembly under the interim leadership of Chang Myōn made the teachers’ union illegal, an action that ultimately led to the arrest and imprisonment of union leaders soon after the military coup in May 1961.

Observing the repression of the teachers' movement, all seven teachers reckoned with the cost of their optimism about the post-Rhee era. Yi Hyönggün says: "After we ousted Rhee, the school was immediately filled with dynamic conversations about how to reform education. But when teachers attempted to translate these ideas into practice [by forming and legalizing a teachers' organization] the people in power framed us as being 'selfish' and even 'commies (ppalgaengi)."⁵⁷ The new government under the leadership of Park Chung Hee promised a fundamental reform of education, but teachers soon discovered that its approach to education was even more nationalistic and utilitarian than that of its predecessors. One indication came from Park's stronger emphasis on vocational and technical education so that the skills taught in schools would meet the country's economic needs. Another indication could be seen in the added emphasis on subjects such as "Anti-communism" and "Morals," which reinforced ideological education. The ethos of anti-communism overshadowed the curriculum, and though more Korean AV materials became available thanks to Park's increased investment in government-sponsored films, the messages of these films seemed more "black-and-white" and "parochial."⁵⁸

These new directions, on top of the enforced disbandment of unions, frustrated teachers, but these changes did not entirely stop their work to make democracy tangible in everyday spaces. Some teachers gave more weight to the enactment of horizontal relations in the classroom than to the increasingly militaristic fingerprints on the curriculum. Both Chöe Yunok and Cho Ŭnsuk integrated more collaborative work and discussion in assignments and class "in opposition to the system overemphasizing individual excellence in exams."⁵⁹ Many teachers also continued to work closely with the grassroots networks of AV education throughout the 1960s. Due to the government's increased suppression of teachers' associations, they were forced to protect themselves from the suspicious eyes of other teachers and even students' parents. Both Yi Sanghyön and Yi Chönghui renamed their local networks as religious book clubs so that they could continue their community building "in the guise of a small, depoliticized group."⁶⁰ Nonetheless, they carried on their community work to ensure improved access to AV materials. Crucial to their work were efforts to eliminate the threshold for accessing what they deemed to be public resources ("konggongjae"). Yi Chönghui adds:

A handful of administrators dominated the whole decision-making process [about what materials should be purchased and how they should be accessed] as if public resources were their own. But these materials were meant to serve many students and teachers. . . . I had to do what had to be done to make access more equitable. I did what I did because I could not wait until someone would do something about it [building a community network].⁶¹

Other teachers similarly saw the AV materials as public resources, not the state's instruments to use exclusively for its political purposes. And by claiming their

right to access them—not just for themselves but also for others—they exercised a vision of a radically different ecology for all participants in AV practices.

. . .

Often when I was speaking with them, the seven teachers wondered why their stories would matter. Despite their self-doubt, their experiences offer a remarkable story of how young, ordinary teachers dreamed of democracy in their everyday lives. They critically assessed the postwar powers' superficial notion of democracy, enacting new relations and bringing experimental teaching practices into their classrooms. While the Peabody team's showcasing of the American way influenced these teachers, they did not implant it into the Korean classroom as they were taught; instead, they worked to translate and appropriate the American practices to cultivate democratic feelings in the Korean classroom. Their aspiration for democracy was also realized through the formation of grassroots networks for teachers. Against the state's top-down distribution of teaching and AV resources, the teachers created more community-based networks and programs in hopes of benefiting the members of the community who needed them. Their organizing work contributed to creating more accessibility to AV materials, subverting the state's monopoly on the production and distribution of relevant resources.

The stories of these teachers ask citizens of modern democracy to reflect on our imagination of democracy. When speaking about democracy, we tend to limit ourselves to the realm of institutions rather than considering the relations between people and a centralized authority. Even when considering the relations between constituents—the people—and their representatives, we reduce our imagination of democracy to the concepts of elections, representation, and mandates. The postwar teachers' experience is valuable even today because they showed the importance of being cognizant of the gap between democracy as an institution and democracy as a daily experience. It was their judicious recognition of the gap—as constituents living in a democratic republic but feeling their society to be undemocratic—that generated diverse imaginations of democracy. Their articulation of democracy might not have always been as explicit as they wanted it to be, but their work confronted the conventional notion of democracy as fixed and objectifiable. It was through their practice as AV media distributors, exhibitors, and programmers that they transformed themselves from subjects of power to citizens of society, from bricks in the rigid school system to conscious teachers and community builders who creatively engaged with celluloid to reshape education. Their stories, more than anything, prove that democracy must be constantly imagined and reimagined by asking who counts as a citizen, where participation can and should happen, and how forums for the exchange of resources and ideas can be made more inclusive.

At the Margins of Freedom

A Day Off (1968) and Film Censorship

In an interview in April 1968, the director Yi Manhŭi unveiled his new project, *A Day Off (Hyuil)*, a film about a poor young couple in Seoul. Yi and his team—the writer Paek Kyŏl and the producer Chŏn Oksuk—seemed thrilled about the film’s prospects of success. Chŏn, the only woman studio-runner in the industry, saw “exceptional promise” in the script that convinced her to submit the complete film to prestigious film festivals such as “Venice and Cannes.”¹ In less than three months, her hopes would be dashed when the script failed to win the state censor’s approval. During the interview, however, not knowing what disappointment awaited them, the trio eagerly discussed the film’s plot: one Sunday, Uk and Chiyŏn decide to have an abortion because of their economic precarity. Out of desperation, Uk steals money from a friend in order to take Chiyŏn to the clinic. While she is in surgery, Uk wanders aimlessly around the town. When he returns to the clinic, he learns that Chiyŏn has died. Looking back at his beautiful memories of Chiyŏn, Uk realizes he has been left with nothing to hold onto. Those who had heard about the making of this film were also left with nothing to grasp, wondering how the film had been revised or what the censorship process had been.

Until an original print of *A Day Off* appeared in the storage facility of the Korean Film Archive in 2005, these questions could not be answered. Before this unexpected discovery, the film had existed only in the memories of silver-haired filmmakers and critics and in the pages of old magazines. When the film was unearthed during the year of the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Yi Manhŭi (1931–1975), it increased his fame as an auteur whose creativity as an artist and critical assessment of Korean society were unmatched. Various screenings that celebrated the life of this almost-forty-year-old film widely acclaimed the “belated arrival” of a “masterpiece” that rendered the couple’s despair in an elegant black-and-white aesthetic.² In a fascinating interpretation of the film, the critic

Kim Soyoung describes it as an affectively charged cinematic image of the late 1960s that reflects the climate of a repressive society under the leadership of Park Chung Hee.³ She reads the film's moody depiction of society, with the camera capturing the youngsters' drifting away, as a subtle challenge to the state's aggressive promotion of national unity and developmentalism. If we follow her analysis, it is not surprising that the film raised red flags during the state censors' review process. The published testimony of the writer Paek and other crew members also supports this reading. According to them, the censors recommended a specific and rather abrupt conclusion during revision: Uk was to join the military, making himself useful to the nation to cure his despair.⁴ This proposed ending, at least in the eyes of the censors, would provide the male protagonist with a satisfying escape. As the surviving print shows, the filmmakers accommodated the demand to some extent by revising a final scene in which Uk reminds himself to go to the barbershop to get a crew cut, an action that in the Korean context could allude to joining the military.

The case of *A Day Off* has long been cast as a notorious example of state censorship in analyses that rely on the conventional dynamic of the "oppressed" and the "oppressor" that often operated in the censorship process.⁵ As the Korean Film Archive has expanded access to the collection of Cold War film censorship documents throughout the 2010s, newer discussion has broadened our perspectives on the role of government censors and other important stakeholders in the process. In a departure from previous scholarship that stresses the regulative power of censorship as a tool of the authoritarian state, scholars such as Hye Seung Chung and Cho Junhyoung have revealed the constructive power of censorship that also operated in the negotiations between the censors and the censored.⁶ Attending to *A Day Off*, however, requires a more careful approach given the absence of its official censorship records. Upon receipt of a script from filmmakers, censors typically began a thread of relevant documents on the film. This thread, filed under the film and tagged with its date of birth, includes missives such as a request for script revisions, a confirmation of the approved script, and even a receipt of the film print for review. More important, it shows who was involved in evaluations and what specific decisions were made. In the absence of such a thread on *A Day Off*, one is tempted to speculate that the dossier was "accidentally" lost to avoid a public scandal over censorship.

Such speculation cannot solve one mystery, though, namely, why the film print still exists. Since 1966, the film law had dictated that no movie could be shot without the censorship board's approval of the script, and the surviving print proves, by its sheer existence, that the filmmakers proceeded without the censors' permission.⁷ If we recall the excitement about the film's prospects in the interview that opened this chapter, the filmmakers were unlikely to have deliberately set out to run afoul of the pre-shooting censorship that upset almost every creator in the late 1960s. Even if it was a pure mistake, we cannot deny that when the filmmakers

shot the film without the authorities' consent, they violated the law by disobeying the mandatory censorship protocol. Another act of disobedience followed when the creators of *A Day Off* withdrew the revised film from public release. In the two-tier mechanism of censorship, filmmakers were often left with few or no options beyond making the specified revisions or cuts to get approval for shooting or screening the film in public.⁸ It is unlikely that they, as film-industry veterans, were unaware of the significant cost—economic and, potentially, political—of their decision.⁹ Nonetheless, they chose not to exhibit the film with the revisions demanded by the censors.

Today we have two versions of the script and a film print, none of which was officially approved by the censors at the Ministry of Culture and Public Information, the primary content-approving authority.¹⁰ Analyzing the three available texts of *A Day Off* helps us understand how Cold War film censorship invited not only the authorities' oversight but also a process of bargaining and negotiation between the authorities and filmmakers. I begin by mapping out the ongoing reform of the censorship system in the mid-1960s, which formalized a two-tier system of review that yielded more dialogues between censors and the censored. While tracking the constructive effect of this change across the three texts of *A Day Off*, I consider how the revision process permitted both filmmakers and their advocates in the film industry to imagine freedom apart from the government's definition. On one level, it prompted a reckoning among critics and filmmakers about the right to express themselves freely in cinema, which they saw as contingent upon the political regime that often overrode citizens' constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression. On another level, the creators of *A Day Off* chose not to capitulate to the censors and withdrew the film from public release, and in so doing, they ultimately refused to accommodate the government's definition of what could and could not be shown in public. Both the discourse and the action involved in *A Day Off* manifested celluloid democracy. I show that they emerged as nonconfrontational yet critical expressions of resistance against the condition of censorship that hollowed out the meaning of freedom. In a moment when modes of direct confrontation could elicit violence, they tested and undermined the boundaries set on cinema, opening up other ways to practice freedom at the margins of the system.

COLD WAR STATE CENSORSHIP

From the outset, South Korean film censorship had been established with the intention of regulating all motion pictures and their place in public. But its protocols and rules had changed via multiple reforms that increasingly tied cinema to the state's priorities and perspectives. During the early postwar era under the leadership of Syngman Rhee, cinema's popularity had intrigued political authorities at the same time that it raised concern about the medium's influence in society. Still, this was a period of relative freedom for Korean filmmakers. While the

state cracked down on representations of sexuality and depictions of Japan, as well as allegedly anti-nationalistic ideas, its regulations targeted primarily foreign features. Restrictions on cinema dictated by the law remained incomprehensible and irregular until Park Chung Hee, a rising military leader, instituted a series of regulatory measures. Soon after the coup under the banner of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction in May 1961, he proposed a new registration to industrialize film production, ultimately ratified through the 1963 Film Act. From this point onward, the law put film production in the hands of those who met the state's requirements for registration, demanding that they produce a certain number of films per year in order to expand the capacity of the domestic film industry. Over the next few years, this policy worked to turn small production companies and individual producers into an industrialized studio system, which Steven Chung calls "a highly productive but creatively constricted factory."¹¹ As for censorship, Park immediately called a halt to the first non-state film censorship board, a young institution charged with overseeing the state's regulation of cinema that had emerged during the April Revolution in 1960. The next step placed a strict prior restraint on public release; any film that was to be screened in public had to receive approval from the Ministry of Public Information (expanded as the Ministry of Culture and Public Information in 1968). The Film Act explicitly prohibited the making or distribution of any movie that "celebrated the communists, violated public propriety, or spread fake news."¹² What the state censors aimed to forbid was straightforward enough, but the way they went about it turned out to be remarkably obscure.

Consider the case of *Seven Female POWs* (*Ch'irinüi Yöp'oro*), arguably the most excessive instance of the control of cinema that made the headlines in the so-called golden age era. It began on December 19, 1964, when the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office filed charges against the director Yi Manhüi and the producer Yi Chongsun for *Seven Female POWs*, a feature about the Korean War. Pinpointing the film's humanistic portrayal of North Korean soldiers and critical depiction of the war, the prosecutors sought an arrest warrant for the two on the grounds of their "violation of the Anti-communist Act."¹³ In the next few hours, even as the arrest warrant was lifted, a new warrant for the search and confiscation of the film was issued by the Seoul Criminal District Court.¹⁴ Against that court's decision, the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) stepped in, accusing Yi Manhüi of being pro-communist.¹⁵ Yi was arrested on February 5, 1965, and imprisoned for forty days before being released on bail.¹⁶ Over the next few months, Yi refilmed almost every scene as demanded and eventually released the film with the new title *A Returned Female Soldier* (*Toraon Yögun*). The film earned neither critical acclaim nor box office success. However, this was not the end of the affair. The Seoul Central District Prosecutor sentenced Yi to a year in prison and a suspension of his qualification. Even after the Criminal Court dismissed the prosecutors' appeal in December 1965, the prosecutors never dropped

the case. In the second appeal against Yi and *Seven Female POWs* in March 1969, the Criminal Court justices finally put the prosecutors on a leash, denying that they had the right to arrest the moviemaker for the allegation of being pro-communist. While the judges did not declare the state's censorship unconstitutional, they reversed the burden of proof. Previously, the burden had been on the filmmakers to prove that their film was not "antisocial" or "immoral." With the Yi decision, the Criminal Court for the first time placed the burden on prosecutors and censors: if they did not want the movie shown as it was, or if they wanted Yi to stop making films, they had to prove to a judge that the film or Yi was undeniably detrimental to society.¹⁷

As the *Seven Female POWs* incident discloses, two other powerful state apparatuses secured footholds in the regulation of cinema in the mid-1960s: the Prosecutors' Office and the KCIA. The former, as in typical civil law jurisdictions, was not part of the judiciary. Instead, it was part of the government bureaucracy. The latter, as an institution under the president's directive, oversaw virtually all aspects of governmental bureaucracy. It was these state organs, not the presumed censorship authority, that charged Yi with violating the Anti-communist Law and appealed the Criminal Court's decision about Yi's probation. They insisted that Yi had violated Article 4 of the Anti-communist Law, one of the provisions most frequently cited by these state organs to punish "an individual who benefited an anti-state organization by praising, encouraging, or supporting it or benefited by other means the activities of an anti-state organization." The law was designed specifically to block the activities of communist organizations in the name of national security. But because of its broad and vague terminology, it was "prone to abuse" by the Prosecutors' Office and the KCIA.¹⁸ Whereas these institutions rationalized Yi's arrest as a means of protecting society from the threat of communism, this rationalization in itself reveals how they could wield their power to limit freedom of expression and ultimately criminalize any citizen.

Even before the *Seven Female POWs* episode, members of the film industry had a troubled relationship to censorship. Filmmakers and producers not only had to endure the inherent delays involved in submitting a film for review, but they also had to pay the fee for its review. If scenes were ordered to be removed or a film was disapproved, it was the studio owners and distributors who had invested in the production that bore the financial loss. Many film workers also questioned the qualifications of the state censors at the ministry, who seemed to have no specialized knowledge of movies or public morals. As civil servants, the censors had been appointed by their superiors and worked without clear guidelines to explain what the statutory language meant. Terminology that today seems utterly vague and imprecise was accepted by the minister and other stakeholders. Worse yet, the flexibility of the imprecision may have been the point: the censors could be easily asked to apply a word like "immoral," "antisocial," or "pro-communist" without a statutory definition or a regulatory clarification.¹⁹

The government's destructive regulation of Yi Manhŭi led other artists and writers to ponder what it might mean for them and their society. In a roundtable organized immediately after Yi's arrest, the critic Yi Yŏngil, the writers Sŏnu Hwi and O Yŏngjin, and the former justice Kwŏn Sunyŏng shared their concerns about the coerciveness of the state's regulation.²⁰ Yi and Kwŏn, in particular, pointed to an inherent contradiction in the constitution that guaranteed citizens' right to artistic and intellectual freedom (Article 19) while subjecting all films to censorship in the name of "public propriety" and "moral order" (Article 18). The contradiction between these two consecutive lines left them highly suspicious about their country's constitutional foundation. In a different space, the state censor Hong Chŏn acknowledged such contradictions and yet defended the necessity of regulating cinematic expression to "purify society."²¹ Amid the ongoing debate over censorship, the renowned filmmaker Yu Hyŏnmok came out as the first of his fellow directors to support Yi Manhŭi; in a public lecture, he warned of the "death" of cinema if there was to be no freedom in artistic expression and communication with the audience.²² According to Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, Yu's public advocacy of freedom of expression almost immediately generated a targeted investigation of his 1965 film *An Empty Dream* (*Ch'unmong*), based on the allegation it violated obscenity laws, a charge made with no tangible evidence.²³

Facing this broad criticism, the government revised the film law in 1966, making two controversial changes. First, it normalized a pre-filming censorship of the script as a formal procedure. This action was justified as a way to avoid costly reshoots of scenes to which the censors took exception, or even more costly outright bans on entire films. In any case, film companies were now required to submit a script to the board of censorship to get approval for shooting. Censors could approve it, require certain revisions or cuts to be made before approval for filming, or ban it entirely. A completed draft film—based on the script that survived the first round—was subjected to another round of evaluation for screening. Second, the revised law effectively replaced more community-based protocols of gate-keeping with more centralized procedures, empowering the Ministry of Public Information. Previously, a network of script reviewers had worked as a public mechanism to provide relatively collegial feedback to moviemakers before the ministry's formal review. With the revision that authorized the government to be the sole content-determining agent of censorship on paper, the members of this network lost most of their power to the Ministry of Public Information.²⁴

Filmmakers suspected that these changes could yield a form of "invisible" censorship in which films were effectively banned before they could be made.²⁵ Technically, the 1966 Film Act did a better job of specifying what the censors were looking for than had the earlier version: films deemed unconstitutional or likely to harm national prestige; films seen as likely to be immoral or obscene; films considered likely to harm international relations; and films that would be likely to diminish the national spirit.²⁶ Yet filmmakers worried that, as in the earlier practice, the

review criteria were flexible enough to block any film deemed to be contrary to the state's vision of national security and prosperity. The last article of the film law frightened moviemakers even more, as it dictated that any other detailed criteria of censorship could be determined by the highest authority: the president. The exercise of state power on cinema had already rattled filmmakers making features, particularly those about the Korean War or that included North Korean characters. Kim Su-yong, one of the popular directors of the era, even admitted that since the implementation of the revised law, he had been racked with concern about how to avoid "cuts" during every second of shooting.²⁷ Clearly, he was not alone. The fact that very few films were alleged to be pro-communist after Yi Manhŭi's arrest indicates that producers and directors became cognizant of the new limitations set on the realm of representation.²⁸

The testimony of the filmmakers as evidence of oppressive state censorship, however, should be taken with a grain of salt. Their self-positioning as victims of oppression has long shaped scholars' view of censorship as a mere tool of the authoritarian state, impeding other ways of understanding its complex operations. Of course, this is not to invalidate the vulnerability of the film creators, whose cinematic expression became more strictly subjected to the state's regulation than ever before—at least based on the 1966 revision. Yet because both scripts and film prints had to be reviewed, the dual process of censorship generated more back-and-forth conversations between censors and filmmakers. Even in this allegedly more draconian process, censors and filmmakers participated in dialogues that inescapably shaped and reshaped the destiny of film. Annette Kuhn, in her important study of film censorship, remarks: "Censorship is not reducible to a circumscribed and predefined set of institutions and institutional activities, but is produced within an array of constantly shifting discourses, practices and apparatuses. It cannot, therefore, be regarded as either fixed or monolithic. [It . . .] is an ongoing process embodying complex and often contradictory relations of power."²⁹ Crucial to this perspective on censorship is that *both* censors and filmmakers are subject to changing protocols and practices.

Indeed, determining what is expected on both ends requires verbal and written dialogues that are not always tethered to a set of prescribed notions about what should be seen or not. With the 1966 codes, Korean censors were expected to follow more specific guidelines that demanded the revision or elimination of scenes deemed "anti-constitutional," "immoral," or "harmful to international relations and to the national spirit." Although these terms were applied without much justification, insofar as the state guidelines were subject to an individual censor's interpretation, there was room for the moviemakers to interpret both the guidelines and the censor's language. In other words, filmmakers could read what they were supposed to do differently from the written or spoken codes and represent their position to censors through communication during the censorship process. As we will see in the case of *A Day Off*, it was, in the end, the filmmakers who

decoded the censor's unsolicited suggestions and decided how to apply them with minimal damage to their work.

INTERTWINED PRODUCTION AND CENSORSHIP

The production of *A Day Off* began in spring 1968 and ended in the fall of the same year. This was a long production time for a single feature, especially when the logic of the local film market encouraged quicker turnaround times.³⁰ Typically, regional distributors and theater owners invested eighty to ninety percent of the costs of production with a demand for a swift return on their investment so they could finance other productions. Because studio owners rushed producers and filmmakers to shoot as efficiently as possible to meet investors' demands, filmmakers often directed multiple features per year. In 1968 alone, Yi Manhüi made four films, an arguably modest number when two others in the same generation of directors, Kim Su-yong and Yu Hyönmok, shot nine and seven, respectively. Given this climate, when the film crew embarked on *A Day Off*, no one anticipated such a delay in production. The film's script, however, kept being returned without a seal of approval. The earliest script came back with a hopelessly discouraging and ambiguous comment from the censors that targeted the lack of both "artistic merit" and "consciousness." The revised version also failed to pass, this time with an even more ambivalent note on the "continuous lack of subjectivity." The filmmakers were finally told, in response to an informal inquiry that seems to have left no official record, "A film like this had better not be made."³¹

Far from singular or complete, the back-and-force process of censorship demands a close reading of the three available texts—two scripts and a film print—of *A Day Off*. This task is not meant to highlight the "polarities between repressed and authentic versions of an author's work," an approach that often views censorship as an external silencing of a resistant subject's speech or expression.³² Working under the assumption that an intervention occurs *after* the act of expression, this view of censorship as a mere regulative force fails to consider the many different ways this expression can be conditioned.³³ In the case of *A Day Off*, the changes made to the extant texts indicate an intertwined mechanism of censorship and filmmaking that shaped the entire revision. What is particularly interesting about this process is, as I demonstrate below, the consistent engagement of the censors, and not merely the filmmakers, in the production of the citizenship model backed by the Cold War state, and the filmmakers' identification of and reactions to this dynamic. Beyond the direct legal control of expression, each revision proves the relatively covert use of state power to privilege a particular model of citizenship that embodied dutifulness, cheerfulness, and wholesomeness. This production worked within the discourse of the film law that explicitly stated what could be seen (and what could not be seen) on screen to a certain extent. But even if the rule about what could be seen began to appear as the "natural" way of the world, it was

not always internalized by censors and filmmakers in the same way. By analyzing the three available texts of *A Day Off*, we can see how the filmmakers, while decoding the ambivalent comments, also made decisions to obstruct the control of the textual meaning and the promotion of the citizenship model that the censors and their regime were attempting to enforce.

The first round of revision, which took place prior to shooting, influenced the film text structurally. Upon receipt of comments from the censors, the filmmakers removed a prologue and an epilogue in which Uk, the male protagonist, commits suicide after the death of his lover. In the earlier version of the script, the film begins with a ferryman's retrieval of Uk's dead body. Detectives arrive and start to investigate the cause of death:

Detective: When exactly did this happen?

Ferryman: Sunday evening. *They* usually pick Sunday.

Detective: Why is it that *they* chose Sunday?

Ferryman: I have no clue.

Detective: Who is the dead?

Ferryman: *They* like to leave nothing.

Detective: What is your occupation?

Ferryman: I used to fish . . .

Detective: And these days you catch the dead . . .

Ferryman: In the past it used to be those in their 30s or 40s . . . but nowadays it is all in their 20s. Why do you think this happens?

Detective: . . .

Ferryman: Why is it that *they* dived into the river?

Detective: I need to ponder that.

Ferryman: *They* were crazy, you know? *They* were just crazy.³⁴

At first glance, the conversation includes little information about why Uk has been found dead. But when considering why many young people—not a singular *he* but the plural *they*—have killed themselves, the ferryman and detective acknowledge but do not utter aloud what they are thinking. In the ending, the script circles back to the investigation scene in which Uk's friends fail to identify the dead man. The detective then wraps up the case by confirming: "John Doe, unknown cause of death, about 25 years old." The camera zooms out to show the scenery of the riverfront, as if nothing has happened.

The writer Paek Kyöl feared that a script that included the death of the male protagonist would not be approved.³⁵ In the late 1960s, the suicide of a young male had very rarely been shown as a film's key plot point in his country. Unless the main character's death was justified as inevitable for the safety of the nation (as in the case of soldiers depicted as war heroes), it was rare to see suicide as a response to a crisis experienced by a character in a film. Perhaps the only

exception is a 1968 film titled *General's Mustache* (*Changgunŭi suyŏm*, dir. Yi Sŏng-gu), which begins and ends with the male protagonist being alleged to have died by suicide. This time its creators received an easier pass. At least partly because the film was an adaptation of an already highly popular novella of the same title by Yi Oryŏng, it could safely be categorized as a literary art film (“munye yŏnghwa”), a state-promoted film genre. Even in the films in this preferred genre, however, a youth suicide would have been seen as damaging to the government’s diffusion of developmental ideology. When *A Day Off* was in the making, all media were expected to disseminate ideology in line with the second Five-year Economic Development Plan, the state-led modernization push.³⁶ *A Day Off* was also written at the height of the Vietnam War, in which South Korea had already sent about two hundred thousand troops to aid US-backed South Vietnam; using an extensive network of various channels, the government aggressively mobilized working-class, able-bodied men as military labor in Vietnam in the service of economic growth and consolidation of the anti-communist front, “Free Asia.”³⁷

In this climate, Paek’s specific concerns about the representation of Uk’s suicide seemed warranted, as the censors indeed viewed with suspicion the lack of “consciousness” in a young, able-bodied male subject and refused to allow his unjustified death to enter the realm of representation. But then the revised version—with the opening and ending sequences removed—was also returned quickly. In this version, the film begins with Uk and Chiyŏn’s meeting on Sunday morning. In the end, Uk does not commit suicide in the agony of loss, and the film instead focuses on his recollection of Chiyŏn in a series of flashbacks. The last sequence begins with the empty streetcar at night, followed by his monologue: “Seoul, Mt. Nam, the barkeeper, the landlady, Sunday, and everything. I love them all. There is nothing I do not love. From now on, I do not need to wait for Sunday, I do not need to have money for coffee, goodbye . . . goodbye.”³⁸ The scene magnifies Uk’s devastation at the absence of Chiyŏn, whom he could not afford to take to a café every Sunday. Soon a streetcar operator comes to gently remind Uk that they have reached the last stop:

Operator: Sir, shall we meet again tomorrow?

Uk: Where are we now?

Operator: What is your destination?

Uk: . . . I just hopped in.

Operator: This is our final stop.

Uk: Then I should leave.

Operator: . . .

Uk: Farewell!

The last sequence draws to a close when Uk, having hopped off, hopelessly stares at the streetcar heading back to the garage. The revised version subtly

points to his despair without concluding with his suicide. The filmmakers accommodated the censor's comment without tweaking the narrative to the extent of changing the overall tone and meaning; the revised version, they thought, would pass review. But against their expectations, it was returned again with puzzling feedback denouncing its "lack of subjectivity."

