The Representation of Asian Others in Korean Cinema since 2003: Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Sub-imperialism

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Declaration

I, Juyeon Bae confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from others sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Signed  **Date…26-Apr-2016……**

Abstract

This thesis elucidates current industrial and representational tendencies in South Korean films that depict Asian others. Asian others such as migrant workers, marriage migrants, overseas ethnic Koreans and North Korean defectors have become increasingly important in South Korean filmic discourse and practice since 2003. This thesis examines how contemporary Korean cinema has responded to the multicultural society and how it seeks to articulate Korean nationalism in the globalised era through the appropriation of Asian others. Such films are intertwined with governmental policies of multiculturalism and discourses on globalisation and thus reflect historical formations both inside and outside South Korean cinema. In particular, this thesis places the celebration of multicultural identity in Korean cinema into dialogue with existing debates on nationalism and sub-imperialism. Through case studies of selected films, this thesis investigates the tension between a changing society and emerging sub-imperial perspectives. The specific interest of this thesis lies in the examination of historical, geopolitical and socio-cultural trajectory in the representation of Asian others, since this discursive structure has been formed around Asia and its regional socio-political history. In doing so, this thesis aims to shift the discursive sphere of these films, which is limited to the discussion of multiculturalism and globalisation, to an expanded sphere which embraces historical and regional perspectives.

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As to Romanisation, I have followed the McCune-Reischauer system of romanisation for Korean words except names renowned in English. For the names of authors, I used appeared name in their English publications and commonly used way of spelling in case of Korean publications. Korean and Chinese names follow the convention, putting surname first before given name, except those who are already known the other way around.

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Abbreviations

BIFF	Busan International Film Festival
EPS	The Employment Permit System
KIFV	The Association of Korean Independent Film and Video
KOFIC	Korea Film Council
NHRC	The National Human Rights Commission in Korea
NICs	Newly Industrialised Countries
NIS	National Intelligence Service
SIFF	Seoul Independent Film Festival
USIS	United States Information Service

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Introduction

In this thesis I examine the representation of Asian others in contemporary Korean cinema since 2003 and expand the discussion of the representational sphere to include more general social topics dealing with Korean nationalism in the age of globalisation. The term "Asian others" indicates Asian migrant people living in South Korea, such as migrant workers, marriage migrants, ethnic Koreans from China and Central Asian countries and North Korean defectors. Their emergence on screen is often considered a result of globalisation of South Korean society in the 1990s. Thus, the discussion of the representation of Asian others is often located within existing debates about multiculturalism that are often expected to be a new agenda in the newly globalised Korean society. Yet, this thesis seeks to historicise the emergence of Asian others on screen. By doing so, this thesis explicates the complex constellation of historical and social factors around the representation of Asian others in contemporary Korean cinema and expands the discursive sphere to include the dynamics of nation, trans-nation and trans-Asia.

After the end of the long period of military dictatorship from 1961 to 1987, South Korea faced a more liberal and democratised era which emerged in tandem with the forces of globalisation. While the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games has been seen as a signal for the dawn of a global Korea, the *Segyehwa* (globalisation) policy of the Kim Young-sam government (1993-1998) was a clear declaration in favour of the internationalisation

of Korean society. Simultaneously, Korea invited a number of foreign visitors mostly from the rest of Asia for the purpose of managing the country's shortage of labor forces and brides. These changes in internal demographics and international geopolitics transformed the everyday scenery in both urban and rural areas and demanded a new perspective on the status of the Korean nation and national identity. Long-lasting beliefs in one single ethnicity starting with the advent of the modern era in the late 19th century, also needed to be revised in this new era. During this time, the idea that Korean society should be multicultural and international was widely promulgated after President Roh Moo-hyun's declaration in 2006. Subsequently, Asian others such as migrant workers and brides, North Korean defectors and the returning ethnic Koreans who newly emerge in Korean society were beginning to attract attention from both the media and from scholarship. Yet, the celebration of global and multicultural Korea is not the opposite of Korean nationalism. Ostensibly, multiculturalism seems to threaten the traditional homogenous Korean national identity, but eventually, these seemingly contradictory positions come to compliment each other and, taking this point even further, multiculturalism is often regarded as an expanded or disguised form of Korean nationalism.

From this vantage point, this thesis explores the relationship between multiculturalism and nationalism. In particular, by focusing on regional aspects, this thesis suggests the existence of a form of sub-imperialism that drives the desire for strong national identity in

contemporary Korean society and Korean cinema. A term first deployed by Chen Kwan-hsing, sub-imperialism indicates a lower-level empire's desire for regional prominence that depends on the larger structures of imperialism.[1] Since 2000, Korean scholars working in various disciplines and filmmakers have started to pay great attention to Asia, a discourse ignited by the popularity of Korean pop culture in the Asian region, a phenomenon that has been called the "Korean Wave" (*Hallyu*), and the economic potential of the region, specifically of China.[2] On the surface, Korea appears to celebrate regional cooperation and diversity. However, it can be argued that Korea consumes and appropriates Asian others in a hierarchic relationship between superior Korean natives versus inferior Asian others, group which even includes non-native Koreans so as to place itself in a dominant position within an imaginary sub-imperial map of the region. This self-image results from the victimisation of Korea by imperial powers and dictatorship, which over-arches modern Korean history of the last century.

This trend is also predominant in contemporary Korean films that depict Asian others. Here, Mika Ko's proposition of what she calls cosmetic multiculturalism in the context of Japanese cinema dealing with internal others in Japan is also applicable. Cosmetic multiculturalism describes contemporary Japanese multiculturalism as a form of nationalism which

[1] Chen Kuan-Hsing, "The Imperialist Eye: The Cultural Imaginary of a Subempire and a Nation-State." Translated by Yiman Wang. In *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 8 (1), 2000: 15

[2] Shin Gi-wook, "Asianism in Korea's Politics of Identity." In *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6 (4), 2005. He points out that Korea's interests in Asia started from the downfall of China (Qing Dynasty) in the late nineteenth century and have revisited since the 1990s due to China's rising in the world.

celebrates other cultures as objects of consumption.[3] Similarly, Korean cinema depicting Asian others celebrates multicultural Korean society and addresses Asian others as a constitutional tenet of Korean national identity in the global era. However, Asian others are tolerated only as long as they can be appropriated and consumed by Koreans, especially Korean men. Korean cinema has a long legacy of male Korean protagonists who are the central part of narrative around which Korean national identity is built. This is also the case in recent Korean films depicting Asian others. In this regard, Asian others in Korean cinema undergo a double marginalisation by South Korean male protagonists: gender marginalisation – by taking over roles traditionally filled by female Koreans in previous eras – and ethnic marginalisation. Yet, if films from the previous era construct a masculinised national identity within the Korean national boundary, the appropriation of Asian others functions to place Korea on the global stage and to present Korea as the dominant regional power. In this regard, Asian others in Korean cinema become the objects of sub-imperial desire by South Koreans. Therefore, contemporary Korean films representing Asian others lie in the contested space between national, regional and global forces.

My use of the term Asian 'others' rather than multicultural subjects or simply Asians aims to emphasise the tendency to otherise multi-cultural and multi-racial characters in contemporary Korean society and Korean cinema. Asian others are others differentiated from hegemonic

[3] Mika Ko, *Japanese Cinema and Otherness: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and the Problem of Japaneseness*. (London: Routledge, 2011): 1

Korean national subjects. At the same time, these Asian others are others that are necessary constituents of Korean national identity. Anna Triandafyllidou takes into account the fact that national identity has been formed both from within, that is through the commonality of its members, and from without, namely, by distinguishing and differentiating the nation from others.[4] Here, the others could be other nations in conflict with the "main" nation, but also "a group that threatens to blur the distinctiveness of the ingroup" such as immigrant people.[5] Triandafyllidou names these groups that reconstitute of the national identity of the ingroup as "significant others."[6]

Asian others in South Korea as relative newcomers raise questions about a Korean national identity that has been characterised by its ethnic homogeneity. In this sense, Asian others are "significant others" who blur the homogenous Korean national identity. Korean multiculturalism and Korean films dealing with Asian others are, therefore, involved in the ongoing process of rebuilding the Korean national identity in the globalised era. However, Asian others are not a homogeneous group, even under the broad category of "Asians" nor can they be reduced to one representative nationality such as Singaporean, Bangladeshi or Vietnamese. They embody overlapping terrains wherein ethnic, national and racial identities as well as their gender, class and cultural identity intersect. Therefore, they exist outside of the

[4] Anna Triandafyllidou, "National Identity and the 'Other.'" In *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21 (4), 1998: 593
[5] *Ibid*.: 600
[6] *Ibid*.: 600

constitutional power of nationalism in each place.

Although there are a great number of documentaries, features and short films which deal with Asian others and other Asian cultures, this thesis limits its main research area to theatre-released films produced since 2003 so as to reveal "the optical unconscious" around the representation of Asian others and the influence of this unconscious in building the discursive sphere of nationalism and multiculturalism. TV shows are also excluded in this thesis since a different medium needs different research methods. Selected films in this thesis are not always successful in the box-office but embrace significant tendencies to represent Asian others depending on their industrical positions and the objects they deal with. The year 2003 is selected because a number of films depicting Asian others burst onto official Korean theatre screens in that year and the visibility of migrants in Korean society was suddenly increased in Korean society due to mass demonstrations by migrants from 2003 onwards.

Nationalism and Ethnic Nationalism

What this thesis intends is to engage in the current discursive sphere around nationalism which is invoked again after the multiculturalism emerged in South Korea. Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as "primarily a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit

should be congruent." [7] According to him, industrialisation develops nationalism because industrialisation facilitates mobilisation and then people need to learn new skills and knowledge such as reading letters and then the political area needs to correspond to the area of homogeneous high culture based on literacy.[8] Here the political area corresponds to states or equivalent political organization. He separates cultures and social organizations from states and nationalisms and then argues that the former is natural and universal but the latter is not. [9] In this sense, he agrees with a modernist idea that nationalism has been formed and developed in the modern era.

On the other hand, some scholars such as Anthony D. Smith support an essentialist idea of nationalism. Smith argues that nation has its ethnic origin and 'ethnie' had developed into a nation.[10] According to him, the 'ethnie' is a term to indicate ethnic communities and it has specific features like these: it should have a collective name; it should have a common myth of descent; it should have a shared history; it should have a distinctive shared culture; it should associate with a specific territory and should have a sense of solidarity. [11] He says that the features of ethnie are basic ideas of a nation and then ethnie proceeds to nation throughout revolutionary process in the area of economy (to capitalism), politics/

[7] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000): 1
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism* (London: The Orion Publishing Group, 1997): 5
[10] Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986)
[11] *Ibid.*: 22-31

administration and culture/ education.[12]

However, Smith's argument cannot explain the difference between 'ethnie' and nation. Why does he distinguish the nation and ethnics if the nation is just an extended version of the 'ethnie'? Here, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* could be referred. In this book, Anderson also mentions that almost "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to face contact are imagined" in some ways but what the nation is distinguished from others is that the nation is only possible as long as it is imagined.[13] In this regard, Anderson pays attention to the way in which a nation is formed through print capitalism.

Citing and enlarging Anderson's arguments, Masachi Oosawa reverses Smith's view. Oosawa asserts that the ethnics are not the origin of nations but the other way around.[14] If nation is imagined, which means people are bond through universal and abstract (mediated) concept such as citizen, the bond between nation and people needs to be emerged as an ethnic (specific) and concrete form.[15] Therefore, ethnics are not the origin of nations but appear as the result.

Oosawa's argument is significant to understand the current sphere of contest between nationalism and multiculturalism in South Korea. As I will argue in Chapter 1, nationalism in Korea has developed

[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983;2006): 6
[14] Masachi Oosawa, *Naesyŏnŏllisŭmronŭi Myŏngch'ŏ [Fifty Masterpieces on Nationalism-theory]* (Seoul: Ilchokak, 2010): 298
[15] *Ibid.*:298

with the advent of the modern era in the late 19th century with strong ethnic sentiment. At that moment, there was a work rewriting Korean history and the Han ethnic (Korean ethnics) became the only legitimate one. In particular, with the fall of Qing dynasty and the rise of Japanese Imperialist desire, Korean nationalism developed with the emphasis of the distinguished Han ethnic and its independence. In this sense, Korean nationalism has existed as a form of ethnic nationalism which is endorsed by the idea of ethnic homogeneity. Ethnic nationalism is often regarded as an obstacle for multicultural society. However, as I will argue in other chapters, that is not always the case. Even, they are correlated in some ways.

Research method

This thesis integrates its textual analysis into the historical, geopolitical and cultural context of South Korea. To do so, three research methods are employed here: Asia as method, cinema specificity, and contextuality. The reason to design these terms as methods rather than following more generally used methods such as text analysis or historical analysis is these three categories are significant frames in which this thesis is articulated.

Asia as method

Avoiding dichotomous descriptions such as the West/the East or the First/Third Worlds, which coincided with imperialism or Euro-centrism,

this thesis employs Asia as a method rather than geographical location. This is a method that was suggested by Yoshimi Takeuchi in the 1960s and reinforced by Chen Kuan-hsing in the 2000s, which argues that each Asian country becomes each other's point of reference rather than applying (Western) theories to each country's case and being an informer to prove these existing hegemonic theories.[16] As a matter of fact, this is a strategic and proclamatory method rather than disciplinary one. Chen describes

> 'Asia as method' as a critical proposition to transform the existing knowledge structure and at the same time to transform ourselves. The potential of Asia as method is this: using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, societies in Asia can become each other's points of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt. On this basis, the diverse historical experiences and rich social practices of Asia may be mobilized to provide alternative horizons and perspectives. This method of engagement, I believe, has the potential to advance a different understanding of world history.[17]

In a similar vein, Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto suggests another term, "trans-Asian cinema", as a methodological frame. For Yoshimoto, trans-Asian cinema is a term that can be employed to refuse the understandings of Asian cinema

[16] Chen Kuan-Hsing, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
[17] *Ibid.*: 212

as uniqueness or a compilation of various national cinemas in Asia.[18] Accordingly, Chen and Yoshimoto's proposition requires the reification and historicisation of each text/context and comparative/empirical studies within Asia. Furthermore, their assertion is a strategy designed to deconstruct colonial, imperial, and cold-war structures especially in knowledge production and distribution in cultural studies.

In this regard, this thesis conducts historical and empirical research rather than applying established theories such as multiculturalism and nationalism to new texts. The ambivalent usage of these terms is also the reason to employ this method. As a matter of fact, multiculturalism and nationalism are still uncompromised terms and have variously developed depending on contexts. Regarding this situation, this thesis looks up Korean modern history in which nationalism has been forged and the current discursive sphere of multiculturalism is positioned. By doing so, this thesis places the films into geopolitical, historical and cultural maps delineated by conflicting national, regional and global forces. In this process, Asia as method forges a significant frame of research to explicate multiculturalism and sub-imperial desire in Korean cinema.

Cinema specificity

[18] Matsuhiro Yoshimoto, "National/International/Transnational: The Concept of Trans-Asian Cinema and the Cultural Politics of Film Criticism." In *Theorising National Cinema*, edited by Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen. (London: British Film Institute, 2006): 260

The role of cinema, as a medium of representation, is underscored especially in studies of ethnic, racial and cultural others since cinema not only represents others but also constitutes the discourses around them. This understanding is grounded in Stuart Hall's assertion that

> We have been trying to theorize identity as constituted not outside but within representation; and hence of cinema, not as a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places to speak. Communities [...] are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.[19]

In this regard, it is not in the interest of this thesis to evaluate the represented images under the consideration of positivity and negativity. Neither does this thesis judge to what extent films taken in this thesis reflect the reality of Asian others. Rather, this thesis pays attention how cinema forges the discursive sphere in terms of nationality and cultural identity through the representation of Asian others.

As a matter of fact, cinema specificity – or media specificity – which was inspired mostly by apparatus theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry has been almost abandoned due to its technological determinism.

[19] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell, 2003): 245

However, Thomas Lamarre whose book on Japanese Animation asserts the resurrection of the media specificity thesis, argues that "it is impossible to separate questions about material specificity [of cinema or animation] from questions about material conditions or historical formations [of modernity or postmodernity]." [20] Pointing to the tendencies within Japanese animation studies such as reading animation as a symptom or allegory with a consideration of a major theme, Lamarre continues that this trend asserts the idea that problems and questions come from outside and animation just re-present them, meaning that this animation can only represent Japanese national culture as one of the tenets or one counterpart of world culture.[21] Although it is difficult to directly adopt his methodology since his arguments still tend toward a troubling technical determinism – although he distinguishes his "machine thesis"[22] from a technical determinism – it is worth considering his criticism on contemporary trends in national cinema (or media) studies.

In the meantime, Robert Stam and Louise Spence suggest cinema specificity as a valuable methodology for the analysis of the cinematic representation of the 'Third World.'[23] Stam and Spence question the tendency of film studies to focus on colonialism and racism which pays significant attention to the "social portrayal, plot and character" illustrated

[20] Lamarre, *The Anime Machine a Media Theory of Animation*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): xxiii
[21] *Ibid.*: xxxi.
[22] Amending Guattari's term, he calls his thesis as machine thesis with distinction from apparatus theory. Machine thesis necessarily has a feature of discontinuity and each text and culture is a process of negotiation and negation of this discontinuity. *Ibid.*: xxvii.
[23] The emphasis is from this author.

by their insistence on positive images and emphasis on realism.[24] They argue that at times "[the emphasis on realism] avoids the fact that films are inevitably constructs, fabrications, representations and the insistence on positive images, finally, obscures the fact that 'nice' images might at times be as pernicious as overtly degrading ones, providing a bourgeois façade for paternalism, a more pervasive racism."[25] Accordingly, they argue for a methodology based on cinema specificity, emphasising textual and intertextual analysis.[26]

Bearing this criticism in mind, this thesis investigates "the filmic style in which multiculturalisms and nationalisms are imagined"[27] and the material condition of the representation of Asian others rather than represented images per se, with a consideration of cinema specificity. This method also helps to understand the gab between ostensible celebration for multicultural society and the deep layers' resistence against Asian others. The former usually happens on the surface such as story which is deliverd by dialogue and action while the latter usually emerges between shots and scenes. What is important in the representation of others is to reveal "the obtical unconscious" as Walter Benjamin says.

However, it should be noted that cinema specificity exists within particular historical and cultural contexts. With a concern for nationalism

[24] Robert Stam and Louise Spence, "Colonialism, Racism and Representation: An Introduction." In *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, edited by Bill Nichols. (Berkeley; London: University of California Press 1985): 632
[25] *Ibid.*: 632-633. The emphasis is from the original text.
[26] These are exemplified through the analysis how cinematic apparatus functions to build their ideological effects and the political positioning of spectators, which they call as aberrant reading. *Ibid*.
[27] The emphasis is from this author because this sentence is following Stuart hall's statement.

and multiculturalism, Paul Willemen warns that film theories often assume the universality of film language.[28] In order words, it should be acknowledged at this point that technology is not a neutral but a political and ideological factor. From this vantage point, this thesis reads cinema specificity in each film it considers within their socio-political, historical and cultural contexts.

Contextuality

This thesis places its case studies into the critical context of film practice, Korean society and history and then extends its examination to the transnational context so as to bridge between Korean studies on nationalism/multiculturalism and cinema studies. Contextuality is, according to Martyn Hammersley, central to most forms of qualitative inquiry.[29] Hammersley goes on to argue that "human actions, of whatever kind, can be properly understood only in context."[30]

However, how to define this context is a central debate for interested scholars. Hammersley introduces three issues around which to build an understanding of this context: to what extent researchers focus on context, how this context is to be identified by its actors, and the task the analyst draws on since "context exists beyond or below actors,

[28] Paul Willemen, *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory*. (Bloomington; London: Indiana University Press ; British Film Institute, 1994): 211
[29] Martyn Hammersley, "Context and Contextuality." In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, edited by Lisa M. Given. SAGE Publications. 2008: 122
[30] *Ibid*.: 122

whether in the form of unconscious psychodynamic process, macrohistorical structures, or both."[31] He links the third issue to the postmodern idea that, "context is essentially arbitrary."[32]

This thesis follows this postmodernist understanding. Context is essentially arbitrary and it exists beyond or below actors. Therefore, the contextuality method here is used to analyse the political unconscious – the concept which Fredric Jameson develops – in the representation of others in contemporary Korean cinema.[33] What is significant is not context itself but contextualisation of the representational sphere and historicalisation of the context. I will use this method in case studies.