In response, the producer Chŏn Oksuk, a worldly-wise networker in the cultural industry, approached the censors for feedback about how to move *A Day Off* forward, and they apparently responded that they were not looking for "a kind of film that portrays the dark side of society."³⁹ In this conversation, the filmmakers were also encouraged to change the male protagonist's destiny to what the censors regarded as a fulfilling one: volunteer enlistment in the military service. At least to the censors, this would let the audience assume that Uk found temporary relief from his pain by committing to serving the nation as a wholesome male subject.

Based on the available film, the filmmakers seem to have followed the unwelcome recommendation. The surviving print includes the addition of a few lines to Uk's monologue, which now comes at the very end of the final sequence. In voice-over, he narrates: "Seoul, Mt. Nam, the barkeeper, the landlady, Sunday, and everything. I love them all. There is nothing I do not love. From now on, I do not need to wait for Sunday, I don't need to have money for coffee. (pause) *It is going to be morning soon. Dawn will come. Shall I go out to the street? Shall I go meet people or drink coffee? No, I will go to the barber's first. I will cut my hair first.*"

In the newly added lines (in italics), Uk has moved to hold onto tomorrow, a time that in his despair he had hitherto neither imagined nor embraced. Even in the previous versions, his sense of temporality was disrupted by Chiyŏn's death, shifting only between the past (in his remembrance of their time together) and the present (in his processing of her absence). He has now decided to get a haircut the next day. His subdued tone of voice sounds much more determined when he reiterates to himself: *I will cut my hair first.*

In her study of South Korean citizenship under authoritarian rule, Seungsook Moon compellingly argues that the South Korean state-led modernization project actively deployed gendered strategies for militarizing citizens. It aimed to transform the men to be productive on the front lines of the industrialization of the nation, and the women be useful both at home and at work.⁴⁰ When we use this social imagery of gendered citizenship as a lens through which to review *A Day Off*, it becomes more evident what censors meant by the "lack of consciousness." During most of the film, Uk is far from an ideal male subject. In scenes in which he waits for Chiyŏn's surgery to be done, he feels empty and drifts away. Following his aimless steps through streets, parks, and bars, the camera captures Uk in choked desolation; his emptiness is magnified when the camera zooms out to put him in the perspective of the urban landscape, as if he, the dispossessed youth, belongs nowhere. Uk's friends



FIGURE 5. Uk staring back at the streetcar while reminding himself in voice-over to get a haircut. *A Day Off* (1968). Credit: Korean Film Archive.

are also melancholic and defeatist. For instance, a drunken friend laments: “I am college-educated but have failed to get a job in this society. And that is not my fault.” Another friend, feeling “too bored,” numbs himself by taking six baths at home on Sunday. *A Day Off*’s young male characters hardly fit with the state’s promotion of images of diligent citizens or images of the efficacy of its policies for national development.

Meanwhile, Chiyön, who dies during an abortion in all versions of the film, confronts the model of the female citizen once she agrees to end a pregnancy and thus refuses to birth a future citizen. She justifies her decision because neither she nor Uk—the breadwinner in the conventional sense—can afford a family, saying, “We are hardly capable of managing our own lives, so how can we be responsible for another human life?” Her concern appears reasonable in the film’s context, but the goal of her action challenges the gendered nationalist ideals that she does not perform as a female protagonist.

With almost all the film’s characters failing to embody the state’s ideal citizens, the censor’s comment—“A film like this had better not be made”—was not a joke: in the eyes of the state apparatus, neither the useless citizens in *A Day Off* nor the film was meant to be born. Uk’s seemingly abrupt determination to get a crew cut has to be understood in this context; originally represented as anything but a productive and forward-looking male subject, he had to be turned into a useful citizen in order to continue to be seen until the end of the film.

Just as the writer Paek supposed the censors would likely control the meaning of the male protagonist’s death, filmmakers could internalize certain forms of perception and expression that were mandated by censorship. Yet their process of decoding these forms did not guarantee any prescribed outcome. In fact, filmmakers could only assume and assess what censors wanted (not) to see in the



FIGURE 6. Uk's unemployed friend complaining about his miserable life in a tavern named "malse" in Korean, meaning doomsday. *A Day Off* (1968). Credit: Korean Film Archive.



FIGURE 7. Chiyŏn determined to have an abortion. *A Day Off* (1968). Credit: Korean Film Archive.

face of the broad and vague comments they received along the way. Even though the 1966 Film Act specified a rubric of certain demands, nowhere did it dictate exactly how characters on screen should perform to be perceived as productive and useful—and thus representable—citizens. As we can see in the last scene, in which Uk reminds himself to get a haircut, the censor's suggestion indeed guided the filmmakers' revision, but not necessarily in a way that sacrificed the character's development or the tone of the film. Despite an inherent power dynamic that presumably granted the censors the controlling hand, the multiple revisions of *A Day Off* reveal that the relation between the subjects of censorship involved more than an overt and unilateral regulation. State censors and filmmakers constantly pushed and pulled the boundaries of what could be shown—or who deserved to be seen—on screen, yielding a process in which film censorship and production became intricately intertwined.

BEYOND THE STATE'S FREEDOM

A Day Off's multiple rejections fueled the rapidly growing concern among members of the film industry about the state's suppression of artistic freedom. The critic Yi Yŏngil stood at the forefront of criticism of the state's "overexercise" of its power over cinema. Once the revised scripts were returned, he wrote: "What a pity that competent filmmakers have lost their creative power in this dreadful process of pre-filming censorship."⁴¹ A publisher of a major journal of the 1960s, *Film Art* (*Yŏnghwayesul*, renamed *Film, TV, Art* in 1968), he used this platform to support filmmakers and advocate for freedom of expression. In a commentary on censorship at the end of 1968, he once again pointed to the "extremely rigid and unreasonable regulation of film in contradiction to the constitution that protected the right of free artistic expression."⁴² Despite his measured tone, Yi, perhaps due to fear of retaliation, could not help but ponder what democracy might mean for citizens when the state possessed unlimited power. The case of *A Day Off* showed, at least in his view, that the state was abusing its power by violating the right of its citizens to free expression, and that alone proved the hypocrisy of Korean democracy.

While Park Chung Hee remained a civilian leader for most of the 1960s, his notion of democracy appeared remarkably contradictory. For instance, he justified various forms of state violence as a way to protect the nation-state from the threats of communism and economic devastation. Park claimed that because South Korea lacked "the subjective condition"—vaguely meaning his principle of self-determination and national development—its democracy could not be adopted in its "ideal" form. Until his country advanced to the degree of the developed countries, he believed that Korea's democracy should be "properly modified and suited" for its current (i.e., "less developed") situation.⁴³ His modifications yielded ambiguous terms such as "Koreanized democracy" and "bureaucratic democracy," concepts that were used to validate his rule and its incremental erosion of the democratic process during most of the 1960s. With the launch of the Second Economic Plan in January 1968, his rhetoric of democracy notably came to emphasize the traditional values of self-reliance, cooperation, and frugality. He imbued his self-proclaimed Koreanization of democracy with these values to legitimate his regime.

In the eyes of journalists and writers, however, Park's notion of democracy looked suspicious and even conflicted with what citizens experienced, raising the question of whether he considered citizens' basic rights to be subordinate to economic development. Frustrated with the Park regime's authorization of itself to violate artistic and intellectual freedom, Yi sharply captured its operation *above* the constitution as a sign of crisis of both democracy and cinema in South Korea.⁴⁴ To him, the undemocratic limitations set on filmmakers' freedom became most evident when they made movies that included what was deemed a critical commentary on society. Only when a film approached the boundaries of what could be seen did the censorious intervention make itself visible. Put differently, once someone created a work, the limit of freedom announced



FIGURE 8. Yi Yǒngil dedicated two pages of the July 1968 issue of *Film, TV, Art* to *A Day Off*; he published the blurb and still images of the film on the right side of the page, and his editorial on the left. Credit: Korean Film Archive.

itself. And this announcement occurred at the expense of filmmakers’ artistic and personal integrity.⁴⁵

This recognition is powerful, yet it leaves me wondering why Yi paid so much less attention to the decisions made by the filmmakers than to those made by the state authorities. Yi’s emphasis on the state’s acting as the oppressor—of cinema and democracy—is reasonable enough. As a writer, he had repeatedly struggled with the state’s censorship. But this struggle hardly relegated him to a compliant silence throughout his entire career.⁴⁶ While constantly exposed to the state’s control of the pen, he did not lose all his power to write or his agency in the process of writing. The same was true for the filmmakers of *A Day Off*. Of this agency of the subject in a position of presumably little power, Judith Butler writes:

To become a civic and political subject, a citizen-subject, one must be able to make use of power, and this ability to make use of power is, as it were, the measure of the subject. To make use of power is linked to the ability to speak insofar as the citizen is defined as one with the ability to do what one says, to translate word into deed. . . . One can live in a polity without the ability to translate the words into deeds, and this is a relatively (though not absolutely) powerless way to live: it is to live on the margins of the subject, or rather, as its margin.⁴⁷

With *A Day Off*, it was not only those with more power—the censors—who exercised its agency, or in Butler’s words, the “ability to speak,” but also those in a position of relatively little power—the filmmakers. The filmmakers, like the censors, navigated the dynamic with their agency, however limited, while expressing their “deed” by making certain choices. If we are willing to see their “ability to speak,” any forms of their expression can point toward an emergence of a different relation of power that was not solely dictated by the state. Such interventions in asymmetric power relations can generate a new horizon for considering cinema and democracy beyond the state’s instrumentalization. This state, with its myopic view, assumed that it could repress any expressions by citizens and ultimately control all the realms of representation. But even under the repression of state censorship, as we have seen, filmmakers demonstrated how it was possible for citizens to exercise their agency: by following the state’s directives and yet making changes that were not really changes to the film’s tone and themes.

The filmmakers’ choice to shoot the film before the state’s approval of the script is another expression of their agency. Technically, this action broke the film law, which required official registration and approval of the script in order to shoot. Anyone who failed to follow suit could not only be forced to cease production but also be charged a penalty of up to 200,000 won (equivalent to 5,500 US dollars today).⁴⁸ It is difficult to say whether the filmmakers’ decision to film before receiving official approval to do so had the ulterior motive of dismantling a prior constraint. Once again, none of the film crew expected another rejection of the script after they changed the opening and the ending; the excisions were done under the assumption that the changes would allow the film to pass the pre-filming censorship process within a reasonable period of time.⁴⁹ It was, nonetheless, their decision to shoot without approval, an act that would undo the mandate of the state regulation and create a film text that was technically unapproved before its birth. In a sense, the effect, not the intention, of their act enabled *A Day Off* to live a life in celluloid over the decades, possibly moving from one house to another until it was caught in—and therefore, however unintentionally, preserved within—a dark storage room of the Korean Film Archive.

Even more critically, the filmmakers asserted their right not to carry over the project and exhibit it in its revised form. Although the filmmakers accommodated most of the revision requests of the state censors so that they could eventually screen the film in public, they were determined to silence *A Day Off* as revised. With the term “silence,” I am building upon Wendy Brown’s insightful interpretation of silence in censorship. The conventional way we talk about silencing cinema presumes a particular power imbalance between the two parties—the one who silences cinema and the other whose cinema is silenced.⁵⁰ While this kind of power dynamic played out in the process of censoring *A Day Off* to an important extent, what is equally important to me is that the filmmakers used their power to withdraw the film from further revision and from public release. Here, according

to Brown, is where we can see a resistant ground in the practice of “refusing to speak.”⁵¹ This refusal did not necessarily involve a direct confrontation with the state authorities, because, as she points out, subtle resistance can work in many cases as “a defense in the context of domination” or “a strategy for negotiating domination.”⁵² Still, silence can speak to and reject complicity in a regulative relation. Despite the cost of the action, silencing the film was a nuanced act of withdrawal from the censorship process, and possibly the only way the filmmakers could choose not to speak as they were directed from above. Rather than being silenced by the authorities, their silencing was “deployed from below,” a deliberate action that withheld their consent to the ways *A Day Off* was revised and was supposed to be seen in public.⁵³

The filmmakers expressed themselves through noncompliance with the state’s demand, and their voices might have gone unheard at the time of speaking. It has nonetheless arrived at this moment of acknowledgment. By acknowledging their voice here, I am not simply concluding that in retrospect they fought against the state and its interdiction of freedom. Instead, I want to dwell on the other qualities of their enunciation of “would rather not.” In the writer Paek Kyöl’s words, he, Yi Manhüi, and Chön Oksuk felt that they “would rather not” let the revised film be shown in public.⁵⁴ They may have (or may have not) wanted to compromise further with the state’s mandate; they may have just wanted to move on to other projects in the interest of time. In any case, the effect of silencing is a claim of their own, one that manifests the refusal to be forced to speak.

In his rereading of Herman Melville’s story “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street,” Slavoj Žižek finds a radically political response to the mandate in the protagonist.⁵⁵ At first, Bartleby is a dutiful and productive employee, but he soon begins to respond to all the requests of his boss with “I would prefer not to.” Bartleby’s basic disposition of refusal expressed in his “I would prefer not to” throws the workplace into total disarray. Bartleby does nothing, but this sort of doing nothing is far more effective than “doing something.” What Žižek sees in this action is a profound critique of the Foucauldian notion of power and resistance. Michel Foucault famously wrote, “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.”⁵⁶ Power and resistance thus form a kind of antagonistic enclosure, and therein lies the problem. This means that acts of resistance are ultimately affirmations of the very power the subject resists. Insofar as one is invested in specific types of resistance, one is unconsciously invested in the power that makes them possible. For Žižek, Bartleby escapes the circuit of power and resistance; he occupies the “position of exteriority” at which resistance is incapable of arriving.

Bartleby’s imagination of exteriority resonates with the filmmakers’ withdrawal—“would rather not”—of *A Day Off* in that their decision was not dictated by the authorities, who were preoccupied with approving or disapproving the screening. In making this decision, they chose to negate the unspoken rule of

censorship that the ruled should subscribe to the ruler's prescription, not the other way around.

This negation did not emerge out of a state of impotent passivity. Instead, it activated another kind of freedom when the filmmakers unleashed themselves from the authorities' protocols and expectations in the process of censorship. It was through this freedom that they chose not to fully concede the authorities' right to determine what could be seen or to push themselves further to comply. True, filmmakers' freedom of expression was undeniably constrained without reasonable justification at the time; the writer's removal of the opening and the ending alone tells us that the code of censorship could overrule the choices made in the realm of representation. Through another kind of freedom, however, filmmakers refused to let the state power alone determine the destiny of *A Day Off*. Only through this refusal can we see the boundary that the state set on freedom or, more glaringly, the condition of unfreedom.

. . .

As they moved forward, the creators of *A Day Off* continued to struggle to survive within the confines of the system. The film careers of Yi Manhŭi, Paek Kyŏl and Chŏn Oksuk started to dwindle in the early 1970s, as did the careers of other popular filmmakers from the previous decade. The new decade took off with a series of regulations aimed at the ratification of a new constitution that granted Park Chung Hee nearly absolute control of society. Before promulgating this new constitution in October 1972, he had already arrogated to himself the power to control wages and prices, restrict strikes, ban demonstrations, and censor the press. He legitimated his move by naming the external threats—a relaxation of tension growing out of US President Richard Nixon's visit to China and negotiations with North Korea to reunite divided families—that would weaken what he claimed to be "national unity." Another justification for his grip on society came down in the shift of the direction of economic development to favor heavy industry and the production of capital goods, accompanied by more restrictive policies on direct foreign investment. In alignment with its developmental strategy, the state's new regulator, the Motion Picture Promotion Corporation (now the Korean Film Council), was created to promote the production of notorious national policy ("kukch'aek") films. Once again, the revised film law enforced a stricter policing of scripts, and under increased political control, film workers noticed that their opportunities for creative dissent were increasingly curtailed. Of course, as Steven Chung notes, the state's control was "not total" and had "uneven effects on political and cultural expressions" in the 1970s; directors like Shin Sang-ok pushed through and even circumvented the newer challenges within the system.⁵⁷ Yet the confines in artistic expression and the saturation of national policy films at the theaters turned audiences to the rapidly expanding television network, leading to a sharp decline in box office numbers, from 170 million viewers in 1969 to 98 million in 1979. The number of films produced also fell from its peak of 229 in

1969 to 100 in 1979.⁵⁸ In this sense, Chŏn Oksuk and Paek Kyŏl made a sensible choice. Chŏn, based on her network in Japan, imported Japanese TV series to South Korea, and Paek wrote scripts for TV series until he returned to the film industry toward the end of the decade. Meanwhile, Yi Manhŭi faced another major censorship fight with *The Wildflowers in the Battlefield* (*Tŭlguk'wanŭn p'ionnunde*, 1974), a “national policy” film on the Korean War produced by the Motion Picture Promotion Corporation. Amid an escalating conflict between Yi and the producer—this time the state institution—he succeeded neither in bargaining nor in playing with the system, and he was ultimately forced to leave the editing room. It seems that he never fully recovered from this experience. When he died a few months later at age forty-four, he was in the middle of adding the final touches to *A Road to Sampo* (*Samp'oganŭn kil*, 1975), a movie based on a popular novel by Hwang Sok-yong.

Knowing this unfortunate ending should not prevent us from asking what other expressions of resistance film workers developed in order to create and defend a space of another freedom, a space the censors were unable to block. In her reading of freedom encapsulated in the practices of art and writing in trying times, Svetlana Boym notes that adventures of thinking can open up “border zones, thresholds, bridges and doors.” These spaces are not given but must be generated by artists and writers who become aware of “fences and passages and boundaries” in their imagination; it is in these spaces that they learn the importance of envisioning alternative frames, norms, and tools.⁵⁹ Despite the tragic loss of Yi, what still remains salient is that, in the acts that created an alternative future for *A Day Off*, filmmakers carved out a space of freedom at the margins of film production and censorship. It was a space where they could liberate themselves, albeit temporarily, from the older ways of doing things and turn obstacles into adventures in Boym's sense of the word. Put another way, it was in this freedom, not the state's unfreedom, that filmmakers were able to breathe in the possibility of existing outside the norms of film business and censorship. Certainly, dwelling on such freedom is not a liberationist politics, as it did not ultimately destroy or even fight the conditions of oppression, but it nevertheless opened up a clear form of resistance *within* the system that even today offers insight into other ways to work around the rules. Without the filmmakers' specific choice to carve out such a space, our understanding of censorship would have landed on a much more black-and-white authoritarian world of the oppressed and the oppressor. *A Day Off's* existence—across the available scripts and film print—permits us to feel the space of another freedom, inviting us to view what might seem to be capitulation as fertile ground for a subversive aesthetics and politics.

Beyond the Marginalization of Women

Khaidu as a Feminist Experimental Film Collective

Over five nights in July 1974, a South Korean women's film collective threw a film festival on the rooftop of Shinsegae department store in downtown Seoul. In the eyes of moviegoers accustomed to commercial exhibition in theaters, almost every aspect of the festival appeared unconventional. Free and open to the public, it showcased seven experimental films by nonprofessional woman filmmakers working under a name that was unfamiliar to most Koreans: Khaidu, after Khutulun, the great female warrior of the Khaidu clan of Mongol. Four months previously, four women in their early twenties had formed the first women's film collective in South Korea with the aim of finding new film languages and platforms for women. Han Okhi and Kim Chömsön had graduated from Ewha, the country's most prestigious women's college, having studied literature and education, respectively. The other two members were Yi Chönghui, a literature major, and Han Sunae, a communications major, both of whom were still in college. Soon these self-taught filmmakers produced their first works, including *A Hole* and *OVER*, which featured innovative film practices such as the use of abstracting techniques, the recourse to small-gauge format, and a commitment to collaboration, to name a few.

The mainstream media quickly responded to Khaidu's film festival. Several published reviews welcomed the women's experiment with nonlinear form and style as a "willful endeavor to radicalize mainstream cinema," even as they diminished it as a mere "part of the tradition of 'underground movements.'"¹ Yet these reviewers seldom cared enough to delve into other political and creative meanings that Khaidu's practice might impart. In coverage by one of the country's most popular periodicals, *Sundayseoul*, each member was introduced in relative depth, yet little attention was paid to the rationale behind their filmmaking. The reporter included a quote from Han Okhi that claimed Khaidu was taking action for "gender equality in cinema." What follows this quote is a rather condescending comment characterizing the filmmakers as "unruly tomboys with bachelor's degrees," assessing their films as "rough," "immature," and "unsophisticated," without citing specific evidence.² But what if the play with focus, the haphazard framing,

and the disjunctive editing in Khaidu's films were not signs of incompetence but marks of a different vision as woman artists? As we will see in this chapter, Khaidu's interest lay in articulating such a vision, not achieving the maturity and sophistication of cinematic techniques. Its experiment with unconventional forms and styles foregrounded a desire for ways to represent women and their voices lacking in the mainstream media.³

Born in the late 1940s, Khaidu members had come of age during the rapid urbanization and industrialization that had unfolded in the grip of postwar state power. Unlike those of their parents' generation, they attended high school and university and considered themselves more individualistic and defiant in their life and career goals. Still, their country constantly mobilized women as mothers and housewives, discouraging women from pursuing professional activities outside the home. In their view, this marginalization of women reinforced and was reproduced by mainstream cinema's under- and misrepresentation of women. Growing up, they could not identify with any major female characters in films, as most seemed to be portrayed as "inferior" or "supplementary" to their male counterparts.⁴ The media rarely showed educated and professional women, and when it did, they were often depicted as a "threat" to the male-centered family and society. To the Khaidu members, it was evident that the media reinforced the patriarchy in its normalization of obedience and domesticity as "natural" values of women. Seeing this issue of representation as a product of male-dominant field of media, Khaidu's members transformed themselves from college students with limited work options into filmmakers bent on inventing new languages and platforms for women's cinema. Through this transformation that unfolded over the next four years until the collective's official disbandment, Khaidu fought against the marginalization of women in cinema as both a realm of representation and a field of labor. In this chapter, I will examine Khaidu's struggle toward a vision of a feminist, experimental cinema that enacted celluloid democracy not only by articulating an inclusive and nonviolent film language but also by expanding public spaces for women in the collective's film festivals, symposium, and performance.

Khaidu's work demonstrates that the mid-1970s was a watershed moment for more than just Western feminist film activism. Having learned from the women's liberation movement of the previous decade, women film critics and artists in the northern hemisphere reconfigured what women's cinema could and should be. From publication to organization, their work spearheaded new filmmaking trends and forms of activism centered on women's liberation and empowerment in opposition to the mainstream industry.⁵ Khaidu's formation resonated with this aesthetic and political movement that arose in the West, but this resonance should not guide us to a naive assumption that Khaidu's practice was merely a Western derivative or under Western influence. Tracing the influence of the Western feminist movement would ignore the fact that the works of Western film feminism reached few Koreans at the time, and fundamentally, it would reproduce the

orientalist perception of non-Western women as less developed compared to their Western counterparts.⁶ This chapter shows that a more careful way to understand Khaidu can be found in analyses of the conditions of its formation and of its extant work, as well as in conversations with its members and participants in its events. This approach will broaden our understanding of what constituted film culture in the 1970s, challenging the narratives about the development of film and feminist activism that center on the Western liberal sphere. In what follows, I attend to how the young women artists defined their work at the time and what experimental and feminist visions of cinema they promoted to shift the constraints set on women like them. In so doing, we can see how they struggled against the forces behind the marginalization of women: the nationalistic Cold War state and its power over the film industry, as well as its normalization of a patriarchal and hypermasculine order of society.

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

In the historiography of Korean cinema, the 1970s has been considered the “dark age” because of tightened censorship regulations and increased political control. Less than two years before Khaidu’s formation, Park Chung Hee had announced the era of Yusin, literally “revitalization” but really meaning his transition to dictatorship.⁷ With a revised constitution allowing him to prolong his rule indefinitely, he granted himself unlimited power to manipulate the right to free expression, normalize mass arrests of dissidents, and reinforce social surveillance by armed soldiers and plainclothes police officers. The Yusin film law, enacted in 1973, launched the Motion Picture Promotion Corporation to promote national policy films, pushing filmmakers to the margins. In the face of greater demand to produce feature and promotional films that propagated the state’s ideology, filmmakers in the mainstream industry lost many of their opportunities to experiment with the medium. Amid these challenges, a younger generation of filmmakers rose up in the mid-1970s to revitalize the industry, at least temporarily. For instance, the Visual Age group, consisting of filmmakers in their thirties, like Yi Jangho and Ha Giljong, articulated their cinematic language by bringing youth culture to the screen: beers, blue jeans and miniskirts, and Westernized folk music all symbolized the yearning for freedom from the restrictive social norms of society. With these symbols of youth culture, the filmmakers tweaked genre conventions and added more versatility to their style, speaking directly to the younger consumers of domestic film. Movies such as *Heavenly Homecoming to Stars* (*Pyöltürüi kohyang*, 1974) and *March of Fools* (*Papotülüi hangjin*, 1975) brought Yi and Ha, respectively, fame and box office success that were unparalleled for the time.⁸ These directors nonetheless could not escape the regime’s suppression, which crystallized in its campaign to “purify” society. Yi Jangho, among other popular artists, became a target of investigation for smoking marijuana in April 1976, and his activities were

suspended until the end of the era. Meanwhile, Ha Giljong had to endure almost every one of his features being harshly cut by the censors.

Out of these unfavorable conditions of filmmaking, new pathways for making movies were cleared from the margins of film culture. Young artists and critics were drawn to more radical kinds of experimentation with the cinematic medium. Neither the theory nor the practice of “avant-garde,” “experimental,” or “independent” cinema had established a solid base in South Korea. Yet there was a burgeoning underground scene, represented by a group of novices producing independent art, cinema, and theater. The increased repression of artists and writers engendered a sense of urgency among the younger creators that made experimentation outside the established system of art and media more feasible and desirable. At a time when the government strictly regulated the state-sanctioned media and commercial cinema, collectively produced, noncommercial cinema became a viable way for them to counter a highly manipulated mediascape. The experience of being pushed underground created a newfound solidarity, mutual support, and artistic cross-fertilization, and urban areas increasingly provided young artists with new spaces in which to network and collaborate.⁹

The earliest noncommercial film collective of the era was the Small-gauge Film Coterie (Hang'uksohyōng yōnghwatonghohoe), founded in 1970. Its inauguration demonstrated a rising interest in “nonindustrial and avant-garde cinema” across the broad fields of cinema. The members included well-known filmmakers such as Yu Hyōnmok and Ha Giljong and the young critic Pyōn Insik, as well as nonprofessional cinephiles.¹⁰ Through screenings and workshops, they initiated opportunities to discuss nonconventional filmmaking and avant-garde films from other parts of the world and practice their own. In less than two years, several students at Sogang University in Seoul formed another collective, named the Moving Image Research Group (Yōngsangyōnghuhoe). Setting themselves apart from the mainstream industry, its members—including Yi Iktae, whose film *From Morning to Evening* (*Ach'imgwa chōnyōksai*, 1970, 16mm, B&W) has been recognized as the country's “first underground film”—sought to articulate their vision for amateur cinema.¹¹ By organizing informal and spontaneous events around the campus, they offered a loosely organized community for young, nonprofessional filmmakers, including those from other campuses who were similarly invested in motion pictures. These two groups seemed to have little in common other than their interest in diversifying film culture, but they nonetheless signaled a new era of experimentation with cinema outside the norms.

In a sense, Khaidu's formation incarnated this new trend, which grew out of an aesthetic and political shift in the early 1970s. The influence of these earlier collectives on Khaidu cannot be denied, as Khaidu members had frequented the events organized by these groups and remained in contact with several members before forming their own collective. Han Okhi graciously acknowledges these collective members as her contemporaries, especially the senior filmmaker Yu Hyōnmok,

who supported Khaidu's work by sharing his knowledge and even his editing studio. Yet Khaidu stood out among these contemporary film groups in two ways. For one, Khaidu was distinctively a women's collective that "emerged out of a thoroughly male-centered world of art and media."¹² If other contemporary film collectives generally pursued formal and aesthetic experimentation, Khaidu gravitated more toward changing the male-dominant landscape of filmmaking across fields. This can be seen, for instance, in Khaidu's challenge to the conventional mode of production in which the male director wielded his power over other workers as the sole auteur of the film. The product of an apprentice system, the director often reinforced a hierarchy among film workers in order of seniority that had long been normalized in the industry. In contrast, Khaidu decided to work together as a group without prescribed positions such as "director" or "screenwriter." The members also financed their productions equally and made decisions via open discussions in which all the members participated as creators. This practice matured through their principle that women could raise each other up and channel the power of collaboration, helping them distance themselves from competition or domination.