Literature Review

To date, only a small amount of research has been conducted on the representation of (Asian) others in Korean cinema, focusing on the identity or discourse on Asian others which is rendered in the representational sphere.[34] Amongst them, several research projects

[31] *Ibid*.: 122
[32] *Ibid*.: 122
[33] See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. (NY: Cornell University Press, 1982)
[34] See, for example, Ryu Chan-yeol, "2000nyŏntae Hankuk Yŏnghwa-e Nat'anan Ichu Notongcha-ŭi Chaehyŏn Yangsang Yŏnku [A Study on the Representational Images of Immigrant Workers in the Korean Films in the 2000s: Focusing on Searching for Ronny and Bandhobi]." In *Tamunhwa Kont'ench'ŭ Yŏnku* [*Multicultural Contents Studies*] 8 (3), 2010; Kim Ye-ran, Yoo Dan-bi and Kim Ji-yoon, "Inchong, Chentŏ, Kyekŭp-ŭi Tamunhwachŏk Yŏkhak [Disarticulated Dynamics of Ethnicity, Gender and Class: Analysis of Transnational Love Narrative and Capitalism Discourse in TV 'Multicultural Dramas']." In *Ŭnronkwa Sahoe* [*Media and Society*] 17 (1), 2009; Kim Jung-eun, "Hanchung Sukyo Ihu Hankuk Yŏnghwa Soke Jaehyŏntoen Chungkukin Tiasŭp'ora Yŏngu [The Chinese Diaspora in Korean Movies: After Amity between Korea and China]." In *Chungkukhak Yŏngu* [*Chinese Studies*] 46, 2008; Moon

emphasise the representative role of cinema that has to represent the other's story from the perspective that they are subaltern and cannot speak.[35]

However, most of the previous research on the subject has tended to pay attention to the represented images, with considerations of their political correctness, rather than the films themselves as a representational medium. Only a small number of existing research critique the discriminative and hierarchic views which are immanent in the current representation of Asian others by public media. Kim Ye-ran, Yoo Dan-bi and Kim Ji-yoon point out that previous research on Asian others on Media generally problematises represented negative images of Asian others by the evaluation of their political correctness in their representations, which inevitably objectify others.[36] This tendency evinces that those studies consider cinema as a tool which reflects the real world. This idea of cinema as a tool reflects the idea that cinema is a transparent medium or, rather, a component, disregarding the fact that the medium itself could mediate ideological and political concerns.

While a considerable body of research focuses on images reflected

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So-young, "Hankuk Yŏnghwa-e Nat'anan Orient'allichŭm Yŏnku [A Study of Orientalism in Korean Cinema: Focus on Failan]." In *Yŏsŏnghak Yŏnku* [*Feminism Studies*] 16 (1), 2006.

[35] For example, Song Jae-young, Han-kuk Tamunhwa Sahoe-ŭi Ichungsŏng [The Ambivalence of Multicultural Society in Korea]." MA dissertation (Seoul: Kyung Hee University, 2012); Hwang Young-mee, "Hankuk Yŏnghwa-e Nat'anan Tamunhwa Yangsang Yŏnku [A Study on the Multicultural Aspect in Korean Movies: Centering on Acceptance of the Aliens]." In *Yŏnghwa Yŏnku* [*Film Studies*] 47, 2011; Ryu, "2000nyŏntae Hankuk Yŏnghwa-e Nat'anan Ichu Notongcha-ŭi Chaehyŏn Yangsang Yŏnku"

[36] Kim et al., "Inchong, Chentŏ, Kyekŭp-ŭi Tamunhwachŏk Yŏkhak [Disarticulated Dynamics of Ethnicity, Gender and Class: Analysis of Transnational Love Narrative and Capitalism Discourse in TV 'Multicultural Dramas']."": 34

in cinema and their discursive effects in Korean popular culture as mentioned above, some researchers have chosen to pay attention to its representational form and discursive constitution. For instance, Lee Kyung-sook's research attempts to reveal the relevance between the generic features of the reality TV show format and its constitutive effects through its emphasis on 'reality.'[37] Kim So-young's research on an independent film, *Bandhobi* (Shin Dong-il, 2009), analyses how the conception of intimate (Asian) others derived from diasporic communities and migration are rendered by cinema specificity such as close-up and non-typical modes of representation.[38] Pointing out the typicalised representation of migrant workers in *Bandhobi* in contrast to a female Korean character's uniqueness and eccentricity, Kim concludes that the film cannot transform the existing perception of migrant workers, that is, as innocent victims who are given the role of the stranger.[39] These kinds of studies effectively show that complex and comprehensive tenets beyond represented images compete and operate in the constellation of constitutive discourses on Asian others. Cinema needs to be regarded not as a reflection of reality but as a constitutive tenet in which discourses and identities are formed.

Meanwhile, amongst the previous research on this subject, several

[37] Lee Kyung-sook, "Honjongjeok Reality Program-E Poseop-Deoin 'Isanin'ui Jeongcheseong (The 'Diaspora' Identity Represented in the Hybrid Reality Program: The Textual Analysis of Love in Asia." *Hankook Bangsong Hakbo* 20 (3), 2006.
[38] Kim So-young, "Tainchong, Tamunhwa Sahoe: Ŏlkul, K'ŭllochŭŏp, Koemulsŏng [Multiracial and Multicultural Society: Face, Close-Up, Monsterness]." In *Chakka Segye* [*World of Authors*]. (Spring 2010)
[39] *Ibid*.:330

researchers examine the representation of Asian others within the industrial, historical and cultural context of South Korea. Kim So-hye, whose research focuses on the representation of the diaspora in Korean independent films, and foregrounds the desire of Korean independent films to attain legitimacy through the appropriation of the Korean diaspora in Japan and China.[40] Kim Ye-ran *et al.*'s research on multicultural television dramas reads transnational capitalist desire in these TV dramas, which coincides with the Korean Wave.[41] On the other hand, Joo Jin-sook and Hong So-in interpret the works of Zhang Lu, a Korean Chinese diasporic filmmaker, in the vein of national and ethnic positions from a feminist perspective.[42] Putting Zhang Lu's films into the genealogy of Chinese cinema, rather than Korean cinema, which has been acclaimed at international festivals and in art film circuit,[43] Joo and Hong analyse the cross-cultural meaning of Zhang Lu's films.[44]

This strand of research contributes to the conjuring up of the

[40] Kim So-hye, "2000nyŏndae Ihu Hankuk Tokrip Yŏnghwa-ŭi Tiasŭp'ora Chaehyŏn-e Kwanhan Pip'anchŏk Koch'al [A Critical Review of the Representation of Diaspora in Korean Independent Films: Our School and Let the Blue River Run]." MA dissertation. (Seoul: Korea National University of Arts, 2010)

[41] Kim et al., "Inchong, Chentŏ, Kyekŭp-ŭi Tamunhwachŏk Yŏkhak [Disarticulated Dynamics of Ethnicity, Gender and Class: Analysis of Transnational Love Narrative and Capitalism Discourse in TV 'Multicultural Dramas']."

[42] Joo Jin-sook and Hong So-in, "Chang Ryul Kamtok Yŏnghwa-esŏŭi Kyungkye, Mainŏrit'i, kŭriko Yŏsŏng [The Border, The Minority and Women in the Films of Zhang Lu]." In *Yŏnghwa Yŏnku* [*Film Studies*] 42, 2009.

[43] This idea is different from other Korean scholars' views to regard Zhang Lu's films as a part of Korean cinema or cinema on the border between Korea and China. Most research on Zhang Lu focus on his position on border. See, for example, Kang Sung-ryool, "Ttŏtonŭn Insaeng, Chikyŏponŭn K'amera - Chang Ryul Yŏnghwa-ŭi Tiasŭp'ora [Floating Life, Watching Camera: Diaspora in Zhang Lu's Films]." In *Hyŏndae Yŏnghwa Yŏnku* [*Modern Film Studies*] 11, 2011; Kim Ji-mi, "Chang Ryul Yŏnghwa-e Yukhwatoen 'Kyŏngkye'rosŏúi Yŏsŏng Chuch'esŏng [Female Subjectivity in Zhang Lu's Films as Incarnated 'Boundaries']." In *Yŏsŏng Munhak Yŏnku* [*Feminism and Korean Literature*] 22, 2009.

[44] Joo and Hong, "Chang Ryul Kamtok Yŏnghwa-esŏŭi Kyungkye, Mainŏrit'i, kŭriko Yŏsŏng [The Border, The Minority and Women in the Films of Zhang Lu]."2009

complex constellation of referents present in the representation of Asian others, overcoming the limitations of the analyses of represented images. Referring to the methods deployed in the existing research on the representation of Asian others, this thesis contextualises the films depicting Asian others it examines in the historical, geopolitical, industrial and cultural constellation present in South Korean cinema. In doing so, this thesis will draw upon the complex discursive map in which the representation of Asian others lies.

Thesis structure

With this research method, this thesis consists of three parts each of which contains three chapters. The first part aims to elucidate theoretical, historical and discursive spheres of Korean cinema and Korean nationalism that appropriate Asian others. Within this section, chapter 1 delineates the discursive sphere in which Korean films depicting Asian others lie. With this aim in mind, this chapter introduces several key studies of multiculturalism from cultural studies and then scrutinises the development of multiculturalism in the Korean context and also looks at the emergence of sub-imperial desire as a form of nationalism by the consumption and appropriation of Asian others. Chapter 2 elucidates the modern history of the Korean nation and nationalism conditioned by its geopolitical situation. Regarding the current emergence of sub-imperialism in South Korea as the result of modern Korean history and its reactive nationalism, this chapter introduces pan-Asianism in the early

19th century, post-colonial discourse in the cold war era and sub-imperialism in the global era. Chapter 3 examines socio-political and industrial changes in Korea that condition and stimulate the production of Korean films depicting Asian others. The 1990s' socio-political changes in Korea enormously transformed the nation's film industry and became the premise for films depicting Asian others. This thesis pays particular attention to three factors: democratisation, liberalisation and globalisation. These factors are not only prerequisites for the emergence of multicultural films but also define the current features of the representation of Asian others in Korean cinema.

The second part of this thesis examines films depicting Asian others which correspond to the three main proposition for Asian others, namely, humanism, democracy and multiculturalism, by the examination of films holding three different industrial positions, that is, state-led, independent and commercial films. Chapter 4 is about the human rights omnibus project, named *If You Were Me* (Inkwŏnyŏnghwa or Sisŏn P'ŭlochekt'ŭ, 2003 – to the present) which was produced by the National Human Rights Committee (NHRC). As a state-led organization, the NHRC has produced human rights omnibus films focusing on anti-discrimination. The issue of Asian others was one of the most popular topics for films produced within this project. In this vein, this chapter explores the filmic negotiation between each filmmaker and state-led multiculturalism and human rights policies around Asian others later. In addition, as a long-term project, the omnibus film project shows the earlier filmic acceptance

of multicultural policy and a change in the representational strategy around Asian others. Chapter 5 refers to democracy and links it to the cultural politics of Korean independent films depicting Asian others. Developed within the Korean *Minjung* movement in the 1980s, Korean independent films have accentuated democracy and film activism. Through the encounter with Asian others, who are new social minorities in South Korea, Korean independent film proclaims its activist agenda in the global era. An Independent film, *Bandhobi* (Pandupi, Shin Dong-il, 2009), illustrates Korean independent films' efforts to herald a new political agency in the post-authoritarian era by portraying social minorities including Asian migrant workers. In chapter 6, two commercial films – *Punch* (Wandŭki, Lee Han, 2011) and *A Wonderful Moment* (aka *My Little Hero*) (Mai Rit'ŭl Hiŏro, Kim Seong-hoon, 2012) – are considered. Recently, so-called multicultural films have emerged on screen and have attracted the attention of both critics and audiences. These films attempt to embrace Asian others as community members, namely, citizens. However, by reiterating the role of South Korean men who equate themselves with the traditional father figure, these films produce and reinforce paternal multiculturalism.

The last part examines the representation of Asian others according to their ethnic, cultural and national backgrounds since they take up different social positions and residential statuses depending on their backgrounds. Chapter 7 investigates films dealing with Asian migrant workers. Asian migrant workers are at times equated with South or

Southeast Asians in these films. Taking two films, *Himalaya Where the Wind Dwells* (Himalaya Parami Mŏmunŭn Kot, Jeon Soo-il, 2009) and *He's on Duty* (Banga? Banga! Yuk Sang-hyo, 2010), this chapter argues that these two films reveal South Korean male concerns about their socio-economic instability and, in efforts to overcome their sense of crisis, place South Korean men in the superior position over Asian others. By analysing these two films, this chapter shows the operation of Korean nationalism in the global era and the subsequent rise of sub-imperial desire. Chapter 8 examines the representation of North Korean defectors. In the cold war era, North Koreans were often depicted as external others who threaten South Korean national safety. However, in the global era, North Korean defectors have become internal others who problematise the belief in ethnic homogeneity. Two films are examined in this chapter: *The Journals of Musan* (Musan Ilki, Park Jeong-beom, 2010), which compares North Korean defectors with the previous domestic migrants from rural areas to cities and then denounces the inhumane capitalist development in South Korea. Yet, North Korean defectors in these films are again otherised by taking a double-edged position in terms of gender and nation. *Stateless Things* (Jult'aktongsi, Kim Kyung-mook, 2011) searches for the possibility of survival by solidarity amongst minorities. This position can be maintained by not involving in state's violence nor depending on a benevolent understanding of otherness. The last chapter of this thesis (chapter 9) introduces three films depicting the Korean diaspora in China and Central Asia. In contrast to other Korean diasporic communities, these two diasporic communities have been absent from South Koreans'

imagination for a long while due to the cold war regime. Therefore, their return home since the 1990s after the end of the cold war has stirred up troubles in terms of ethnic homogeneity. The three films explored in this chapter – *Let the Blue River Run* (P'urŭn Kangŭn Hŭllŏra, Kang Mi-ja, 2008)*, Yellow Sea* (Hwanghae, Na Hong-jin, 2010) and *Hanaan* (Hanaan, Park Ruslan, 2012) – hold different perspectives on this ethnic homogeneity. The first one reasserts the ethnic homogeneity of Korean Chinese by imagining the diaspora as the origin of Korean nation. The latter two films accentuate this otherness rather than attempting to reinstate sameness. By portraying these different viewpoints, this chapter delineates the complexity of ethnic sameness/ otherness and thereby warns the danger of appropriating overseas ethnic Koreans into homogenous ethnicity without consideration of historical gap.

By adopting this thesis structure, this thesis explores how contemporary Korean cinema depicting Asian others adopts and forges discourses on nationalism, multiculturalism and sub-imperialism. By doing so, this thesis aims to extend the representational sphere as well as the discursive sphere surrounding Asian others in Korean studies. .

Part I. Theoretical Analysis

Chapter 1. Multiculturalism and Sub-imperialism

This thesis examines the representation of Asian others – Asian foreign migrants, ethnic Koreans living in other Asian countries and North Korean defectors in South Korea – in contemporary South Korean cinema. The purpose of this thesis is to elucidate how contemporary South Korean cinema has worked to position itself within the national, transnational and trans-Asian flow of culture, capital and people by means of the appropriation of Asian others. In order to construct this examination, this chapter conducts a critical review of key literature on the representation of Asian others, attempting to illuminate the current research on the topic, and drawing the theoretical framework of this thesis.

In particular, this chapter delves into two main contexts: firstly, it examines multiculturalism as the discursive sphere in which the representation of Asian others lies. The influx of Asian others into South Korea since the late 1980s has provoked a policy change toward multiculturalism in South Korean society. In addition, most Korean films depicting Asian others are financially supported by governmental organization related to the policy of multiculturalism. Therefore, multiculturalism is a key tenet to understanding the representation of Asian others. However, multiculturalism is a disputed term, and is often arbitrarily used depending on its national and regional context. Therefore, the second part of this chapter examines the usage of multiculturalism in South Korea. I introduce some preliminary arguments in order to understand the concept of multiculturalism. By doing so, this chapter

asserts that multiculturalism is a polemical concept in South Korea and that it could accentuate sub-imperial desire as a form of nationalism.

Multiculturalism in cultural studies

Film history shows that a great number of films could be multicultural from their very beginnings, including casting, production, circulation and reception. Yet, the issue of multiculturalism was not a focal point in the first half of the twentieth century. As J. Heli Hernandez argues, the representation of races and ethnicities in the earlier stage of cinema was possible only within a system that assumed white male superiority in Hollywood cinema.[1] However, the mood changed after film studies was inaugurated as an academic discipline.[2] This change was also related to the currents of decentring films in the early 1980s and the rise of identity politics in the 1990s.

Problematising the representation of racial and ethnic others originated in the struggle against Western centrism in Euro-American film cultures, which was triggered by Edward Said's prominent work, *Orientalism.*[3] According to Said, the Western representation of ethnic and cultural others produces a binary division between the Orient and the Occident (the West) which reduces the Orient to stereotypes such as being

[1] J.Heli Hernandez, "Introduction." In *Cinema and Multiculturalism: Selected Essays*, edited by Sheryl Lynn Postman and J. Heli Hernandez. (New York: LEGAS, 2002): 10
[2] *Ibid.*: 10
[3] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin, 1978)

a strange, exotic and timeless place.[4] His work has hugely influenced Western humanities and sociology scholarship since 1978 and specifically, film studies as a discipline about a representational medium. Amongst the responses to Said's work, postcolonial studies has emerged as one of the most powerful anti-theses of Western hegemony in cultural studies, especially cinema studies, since post-colonial studies have engaged with questions of representation from its inception.

Concerning the influence of postcolonial studies on cinema and cinema studies, Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller collect the complex constellation of cinema and film theories that resist Western hegemony under the umbrella of postcolonial cinema studies. In the introduction of their anthology on postcolonial cinema, they explain that postcolonial cinema is "constituted by and within a conceptual space in which making connections and drawing inferences, specifically those that are occluded by national and colonial frames, is encouraged."[5] Therefore, in their conception of the term, postcolonial cinema is intertwined with third cinema, the cinemas of exile, migration, or diaspora, feminist cinema, accented cinema,[6] transnational cinema and even world cinema. Yet, as they emphasise, postcolonial cinema is not a comprehensive concept which can be explicitly defined. Rather, their view suggests that postcolonial cinema can function as a bridge to link postcolonial studies

[4] *Ibid*.
[5] Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller (eds.), *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*. (London; New York: Routledge, 2011):: 1-2
[6] An accented cinema is a designated term to emphasise the distinguishableness of diasporic and exile films from dominant commercial films. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2001).

and cinema studies while "using cinema to expand and deepen postcolonial critique."[7] For them, cinema should be scrutinised for the purpose of de-colonisation, since gaze and representation is the kernel of colonialism as well as cinema. Although their idea is based on a conception of cinema as a tool, the anthology reveals the colonial desire in the "Empire film" [8] and the conspiracy between the Empire film and globalisation. In so doing, Ponzanesi and Waller attempt to examine the historical and aesthetical perspectives in film studies from a postcolonial viewpoint.

Multiculturalism also shared with postcolonialism the idea that white male centrality is problematic. However, different socio-political positions give different views on the definition of multiculturalism. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam point out, multiculturalism has so far failed to define itself as an affirmative term and is used differently depending on its user's position.[9] In fact, multiculturalism has totally different values and usages depending on the places, political positions and socio-historical backgrounds in which it is invoked. Shohat and Stam argue that

> Multiculturalism for the Right is too radical, a social revolution that empowers Native Americans, African Americans Latinos, and white radicals and thus balkanizes American society. For a certain Marxist

[7] Ponzanesi and Waller, *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*: 9
[8] They did not clearly define what the Empire film is. However, Empire films include such regional films as Hollywood, Great Braitan, France and fascist Italy which have 'universally' made power and knowledge of cinema.
[9] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*. (London: Rutgers University Press, 2003): 6

> Left, meanwhile, multiculturalism is not radical enough; it is a culturalist diversion from the real issues of class and political economy. Multiculturalism in this sense occupies a paradoxical space; for some it is too radical, while for others, it is too co-opted.[10]

For instance, advocates of multiculturalism like Will Kymlicka assert that multicultural policies have made practical progress in the protection of human rights and liberal democratic values despite the fact that it seems to fail in some countries.[11] Eventually, multiculturalism has come to be officially adopted as a governmental policy in many countries such as Australia, Canada and South Korea and in larger regional communities such as the European Union to deal with racial, cultural and ethnic differences. Canada, for example, is regarded as the most successful Western country to adopt multiculturalism. According to Kymlicka, Canadian multicultural policy is comparatively successful in integrating immigrants into the Canadian national identity.[12] Based on the Canadian case, he further asserts "there is some significant evidence that [multiculturalism] is making progress toward that goal [of replacing older hierarchies of ethnicity and race with new relations of democratic citizenship]."[13]

However, some critics question multiculturalism exactly for the

[10] *Ibid*.: 6
[11] Will Kymlicka and Baogang He, *Multiculturalism in Asia*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Kyimlicka himself provides Netherlands as an example of failure of multicultural policy but denies to see the failure as the essential problem of multiculturalism. Will Kymlicka, *Multiculturalism: Success, Failure, and the Future*. (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2012).
[12] Kymlicka, *Multiculturalism: Success, Failure, and the Future*
[13] *Ibid.*: 14

reason that Kymlicka advocates its use. For instance, Smaro Kamoboureli denounces the policy of multiculturalism in Canada as a 'sedative politics':

> The Multiculturalism Act (also known as Bill C-93) recognizes the cultural diversity that constitutes Canada, but it does so by practising a sedative politics, a politics that attempts to recognize ethnic differences, but only in a contained fashion, in order to manage them. It pays to tribute to diversity and suggests ways of celebrating it, thus responding to clarion call of ethnic communities for recognition. Yet it does so without disturbing the conventional articulation of the Canadian dominant society.[14]

By the same token, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's naming "the 3S model of multiculturalism" – saris, samosas, and steeldrums[15] – precisely exposes the camouflaging properties of the multicultural policy. The 3S model shows that the current tendency of multicultural policy tries to avoid more polemical issues such as economic and socio-political inequality but celebrates the ostensible acceptance of token cultural differences and then is used to seduce minority groups. This attitude toward the cultures of ethnic minorities firstly regards cultures as fixed and secondly isolates their cultures from others' cultures or mainstream cultures. Mika Ko also points out that multiculturalism can function to confine the cultures of minority groups "in a fixed and never-changing form."[16] In this regard, some European countries recently proclaim interculturalism as an

[14] Cited in Ko, *Japanese Cinema and Otherness*: 24
[15] Cited in Kymlicka, *Multiculturalism: Success, Failure, and the Future*: 4
[16] Ko, *Japanese Cinema and Otherness*: 24

alternative term for a unilateral multicultural policy.[17]

Furthermore, some argue that multiculturalism only pertains to the Western (neo-) liberal capitalism and therefore needs to be examined with the relevance of Eurocentric hegemony. For instance, Slavoj Žižek denounces multiculturalism as "a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism, a *racism with a distance*."[18] In a similar vein, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam emphasise the need to deconstruct Eurocentrism in order to reconfigure multiculturalism. They assert

> Multiculturalism and the critique of Eurocentrism are inseparable concepts; each becomes impoverished without the other. Multiculturalism without the critique of Eurocentrism runs the risk of being merely accretive – a shopping mall boutique summa of the world's cultures – while the critique of Eurocentrism without multiculturalism runs the risk of simply inverting existing hierarchies rather than profoundly rethinking and unsettling them.[19]

[17] According to the council of Europe, interculturalism is distinguished from multiculturalism or other immigration policies in this sense: "Rather than ignoring diversity (as with guest-worker approaches), denying diversity (as with assimilationist approaches), or overemphasising diversity and thereby reinforcing walls between culturally distinct groups (as with multiculturalism), interculturalism is about explicitly recognising the value of diversity while doing everything possible to increase interaction, mixing and hybridisation between cultural communities. Interculturalism is also about addressing issues of cultural conflict or tension (religious customs and requirements, communitarianism, women's rights etc.) openly though public debate, with the involvement of all stakeholders." http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/about_en.asp (accessed in 11-04-2014). However, interculturalism lies in its initial and experimental stage, and therefore it is difficult to evaluate whether interculturalism is totally different from multiculturalism or can overcome the limit of multiculturalism.