Khaidu also distinguished itself from other collectives in its commitment to what its members called "silhomyŏnghwa," which literally means "experimental cinema." Khaidu clearly preferred this term over others, such as "chŏnwi" (avant-garde) and "ŏntökŭlauntŭ" (the Korean transliteration of underground). All these terms were used loosely by filmmakers and writers at the time, but Khaidu identified itself as a group of female filmmakers who were "path-finders of experimental cinema."¹³ This preference for "silhŏm" could have been a practical decision, given the Korean mainstream media's moral condemnation of avant-garde and underground art, not to mention the government's targeted investigation of drug use. Still, it is relevant that Khaidu envisioned a fundamentally new configuration of cinema through silhŏm, which, to the collective, meant "testing out an existing order of things and giving rise to something new."¹⁴ Both acts, testing the old and generating the new, had to complement each other in order to achieve the ultimate goal of experimentation: to undermine the dominant idea of what film should be and do. For these reasons, Khaidu refused to be constrained by either the label that the mainstream media imposed upon it or the trends in nonconventional cinema.

Khaidu's conceptualization of silhŏm did not yield a set of polished manifestos during its active years. Rather, it blossomed through the practice of making films. Using resources obtained from foreign cultural organizations, libraries, and other collectives, Khaidu's members taught themselves shooting and editing techniques. They chose 8mm and 16mm cameras over the standard 35mm film because of their affordability and portability. But their preference for the small-gauge format was also motivated by the desire to push the boundaries of conventional, theatrical cinema, characterized by the linear development of a story line and characters as well as seamless editing, among other features. Their earliest works demonstrate

how Khaidu wanted to shake up the existing film language and grammar. While the content of these films varied, the filmmakers were united in their intensive use of disjunctive editing and nonnarrative form.

A Hole (*Kumǒng*, 1974, 16mm, B&W), for example, begins with a naked woman and man and then jumps to trace the man escaping from a prison cell into the city. The man's restless wandering is accompanied by a soundtrack of breathing, ambient noise, jazz music, and silence, in which sound and images are layered into dissonance. At the film's end, the man returns to the cell. However, a lingering sound from the woman who appears in the opening shot leaves the film open ended. To the viewers, it remains thoroughly obscure who these people are, why the man escapes, or what the sound of breathing signifies. The film also embodies the director's physical, hands-on engagement with its material body. Using hand-held shots throughout, *A Hole* stresses—rather than erases, as conventional film tends to do—the subjectivity of the moviemakers' gaze and their relationship to the filmed object. Taken together, the nonlinearity, the shakiness, and the disjunction between image and sound all contribute to preventing the illusion of narrative linearity valued by mainstream filmmaking.

Another 16mm film, *Untitled* (*Muchè*, 1974, B&W), achieves a profound fusion of cinema and performance, collapsing the boundary between the screen and the real world. The film begins with a woman eating ice cream, and soon its space is expanded when the woman appears outside the frame as well. Until the end of the filmic time, she continues to eat both on- and off-screen. Outside the four-walled screen, the viewers are invited to see her handing them ice cream, interacting with them, and watching herself.¹⁵ This type of mixed-media work was not entirely new to Korean artists at the time. In 1970, the avant-garde artist Kim Kulim exhibited his *The Meaning of 1/24 Second* (*1/24ch'õi ÿimi*, 1969, 16mm color and B&W) as a backdrop to a performance that he staged with another artist, Jung Kangja.¹⁶ Considered the first work of "Korean avant-garde cinema," Kim's piece opened up a new tradition of expanded cinema, sprouting a series of other experiments in the following years.¹⁷ Drawing an idea from avant-garde art, Khaidu similarly pushed cinema into full dialogue with other media and, more important, invited the audience to ponder what constitutes the medium. Put differently, *Untitled* showcases not only the spontaneity and fluidity of intermedia work but also Khaidu's interest in blurring the traditional boundedness of cinema to provoke new questions about the medium.

Parallel to its experiment with the medium's boundaries, Khaidu's sense of filmmaking as feminist labor was pronounced, as shown in *OVER* (1974, 8mm, B&W). The film evokes what it meant to be a young woman in a world that ceaselessly objectified women and their bodies. In a frame divided horizontally into three parts, a young woman's eyes in close-up are located at the center, while the top and the bottom show selected sets of images: from an iconic pinup girl



FIGURE 9. *A Hole* (1974). Credit: Han Okhi.

in the advertisement to an image of an almost naked woman on a movie poster. The woman's eyes nervously glare at the camera, which captures her trapped between the images of hypersexualized women. Imprisoned by these objects of the male gaze, she endures discomfort, which is exaggerated by the annoying clicking sound that persists throughout the film. With this sequencing, *OVER* poignantly conveys how consistent the hegemonic representation of women has been in South Korean society.

The Khaidu members' critique of the mainstream media in *OVER* may have not resulted in a thorough conceptualization of feminism on their terms at the time, but it evolved through their search for new languages and platforms for women's self-expression and empowerment. This search, in many ways, necessitated their own reflection on their lived experience as women. The Khaidu members found themselves at odds not only with the pervasive depiction of women as sexual objects but also with the masculine culture that persisted even in the so-called alternative, countercultural film communities constructed around foreign institutions. Starting in the early 1970s, the French Cultural Institute and the Goethe-Institute organized regular film screenings of renowned European films that Korean audiences could not watch anywhere else.¹⁸ Visiting these institutions became routine for college students and cultural elites who wanted to distance themselves from most popular Korean and Hollywood commercial films. A fan of the French New Wave, Han Okhi discovered in cinema a potent

The inaugural festival took place in the spacious rooftop space of a department store in the heart of downtown, which filmmakers managed to rent for five evenings. At first, the idea of holding an open rooftop screening was seen as excessively wild, but filmmakers soon recognized the benefits of such an unconventional setting. Compared to theaters, the rental fee was minimal, thanks to a discount for using the space after hours. With the support of sponsors such as their neighborhood coffee shops, the filmmakers were easily able to cover the fee. Another advantage, perhaps bigger than the financial one, was the emancipatory possibility of demolishing the traditional relationship between the film and the audience staring at the screen.²⁰ Unlike most theatrical settings, which fixed the viewer into this mode of viewing, Khaidu's showcase allowed the viewers to move freely around the rooftop and socialize during the screening. The audience members could lounge in chairs, stand, or sit on the mat; they could chat with filmmakers while viewing the films. The biggest benefit for filmmakers turned out to be the enlarged opportunities for networking with other women who shared similar interests. They were able not only to receive immediate feedback on their work but also, surprisingly, to find comfort in other women's hunger for spaces where they could be seen and heard.

DEFINING WOMEN'S CINEMA

In Khaidu's next project, *silhöm* expanded to make salient the category of gender and gender hierarchy in all areas of inquiry and practice. This project was the Women and Cinema (*yösöngkwa yönghwasekye*) symposium. Held in a rented hall at the United States Information Services (USIS) library in Seoul on April 19, 1975, it foregrounded the collective's commitment to filmmaking about, by, and for women. The first public event of its kind on the theme in Korea, the symposium featured two programs. The first part included presentations and a roundtable. Reputable writers, such as Pyön Insik, Song Sukyöng, and Yi Oryöng, spoke about commercial cinema's depiction of women and the role of women artists in the society; the subsequent roundtable with two senior female filmmakers, Pak Namok and Hong Ünwön addressed structural discrimination against women in film industry. In the second part, Khaidu showcased their works in progress, including three 16mm films: *Nonetheless, We Need to Begin Again* (*Kürömedo urinün tashi shijakäeyahanda*, B&W); *75-13* (color and B&W); and *Three Mirrors* (*Segaeüi köul*, B&W).

The symposium centered on the issue of representation in both the political and aesthetic senses as the key to defining the purpose of women's cinema. Khaidu proposed to interrogate the image of woman by challenging the stereotyped images of women in Korean cinema and the structural problems that enabled such images. In the group's manifesto, published on the day of the symposium, it declared:

There is no woman in Korean cinema. There is no woman, even if Kyong-a [the heroine of *Heavenly Homecoming to Stars*] is called a “dream girl” that our society has lost. There is no woman, even if Yeong-ja [the heroine of another mega-hit film, *Yeongja's Heyday*] is said to have a happy ending. There is no woman, insofar as the state censor absurdly forced a change from the film's original title *Woman, Woman, Woman* (女女女), only because the three Chinese characters for “woman” combined (姦) mean adultery. There is no woman in Korean cinema, where the hostess films dominate under the deceptive slogan of “films for the International Women's Year.” There is no Agnès Varda calling for cinema as women's art. There is neither Jane Fonda nor Melina Mercouri looking back in anger around us. Therefore, with urgency, today we must seek the woman in question.²¹

Here Khaidu clearly rejects the figure of the woman in two of the most commercially successful films of the era: *Heavenly Homecoming to Stars* (dir. Yi Jangho, 1974) and *Yeongja's Heyday* (*Yongjaui chönsöngshidae*, dir. Kim Hosön, 1975). Widely celebrated as “hostess films”—with “hostess” generally meaning “prostitute”—these films feature young rural-urban migrant women, recently arrived in Seoul, who end up in brothels. Common to these and other hostess films is the tendency to depict the female protagonist as a sexual object through the lens of voyeurism. This strategy had the practical outcome of breaking box office records at a time dubbed the “dark age” of the industry. The genre's dominance is striking: at least one study reports that sex workers accounted for 87.5 percent of all female characters in Korean films produced from 1971 to 1979.²² Although this overwhelming number tells us little about the complexity of the individual characters or their narrative roles in each film, it certainly warrants Khaidu's critique that women were eroticized on the screen. The collective's criticism targeted not individual directors but the institutions that enabled the perpetuation of this depiction of women. Rather than comply with these institutions that normalized the objectification of woman, the Khaidu filmmakers intended to bring a sense of urgency to their commitment to changing it, urging the symposium participants to imagine a “woman.”

At this point, one might wonder whether the Western feminists mentioned in this manifesto provided Khaidu with a model for a “woman.” It is difficult, however, to estimate how the work of Varda, Fonda, and Mercouri influenced the South Korean filmmakers. Few of their works had traveled to South Korea, and even published Korean articles on these women paid scarcely any attention to their feminist activism and its generative impact.²³ But the Khaidu members were aware of the explosion of the women's liberation movement in the United States and other European countries. Han Sunae remembers the first time she learned about the influential figures of so-called second-wave feminism, including Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, in an ABC documentary aired via TBC, a South Korean broadcasting company.²⁴ She was impressed that her Western counterparts worked with the goal of social equality, with sexuality and reproductive rights being central concerns of the liberation movement. But this impression did not

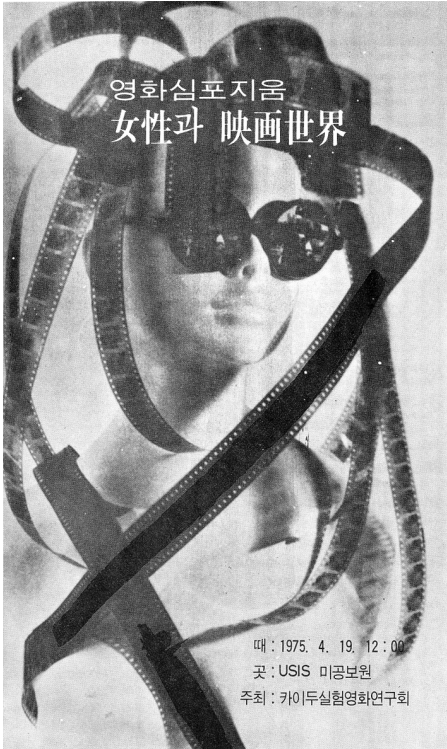


FIGURE 11. Cover of a symposium pamphlet. Credit: Han Okhi.

quite determine her collective's vision. To Han, the Western feminists' fight was "neither the exclusive origin of the [women's rights] movement nor its completion." Her negation of the Western feminist movement as a norm challenges the orientalist preconception that non-Western women needed to learn from their Western sisters, whose tradition of women's movements was allegedly richer. Although less documented and acknowledged outside their localities, South Korean women leaders and activists had also played a critical role in advocating for women's rights at the time. Since the mid-1960s, progressive church-based activist groups had supported the unionization of working-class women to improve working conditions, raise wages, and fight gender-based discrimination.²⁵ Moreover, Korean women across fields—whether they identified themselves as feminists per se—had fought fiercely for the reform of the family law that authorized men to be the heads of their families.²⁶ Through various campaigns and public education activities, they struggled to upend the patriarchal system that discriminated against women when it came to, for instance, inheriting property rights and securing child custody. While these movements were not specifically about the aesthetic representation of women, they spoke to Han more directly than those in the Western liberal sphere.

In this light, it makes more sense that the Western feminist movement that Han saw in the documentary did not necessarily appear as a model to follow but rather encouraged her to envision women and women's cinema on her own terms.²⁷

What could be, or should be, the “woman” in question, then? How did Khaidu's symposium make opportunities to articulate new visions of a “woman” and women's cinema? It should be noted here that Khaidu's call for a “woman” arrived at a juncture when the country was aggressively mobilizing women as developmental subjects in the service of the nation. Constructed by the official media and government-sponsored women's organizations, the developmental discourse on women confined their agency strictly to domesticity, motherhood, and productivity. Denouncing the women's liberation movement in the West, these institutions often accused its supporters of selfishly prioritizing gender equality over national development.²⁸ Perhaps the most succinct summary of this perspective can be found in the words of Congresswoman Sö Yönghui: “Women in developing countries must unite for development (palchön), not liberation (haepang).”²⁹

At least in the context of Khaidu's symposium, what was at stake was popular cinema's contribution to propagating this developmental discourse on women. Since its foundation in 1973, the Motion Picture Promotion Corporation had elevated cinema in the service of the state's anti-communist and nationalist agendas, while preventing anything deemed a hindrance to these goals from being shown in theaters. These measures significantly reinforced stereotypes of women in particular roles, such as industrious housewives and young workers in the service industry, whose worth was determined largely by their contribution to the nation or the lack thereof. For instance, *Parade of Wives* (*Anaetülüi hangjin*, dir. Im Kwon-taek, 1974), one of the films sponsored and heavily promoted by the government, focuses on a persevering woman marrying a man in a rural village that has been plagued by poverty and disease. Thanks to her spirit of self-reliance and hard work, the village soon turns into a prosperous and tidy place to live. The film presents the village as a successful model of Park Chung Hee's rural development plan, called “Saemaedul”—meaning “new village”—in contrast to the older village, characterized in the state's framework by stagnation. While promoting the plan and its promise, the film strongly endorses cooperative and productive women who dedicate their lives to their family, village, and country as model citizens.

In this climate, Khaidu's invitation to search for a “woman” demanded other ways to imagine women and their subjectivities on screen. On the dominant figures in the cinema of the era, Han Okhi comments: “Women were often portrayed as agentless in their lives . . . no control over their bodies, no desire to fight for themselves.”³⁰ There were, at least to Han, no women's voices in films like *Parade of Wives* and *Heavenly Homecoming to Stars*, the industry that produced them, or the policies that enabled their dominance. Her observation yields a certain notion of women's agency that prioritizes self-determination and freedom, while dismissing other expressions of agency; in so doing, she inevitably fails to acknowledge

her privilege as a college-educated woman whose opportunities were more bountiful than those of the urban poor and working-class women in these films. To acknowledge this, however, is not to downplay what she, the other Khaidu members, and the participants brought to the symposium: a rare and indispensable critique of the dominant convention in picturing women and the forces behind it. At least two speakers offered a reflection on the effect of mainstream media and advertising on body image, sex roles, and violence against women, which, in turn, fueled women's intervention in image-making during the discussion. The critic Yi Chinsöp, for instance, powerfully deconstructed a typology of images of women—an array of virgins, victims, and suffering mothers—and urged the industry members to listen to the diverse voices and experiences of women.

The screening of Khaidu's films following the discussion prompted more conversations about ways to complicate the objectification of women in cinema. In particular, the participants engaged with *Three Mirrors* regarding its strategy of challenging the prevailing erotization of women in cinema. The film upends the role of the male director who exploits a female actor's sexuality, including a naked female director turning the camera on a woman in clothes.³¹ In most films of the era, the male director's camera exposes the female protagonist's naked body—often with excessive use of close-ups—purportedly to entertain the audience, even when she is being raped or having intercourse. This portrayal of the woman as an eroticized subject is disrupted in *Three Mirrors* when the filmmakers, without a script, focus on two women looking at each other throughout the film. Tracing their synchronous interactions and body movements, the film presents women's reclamation of their space in a frame that was typically dominated by male protagonists who assumed the power to eroticize their counterparts. The journalist Kim Sönju, who attended the symposium, recounts how *Three Mirrors* opened something that did not yet exist. As she puts it: "Back then, [male] colleagues mindlessly applied the term 'yösöngyöngghwa' (women's film) to market commercial films that had nothing to do with woman's rights. . . . But when I saw Khaidu's film, something happened to me that I could not explain. There was not yet a feminist movement, but there was a feminist film."³² In the film, Kim saw the different figures of women who exercise their desire to see each other without being subjugated to others. These figures, who are not flattened into the stereotypes promoted by the state and the male-dominated industry, present themselves as who they are in the film.

Deconstructing the dominant representation of women, as Khaidu's manifesto proposed, necessitated a structural change in the film industry, which was a predominantly male-centered enterprise. In fact, its gatekeeping had long prevented women from building careers in cinema. To address this obstacle in public, Khaidu organized a roundtable, in which Pak Namok and Hong Ŭnwön spoke of their previously untold struggle. Pak, who has been credited with being the first woman to direct a Korean feature, revealed the constraints she faced in making her debut

The Widow (*Mimangin*, 1955), a film about a war widow's search for a career and love. During the film's production, Pak faced aggression targeting her as a female director at almost every stage, from the pettiness of male film workers to trouble financing her project. Even borrowing equipment or reserving recording rooms was extremely difficult for her, as most resources were under the control of male film workers.³³ Hong, known as the country's first female screenwriter, pushed through similar difficulties in making her debut, *Woman Judge* (*Yöpansa*, 1962), a film based on the first Korean female judge. Despite the film's success at the box office, Hong encountered numerous barriers to financing her subsequent projects, an experience that ultimately forced her to leave the film industry.³⁴ These women testified to the toll of cracking the glass ceiling of the field, stimulating honest and robust conversations among participants about the patriarchal system that pushed women to the edges.

Simultaneously, this roundtable opened a new dialogue on whether the filmmakers' identity as women could make an essential difference in cinematic language and expression, helping Khaidu members define and compare their own notion of women's filmmaking. This discussion and the production of *Three Mirrors*, in fact, produced a breakthrough in which the filmmakers reached a consensus that just because one is born a woman does not mean one automatically assumes a "natural" connection to other women.³⁵ To them, mediating other women's experiences would require a deeper connection that had to be built by both the filmmakers and the filmed object as well by as their relationship to technology. It would be through this connection that the viewer would recognize a politically and ethically different dynamic in women's cinema, that is, an expansive capacity of empathy that would come from an acknowledgment of the systemic oppression that bound filmmakers and others together. Han Sunae emphasizes this power of empathy as the basis for what constitutes women's cinema: "There was a strong sense that women's cinema must see the world through women's eyes." She continues: "Most men in our society would never be able to understand women's experience . . . [of] being regarded as an object. While looking at Kyong-a being raped and tortured by men in the film [*Heavenly Homecoming to Stars*], I had to close my eyes. I just could not look at the scene like others in the theater. How could you? The scene was full of pain that reminded me of the suffering of other women."³⁶

Han's refusal of the film that used another's pain to entertain did not happen simply because she identified as a woman. An imagination of women's cinema had to begin otherwise: it was Han's active noticing that made her attentive to their shared pain and its cause. Such attentiveness to the other's experience allowed her to guard against becoming complicit in the perpetuation of sexism and to imagine more dialogical relations to other women. By sensing violence while refusing to see it through the lens of objectification, the lens used by the

male director and viewers, Han resisted the forces that sustained sexism and its dominance in cinema.

Through the symposium, the Khaidu members realized what they wanted to do with cinema, namely, dream up new languages, new images, and new spaces that would help them deconstruct the old order and write the future—to be precise, a more just future for women and women artists. But they also found themselves caught in the difficulty of sustaining their nonprofit filmmaking and organizing. For the past two years, Khaidu members had managed to find sponsors for their public events while financing their own filmmaking in order to maintain their autonomy. This independent filmmaking nonetheless pushed them to face reality. Later in her 2004 interview, Kim Chömsön revealed why she had to stop making films after the symposium: “Filmmaking cost more than painting or performing. My mother had funded me over the years not because she was affluent but because she wanted me, unlike her, to pursue what I wanted. . . . I simply could not continue if I had to milk my mother again and again.”³⁷ Kim’s confession presents an acute recognition of what made her independent work possible: the inadvertent exploitation of another woman. While a concern with representation—in both the political sense and the aesthetic sense—had strongly united the four filmmakers up to this point, their search for a “woman” at the symposium seemed to leave them with more difficult questions than answers about their practice.

MOVING FORWARD

After a few months of hiatus, Khaidu returned with a new project in February 1976. Magazines spotlighted the group’s return with a “haep’üning,” a romanized term for “happening” that seems to have been borrowed from the American artist Allan Kaprow.³⁸ The happening as an art genre emerged in the US and Europe in the late 1950s and 1960s, and the term eventually became a flexible concept used to describe a wide array of performative pieces that combined visual and aural material. Since the early 1960s, South Korean artists had similarly been experimenting with the nature of art practice, going beyond sculpture and painting to introduce a blending of mediums. In the ensuing decade, a boom in intermedial art yielded an array of diverse forms of performance that spoke against the repressive and domineering social fabric.³⁹ Like their contemporaries, the Khaidu members turned to creating a multimedia project composed of daily objects and situations. Han Okhi recalls:

I read about artists like John Cage and Nam June Paik, but never saw their work at that time. I was close to several Korean painters and sculptures who were at the forefront of the avant-garde movement, and we were all interested in blurring the boundaries between art and life. We called most experimental performances

“happenings,” and I saw them roughly as an expression of creative ideas that could only be conveyed via an action. It was difficult to pin down what a happening really is. This difficulty hooked us.⁴⁰

As is the case with most other happenings, little documentation has been left of Khaidu’s performance, which took place near the Cheongnyangni Station, one of the busiest areas of Seoul. A magazine article provides some description of the performance:

Three masked women walked through the flood of people. And a woman in a shamanic costume danced, holding a bell and a knife just like a real shaman using them to drive out evil spirits during a ritual ceremony. Calling up the spirits of the dead that inhabited the world, the shaman circled and turned hypnotically. When an old lady among the crowd chanted after the shaman, the shaman’s movement became more intense, as if she were encountering those spirits.⁴¹

In addition to this detail, the article notes that the performance was set to commemorate the victims of the massive fire that had occurred at Taewang Corner, a large shopping mall in the area.⁴²

Another look at the performance, in close dialogue with the performers, offers a different story. The article provides little information about the format of the happening. In fact, it was through interviews with the artists that I was able to ascertain that the film was part of their performance. Han Sunae states: “Cinema played a pivotal role in conceiving the idea for the happening, and we brought a Bolex to document what was happening on site and how we and the audience members were interacting, not just what we were doing.”⁴³ The magazine’s description is also disputed by the memory of a professional actor, Kim Tongju, who played the shaman as a guest performer: “The shamanic ritual began with a commentary on the unfortunate deaths. But the whole thing was not about them.”⁴⁴ She and two other performers danced to the sound of a drum and a stringed instrument while encouraging the audience to stamp to the sound. Kim recalls: “From the beginning, our commanding presence created a palpable air of curiosity among the audience. Most people there did not even notice that we were performing. But they were mesmerized by us.” Following the opening, Kim recited a poem, written by one of Khaidu’s founders, Yi Chŏnghŭi. It reads:

a young girl, upon becoming pregnant after rape, hangs herself
 on a cold night; the dawn has not yet come
 hard to tell how many yards of cloth were used to wrap around the abdomen
 her pure and precious body
 has been wrecked by a gray wolf during the dark night
 aigo, aigo, it is terribly sad.

The poem targets both physical violence inflicted by “a gray wolf” and the symbolic violence that forced the woman to hide her body from the social stigma

surrounding pregnancy in unmarried women. During the performance, this evocative critique of violence against women was delivered several times. No one in the audience asked whose story it was or why it was narrated multiple times, but Khaidu's telling of this woman's story transmitted her suffering to others. Kim discloses: "I did not just memorize the lines. I was so affected that I could play with anger and sorrow in my gut. I wanted to comfort her spirit as if I were a genuine shaman." For more than an hour, Kim slowly but surely sensed the affirmative energy of others responding in empathy, listening with patience, and chanting the interjective expression "aigo, aigo," which encapsulated complex emotions from frustration to sadness.

Combining film, theater, music, happening, and poetry, Khaidu's 1976 project embodied a radical openness that expanded its earlier *silhöm*—it extended the boundaries not only of cinema but also of women's representation. This performance met its audience at a time when the pro-choice group's efforts to legalize abortion had faced pushback from local conservative and religious groups. Soon after Khaidu's happening, the National Assembly suspended its consideration of the revision of the anti-abortion law in the name of protecting "public morals."⁴⁵ Speaking to this moment, Khaidu's project permitted the unjust burden imposed upon women to be seen and heard in the street. During the performance, the performers did not precisely name the oppression in question as a product of patriarchy and hypermasculinity. However, the performers initiated an act of solidarity in artistic response to the injustice against women in their society. Members of the audience joined the act by listening to the story, by answering in their murmuring of "aigo," and by standing with the performers. Together, they enacted the embodied memory of women living in a culture of deeply rooted sexual violence and stigmatization, ultimately widening the stage to the street. Han Okhi recalls: "The march [on the populated street called Mangwu-ro] was never planned. It was a response from the audience that moved us [the performers] to walk with them. We marched for about an hour."⁴⁶

Khaidu's happening also disturbed, albeit temporarily, the authoritarian state and its normalized control of public space. The group began the performance an hour before the monthly defense drill that forced the entire country to stop for about half an hour. No exception was granted in this shutdown mandated by the state's farcical mission of protecting society from the threat of communists. The police officers, "arming themselves with batons," were prepared to arrest anyone who defied the mandatory drill and eventually put an end to Khaidu's performance.⁴⁷ However, the Khaidu members resumed their performance for another hour, until the police arrested Han Okhi and Yi Chõnghũi for violating the traffic laws, which mandated any public activity on the road be preapproved by the police.⁴⁸ This was not the first time they had run afoul of the police: they had been detained on exactly the same grounds at the previous day's rehearsal. Despite being warned and fined, the members insisted on proceeding with the

performance the next day.⁴⁹ By insisting on their presence in this way, they essentially reappropriated public space as a shared space that belonged to citizens, not exclusively to the state.

. . .

Following the 1976 happening, Khaidu paused its collective activity and officially disbanded a year later. As they moved forward, these still-young women carried on the struggle on their own terms. Han Okhi moved to Germany in 1980 to study film and continued to experiment with unconventional filmic expression. Han Sunae broke the glass ceiling of the broadcasting industry, becoming one of the very few women TV producers in the country. Yi Chǒnghŭi worked as a teacher and writer, struggling to remain attentive to those at the margins of society. Finally, Kim Chǒmsŏn expanded her horizons through painting, performance, and writing until her death in 2009. During their short yet vital existence as a group, none of them quite believed that their work would dismantle the status quo, but they knew they must continue doing it. Individually and collectively, they reckoned with the conditions of unjust representation of women in cinema as both a field of artistic representation and a field of labor.