[18] The emphasis is from the original text. Slavoj Žižek, "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism." In *New Left Review*, I, no. 225 (October 1997): 44

[19] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. (London, New York: Routledge, 1994): 359

Here, multiculturalism is examined not as a constitutive result of but as a historical component of multiculturedness. [20] In their terms, multiculturalism is the recognition of "irreconcilable difference" and an attempt to discern "the forces which generate the borders". [21] Furthermore, Eurocentrism in Shohat and Stam's argument is intertwined with colonialism, but is not necessarily exhibited as a form of colonialism when it is taken into consideration that colonialism is a practice while Eurocentrism is "a mode of thought."[22] From this viewpoint, they look at Anglo-Western pop culture and place it within a historical context.

Moreover, multiculturalism needs to be examined from different cultural and historical frames of reference. As Shohat and Stam remark, multiculturalism "is situated differently in other national, institutional, and discursive contexts."[23] In this sense, Will Kymlicka and Baogang He argue that multiculturalism, which originates in a Western context, cannot be directly applied to the Asian context. They say

> The main difficulty in implementing Western models of multiculturalism, therefore, is not incommensurable cultural values. There are, however, many other potential obstacles rooted in the specific historical, demographic, economic, and geopolitical circumstances of the region.[24]

[20] *Ibid.*: 4-5
[21] *Ibid.*: 359
[22] Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*: 2
[23] Shohat and Stam, *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*: 6
[24] Kymlicka and He, *Multiculturalism in Asia*: 7

In addition to these regional and national differences, multiculturalism also needs to be examined alongside other socially constitutive factors such as class and gender, since those who are socially marginalised along these vectors face additional struggles for recognition.

The ambiguous development of multiculturalism in South Korea

Multicultural issues attracted widespread attention in the South Korean media in 2009 when four independent films[25] depicting Asian others showed up at the same time.[26] In succession, the unexpected success of *He's on Duty* (Pangka? Pangka! Uk Sang-hyo, 2010) drew the attention of the mainstream media and finally the runaway success of *Punch* (Wandŭki, Lee Han, 2011) at the box-office triggered a celebratory mood toward multicultural films (*Tamunhwa Yŏnghwa*) among popular media outlets. The rise of multicultural films is intertwined with demographic changes in Korean society. Under the title of "Migrants Finally Recognised by Korean Cinema," Baik Seung-chan remarks that the filmic representation of migrants seems to emerge too late, regarding the fact that migrants including North Korean defectors, Southeast Asian migrant workers and migrant brides started to come to South Korea in increasing

[25] The four films are *Bandhobi* (Pandubi, Shin Dong-il), *Hello Stranger* (Ch'ŏŭm Mannan Saramtŭl, Kim Dong-hyun), *Where Is Ronny* (Ronirŭl Ch'atasŏ, Shim Sang-guk) and *Himalaya Where the Wind Dwells* (Himalaya Parami Mŏmunŭn kok, Jeon Soo-il).

[26] There are several precedents depicting Asian others, such as *Failan* (P'airan, Song Hae-sung, 2001) and *Wedding Campaign* (Naŭi Kyŏlhon Wŏnchŏngki, Hwang Byung-guk, 2005). These films had been acclaimed by audience and critics but had not been followed by further discussion on multiculturalism.

numbers at the early 1990s.[27] Moreover, one director comments that "filmmakers cannot avoid multicultural families and foreign labours as they [migrants] have become so common these days. […] We [the audience] will probably see more movies taking on this issue." [28] Eventually, many Korean films started to place Asian migrant characters into narratives in roles ranging from the main protagonists to supporting roles, reflecting the reality that South Korean society is no longer homogeneous. Now multiculturalism is not an abstract catchphrase but reality in South Korea.

Yet, the term 'multiculturalism' used by South Korean media is ambiguous or even sometimes contradictory. Some argue that Korean multiculturalism is exaggeratedly focused on cultural aspects without the consideration of ethnic or racial aspects of the term.[29] On the contrary, some scholars assert that Korean multiculturalism has been mistakenly understood as racial and ethnic diversity and therefore needs to shift its focus from racial and ethnic diversity to its cultural aspects.[30] However, despite this contradictory approach toward multiculturalism, the multiculturalism depicted on Korean media would be closer to racial diversity than to cultural diversity. As a matter of fact, multiculturalism on the discursive level with regards to cinema is often replaced with the term

[27] Baik Seung-chan, "Icheya Nune Tŭlŏon Ichumin [Migrants Finally Recognised by Korean Cinema]." In *Kyung-Hyang Shinmun* (28 May 2009)
[28] "Multiculturalism a New Theme in Korean Movies." In *Chosun Ilbo*, 13 January 2012
[29] Ian Watson, "Paradoxical Multiculturalism in South Korea." In *Asian Politics & Policy* 4 (2), 2012a
[30] Han Kyung-koo, "The Archaeology of the Ethnically Homogeneous Nation-State and Multiculturalism in Korea." In *Korea Jounal* 47 (4). 2007.

racial diversity, which excludes North Korean defectors or other non-native ethnic Koreans. For instance, *Pace-Maker* (P'eisŭ Meik'ŏ, Kim Dal-joong 2012) is regarded as a multicultural film just due to the fact that a person who came from Ghana – but whose nationality is Korean – appears on the screen, but other films such as *Yellow Sea* (Hwanghae, Na Hong-jin, 2010) or *Crossing* (K'ŭlosing, Kim Tae-kyun, 2010) which respectively depict ethnic Koreans in China and North Korean defectors can easily be neglected in this discussion. This problem becomes clearer if we consider the program and slogan of the Multicultural Film Festival in South Korea,[31] saying "the festival, *which is held for foreigners* in Korea, will invoke the attention for the multicultural (*Tamunhwa*), reconsider social recognition for them, and present the place of communication *between Koreans and foreigners/multicultural populations*."[32] Here multiculturalism exists for foreigners who are not Koreans, and as a result the festival excludes expatriated Koreans or North Korean defectors who are ethnically Koreans but culturally others. The 2012 program of the festival also exemplifies the fact that its main concern is racial diversity, as it includes such films as *Leafie* (Matangŭl Naon Amt'alk, Oh Sung-yoon, 2011), whose plot celebrates the diversity of species.

Meanwhile, Korean multiculturalism often coincides with liberal multiculturalism. As I argued in the introduction to this thesis, media scholarship on the research of multiculturalism often focuses on political

[31] The film festival has been held by the CGV Movie-collage (the art cinema sector of CGV which is the biggest multiplex cinema chain in South Korea) since 2009.
[32] The emphasis is from this author.

correctness by examining the images of Asian others on screen. However, in many cases, the way to evaluate textual political correctness coincides with the ideas of liberal multiculturalism. For instance, Seo Yeon-ju argues that South Korea, as a multicultural society, should embrace others' different cultures on the premise of social integrity.[33] Ryu Chan-yeol also advocates liberal multiculturalism by means of understanding multiculturalism as a premise of mature citizenship and extended humanism. [34] This is also the case within studies of another representational medium, television. Lee Myeong-hyun embraces the attitude of liberal multiculturalism by saying that married immigrant women should be held up as a model of the liberal individual subject.[35] However, the liberal individual subject is exactly what global exploitative capitalism from imperialism to global capitalism demands its colonised subjects be in order to expand its profits. Although Lee Kyung-sook's article on the hybrid reality program *Love in Asia* denounces the idea of "equivalent Asia", which obscures cultural differences, this study is not free from criticism in that it also bears equivalent others' culture in mind.[36] By revealing the conspiracy between multiculturalism and global capitalism, Slavoj Žižek argues that multiculturalism is a transited form of

[33] Seo Yeon-ju, "Hankook Munhwa-E Natanan Damunhwa Insik Yangsang Gochal (A Study on Recognizing Multi-Culture in Korean Culture: Focusing on Human Right Moview)." In *Kook-Eo Munhak (Korean Language Literature)* 47 (August, 2009).
[34] Ryu, "2000nyŏntae Hankuk Yŏnghwa-e Nat'anan Ichu Notongcha-ŭi Chaehyŏn Yangsang Yŏnku"
[35] Lee Myung-hyun, "T'ellepichŏn Orak P'ŭrokŭraem-e Chaehyŏntoen Kyŏlhon Ichu Yŏsŏng [Married Immigrant Women Portrayed in a TV Entertainment Program: Based on Nice to Meet You, My In-Laws]." In *Tamunhwa Kont'ench'ŭ Yŏnku* [*Multicultural Contents Studies*] 6, 2009: 70
[36] Lee, "Honjongjeok Reality Program-E Poseop-Deoin 'Isanin'ui Jeongcheseong (The 'Diaspora' Identity Represented in the Hybrid Reality Program: The Textual Analysis of Love in Asia."

western imperialism.[37] According to Žižek, multiculturalism, pretending to be universal from its privileged position, not only hides its Eurocentrism, but also produces its hegemony, by emphasising its stereotyped images (concrete universality) per se.[38] Therefore, the liberal multiculturalist approach without any filtering would reproduce and reinforce existing imperialist power relationships.

In the meantime, this arbitrary usage of multiculturalism on screen stems from the social discourse on multiculturalism in South Korea. In 2007, publishing its special edition on multiculturalism in South Korea, the editorial board of the *Korea Journal* problematises the very concept of multiculturalism in the South Korean context. Cho Uhn, the editor of the journal, points out that

> Abruptly, the terms 'multiculturalism', 'multicultural family', and 'multicultural society' have been popularized not only for policy-makers and academics but also for NGOs and common people to paraphrase the current multiracial and multi-ethnic trend in Korean society. Yet there is no agreement on what those terms mean or what kind of multicultural society is taking shape even among academics.[39]

Although, as examined above, multiculturalism has an ambiguous meaning and role in the multicultural and multi-ethnic society per se,[40] the

[37] Žižek, "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism."
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] Cho Uhn, "[On This Topic] Toward a Multicultural Society?" In *Korea Journal* 47 (4), 2007: 5
[40] Ko, *Japanese Cinema and Otherness*; Willemen, *Looks and Frictions*

uncompromised and vernacular usage of the term can be more easily witnessed in the countries in which a multicultural/ multi-ethnic society is newly emerging. In fact, there is even less consent about what multiculturalism is and how it functions in Korean society than in countries that have long adopted multiculturalism. Moreover, it is still debatable whether multiculturalism can resolve social struggles and dissolve the hierarchy between South Korean natives and other ethnic/foreign migrants.

Even within the academy, multiculturalism in South Korea has been diversely understood. Kim Eun-Mee and Kang Jean S. distinguish multi-cultural society from multi-ethnic society, terms which correspond to multiculturalism and cultural pluralism respectively.[41] Arguing that cultural pluralism still puts mainstream culture at its core and urges other (minority) cultures to be integrated into it while multiculturalism emphasises equality amongst diverse cultures, they assert that South Korean society as a current multi-ethnic society should move forward to multicultural society.[42] Here, multiculturalism is suggested as the way to overcome Koreans' sense of cultural superiority. As well, remarking that the real issue of racial and ethnic conflict lies in ideas of cultural superiority, Han Kyung-koo argues that these ideas should be overcome so as to move toward a harmonious multicultural society.[43] Meanwhile, Kim Hyun-mee underscores ethnic nationalism as one of the key tenets in

[41] Kim and Kang, "Seoul as a Global City with Ethnic Villages." In *Korea Journal* 47 (4). 2007.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] Han, "The Archaeology of the Ethnically Homogeneous Nation-State and Multiculturalism in Korea."

causing the discrimination of Asian others. Kim argues that

> The term 'multiculturalism' was coined in Korea after the racial, sexual and class violence stemming from ethnic nationalism based on pure-blood ideology was thought to seriously encroach on the rights of migrant workers, biracial people, and migrant women. Multiculturalism in Korea is thus used as a counter-concept to Korea's violent mono-ethnicity, rather than its general meaning of recognizing or having a mutual understanding of cultural difference.[44]

Both judgments mentioned above are based on the idea that Korean society holds strong belief in ethnic homogeneity and ethnic nationalism and that as a result multiculturalism is used arbitrarily in South Korea, detracting from its initial meaning of respecting cultural diversity. In this regard, Kim suggests Korean society should pursue the true meaning of multiculturalism that is necessary to solve social problems wrought by the demographic change from one single ethnic society to diverse ethnic, racial and cultural society. In this proposition, multiculturalism is understood as the opposite of pejorative ethnic nationalism and sense of cultural superiority.

On the contrary, some scholars argue that multiculturalism is intentionally designed and deployed in order to reinforce Korean nationality. Cho Uhn denounces the way in which the "state-sponsored

[44] Kim Hyun-mee, "The State and Migrant Women: Diverging Hopes in the Making of Multicultural Families in Contemporary Korea." In *Korea Jounal*, 47 (4), 2007: 103

[form of] multiculturalism [which] has been coined 'Korean multiculturalism', [is] becoming contested terrain for advocates of the survival [of the] prosperity of the Korean nation state." [45] Indeed, multiculturalism in South Korea is widely promulgated by the government as a way to solve socio-economic problems triggered by demographic changes. Due to low birth rate and a strong gender imbalance, South Korean society faces a shortage in its labour force and brides, especially in rural areas.[46] Importing workers and foreign brides is presented as one of the solutions by the South Korean government. Therefore, the multiculturalism disseminated in South Korea is sold as a means to sustain the nation state in the global era. From this vantage point, Timothy Lim regards multiculturalism as an expansion of Korean-ness. This is the transition of a question from "who are Koreans" to "who belongs in Korean society."[47] According to Lim, this transition is "the premise behind multiculturalism, which might most simply be defined as the acceptance and embrace of cultural difference."[48] For Lim, multiculturalism is not the opposite of nationalism, but a mechanism designed for the benefit for Korean national prosperity.

However, some scholars raise concerns about this nationalist understanding of multiculturalism. For instance, Ian Watson asserts that ethnic nationalism should be dissolved for mature multicultural

[45] Cho, "[On This Topic] Toward a Multicultural Society?": 6
[46] Timothy Lim, "Who Is Korean? Migration, Immigration, and the Challenge of Multiculturalism in Homogeneous Societies." In *The Asia-Pacific Journal* (July 2009). www.japanfocus.org.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] *Ibid.*

societies.[49] Watson further suggests that state-led multiculturalism in Korea needs to shift to a citizen-led form of multiculturalism so as to depart from its current nationalist perspective on multiculturalism.[50] In a similar vein, Yoo Ji-young and Keith B. Wagner argue that ethnic nationalism based on the belief in pure blood accentuates misunderstanding of and discrimination against non-native Koreans even including overseas Koreans such as transnational adoptees and expatriated Koreans.[51]

Regardless of their understanding of what multiculturalism is, a number of scholars now agree that multiculturalism in South Korea does not operate well despite the government's initiatives to support it. Furthermore, it is often argued that Korean multiculturalism is just a means to disguise Korean nationalist desires, that is, Korean multiculturalism ostensibly celebrates multicultural subjects, but on closer inspection, instead reinforces the socio-economic inequality between Korean natives and Asian others. The problem with ethnic nationalism is that it reiterates Korea's claim of national/ ethnic superiority over other Asians and then positions South Korea in an imagined sub-empire. The next section of this chapter examines this imagined sub-imperial desire by a further investigation of nationalist multiculturalism.

[49] Watson, "Paradoxical Multiculturalism in South Korea."
[50] *Ibid.*: 245-247
[51] Yoo Ji-young and Keith B. Wagner, "Transnational Adoption in Korean Cinema." *Third Text* 27 (5), 2013: 661

Consuming Asia and the current emergence of sub-imperialism

In terms of Japanese cinema, Mika Ko addresses what she calls cosmetic multiculturalism in Japanese society and contemporary cinema.[52] Cosmetic multiculturalism is a term designed by Tessa Morris-Suzuki to reveal nationalist desires embedded in Japanese multiculturalism. Ko points out that Japanese cinema and society celebrates other cultures and otherness only as long as they are the objects of consumption. Aaron Gerow also critiques the way in which some Japanese films depicting Asian others actually "efface the other and reconstruct the nation in a postmodern consumer culture."[53] Gerow further argues that those who cannot be included in this consumerist process became "a threat, the other which commodification itself aims to efface."[54] In this regard, multiculturalism in Japanese society and contemporary cinema is often considered as one of the efforts to build national identity and tame others within Japanese national identity, thereby effacing the more complex political agenda of multiculturalism by means of consumption and appeasement of others.

Mika Ko further links this cosmetic multiculturalism to Japanese orientalism toward Asian neighbors at the turn of the nineteenth century.[55] According to Kang Sang-jung, Japanese orientalism operates through the simultaneous double desire to both avoid Western territorial

[52] Ko, *Japanese Cinema and Otherness*
[53] Aaron Gerow, "Consuming Asia, Consuming Japan: The New Neonationalistic Revisionism in Japan." In *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States*, edited by Laura Elizabeth Hein and Mark Selden. (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000): 88
[54] Ibid.: 89
[55] Ko, *Japanese Cinema and Otherness*: 33

ambition toward Japan and to appropriate orientalism's hegemonic power for Japan to use over other Asian regions.[56] Developed in the early 1900s between the first and second World War and extended into the postcolonial era, Japanese orientalism or *Nanyo* (Southsea) orientalism reflects "the desire of westernisation (or Japanese self-colonisation)" and "Japanisation (or assimilationism, the colonial imposition of a Japanese self on a pacific other)."[57] As a matter of fact, the key operative force in Japanese orientalism is Japan's own imaginary position as an empire. Cosmetic multiculturalism eventually reflects the imperial desire which was immanent in Japanese orientalism.

In a way, the multiculturalism disseminated by Korean cinema and society fits with cosmetic multiculturalism in Japan. Cho Uhn points out the process in which "the media uses multiculturalism merely as a 'rhetoric' to promote middle-class consumption-oriented foreign cultures."[58] Actually Korean multiculturalism is often criticised as a policy of control over the growing numbers of migrants in South Korea.[59] This is well evinced in the fact that Korean multiculturalism excludes illegal migrants from its categories. Ian Watson further argues that Korean multiculturalism is actually the "cosmetic celebration of [the] foreign"

[56] Kang Sang-jung, *Orientarizumu no Kanata e [Going beyond Orientalism]*. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996): 86. Cited in Naoto Sudo, *Nanyo-Orientalism: Japanese Representations of the Pacific*. (Amherst, N.Y: Cambria Press, 2010): 3
[57] Sudo, *Nanyo-Orientalism*: 4
[58] Cho, "[On This Topic] Toward a Multicultural Society?": 6
[59] Lee Seon-ok, "Hankukesŏŭi Ichunotonguntongkwa Tamunhwachuŭi [Migrant Worker's Movement and Multiculturalism in South Korea]." In *Hankukesŏŭi Tamunhwachuŭi: Hyŏnsilkwa Chaengchŏm [Multiculturalism in South Korea: The Reality and Issues]*. (Seoul: Hanul, 2007); Jamie Doucette and Robert Prey, "Between Migrant and Minjung: The Changing Face of Migrant Cultural Activism in Korea." In *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 12 (2), 2010.

through the consumption of stereotypical foreign images, foreign foods and foreign dress.[60] For instance, a number of TV shows such as *Love in Asia* (lŏbŭ in Asia, MBC) and *Foreigners' Song Contests* (Oekukin Norae Charang) which is held in KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) around Korean national holidays almost every year present Asian others as objects of consumption by selling their sad stories which stir up the audience's emotions. This is often criticised by Korean media scholars as the commercialisation of others as an object of spectacle.[61]

However, although Japanese and Korean versions of cosmetic multiculturalism have a common aim to reconstruct national identity in the global or post-modern era, their operative forces may not be identical with each other. As previously mentioned, the Japanese version of cosmetic multiculturalism coincided with the rise of Japanese orientalism which serves as a mode of operation for Japanese imperial desire throughout the modern history of Japanese nation building. Put differently, Japanese orientalism makes feasible Japan's self-identification with its Western counterpart, i.e., Western imperialists. This is what Koichi Iwabuchi names as an Orient orientalism against 'inferior' Asia.[62]

Some Korean scholars also find orientalism in the representation of Asian others in Korean cinema. For instance, Moon So-young's article on Korean cinema points out the internal orientalism which produces the

[60] Ian Watson, "Cultural Policy in South Korea: Reinforcing Homogeneity and Cosmetic Difference?" In *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 5 (1), 2012b: 100
[61] Kim Ye-ran, Yoo Dan-bi and Kim Ji-yoon, 2009: 34
[62] Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 8

power relations within 'the Orients'.[63] As well, Seo Yeon-ju, who studies the *If You Were Me* series (a Human Rights Film project), critiques that the benevolent attitudes and romanticisation present in the film series as a *mimicry of orientalism*,[64] arguing that this series confirms rather than challenges the priority of South Korean natives.[65] Yet, here South Korea's orientalist desire is feasible only as the form of *mimicry* of Western orientalism since Korea does not have a western counterpart or imaginary imperial authority with which to identify itself. It is often said that Korean national identity has been formed through feelings of suppression, sentiment and self-victimisation wrought by being colonised by Japan, occupied by the US army, separated into two nation-states, and governed under thirty years of military dictatorship. All these things have forged the postcolonial unconscious in Korea. Therefore, today's rise in cultural diversity and Korea's desire for superiority over Asian others result from Korea's sense off having been oppressed in the colonial and postcolonial periods.

From this vantage point, the Korean version of cosmetic multiculturalism appears to operate within sub-imperial desire rather than imperial desire. Chen Kuan-hsing notes sub-imperial desires in the NICs (Newly Indurstrialised Countries in Asia which embrace South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore). These countries are former colonies of Western countries or Japan until the mid twentieth century who are

[63] Moon, "Hankuk Yŏnghwa-e Nat'anan Orient'allichŭm Yŏnku [A Study of Orientalism in Korean Cinema: Focus on Failan]." The emphasis is from the original text.
[64] The emphasis is from this author.
[65] Seo, "Hankook Munhwa-E Natanan Damunhwa Insik Yangsang Gochal."

now enjoying their glorious days armed with economic powers "benefiting from the US's cold-war economic policies towards these pro-West East Asian countries."[66] In particular, these countries have imported Asian migrant workers from other Asian countries in order to resolve their domestic shortage of labour while consuming Asia as exemplified in Taiwan's discourse of "Southward Advance" that is the Taiwanese version of economic expansionism toward Southeast Asia. In this global migration of human, natural resources and capital within Asia, these NICs have become "the imperial subject" while Southeast Asia becomes "the target of colonisation."[67] Chen calls this movement the new imperial imagination and describes it as a copy – but, new and pirated – of Japanese and Western imperial thought, one that provokes the emergence of sub-imperialism. [68] Therefore, sub-imperialism should be regarded as a postcolonial symptom. Chen points out that

> The ubiquity of the postcolonial trajectory, in which decolonization is followed by recolonization or neocolonization, shows that the ideological condition that permits the sub-imperial desire to take shape exists precisely because there has been no critical reflection on decolonization. This is what makes it possible for the imperialist cultural imaginary to be so effortlessly inherited by the colonized.[69]

[66] Lin Angel M. Y., "Towards Transformation of Knowledge and Subjectivity in Curriculum Inquiry: Insights from Chen Kuan-Hsing's 'Asia as Method.'" In *Curriculum Inquiry* 42 (1), 2012
[67] Borrow the terms from Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*: 35.
[68] *Ibid*.: 35
[69] *Ibid*.: 63

Korean's celebration of cultural diversity and multiculturalism can be regarded in this context. Korea, as a formerly colonized country, has constituted its national identity as a victimised and suppressed one under the effects of postcolonial geopolitics and it is now attempting to reconstruct its national identity by using ideas of economic and cultural superiority against the 'inferior' rest of Asia. Here, multiculturalism becomes a screen behind which Korea can hide its formulation of national and ethnic hierarchies. Of course, this proposition does not intend to devalue the positive effects of multiculturalism in Korean society. As examined above, multiculturalism has been differently used and produced different results in each context. Nonetheless, the link between multiculturalism and nationalism demands a careful examination and should be discussed with the consideration of the East Asian development of modernism and nationalism.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed existing literature on different levels: multiculturalism in cultural studies, multiculturalism in the South Korean discursive context, and the emergence of sub-imperial desire. In so doing, this chapter articulates the theoretical frame of this research. In general, multiculturalism practically and theoretically serves to create the discursive sphere to examine the representation of Asian others for multiple reasons: first, Korean films depicting Asian others/multicultural issues are financially supported by the Korean multicultural policy;

second, these films have been developed and discussed within the discursive sphere of multiculturalism. However, as examined above, multiculturalism has been arbitrarily used, sometimes with relevance to nationalism and pre-existing hegemonies such as Eurocentrism. Furthermore, in the case of South Korea, it could support and disguise sub-imperial desire as an extended form of nationalism, as I argue in detail next chapter. Therefore, multiculturalism cannot be a simple solution to resolve the enlarged ethnic and cultural differences in South Korean society.

Chapter 2. Korean Nation Building from Regional Perspectives

With the theoretical and practical framework of this thesis examined in the previous chapter, this chapter aims to give a historical perspective on recent attempts to rebuild the Korean national identity so as to understand current tendencies in the representation of Asian others. Asian others are in a difficult situation in South Korea in various ways such as low pay, the threat of deportation, racism and cultural bias against them. Along with the popularity of Korean pop culture in Asian countries, the unfair treatment toward Asian others evokes the concern that South Korea is now attempting to assume a sub-imperial position in the region. As explained in chapter 1, "the term of sub-empire refers to a lower-level empire that depends on the larger structure of imperialism."[1] South Korea, a country that was colonised in the first half of the last century, now claims its superior position in the region through the appropriation of Asian others. As Chen Kuan-hsing argues, however, sub-imperialism is a historical concept which has been formed in the midst of modernisation. Therefore, the current emergence of sub-imperialism in South Korea, in a similar fashion to its emergence in other East Asian NICs, is a historical process in Asian region rather than a newly emergent event caused by globalisation.

Therefore, this chapter investigates how South Korea has positioned itself in its current geopolitical position in an attempt to build a

[1] Chen, "The Imperialist Eye: The Cultural Imaginary of a Subempire and a Nation-State.": 15

modern nation-state. As Shin Gi-wook argues, "a century ago, Koreans were similarly seeking to (re)position their nation vis-à-vis a newly emerging regional and world order."[2] Wang Hui also points out that the current trends toward neo-liberal globalisation and regional thinking on Asia would find its origin in the period of Asian modernisation from the late 19th century and early 20th century.[3] As a matter of fact, the thought of Asia has been a significant factor of consideration to build national identity since the nascent age of modern nation state in each Asian country.

In the meantime, the process of Korean nation building as a modern concept could be divided into three periods: first, experiences of imperialism and Japanese colonial rule (from the late 19th century to 1945),[4] second, the cold war and military dictatorship (from 1945 to the early 1990s), and finally, the era of globalisation and civilian governments (from the early 1990s to the present). These three periods are respectively characterised as the nascence of resistant nationalism against colonial power, the building of a nation-state and consolidating nationalism, and adjusting that nationalism in the global era. In the colonial period, Asia entered the field of Koreans' cognition but became an ambivalent term due to Japanese colonial ideas of "Greater East Asian Co-prosperity"

[2] Shin, "Asianism in Korea's Politics of Identity."
[3] Wang Hui, "The Politics of Imagining Asia: A Genealogical Analysis." Translated by Matthew A. Hale. In *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8 (1)2007
[4] This period actually includes pre-colonial era, as Shin Gi-wook and Andre Schmid clearly separate the period from the colonial era. Shin, "Asianism in Korea's Politics of Identity"; Andre Shimid, *Korea between Empires, 1895-1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). However, this research does not make a distinction between pre-colonial era (the late 19th century to 1910) and colonial era (1910-1945) since pre-colonial era was already in the arena of contest amongst imperial/colonial powers.

(Recognition of Asia). In the cold war period, the authoritarian anti-communist regime, post-colonial condition of the country – which was match by a strong pro-American and anti-Japanese national sentiment – and militant dictatorship discouraged the Korean imagination from straying outside their borders (the Disassociation from Asia). In the global era, the situation is reversed and the imagination beyond the national borders is encouraged and sub-imperial desires begin to emerge (Return to Asia).

With this perspective, this chapter reveals that the abrupt appearance of Asian others in the discursive and representative spheres in Korea is not a new paradigm within Korean nationalism but a part of the continuous process of constitution and reconstitution of Korean nationalism and national identity. With this aim in mind, this chapter investigates the historically constitutive process of Korean nationalism from the end of the Chosŏn Dynasty, when the debate about modernism started, to the current revisitation of the region.

The emergence of national identity in collusion with pan-Asianism

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, pan-Asianism penetrated into East Asian countries especially Japan and Korea, as a response to rising Western imperialism at the time.[5] In terms of the Japanese context, Sun Ge takes note of two important earlier intellectuals regarding the question of

[5] In the case of China, it has a long history of Sinocentrism (*Zhong hua-ism*), which is an idea that China is the centre of the world.

Asia, Fukusawa Yukichi and Okakura Tenshin in the Meiji era.[6] Fukusawa, seeing Asia as the symbol of a doomed barbarity, asserts that Japan should "disassociate [from] Asia and integrate into Europe." On the other hand, Okakura endorses the idea of reviving Asia, emphasising the ideals of the East, that is, the symbol of love which is superior to Western civilisation.[7] Although they stand at the opposite poles from each other, Sun Ge remarks that from that moment, Asia began to be discussed on a level of abstraction and symbolisation rather than geopolitical concretion.[8] In succession of these two ideas and influenced by social Darwinism, Kato Hiroyuki's idea of social organisms (*yūkitai*) which regarded state, nation and race as social organs had influenced on the formation of pan-Asianism.[9]

Indeed, the discourse of Asia in Japan began from a sense of crisis resulting from the encounter with Western imperialism. In this regard, the Chinese politician Sun Yat-sen in 1924 endorsed a broadening of pan-Asianism to include all races of the Asian region, inspired by victory in the Russo-Japanese War.[10] Yet, although Sun Yat-sen's pan-Asianism emphasises Asian countries' solidarity, it also gave Japan an excuse to invade other Asian countries, based on its racial and civil superiority just as its Western counterparts had done to other non-Western countries

[6] Sun Ge, "How Does Asia Mean?" In *The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Kuan-Hsing Chen and Beng Huat Chua, translated by Shiu-Lun Hui and Kinchi Lau. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007): 11
[7] *Ibid*.: 15-17
[8] *Ibid*.:22
[9] Shin Gi-wook, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2006): 29
[10] Sun, "How Does Asia Mean?": 23

based on the doctrine of social Darwinism. Yoshimi Takeuchi argues that the Japanese policy of modernisation of the time could spur on liberation movements in other Asian countries who were colonised by the West.[11] However, due to Japan's turn to expansionist desires, the possibility of solidarity failed to materialise.[12] In the same vein, Mika Ko strongly criticises that the period's conception of Asia as one that only reinforces Japanese nationalism and essentialism, triggering ideas about the superiority of Japanese "blood".[13]

While Japan's pan-Asianism is based on the sense of crisis wrought by Western modernisation and imperialism, Korea's pan-Asianism and cognition of national identity begins from the change in geopolitical relationships wrought by the emergence of Japanese power and the decline of the Qing Empire although pan-Asianism in Korea was influenced by Japan's conception of the term.[14] Andre Schmid points out that Korean nationality as a modern concept started from a resetting of Korea's relationship with China after the Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895).[15] As the Qing Empire collapsed and Japanese imperialism rose, the Chosŏn dynasty emerged from its vassal state under the Qing Empire. Simultaneously, modern newspapers in the Chosŏn dynasty started to differentiate Korean indigenous culture and knowledge from their Chinese equivalents in an effort to discover an independent Korean national

[11] Yoshimi Takeuchi, *What Is Modernity?: Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*. Translated by Richard Calichman. (New York, N.Y: Columbia University Press 2005): 153
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Ko, *Japanese Cinema and Otherness*: 13
[14] Schmid, *Korea between Empires*; Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea.*
[15] Schmid, *Korea between Empires*: 1-22

culture as evinced by the story of the Kwanggaet'o stele.[16] What is intriguing in Schmid's argument is that he sees the emergence of "racial pan-Asianism" as coinciding with the emergence of Korean nationalism between two Empires. He says that:

> [B]y the early years of the twentieth century, the cultural definitions of the East blossomed into a style of racial Pan-Asianism as the editors [of newspapers] began to participate in an espousal of social Darwinian doctrine across East Asia. The yellow peoples against the white peoples. […] Only by uniting the three nations of the East could the individual nations survive the onslaught of the white peoples.[17]

Here, the "yellow peoples" indicate only East Asians, and thus this sentence alludes to the superiority of East Asian countries over other Asian countries based on ideas of social Darwinism. Thus, pan-Asianism in South Korea was presented as an argument for replacing Western imperialism with an East Asian version of imperialism and racism. Indeed, Japanese colonial desire was endorsed by this formulation of pan-Asianism.

While Schmid regards pan-Asianism as a part of the process of building national identity, Shin Gi-wook differentiates pan-Asianism from nationalism, saying that pan-Asianism is a transnational notion of East Asia in contrast to nationalism.[18] Shin argues that "whereas pan-Asianists

[16] The stele was erected to memorise Kwanggaet'o, a king from the Kokuryŏ dynasty, but had been lost over centuries before it was discovered in 1905 in the area of Manchuria (under the Qing Empire). This stele became the symbol of Korean nation since the king's main achievement was regarded as a protest against Chinese Empire. *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid*.: 12
[18] Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*: 27

looked into common traditions within East Asia to produce a counter-narrative to the Western discourses of civilization, nationalists focused on promoting their own cultural heritage to establish the idea of a distinct ethnic nation."[19] However, it is difficult to differentiate pan-Asianism from the discourse of nationalism in Korea when we understand that pan-Asianism is a part of a process to search for national survival strategies to stand against Western aggression.

Yet, racial pan-Asianism itself caused two main problems in Korea. Firstly, it gave Japan an excuse to invade the Korean peninsula under the name of protecting Asia against the West. In particular, by emphasising civilisation and enlightenment in building the Korean nation, Korean nationalism and nationalists unwillingly conspired with Japanese colonialism and imperialism.[20] Using the terms of modernism and industrialism instead of enlightenment and civilisation, Adrian Buzo also declares that Korean nationalism at that time could not help but fail due to its immanent contradiction that resistant nationalism pursued stability while modernism pursued mobility.[21]

Secondly, racial pan-Asianism centred on three East Asian countries is not simply an ideology of resistance against Western power. It is also a form of imperialism against other Asians beyond East Asia. This doctrine actually mirrored the logic of Japan's Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere. Actually racial pan-Asianism in South Korea advocates the superiority of East Asia over other parts of Asia as previously

[19] *Ibid*.: 28
[20] Schmid, *Korea between Empires*: 13
[21] Adrian Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea*. (Abingdon ; New York: Routledge, 2007): 31

mentioned, identifying Korea with two neighbouring empires rather than problematising its own logic of colonialism. Consequently, pan-Asianism became another kind of imperialism and it has developed into the idea of Korea as sub-imperial power in Asia.

When the values of pan-Asianism encountered the crisis of its own complicity with Japanese imperialism, Korean nationalists started to try to find a position for Korea in the spiritual sphere. The representative person in this struggle is Shin Chae-ho, a historian-cum-editorial member of the *Hwang-sung* daily. He attempted to discover a mythic origin of the Korean ethnicity and indigenous culture and spirit. Schmid points out that Shin's work "creates a history that descended through time in a manner reminiscent of the patrilineal family records used in the Chosŏn dynasty."[22] Shin's appeal to ethnic and gendered nationalism is a repeated motif in Korean nationalism. In particular, during the Japanese ruling period, the character of Korean nationalism advocated by Shin was deepened through Korean literature and films and revealed its sense of loss of the Korean nation-state by depicting the loss of female siblings or lovers. *Ariang* (Na Un-gyu, 1926), a film whose plot centres on a peasant man who lost his younger sister and land to his Japanese landlord and then goes insane as a result of these losses, is a representative film which shows the state of Korean nationalism at the time. However, The number of Korean nationalistic resistance films, which were booming in 1920s, diminished in the late 1930s until the liberation from Japan in 1945 since

[22] Schmid, *Korea between Empires*: 16

the Japanese colonial strategy during the Second World War changed and focused on coercing Koreans to cooperate with the military regime,[23] emphasising *Nae-sŏn-il-ch'e* (literally, Japan and Korea as one). Accordingly, the perspective of Korea as a part of Asia and nationalistic imagination in the regional geopolitics came to dwindle in this period.

Nation as a Split Self-Recognition between the Coloniser and Colonised

After the liberation from Japanese colonial rule, Korea's understanding of nationality becomes more complicated. Between August 1945 (the year of liberation from colonial Japan) and August 1948 (the year of the establishment of the modern nation-states called the Republic of Korea, i.e. South Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, i.e. North Korea) was thought of as the era to liquidate the colonial past and to prepare for the dawning of a modern nation-state. However, at that moment, the Korean peninsula was divided into North and South, under the control of the Soviet Union and the United States respectively. This division meant that Korea needed to build a new national identity in relation to the new others as well as the internal split of an ethnically single identity. This process of the internal division was accelerated following the outbreak of the Korean civil war between North and South in 1950 – 1953. While the United States became a familiar other to South Korea, North Korea emerged as a threatening other to South Korea's

[23] Lee Hyang-jin, *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Culture, Identity and Politics*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000): 25

national identity, one which has remained as a threat since the end of the Korean civil war.

In his research on cultural films (*Munye Yŏnghwa*) produced by the United States Information Service (USIS) in South Korea between 1945 and1972, Kim Han-sang states that, "cultural films were placed to educate the nationals of this new-born country about a standardized model of [the] ideal citizen in the 'Free World'."[24] Put another way, the southern part of Korea is required to remap its geopolitical position within the "Free World", that is, the First World. Simultaneously, its identification with Asian countries became much more difficult since the three countries adjacent to South Korea are Japan, North Korea and China which were respectively the former coloniser, a hostile country on temporary cease-fire and its Communist ally. Although several attempts to formulate a cohesive Asian community have existed,[25] the previous era's vigorous discussion of Asia such as pan-Asianism in the colonial era almost disappeared in the cold war era.

[24] Kim Han-sang, "Uneven Screens, Contested Identities: USIS, Cultural Films, and the National Imaginary in South Korea, 1945-1972." Ph.D dissertation. (Seoul: Seoul National University, 2013): 5. The emphasis is from the original text.

[25] For instance, Oh Young-sook remarks the interests at that time in Asia as the context of self-consciousness of newly-independent state: "There is no difference amongst South Korea, Malaysia, Burma and Thailand regarding they were all colonised countries in the past. The consciousness of solidarity [as a victim] was being expressed in films though in a very vulgar way. It is noteworthy that the moment that newly independent states start to communicate and have sympathy with each other made possible by means of the memory of colonial age and the sense of anti-Japan." Oh Young-sook, "Sinsaeng Dokripkook-Ui Jagi Insik-Gwa Asia Sangsang: Kosmopolitanism-Gwa Minjokjooui Saiui Hankook Yonghwa (Self-Consciousness of Newly-Independent State and the Imagination of Asia: Notes on Korean Cinema (1957-1960s) between Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism)." In *Public Narrative Studies* 24, 2010: 298.
So the necessity for nation-building as a newly-independent country and sympathy amongst previous colonisers make their transient solidarity possible.