Khaidu pursued feminist experimental cinema many years before the arrival and subsequent discussion of terms like “experimental cinema” in South Korea. The political potential the Khaidu members saw in other kinds of cinema informed the ways alternative modes were discussed in the coming decades. As the next chapter investigates, the 1980s saw more efforts to politicize the small-gauge, independent cinema that sprouted up across college campuses. In the following decade, during the country’s democratic transition, various film initiatives facilitated the process of decentralizing the state’s power and diversifying the film community. The term “experimental cinema” gained currency later in the 1990s, with a surge of film clubs, cinematheques, and video archives across big cities. The boom in new spaces for alternative cinema prompted numerous screenings of foreign, “classical” avant-garde films and videos, including the work of Fluxus, and gave rise to a range of film festivals, such as the Experimental Film and Video Festival in Seoul (EXiS).⁵⁰

Khaidu’s legacy also lies in its politicization of cinema as a medium for feminist visions in 1970s South Korea. The young filmmakers made and exhibited their work at a time when women artists rarely had a platform of their own, and no radical discourse on women’s liberation was ever approved for publication. Their pursuit of other cinema continued in the next generation’s film discourse and practice, which have been broadly termed “cine-feminism.” Later, in 1989, Paritŏ, a women’s film collective of young critics and graduate students, produced several 16mm documentary films on working-class women, such as *Even Little Grass Has Its Own Name* (*Chakŭn p’uredo irŭm issŭni*, 1990). Although not long-lived, it collaborated closely with grassroots women’s organizations and presented a feminist

model of solidarity through its filmic rendition of urgent issues such as childcare and discrimination at work.⁵¹ In less than five years, a group of filmmakers and scholars took the lead in the cine-feminism movement, from translating Western feminist theory and organizing the Seoul International Women's Film Festival (SIWFF) to demanding fairer representation of women artists.⁵²

To bring Khaidu's *silhöm* for an alternative cinema into our time is not to romanticize the short-lived collective. More than four decades after Khaidu's debut, the members still alive in 2017 and 2018 watched a younger generation of women in South Korea and abroad break the silence about sexual violence in unprecedented ways. Emboldened by these women's courageous demands for change, many South Koreans began to acknowledge the structural misogyny that remained unshakable at every level of their lives. The surviving Khaidu members found the so-called #MeToo movement relevant and empowering.⁵³ Yet they also saw the younger women as burdened with a long-postponed task of their own. Han Sunae regretfully admits: "Look at the girls in the street to abolish the Anti-abortion Law and women film workers breaking the silence. . . . These things should have happened back in the 1970s, not today. If we had been able to change, none of this would have happened in 2017 and 2018, don't you agree?"⁵⁴

Her question feels weighty. In today's film culture and beyond, many women's experiences of systemic oppression are still silenced and even denied. It was only in 2018 that the Center for Gender Equality in Korean Cinema (*Han'guky ōnghwasōngp'yōngdūngsentō*) was launched to raise consciousness about the structural issues in the field. In response to the new wave of feminist activism that has swept the country, women film workers—in both the mainstream and independent sectors—have organized themselves to redress the lack of female voices in cinema; an emerging group of younger self-identified feminists across all industries has demanded justice in areas from salary differences to everyday bias against women.⁵⁵ Notwithstanding these much-needed voices, the field is still strikingly hypermasculine and misogynistic. According to the Center for Gender Equality in Korean Cinema, despite the recent increase in the number of women working in the industry, only about ten percent of features were directed by women, and more than three-quarters of leading cast and crew roles went to men. Worse yet, more than seventy percent of women in the film business experienced sexual harassment in 2019–20.⁵⁶ Han Sunae's frustration feels contagious at a moment when a more just and equitable future for women seems too far away. Where do we go from here to imagine a future where no woman is marginalized? If anything can be learned from Khaidu, it is that we need to experiment in every possible way to push against all forms of oppression, whether of ourselves or of others. The power they saw in radicalizing cinema and women's voices asks us to return with them to a moment of profound intervention. And that invitation itself can be a marker of hope, something we can grasp as we move forward from our difficult present.

Toward a New Cinema

The Seoul Film Collective's Aesthetic and Political Subversion

In April 1980, the Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation, a state-run organization with the mission of facilitating the consumption of domestic cinema, faced unpleasant survey results. Among 680 college students, fewer than one percent of the respondents found Korean cinema appealing, and only nineteen percent anticipated that Korean cinema would flourish in the future.¹ These results must have frustrated those at the state institution, but it was no secret that the industry had gone downhill throughout the previous decade. The domestic film market had seen a significant decrease in audience members, from 170 million viewers in 1969 to 98 million in 1979. The number of movies produced per year also declined from its peak of 229 in 1969 to 100 in 1979.² Filmmakers identified the state's regulation of cinema as the biggest source of their decade-long struggle. In a roundtable organized in July 1979, the veteran filmmaker Kim Su-yong lamented: "In this country, cinema, the most democratic genre of arts, has been subjected to the awfully undemocratic film policy."³ True, the stricter film policy of the Yusin era had aggravated the downfall of domestic film, but Kim missed another crucial factor here: the increased accessibility and nationwide diffusion of a new medium, television. Household ownership of television sets in the country increased dramatically from two million in 1969 to fifty-nine million in 1979; in Seoul, the country's capital city, 92.7 percent of households owned a television set by the end of the decade. No one could deny that the film industry seemed to have lost the competition against the expanding television network that lured moviegoers with entertaining programs such as daytime and nighttime soap operas and variety shows.

The industry's struggle would likely astonish many of today's South Korean film aficionados at home and abroad who have enjoyed the country's domestic and

international successes since the early twenty-first century. However, it came as no surprise to young Korean film enthusiasts of the time. The members of the Seoul Film Collective (Söulyöngchwachipdan, hereafter SFC) were among them. After beginning as a small university film club called Yallasyöng in 1979, a group of cinephiles formed a collective to make their own films in 1982. Among the SFC's members were Pak Kwangsu, Kim Hong-joon, Song Nünghan, and Hong Kisön, who later directed commercial films that are considered part of the Korean New Wave of the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁴ Together with others who joined the club later, like Kim Myöngjun and Pae Injöng, these SFC members set out to imagine a new cinema ("saeroun yönghwa") that would oppose and subvert what the older cinema—commercial and state-sanctioned films—presented.

The collective's aspirations for a more radical kind of cinema blossomed during and immediately after the so-called Seoul Spring, the short period under the interim government. To them, Park Chung Hee's abrupt death in October 1979 signaled an end to nearly two decades of his autocratic rule, which was poetically captured in the metaphor of the Winter Republic.⁵ Amid the shock of the nation, they witnessed campuses and streets slowly but surely fill with unleashed hopes for the arrival of spring in every corner of society. In less than two months, these hopes were dashed when General Chun Doo-hwan and his fellows declared martial law. While using their military power to take over the interim administration, they brutally cracked down on the prodemocratic protests that were spreading across the country. Their most notorious suppression took the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians in Gwangju, a regional capital in the southwest.⁶ The military-controlled media aggressively framed the peaceful protesters and others who stood up to protect themselves against the randomly exercised violence as "rebels" and "mobs" who threatened the community's well-being and safety. Against this deceitful frame, witnesses and journalists on site strove to reveal the truth that the state-controlled media was silencing. Yet their efforts were almost immediately met by the military power's complete ban on broadcasts, publications, and even public speech about Gwangju. It was this regulation and manipulation of media that aggravated what the SFC identified as a crisis of representation, one that urged them to select an affordable 8mm camera to document what rarely appeared in the mainstream media operating under the wing of the state.

This sense of crisis shaped each member's idea of what should and could be shown in a new cinema in varying ways. As Seung-hoon Jeong aptly observes, the SFC's vision of a new cinema was neither thoroughly nor uniformly conceptualized during its formative time.⁷ It should be noted, however, that the propagated framing of Gwangju, not to mention the brutality of state violence, opened the eyes of SFC members and others on campus. Any evidence of the atrocities that had become unrepresentable in the media—reports, pictures, and videos secretly circulated among underground circles—evoked humiliation and even guilt about their powerlessness. Indeed, the unrepresentable Gwangju compelled numerous

college students to use their privilege to fight against the military power and its destruction of democracy, seeing their ability as elites to speak about and act on the injustice as an issue of conscience (“yangsim”). According to Namhee Lee, Gwangju became not only a “historical burden” to many students and intellectuals but also a “point of departure” for the so-called minjung movement, that is, aesthetic, intellectual, and social activism anchored to the power and potential of the “people (minjung).”⁸ Despite their fear about the repercussions of their actions, the SFC members were also drawn to imagine a new kind of cinema that would serve the people under oppression, not the oppressor.

This chapter traces how the SFC’s creation of a new cinema began in this complex interplay of the members’ interest in radical film practices, their national mediascape, and the social and political atmosphere. Through their making and showing of films, the SFC members experimented with enacting new relationships to the filmed object, technology, and their audience. In so doing, they allowed diverse voices from the margins of society to enter the domain of representation, activating the possibility of a counter-history that challenges the dominant representation of the poor. The SFC’s search for a new cinema also generated a vision for the alternative distribution and exhibition of nonprofit films like theirs—what they called “small film” (“chakün yŏnghwa”). Their notion of small film literally meant a smaller format, such as 8 and 16mm, but also distinguished itself from “big” commercial cinema. Apart from the mainstream industry, the collective attempted to build a more inclusive and organic network that would connect many participants in filmmaking and viewing while also modeling new kinds of media coverage of the “people” and formations of democratic resistance. Despite its short life, spanning less than five years in its initial formation, the collective reconfigured cinema to undermine the hegemonic capitalist media system, imagining more radically democratic futures for film and its community.

NEW PRINCIPLES OF FILMMAKING

Before discussing the SFC’s films, I will describe who made up the collective and what brought them together. Born in the early postwar years, the SFC members belonged to the generation whose adolescence and early adulthood spanned the military rule of Park Chung Hee. They grew up seeing police officers in plainclothes almost everywhere. They were told that it was not only protesters who risked detention and arrest, but also anyone who read books or watched films that were considered “suspicious” by the police. Early in college, they tended to identify as political moderates rather than radicals, viewing street protests as an activity in which only the latter engaged. Remaining distant from protests was also a practical choice, as most members, particularly those from the lower class, faced pressure to get a stable job upon graduation and support their family. Although some had started to make films even before college thanks to their relative economic advantage, most members had no previous experience of filmmaking before joining the collective.⁹

What united them was their social status as students at Seoul National University, the country's most prestigious college. Their higher-education background made it easier for them to find well-paying part-time jobs like private tutoring that allowed them to save time and money for their film work. They could obtain books about how to use film cameras from the black market, secondhand foreign bookstores, and college libraries—resources they used to familiarize themselves with film-making.¹⁰ Living in Seoul, the largest metropolis of the country, they also enjoyed significantly more social capital relative to people in other areas of the country. Founding members such as Kim Hong-joon frequented foreign cultural centers in downtown Seoul, where they could watch and discuss European and American arthouse films that most Koreans did not have access to at the time.

However, neither their political orientation nor their privilege shielded them from the harsh realities of the early 1980s. Sending troops and tanks to Gwangju was only the beginning of the military power's ruthless oppression of civilians. Even before Chun Doo-hwan endorsed himself as the new president in March 1981, the military leaders quickly consolidated their power base and took the media under their control. In November 1980, sixty-four newspapers and broadcasting companies were either forced to shut down or were merged into eighteen state-sanctioned organizations.¹¹ Meanwhile, the state regulation of cinema continued, yet its approach to sexual content appeared to be more liberal than in the previous decade. As part of the "3S policy" (Sex, Sports, and Screen), the regime's investment in entertainment aimed to divert the public attention from politics to eroticism.¹² Filmmakers began to seek respite in the so-called ero genre—with depictions of partial nudity and the inclusion of sexual themes—in hopes of bringing audiences back to domestic cinema.¹³ Soft pornography films such as *Madame Aema* (*Aemapuin*, 1982, dir. Chŏng Inyŏp) became box office hits and gave rise to the boom of ero films. While this genre became a temporary relief for those in the dwindling industry, its proliferation attested, at least on the surface, to the success of the regime's policy that appropriated cinema to shape depoliticized consumers.

When the dominant media seemed to comply with the regime's policy, the SFC members insisted on their own agency in transforming cinema into a medium of documentation and a platform of civic participation. In one of their unpublished manifestos, they declared:

Cinema has the right to participate in the world. Film must not be used as a mere tool of propaganda. When film speaks to the audience, the audience has agency to figure out what is true or wrong. Even when film serves the purpose of propaganda, it, as an audiovisual technology, still documents a piece of reality that can bear the truth of society. One's participation in society with cinema thus can begin with a [new] documentation practice that delivers the truth to the audience.¹⁴

To tap into cinema's ability to document and speak the truth, the collective had to challenge what it saw as a crisis of representation augmented by the existing power and its instrumentalization of cinema. To the collective, signs of the crisis

did not emerge only from the media's silencing of Gwangju or the boom of ero film. They seemed ubiquitous when it came to representation of the marginalized in the capitalistic society. Mainstream media rarely showed the experiences of those who led precarious lives, and when it did, they typically appeared as passive victims of the state's modernization or examples of pastoral purity. This sentimentalization of the poor can be seen, for instance, in *A Small Ball Shot by a Dwarf* (*Nanjangiga sson chakün kong*, 1982, dir. Yi Wönse), a film based on a realistic novel by Cho Se-hüi. The original text illustrates the struggle of a dwarf and his family as they are evicted by the government's new urban planning in the name of "regeneration," navigating the complex desires of the characters as they are torn between the agony of poverty and fantasies of social mobility.¹⁵ The film, however, flattens this complexity by portraying these evictees as helpless victims of urbanization. Similarly, popular television shows simplified the lives of the dispossessed. The television series *Pastoral Diary* (*Chönwönilgi*), which first aired in October 1980, portrays farmers and their families as united under the state's promise of a bright future for a rural area. Despite its unprecedented in-depth portrait of a rural community, the farming villages are depicted as both resourceful and cooperative enough to resolve any trouble, even structural problems such as the unstable rice market.

The SFC members viewed this crisis of representation as a mirror of the logics of the state and market that restricted the parameters of the sensible, or what Jacques Rancière terms the "distribution of the sensible."¹⁶ Restricting what could be seen and heard, the powerful prevented nonnormative voices and perspectives from claiming their space in the realm of representation. To disrupt this crisis, the filmmakers believed their practices had to be distinctly different from those of the mainstream media. Similar to Khaidu, discussed in the previous chapter, the SFC prioritized the equal participation of "multiple authors," with no single author governing the others.¹⁷ They also advocated small-budget filmmaking over the commercial, industrialized production mode. Denouncing the alliance of the major corporate media companies and the political regime, the filmmakers considered it essential to be independent of external support in order to document society. Last but not least, they sought to challenge the grammar and language of commercial cinema by rejecting seamless editing, linear pacing, and a high density of incidents—all elements they saw as reinforcing the conventional media's narrative structure and style.

The SFC's first film, *P'annori Arirang* (1982, 8mm, color), demonstrates its early exploration of these principles. The film is a short but highly experimental documentation of a folk performance called "madanggük," which features the lives of the marginalized in song, dance, and dialogue. Four of the SFC members—Pak Kwangsu, Kim Hong-joon, Mun Wönlip, and Hwang Kyutök—chipped in on the production and collaborated on planning, shooting, and editing. Together, they recorded the pre-stage preparation, the performance, the audience's response, and the dialogue between performers and critics in the post-stage phase.¹⁸ With its

camera in constant motion, its unsynchronized sound and images, and the filmmakers' active engagement with audience members, the film presents the SFC's experimental articulation of a unique film language.

At its beginning, *P'annori Arirang* invites us to a series of still photographs of the stage. This scene appears in disjunction with the sound of the climax of the theatrical piece, when performers and their audiences sing a popular folk song, "Arirang."¹⁹ This dissonance of the image and the sound is expanded in the following scene. This time, the camera takes us to a pre-stage scene of performers preparing for the show, integrating more nondiegetic sounds of the rehearsal; as we see performers changing costumes, practicing instruments, and dancing, we listen to a part of the stage where they play their characters. The disjunctive construction of filmic space continues through a longer sequence in which we see a few fragments of the stage scene while being introduced to the voices of audience members, taken from an off-stage interview with the filmmakers. The diegetic dissonance is resolved for the first time in the film when performers, audiences, and filmmakers appear in harmony. This is a climactic moment that nicely captures the dynamic movement of all on stage; the performers and audience members dance along with the traditional instruments and with the camera. The final scene returns to the dissonance of sounds and images, showing the stage photos overlapping with the performers' post-stage reflections in voice-over.

Not meant to be a rigorous documentation of the performance staged by a prominent Yŏnwu theater, *P'annori Arirang* focuses on translating the ethos of madanggŭk, typically performed in open areas called "madang," into the language of cinema. This translation entails the filmmakers' deliberate engagement with the manifold borders between sound and image, media, and social relations of performers and their audiences (the filmed object) as well as filmmakers. Throughout the film, the camera fluidly moves along with the performers and the audience members, refusing to be bound to any specific space or object. The unconventional audiovisual components constantly intervene in a viewing experience that differs strikingly from the experience of most conventional films, where a harmonious synchronization of sound and visuals is backed by a linear narrative style.

All these formal experiments, as Young-a Park notes, resonate with the principle of "open cinema," a notion of alternative cinema proposed by the renowned young playwright Chang Sŏnu [Jang Sun-woo] (who later became one of the important filmmakers of the late 1980s and the 1990s).²⁰ As opposed to the closed nature of narrative cinema, he suggests that the openness and communality of madanggŭk be merged with the cinematic medium.²¹ One of the most important ways *P'annori Arirang* realizes his vision is the film's destabilization of the diegetic illusion that invites the viewers to actively engage with what is shown and what is heard throughout. For spectators accustomed to the dominant media, the film's anomalous representation of the events could be surprising or shocking. Viewing in a mainstream media setting, as Rancière warns, not only inscribes but also normalizes a fixed position of viewers in relation to the camera, often with the assumption that the viewer is a

passive receiver of what the camera shows.²² *P'annori Arirang* unsettles the viewers' position. Its strategic intervention in the progression of the filmed events, most notably in its disjunctive images and sounds, asks the audience members to engage with the construction of both performance and film. It is this display of construction that enables viewers to take part in the creative process that, according to Chang, goes beyond what is shown on the screen. This participation did not involve a large audience: the SFC held only small, local screenings. Nonetheless, this should not lead us to dismiss the dialogical relationship of filmmakers and viewers that *P'annori Arirang* initiates: from this point on, creating this relationship became a pillar of its practice, regardless of topics and formats of the collective's work.

FILMING THE MARGINALIZED

Between 1984 and 1986, the SFC increased its collaborative output, including film production and publication. As the founding members left campus upon their graduation, the remaining collective members welcomed new faces. Together they produced several mid-length 8mm films, including *That Summer* (*Kū yōrūm*, 1984, color), *Water Tax* (*Surise*, 1984, color), and *Bluebird* (*Parangsae*, 1986, color), experimenting with the norms of both documentary and feature films. Their second publication, *On Film Activism* (*Yōnghwaundongron*, 1985), also came out. As its title indicates, the book reflects the collective's growing interest in politicizing their film practice. The book includes the SFC's translations of several manifestos from Latin America, including Glauber Rocha's "Aesthetic of Hunger" (1965), Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's "Towards a Third Cinema" (1969), and Jorge Sanjinés's "Problems of Form and Content in Revolutionary Cinema" (1976).²³ Common to the authors of these manifestos is their dedication to what they called "third cinema"—one conceived in opposition to both Hollywood and European arthouse cinema, which served the hegemonic system built only for the wealthy and the elite in the West. Regardless of the differences in their style and process, they aimed to film the lives of the oppressed under capitalism and imperialism, supporting national liberation movements in their countries and regions. Although the SFC members had few opportunities to watch works by third cinema advocates at the time, the sheer presence of a counter-hegemonic film movement in other parts of the world demonstrated the possibility of a new cinema that could be realized in their hands.²⁴ Despite the temporal and geographical distance, the Korean filmmakers were in sync with these radicals in the southern hemisphere when it comes to the imperative of transforming cinema into a medium in the service of the people at the bottom, not the top, of the extant system.

The SFC found a viable model of radical cinema in third cinema, but its realization was more complicated than the collective had anticipated. Practically, filmmakers needed to sort out the challenges of the guerrilla mode of filmmaking, characterized by extremely low budgets, skeleton crews, and limited props. What



FIGURE 12. In an assemblage of still and moving images of the stage performance, *P'annori Arirang* (1982) incorporates the voices of the audience members being interviewed by the filmmakers. Credit: Korean Film Archive.

hit the filmmakers harder than these challenges seems to have been the growing awareness of their own elitism as a barrier to filming the marginalized. In a reflection on the SFC's practice, one filmmaker admitted that he had to unlearn his "naïve" assumption that he could speak *for* the farmers during production of *Water Tax*, as this assumption was substantially challenged by the farmers who could express themselves very well without mediation from the "elite" like himself.²⁵ This kind of recognition led the filmmakers to face their hypocrisy in having assumed that they were the subjects of knowledge production while, albeit unwittingly, discrediting those filmed. Without working against their own hidden assumptions about their filmed object, it appeared "almost meaningless" to imagine a new cinema: for whom would it be a new cinema if it continued to objectify—and commodify—the marginalized just as the dominant media did?²⁶

In many ways, *Water Tax* (1984) answers this question. A film about the farmers who were struggling against the government's tax system, it goes against the typical dynamic of the documentary in which filmmakers position themselves as speaking for the "other" while positioning the filmed as receivers of the documenting. The filmmakers spent a significant amount of time with the peasants and participated in the daily activities in the farming community.²⁷ In this process, they prepared themselves to experiment with a mode of filmmaking that entailed making cinema *with* farmers and their families, as collaborators, not as objects. To them, enacting this mode was essential to a new cinema that would disrupt the state power, whose control of mainstream media prevented many stories of marginalized subjects from being told.

The film skillfully pieces together voice-over, pictures, footage, and interviews to demonstrate the community's collective action as its members seek to pay their taxes, in the absence of sufficient cash, with products. In its opening sequence, we can see that farmers in the early 1980s who were taking on crippling debt called for the government to support prices that would cover their production costs. Soon we learn that the sources of their struggle were manifold: the increasing numbers of cheap American imports in the local market had threatened local farmers; the government's policy had provided no protection for local products; and a handful of regime-friendly corporations had manipulated the marketplace, pushing down the prices paid to farmers and driving them out of business.²⁸ In its careful contextualization of these challenges, the film reveals a powerful story that was otherwise excluded or distorted in the mainstream media: the farmers were forming county-level organizations to protest the government's top-down policy that favored the US and big businesses, ultimately seeking to democratize the agricultural sector.

As a result, *Water Tax* presents a rich reservoir of the voices of the farmers. In contrast to the dominant media's sentimentalization of farmers, *Water Tax* also accentuates the peasants' agency. The filmmakers deliberately refrained from taking their traditional positions while focusing on the ordinary farmers and their actions. We can find this dynamic in the filmmakers' limited usage of voice-over narration and in their existence out of the diegesis so that the farmers could govern the realm of representation without interruption. The film portrays the peasants as savvy and active political agents who refuse to simply wait for the government's actions to affect them. Such images of peasants challenge the constant denial of their struggle—whether the denial was expressed through physical crackdowns on their protests or through the mis- or underrepresentation of their real lives and the issues affecting their well-being in the national media. In parallel, the film documents the rural landscape without dramatization. Throughout the film, the pastoral landscape is not used to show that the rural community is peaceful and bountiful, as in the popular media. Rather, it is invited to dismantle the stereotypical image: we hear the voice-over of the protesters in their struggle against economic injustice and are led to understand their common history and cultural identity rooted in the land and its past. The fluid movement from character to character and the blending of diverse discourses (common slang, folk songs, popular rhymes) also suggest the community's textured complexity, refusing to reduce it to nationalist imagery.

The SFC's 1986 film *Bluebird*, a fictive documentary about a rural family's struggle, similarly weaves diverse materials—newspaper clips, photographs, and folk songs—into a people's history. Following long shots that pan across the landscape, we are introduced to the life of the family, and soon the film reveals each family member amid difficulties: the poor parents cannot pay their son's tuition, and they are forced to send their eldest daughter to work in a city as a bus guide for less



FIGURE 13. *Water Tax* (1984) interweaves the daily rituals of the farmers and the memories of their protest against the government. Credit: Korean Film Archive.

than minimum wage. When the daughter becomes ill and needs surgery, the father decides to sell their only cow as a last resort. Yet the falling domestic beef prices leave him with nothing but devastation, as the money from the cow's sale will not be enough to pay his daughter's medical bills. Then the camera abruptly shifts to a close-up of a dying bluebird on the soil, lingering on the body, head, and leg. The dramatic percussion sound grows until the father, throwing aside his sickle, strides toward the community-based march against the government. The film ends with a collage of photographs documenting the actual protests of farmers, their banners and slogans, and their confrontation with the police and local government.

Bluebird emphasizes the continued struggle of peasants in reference to the 1894 Tonghak Uprising, in which impoverished peasants resisted the government's unjust exploitation on an unprecedented scale. The film opens with a folk song, "Parangsae," that is said to have been sung during the rebellion, with its lyrics: "Bird, bird, blue bird, dare not sit on the mungbean patch; if the mungbean blossom fails the beancurd seller will leave in tears." Mungbean is said to have been the nickname of the uprising leader Chon Pongjun, and with the good wishes for the mungbean in the lyrics, the song implies the peasants' support for the Tonghak Uprising. In her analysis of the uprising's symbolic meaning in the 1980s social movement, Chungmoo Choi points to the song's contemporary

resonance with the devastation of rural economies.²⁹ The struggle of the rural community in the 1980s is represented as a beaucratic seller in the last verse, who is “so precarious that one crop failure may force him to leave his land.” Using the song to evoke the peasants’ past struggles against poverty and oppression, *Bluebird* establishes its critique of the unending exploitation in its filmic time. When the film parallels the resistance in these two temporalities through the symbolism of the dying bluebird, it poignantly alludes to a longer history of peasant exploitation and resistance, and in so doing, positions the contemporary farmers’ movement in dialogue with this history.

Creating a rich portrait of the ongoing struggle proved to be a collective effort on multiple levels. The filmmakers were touched by stories of the resilient peasants published in the periodical of the Korean Catholic Farmers Association, a progressive religious organization for rural activism. Thanks to this organization, they made contact with a local community in the North Cholla province and eventually worked with its members.³⁰ But their mode of production—collaboration *with* the farmers—had to be radicalized. One of the filmmakers, Yi Hyoin, remembers: “When we wrote the script for *Bluebird* based on the stories we learned from the community, we told the farmers, ‘This film will be shown to other farmers who have also struggled with the government’s lack of commitment to rural communities.’”³¹ However, it was not this promise that paved the way for the community’s collective endorsement and participation. The filmmakers instead were invited to learn how to work with the farmers. For instance, they earned the support of the community members throughout a filmmaking process that invoked the rural tradition of shared labor (“p’umatsi”), in which the community worked together to harvest the crops. The filmmakers’ participation in the community, under the guidance of its leaders, substantially shaped the entire dynamic of the production. The filmmakers bore much of the decision-making responsibility for shooting and editing, but the farmers, as both sources of local knowledge and protagonists of the film, codetermined, for instance, where to shoot and when to stop, as well as who could play which part.

In this sense, the filmmakers and community members cocreated the content of the film: a story of the actively resistant farmers that had hitherto been unheard and undocumented. This collaboration with the farming community also structured the film’s exhibition. After the premiere in the town where the film was shot, the community leaders helped contact other village leaders who were likewise burdened by the government’s unfavorable tax system. The screenings in other areas often led to informal town hall meetings that raised awareness about self-denigration and encouraged the viewers to conclude that change had to start in their own lives and communities.³²

As shown in *Water Tax* and *Bluebird*, the SFC’s work intervened in the conventional media’s silencing of the manifold struggle of the peasantry at that time. The filmmakers rejected the existing power relations that framed the peasants as embodiments of pastoral peace or impotent victims. Instead, the filmmakers



FIGURE 14. Close-up of the head of a bluebird at the climax (left) and a picture integrated into the collage that attests to the persistent struggle of peasants (right) in *Bluebird* (1986). Credit: Korean Film Archive.

portrayed them as oppressed by a social condition and yet fully capable of representing themselves, and in the end, as agents of their own destiny. *Water Tax* generates a unique picture of the rural community by bringing an otherwise unrepresented farmers' protest and its vital community culture together on the screen. *Bluebird* offers a constructive site in which an underrepresented present and a forgotten past come together to claim space in the realm of representation. With its recognition of the dispossessed as agentic participants in both filmmaking and local politics, the SFC transformed the cinematic space into a generative site where neglected representations, memories, and experiences were permitted to assume their own forms of expression.