Yet, although the United States and Western liberal countries seemed to be the only imaginable others in Korea's geopolitical condition at that time, this was not a simple identification. According to Kim Han-sang, the images screened by the USIS were mostly about American urban life with which Koreans cannot fully identify since material conditions on screen were far from the reality of Korean society. Equally, the images about American army's victory or the defeated Japanese army during the Second World War, which presented Koreans with a new spectacle provoked the transition of the central point of reference for Koreans from that moment on: from the weak East to the strong West.[26] This discrepancy between self-recognition and the recognition of others as their main point of reference made it difficult for Koreans to envision a unified national identity. For instance, Choi Chungmoo points out the split within a male subject in *Sopyonje* (Im Kwon-taek, 1994) who explicitly seems to represent Korean national identity, saying that the male protagonist of the film holds two gazes: both colonising males' and otherised females'.[27] In particular, Choi sees the Vietnam War as the effort to search for a compensation of this self-contradiction and discrepancy, asserting that:

> South Korean military authorities argue that the Korean military's bloodshed in the Vietnam War was an invaluable experience for the

[26] Kim, "Uneven Screens, Contested Identities: USIS, Cultural Films, and the National Imaginary in South Korea, 1945-1972.": 68-69

[27] Choi Chungmoo, "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea." In *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, edited by Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (New York: Routledge, 1998): 22

> "maturity (*Sŏngsuk*)" of the military state of Korea. In other words, partaking in the oppression of another feminized former colony was opportunity for self-assertion that led South Korea through a rite of passage to recuperate its virility and join the ranks of the imperialistic order. Yet by joining this order, the South Korean government uncritically internalizes and reproduces the very hegemonic practices of the United States.[28]

According to this conception of Korea's wider involvement in Asia, it is probable that the appropriation of other Asian countries makes it seem, to some observers at least, that South Korea can also take the position of the "Free World" by taking part in the Vietnam War begun by the United States in the name of protecting the Free World. Lee Jin-kyoung goes further, arguing that the constitution of Korean nationality has always coincided with the appropriation of other Asian countries as in the case of the Vietnam War, which posits South Korean's position as a sub-empire.[29] As well, in his analysis of Hwang Suk-Young's novel, *The Shadow of Arms* (Muki-ŭi kŭnŭl; 1985, 1988), Theodore Hughes points out that Hwang's novel "instantiates the subimperialist trajectory of the South Korean state in Vietnam (the counterrevolutionary violence of the South Korean military apparatus bought and paid for by the US)."[30] However, Hughes also points out that the novel displays the tremendous possibilities of pan-Asianism through a South Korean protagonist's "consciousness" (or

[28] *Ibid*.: 18
[29] Lee Jin-kyung, *Service Economies Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010)
[30] Theodore Hughes, "Korean Memories of the Vietnam and Korean Wars: A Counter-History." In *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*. (April 2007). http://www.japanfocus.org/-theodore-hughes/2406

awareness) of American hegemonic racism and hierarchy – although the protagonist's attempts to act on this consciousness ultimately fail.[31]

In this way, South Korea's sub-imperial position within the region has been not only forged but also sustained as a form of split self-recognition during the cold war era. Put differently, South Korea's sub-imperialism is the product of the post-colonial geopolitical relationship within Asia but at that moment, it could not fully rise up. Reflecting this situation in which South Korea did not have fully matured material conditions and with the experience of colonial and post-colonial conditions, South Korean literature and films during the cold war era reveal their subjects' difficulties in defining their identities and thereby reveal similar issues within South Korean national identity itself.

Globalism, regionalism and sub-imperialism

Yet, the cold war situation began to change in the 1990s. President Kim Young-sam, who was in office from 1993 to 1998, declared *Segyehwa* (Korean translation of globalisation) as a governmental catchphrase in 1994. According to the Ministry of Information and Communicaions at that time, the *Segyehwa* of Kim's administration meant not only economic liberalisation but also political, cultural, and social open mindedness.[32] Eventually, Kim's administration came to emphasise the idiosyncrasy of the Korean term *Segyehwa* rather than the more common term

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] Cited in Samuel S. Kim, "Korea and Globlization (Segyehwa): A Framework for Analysis." In *Korea's Globalization*, edited by Samuel S. Kim. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000a)

globalisation. The key point of *Segyehwa* is that it embraces the idea that the most traditional Korean values show the best way to go for globalisation.

In this regard, some scholars argue that Kim's globalisation policy is not globalisation itself but rather localisation or deglobalisation, as Samuel S Kim notes.[33] Even Park Hyun-ok considers Kim's globalisation to be a "strong nationalist sentiment, calling for national unity in order to survive and gain leadership in the international community."[34] This is a strategy of globalisation which many Asian countries such as Japan and Korea have since adopted, as explained in Shuling Huang's term "strategic hybridism" (meaning the combination of traditional "national spirit" and Western technology).[35] Although some scholars such as Manuel Castel predict globalisation will erase national borders and thereby weaken nation-state,[36] in many places the state itself drove a strong policy of globalisation in order to strengthen its national competitiveness in the emerging global marketplace.[37]

Meanwhile, the focus on globalisation moved to the region under the Roh Moo-hyun government (2003-2008).[38] Regionalisation, as

[33] *Ibid.*: 4
[34] Park Hyun-ok, "Segyehwa: Globalization and Nationalism in Korea." In *Journal of the International Institute* 4 (1), 1996
[35] Huang Shuling, "Nation-Branding and Transnational Consumption: Japan-Mania and the Korean Wave in Taiwan." In *Media, Culture & Society.* 33 (1), 2011: 4
[36] Manuel Castel, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Malden; Oxford: Blackwell 1996); Kenichi Ohmae, *The borderless world: power and strategy in the interlinked world economy*. (Harper Business, 1990).
[37] Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*; Ryoo Woongjae, "The Political Economy of Global Mediascape: The Case of the South Korean Film Industry." In *Media, Culture & Society.* 30 (6), 2008
[38] Between Kim Young-sam government and Roh Moo-hyun government, Kim Dae-jung, a president who inaugurated next to Kim Young-sam, generally keep pursuing his previous

understood by the Roh government, does not contradict or impede the process of globalisation, but is rather interwoven with globalisation and, for South Korea, regionalisation is considered an expedient way of globalising the nation's reach.[39] In this regard, the president Roh showed particular interest in Northeast Asia. In his inaugural address on 25 February 2002, Roh announced "the age of Northeast Asia is arriving amid the currents of post-Cold War, globalisation, knowledge and information. Northeast Asia today is playing the engine's role for the world economy as capital, technology, production and logistics converge upon this region."[40] In particular, he emphasised South Korea's role as a balance between two neighbors (China and Japan) and the reconstruction of the relationship with the United States from a unilateral to a bilateral one.[41] Taking the European Union as an example, Roh further suggests building "multilateral security cooperation, as well as regional economic, cultural, and social cooperation to realize the vision of a peaceful Northeast Asia."[42] Roh's Asianism was triggered by the rise of Chinese military and economic power and influence in Northeast Asia, just as the rise in Korea's nationalism had its origins in the sense of danger caused by the decreasing power of China and rising power of Japan in the late 19th century.[43]

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regime's *Segyehwa* policy. He started his term of office with Asian economic crisis in 1997 and strongly drove social and economic reformation urged by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Therefore, Kim's globalisation policy accelerates neo-liberalisation that was regarded as a normative world order at that time.

[39] Kim, "Korea and Globlization (Segyehwa): A Framework for Analysis.": 19-20

[40] Cited in Sung Suh, "Japanese Neo-nationalism and an Idea of an East Asian Community." In *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6 (4), 2005

[41] Roh Moo-hyun, "On History, Nationalism and a Northeast Asian Community." In *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* (May 2007). http://www.japanfocus.org/-Moo_hyun-Roh/2424

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] Shin, "Asianism in Korea's Politics of Identity."

Asianism was also fueled by a specific cultural phenomenon at that time, so called *Hallyu* (the Korean Wave), which brought great revenues to South Korea's cultural industry. In the late 1990s, Korean popular culture including TV dramas and popular music burst out of the country into the overseas markets, especially Asian markets such as Japan, China, Taiwan, Thailand and Singapore. This phenomenon was called *Hallyu* by Chinese news media in 1998 to describe Chinese youths' craze for Korean pop culture.[44] Starting in Asia, the Korean Wave has spread to the United States, Brazil, Europe and South Africa. Also, the realm of the *Hallyu* has been enlarged to include films, animation, fashions, cosmetics, electric products, and even plastic surgery.

Although the Korean Wave was spontaneously formed in the first place through informal routes such as Youtube channels and pirate DVDs, it was later government-led and South Korean enterprises-subsided (*Chaebeol* such as Samsung and LG). As Samuel S. Kim points out, South Korea was a decision taker than a decision maker in the area of sociocultural globalisation before the 21st century.[45] In an effort to overcome this situation, the South Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism attempted to improve the image of Korea in the world and invested to promote the 'Han' brand around the globe.[46] As a matter of fact, the cultural industry facilitates national branding and thereby helps to

[44] Kim Youna, "Introduction: Korean Media in a Digital Cosmopolitan World." In *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global*, edited by Youna Ki. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2013): 1
[45] Samuel S. Kim, "Korea's Segyehwa Drive." In *Korea's Globalization*, edited by Samuel S. Kim. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000b): 257
[46] Ryoo, "The Political Economy of Global Mediascape": 881

promote the tourist industry and to sell products made in the country.[47] In many trendy Korean dramas, for example, all the protagonists in a show use products made by the programs' sponsors. This helps to promote the new products to international Korean TV drama fans. Yet, the main purpose of this advertising is to improve the image of Korea and as a result the competitiveness of Korean-made goods which have historically been regarded as being inferior to Japanese brands.[48] In this regard, the Taiwanese scholar Shuling Huang argues that the Korean Wave is not a simple nationalistic national building but is "blended with capitalist national building."[49] Similarly, Koichi Iwabuchi points out that "the three interrelated forces of marketization, state policy of national branding and cultural internationalism" hinder "cross-border dialogic connections in East Asia as it promotes market-oriented international diversity and connections while suppressing other kinds."[50]

Yet, and more significantly than Iwabuchi's comment, the state-led and capitalist Korean Wave attempts to alter the previous privileging of Japan and Hong Kong on to South Korea. Ryoo Woong-jae argues that Korean pop culture's popularity in the region stems from its 'in-between stance' which means "neither too advanced nor too behind" compared to its Japanese counterpart.[51] Although the Korean products have become

[47] Huang, "Nation-Branding and Transnational Consumption: Japan-Mania and the Korean Wave in Taiwan."; Ko, *Japanese Cinema and Otherness*
[48] Huang, "Nation-Branding and Transnational Consumption: Japan-Mania and the Korean Wave in Taiwan."
[49] *Ibid.*: 15
[50] Koichi Iwabuchi, "Korean Wave and Inter-Asian Referencing." In *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global*, edited by Youna Kim. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2013): 50
[51] Ryoo Woong-jae, "Globalization, or the Logic of Cultural Hybridization: The Case of the

popular in Asia due to their lower prices compared to their Japanese equivalents and their sentimental accessibility, using pervasive anti-Japanese sentiment in the region wrought by Japanese colonial history,[52] a pernicious factor of this transference of power lies in the Korean desire to take over the Japanese position of empire. While the Korean Wave is extolled by South Korean media, the superiority of South Korean pop culture is frequently remarked upon as if it defeats Hong Kong, the most westernised country, and Japan, the only empire in Asia. Some scholars point out the Korean Wave as a form of cultural imperialism accompanied by economic imperialism.[53] From the same vantage point, Won Yong-jin denounces Koreans' sense of superiority as the form of sub-cultural imperialism, reminding them of their previous history in which they lamented Japanese and American imperialism.[54]

Along with *Hallyu*, another moment for South Koreans to recognise the region beyond Northeast Asia is the demographic change within South Korean society. This is acknowledged by the term "Southeast Asian phenomena" which speaks to the recent interest in the region caused by *Hallyu* and the growing Southeast Asian population in South Korea. Kim Hong-koo explains the term as "a totality of Korean people's experience of Southeast Asian and their perception on the region" for the

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Korean Wave." In *Asian Journal of Communication* 19 (2), 2009: 146

[52] Japanese cultural products have been rejected in several Asian countries as a part of the policy of anti-Japan.

[53] Huang Xiaowei, "'Korean Wave' — The Popular Culture, Comes as Both Cultural and Economic Imperialism in the East Asia." In *Asian Social Science* 5 (8), 2009: 123

[54] Won Yong-jin, "Hallyu Dwijibeo Bogi (The Korean Wave, Inside Out)." In *Hankyoreh* (26 September 2011).

last two decades.[55] In addition to Southeast Asian populations, the increasing influx of ethnic Koreans born in China and Russia into South Korea due to South Korea's economic development changes South Koreans' cognition toward the rest of Asia after the end of the cold war.[56] Later, North Korean defectors were added to the list of Asian populations entering South Korea. All these changes demand a reconfiguration of Koreans' self-identity as a homogeneous ethnicity or Korean-ness.[57]

First arriving in the late 1980s around the time of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, migrant workers were encouraged to come to South Korea to fill the shortage of labor especially in the manufacturing industry in the 1990s. Simultaneously, rapid industrialisation and urbanisation caused rural women to move to cities, and the shortage of brides in rural areas caused by this shift resulted in marriage migration to South Korea.[58] Owing to strong ethnic nationalism and racial prejudice, female marriage migrants mostly came from Asian countries.

Meanwhile, South Korean society suffered from the shortage of labor due to the younger generations' avoidance of so called 3D (dirty, dangerous and difficult) jobs in the early 1990s.[59] In the summer of 1991,

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[55] Kim Hong-koo, "Ingan-ui Idong-ul Joongsim-uro Bon Hankook Sok 'Dongnama Hyunsang' (The Origin and Diffusion of 'Southeast Asian Phenomena' in Korea: Focusing on Human Movement)." In *Dongnam Asia Yeongu (Southeast Asian Studies)* 21 (2), 2011: 78.
[56] Kim Eun-mee et al., *South Korea Advances toward a Multicultural Society*. (Gyoha-eup: Nanam, 2012): 31
[57] Kim et al., *South Korea Advances toward a Multicultural Society*. 2012; Katharine H. S. Moon, "Strangers in the Midst of Globalization: Migrant Workers and Korean Nationalism." In *Korea's Globalization*, edited by Samuel S. Kim. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)
[58] Kim Sookyung, "Racism in the Global Era: Analysis of Korean Media Discourse around Migrants, 1990–2009." In *Discourse & Society* 23 (6), 2012: 659
[59] "3D Kipi Hyunsang (the Phenomenon of the Avoidance of 3D Jobs)," In *Maeil Economy*, 18 May 1990;"Silupnan Haesoe Yeokhaeng, Haewoi Nodongryuk Suib Ilryuk Haesoe Doum (The

the Ministry of Commerce and Industry's strategy to deal with the resulting labour shortfall revolved around the importation of foreign workers to fill these jobs. Despite opposition from domestic workers and other ministries such as the Ministry of Labor, in the following year, the government launched short-term trainee programs for foreign workers (of generally from six months to one year). Mostly originating from South and Southeast Asian countries, migrant workers who came to participate in these schemes were forced to endure low wage, poor working conditions, poor welfare and social discrimination.[60] Even worse, some of these migrant workers were deported owing to the expiration of their work-permit visas and often their employers did not pay their wages before they were deported. Sometimes these migrants' passports were taken by their employers and thus they could not leave their workplace even if their employers inflicted unfair conditions on them. The Joint Committee on Migrant Workers in Korea criticised these deplorable working conditions and the severe exploitation of migrant workers, calling it a modern form of slave labor.[61] Although overseas ethnic Koreans from China and Russia were slightly preferred due to the similarity of their skin color and language, they also faced a similar socio-economic predicament as other foreigners from Asia when they arrived in South Korea.

Cross-Current of the Solution of Unemployment, the Import of Oversears Workforce Will Help the Shortage of Labor)," in Dong-a Ilbo. (9 July 1991); "Jeolmuncheung Gipi Silup Nuletta (Youths' Unemployment Owing to Avoidance Increases)," In *Kyung-hyang Sinmun*. (31 July 1991).

[60] Moon, "Strangers in the Midst of Globalization: Migrant Workers and Korean Nationalism."

[61] Cited Moon, "Strangers in the Midst of Globalization: Migrant Workers and Korean Nationalism.": 149

In accordance with South Korean workers' antagonism and pervasive racist discrimination, migrant workers were often regarded as criminals or inferior 'kinds' of people. The South Korean media instigated this xenophobic view to migrant workers. In May 1995, *Dong-a Ilbo* published an article about the Chosŏnjok criminals who targeted South Korean travellers in China.[62] In their coverage of this story, South Korean media outlets neither hesitated to see all Chosŏnjok as a criminal group nor raised the structural problems they faced. This bias against immigrants from other Asian countries still remains. In a radio interview right after the terrorist attacks in Oslo in 2011, Cho Dong-hwan, the co-director of Anti-multicultural Organization (*Pan Damunhwa Danch'e*), referred to immigrants in South Korea as criminals and robbers.

> Due to the influx of foreigners, the opportunities of employment for lower class have diminished while a number of various crimes have increased. International marriage is just a method for foreigners to legally come to South Korea. They run away after marring with rural men or the urban poor. Even they committed crimes such as voice phishing, fraud and prostitution. The fact that these crimes are unseen and concealed alerts a serious national security problem.[63]

Park Heh-Rahn's research based on interviews with Chosŏnjok also shows Korean's bias against immigrants. She points out that South Koreans portrayed Korean Chinese women married to South Korean men as

[62] "Chungguk Yeohaeng Chosonjok Chosim (Watch out Choson-Jok When You Travel to China)," In *Dong-a Ilbo*. (3 May 1995)
[63] "Pan Damunhwa Danch'e 'Hankook 10nyun Nae Norway Satae Balsaeng' (Anti-Multicultural Organization Says Korea Will Face a Similar Accident like Norwary in 10 Years")," In *Nocut News* (26 July 2011).

"women obsessed with material wealth who are willing to transgress all moral principles and threaten the very basis of Korean identity."[64]

These kinds of antagonism and xenophobic responses to immigrants are especially targeted at non-Western immigrants who most often work in relatively low-skilled jobs. Katharine H. S. Moon tries to find the reason of this nationalistic xenophobia in its history origins. Koreans have tried to build a form of nationalism and have grown xenophobic due to their history of victimisation by and defensiveness toward threatening powers in the relations with the United States and Japan.[65] However, as Moon notes, "with the presence of foreign workers, especially those from South and Southeast Asia, Koreans are for the first time being charged with a xenophobic nationalism that is offensive and oppressive toward others, especially those who are poorer and weaker."[66] Moon adds here the near future's increase in North Korean defectors.[67]

As the backlash of negative images produced in Korean media, contemporary Korean media outlets tried to portray positive images of foreign migrants. However, they too often victimise and objectify migrants as other, as they do in these examples:

[64] Park Hye-rahn, "Narratives of Migration from the Formation of Korean Chinese Nationality in the PRC to the Emergence of Korean Chinese Migrants in South Korea." Ph.D dissertation (Washington: University of Washington, 1996): 196-201. Cited in Moon, "Strangers in the Midst of Globalization: Migrant Workers and Korean Nationalism.": 159
[65] Moon, "Strangers in the Midst of Globalization: Migrant Workers and Korean Nationalism." : 160
[66] *Ibid.*: 160
[67] *Ibid*.: 169

> Korea, a country that entrenches the feeling of hostility to foreign workers. Ugly Koreans who force to deport the injured [migrant workers] during work without any compensation.[68]

> Chantittung (35, female) continues to wipe tears. Her brother, Chanbatpung (33) was found dead on 28th last month while sleeping in an accommodation in the farm where he worked. It was a tragedy that happened two years after he came to South Korea with a 'Korean dream'.[69]

Although these articles report the cases of casualties which migrants suffer and then urge the development of countermeasures, they also bolster the stereotype of migrants as victims who need Koreans' protection. In her research on the representation of migrants in two representative Korean newspapers, *Chosun Daily* (which holds a conservative perspective) and *Hankyoreh Daily* (which holds a more progressive perspective), Kim Sookyung discovers subtle racism in both papers despite their ostensibly positive stance toward migrants.[70] Kim points out three ways of negative stereotyping: first, portraying migrants as helpless victims, second, portraying migrants as manipulable objects, and finally, avoiding concrete discussion on how to empower migrants.[71] Here the important point is, as Kim argues, the fact that migrants cannot be active agents and so remain objects, and these viewpoints intensify Koreans' racial bias toward migrants. Kim further says that the ostensibly

[68] "Oikukin Nodongcha Kasum-E Simun 'Ch'eungo' [The Hostility Entrenched into the Heart of Foreign Workers]," in Hankyoreh. (22 August 1994)
[69] "Hanguk Sali: Nunmul Chutsun K'orian Durim (Living in Korea or with Lament: Korean Dream Got Wet with Tears)," In *Segye Ilbo* (13 September 2014).
[70] Kim, "Racism in the Global Era: Analysis of Korean Media Discourse around Migrants, 1990–2009."
[71] *Ibid.*

positive attitude of Korean media toward migrants is based on political correctness and the belief that migrants are indispensible for Korean national interests.[72] Here again, South Korea becomes the centre while other Asian migrants are forced to occupy the periphery.