I find the power of this transformation in what is offered by what Michel Foucault terms "counter-history," albeit in a different context. For Foucault, official histories are produced by monopolizing knowledge-producing practices; official histories create and maintain the unity and continuity of a political body by imposing an interpretation on a shared past and its ongoing present, and simultaneously silencing alternative interpretations of historical experiences.³³ Counter-histories try to undo these silences and undermine the unity and continuity that official histories produce. If the mainstream media created a narrative of national prosperity that projected the state's developmental vision of modernity onto the viewers, the SFC members' work, by documenting and exhibiting the voices of the poor, challenged the dominant narrative. In their counter-history of the underrepresented, we can see how their actions not only bear traces of the daily struggle of the people but also resist the state's monopoly on producing and distributing knowledge about them. The counter-history registered in the collective's films could block the unifying function of the official history that normalized a singular imagination of modernity led by the powerful state. The disunifying effects of a counter-history in the SFC's work, when brought to the viewer, contain the potential to destabilize the normative order by introducing a counter-perspective that resists and invalidates the normative expectations of the state's dominant ideology.

STRUGGLES FOR A SMALL FILM

While tackling the issue of aesthetic and political representation, the SFC members gradually asked themselves how to bring their work to viewers beyond their small network on campus. In order to maintain their integrity, it seemed clear to many that they would need an independent network of their own, one that would break from the mainstream media tendencies and practices. Typically, distributors and exhibitors, based on a film's perceived marketability, decided how long they would run the film and at which theaters it would play. After its theatrical screenings, a film was put on VHS tapes that circulated through official channels such as rental shops and private video markets, which were experiencing a quick rise in urban areas. Film, in this process, was deemed a commodity—a particular kind of commodity due to its intangible materiality as a moving image projected in commercial theaters for a certain amount of time, broadcast on television, and viewed on rented VHS tapes. In the eyes of the SFC members, this seamless lifecycle of film that we might take for granted today was thoroughly subjected to the process of capitalistic commodification. They wanted to complicate this process and its alienation of the audience while imagining an alternative channel through which small films like theirs could meet viewers. This channel would challenge the dominant one that positioned the viewers as mere consumers with little to no option of seeing motion pictures produced outside the commercial market.

In many ways, the emergence of small-film advocates in South Korea resonated with the rise of video guerrillas of the 1970s United States, as the media creators in both contexts attempted to create a more democratic media ecology by taking full advantage of media portability.³⁴ Their goal was to see the roles of consumer and producer merge by allowing ordinary people to create their own culture and seize control of their lives and environment. The SFC shared close links with the video guerrillas' outlook in its emphasis on the importance of, in the words of its member Hong Man, "liberating both the viewer and the filmmaker from commodification of the medium and film technology."³⁵ Hong identified the underlying alienation that accompanied the capitalistic industry of cultural commodification. Rejecting this alienation by establishing networks in the hope of escaping such bureaucratic institutions and outlooks, Hong claimed that these networks of small-film creators and consumers would enable a more sustainable film ecology for all participants. According to him, cinema could help "humanize" society if it could be incorporated into many small-scale communities.³⁶ For this incorporation to occur, the film's makers, protagonists, and viewers should create an "organic system of collaboration" at all stages, from production to exhibition. This system, as Hong emphasizes, would enable a ubiquitous presence of small film "at the heart of the people's life, in virtually any place, including colleges, churches, factories, small theaters, squares, lounges, and play yards."³⁷

An alternative ecology appeared particularly promising at a time when a surge of college film clubs was bringing new opportunities for small-film advocates to share their work with broader audiences. As early as July 1984, the SFC, in partnership with four other film clubs, organized the first Small Film Festival, during which six movies, including *P'annori Arirang*, were shown to an off-campus audience. This inaugural event planted a seed that soon led to a multicampus small-film movement; within a year, a group of student filmmakers succeeded in securing bigger screening events at six universities across the country.³⁸ Organizing these screenings brought clarity to the SFC members about who they made films for and how they could build a more sustainable platform for exhibition. While keeping most screenings free and open to the public, the filmmakers launched a small campaign to crowdfund other projects and attracted a sizable number of individual sponsors.³⁹

Yet these expanded opportunities for exhibition provided no immediate solution to the collective's concern about sustainability. From the beginning, the SFC's work was volunteer based: its members provided key equipment, personnel, and money that made it possible to continue the group's existence independent of state or corporate sponsorship. Indeed, most members tended to see the structure based on voluntary free labor as inherently democratic. Such idealism and naivety existed in almost all student film groups at that time. Many filmmakers assumed that unpaid labor naturally led to nonmonetary and "authentic" goals in contrast to the capitalist practices that associated paid work with professionalization.⁴⁰ The free labor celebrated in the collective, however, required most members to support themselves and subsidize their productions with other paid work.⁴¹ Although they were able to raise some funds for future productions during the first two small-film festivals, the lack of sustained financial resources placed a strain upon its members.

Before the filmmakers could sort out how to move forward, they were interrupted by the state's framing of their practices as "illegal." In October 1986, two members—Hong Kisŏn and Yi Hyoin—were arrested on the grounds of distributing and exhibiting *Bluebird* without authorization. This move indicated the political regime's intensified regulation of any form of campus activism, and it simultaneously signaled the state's subjugation of the SFC's independent film practice to the logic of capitalistic filmmaking and markets. The two directors were sentenced to two years in prison because they had charged other college film clubs a small, fixed fee to borrow the film print for public screening. The state power did not justify its arrest and imprisonment of the student filmmakers merely by citing the film's social—or "leftist," in the words of the prosecutors—commentary on the precarity of life in a rural community.⁴² Rather, it pointed more explicitly to the SFC's violation of the Performance Law that mandated all media producers and exhibitors register with and receive approval from the Korea Media Rating Board (Kongyŏnyulliwŏnhoe) for public viewings. Operating as a government-sanctioned gatekeeper, the rating board wielded unlimited power over virtually

all South Korean profit-based media content to prevent antigovernmental content from reaching the public.⁴³ Despite the SFC's claim to be a nonprofit media collective, in the state's view it was deriving a profit, however small, from unapproved public showings. In response, the SFC claimed that the fee covered only the cost of delivering the film print, but the court did not reverse its decision. Feeling guilty about their two peers in prison, some collective members supported them financially and morally; others moved on with a new mission of more militant filmmaking. In both cases, the SFC members were forced to face the cost of what they believed to be the realization of a new cinema.

In addition to this external intervention, the collective could not resolve an internal conflict that stemmed from the nature of its outside-the-ivory-tower collaboration—not only with the protagonists of its films but also with its audience members. The making of *Water Tax* and *Bluebird* opened the young filmmakers to a unique mode that encouraged them to speak with, not for, the peasants. Yet this experience raised further suspicions about the nature of their practice, and factions developed over the group's mission in this regard. This kind of division did not occur only in the SFC but evolved more broadly among student activist groups of the era that promoted a close alliance with factory workers. Seeing laborers as subjects of history and instigators of social movements, student activists organized the networks for workers' education and even became "disguised workers" to experience life in factories.⁴⁴ They shared the goal of activating workers' potential as agents of social change, but this did not stop rising concerns about their relationship to workers. At the heart of their activism, an inherent contradiction grew between what Namhee Lee aptly calls "the Gramscian aspiration to fuse organically with the workers" and "the Leninist one to lead them."⁴⁵ This contradiction, in the context of the SFC, came from what they had believed to be a more horizontal filmmaking mode that expanded the participation of the marginalized. At least some members painfully acknowledged that their practice was not entirely free of the normalizing impact of college students' widely accepted social status as elites.⁴⁶ As a result, they were uncomfortable listing the SFC as sole producer, an action that looked disrespectful to the farmers with whom they closely collaborated. This credit might have been justified by the fact that the filmmakers bore more responsibility than the farmers throughout the production and postproduction processes, but this justification did not alleviate their discomfort. Several SFC members found themselves facing a dilemma: while questioning injustices in the dominant field of media representation, they inevitably inscribed their privilege as intellectuals in a deeply hierarchical world that their film activism ostensibly intended to reject.

These internal and external difficulties did not put an immediate end to the SFC's struggle for a new cinema. Even after the imprisonment of the two filmmakers, which ultimately contributed to the group's reformation, many filmmakers kept going amid their contradictions to realize what they believed was a more just

representation. Some SFC members distanced themselves even more from conventional filmmaking, participating in the rapidly expanding prodemocratic movement at the time. With millions of protesters flooding the streets, the nationwide movement in June 1987 led to the end of the military rule of Chun Doo-hwan. However, his stepping down did not open a new chapter of democracy. His successor, Chun's fellow general Roh Tae-woo, won less than thirty-seven percent of the vote in the first direct election in December 1987. In less than a year, demands for a drastic social reform became sidelined by the Roh administration's push for a smooth and uneventful Olympic debut in 1988. Yet urban workers and peasants continued their struggle against the unjust economic structure that kept pushing them to the margins of society. In response to the increased need for alternative media to represent these workers, SFC members such as Kim Myŏngjun and Pae Injŏng formed a new militant video collective, Labor News Production (Notongchanyusŭ chechakdan). These filmmakers recommitted themselves not only to documenting the nation's growing progressive labor movement but also to teaching workers to make their own small films as a tool of resistance. Meanwhile, Yi Hyoin founded the National Cinema Research Group (Minjokjŏnghwayŏnguso) to radicalize film criticism and historiography. Through writing and public education, he and other founders, such as Yi Chŏngha, articulated a vision of a new cinema committed to anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism, crystallized in their notion of "minjok yŏnghwa" (national cinema).

Other SFC members pursued filmmaking in the mainstream industry in hopes that they could challenge the system from within and rejuvenate film language. The founding member Pak Kwangsu debuted with *Chilsu and Mansu* (1988), which brought the struggles of the urban poor in a rapidly commercialized Seoul to the screen. The film features Chilsu, who works as a billboard painter, and Mansu, who paints buildings by rappelling. While tracing their bonding as working-class men estranged from their families, Pak captures their isolation in a society that is not built for those who are poor and undereducated. The film's finale captures their frustration at society with substantial nuance. They are shown painting a billboard on the roof of one of the tall buildings in Gangnam, a newly urbanized district under the government's developmental plan. As the two stand up and begin to shout at everyone below, their voices are mistaken as dissident by the police, the press, and the uncaring crowd, all of whom have failed to understand the socially alienated. As the country was marching toward its Olympic debut in the same year, Pak succeeded in making the voices of the marginalized heard across commercial theaters. His success was hard won. As Kyung Hyun Kim points out, a new generation of the filmmakers, like Pak, needed to constantly negotiate with the rules of commercial industry that operated without government or public support. This meant they had to survive in the market, where their work competed with Hollywood features distributed freely across the nation since 1988, all while keeping their artistic integrity.⁴⁷

A few members, including Hong Kisŏn, did not follow either of these paths, continuing their work at the limits of campus film activism until the end of the decade. They collaborated with younger filmmakers from other campus clubs such as Yi Ŭn and Chang Yunhyŏn, contributing to launching off-campus collaborations and genre experiments. Their films, such as *Oh, Dreamland* (*O kkumŭinara*, 1989) and *The Night before the Strikes* (*P'aŏpchŏnya*, 1990), addressed the state violence in Gwangju and the precarious lives of factory workers on the path to unionization, respectively.⁴⁸ As social realistic features with coherent narratives and dramatization of characters, these films depart from the earlier aesthetic and political experimentation promoted by the SFC. Still, both films attest to the possibility of new cinema in their testing of the boundaries of what could be seen and heard, and also in their mode of exhibition: the filmmakers reinvented a grassroots network of exhibition, just as the SFC had envisioned, incorporating a guerrilla style of screening in various spaces that reached more than a million viewers, a strikingly high number for any nonindustry film project of the era.⁴⁹ Apart and together, the young dreamers of a new cinema laid the groundwork that would allow a new era of film and video activism to flourish, even as the next generation would also have to confront the difficulties of film activism under capitalism.

As we have seen, the SFC's struggle for a new cinema was not perfect and at times replicated some of the structural problems it was attempting to address. Nonetheless, the collective represented an important part of the mediascape at a time when all media were strictly controlled by the government and no anti-state criticism, much less any defense of social activism, was ever approved for broadcasting. Their pursuit of a new cinema did not completely dismantle the "older" cinema, yet it succeeded at breaking the dominant media's conventional film practice that prevented the lived experience of those dispossessed from being seen and heard in public. The SFC's vision of cinema as a self-reflexive medium also complicated the mode of filmmaking that typically imbued the director with a great capacity to speak for others. Encouraged by their work to contemplate their own privilege, the filmmakers navigated the unprecedented possibility of speaking with others in mediating the reality of farmers that had been erased across the mainstream media. In this way, despite the limits of their practice, the SFC members proved that film media could bring together people who had been isolated from one another and, in so doing, disrupt the isolation of the people and the silencing of their voices. Although the SFC's aspiration for an alternative distribution and exhibition network did not come to fruition in its time, it influenced the next generation's countercultural media festivals and grassroots cinematheques. Thanks at least in part to this generation's advocacy of more equitable distribution and exhibition, the seed planted by the SFC's small cinema grew to produce a set of nonstate and noncorporate-sponsored media networks.⁵⁰

Bringing the SFC's quest for a new cinema to our time does not mean replicating the tendency in film history to romanticize the film activism of the 1980s. Starting in the late 1990s and through the 2000s, critics and filmmakers legitimated the SFC and other film collectives as the foundation of independent cinema that intersects with the country's democratic struggle in the 1980s. Their affirmation often appeared to be a collective form of authorizing themselves as the successors of the SFC's vision of a new cinema, and this, in turn, contributed to their territorialization of the independent sector that began to sprout with the civilian government's support in 1999. One of the earliest examples can be seen in *From Periphery to Center* (*Pyönbangesö chungsimüro*, 1997)—in both the documentary film and the sourcebook—on top of other similar retrospectives on the history of independent cinema.⁵¹ Based on the recollections of a few former SFC members and other filmmakers of their generation, these works endorse these filmmakers as progressives at the forefront of social and film activism. Without attending to the SFC's multifaceted struggles, particularly its reflexive engagement with its positionality and sustainability, these works—most notably *From Periphery to Center*—celebrate the SFC's quest for a new cinema as a homogeneous force that yielded its vision of the poor as victims of capitalist developmentalism under autocratic rule. To a certain extent, this glorified tradition has lauded the successive experiments with film languages and film modalities that led to a boom in interactive documentary forms. As exemplified in late 1980s and early 1990s films such as *Sanggyedong Olympic* (1988, dir. Kim Dong-won) and *Kkangsuni* (1989, dir. Yi Sangin), many filmmakers integrated their artistic practice into social activism by bringing the camera close to the still-unheard voices of the marginalized urban poor. These works, together with the SFC's formative films, have been continuously positioned as the "origin" of independent cinema in the linearly imagined path of South Korean cinema.

Rather than prompting rigorous self-reflection, this established narrative has augmented the unquestioned authenticity ("chinchöngsöng") of the filmmakers who became the main force in the independent film scene and film industry in the late 1990s and 2000s. It has resonated with the conventional narrative of democratization in its celebration of the past to validate the present without permitting any new visions of cinema or democracy. At the limits of these histories that celebrate a seamlessly constructed past, I am concluding this chapter by returning to the burning question that the SFC members originally asked themselves, with the hope of more stories of subversion to come. If cinema can be a critical medium to reflect on ourselves and the world we live in, what vision of a new cinema today might carry forward the ethos of celluloid democracy?

Conclusion

In June 1987, millions of South Korean citizens rallied against the Chun Doo-hwan regime's attempt to extend its military rule and violent repression of dissent. For two weeks, the center of Seoul was occupied by people demanding an end to autocracy. Their action fueled the country's process of reinstitutionalizing direct presidential elections, which has been regarded as a decisive first step toward a peaceful transition of power to civilian government in the ensuing decade.¹ Almost thirty years later, downtown Seoul was once again filled with hundreds of thousands of citizens expressing anger and frustration. This time, the streets were taken over for much longer; every Saturday from October 2016 to March 2017, protesters publicly rejected the demoralizing corruption and impunity of Park Geun-hye's rule. The citizens of a notoriously polarized society came together to oust Park, whose approval rating had fallen to four percent, by far the lowest of any South Korean president. Their call for government transparency swiftly paved the way for the unprecedented impeachment of the incumbent and the ascendance of Moon Jae-in to the presidency with a strong anti-corruption mandate in May 2017.²

Both the June uprising and the so-called Candlelight Movement have been viewed as historic "victories" of the citizens against the powerful. In 2017 alone, a number of publications and conferences commemorated these mass protests under the banner of the thirty-year anniversary of the uprising.³ Often depicting the protesters as "awakened" citizens who provided the basis for a "hard-won" democracy, scholars and pundits celebrated the counterbalancing power of the people. Amid this triumphant climate in the post-Candlelight era, the first blockbuster film about the June uprising, *1987: When the Day Comes* (hereafter *1987*), achieved remarkable success.⁴ With an emphasis on ordinary citizens and their experiences under the dictatorship, the film brought the story of the uprising to a contemporary audience, becoming one of the biggest box office hits of 2017. Its narrative begins with the death of a college student, Park Jong-chul, during a police investigation of purported anti-government activities in January 1987.

Concerned about the public outcry over police brutality, political authorities attempt to cover up the unjustified killing. Their efforts to hide it are foiled by a few people who want to reveal the truth. The more powerful the scheme to deceive becomes, the closer the people get to the truth: doctors who were called on to perform CPR on the dying Park testify to the evidence of water torture; prosecutors leak Park's autopsy results to reporters; reporters make the cause of Park's death public against the government's guidelines; and prison guards collect evidence of riot cops having used water torture and relay it to activists and priests, who, along with university students, play a crucial role in organizing prodemocratic coalitions. After the truth of Park's death becomes widely known, students organize a rally for June 9, and during the riot, the cops severely injure another college student, Yi Han-yeol, with a canister of tear gas. Yi's critical condition soon becomes public knowledge, igniting widespread anger and disgust at the state's violence. The film ends with a spectacular mass of citizens occupying downtown Seoul and condemning the Chun regime.

The film tells us nothing new about the actual uprising. Instead, *1987* vivifies an official history of the protest that stresses the collective, homogeneous power of the people. This emphasis has its roots in the early 2000s historicization of democratic struggle that was vigorously undertaken by a generation of scholars and activists with the support of the liberal Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003–8) administrations. Their efforts established the uprising as a breakthrough of democratization, simplifying matters—most notably the uprising's limitations—in the service of producing a coherent narrative. *1987* amplifies this official narrative of the June uprising in many ways. When it was released a few months after Moon Jae-in took office in 2017, the film received nothing but praise for its seamless restoration of the past. In a sense, the film's arrival, following the overthrow of Park, could not have been better timed. The film would never have been completed, let alone positively received, during the conservative rule of the preceding decade. Both the Lee Myung-bak (2008–13) and the Park Geun-hye (2013–17) administrations had blacklisted about ten thousand artists who had voiced anti-regime opinions and who were, as a result, placed under state surveillance, barred from receiving state funding and, in some cases, prevented from producing or publishing their work.⁵ The *1987* director Jang Joon-hwan—blacklisted due to his participation in the 2008 rallies against the government—later admitted that the film's preproduction had been anything but smooth until the end of Park's rule.⁶ Released amid the rosy expectations of the new “Candlelight government,” the film won favorable attention from many now gray-haired politicians, including President Moon himself, who had participated in the June uprising as students and activists. Their public endorsement not only validated the rigorous restoration of the uprising in the film but also gave credibility to many administrators in the new regime as longtime, dedicated supporters of democracy who embodied the ethos of the “victories” of 1987 and 2017.⁷

Yet as a conveyor of official history, 1987 can dangerously envelop us in a restored past even as it entertains us. In fact, the film's restorative power overwhelmingly continues even after the fictional narrative draws to a close. The film's closing credits introduce the viewer to a mixed-media representation of "what happened" after the mass protests. Beginning with a picture of Yi Han-yeol's funeral, which was conducted as a communal mourning ritual, the credits turn to an excerpt from the television documentary on the funeral made by MBC, a public broadcasting company. Yi lingered in a coma for about a month and died on July 5, a week after Chun's regime surrendered to popular demand, issuing a statement on June 29 promising democratic reforms followed by direct presidential elections. The found footage of Yi's funeral gives evidence of the number of people in cities across the country who mourned his death. A set of pictures of Park Jong-chul and Yi Han-yeol from childhood to adolescence follow, all located so as to memorialize the two whose lives were lost to state violence. The commemorative force in the end credits crystallizes in a specific scene of the documentary that is quoted at length in the film. There, the Reverend Mun Ikhwan, a renowned prodemocratic leader, calls out the names of "martyrs" who died during the struggle. His sorrowful face is juxtaposed with the weeping people, including Yi's mother, at the funeral until Mun finally shouts Yi Han-yeol's name. The credits continue with the climax of a background tune, "When the Day Comes," a popular protest song of the late 1980s.

Local audiences seem to have been receptive to the film's final turn to the documentary space. One commenter on a YouTube video describes having watched the movie with their father, an uprising participant, and having learned to appreciate all those who have "protected" democracy thanks to all the "records" in the credits.⁸ Another commenter, identifying themselves as belonging to the same generation as Yi Han-yeol and Park Jong-chul, pays tribute to the "sacrifice" their generation made to "ignite" democracy.⁹ To these viewers, the film invites them to memorialize the struggle that people like Yi carried out. But this invitation can be detrimental, if not perilous, because it operates under an assumption that the struggle is in the past. The film's restorative gaze, culminating in a sentimental glorification of the people in the uprising, produces a fantasy that the struggle for a better world came to an end. Simultaneously, the film fed the elevated hope in the post-Candlelight Movement era that democracy had matured thanks to the resilience and resistance of the people, including some who were now in national leadership positions. The belief that the past is completed business, however, tends to foreclose questions about our relationship to the past or, better yet, what we want to do with this past to move forward in the present.

From the point of view of the actors examined in this book, and in keeping with the ethos of celluloid democracy they helped to construct, both historical moments—1987 and 2017—must be called into question rather than celebrated. True, these junctures brought about important changes within political leadership in the respective forms of direct presidential election and regime change.¹⁰



FIGURE 15. 1987's (2017) last mob scene, with the title superimposed, is followed by a documentary space that continues to narrate the official history of the uprising. Credit: Woojung Film.

However, these outcomes were far from sufficient. Some of the surviving creators of celluloid democracy admit that such changes neither represented nor entailed what they imagined as democracy in action. To their eyes, the immediate post-1987 era was instead driven by a state-led synchronization with the world in celebration of the “opening” of communist bloc countries to the market economy and of the rise of information technology. Under the first civilian regime of Kim Young Sam (1993–98), the doctrine of the “new economy” soon became the force behind the internationalization of the Korean economy and the state’s deregulation of the market. Violently channeling the ethos of neoliberal globalization into every level

of society, South Korea's post-authoritarian governments and corporations have soared toward the top of the ladder of global progress as measured by capitalist and developmentalist metrics instilled during the Cold War.¹¹ Before the directive of democratic transition could reach consensus among citizens, the possibilities of a new society have been replaced by the numbers, statistics, and indexes that measure the country's development on a global scale. For instance, South Korea's membership in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), obtained just a year before the bottom fell out of the country's economy in 1997, was widely embraced as a global recognition that the formerly war-torn country had become one of the most advanced countries (*sönjin'guk*) in the world. In the view of my interlocutors, there has been little to no debate about which and whose parameters of development are known as norms, or for whom and for which goals democracies are pursued, or who exercises the power to legitimate them.

Over the past two decades, the neoliberal forces of market and state have even more seamlessly constructed a dominant configuration of cinema as commodity. At least some of my interlocutors admit the challenges in discerning an array of cinematic expressions, methods, and practices that would revitalize their imaginations of celluloid democracy. The Kim Dae-jung administration's abolition of censorship clearly signaled a new phase of Korean cinema.¹² Yet because it coincided with the profitability of the cultural industries, this liberalization of cinema became a lens through which Korean society could envisage and comprehend the country's economy.¹³ Both the commercial and independent film sectors started to receive unprecedented support from the government in the form of comprehensive grant programs for production and incentives for theaters to screen low-budget films, all administered through the Korean Film Council. Amid the rise of the growing overseas demand for Korean popular culture, known as the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) phenomenon, the emerging consensus that culture is an economic domain brought more corporate investment to the film industry. From competitive financing in big budget, blockbuster productions to the consolidation of large theater chains, the influx of corporate capital quickly transformed the landscape of film culture throughout the 2000s.¹⁴ Productions at the margins of the mainstream film industry also received new resources in the name of promoting "cultural diversity." This promotion expanded opportunities for independent filmmakers to make and show their work through the newly rising circuits of cinematheques and film festivals across the country.¹⁵ It also, however, drove a substantial centralization of the independent film sector that relied increasingly on institutional support from government agencies, and this dependence, in turn, started to challenge the very notion of independent cinema. The growth of domestic cinema continued in the ensuing decade under the conservative rule that sought to maximize the economic power of Korean cultural content.¹⁶ While implementing more export-oriented cultural policies to expand the market for Korean cultural products, the government also significantly increased its control of

cinema, most notably in the form of the targeted investigation and surveillance of so-called left-leaning film workers whose efforts did not share the ruling power's political stance.

For most creators of celluloid democracy to whom I spoke, the Candlelight Movement at first seemed like a turning point for South Korean society. With unparalleled momentum, many South Koreans were introduced to the country's unresolved historical grievances: political crimes unresolved, perpetrators unprosecuted, and socioeconomic disparities unredressed.¹⁷ Citizens, particularly the younger ones, recognized that their twenty-first-century issues—the lack of government transparency and redistributive justice, among others—came from authoritarian pasts that overshadowed and bled into their present.¹⁸ Thousands of film workers also joined forces to end the government's abuse of power: from policing the programs of film festivals to surveilling artists, including the world-renowned Park Chan-wook and Bong Joon-ho.¹⁹ Reckoning with what felt like the revival of autocracy may have led South Koreans to hold Park Geun-hye accountable not merely as the president but also as the political heir to her father, Park Chung Hee, who ruled the country with an iron fist from 1961 to 1979.²⁰ This reckoning, however, has not grown into the kind of vital force that would be necessary to reform Korean society at every level. One of my interlocutors observes: “Beyond the flame-like movement, our challenge is to figure out ways to create a space where the complexity of democracy [in a ‘post’-authoritarian society] we are facing can be questioned, not ignored, again and again.”²¹

In this book, I have written about a number of South Korean visionaries of celluloid democracy who refused to partake in the construction of cinema as a monolithic medium in the service of the powerful. They confronted the norms imposed by imperial and authoritarian state power, the prison of preconceptions about cinema's purpose and capacities, and the illusion of democracy as an abstract system. From rejecting the industrial norms of cinema to inventing alternative modes of filmmaking and film showing, they approached cinema as a medium with which to redefine the contours of a society that they experienced as highly alienating and oppressive. Inside and outside the limited domain of the film industry, they reconfigured film as an arena through which democracy might be thought, experienced, and enacted differently from the norm. By pushing the limits of what could be shown and considering whose voice mattered, their film practices yielded a more expansive realm of representation. Simultaneously, these film workers refused to comply with the state's monopoly on resources and the power to distribute them. Through the inventions of strategies, networks, and platforms to work around the constraints on cinema, they reclaimed it as an ecology that generated a sense of community backed by horizontal social relations and shared hopes for a different world. Shaped by their reckonings with the boundedness of the state's protocols and rules, their reclamation of cinema appropriated the existing system that was designed to instrumentalize it for what they saw as nondemocratic ends.