Moreover, the hierarchical view against others becomes more vivid in the case of TV reality shows that are designed to promote global Korea and cultural diversity. They are divided as two kinds: one, mostly in talk show formats such as *Minyŏdŭrŭi Suda* (*Global Talk Show: A Chat with Beauties*, KBS2, June 2006 – May 2010) and *Pijŏngsang Hoedam* (*Non-Summit*, JTBC, July 2014 – now), who can view 'ugly' Korea from a more "civilised" viewpoint – mostly Westerners and East Asians; the other, mostly in documentary formats featuring South/Southeast Asians, Korean Chinese, and Central Asians such as *Love in Asia* (KBS1, November 2005 – Now), who suffer from poverty and cultural differences and thus need to be protected by Koreans. In a similar vein, Kim In-young, Park Kwan-young, and Lee In-hee argue that TV reality programs depicting Asian others reinforce the bias of the refined, powerful West and the pre-modernised, pathetic Asia [especially beyond Northeast Asia].[73]

As the two cases seen above indicate, South Korean society is currently undergoing the fludity of Asian discourse in support of globalisation and regionalisation policies. Yet, this increasingly global perspective does not oppose to the growth in Korean nationalism nor does

[72] *Ibid.*
[73] Kim, In-yung et al., "T'ip'i P'ŭrokŭraem-e Nat'anan Hankukchŏk Tamunhwa-Chuŭi-ŭi T'ŭksusŏng-e Kwanhan Mitiŏ Tamron [Discourse Analysis on Multiculturalism in Korean Television Programs]." *Oughtopia: The Journal of Social Paradigm Studies* 24 (2), 2009.

it diminish national sentiment. On the contrary, globalism and regionalism is a way to disguise nationalism and, in the process, sub-imperialism emerges, linking to globalisation and multiculturalism.

Conclusion

The 21st century is characterised by increasing attention to Asia within South Korea. In 2004*, Cine 21*, a prominent Korean weekly film magazine, opened up its new year's issue with special articles on Asia, titled as "Asian Film Network Ignites Fireworks."[74] The articles in this special issue are constituted of seven topics dealing with current situations in Asia and prospectuses written by two film specialities, Lee Seong-wook and Kim So-young. The articles firstly review the industrial currents within Asian markets from the viewpoint of South Korean film personnel, introducing Pan-Asian projects (meaning films invested by transnational capital based in Asian countries), Busan as a hub city for Asian visual culture, and the emerging importance of the Chinese market. Although some of interviewees in these articles warn their readers about Koreans' narcissism that could cause antagonism among other ethnics against Korean films and other Korean culture products, the overall atmosphere in the articles is celebratory and full of expectations that the increasing communication and cooperation amongst Asian countries will be beneficial to the South Korean film industry. Meanwhile, two articles written by Kim So-young are given over to resetting the frame of Asian

[74] Lee Seong-wook and Kim So-young, "Asia Yŏnghwa Net'ŭwŏk'ŭ, Pulkkoch'nolilŭl Sichakhata [Asia Film Network Ignited]." In *Cine21* (2 January 2004).

film studies. Her main concerns in the two articles could be summarised as such: the importance of inter-Asian studies and trans-screen studies within Asia as a way to fight back against the hegemony of Hollywood; and criticism against East Asian centrism in Korean film studies.

Indeed, this issue of *Cine 21* clearly shows the paradox of the recent interest in, and concern regarding Asia, and further, the complex constellation of nationalism, globalism and regionalism. Korean films depicting Asian others are positioned within this complex constellation. In a way, some films depicting Asian others celebrate their diversity and appeal for human rights for migrants. In other ways, however, they still hold on to the Korean subjective position, which otherises the migrants they depict. If multiculturalism necessarily denounces and deconstructs Eurocentrism, it should be so for South Korea. East Asian centrism and sub-imperialism should be reconsidered and deconstructed. The case studies in the remainder of this thesis aim to examine these films under these frames of reference.

However, I do not mean to suggest that the pan-Asian discussions are all destined to be reduced to the sub-imperialism, nor to ignore the feasibility of peaceful and multi-racial inter-Asian communication and co-operation. However, as Iwabuchi argues, "we should ask what kinds of mutual understanding are predominantly promoted through which media texts and whose voices and which issues are *not* included and/or shared in the emerging inter-Asian cultural public sphere."[75]

[75] Iwabuchi, "Korean Wave and Inter-Asian Referencing.": 50

This chapter has examined the historical process of building Korean nationalism from regional perspectives. By doing so, this chapter is intended to shift the discursive sphere on the representation of Asian others from the discussion about represented images or multiculturalism to a discussion of Korea's modern history and the sphere of trans-Asian geopolitics. The recent predicaments facing Asian others in Korea are not the simply dark side of trans-Asian co-operation. Both coincide with each other through the historical formation of the sphere of recognition. As a medium of representation, films are especially significant in understanding this formation and the current emergence of multicultural films needs to be discussed with consideration of modern history and trans-Asian relationships.

Chapter 3. The Change of Industrial Conditions

This chapter elucidates the changes in industrial conditions in South Korea since the early 1990s that have precipitated the emergence of multicultural films (*Tamunhwa Yŏnghwa* in Korean). Now, multicultural films or, more precisely in the Korean context, multiethnic films have become a sort of genre, following David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's definition of genre as an expectation and categorisation by the media, the audience and those who engage in the industry.[1] South Korean media use the term "multicultural films" to indicate films which deal with multicultural issues, multi-ethnic casts, diaspora, defection and cultural diversity. In this regard, the multicultural film as a genre is a broad concept which includes multicultural issues and accented cinema, as Hamid Naficy calls diasporic and exile films distinct from commercial cinema, while the multicultural film in South Korea embraces commercial cinema.[2] Also, the term multicultural film pays attention to theme, subject matter and cast rather than just aesthetic vision. In the bulk of this thesis, I avoid using the term multicultural film, due to its ambiguous and arbitrary usage in South Korea, as I argued in chapter 1. Yet, here I use the term to refer to these films as a genre, following its common usage in media and film practice. This is for the convenience and to help understand this constellation of films.

[1] Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art : An Introduction*. (Boston; London: McGraw-Hill, 2004) 110

[2] For the concept in detail, see Naficy, *An Accented Cinema.*

The term "multicultural film" firstly appeared in Korean media in 2009 when four independent films dealing with Asian others were released within a few months of each other [3] and the first CGV multicultural film festival launched. [4] However, the first Korean film depicting Asian others was produced a decade previously, before the multicultural term became prevalent. An independent feature film, *Barricade* (*Parikeidŭ*, 1997, Yoon In-ho) portrays illegal migrant workers' miserable working conditions and South Koreans' discrimination against them. *Failan* (2001, Song Hae-sung) starring a Korean actor, Choi Min-sik and a Hong Kong actress, Cecilia Chung, focuses on a Chosŏnjok woman who comes to South Korea through a disguised marriage to a South Korean man. However, multicultural films have been produced in ever greater numbers since 2003. Table 3.1 shows the statistics of multicultural films that have been released to date.[5]

The question to be asked at this point, then, is what makes the emergence of multicultural films feasible at that time? This chapter aims to understand the industrial conditions which contributed to the production of multicultural films. To do so, this chapter returns to the early 1990s to examine the changes taking place within the South Korean film industry. In particular, I address three significant factors of the film industry: democratisation (and deregulation), liberalisation (and

[3] See chapter1.
[4] See Lee Hyung-seok, "'Natikun Ibangin'e Hankook Yeonghwa Malul Gulda (Korean Cinema Addresses 'Familiar Strangers')." In Herald Economy, 05 June 2009. However, before the term was used to refer to several Korean films depicting foreign subjects, there was another usage as a translated word.
[5] The year is based on the released date. The column of country is described only in the case of co-production (others are produced by South Korean companies).

Year	Title	Country	Release Date	Yearly Gross	Admissions	No. of Screens
2005	Rikidozan: A Hero Extraordinary		Dec 15, 2004	$5,466,328	951,646	223
2004-2005	Repatriation		Mar 19, 2004	$12,526	2,311	3
2005	Typhoon		Dec 14, 2005	$20,066,566	3,471,150	481
2005	Dancing Princess		Apr 28, 2005	$10,547,643	1,856,759	240
2005	My Wedding Campaign		Nov 23, 2005	$3,487,708	632,553	237
2005	If You Were Me: Anima Vision		Sep 23, 2005	$30,242	5,878	11
2005	Five Is Too Many		Nov 25, 2005	$13,150	2,634	6
2006	If You Were Me 3		Nov 23, 2006	$19,449	3,510	7
2007	Our School		Mar 29, 2007	$187,151	33,810	13
2007	Desert Dream	SK Mongolia	Nov 08, 2007	$4,551	755	4
2008	Crossing	China, SK Mongolia	Jun 26, 2008	$5,106,307	898,000	304
2008	If You Were Me 2 : Anima Vision		Apr 17, 2008	$16,305	3,625	11
2009	Himalaya, Where The Wind Dwells		Jun 11, 2009	$50,224	8,885	27
2009	Bandhobi		Jun 25, 2009	$47,234	7,689	21
2009	If You Were Me 4		Jun 11, 2009	$26,876	4,654	14
2009	Where Is Ronny		Jun 04, 2009	$9,001	1,478	6
2009	Hello, Stranger		Jun 04, 2009	$3,044	531	5
2010	Secret Reunion		Feb 04, 2010	$36,279,119	5,416,812	569
2010	The Yellow Sea	China SK US	Dec 22, 2010	$15,808,787	2,260,512	618
2010	He's on Duty		Sep 30, 2010	$6,337,046	972,431	312
2011	Punch		Oct 20, 2011	$34,808,603	5,309,928	629
2011	The Journals of Musan		Apr 14, 2011	$74,871	11,082	21
2011	Dooman River	China, SK France	Mar 17, 2011	$14,875	2,309	16
2012	Traffickers		Aug 29, 2012	$11,059,780	1,646,142	496
2012	Papa		Feb 01, 2012	$3,614,087	587,291	414
2012	Stateless Things		Mar 01, 2012	$21,674	3,469	16
2012	Red Maria		Apr 26, 2012	$12,299	1,957	14
2013	Secreatly Greatly		Jun 05, 2013	$44,001,525	6,959,083	1,341
2013	A Wonderful Moment		Jan 09, 2013	$1,162,092	183,650	341
2013	Hello?! Orchestra		Nov 28, 2013	$79,481	13,998	49
2013	Mai Ratima		Jun 06, 2013	$44,548	7,172	29
2014	Haemoo		Aug 13, 2014	$10,577,144	1,475,507	584
2014	One for All, All for One	Japan, SK	Sep 18, 2014	$133,304	21,239	76

3 1. Multicultural Films from 2004 to 2014. The data is based on the Korean Film Council (www.kofic.or.kr). * SK = South Korea

industrialisation), and globalisation (and regionalisation). As a matter of fact, these three factors are intertwined with each other. Liberalisation

and industrialisation allude to the enhancement of globalisation and the influx of global capital to the South Korean film industry. Moreover, the democratic mood in the film practices of the time accelerated the ongoing processes of liberalisation and industrialisation. Globalisation drove forces of liberalisation and democratisation in South Korea. Deregulation embraces the sphere of democracy and liberalist capitalism. Therefore, these three factors are inseparable dynamics which determine the current position of Korean cinema and stimulate the emergence of multicultural films.

Democratisation and deregulation

Democratisation of Korea was initiated by the 1987 social movement and the victory of civilian presidents in elections in the 1990s significantly influenced the South Korean film industry. South Korea suffered under a military dictatorship for about 30 years from the beginning of the 1960s to the end of the 1980s and during this time severe censorship of domestic films limited freedom of expression for a long while. In particular, the anticommunist ideology resulting from national division contributed to sustaining the military power regime and gave a cause to charge the dissidents who fought for democracy and criticised social contradiction as communists or spies from North Korea.[6] Owing to the oppression of the cultural sector, one of the main desires of the people's cultural movement

[6] Min Eungjun, Joo Jinsook, and Kwak Han Ju, *Korean Film: History, Resistance, and Democratic Imagination*. (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003): 58. This still remains through the presence of the National Security Law.

(*Minjung Munhwa Undong* stimulated by *Minjung* movement) in the 1980s in Korea was to achieve democracy.[7]

The people's cultural movement in the 1980s and in particular the 1987 *Minjuhwa* (Democratisation) movement paved the way for greater freedom of expression in the 1990s. Severe censorship of the type seen under the military dictatorship loosened in the end of the 1980s. In 1988, the Motion Picture Law requiring the censorship of all scripts in the preproduction stage was abolished, and postproduction censorship by means of cutting several scenes by the Public Performance Ethics Committee was invalidated by the judgment of the Supreme Court in 1996.[8]

The experience of the democratisation movement in the 1980s significantly changed the circumstances of the Korean film industry in the 1990s. Firstly, the experience of the nationwide democratisation movement was infiltrated into the film contexts and practices afterward. Eventually, filmmakers who were involved in the 1980s' film movement such as Chang Yun-hyun, Hong Ki-seon and Lee Eun started to come to the surface and then became the main protagonists who led the Korean film renaissance of the 1990s. Even those who did not directly participate in the movement sometimes mention the influence of the social atmosphere in the 1980s in various ways. For instance, Park Chan-wook said that the

[7] *Ibid*.: 58

[8] Park Seung-hyun, "Korean Cinema after Liberation: Production, Industry, and Regulatory Trends." In *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema*, edited by Frances Gateward. (Albany: State University of New York Press 2007): 30. However, this does not mean there is no censorship now. Ratings by the Korean Media Rating Board becomes another means to oppress the industrial people by means of giving "no rating", which does not allow public screening.

film *Thirst* (*Pakchwi*, 2009) "is based on the experience in Korea in 1980s when the *Minjuhwa* movement took place. At that time, I was an undergraduate student and the student movement often encountered severe violence. [Thus] I was scared to join it. Yet, now I am exploring the violence and the relationship amongst violence, love, sexuality and fear through filmmaking."[9]

Indeed, the era of the Korean renaissance in the 1990s owed to the 1980s' social and cultural movement in many ways. The experience of the democratisation movement and the common sense of filmic engagement in the social event present in the 1980s still remains in the current filmic context as evinced by some foreign film critics' evaluation that Korean films are highly politically aware.[10] The long-term oppression of the depiction of people's mundane lives under the military regime caused the newly emancipated filmmaker of the 1980s and 1990s filmmakers to pursue a form of filmmaking reflective of real society rather than fantasy. Isolde Standish remarks that the early 1990s' democratic atmosphere brought about a new wave of realism that addresses and interprets social realities through serious representations of working-class experience.[11] Furthermore, she regards this as the shift into mainstream popular culture

[9] "Pakch'anuk, Yelusallemyŏnghwache Masŭt'ŏk'ŭllaesŭ Chung Kongsŭpkyŏngpo..Taep'isotong (Park Chan-Wook Undergoes Evaculation Happening in the Middle of Masterclass in Yerusalem due to an Air Raid)," In *Starnews*, (14 July 2014).

[10] See Tony Rayns Interview. Lee Jung-hyun, "Chŏngch'ichŏk Chakak Nop'a Olakmulto Chŏngch'iwa Yŏnkyŏl: Sekyechŏkin Yŏnghwapip'yŏngka T'oni Leinchŭka Malhanŭn Hankukŭi Yŏnghwakamtok [Even Entertaining Films Link to Politics due to High Political Awareness: Tony Rayns Talks about Korean Directors]." In *Sisa Journal* (25 October 2010). http://www.sisapress.com/news/quickViewArticleView.html?idxno=53514.

[11] Isolde Standish, "Korean Cinema and the New Realism: Text and Context." In *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema*, edited by Wimal Dissanayake. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994): 65

of formerly suppressed underground movements.[12] Current multicultural films are descendants of the previous era's filmic and social movement.[13] As a result, they tend to emphasise realism of their portrayals of society.

As outlined above, Korean cinema finally attained more freedom of expression in the 1990s than the previous decades. As filmmakers could make a greater variety of films under the newly-loosened censorship of the 1990s, screens abruptly became unprecedentedly diverse with previously suppressed issues such as sexual, violent and political subject matters suddenly entering the representational sphere. The diversity and high quality of this new wave of films attracted a domestic audience which was sick of seeing propaganda-like films and repetitive narratives in such films as '*Shinpa*' Melodrama and action films. At the end of the 1990s, the Korean Film Promotion Public Company, founded in 1973 to regulate the film industry, was replaced by the Korean Film Council (KOFIC), which was more supportive of creativity and strove to protect rather than regulate the domestic film industry in Korea although this was actually the process of capitalisation and commoditization of the Korean film industry. Moon Sung-geun, a Korean actor and politician, attributed to the success of Korean film during last two decades of the rise of democracy in the country, saying that just "as Korean cinema has been democratised, so Korean cinema could enjoy its resurrection thanks to the enlarged freedom of expression and the funds from the KOFIC."[14] As the recent

[12] *Ibid.*: 65
[13] I will develop this point in chapter 5.
[14] "Hankukyŏnghwalŭl Salanghanŭn Ŭiwŏnmoim Ch'anglip...chŏngch'aekchiwŏn, Ch'angchak Chayu Pochang Tachim (The Inauguration of the Committee of Assemblymen Who Love

conservative governments (from 2008 to the present) have tried to limit this freedom of expression, democracy has once again become an urgent and significant issue for the Korean film industry. This is illustrated in Kim Kyung-hyun's denouncement, saying that the conservative government who attempts to "close off many of the paths to success that the Korean film industry had been flowing during the liberal government rule that lasted from 1998 to 2007."[15]

The demand for freedom of expression among filmmakers has been accompanied by a concomitant demand for the freedom of screening. This is the demand for diversity and the protection for minor films within the local market against competition from blockbusters. When four art films were released in 2001 but were denied sufficient opportunities to be shown, local movie-goers raised questions about the current screening system. Called the 'Wa Ra Na Go movement' (a combination word from the four films' initials), this protest sought to raise common awareness of this problem and gathered various participants in the film industry to push the KOFIC to protect minor films such as art films and independent films. Later, some even requested the creation of a 'minor quota system' to encourage the showing of minor films, denouncing current unequal system of distribution.[16] Corresponding to this movement, the KOFIC

Korean Cinema .. Pledge to Support Filmmaking and the Freedom of Express)," In *Ohmystar*, (07 July 2012).

[15] Kim Kyung-hyun, *Virtual Hallyu: Korean Cinema of the Global Era*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 3

[16] The discussion on minor quota system became vigorous during the demonstration for the protection of screen quota in 2004. At that time, the industrial engagers had a discussion on minority quota in detail that guarantee 14 days' screening a year for minority films. Shim Gwang-hyun, "Tasi Pulput'ŭn Sŭk'ŭlink'wŏt'ŏ Nonchaeng 4: Yŏnghwaintŭli Ch'amyŏchŏngpue

supported two pre-existing art cinemas and, in the following year, enlarged its support to include other cinemas which wanted to screen art films under the name of the Art Plus Cinema Network. As a result, minor films have found more opportunities to reach audience in cinemas, which also opens the door to the greater distribution of multicultural films.

Last but not least, independent cinema was reconfigured and systemised from the inside during the 1990s, due to the weakening of political censorship and the blooming democratic mood in South Korea. Although democracy, as Julian Stringer has clarified, significantly changed the condition of commercial Korean cinema in the 1990s and has been the basis for the current craze of Korean cinema in the global market,[17] this movement was also significant influence on the development of independent films. Before the early 1990s, independent films were severely censored by the authority. The brutal suppression of the public screening of *The Night before Strike* (*P'aŏp Chŏnya*, produced by Changsankotmae, 1990), which included arresting filmmakers and confiscating film reels during its screening exemplifies the severity of censorship at that time.[18] However, the situation has changed since the middle of the 1990s. The Kim Young-sam government, as the first civilian

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Ponaenŭn Ŏmchung Kyŏngko (Re-Ignited Dispute on Screen Quota 4: Serious Warning Message from Film Industry Insiders to the 'Engagement' Government)." In *Cine21* (7 July 2004). http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/25092. After the huge success of his film *The Host* (*Kwoemul*, 2004), Bong Joon-ho also appealed the necessity of minor quota. "Director Bong Joon-Ho Raises Need for Minor Film Quota System." In Hancinema, 8 August 2006. http://www.hancinema.net/director-bong-joon-ho-raises-need-for-minor-film-quota-system-6798.html.

[17] Julian Stringer, "Introduction." In *New Korean Cinema*, edited by Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005): 4

[18] See Park Jin-hyung, "The Night before Strike a film which was screened with a tear bomb, will be screened via KBS (Choirutan-gwa Ssaumyeo Bodeon Paup Junya, KBS-eseo Sangyeong)." In *Voice of People* (2 November 2006).

government of South Korea, alleviated regulation on independent films in a gesture designed to differentiate itself from the previous military governments. Moreover, the Kim Dae-joong government (1998-2003) promoted a friendly policy toward independent films.

As a result, the Association of Korean Independent Film and Video (KIFV) was established in 1998. From the start, the KIFV was funded by the KOFIC. Right after the foundation of the KIFV, a distribution company for independent films, IndieStory, was founded, aiming at "dedication to all kinds of independent films including independent feature films, short films, short animations and documentaries domestically and internationally."[19]

Democratisation is especially important in understanding multicultural films' texts and contexts. As to contexts, the initial migrant movement in the early 1990s appealed to democracy and human rights.[20] In other words, migrant people argued that the discrimination against them indicated the immaturity of Korean democracy. The strong tradition of social engagement embedded in Korean cinema inescapably embraces these issues. Additionally, the KOFIC's promotion policy has proved to be a necessary component of the recent rise in Korean multicultural films since almost all multicultural films are funded by the KOFIC and released through art cinemas that are again subsided by the KOFIC. As well, the demand for diversity also influences the booming of multicultural commercial films. In terms of texts, let it suffice to say that realistic

[19] From the website of Indiestory (http://www.indiestory.com/English/html/indie_Background.asp).
[20] Moon, "Strangers in the Midst of Globalization: Migrant Workers and Korean Nationalism."

representation is the main form of multicultural films as previously mentioned.

Liberalisation and industrialisation

Breaking the so-called period of darkness in the past two decades, South Korean cinema had experienced dramatic changes in the 1990s. First, the emergence of young directors such as Park Gwang-soo and Jung Ji-young who embraced social criticism against the military regime in the late 1980s attracted the attention of both domestic and foreign critics, who dubbed the emergence of these new filmmakers 'the Korean New Wave'.

However, a groundbreaking shift occurred in the film industry in 1992, which is most clearly exhibited in the success of the film *The Marriage Life* (*Kyŏlhon Iyagi*, Kim Ui-seok, 1992). In an effort to strengthen their competitiveness against Hollywood films in the domestic market, Korean producers desperately searched for people who were willing to invest their money into film production in the early 1990s. In particular, Hollywood companies' transition to direct distribution in 1987 stimulated a sense of crisis among local producers. Considering the concern of local companies, the government opened up more opportunities for film producers by means of changing their definition of the film industry from a service industry to a manufacturing enterprise in 1993 so as to enable film producers to more easily lend money from banks. However, the government's effort did not bring the results they were hoping for, and

despite their efforts, local banks hesitated to lend money to film companies since the film business still looked too risky to invest.[21]

In this regard, the involvement of *Chaebeol*s (a Korean term for a conglomerate) in the film business seemed like a solution to supply the big money needed to Korean film production. *The Marriage Life* attracted investment from Samsung, one of the biggest South Korean conglomerates. The success of the film in the box office attracted other *Chaebeol*s to engage and invest in film production. *Chaebeol*s' participation in the film industry brought about several changes in the production of Korean films: *Chaebeol*s preferred young producers who were likely to be more flexible and reasonable than experienced and old-fashioned producers; *Chaebeol*s asked their producers for full transparency in the process of production, emphasising the importance of account management, and most significantly, *Chaebeol*s increased the total budget of filmmaking considerably.[22] Production companies receiving funding from such deep pockets could not but restructure their systems so as to accommodate the requirements of the *Chaebeols*. In other words, the production process became more standardised in order to attract more investment. After the 1997 economic crisis swept across Asia, most *Chaebeol*s' investment in filmmaking was withdrawn and the majority of investment in filmmaking moved to the venture capital companies, corresponding to Kim Dae-joong administrative policy to support venture

[21] Park, "Korean Cinema after Liberation: Production, Industry, and Regulatory Trends.": 26
[22] Darcy Paquet, "The Korean Film Industry: 1992 to the Present." In *New Korean Cinema*, edited by Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005): 39

businesses. Furthermore, this involvement of investment from venture capitalists aimed to prevent possible future crises.

Meanwhile, the *Chaebeol*s such as CJ, Showbox (Dongyang) and Lotte, who did not leave the film business during the 1997 economic crisis, expanded its investment from production to include exhibition. As a matter of fact, interest in the exhibition circuit had existed from the early stage of *Chaebeol*s' involvement in the film industry. However, while they has previously focused on the video market and supplying the devices to play them, the remaining *Chaebeol*s in the film market focused on the distribution of contents per se. They built multiplex cinemas in places with high cinema attendances (also aiming for the investment in an asset), ran their own cable channels and produced their own contents. The 10 million admissions (1/5 of total population), which is the current barometer of the success of a Korean film, became possible due to the creation of these multiplexes since they have the capability to release films nation-wide on multiple screens.[23]

Along with the changes to the industrial sector, abundant discursive and educational resources were supplied to Korean cinema. In 1996, the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF)[24] was held, the first international film festival in South Korea. After that, other international film festivals started up in accordance with the policies of local

[23] Nikki J.Y. Lee points out that the rise of Korean cinema, especially of Korean blockbusters, stems from this wide release strategy. Lee, "Localized Globalization and a Monster National: The Host and the South Korean Film Industry." In *Cinema Journal* 50 (3), 2011

[24] The initial name of the festival was the Pusan International Film Festival (PIFF), but as the official name of the city was defined not as Pusan but as Busan, the festival has changed its name into the BIFF since the 2011.

governments. The BIFF itself has rapidly grown in size and budget and has become one of the most important film festivals in the world, especially for the circulation of Asian films.[25] The rapid growth of the BIFF has not simply influenced the film industry but also the discourse around film which has in turn stimulated attention to the sphere of national cinema within transnational cinema, or specifically trans-Asian cinema.

The foundation and enlargement of national film schools in the 1990s is also noteworthy. Between 1996 and 1997, the Korean Academy of Film Arts, which was founded in 1984 and is supported by Korean government, increased the duration of its training from one year to one and half years and established a new department of cinematography. In 1995, the Korea National University of Arts opened the School of Film, TV & Multimedia which was, according to a statement from the university, the first department ever in Korea dedicated to the training of specialists in the field of film and media. The creation of specialist institutions to teach the professional skills of filmmaking was one of the major factors in the break down of the apprentice system which had existed in filmmaking at that time. This professionalisation of filmmaking gave more opportunities to young filmmakers to debut their work earlier in their careers. This was also the case for practitioners working in other production areas such as cinematography and producing.

The launch of the weekly film magazine *Cine21* in 1995, reflecting the massive popularity of films at that time, while a monthly film magazine

[25] See Ahn SooJeong, *The Pusan International Film Festival, South Korean Cinema and Globalization*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011) for further information.

KINO, which launched in the same year reflected the burgeoning variety of film discourses. In the middle of these changes in its internal and external circumstances, Korean cinema in the 1990s was preparing to go beyond national boundaries in the near future.

In the meantime, the digitalisation of filmmaking also profoundly affected the production and exhibition of Korean films. The prevalence of digital cameras since 2000 enabled many young people who were not professionally trained or who did not join any kind of filmmaking group or company to make films on extremely low budgets. As a result, the sphere of independent films were enlarged and diversified. In particular, the digital camera also enabled the production of independent feature films, which had previously rarely produced due to their need for big budgets.[26]

The foundation of the KIFV and IndieStory enabled to organise and systemise the production and distribution of independent films. The inaugural declaration of the KIFV explains that the aim of the association is to build a community in which filmmakers can communicate with each other. Intriguingly, it also makes an appeal to commercial filmmakers to engage with this community and to share their knowledge.[27] Meanwhile, one of the main purposes of IndieStory is to introduce independent

[26] Independent filmmaker Lee Song Hee-il said "It was unimaginable to make a feature film before the 2000s. Now it is much easier to make it with small budget. Production costs dramatically reduced because [we] don't have to have celluloid films after digitalisation. Also mobility increased due to the simplicity of equipment." Yoon Hye-ji, "Ŏttŏhke Kwankaekŭl Moŭlkka, Mak'et'inge Nunttŭl Ttaeta (How Can We Attract Audience? It's Time to Open Eyes to Marketing)." In *Cine21*, (9 October 2014).
http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/78081.

[27] KIFV, "Ch'anglipsŏnŏnmun [Inauguration Manifesto]." In *The Association of Korean Independent Film & Video*. (18 September 1998).
http://www.kifv.org/intro_kifv/overview_02.html

Korean films to the international film market, including film festivals. Multicultural films also mainly circulated within the festival circuit, as they appeal to the sensibilities of diasporic audiences.

In sum, the liberalisation and industrialisation in the Korean film industry opened up the emergence of diversity. Filmmakers were able to utilise more human resources and capital within a more stable system, meaning that they were freed from many other obstacles which they had faced in the previous era. Moreover, this liberation and stabilisation also contributed to the later renaissance in the national film industry.[28] Korean cinema's heightened competitiveness in the domestic market formed the loyalty of local film fans who want to see more diverse films. Although the liberalisation and industrialisation of the industry has resultantly caused more dependency on capital, filmmakers can find more space in which they can intervene.

One thing we need to remind is the government's role in the liberalisation and industrialisaion. The government's role in the film industry seems to reduce as it has been more industrialised. Yet, the industrialisation itself is one of the results of the Korean government's policy. In fact, cinema had been regarded as an art rather than industry until Kim Young-sam government. However, Kim Dae-jung government (starting at 1998) declares a 'creative cultural welfare state' and then regards culture as an industry as well as the main power of state

[28] Ryoo, "The Political Economy of Global Mediascape": 885. He argues "[T]he industrialization, liberalization and deregulation of the film industry by the state as a targeted object of its cultural policy is one of main factors that led to the national film industrial renaissance."

development.[29] After the Korean pop culture has been popularised in other regions especially Asia since the early 2000s, the status of the cultural industry has also risen and the market in the cultural industry has been bigger and bigger. The Film industry could be more liberalised and industrialised owing to this kind of government's cultural policy.

Globalisation and regionalisation

The moments calling for Korean cinema to recognise the world film market were various but the most prominent was likely the prizes given to Korean films at prominent international film festivals, especially the Cannes Film Festival in the 2000s. In 2000, Im Kwon-taek's *Chunhyangdyun* (Ch'unhyangdyŏn, 2000) was nominated in the main competition at Cannes, the first Korean film to be so honoured. This event inspired many Koean filmmakers and journalists who were frustrated in the local industry's deteriorating condition to reconsider Korean cinema's status at the level of the 'world class' film. When Im was honoured at the 2002 Cannes festival for *Painting Fire* (Ch'wihwasŏn, 2002), he gave an acceptance speech in which he dedicated his prize to all Korean ethnics including South Koreans and North Koreans, Korean national cinema was precipitated into the level of the world cinema on an even footing.

While the nominations and awards accrued by Korean films at prominent film festivals were symbolic events which boosted and encouraged filmmakers and critics, the success of *Shiri* (Swiri, Kang Woo-

[29] Choi Eun-kyung, *K'ŭlrop'ŏl Midiŏwa Munhwa K'yŏngk'ye [Global Media and Cultural Boundaries]* (Seoul: Communiction books, 2014)

seok, 1999) in Japan and other Asian countries in 2000 gave them more a practical vision. Prior to *Shiri*, several films such as *The Gingko Bed* (*Ŭnhaeng Namu Chi'mtae*, Kang Je-kyu, 1995) had experiences notable success in the wider Asian market, but *Shiri* became the first Korean film to earn more than one million dollars in non-domestic returns.[30] According to Sojo Teruoka, *Shiri* changed the way in whcih Korean films were distributed in Japan.[31] Previoulsy Korean films had received only limited releases (such as featuring only on one screen in Tokyo) but, after the success of *Shiri*, Korean films were widely released all across Japan and achieved considerable successes (in case of *Shiri*, ranking second at the box-office of the year in Japan).[32]

What is intriguing here is that the moment when the world film market came within reach of Korean filmmakers began with films holding strong national sentiment. Im Kwon-taek's two films mentioned above are both based on traditional Korean stories about traditional performance, *Pansori* (Korean traditional song with specific narrative), and traditional painting. Also *Shiri* is regarded a film which heralds the start of the age of the Korean Blockbuster. "Korean Blockbuster" is a name corresponding to the concept of the Hollywood blockbuster.[33] Through the combination of

[30] Park Seung-hyun, "Korean Cinema after Liberation: Production, Industry, and Regulatory Trends.": 26

[31] Sojo Teruoka, "Two or Three Reasons of the Success of Shiri in Japan (Shiri-Ga Ilbon-E-Seo Dae-Hit-Han Du-Se-Gaji Iyu)," In *Cine21* (21 March 2000). http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/31225/p/1.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] See Shin Chi-yun and Julian Stringer, "Storming the Big Screen: The Shiri Syndrome." In *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema*, edited by Frances Gateward. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007) for further discussion on the complex relevance between Korean blockbuster and Hollywood blockbuster.

financial capital and the desire of the newly rising industry at the end of the 1990s, some Korean films which invested tremendous amounts into their production and marketing, especially into their special effects and star casting, triggered the beginning of the Korean blockbuster. Although the size of Korean blockbusters cannot be compared with that of the Hollywood blockbuster, the Korean blockbuster is an effort on the part of the Korean film industry to compete with the Hollywood market and protest the domestic market. According to Lee Kyung-eun, while Korean blockbuster blows up its budget in the industrial aspect, it resorts to the fantasy or action genres in order to exhibit its growing size and also nationalism in its generic and narrative aspects.[34] In a similar fashion, Korean blockbusters set the nation at its centre and cast colonial Japanese or North Koreans characters as its antagonists so as to make its narratives understandable and clear to audience.[35] Choi Jin-hee explains this as a form of "consumer nationalism." Consumer nationalism appeals to the audience as it enables them to consume relatively familiar things and influences their decisions depending on who benefits from their consumption.[36] Nikki. J. Y. Lee also points out that so called Korean blockbusters make appeals to the widest possible audiences to go to the cinema and to become patriots through their overtly nationalistic

[34] Lee Kyung-eun, "<Shwri> Eseo <Kongdong Kyeongbi Kuyeok JSA> Kkaji: Nambuk Kwankye-Rul Daru-Nun Hankukhyeong Bulokbeosuteo Eseo Poyeojinun Mijokkukka Seosae Daehayeo [From Shiri to JSA: National Narratives in Korean Blockbusters Dealing With the North and South Korean Issue]." In *Hankukhyung Bulokbeosuteo: Atulantisu Hokun Amerik'a (Korean Blockbuster: Atlantis or America)*, edited by So-young Kim. (Seoul: Hyeonsil Munhwa Yeonku, 2001)
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] Choi Jinhee, *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs*. Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press. 2010

marketing not because of filmmakers' interest in nationalism or history itself but rather out of interest in maximising the spectacle of their action scenes and the numbers of their audience members.[37] What all of the above tells us is that the Korean blockbuster has been shaped and developed in the mood of the capital drive and the industrial desire based on genre and nationalism. Eventually, this strategy can effectively appeal to Korean audience and journals.[38] Furthermore, as Chi-yun Shin and Julian Stringer point out, South Korean blockbusters effectively work "within the purview of an export-led, ostensibly pan-Asian" and "youth-oriented market".[39]

Therefore, the success of Korean blockbusters in the Asian market including Japan, the most influential Asian film market at the time, provides a way for Koreans to go to the world market without throwing away or obscuring their national colour. This exactly matched what the Kim Young-sam government asserted with regard to its adoption of globalisation in South Korea. As Shin Jeeyoung argues, President Kim Young-sam's policy of *Segyehwa* which emphasised traditional Korean values for globalisation triggered the restructuration of the film industry.[40] In this way, the globalisation in Korean cinema was accepted as it contained within it a strong national identity. As Rey Chow clearly asserts,

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[37] Lee, "Localized Globalization and a Monster National: The Host and the South Korean Film Industry.": 50-51

[38] Chris Howard, "Contemporary South Korean Cinema: 'National Conjuction' and 'Diversity.'" In *East Asian Cinemas Exploring Transnational Connections on Film*, edited by Leon Hunt and Wing-Fai Leung. (London: New York : I.B. Tauris, 2008)

[39] Shin and Stringer, "Storming the Big Screen: The Shiri Syndrome.": 59

[40] Shin, "Globalisation and New Korean Cinema." In *New Korean Cinema*, edited by Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005)

however, "national cinemas are, in themselves, at the crossroads of different types and states of cultural translation."[41] Thus, the national identity in national cinema is still translated and articulated in specific ways.

Overall, one significant point we should pay attention to is that this moment of recognition of globalisation in the Korean film scenes coincides with the recognition of the potential power of the Asian film market as aforementioned in the case of the success of *Shiri* in Japan. In fact, Asia was not a targeted market in the first place. A slew of journals and media at that time saw the popularity of Korean cultural products in Asia as an abrupt phenomenon.[42] There are two moments of this coincidence: One is the huge success of a Korean TV drama named as *Winter Sonata* (*Kyŏul Yŏnka,* presented by KBS2 from 14th February to 19th March in 2002 in South Korea) in Japan although the popularity of Korean TV dramas especially in Taiwan and other Northeast Asian countries had already begun in the late 1990s.[43] The popularity of Korean TV dramas and pop starts in Asian countries had subsequently attracted Korean TV drama fans to Korean cinema. For instance, a film *April Snow* (Oech'ul, Hur Jin-ho, 2005) casting the most famous '*Hallyu* star', Bae Yong-jun, was released simultaneously in Korea and six other Asian countries including

[41]Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema*. (New York ; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1995): 182

[42] Nam Dong-cheol notes that "the Korean Wave was accepted to most Koreans as a dubious phenomenon and most journals did not seem to have capabilities to analyse the reason of this phenomenon." Nam Dong-cheol, "The Analysis of the Korean Wave Craze (1) - What Is the Meaning of the Korean Wave to Us? (Hallyu Yeolpung Jindan (1) - Jigeum Hallyu-Nun Uri-Ege Muot-Inga?)." In *Cine21* (13 July 2004).

[43] See the special coverage of *Cine 21* as to the Korean Wave. "The Analysis of the Korean Wave." In *Cine21*, 13-07-2004.

Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam, an ambitious release which was enabled thanks to Bae Yong-jun's stardom in Asia based on *Winter Sonata*.

The other factor to consider at this point is a great number of viewings of a pirate version of *My Sassy Girl* (*Yŏpkichŏkin Kŭnyŏ*, Kwak Jae-yong, 2001) in China. Although it is difficult to find precise sales volumes since the DVDs of this film circulated illegally, the sales are presumed to range from three million to seventy million.[44] The popularity of the film on the Chinese black market did not give direct income to the Korean filmmakers but significantly contributed to the Asian co-production of the director's next film, *Windstruck* (Nae Yŏchach'inkulŭl Sokaehapnita, 2004), which was marketed as a "global project". In particular, this film became an issue in Korea due to the influx of foreign capital, co-production (with October Pictures, based in Hong Kong) and distribution by Bill Kong, a film producer renowned for acting as producer on *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (*Wo Hu Cang Long*, Ang Lee, 2000) it brought with it. After *Windstruck,* industrial flows toward co-production and co-distribution amongst Asian countries intensified. As Janet Staiger clarifies, the benefits of co-production, and the aim of co-production is the increasing of capital, the spreading of risks and the maximising of revenues.[45] Simultaneously, regional co-production is considered more beneficial but less risky due to

[44] "The Analysis of the Korean Wave."In *Cine21*.
[45] Janet Staiger, "A Neo-Marxist Approach: World Film Trade and Global Culture Flows." In *Film and Nationalism*, edited by Alan Larson Williams. (New Brunswick, N.J. ; London: Rutgers University Press, 2002): 241

the reason of cultural proximity, as Koichi Iwabuchi argues,[46] which denotes similar historical backgrounds and appearances based on the Asian star system. However, almost all co-produced and co-distributed films have struggled to succeed in each domestic market. In particular, (mainly) Korean films are more successful in other Asian countries than the other way around.

The interest in the Asian market as a receptive venue for Korean cinema which was invoked by the Korean Wave has considerably restructured the Korean film industry. As previously mentioned, Korean cinema is now targeted at international audiences, more specifically the (trans-) Asian audience as well as the domestic one by means of various forms of cooperation and on-location shooting. This is another example of the influence of the rise of the Asian market for Korean cinema that the direct enhancement of Korean movie theatres has been increasing. CGV, the biggest multiplex chain in Korea[47] has been building overseas movie theatres since 2006 in Shanghai and now has sixteen theatres in China, and ten in Vietnam. The theatres target the local audience so as to enlarge the number of admissions of Korean cinema in the region. As implied here, in this case, Asia is objectified as a 'passive' consumer or purchaser of 'active' Korean contents and producer/ providers.

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[46] Koichi Iwabuchi, "Time and the Neighbor: Japanese Media Consumption of Asia." In *Rogue Flows: Trans-Asian Cultural Traffic*, edited by Koichi Iwabuchi, Stephen Muecke, and Mandy Thomas. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004)

[47] According to KOFIC's statistic in 2013, the CGV has 858 screens amongst total 2,081 screens, approximately taking up 41 % of total screens. Next to the CGV, Lotte Cinema and Megabox are followed, relatively possessing 590 and 493 screens. Park Juyeong, *The State of Movie Theatre in 2013 (2013 nyun Jeongook Yeonghwagwan Hyunhwang)*. Korean Film Council. 2014.
http://www.kofic.or.kr/kofic/business/board/selectBoardDetail.do?boardNumber=2#none

Meanwhile, following the digitalisation of production especially in the independent film sector, art cinemas began to equip themselves with digital projectors to show digital films. After the huge national success of the independent film, *Old Partner* (*Wŏnang Sori*, Lee Choong-ryoul, 2008) and the development of the D-cinema system, multiplex chains also started to replace their projection systems with digital equipment. Here, Chris Howard notes an interesting point in terms of the digitalisation of art cinemas. He argues that the KOFIC uses the Art Plus Cinema Network as a test bed for larger digital screening/distribution projects across Asia, including the contribution to a Northeast Asia council on digital cinema.[48] In other words, the digitalisation that has been supported by the governmental organization bears an ambition to locate the national film industry as the centre of the Northeast Asian film market in the near future.