As imaginations of a more just and equitable and inclusive world system, the possibilities of celluloid democracy cannot expire. Recent documentary films by independent collectives have revitalized these possibilities in what Jihoon Kim calls “new constellations of aesthetics and politics.”²² Diverging from the earlier mode of militant or participatory documentation, this new tendency presents more subjective and creative engagements with the filmed object. What is crucial to our discussion is that these films often work as an antidote to the system of images and sounds in which the state and mainstream media exercise the right to exclude those deemed “other” from anti-communist, capitalist modernity.

Yongsan (2010) provides a particularly relevant example that undermines the power of exclusion and, more important, the “post” in post-1987, a division that has long sustained the dominant narrative of democratization. The film addresses the so-called Yongsan disaster, based on the state’s violent evacuation of the residents of slum quarters in the Yongsan district of Seoul by mobilizing the riot police in 2009. During this event, the evictees, occupying a watchtower on the roof of a building in the area, were protesting the government’s unreasonable redevelopment plan when the riot police’s forceful operation sparked a fire that killed five protesters and one riot cop.²³ *Yongsan* begins with the filmmaker Mun Jung-hyun’s firsthand footage of the fire but evolves into a critical reevaluation of the country’s democratic struggle. Triggered by the deaths in the devastating fire, the filmmaker traces his memories of student protesters’ self-immolations in 1991, the loss of Yi Han-yeol in 1987, and the 1980 civilian massacre in Gwangju. These junctures all point to the state’s abuses of power that took the lives of many innocent citizens who stood against tyranny. While it is easy to blame the politicians and military forces here, the recurring violence pushes the filmmaker to a less comfortable stance: holding the “people”—including himself—accountable. He asks: “Where are the people now who once occupied the streets of Seoul in 1980, 1987 and 1991?”

The rest of the film is an attempt to answer this question. The filmmaker pauses at each historic juncture that is said to have been a turning point on the road to democracy. His gaze, rather than mourning the sacrifice of the people involved in these moments, stops at the glorified image of the people imagined as a homogeneous and potent social force, particularly in the June uprising. It turns to deconstructing this populist imaginary that has substantiated the myth that democratic struggle emerged triumphant in the past and is no longer necessary. Refusing to flatten the people into a singular group, the filmmaker parallels the collective body of the protesters in the past to the voices of self-defined “former” student activists in the present. This assemblage leads us to see that many protesters have lost their aspiration for a more just world to an illusion of progress, one that circumscribes their outlook. At least in their own eyes, they inhabit a better world than they did in the authoritarian past. Another juxtaposition interrupts their comfort in the illusion by pointing to their active disengagement with ongoing injustice in the Yongsan disaster; it shows that even as these older activists sentimentalize their

days in the streets over drinks, the “democratic” government uses its excessive force to make the lives of the marginalized even more precarious. These creatively mixed assemblages encourage the viewers to face the fact that the country’s democratic transition has been celebrated at the cost of ongoing segregation and violence, a cost that has been almost completely erased from the mediascape.

The power of constructive assemblages explodes in *Yongsan*’s ending in a way that presents, compared to *1987*, an alternative narration of the historical experience of democracy. The filmmaker remixes shots from the most-cited markers of democratization into one sequence with sound recorded on the site of the Yongsan disaster, where the protesters and riot cops witnessed people dying in agony and despair. This constellation of image and sound captures what Jonathan Crary calls “counterpractices of the audiovisual,” disrupting the seamless construction of the world in cinema. It is radically different from the documentary space in the closing credits of *1987*, which remixes images and sound to give force to the established narrative of the uprising.²⁴ In *Yongsan*, none of the excerpts is simply quoted; rather, all the images are transformed as the director reframes them and inserts new sounds, weaving together moments from the country’s history of prodemocratic movements. Here the film’s potent layering of images and sounds resists the illusion of democratic transition in which we are embedded and which we take for granted. If *1987* presents a melancholic obituary that looks backward, *Yongsan* offers polyphonic voices of the past that prompt us to reckon with the unending injustice in front of us. Also in this space, multiple past junctures recorded in video footages are creatively cited to collapse the borders of different historical events. Erasing the borders between the past and the present, the film ultimately generates an alternative vision of a history that challenges the dominant one grounded in a linearly constructed time of progress.

Through its creative expressions and methods, *Yongsan* gives rise to a new iteration of the space I have identified in this book as celluloid democracy, the space that pushes back the boundedness of what is representable and of who can access the power to imagine differently. This space created in *Yongsan* may well be seen as a temporary one, but it sparks a light in our time. Like the works of the film workers examined in the previous chapters, it radicalizes cinema as an alternatively creative and democratic terrain, one that invites us to be vigilant to the violence and injustice happening before our eyes and ears in the name of progress. This invitation calls on us to choose to notice, and in choosing to notice, it also asks us to transform ourselves so that we can continue to imagine other possibilities for the world.

What would it mean if each of us could live with this imagination as our horizon? How could such an imagination, however modest, be anchored by the reflective invitation to undo the exclusion of those who are dispossessed and the indulgence in the illusion of progress? How could this undoing help us open ourselves to other expansive capacities of cinema that have been buried in plain



the scene of the accident is full of screams



There are people in there!

FIGURE 16. In *Yongsan* (2010), the scene of evictees dying in a fire transports the film's director to other forms of state violence at different historical moments. Credit: Mun Jung-hyun.

sight? Celluloid democracy led neither to a dismantling of the state's hegemonic system nor to a revolution in the film industry during the historical period examined in this book. Yet it challenged people to see how the statist democracy and modernity had collapsed into a nationalist developmentalism that harmonized with colonial and authoritarian forms of governance and essentially forced all citizens to see the world through the eyes of the state. In response to their own political and aesthetic crises, the creators of celluloid democracy noticed contradictions, especially in the realms of representation and distribution, that were undermining what they envisioned as democracy. Using all the agency they possessed, they transformed not only the existing order of cinema but also their relationship to the world at moments when the powerful wanted to pulverize that agency. If there is anything we can learn from them, it is that we, regardless of who or where we are, must ask ourselves what kind of world we want to fight for. Their struggle reminds us that we share an obligation to undermine the status quo, and celluloid democracy reveals ways we can work toward meeting this obligation by imagining radically different futures.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Stuart Hall, “The Neoliberal Revolution,” *Soundings* 48 (2011): 9.
2. Since Bruce Cumings published his seminal two-volume study *The Origins of the Korean War* (1981), scholarly concerns have expanded to include not only the war’s global and regional implications in the era of new imperialism but also its impacts on every level of Korean society. On the former, see Monica Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019); Hajimu Matsuda, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013); Park Tae-gyun, *An Ally and Empire: Two Myths of South Korea–United States Relations, 1945–1980*, trans. Ilsoo David Cho (Bundang: AKS Press, 2012); and Steven Lee, *Outposts of Empire: Korea, Vietnam, and Origins of the Cold War Asia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), among others. On the latter, see, for instance, Heonik Kwon, *After the Korean War: An Intimate History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Su-kyoung Hwang, *Korea’s Grievous War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Kim Dong-Choon, *Chönjaengkwa sahoe* [War and Society] (Paju: Tolbegae, 2006); and *Kündaeüi küñül: han’guk kündaesöngkwa minjokchuüi* [The Shadow of Modernity] (Seoul: Tangdae, 2000).
3. Henry Em, Christine Hong, and Kim Dong-Choon, “Coda: A Conversation with Kim Dong-Choon,” *positions: asia politics* 23, no. 4 (2015): 837–49.
4. As Namhee Lee astutely points out, the maintenance of the National Security Law (NSL) alone demonstrates the “continuing geopolitics of the Cold War regime” in South Korea. Even today, law enforcement authorities, in the name of security, can arrest any citizen who possesses and circulates a copy of Karl Marx’s *Capital* as a violation of the NSL. Namhee Lee, “Social Memories of the 1980s: Unpacking the Regime of Discontinuity,”

in *Revisiting Minjung: New Perspectives on the Cultural History of 1980s South Korea*, ed. Sunyoung Park (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 19.

5. Coined by Joseph Nye in 1990, the term “soft power” refers to the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion. Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

6. Since the late 2000s, scholarship on the Cold War has revealed how US administrations and their information agencies used a variety of media—publication, radio, and motion pictures—to construct South Korea as their ally in the so-called free world. While it has expanded our understanding of the role these media played in building Cold War South Korea, the subject of analysis has been limited to state-level policy making and its elite stakeholders. For instance, see Hō Ūn, *Migukūi Hegemoniwa Han'guk Minjokchuūi: Naengjōn Sidae* [American Hegemony and Korean Nationalism] (Seoul: Koryō Taehakkyo Minjok Munhwa Yōnguwōn, 2008); and Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

7. For instance, Charles Kim, *Youth for Nation: Culture and Protest in Cold War South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017); Youngju Ryu, *Writers of the Winter Republic: Literature and Resistance in Park Chung Hee's Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016); Theodore Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom's Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). For recent Korean scholarship with an emphasis on dialogical formations of Cold War culture, see Pak Chiyōng, *Pōnyōkūi sidae, pōnyōkūi munhwa chōngch'i 1945–1969* [An Age of Translation, Cultural Politics of Translation] (Seoul: Somyōng Chulpan, 2019); Yi Yong-jae, *Asiājōk sinchē: Naengjōn Han'guk, Hongkōng, Ilbonūi t'uraensūnaesyōnl aeksyōn yōnghwa* [Asian Body: Transnational Asian Action Film in Cold War Era] (Seoul: Somyōng Chulpan, 2019); Chang Sejin, *Sumgyōjin mirae: t'alnaengjōn sangsangūi kyebo 1945–1972* [The Hidden Future: Lineage of Post-Cold War and Imagination] (Seoul: P'urūnyōksa, 2018).

8. This tendency can be seen as part and parcel of making Korean cinema a subject area in the field of film studies, which has remained Euro- and American-centric. Sangjoon Lee traces it back to the emergence of the “first generation” of Korean film scholarship that resonated with the critical success of Korean contemporary films in the world's prestigious film festivals. It is not a coincidence that one of the first English-language books on Korean cinema focuses on Im Kwon-taek, who earned the first Best Director award to be given to a Korean at the Cannes Film Festival with his 2002 feature *Chihwaseon*. David James and Kyung Hyun Kim, eds., *Im Kwon-Taek: The Making of a Korean National Cinema* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2002). Two important edited volumes on Korean cinema have focused on films from the 2000s: Frances Gateward, ed., *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema* (Buffalo: State University of New York Press, 2007); and Chi-yoon Shin and Julian Stringer, eds., *New Korean Cinema* (New York: NYU Press, 2005). For a helpful historical overview of English scholarship on Korean cinema, see “Introduction,” in *Rediscovering Korean Cinema*, ed. Sangjoon Lee (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 1–33.

9. Steven Chung, *Split Screen Korea: Shin Sang-ok and Postwar Cinema* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

10. Jinsoo An, *Parameters of Disavowal: Colonial Representation in South Korean Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).
11. Christina Klein, *Cold War Cosmopolitanism: Period Style in 1950s Korean Cinema* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).
12. Sangjoon Lee, *Cinema and the Cultural Cold War: US Diplomacy and the Origins of the Asian Cinema Network* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).
13. Several important book-length studies include Jack Newsinger, Mike Wayne, and Steve Presence, eds., *Contemporary Radical Film Culture: Networks, Organizations, and Activists* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2020); Ewa Mazierska and Lars Kristensen, eds., *Marxism and Film Activism: Screening Alternative Worlds* (London: Berghahn Books, 2015); B. Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema: The Director's Cut* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013) and *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Patricia Zimmermann, *States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) and *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Alexandra Juhasz, *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995); and Thomas Waugh, "Show Us Life": *Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1984).
14. Since Teshome H. Gabriel published his seminal study of third cinema in 1982, a series of important works has developed its theorization. Teshome H. Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982); Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake, eds., *Rethinking Third Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Michael T. Martin, ed., *New Latin American Cinema*, vol. 1 (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997); Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, eds., *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989). Besides third cinema, a relatively rich discussion on radical film tradition has grown out of the field of Japanese cinema. For instance, see Yuriko Furuhashi, *Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-Garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Abe Mark Nornes, *Forest of Pressure: Ogawa Shinsuke and Postwar Japanese Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
15. Scott MacKenzie, *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).
16. Chris Robé and Stephen Charbonneau, eds., *Insurgent Media from the Front: A Media Activism Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020); Victor Pickard and Guobin Yang, eds., *Media Activism in the Digital Age* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Zhang Zhen and Angela Zito, eds., *DV-Made China: Digital Subjects and Social Transformations after Independent Film* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015).
17. Young-a Park, *Unexpected Alliances: Independent Filmmakers, the State, and the Film Industry in Postauthoritarian South Korea* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014); Darcy Paquet, *New Korean Cinema: Breaking the Waves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). As many of these filmmakers became key players in the film industry, academia, and independent sector in the ensuing decades, their past has often been credited for being an incubator for an unprecedented growth of Korean cinema starting in the late 1990s. For a critical overview of the film movement discourse that was specifically promoted by self-proclaimed "left" or "left-leaning" critics, see Kim Soyŏn, "1980nyŏndae

yŏnghwaundong tamnone nat'anān segyeyŏnghwasawaūi chŏnījŏk kwan'gye yŏn'gu" [On the Transferred Relationship between the Discourse of Film Movement and the World Cinema], *Hyŏndaeyŏnghwayŏn'gu* 15 (2013): 145–79.

18. Todd Gitlin, *Letters to a Young Activist* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 5.

19. Here I am indebted to Kevin Quashie's articulation of the "quiet" as one of many possible ways of resisting anti-Black culture. See Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

20. What the political scientist Samuel Huntington has called the "third wave" of democratization refers to a global democratic transition that occurred through bringing down authoritarian regimes and replacing them with elected governments. This transition spread widely beginning in 1974. Among the sixty countries in this "wave," South Korea has been considered a remarkable success. See Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992). For comparative studies of third wave democracy, see Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, Yun-han Chu, and Hung-mao Tien, eds., *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

21. Despite their varying stances on the US intervention and its continuing influence in Korea, many political scientists and historians have tended to see Korean democracy as a Western derivative even when they criticize the "implantation" of democracy as the by-product of US containment of South Korea. See, for instance, Pak Chanpyo, *Han'gukūi 48nyŏnch'ŏje* [The 1948 System of South Korea] (Seoul: Humanitas, 2010) and *Han'gukūi kukkahyŏngsŏngkwa minjujuūi* [State-building and Democracy in South Korea] (Seoul: Humanitas, 2007); Chŏng Haeku, "Han'guk minjujuūi chŏnkaewa kŭ tŭk'jing" [The Development and Characteristic of Korean Democracy], in *Tasi ponŭn han'guk minjuhwaundong* (Seoul: Sŏnin, 2010), 19–52; Choi Jang Jip, *Nonjaengŭrosŏūi minjujuūi* [Democracy as Dispute] (Seoul: Humanitas, 2013), *Minjuhwa ihu minjujuūi* [Democratization after Democracy] (Seoul: Humanitas, 2002), and *Han'guk minjujuūiūi chokŏnkwa chŏnmang* [The Condition and Vision of Korean Democracy] (Seoul: Nanam, 1996). Apart from the institutional- and Western-centric tendency, several scholars have explored the indigenous "seeds" of democracy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In their emphasis on the decay of the earlier sense of democracy, they unavoidably place more weight on the electoral foundation in 1948 or on the nationalistic element of such seeds. For instance, see the anthology edited by Kang Jungin, *Minjujuūiūi han'gukjŏk suyŏng* [Korean Reception of Democracy] (Seoul: Ch'aeksesang, 2002).

22. In an in-depth survey on the perception of democracy among South Korean citizens in the mid-2000s, many respondents, even those who actively participated in the prodemocratic struggles of the 1980s, confessed that democracy—or more precisely their aspirations for democracy—has yet to be translated into concrete terms in daily politics. Yu Sichu and Yi Hŭiyŏng, eds., *Urinŭn tŏ manŭn minjujuūirŭl wŏnhanda* [We Need More Democracies] (Paju: Changbi, 2007).

23. Most existing narratives have contended that the political leadership's repression of civil society impeded the growth of democracy until the decisive historic moment in 1987. This moment has thus been celebrated as the triumph of a singularly imagined "people." For a critical assessment of this triumphalism, see Lee, "Social Memories of the 1980s," 17–45; Lee expands her discussion of triumphalism in her more recent work,

Memory Construction and the Politics of Time in Neoliberal South Korea (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 95–120. For more on a teleological historiography of the authoritarian era, see Kyung Moon Hwang, “The Irrepressibility of Teleology: The 1980s as Historiography,” in *Revisiting Minjung*, 46–61. For an engaging critique of the persistent teleology in post-1945 Korean history, see Henry Em, *The Great Enterprise: Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 138–60.

24. Kim, *Youth for Nation*.

25. Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

26. Christina Sharpe and Saidiya Hartman warn, albeit in the archival context of the erasure of Black voices, that writing “against” the erasure of “ordinary” historical actors can enact violence if we assume that these actors had little to no agency. Seeing non-state actors in such a way can project or even reinscribe the power of the archive, under the premise that the governed—the numerous people under the eyes of the governing power—were powerless and that their stories could be silenced. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14, and *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007).

27. Yi Hwajin, “Kükchangkukkalosö cheikonghwakukkwa kinyöümü kyunyöl” [The First Republic as “Theater State” and The Ruptures of Commemoration], *Han’gukkündae munhakyöngu* (April 2007): 197–228; Im Chöngmyöng, “Cheikonghwakukchogi Taehanminguküi Kachökukkawa naepa” [The Making of the Republic of Korea as a Family State and the Implosion of the State Project in the Early First Republic], *Han’guksayöngu* 131 (2005): 289–329.

28. Kong Imsun, “Pakchönghüüi taep’yo/chaehyönt’üi nollwiwa chidojasangüi kuch’ukül chungshimüro” [Park Chung Hee’s Representation and Construction of His Political Image], *Tongbanghakchi* 142 (2008): 151–77. On the mythification of Park Chung Hee, see Seungsook Moon, “The Cultural Politics of Remembering Park Chung Hee,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 7, no. 5 (2009): 1–32.

29. For an emphasis on a material presence of the power in the archive, see Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 19–26.

30. The vertical stratification of the world had long been normalized in the era of imperialism, but what demarcated the postcolonial era was the reinscription of this stratification in the name of national development. As Prasenjit Duara notes, former colonies, without a thorough process of decolonization, now found themselves at the bottom of the ladder of global development, being commanded to “catch up” by learning from those higher up on the ladder. Prasenjit Duara, “The Cold War and the Imperialism of Nation-States,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. Richard Immerman and Petra Goedde (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 86–104.

31. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

32. Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

1. TO DEMOCRATIZE CINEMA: FILMMAKERS, CRITICS,
AND BOOTLEGGERS IN THE US OCCUPATION

1. "Inter-office Memo: Russian Motion Pictures," February 26, 1946, Bureau of Public Information, G-2 files; "Letter, Gen. Garvin, C/S, to Polianski," March 7, 1946, G-2 files. *History of the United States Army Forces in Korea*, Part II, available at http://db.history.go.kr/item/level.do?itemId=husa&levelId=husa_002_0030_0130_0040&types=0.

2. "Winnajinju sangyönggümji" [Screening of *Taking of Vienna* Being Banned], *Hansöngilbo*, March 10, 1946; "Soryönyönghwamanül kümjihannün iyu" [Why Is It Only Soviet Films are Banned?], *Haebangilbo*, March 11, 1946.

3. For more on the formation of the CMPE, see Kitamura Hiroshi, *Screening Enlightenment: Hollywood and the Cultural Reconstruction of Defeated Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 33–41, 90–94.

4. "Mikukyöngghwa yön paekp'yön paeküp" [100 Hollywood Films Distributed in One Year], *Hansöngilbo*, April 12, 1946.

5. John Hodge, "Chosönninminjeguniyö!" [To the People of Korea]. Quotes are from a special edition of *Maeilsinbo*, September 9, 1946.

6. "Negat'ibü" [Negative], *Donga Ilbo*, April 23, 1946.

7. A binary logic of "nationalist" and "anti-nationalist" cinema can be traced back to the earlier historiography produced by filmmakers and critics who had survived the colonial era. See Yu Hyönmok, *Hankugyöngghwapaltalsa* [A Developmental History of Korean Cinema] (Seoul: ch'aegnuri, 1997); Yi Yöngil (Association of Korean Film Personnel), *Han'guk yöngghwa chönsa* [Complete History of Korean Cinema] (Seoul: Samaesa, 1969); An Chonghwa, *Han'guk yöngghwa ch'ükmyönpisa* [The Bypaths and Hidden History of Korean Cinema] (Seoul: Ch'unch'ukak, 1962). For relatively recent work, see Han Sangön, *Haebang Kongganüi Yöngghwa, Yöngghwain* [The Film and Film Personnel in The Space of Liberation] (Seoul: Ironkwa Silchön, 2013); Yi Hyoin, *Yöngghwaro ingnün han'guksaheomunhwasa: Angmongüi kündae, mimongüi yöngghwa* [Reading Sociocultural History of Korea through Cinema] (Seoul: Kaemakowön, 2003). For a critical overview of Korean film historiography, see Yi Sunjin, "Han'gukyöngghwasa yönguüi hyöndan'gye: Shinp'a, mellodürama, riöllijüm tamnonül chungshimüro" [The Current Stage of Korean Film History], *Taejungsösayöng'u* 10, no. 2 (2004): 187–224.

8. For instance, see Yi Hwajin, *Soriüi chöngch'i: shingminji chosönnüi kükchangghwa chegugüi kwan'gaek* [Politics of Sound: Theaters and Audiences in Colonial Korea] (Seoul: Hyönsil munhwa, 2016); Baek Moonim, *Im Hwaüi yöngghwa* [Im Hwa's Cinema] (Seoul: Somyöng 2015); Kim Soyöng, *Kündaeüi wöngchögyöng: Poijiannün yöngghwarül poda* [A Primal Scene of Modernity: Looking at Invisible Cinema] (Seoul: Hyönsil munhwa, 2010); Yi Yongjae, *Cheguk ilbonüi chosönyöngghwa* [Korean Cinema of Japanese Empire] (Seoul: Hyönsil munhwa, 2008). On the implications of the rediscovery of late colonial films, see Steven Chung, "Visibility, Nationality, Archive," *Journal of Korean Studies* 16, no. 2 (2011): 193–211.

9. Theodore Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom's Frontier*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

10. Pak Chiyöng, "Poksüi minjuüitül: haebangi inmin(shimin), kunjung(taejung) kaenyöm pönyökül chungshimüro" [Multiple Democracies: The Korean Notions of People and Mass], *Taedongmunhwayöng'u* 85 (2014): 49–89; Kim Chöngin, "Haebang chönhu

minjujuüidürüi pyönju” [Transformation of Democracies in the Pre- and Postliberation Era], *Kaenyömgwa sot’öng* 12 (2013): 197–234.

11. Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia and American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

12. “Our International Information Policy,” *Department of State Bulletin* 13, December 16, 1945, 950.

13. “Harriman to the Secretary of State,” *FRUS* 6, January 20, 1946, 676–78.

14. “Understanding among Peoples,” *Department of State Bulletin* 14, March 17, 1946, 409–10.

15. “A Statement of Policy,” Box 182, Record Group 165: The War Department General and Special Staffs (hereafter cited as MPS Records). Unless otherwise noted, the American documents cited in this chapter are located in this record group at the National Archives in College Park, MD.

16. Jennifer Fay, *Theaters of Occupation: Hollywood and the Reeducation of Postwar Germany* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.

17. “Visit to Film and Theater Section, CAD, NY Field Office,” October 28, 1946, Box 251, MPS Records.

18. Sueyoung Park-Primiano, “South Korean Cinema between the Wars: Screening Resistance and Containment under US Intervention and Influence, 1945–60,” PhD dissertation, New York University, 2015, 106.

19. “First Quarterly Report on Documentary Films,” October 3, 1947, Box 254, MPS Records.

20. “Progress Report of Motion Picture Section for the Fiscal Year 1948,” November 24, 1947, Box 254, MPS Records.

21. For an important analysis of the US-constructed narrative of democratic capitalism that was propagated through various media, including films abroad, see Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: US Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). For a critical interpretation of the US film’s racialized and gendered way of imagining the postwar world order, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

22. Park-Primiano, “South Korean Cinema between the Wars,” 106.

23. “Kungmun’p’yön miyöngghwa palp’yo” [Release of Korean-subtitled American Cinema], *Chosönilbo*, August 9, 1946.

24. The US force conducted the surveys in Germany and Japan to ensure that American films served the purpose of reorienting and reeducating the population. Jennifer Fay includes a discussion of the US survey of German spectators to demonstrate both the “unwitting failures” and “unwitting successes” of Hollywood cinema in reeducating the Germans. Fay, *Theaters of Occupation*. For a case study of the US film program in Japan, see Hiroshi, *Screening Enlightenment*.

25. The film magazines that ran between 1945 and 1948 folded after their inaugural issues due to the unstable economic situation, and with the exception of *Yöngghwasunbo* and *Yesulyöngghwa*, they focused exclusively on domestic films. Chöon Chini, “Ünyöngkwa haebanggiüi yöngghwajapchi” [*Silver Screen* and Other Film Magazines of the Liberation Era], *Kündaesöji* 9 (2014): 784–802.

26. Given that most periodicals published in the postliberation era were short-lived, *New Land* (*Shinchöngji*, published from early 1946 to late 1954 with a suspension during

the Korean War) offers an exception. The relative longevity of the monthly magazine explains why studies of postliberation culture have paid close attention to the intellectual and cultural discourses that the magazine produced. Yi Pongbôm, “Chapchi Shinchhônjiüi maechê chölllyakkwa munhak” [Media Strategies and Literature in Shinchhônji], *Han’gukmunhakyöngü* 39 (2010): 199–267.

27. “Sölmun amerik’a yöngghwae taehaya” [Survey on American Cinema], *Shinchhônji*, March 1948, 154–57; Noksoüpsaeng, “Yojiüme pon miguk yöngghwa” [American Cinema that I Have Seen], *Shinchhônji*, August 1947, 160.

28. Bosley Crowther, “‘No Time for Love,’ a Comedy with Claudette Colbert and Fred MacMurray at Paramount,” *New York Times*, December 2, 1943; “Survey on American Cinema.”

29. “Hold that Ghost,” *Variety*, July 30, 1941.

30. “Survey on American Cinema.”

31. “American Cinema that I Have Seen,” 160.

32. “Film Program for Korea,” January 9, 1947, Box 253, MPS Records.

33. One of the earliest appearances of the term occurred in critic Kim Chöngghyök’s newspaper commentary on the USAMGIK’s policy that essentially turned the Korean film industry and market into its “colony.” My discussion of film-colony discourse engages with the literal term from Kim and its variants, such as “colonization of film,” which was also broadly used by other critics and filmmakers. Kim Chöngghyök, “Yöngghwa kugyöngghwa, Kongyöngghwa” [Calling for Nationalization, Publicization], *Kyöngghyangsinmun*, October 8, 1946.

34. Albert Memmi, *Decolonization and the Decolonized*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 49.

35. For more on the disposition of vested enterprises, see Tingting Li, “The Making of the Postcolonial Political Economy: The Disposition of Formerly Japanese Owned Enterprises in South Korea,” PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2014.

36. “Kükchangüi konggonggwali” [Management of Public Theaters], *Donga Ilbo*, February 14, 1946. On decolonizing culture in the north under the soviet occupation, see Charles Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 166–90.

37. “Kükchangipch’al” [Bidding for Theaters], *Donga Ilbo*, March 23, 1946.

38. Yi Sünghüi, “Hünghaeng changüi chöngch’igyöngghakkwa p’ongnyöngüi kujo” [The Structure of Violence and Political Economy in the Field of Theater, 1945–1961], *Taedongmunhwayöngü* 74 (2011): 424–31; Yi Myöngja, “Mi-so kunjönggi (1945–1948) söulgwa p’yöngyangüi kükchangyöngü” [A Study on Theaters in Seoul and Pyongyang during the Occupation], *T’öngilgwa P’yöngghwa* 2 (2009): 199–230.

39. “Op-ed,” *Donga Ilbo*, April 15, 1946.

40. “Op-ed,” *Kyöngghyangsinmun*, April 23, 1946.

41. For a seminal study of the USAMGIK’s film policy, see Cho Hyechöng, “Migunjönggi yöngghwa” jöngghaäge kwanhan yöngü [A Study on the USAMGIK Film Policy], PhD dissertation, Chungang University, 1998.

42. “Yöngghwa kömyöl chaeko” [Reconsider the Censorship], October 25, 1946, *Donga Ilbo*.

43. Kim Namchön, “Namjosönüi hyön chöngsewa munhwayesurüi wigi” [The Current State and Culture in Crisis in the Southern Korea], *Munhakh’p’yöngnon*, April 1947. Reprinted

in *Haebangkongganü pip'yöngmunhak* [Literary Criticism in the Liberation Space], ed. Song Kihan and Kim Wökon (Seoul: T'aeaksa, 1991), 327–33.

44. The police's attempt to regulate the theater and performance had already begun in March 1946 in the form of precensorship and on-site surveillance, which faced fierce opposition from writers and artists who called the new regulation “fascist.” In response, the Gyeonggi-area (including Seoul) Police Department immediately ceased to implement these measures, but an enforcement of regulations reappeared only a few months later in January 1947. Yi Sünghüi, “Structure of Violence and Political Economy.”

45. Kim Namchön, “Current State and Culture in Crisis in the Southern Korea.”

46. Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 200.

47. Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, “Disarming Japan's Cannons with Hollywood's Cameras: Cinema in Korea Under U.S. Occupation, 1945–1948,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 8, no. 3 (2010): 1–20.

48. “Ordinance No. 115,” USAMGIK, *Official Gazette*, October 15, 1946.

49. On the postwar reissuing of Hollywood films in domestic and international markets, see Eric Hoyt, *Hollywood Vault: Film Libraries before Home Video* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 106–40.

50. Because not all films shipped to Korea were screened, the list of exhibited films that I rely on here is based on published advertisements and other records on Hollywood imports. A most comprehensive list of exhibitions is available in a sourcebook: Yi Myöngja, ed., *Shinmun, chapchi, kwanggo charyoro pon migunjönggi oegyuyöngghwa* [Foreign Films in the Occupation Era: Newspapers, Magazines, and Advertisements] (Seoul: kömyunikëisyönbuksü, 2011).

51. Ch'ae Jönggün, “Amerik'a yöngghwajapkam migungnyöngghwawa chosönnyöneyegyei-bün yöngghyang” [A Few Thoughts on American Film: American Film and Its Impact on Korean Film Culture], *Shinchöngji*, January 1948, 138.

52. “Chosön'gükchangmunhwarül modok piminjujögün toksönjök mihwa sangyöng” [A Desecration of Korean Film Culture: Undemocratic, Self-righteous Hollywood Screening], *Tongnipsinbo*, February 4, 1947; “Miyöngghwaüi shijangghwa, Ögaptöenün chosönmunhwa” [Hollywood Invasion, Repressed Korean Culture], *Donga Ilbo*, February 4, 1947.

53. “Kuksannyöngghwaüi wigi, Kin'güp'an taech'aek kangguhara” [A Crisis of Domestic Film, An Urgent Measure Needed], *Seoulsinmun*, April 23, 1948.

54. On the implications of the 1934 Act, which was designed particularly for the film market in colonial Korea and was not derivative of Japanese film policy, see Yi Hwajin, “Tu chekuk sai p'illüm chönchaengüi chönya: ilponüi yöngghwa chekuk kihoekkwa sik-minchi chosönüi sük'ülünk'wö'töche” [A Night Before the Film War between Two Empires: Japan's Film Empire Plan and Screen Quota in Colonial Korea], *Sai* 15 (2013): 47–83.

55. An Chölyöng, *Söngnimgihaeng* [A Travelogue to Hollywood] (Seoul: Sudomunhwasa, 1949), 51. For An Chölyöng's complex perception of Hollywood, see Sim Hyekyöng, “An chölyöngüi sönglimkihaengesöü halliutü küliko chosönyöngghwa [Hollywood and ‘Chosön Cinema’ in A Travelogue to Hollywood],” *Hankuk ömunhakyöngku*, no. 62 (2014): 385–419.

56. An Sökyöng, “Yöngghwaüijaryonan chöngch'immunjewa tongshihaegyöl” [An Imperative to Tackle Both Issues of the Lack of Resource and Politics], *Kyönghyangsinmun*, December 15, 1946.

57. The Korean Statement of John Hodge, “Migukün chosönch'akch'wie hüngmiöpta” [We, the US Force, Are Not Interested in Exploiting Korea], *Donga Ilbo*, September 1, 1946.

58. Ch'ae Jönggün, "A Few Thoughts on American Film."
59. The US film program heavily relied on the use of Jeeps and trucks that provided "an unprecedented degree of flexibility" for mobile screening. Han Sang Kim, *Cine-Mobility: Twentieth-Century Transformation in Korea's Film and Transportation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 84.
60. "Procurement of Motion Picture Film Raw Stock," March 25, 1947, Box 182, Record Group 554: Records of General Headquarters, Far East Command, Supreme Commander Allied Powers, and United Nations Command (hereafter cited as SCAP Records).
61. "Missing Film," January 6, 1947; "Mishandling of Entertainment Film," May 12, 1947, in Record Group 338: Records of the Korea Military Advisory Group, Adjutant General, Decimal File, 1948–53, Box 3 (hereafter cited as USAMGIK Records).
62. "Mishandling of Entertainment Film," May 12, 1947.
63. J. W. Fraser, written by command of John Hodge, "Loss of Entertainment Motion Picture Film," USAMGIK Records.
64. Fraser, "Loss of Entertainment Motion Picture Film."
65. Bhaskar Sarkar, "Theory Stranded at the Borders, or Cultural Studies from the Southern Fringes," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 16, no. 3 (2019): 219–40; Kavita Philip, "What Is a Technological Author? The Pirate Function and Intellectual Property," *Postcolonial Studies* 8, no. 2 (2005): 199–218.
66. Lawrence Lessing, *Free Culture* (London: Penguin Press, 2004), 63.
67. Philip, "What Is a Technological Author?," 201.
68. Liang Lawrence, "Porous Legalities and Avenues of Participation," in *Sarai: Bare Acts*, ed. Monica Narula, Shuddhabrata Sengupta, Jeebesh Bagchi (Sarai), Geert Lovink (Waag), and Lawrence Liang, 5 (2005): 6–17.
69. Ravi Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism* (London: Routledge, 2009), 111–12.
70. Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz, "Toward a Postcolonial Critique of Modern Piracy," in *Postcolonial Piracy: Media Distribution and Cultural Production in the Global South*, ed. Eckstein and Schwarz (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1–25.
71. This explains why the filmmaker An Chölyöng sought out any opportunity to facilitate direct imports when he met with American leaders at the Department of Commerce and Hollywood during his US trip in 1947. The difficulty in purchasing raw stock continued to hamper film production below the 38th parallel until January 1949, when the Ministry of Commerce of the new government finally took charge of managing Hollywood imports and the purchase of raw stock.
72. An Sökyöng, "Imperative to Tackle Both Issues of the Lack of Resource and Politics."
73. The reissues of the older films provoked public outrage when a wartime feature was shown as if it were a different movie. But in the context of the shortage of entertainment, the revivals of the older films were generally acceptable, and some of the prewar American and European hits were even welcomed.
74. "A Letter from Harmon to General Draper, CAD," October 8, 1947, Box 278, MPS Records.
75. "A Letter from Vice-President of MPEA to Secretary of the Army Kenneth C Royall," June 13, 1948, Box 409, CSCAD 014, Section 3, MPS Records.
76. "A Letter from Secretary of the Army to Mr. Harmon," July 26, 1948, Box 428, CSCAD 091.31, Section 25, MPS Records.

77. Fraser, “Loss of Entertainment Motion Picture Film.”
78. Fraser, “Loss of Entertainment Motion Picture Film.”
79. On the role of the US Army in the use of film, see Sueyoung Park-Primiano, “Occupation, Diplomacy, and the Moving Image: The US Army as Cultural Interlocutor in Korea, 1945–1948,” in *Cinema’s Military Industrial Complex*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 227–40.
80. “Report on the History and Growth of the Office of Civil Information, USAFIK,” November 10, 1947, Entry A1 1256, Box 32, SCAP Records.
81. While it goes beyond the scope of this chapter, Korean piracy continued to challenge the import agreement between South Korean administration and American producers beyond the US occupation era. For more on the persistence of Korean bootlegging during the early years of the First Republic, see Park-Primiano, “South Korean Cinema between the Wars,” 133.
82. Sarkar, “Theory Stranded at the Borders,” 235.
83. Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea*, 89–90.
84. Sŏ Chungśŏk, *Isungmanüi chŏngch’i iteolloki* [The Political Ideology of Syngman Rhee] (Seoul: Yŏksapipyŏngsa, 2012).

2. IN SEARCH OF DEMOCRACY: CINEMA IN THE POSTWAR CLASSROOM AND ITS GRASSROOTS NETWORK

1. For a helpful overview of the postwar crisis and its manifestation through the discourse of poverty, see Charles R. Kim, *Youth for Nation: Culture and Protest in Cold War South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2017), 33–41.
2. Starting in the early postwar era, the term was frequently used by educationalists and pundits who emphasized a stark contrast between colonial education and what they saw as a democratic education. See “Kyoyukchuganül maja” [Education Week], *Kyŏnghyangsinmun*, October 8, 1953.
3. During the US occupation, a group of progressive Korean educationalists had proposed a complete overhaul of what they saw as a “totalitarian” education system; many of these elites had studied in or been influenced by the United States, calling for a “new education.” Michael Seth, *Education Fever: Society, Politics, and the Pursuit of Schooling in South Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 34–73.
4. “Han’gukshichŏnggakkyoyukŏe palchok” [Inauguration of the Korean AV Education Society], *Donga Ilbo*, June 7, 1951.
5. Yi Chŏnghŭi, in discussion with the author, April 8, 2017.
6. Seth, *Education Fever*, 69–73.
7. Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, *The Changing Face of Korean Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient, *Movie Migrations: Transnational Genre Flows and South Korean Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015); Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann, eds., *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2005).
8. Yi Sunjin, “Han’gukchŏnjaeng hu shichŏnggak midioüi paech’iwa naengjönüi midio ne’üwŏk’ü” [Contours of the Cold War AV Media and Its Network in Postwar Korea], *Hanguk’hakyŏngu* 48 (2018): 85–118.

9. For more on the importance of decentralizing the extant tendency that isolates “noncommercial” film histories from the dominant narrative of industrial and technological transformation, aesthetic and stylistic changes, as well as the so-called mass audience, see Haidee Wasson and Charles Acland, *Useful Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), especially the introduction. For a recent study in the line of decentralizing film history (of American cinema, in particular), see Haidee Wasson, *Everyday Movies: Portable Film Projectors and the Transformation of American Culture* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021).

10. Yi Sunjin, “State-sanctioned Filmmaking and the National Film Production Center,” in *Ch’iwöjin hanguk yönghwasa* [The Erased History of Korean Cinema], ed. Korean Film Archive (Seoul: Korean Film Archive, 2014), 115–59.

11. Here I refer specifically to Record Group 469 (Records of US Foreign Assistance Agencies 1942–63) located in the National Archives in College Park, MD. Unless otherwise noted, the American documents cited in this chapter are located in the Korea Subject Files (1953–61) in this group.

12. Charles Acland, “Celluloid Classrooms: Post-WWII Consolidation of Community Film Activism,” in *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States*, ed. Dan Streible, Marsha Ogeron, and Devin Ogeron (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 377–96.

13. Edgar Dale, “World-Wide Communication the Audio-Visual Way,” *Educational Screen* (May 1949): 218. Quote from Charles Acland, “American AV: Edgar Dale and the Information Age Classroom,” *Technology and Culture* 58, no. 2 (2017): 392–421.

14. Dale, “World-Wide Communication the Audio-Visual Way,” 218.

15. Christina Klein, *Cold War Cosmopolitanism: Period Style in 1950s Korean Cinema* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 18–31, and for more specifically on the work of the Asia Foundation, see 57–79; Sangjoon Lee, *Cinema and the Cultural Cold War: US Diplomacy and the Origins of the Asian Cinema Network* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), 17–46.

16. Klein, *Cold War Cosmopolitanism*, 31.

17. James Sang Chi reveals that the American educators in Korea were not always as progressive as they claimed. Yet there was at least a shared sense of what specific virtues they identified as democratic, such as open-mindedness, cooperation, a sense of responsibility, and respect for the rights of others, and the Americans believed these virtues should be cultivated in Korean teachers and children. James Sang Chi, “Teaching Korea: Modernization, Model Minorities, and American Internationalism in the Cold War Era,” PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2008.

18. “Education Newsletter,” December 26, 1956, 66, in Box 1956–57.

19. American Education Team, *Curriculum Handbook for the Schools of Korea* (Seoul: Central Education Research Institute, 1956), 102, 107.

20. *Reflector: Special Korean-international Issue*, February 1958, 3, in Box 1958–59.

21. “Education Newsletter,” December 10, 1958, 80, in Box 1958–59.

22. “Education Newsletter,” December 10, 1958.

23. “Education Newsletter,” December 10, 1958.

24. For a critical assessment of the statist vision of education that centered on nurturing dutiful subjects, see Kim, *Youth for Nation*, 75–91.

25. An Hosang, *Uriüi purujijüm* [Our Outcry] (Seoul: Munhwadang, 1947), 117, and *Minjujök minjüngnon: Hanbaeksüngjuüi iron* [Democratic Nationalism] (Seoul: Ömun'gak, 1961), 239.
26. *Reflector: Special Korean-international Issue*, 3.
27. Kim Yönggün, in discussion with the author, April 1, 2017.
28. Kim Yönggün, April 1, 2017.
29. Kim Chaehüi, in discussion with the author, April 7, 2017.
30. Seth, *Education Fever*, 111–25.
31. Although democracy in a “Manichean set of terms” stemmed from the US plan to strengthen the “free world” against the communist bloc, it was the Korean political authority and educational administrators who organized education curricula according to this Manicheanism during and after the Korean War. Kim, *Youth for Nation*, 88. Quote is from 77.
32. On the “regulation of politics,” including violations of elections, see Eric Moberg, *Top-down Democracy in South Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 20–29.
33. Yi Sanghyön, in discussion with the author, April 15, 2017.
34. Cho Pyöngok, “Minüinün muösül marhaenna” [What the Election Results Shows], *Donga Ilbo*, May 31, 1956.
35. “Taet'ongnyöngbut'ongnyöngün wae tashi söng'öhana?” [Why Do We Elect the President and Vice-President Again?], *Donga Ilbo*, April 9, 1956.
36. Chöe Yunok, in discussion with the author, March 31, 2017.
37. Yi Hyönggün, in discussion with the author, April 20, 2017.
38. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 183. Emphasis added.
39. Yi Chönghöi, in discussion with the author, April 27, 2017.
40. “Certificate of Performance for George Peabody College for Teachers Contract,” March 5, 1959, 44, in Box 1959–60.
41. Yi Sunjin, “State-sanctioned Filmmaking and the National Film Production Center.”
42. “Syracuse University, Contract,” April 29, 1960, 326, in Box 1960–61.
43. Yi Chönghöi, April 8, 2017.
44. Kim Yönggün, April 1, 2017.
45. Yi Sanghyön, April 15, 2017.
46. *AV Education Bulletin*, May 18, 1959, 3.
47. Yi Sanghyön, April 15, 2017.
48. “Certificate of Performance for GPC Contract,” August 28, 1957, 104, Box 1957–78.
49. Kim Chaehüi, April 7, 2017.
50. *AV Education Bulletin*, January 1, 1960, 3.
51. Wön Hünggyun, “Ironsidaenün kkünnatta” [The End of the AV Theory Era], *Donga Ilbo*, June 14, 1956.
52. On the Film Council of America, see Charles Acland, “Classrooms, Clubs, and Community Circuits: Reconstructing Cultural Authority and The Film Council Movement, 1946–1957” in *Inventing Film Studies*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 149–81.
53. Kim Ŭnu, “Mikuküi sich'öngkakyoyuk” [The American AV Education], *Kyöngghyangsinmun*, October 8, 1955.

54. Yi Chõnghüi, April 8, 2017.
55. “Chalmotsohwadoen minjujuüi” [Ill-digested Democracy], *Chosõnilbo*, May 30, 1956.
56. Korea Democracy Foundation (Han’gukminjuhwaundongginyõnsaõphoe), ed., *Han’gungminjuhwaundongsa* [History of Korean Democratization Movement], vol. 1 (Paju: Tolbegae, 2008), 76.
57. Yi Hyõnggün, April 20, 2017.
58. Chõe Yunok, March 31, 2017.
59. Cho Ünsuk, in discussion with the author, April 14, 2017.
60. Yi Sanghyõn, April 15, 2017.
61. Yi Chõnghüi, April 8, 2017.
3. AT THE MARGINS OF FREEDOM: A DAY OFF (1968) AND FILM CENSORSHIP
1. Yi Yõngil, “Soedoen in’ganüi pigük” [Tragedy of Alienated People], *Yõnghwayesuli’ibüi*, April 1968, 94–95.
2. Hõ Munyõng, “Sagõnchõrõm ch’ajaon kõlchak” [A Masterpiece by Accident], *Cine 21*, September 14, 2005.
3. Kim Soyoung, *Pagugüi chido* [A Catastrophic Cartography] (Seoul: Hyõnsilmunhwa, 2014), 113–20.
4. Korean Film Archive, *Yõnghwachõnjae Yi Manhüi* [The Genius Filmmaker Yi Manhüi] (Seoul: Korean Film Archive, 2005), 130.
5. Pak Yuhüi, “Pakchõnghüi chõnggwõn’gi yõnghwa kõmyõlgwa kamsõng chaehyõnüi yõk’ak” [A Study of the Dynamics of Film Censorship and Representation of Sentiment during the Park Chung Hee Regime], *Yoksapipyõng*, May 2012, 42–90.
6. Hye Seung Chung, “Archive Revisionisms: Reevaluating South Korea’s State Film Censorship of the Cold War Era,” in *The Cold War and Asian Cinemas*, ed. Poshek Fu and Man-Fung Yip (London: Routledge, 2020), 174–93; Cho Junhyoung, “Han’guk yõnghwakõmyõlsaüi myõt’gachi chujee taehan sironjõk yõngu” [A Preliminary Study of the History of Korean Film Censorship], *Han’guk kükyesulyõngu* 59 (2018): 51–81.
7. Film censorship guidelines were introduced in the first film law of 1962 and revised in 1966, 1970, and 1974. For more on the history of policing film content, see Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient, *Movie Migrations: Transnational Genre Flows and South Korean Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 85–86. While Yi Namgi started his career as a censor in 1970, his testimony still provides the contours of how pre-filming censorship operated in the Ministry of Public Information and Culture in the late 1960s. Korean Film Archive, *Yi Namgi: Oral History* (Seoul: Korean Film Archive, 2015), 14.
8. As detailed in the first part of this chapter, the updated Film Acts, implemented starting in September 1966, normalized the dual process of censorship. On the implications of the changes made to censorship and the revised Film Act, see Cho Junhyoung, “Ijunggõmyõringa samjunggõmyõringa” [Double or Triple Censorship?], *Hyõndae yõnghwayõn’gu* 25 (2016): 339–71.
9. Korean Film Archive, *Genius Filmmaker Yi Manhüi*, 250.
10. A few copies of both “original” and scripts for review (“kõmyõldaepõn”) are in the Korean Film Archive. While additional revisions may have occurred between these three

texts, I dwell more on a viable possibility of interpretation in these available texts than on the limits of the unknown.

11. Steven Chung, *Split Screen Korea: Shin Sang-ok and Postwar Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 91.

12. All the provisions of the Film Act are available at <https://www.law.go.kr/>.

13. “Pan’gongböm 4cho pan’gukkadanchëe taehan ch’anyanggomu” [Violation of Anti-communist Law], *Donga Ilbo*, December 19, 1964.

14. “Kamdoge taehan kusokün kigang” [Dismissal of Arrest Warrant], *Kyönghyangsinmun*, December 21, 1964.

15. “Igamdökkömch’are songch’i” [Detention of Director Yi], *Donga Ilbo*, December 23, 1964.

16. “Imanhüissi kusokkiso” [Arrest of Director Yi], *Kyönghyangsinmun*, February 5, 1965; “Imanhüissi sökp’ang” [Director Yi Got Bailed Out], *Kyönghyangsinmun*, March 16, 1965.

17. “7inüi yöp’oro kamdong ip’igoe söngoyuye” [Director of Seven Female POWs Sentenced to Probation], *Donga Ilbo*, December 8, 1965; “Imanhüi kamdong hangso kigang söng’o yuye” [Dismissal of Prosecutor’s Appeal on the Case of Yi Manhüi], *Donga Ilbo*, March 25, 1969.

18. Marie Seong-hak Kim, *Constitutional Transition and the Travail of Judges: The Courts of South Korea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 68–69.

19. Pak Sönyöng, “1960nyöndaehuban kömidiyönghwaüi ‘myöngnang’kwa ‘chösokt’” [The Criteria of Vulgarity and Cheerfulness in the 60s’ Comedy Film], *Han’gukkügyesuryöng’u* 51 (2016): 169–201; Yu Süngjin, “Pangongüi kamgakkwa puronüi chöngch’ihak” [The Politics of Anti-communist Sentiment and Immorality], *Taejungsösayöng’u* 21, no. 5 (2015): 451–87.

20. “Yönghwagömyöre isangömnün’ga” [Is Nothing Wrong with Film Censorship?], *Yönghwayesul*, May 1965, 62–67.

21. “Yönghwagömyölüi hankye” [Limits of Film Censorship], *Kukjeyonghwa*, June 1965, 24.

22. Yu Hyönmok, “Ünmagüi chayü” [Freedom of Screen], *Kyönghyangsinmun*, March 24, 1965.

23. Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, *The Changing Face of Korean Cinema: 1960 to 2015* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 51–55.

24. Yi Pongböm, “1960nyöndae kömyölchëjewa ming’an’gömyölgigu” [A Study of the 1960s’ Public Organization of Censorship], *Taedongmunhwayöng’u* 75 (2011): 413–78.

25. “Mulüi . . . kakponüi sajöngömyöl” [The Harmful Script Review], *Sinailbo*, December 7, 1967.

26. See Article 13 of the 1966 Film Act.

27. “Yönghwagömyöl Semina” [Film Censorship Seminar], *Sindonga*, July 1968; Pak, “A Study on the Dynamics of Film Censorship,” 43.

28. Pak, “A Study on the Dynamics of Film Censorship,” 43.

29. Annette Kuhn, *Cinema, Censorship, and Sexuality, 1909–1925* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 127. Emphasis added.

30. For a helpful contextualization of the market logic in light of the state’s regulatory promotion of domestic film in the 1960s, see Chung, *Split Screen Korea*, 95–106.

31. “Chöbang nanyongüro pinsa, chönöm wigiüi chejakkyewa kü yoin” [Meaningless Solutions and Filmmaking in Crisis], *Sinailbo*, May 9, 1968.
32. Robert C. Post, “Censorship and Silencing,” in *Censorship and Silencing*, ed. Post (Los Angeles, CA: The Getty Research Institute, 1995), 4.
33. For more on the criticism of the conventional notion of censorship, see Richard Burt, “(Un)censoring in Detail: The Fetish of Censorship in the Early Modern Past and the Postmodern Present,” in Post, *Censorship and Silencing*, 17–42; Sue Curry Jansen, *Censorship: The Knot That Binds Power and Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). For a critical overview of this notion of censorship, see Helen Whitewater, “Towards a Redefinition of Censorship,” in *Censorship and Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*, ed. Beate Muller (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 217–37.
34. An original script of *A Day Off*, 3. Courtesy of Korean Film Archive. Emphasis added.
35. Paek Kyöl, in conversation with the author, July 19, 2019. Korean Film Archive, *Genius Filmmaker Yi Manhüi*, 130.
36. For an overview of Park’s era with an emphasis on the broader impacts of state developmentalism, see Hyung-a Kim and Clark Sorenson, “Introduction,” in *Reassessing the Park Chung Hee Era, 1961–1979: Development, Political Thought, Democracy, and Cultural Influence* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 3–18.
37. For more on the Park regime’s military mobilization, see Jinkyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 37–77.
38. A revised script of *A Day Off*. Courtesy of Korean Film Archive.
39. Paek Kyöl, July 19, 2019.
40. Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).
41. Yi Yöngil, “Chönmyöng’gaejak chishi” [Editorial: Mandates of Revision of the Entire Script], *Yöngghwa t’ibüi yesul*, July 1968, 10.
42. Yi Yöngil, “Yöngghwagömyörüi han’gye” [The Limits of Film Censorship], *Yöngghwa t’ibüi yesul*, July 1968, 87.
43. Park Chung Hee, *Uri minjoküi nagal kil* [Our Nation’s Path] (Seoul: Koryosöchökchusikhöesa, 1965), 221–22. For more on Park’s varied notions of democracy, see Jungin Kang, *Contemporary Korean Political Thought and Park Chung Hee* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 161–75.
44. Yi Yöngil, “Limits of Film Censorship,” 87.
45. 1968nyön yöngghwa naeoe chongp’yöng” [Review of the Domestic and Foreign Films of 1968], *Yöngghwa t’ibüi yesul*, December 1968, 62.
46. Elsewhere I discuss more specifically Yi Yöngil’s work and his persistent mode of writing. Hieyoon Kim, “Living with a Postcolonial Conundrum: Yi Yöngil and Korean Film Historiography,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 78, no. 3 (2019): 601–20.
47. Judith Butler, “Ruled Out: Vocabularies of the Censor,” in Post, *Censorship and Silencing*, 248.
48. See Article 21 of the 1966 Film Act.
49. Korean Film Archive, *Genius Filmmaker Yi Manhüi*, 130.
50. For instance, see Daniel Biltereyst and Roel VandeWinkel, “An Introduction,” in *Silencing Cinema: Film Censorship around the World*, ed. Biltereyst and VandeWinkel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1–12.

51. Wendy Brown, “In the ‘folds of our own discourse’: The Pleasures and Freedoms of Silence,” *The University of Chicago Law School Roundtable* 3, no. 1 (1996): 185–97. Quote is from page 187.

52. Brown, “In the ‘folds of our own discourse,’” 187.

53. Brown, “In the ‘folds of our own discourse,’” 187.

54. Paek Kyöl, July 19, 2019.

55. Slavoj Žižek, *Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

56. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 95.

57. Chung, *Split Screen Korea*, 117–27. Quote is from page 120.

58. See the records in Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation, *Han’gukyöngghwayönggam* [Korean Film Yearbook] 1979 and 1980 (Seoul: Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation).

59. Svetlana Boym, *Another Freedom: The Alternative History of an Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 6–7.

4. BEYOND THE MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN: KHAIDU AS A FEMINIST EXPERIMENTAL FILM COLLECTIVE

Acknowledgment: A version of this chapter was accepted for publication in *JCMS* (*Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*). See Hieyoon Kim, “Reckoning with A Feminist Experimental Film Collective: Khaidu in 1970s South Korea,” *JCMS* 63, no. 4 (Summer 2024).

1. “Shirhömyöngghwamandün k’aidu huyedül” [Khaidu’s Experimental Filmmaking], *Chosönilbo*, July 29, 1974.

2. “Shirhömyöngghwa p’esüt’iböl” [Experimental Film Festival], *Sundayseoul*, no. 300, July 21, 1974.

3. Only a handful of works have been written on Khaidu. As a comprehensive documentation of Korean women film workers in history, *Dictionary of Women Filmmakers* presents the shared struggle of female artists, including those of Khaidu members, in a traditionally male-dominated sector. See *Yösöng yöngghwain sachön* [Dictionary of Women Filmmakers], ed. Chu Chinsuk, Chang Mihüi, and Pyön Chaeran (Seoul: Sodo, 2001). For a helpful biographical overview of Han Okhi, see Kim Chiha, “Han Okhi,” in *Ai em indipendöntü: churyurül nömö, zinüi yösöng tongnibyöngghwa kamdok* [I am Independent: Seven Independent Female Filmmakers], ed. Jeonju International Film Festival (Seoul: Propaganda, 2021), 162–205. For an extended discussion of Han Okhi’s work, see Mun Kwankyü, “1970nyöndae silhömyöngghwachiptan k’aitu k’üllöpkwa han okhüi kamtok yöngu” [On the 1970s Experimental Film Group and Filmmaker Han Okhi], *Hyöndaeyöngghwayönggu* 7, no. 1 (2011): 141–72.

4. Han Sunae, in discussion with the author, July 11, 2019.

5. For a useful contextualization of Western feminist film activism, see B. Ruby Rich, *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). Khaidu’s formation resonated with the publication of key texts of feminist film criticism, including Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18; and Claire Johnston, “Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema,” in *Notes on Women’s Cinema*, ed. Johnston (London: SEFT, 1973), 24–31. The active years of Khaidu also overlapped with those of leading feminist avant-garde filmmakers, such as Yvonne Rainer and Helke Sander. On Yvonne Rainer’s work in the 1970s, see the special

section on her in the inaugural issue of *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, especially “Interview,” *Camera Obscura* 1, no. 1 (1976): 76–96. For Helke Sander’s work in the context of the post-68 era, see Christina Gerhardt, “Helke Sander’s dffb Films and the West German Feminist Movement,” in *Celluloid Revolt: German Screen Cultures and the Long 1968*, ed. Gerhardt and Marco Abel (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2019), 69–86.

6. For a powerful critique of the imperialist tendency in historicizing non-Western feminist discourses and practices, see Setsu Shigematsu, *Scream from the Shadows: The Women’s Liberation Movement in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), xv–xxxiv.

7. For a helpful overview of the implications of the Yusin era, see Youngju Ryu’s Introduction to *Cultures of Yusin: South Korea in the 1970s*, ed. Ryu (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 1–20.

8. Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, *The Changing Face of Korean Cinema: 1960 to 2015* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 129–34.

9. For more on the era’s underground art scene, see Yeon Shim Chung, “Historicizing the Avant-garde Contexts in Post-war Korea: From Experimental Arts to Collective Groups in the 1960s and 1970s,” in *Korean Art from 1953*, ed. Yeon Shim Chung, Sunjung Kim, Kimberly Chung, and Keith Wagner (New York: Phaidon, 2020), 41–71.

10. “Ch’wimilosöüi yönghwachechak naekön hankuksohyöngyöngghwatonghohoe” [The Small Film Club, Calling for Filmmaking as Everyday Activity], *Donga Ilbo*, July 25, 1970.

11. “Kwankaeküisikanhnün letiko yöngsangyönkuhoe” [Freed from the Audience, Moving Image Research Group], *Chosönilbo*, July 28, 1973.

12. Han Okhi [Han Okhüi], in discussion with the author, November 1, 2021.

13. Han Okhi, November 1, 2021.

14. Han Okhi, November 1, 2021.

15. Han Okhi, November 1, 2021.

16. Asia Culture Center, *Oral History: Kim Kulim, Pioneer of Korean Avant-garde Art* (Gwangju: Asia Culture Center, 2015), and *Oral History: Jung Kangja, the Leading Feminist in the World of Avant-Garde Art* (Gwangju: Asia Culture Center, 2015).

17. “Chönwiyöngghwatüi pökp’ungi han’gugedo” [The Storm of Avant-Garde Cinema Is Finally Arriving in Korea], *Yönghwajapchi*, October 1969, 94–95.

18. “Muryosöbisü tokpulumunhwawön yöngghwasangyöng” [The Goethe-Institute’s Free Screening Program], *Donga Ilbo*, September 24, 1973.

19. Han Okhi, in discussion with the author, August 8, 2018.

20. Han Okhi, August 8, 2018.

21. A symposium pamphlet, courtesy of Han Okhi.

22. Yoo Sun-young, “Tongwönchécheüi kwaminchokhwa p’ülochekt’üwa seksyöngghwa” [Hypernationalization and Sex Film in Mass Mobilization], *Önlonkwasahe* 15, no. 2 (2007): 2–55.

23. For instance, even an article that features female leaders in Hollywood and their “women power” obsessively sensationalizes their private life, particularly that of Jane Fonda, without consideration for their struggle against the male-dominated industry. “Küksöng yöwu” [Aggressive Actresses: Seven Champions of Women Power], *Kyönghyangsinmun*, February 18, 1975.

24. “Segye kotkosüi katkaji yöinsang” [The Female Figures in the World], *Chosönilbo*, July 15, 1971.
25. Hwasook Nam, *Women in the Sky: Gender and Labor in the Making of Modern Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 111–50.
26. Hyunah Yang, “A Journey of Family Law Reform in Korea: Tradition, Equality, and Social Change,” *Journal of Korean Law* 8 (2009): 77–94.
27. Han Sunae, in discussion with the author, October 26, 2021.
28. “Yösöngseryögyüi hwallo” [A Breakthrough for Women], *Kyönghyangsinmun*, July 24, 1973.
29. “Yösöngseryögyüi hwallo.”
30. Han Okhi, August 8, 2018.
31. “Yöünün ipko kamdokün pötöko” [Actress in Clothes and Director in Nudity], *Chuganyösöng*, February 9, 1975.
32. Kim Sönju, in discussion with the author, November 5, 2021.
33. For Pak’s trajectory, see her posthumously published autobiography, *Pak Namok: Han’guk chöt yösong yönghwa kamdok* [Pak Namok: The First Korean Woman Filmmaker] (Seoul: Maumsanch’aek, 2017).
34. Hong’s daughter and her peers published a memoir that includes Hong’s written notes and scripts. Hong Ünwon kinyömsaöphoe, *Sidaerül apsökan yösong sineasüt’ü: Hong Ünwon* [Hong Ünwon: A Ground-breaking Woman Cineaste] (Seoul: Sodo, 2001).
35. Han Okhi, November 1, 2021.
36. Han Sunae, July 11, 2019.
37. Kim Chömsön, “Yöngghwa mandülgirül kwanduda” [Why I Quit Filmmaking], <https://ex-is.org/journal/kimjumsun>, accessed February 14, 2022.
38. “Paek’waüi haep’üning” [A Happening Appeared], *Chuganyösöng*, February 29, 1976.
39. For more on the emergence of radical forms of antiestablishment expression, see Joan Kee, “Why Performance in Authoritarian Korea?” in *Cultures of Yusin*, edited by Youngju Ryu (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 249–53.
40. Han Okhi, November 1, 2021.
41. “Paek’waüi haep’üning.”
42. Notorious in the 1970s as one of the biggest urban disasters, the three-hour fire in 1974 killed eight-eight people and injured more than forty of those in the seven-story building.
43. Han Sunae, October 26, 2021.
44. Kim Tongju, in discussion with the author, August 14, 2018.
45. Under the law, women caught terminating pregnancies were subject to fines of up to two million won or up to a year in jail. Medical professionals caught carrying out abortions could face up to two years’ imprisonment. “Mochapokonbopipbop poryu” [Postponed Revision of Mother Child Health Act], *Donga Ilbo*, May 22, 1976.
46. Han Okhi, August 8, 2018.
47. “Hannach neköli yötaesaeng kut” [A Daytime Ceremony of Women’s College Students], *Chukankyöngghyang*, February 1976.
48. See the Traffic Laws, Article 49.
49. Han Okhi, August 8, 2018.

50. To note, the works of Fluxus, including those of Nam June Paik, did not reach most Korean audiences for years. It was later, in March 1993, that an exhibition on an unparalleled scale opened to the public, featuring the works of Fluxus artists, conversations with them, and a premiere of Paik's video installation "Electronic Superhighway." As a pre-festival event, the organizing committee hosted a Fluxus Film Week, exhibiting seventeen films at the Goethe-Institute. "P'üllöksösü yŏnghwajugan" [Fluxus Film Week], *Kyŏngnyangsinnmun*, February 17, 1993.

51. "Yösŏngchangjakjiptan paritö, samsipchunyönüi üimirülmalhata" [Women's Collective Paritö's Thirtieth Anniversary], *Cine 21*, September 18, 2019.

52. In 1993, a group of scholars published a selection of Western feminist film criticism translated into Korean, including oft-cited works such as Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Two years later, another group published an anthology that included both translations of Anglophone scholarship and criticism of Korean commercial cinema. Together, these scholars played a key role in launching the first international festival of women's cinema in 1997. Kim Soyung, ed., *Ssine-peminisüm* [Cine-Feminism: Reading Popular Culture Closely] (Seoul: Kwahakkwa sasang, 1995); Yu China and Pyŏn Chaeran, eds., *Peminisüm, yŏnghwa, yösŏng* [Feminism, Cinema, Woman] (Seoul: Yösŏngsa, 1993).

53. Han Okhi, August 8, 2018.

54. Han Sunae, July 11, 2019.

55. For a historical overview of the rise of the feminist movement in the South Korean film industry, see Hyun Seon Park, "South Korean Cine-Feminism on the Move," *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 12, no. 2 (2020): 91–97; for more on a new wave of digital feminist activism, see Jinsook Kim, "Sticky Activism: The Gangnam Station Murder Case and New Feminist Practice against Misogyny and Femicide," *JCMS* 60, no. 4 (2021): 37–60.

56. Women in Film Korea and Korean Film Council, *Yŏnghwagye sŏnghüirong'psŏngpŏngnyök shilt'aejosa* [A Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence in Film Industry 2019–2020] (Busan: Korean Film Council, 2021).

5. TOWARD A NEW CINEMA: THE SEOUL FILM COLLECTIVE'S AESTHETIC AND POLITICAL SUBVERSION

1. "Taehaksaeng yŏnghwaüshikkujo chosa" [On College Students' Moviegoing Patterns and Tastes], *Donga Ilbo*, May 12, 1980.

2. See the records in Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation, *Han'gukyŏnghwayŏnggam* [Korean Film Yearbook] 1979 and 1980 (Seoul: Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation).

3. Kim Su-yong, "Han'gukyŏnghwaü shilsang" [The Reality of Korean Cinema], *Kyŏngnyangsinnmun*, July 13, 1979. Kim's reflection resonated with many members of the industry who remained critical of the regime's suppression of their "artistic" exploration. "7onyŏndae kamdok chakkaüshik pingon" [The Lack of Auteurism], *Donga Ilbo*, December 15, 1979.

4. For an overview of the rise and fall of Korean New Wave, a term that encompasses the younger directors and their socially engaging sensibility that broke the conventions of the film industry starting in the late 1980s, see Darcy Paquet, *New Korean Cinema: Breaking the Waves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). Sangjoon Lee offers a trajectory

of local and global articulations of the term; see his “Introduction” in *Rediscovering Korean Cinema*, ed. Lee (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 3–7.

5. A metaphor of the oppressive dictatorship of Park Chung Hee, the Winter Republic was first articulated by Yang Sŏng-u in the title of a poem in early 1975. Youngju Ryu elaborates on its construction: “Yang Sŏng-u drew upon the age-old association in Korean literary imagination between the season of spring and political liberation to reveal that for all the virulence of the Park regime’s recriminations against Kim Il Sung’s ‘Frozen Kingdom’ on the other side of the Thirty-Eighth Parallel, the regime itself had turned into a mirror image of its reviled northern counterpart.” Ryu, *Writers of the Winter Republic: Literature and Resistance in Park Chung Hee’s Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2016), 3.

6. On the military power’s framing, see No Yŏnggi, *Kŭdŭrŭi* 5.18 [The Military Power’s 5.18] (Seoul: P’urŭnyŏksa, 2020). On the broad implications of the Gwangju uprising, see Georgy Katsiaficas and Na Kahn-chaе, eds., *South Korean Democracy: Legacy of the Gwangju Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang, eds., *Contentious Kwangju: The May 18 Uprising in Korea’s Past and Present* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

7. Seung-hoon Jeong, “The Seoul Film Collective: Leftist Strife, Open Cinema, and the Last Chapter of Korean Film Theory,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 34, no. 4 (2017): 348–60.

8. Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 48–55.

9. For instance, Kim Hong-joon started to make short films with a Super 8 camera before college. Previously available only to a few affluent families, Super 8 became more accessible with the importation of affordable equipment and the opening of laboratories to process Kodachrome and Ektachrome film in Seoul in 1977. Until this point, Super 8 users had to ship their work to Tokyo and wait more than a month for processing. Kim Hong-joon, in discussion with the author, July 24, 2018.

10. Some of these books include Sumner Glimcher and Warren Johnson, *Movie Making: A Guide to Film Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975); and Bebe Ferrell McClain, *Super 8 Filmmaking from Scratch* (Hoboken, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1978)

11. Although the military leaders claimed the merger of newspaper and broadcasting companies in 1980 was meant to “encourage wholesome media culture,” as revealed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2009, they aimed to take all media outlets under their control. “Chŏntuhwankwa sinkunpu chŏngkwŏn changakwihae ŏnlonin haechik-tŏngp’yehap” [Chun Doo-hwan and the New Military Regime Led Massive Layoffs of Journalists and Merging of Media Companies to Take Power], *Kyŏnghyangsinmun*, January 7, 2010.

12. John Lie, *K-Pop: Popular Music, Cultural Amnesia, and Economic Innovation in South Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 56; Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, *The Changing Face of Korean Cinema: 1960 to 2015* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 148.

13. Yecies and Shim, *Changing Face of Korean Cinema*, 148–51. On the complex implications of the ero genre, see Yun-jong Lee, “Between Progression and Regression: Ero Film as Cinema of Retreat,” in *Revisiting Minjung*, 223–46.

14. “Why Cinema?” Unpublished note. Courtesy of Kim Hong-joon.

15. For more on Cho’s work, see Ryu, *Writers of the Winter Republic*, 99–135.

16. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004), 13.

17. Untitled note written on November 21 in SFC journals (October 14, 1980–January 22, 1981), unpublished material. Courtesy of Kim Hong-joon.

18. Kim Hong-joon, July 24, 2018.

19. “Arirang” refers to a category of folk songs, and there are numerous regional variations in melodies and lyrics. The version used in the theatrical piece was “Bonjo Arirang,” which originated from a 1926 silent film called *Arirang*, which sparked nationalistic sentiment and became a sensation in Korea during the colonial period. The song’s continued emergence within that colonial context imbued it with solemnity, and many see the tune as one of the foremost articulations of “han”—the bitter, unyielding melancholia that is often described as a national characteristic. E. Taylor Atkins, “The Dual Career of ‘Arirang’: The Korean Resistance Anthem that Became a Japanese Pop Hit,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66, no. 3 (2007): 645–87.

20. Young-a Park, *Unexpected Alliances: Independent Filmmakers, the State, and the Film Industry in Postauthoritarian South Korea* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 39–40.

21. Chang Sönu [Jang Sun-woo], “Yöllinyöngghwalül wihayö” [Toward an Open Cinema], in *Saeroun yöngghwarül wihayö* [Towards A New Cinema], ed. Seoul Film Collective (Seoul: Hakminsä, 1983), 305–22. Darcy Paquet has recently translated an excerpt of Chang’s piece, accompanied by his interpretation and Chang’s reflections. See Paquet, “An Exuberant Vision of Artistic Renewal,” *Nang* 6 (2019): 32–35.

22. Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2011), 13.

23. For an English translation of an array of manifestos that have been credited as the essence of the third cinema movement, see Scott MacKenzie, ed., *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 207–323; and for interviews with those leading the movement, see Julianne Burton, *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America: Conversations with Filmmakers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

24. “Han’gukyöngghwaüi pansöng” [Reflection on Korean Cinema], in *Towards a New Cinema*, 323–40.

25. Hong Man, “Yöngghwasochipdanundongl” [Small Film Collective Activism], in *Yöngghwaundongron* [On Film Activism], ed. Seoul Film Collective (Seoul: Hwada, 1985), 224.

26. Hong, “Small Film Collective Activism,” 212–13.

27. Kim Insu, in discussion with the author, July 28, 2019.

28. For a helpful overview of farmer mobilization in post-1945 Korea, see Nancy Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 202–25. On the beef-industry crisis of the era, see Laura Nelson, *Measured Excess: Status, Gender, and Consumer Nationalism in South Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 121. According to Nelson, the South Korean government’s ill-designed promotion of the domestic beef industry led to a huge drop in domestic beef prices, from 1.57 million won to .92 million won per head between 1983 and 1987, reducing the profitability of the domestic industry.

29. Chungmoo Choi, “The Minjung Culture Movement and the Construction of Popular Culture in Korea,” in *South Korea’s Minjung Movement*, ed. Kenneth M. Wells (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1995), 113.

30. Yi Hyoin, in discussion with the author, July 25, 2018. For a discussion of the relation between social activism and the Catholic church in South Korea, see Donald Clark, "Growth and Limitations of Minjung Christianity in South Korea," in *South Korea's Minjung Movement*, 87–104.
31. Yi Hyoin, July 25, 2018.
32. Yi Hyoin, July 25, 2018.
33. Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (New York: Picador, 2003), 66–70.
34. Chris Robé, "Anarchist Aesthetics and U.S. Video Activism," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 56 (2014), <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc56.2014-2015/RobeAnarchists/index.html>.
35. Hong, "Small Film Collective Activism," 231.
36. Hong, "Small Film Collective Activism," 233.
37. Hong, "Small Film Collective Activism," 232.
38. An Donggyu, "Taehakyŏnghwajiptan/taehakyŏnghwaje" [College Film Collectives and Festivals], *Yŏllinyŏnghwa* 3 (Summer 1985): 107.
39. Hong, "Small Film Collective Activism," 231.
40. Kim Insu, July 28, 2019.
41. Kim Hong-joon, July 24, 2018.
42. "Minjungyŏnghwachechak, yŏngŏp 2myŏng kusok 1myŏng ipkŏn" [Minjung Film-making Collective, Two Members Arrested and One Investigated], *Kyŏnghyangsinmun*, November 18, 1986.
43. "Nongchŏn hyŏnsil yŏnghwachechak konglyun ankŏoch'iko sangyŏng 2 myŏng kuhyŏng" [Film Screened Without the Board's Approval, Sentence to Two Filmmakers], *Donga Ilbo*, March 26, 1987.
44. Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 213–39.
45. Lee, *Making of Minjung*, 250.
46. Discussion with a former SFC member, identity anonymized upon request, July 10, 2019.
47. Kyung Hyun Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 28–29.
48. Nam Lee, "The Night Before the Strike," in *Rediscovering Korean Cinema*, edited by Sangjoon Lee (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 246–59.
49. Park, *Unexpected Alliances*, 44–47.
50. A prominent film magazine of the 1990s, *KINO*, published a series of articles on and interviews of the people in this independent network during its long life. For instance, see "Chigŭm, yŏgi, sŏro, hamkke" [Solidarity of Small, Independent Filmmakers Here], *KINO* (May 1996): 92–97. For the growth of the independent film production and its network during the 1990s and the 2000s, see Park, *Unexpected Alliances*.
51. See, for instance, Nam Taeche and Yi Ch'inpil, "Kyŏkdongŭ hyŏnshilesŏkesŏ taeŏnan tongnipdakyumentŏri" [Independent Documentaries Born from the Combustion of Reality], in *Han'guk tongnipdakyumentŏri* [Korean Independent Documentaries], ed. Independent Documentary Research Group (Seoul: Yedam, 2003): 19–59; The Editorial Collective of *Independent Cinema*, ed., *Maehokui kiŏk, tongnipyŏnghwa* [The Beautiful Memory of Independent Cinema] (Seoul: Han'guktongnipyŏnghwahyŏphŏe, 2001); Seoul Video Collective [Sŏulyŏngsangjipdan], ed., *Pyŏnbangesŏ chungsimŭro* [From the Periphery to the Center] (Seoul: Sigakkwaŏnŏ, 1996).

CONCLUSION

1. On the historical implications of the uprising, see Sö Chungšök, *6wöl hangjaeng* [The June Uprising] (Paju: Tolbegae, 2011); Kim Wön, *87nyön 6wöl hangjaeng* [The June 1987 Uprising] (Paju: Ch'aeksesang, 2009).

2. For an in-depth analysis of the Candlelight Movement as a broad call to redress injustices in post-authoritarian South Korea, see Nan Kim, "Candlelight and the Yellow Ribbon: Catalyzing Re-Democratization in South Korea," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 15, no. 5 (2017), <https://apjff.org/2017/14/Kim.html>.

3. For instance, in June 2017, the Korea Democratic Foundation organized one of the comprehensive conferences that put the two historical events in comparison. As part of its commemorative effort, it commissioned at least five research projects characterized by an active interpretation of both the June uprising and the Candlelight protest as part of the long tradition of prodemocratic movements. All conference presentations and publications are available at its online platform specifically designed to memorialize the June uprising: <https://www.610.or.kr/board/book/page/1>.

4. Ranked the fourth highest-grossing film of the year (\$53,720,270), *1987* drew more than 7.2 million viewers in South Korea and was acclaimed by reporters and critics as the best Korean film of 2017. "1987 chosen as the best film of 2017," *Yonhap News*, January 30, 2018. Elsewhere I discuss more specifically the film's arrival at the immediate post-Candlelight Movement and its implications. Hieyoon Kim, "On 1987: South Korean Cinema in the Era of Re-democratization," *Korea Journal* 60, no. 3 (Fall 2020): 273–94.

5. Ju Oak Kim, "Korea's Blacklist Scandal: Governmentality, Culture, and Creativity," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 59, no. 2 (2018): 81–93.

6. The director comments on various obstacles to completing the project in many post-screening interviews. For instance, see, "1987 kamdok changjunhwani marhanün 87nyön, kürigo 2017nyön" [The 1987 Director's 1987 and 2017], *Kyönghyangsinnmun*, January 15, 2018.

7. "Moontaet'ongryöng, '6wöl hangjaengwansöngsik'in ke chotpulhyökmyöng" [President Moon, "The Candlelight Revolution Completes the June Uprising"], *Hankyorhe*, January 7, 2018.

8. See a comment made by a user named "Choihyeeun" on the closing credits, *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oKwbe2UUR14&t=171s>, accessed September 1, 2021.

9. This is from a comment (by a user named "hong jun lee") on the closing credits.

10. For a detailed account of the democratic transition in the post-1987 era, see Sun-chul Kim, *Democratization and Social Movements in South Korea* (London: Routledge, 2016); and Paul Chang and Gi-Wook Shin, "Democratization and the Evolution of Social Movements: Institutionalization and Diffusion" in *South Korean Social Movements: From Democracy to Civil Society*, ed. Shin and Chang (London: Routledge, 2011), 3–18.

11. Kyung-Sup Chang, "Compressed Modernity and Its Discontents: South Korean Society in Transition," *Economy and Society* 28, no. 1 (2009): 30–55.

12. Hyae-joon Kim, "A History of Korean Film Policies," in *Korean Cinema: From Origins to Renaissance*, ed. Mee-hyun Kim (Seoul: Communication Books, 2007), 351–55.

13. By 2005, South Korea's domestic film market had become the fifth largest in the world, with \$890 million box office profits. This box office success coincided with the international recognition of South Korean film "auteurs." In 2002, Im Kwon-taek [Im Kwönt'aek] won the award for Best Director at Cannes for *Chihwasun*, and Lee Chang-dong [Yi Ch'angdong]

received the Special Director Award at the Venice Film Festival. In 2004, Park Chan-wook [Pak Chanuk] won the Grand Prix at Cannes for *Oldboy*. From this point on, Korean films assumed even greater representative value as national icons, and government institutions and their corporate sponsors increasingly invested in promoting Korean cinema in the globe. See Korean Film Council [Han'gukyönghwachinhünwihwöhö], "Hankukyönghwaii sekychinch'ulyöngku" [A Study of Korean Film's Global Marketing] (Seoul: Korean Film Council, 2004), and "Yönghwapunya hanlyuhwalsönghwapanganyöngku" [A Study of Strategies for Hallyu in the Context of Korean Film] (Seoul: Korean Film Council, 2005). These reports led policymakers and liberal politicians to implement a multiyear planning of the film industry and its expansion in the global market in 2006. See a joint development of the Uri Party (the ruling political party from 2004 to 2007) and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, "Yönghwasanöp chungchangki palchönkyehoek, 2007–2011" [Mid- and Long-term Development Plan for Film Industry] (Seoul: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2006).

14. Jinhee Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 15–30; Darcy Paquet, *New Korean Cinema: Breaking the Waves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 61–112; Dal Yong Jin, "Cultural Politics in Korea's Contemporary Films under Neoliberal Globalization," *Media, Culture & Society* 28, no. 1 (2006): 5–23; Doobo Shim, "South Korean Media Industry in the 1990s and the Economic Crisis," *Prometheus* 20, no. 4 (2002): 337–50.

15. For a helpful overview of the formation and consolidation of independent sector, see Young-a Park, *Unexpected Alliances: Independent Filmmakers, the State, and the Film Industry in Postauthoritarian South Korea* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 48–71.

16. On the shifting roles of the government in cultural sectors, see Woongjae Ryoo and Dal Yong Jin, "Cultural Politics in the South Korean Cultural Industries: Confrontations between State-developmentalism and Neoliberalism," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 26, no. 1 (2020): 31–45.

17. For a recent reflection on the catalysts of the Candlelight Movement, see "Forum: South Korean Candlelight Protest Movement," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 81, no. 1 (2022), especially Albert Park, "A Recycling of the Past or the Pathway to the New? Framing the South Korean Candlelight Protest Movement," 101–5; Jennifer Jihye Chun, "Protesting Precarity: South Korean Workers and the Labor of Refusal," 107–18; Hyun Ok Park, "The Politics of Time: The Sewol Ferry Disaster and the Disaster of Democracy," 131–44.

18. For a compelling analysis of how economic injustice motivated the increased participation of the younger generation, see Hyejin Kim, "'Spoon Theory' and the Fall of a Populist Princess in Seoul," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 74, no. 4 (2017): 839–49.

19. Hyowon Lee, "Inside South Korea's Battle with a State-sponsored Censorship Crisis," *The Hollywood Reporter*, February 9, 2017. In 2019, the Korean Film Council—the state-run agency that involved the systematic repression of film workers who did not share Park Geun-hye's politics—conducted an in-depth investigation of its abuse of power during Park's rule, including informal censorship and unfair distribution of public funding. The results of the investigation have been published in multiple volumes that are available on the council's website, <https://www.kofic.or.kr/kofic/business/board/selectBoardDetail.do?boardNumber=381>, accessed on August 30, 2021.

20. Carter J. Eckert, "South Korea's Break with the Past: The End of the Long Park Chung Hee Era," *Foreign Affairs*, March 11, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles>

/south-korea/2017-05-11/south-koreas-break-past. For more on Park Chung Hee's legacy, see Eckert, *Park Chung Hee and Modern Korea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

21. Yi Chŏnghŭi, in discussion with the author, July 22, 2019.

22. Jihoon Kim, "Post-verité Turns: Mapping Twenty-First-Century Korean Documentary Cinema," *Korea Journal* 61, no. 3 (2021): 188–222.

23. For a short yet potent photo essay on the Yongsan disaster as one of the state's brutal urban renewal projects, see Jon Dunbar, "Resurrection City: The Scale of Seoul's Urban Renewal Process," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 29 (2018): 98–100; and the paired essay, Mihye Cho, "Jon Dunbar's Leftover Seoul," in the same issue, 100–104. For more on the South Korean government's developmental urban policy, see Jonson N. Porteux and Sunil Kim, "Public Ordering of Private Coercion: Urban Redevelopment and Democratization in South Korea," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 16, no. 3 (2016): 371–90.

24. Jonathan Crary, "Jean-Luc Godard, Histoire(s) du cinéma," in *Sensible Politics: The Visual Culture of Nongovernmental Activism*, ed. Meg McLagan and Yates McKee (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 299–303.

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Record Group 554 (General Headquarters, Far East Command, Supreme Commander Allied Powers, and United Nations Command)

Korean Film Archive in Seoul

Censorship Document Collection

PERIODICALS

Chosŏn-ilbo

Chuganyŏsŏng

Chukankyŏnghyang

Cine 21

Donga Ilbo

Haebangilbo

Hankyorhe

Hansŏngilbo

KINO

Kyŏnghyangsinmun

Maeilgyŏngje

Maeilshinbo

New York Times

Seoulsinmun

Shinchŏnji
Sinaillo
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