Similarly, the globalisation of the Korean film industry strongly coincides with national interests of economic and cultural hegemony in the region. Multicultural films reflect on this phenomenon in both beneficial and deleterious ways. Multicultural films themselves are the product of a globalised world, specifically a trans-Asian world. Then, these films circulate globally through international film festivals or the art film circuit. On the other hand, multicultural films are one repercussion of the South Korean film industry's interests in the region. They are often accused of racial insensitivity due to the hierarchal manner hidden in the

[48] Howard, "Contemporary South Korean Cinema: 'National Conjuction' and 'Diversity.'": 99

form of globalism and regionalism they project. However, these films did not throw away cultural superiority either while holding on to their nationalist viewpoints. This superiority is inscribed into film texts as a form of sub-imperialism. I will argue this through case studies in following chapters.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the changes in the industrial conditions in Korean filmmaking since the 1990s. These changes have enabled the emergence of Korean multicultural films. Democritisation and deregulation have combined to enlarge the freedom of expression in Korean films since 1990 as well as forged a socially engaged mood in Korean film culture. The forces of liberalisation and industrialisation have multiplied the filmic voices and given rise to a concomitant demand for diversity. The seemingly contrary globalisation and regionalisation have presented the discursive and industrial base for Korean multicultural films.

Young-a Park argues that "new activist cultural production/consumption" has taken place under "the alliances between the post-authoritarian state, new media capital and the activist filmmakers' circuit." [49] Strongly linking to the new activist cultural production/consumption, multicultural films share these ideas, adding

[49] Park Young-a, "New Activist Cultural Production: Independent Filmmakers, the Post-Authoritarian State, and New Capital Flows in South Korea." In *South Korean Social Movements: From Democracy to Civil Society*, edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Y. Chang. (Oxon, NY: Routledge, 2011): 190

global and regional dimensions to them. Based on these three dimensions, the next chapter investigates human rights films depicting Asian others in order to understand the discourse building around the representation of Asian others.

Part II. Industrial Positions

Chapter 4. The Human Rights Omnibus Project *If You Were Me*: Constructing Discourses on the Representation of Asian others

Issues such as deportation and discrimination against migrants have been intertwined with human rights issues from the introduction of the doctrine of multiculturalism to South Korea. [1] Accordingly, the representation of Asian others is of significant relevance to human rights. Actually, the demand among Asian others for basic human rights builds up discourses on the representation of minorities. This relationship between multiculturalism and human rights is well described in the human rights omnibus project designed by governmental organization.

In 2002, the National Human Rights Commission in Korea (NHRC) announced that it was going to produce a 'human rights omnibus film'. According to its press release, the NHRC suggested six Korean directors to make films dealing with discrimination. [2] The directors were mostly renowned commercial filmmakers at that time: Park Chan-wook joined the project right after breaking admissions records for Korean Cinema with *Joint Security Area* (Kongtongkyŏngpikuyŏk JSA, 2000). Two of the other suggested filmmakers, Yeo Kyun-dong and Park Kwang-soo, were the main members of the Korean New Wave in the early 1990s. On the other hand, Im Soon-rye, Jung Jae-eun and Park Jin-pyo, who had previously only made low-budget films, were also invited to the project,

[1] Moon, "Strangers in the Midst of Globalization: Migrant Workers and Korean Nationalism.": Kevin Gray, "From Human to Workers' Rights: The Emergence of a Migrant Workers' Union Movement in Korea." In *Global Society* 21 (2), 2007.
[2] NHRC, 2002

although they were preparing for their debut commercial films at the moment they were asked to participate.

This omnibus film was the first cultural project of the NHRC since its launch in 2001, and the film portrays social minorities including Asian immigration groups in South Korea. Although the film was produced by a governmental organization, the NHRC initially aimed to show it via a theatrical release.[3] Therefore, this film could be distinguished from other propaganda films, which are commonly distributed via public channels such as schools, army barracks and national TV stations. Although this film was not directly aiming to achieve large commercial success, the filmmakers had to be sensitive to the response from critics and their audience.

Therefore, the filmmakers involved with this project needed to make films taking into consideration of the competing demands of the state, their audience and film critics. As Park Young-a clarifies, new activist cultural production and consumption in the post-authoritarian era takes place between state, new media, capital and the activist filmmakers' circuit, which means blurring traditional boundaries such as state vs. social activist, corporate vs. independent, and filmic spaces of resistance vs. spaces of mobile middle-class consumption.[4] Consequently, this project demands filmmakers' negotiation with several contradictory dimensions:

[3] As to this film's distribution, the producers aimed at exhibition in cinemas and contacted distribution companies from the beginning. Kim Hyun-jung, "Interview: Producer Lee Jin-sook." In *Cine 21*. (08 October 2003b) http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/21278

[4] Park Young-a, "New Activist Cultural Production: Independent Filmmakers, the Post-Authoritarian State, and New Capital Flows in South Korea." In *South Korean Social Movements: From Democracy to Civil Society*, edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Y. Chang. (Oxon, NY: Routledge, 2011): 190

How can they define and depict human rights? How do they deal with a state-led project? To what extent can they achieve the freedom of expression? How do they manage their authorial inscription and the need for entertainment in a theatrical release? Eventually, the participants in the project confessed that they struggled with making films enlightening but entertaining. This is also the case for those films dealing with Asian others subsided by state-led funds.

In this regard, the human rights omnibus project gives a clue to understanding the current trends in the representation of Asian others. While engaging in furthering social justice – here the cause of human rights – those films also need to attract as large an audience as possible. While keeping hold of their entertaining factors, these films also need to intervene the field of discursive and social practice. While being supported by government or other companies, these films are also required to present their own vision. These are exactly the fields of negotiation where the films featuring Asian others are commonly positioned.

In this vein, this chapter examines how each film depicting Asian others negotiates with the discourses of human rights and multiculturalism promoted by governmental policy as well as how the participants reveal their authorial visions in the representation of Asian others by the negotiation between individual participants and the state. In particular, the human rights omnibus project is a site noteworthy when considering the films' discursive and industrial repercussions as a long-standing project. Although eight films, including five omnibus films (named *If You Were Me series*), two animation omnibus films and two

features have been produced to date,[5] the earliest two films and the latest film are the main focus of my discussion here. The earliest two omnibus films produced by this project give an insight into how the representation of Asian others reflects the concept of human rights and how these two films negotiate with the state, audiences and authors, while the latest version of this project shows how the representational strategy has changed over years.

The social, political and industrial context of the human rights project

The NHRC publicised its launch on 26 November 2001 as the start of a project designed "to safeguard human rights by means of investigating and aiding human rights/discrimination victims, making recommendations to reform the human rights violating/discriminating laws, and promoting human rights education."[6] However, the function of the NHRC is very limited since its decisions do not have any legal force.[7] After its several attempts to revise the current law proved to be less powerful than initially expected, its policy has focused more on cultural and educational outputs

[5] The films are: ***If You Were Me 1*** (Jung Jae-eun; Lim Soon-rye; Park Chan-wook; Park Jin-pyo, Park Kwang-soo, Yeon Kyung-dong, 2003), ***If You Were Me 2*** (Jang Jin; Jung Ji-woo; Kim Dong-won; Park Kyung-hee; Ryoo Seong-wan, 2005), ***If You Were Me 3*** (Hong Ki-seon; Jung Yoon-cheol; Kim Gok; Kim Sun; Kim Hyun-phil; Noh Dong-seok, 2006), ***If You Were Me 4*** (Bang Eun-jin; Jeon Kye-soo; Kim Tae-yong; Lee Hyun-seong; Yoon Seong-ho, 2008), ***If You Were Me 5*** (Boo Ji-young; Kang Yi-kwan; Kim Dae-seong; Shin Dong-il; Yoon Sung-hyun, 2010), ***If You Were Me: Anima Vision 1*** (Yoo Jin-hee; Kwon Oh-sung; Kim Jun; Park Yoon-kyoung; Lee Jin-seok; Jang Hyung-yoon; Jung Yeon-joo; Lee Aerim; Lee Sung-gang; Park Jae-dong, 2004), ***If You Were Me: Anima Vision 2*** (Ahn Dong-hee; Ryoo Jung-woo; Hong Deok-pyo; Lee Hong-su; Lee Hong-min; Kwon Mi-jeong; Jung Min-young; Park Yong-je, 2007), ***Fly, Penguin*** (Lim Soon-rye, 2009), ***Juvenile Offender*** (Kang Yi-kwan, 2012)

[6] NHRC, 2002.

[7] The NHRC homepage limited its function to developing, promoting and recommending policies mainly. http://www.humanrights.go.kr/english/about_commission/mandate.jsp

to build the legitimacy of the NHRC. Publishing the webzine named *Human Rights*, cartoons and photo essays in 2003 followed by film project, the NHRC actively rolled out cultural products in its earlier era of settling into its role.

In particular, the NHRC made an effort to proliferate such terms as "human rights awareness", "human rights sensibility" or "human rights culture". In the aforementioned press release, it says that "the human rights situation in Korea has – especially compared to the age of the dictators – improved significantly over the last few years. However, in terms of human rights awareness among [the] general populace, there is [still] a lot to be desired. Thus, the NHRC has been holding many various cultural activities as a means of advocacy."[8] Therefore, the films produced under the auspices of the NHRC are required to inspire people's consciousness of human rights rather than to render polemical issues.[9]

However, the concept of human rights is quite ambiguous. As David S. Diffrient points out, the projects' contributors, including the President Kim Dae-jung and filmmakers, could not exactly define human rights at the time.[10] As the press release from 2002 reveals, Korean human

[8] NHRC, 2002

[9] One of the key projects of the NHRC in 2003 was the re-examination of the National Security Law which was regarded as the main causes of political repression. The issue of the abolishment of the law was a hot issue in the year when this film produced. However, the projects never deal with the issue so far.

[10] Citing Paul Close and David Askew's *Asia Pacific And Human Rights: A Global Political Economy Perspective* (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2004), David Scott Diffrient says that "its contributors – much like former President Kim Dae Jung, and despite their good intentions – could be accused of failing to 'distinguish "human rights" from and in relation to other rights'. Just as Kim Dae Jung, in a pre-Presidential paper written for a 1994 issue of Foreign Affairs, and then in a 1999 speech that he delivered at an International Conference on Democracy, Market Economy and Development hosted by his government and the World Bank, 'did not explicitly define or otherwise indicate a generic,

rights were often related to the political movement in the late 1980s in pursuit of 'freedom of expression and publication' as opposed to the restrictions of expression in place during the era of the dictatorship (1961-1987). Will Kymlicka also remarks that human rights in Asian context are more significantly tied to the movement of democratization than in other national contexts.[11] In fact, the process to launch the NHRC was in accordance with the movement for democracy in the late 1980s. There are, therefore, political and historical contexts at the heart of the discourse on human rights in South Korea.

However, in a general sense, human rights are much more closely related to the discrimination for social minorities. Therefore, human rights is a comprehensive term in which every factor of social contradiction from political suppression to discrimination can be included. For instance, while some issues such as the abolishment of the National Security Law[12] can be discussed in light of human rights on one hand, discrimination based on appearance can be discussed in the same vein on the other. The topics dealt with in the first omnibus film produced by the NHRC exemplify this comprehensiveness well. The topics encompass the booming tendency

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categorical notion of "human rights", so too does the film occasionally muddy the waters with its emphasis on marginalized outsiders simply trying to fit in." David Scott Diffrient, "If You Were Me: Human Rights Discourses and Transnational Crossings in South Korean Omnibus Films." In *Transnational Cinemas* 3 (1). 2012: 121

[11] Will Kymlicka, "Liberal Multiculturalism: Western Models, Global Trends, and Asian Debates." In *Multiculturalism in Asia*, edited by Will Kymlicka and Baogang He. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

[12] This Law was made in the 1950s right after the Korean civil war for the purpose of ferreting out North Korean spies in South Korea. However, the law used to be utilised for political oppression to the opponents against the ruling groups. As a result, a number of people demand the abolishment of the law. The president Kim Dae-joong made an appointment to abolish the law before he was inaugurated. However due to ideologically different stances amongst politicians, the law is still valid so far.

toward English education in South Korea and the annoyance that beautiful girls suffer from in the Korean society, under the name of human rights of children and women.

Yet, the NHRC tried to erase political and historical colours in public acceptance of human rights and attempted to make it a more cultural term. One of the reasons for this attempt could be, according to the film's producer Lee Hyun-seong, to make it easy to distribute the film in cinemas, without being tackled by serious political issues.[13] Therefore, the directors were required to make a film without serious topics, that is, without mentioning political repression.[14] Moreover, since there was an inherent limitation to what can be regarded as a propaganda film, filmmakers tried to avoid heavy topics and manners. However, due to this apolitical manner, the film got caught up in a backlash from independent filmmakers when the first omnibus film was released in public.[15] Indeed, after several independent filmmakers and film activists joined the project, the topic was extended to the political ramifications of human rights and the problematisation of the existing social system.

Another reason to choose apolitical issues is the participants' attitudes towards the past. As a matter of fact, most of the filmmakers who took part in the first *If You Were Me* series had taken part in the

[13] Lee Hyun-seong says "people used to think about torture or repression with regard to human rights. However, we prefer telling the problems which we can easily encounter in everyday life." Kim Hyun-jung, "Interview: Producer Lee Hyun-Seong for If You Were Me." In *Cine21*. (29 October 2003a) http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/21630

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Oh Jung-yeon, "<tasŏskaeŭi Sisŏn> Chung <Jongno, Kyŏul> Mantŭn Kimtongwŏn Kamtok: Interview with Kim Dong-Won, a Director Who Made Jongno Winter in If You Were Me2," In *Cine21*. (20 January 2006). http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/36095

democracy movement in their 20s or 30s, and were part of the leading generation of the movement and some of them engaged directly with it.[16] This can be more clearly seen in the casting process. The omnibus films' producer, Lee Jin-sook says "it was not difficult to hire renowned directors to the film since those who had experiences in the movement in the 1980s now broadly took up positions within the production system. Also sympathy for the necessity of human rights was pervasive amongst filmmakers at that time."[17] However, the NHRC and participants in the film seem to consider political struggles for human rights as being part of the past. In fact, the foundation of the NHRC was considered a successful result of the democracy movement taking place during the past decades. Moreover, the presidents Kim Dae-joong and Roh Moo-hyun who made the launch of the NHRC possible are those who led and succeeded within the movement. Put differently, people who took leading roles in the previous social movement finally achieved political hegemony. There existed, therefore, a pervasive belief that the age of political repression symbolised as the ages of dictatorship has ended.

Instead of political issues, the NHRC tries to turn its attention to cultural aspects of human rights. Preparing its second film project, a representative of the NHRC in charge of this project, Nam Kyu-seon

[16] See the interview of Kim Dong-won who is an independent documentary filmmaker and also engaged with the second project. Kim says "all directors in this project are those who engaged in film activism or at least witnessed the 1980s [democracy movement] and therefore they must have a sense [of human rights] and are coming back [to human rights movement] through this opportunity."Oh, "Interview with Kim Dong-Won, a Director Who Made Jongno Winter in If You Were Me2"

[17] Lee Jin-sook, "Producer Lee Jin-Sook's Production Note." In *Human Rights*. 2003. www.humanrights.go.kr/hrmonthly/printjsp?no_idx=3982&page_num=1

explains the intention of human rights filmmaking like this: "The culture for human rights is necessary in our society. Although we cannot disregard the problem of law and system, discrimination in daily life cannot even be recognised due to the unawareness of human rights."[18]

Indeed, the human rights the NHRC underscores – and in general belief internationally – are the rights which every individual holds regardless of her/his political orientation as well as the pre-conditional rights for human being's basic life and thus should not be contravened by any collective determination. The NHRC clarifies this point in its purpose of establishment:

> Our purpose is to contribute to the embodiment of human dignity and worth as well as to the safeguard of the basic order of democracy, by establishing the National Human Rights Commission to ensure that inviolable, fundamental human rights of all individuals are protected and the standards of human rights are improved.[19]

In this perspective, as Wendy Brown precisely points out, human rights become "a moral discourse centered on pain and suffering rather than political discourse of comprehensive justice."[20] Indeed, this is the basic consensus of the human rights films dealing with minorities including Asian others. These films present the idea that social minorities should be

[18] Kim Do-hoon, "Inkwŏnyŏnghwa P'ŭlochekt'ŭ Kihoek Namkyusŏn (Human Rights Film Producer Nam Kyu-Seon)." In *Cine21*. (21 July 2004) http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/25286

[19] NHRC website. http://www.humanrights.go.kr/english/about_commission/introduction.jsp, accessed in 22-06-2012

[20] Wendy Brown, "Human Rights as the Politics of Fatalism." In *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103 (2-3), 2004: 453

protected since human rights are universal and innately given to all human beings.

However, it would be dangerous and even impossible to erase political manners from the discourse of human rights and only to focus on cultural aspects, since human rights themselves are always of relevance with socio-political choice and the problem of distribution, which again brings about political issues. From this vantage point, Slavoj Žižek denounces the culturalisation of political aspects of human rights that reinforces the belief of the universality of human rights.[21] However, he reminds us of the fact that the belief has historically given a cause to invasion to other cultures – for instance, as a form of imperialism – and supported the idea of the superior West.[22] Presuming the inevitability of conflict between individual rights, Wendy Brown also asserts that human rights cannot be pure rights without political intervention.[23] Of course, these assertions do not mean the invalidity of culture. Rather, as Nancy Fraser points out, the process of pursuing justice should be a transformative one (the change of system) embracing both redistribution (socio-political aspect) and recognition (cultural aspect).[24] This was also the concern which filmmakers faced in the representation of Asian others. Although the filmmakers in the NHRC projects were advised to avoid explicitly polemical political issues such as the National security laws and

[21] Žižek, "Against Human Rights." In *New Left Review* 34 (Jul Aug 2005); "Tolerance as an Ideological Category." In *Critical Inquiry* 34 (4), 2007
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] Brown, "Human Rights as the Politics of Fatalism.": 454
[24] Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a "Post-Socialist' Age." In *New Left Review* I (212), 1995.

to adopt apolitical and entertaining manners, each film approaches the issue of human rights related to Asian others in a different manner and inevitably reflects socio-political aspects to some extent. This point is a mapping out of the arena of negotiation within complex constellations of power, as mentioned above.

Diversity as human rights

In order to spread the awareness of human rights, the tactic of the first human rights film produced by the NHRC is to emphasise diversity. In its initial stage, the NHRC made public advertisement to respect diversity (and difference), saying "difference (*Chai* or *Talŭta* in Korean) between "me" and "you" does not mean discrimination (*Chabyŏl*) or being wrong (*T'ŭlita* in Korean)." [25] Accordingly, *If You Were Me* (Yŏsŏt Kaeŭi Sisŏn, 2003), the first human rights omnibus film, also focuses on discrimination as its main topic. The eighteen types of discrimination defined by the NHRC Act which were given to filmmakers as examples include: sex, religion, disability, age, social standing, place of birth, nationality, ethnicity, physical (in)capability, marital status, pregnancy, familial relations, colour of skin, political opinions, previous conviction, sexual orientation, and medical history. Directors were supposed to choose one amongst the suggested 18 types of discrimination to base their film around. Indeed, the discrimination issues around the younger generation, sexual-convict, disability, gender, physical appearance, and migrant

[25] Koreans usually make a mistake to use two words. While "*Talŭta"* means to be different, "*T'ŭlita"* means to be wrong, so it often justifies discrimination against different people from "us".

worker are chosen in the first project. Other film projects except *If You Were Me 4* (Sisŏn 1318, 2008), which targeted discrimination against the younger generations, were also supposed to choose one of the items.

Yet, this emphasis on diversity is integrated into the unified and universal concept of human rights. The format of the omnibus film assists the audience's integral thoughts. For instance, both Lim Soon-rye's *The Weight of Her* (Kŭnyŏŭi Muke) and Park Kwang-soo's *Face Value* (Ŏlkulkap) in *If You Were Me* deal with discrimination against women's appearance but in different ways. The former shows the discrimination suffered by an 'undesirable' woman and the latter shows the prejudice against a 'desirable' woman. Their situations in both films are quite opposite and thus it would be difficult to guess they are included into the same film if an audience were to watch them separately. However, when we see these two films in succession in an omnibus film, we may not feel any contradiction between them, rather may grasp a bigger picture saying that every woman can be bothered on the grounds of her appearance regardless of whether she is considered beautiful or not since the audience will watch the two films as part of a single feature-film experience. David S. Diffrient points out the omnibus film facilitates the spectatorial act of 'crossing over' and reminds its audience of the idea of human rights' universality and equality.[26] So, in *If You Were Me*, although each film retains different voices, some of which are even contradictory, the audience can hold onto a certain unity, willingly engaging with the film

[26] Diffrient, "If You Were Me: Human Rights Discourses and Transnational Crossings in South Korean Omnibus Films.": 121-122

and crossing over between each film. Put another way, the character of omnibus film makes audience imagine human rights as a universal and integrated concept. The different attitudes and diverse topics just illuminate the idea of diversity. Also the Korean title of the film, *Yŏsŏt Kaeŭi Sisŏn* (Six Viewpoints) and the main poster in which every director looks in different directions directly indicates the respect for diversity (figure 4-1).



Figure 4-1. Main Poster of *If You Were Me.*

The representation of Asian others in these omnibus films is positioned in this discursive sphere. It acquires the same level of discussion as other topics in the films under the name of universal human rights. Actually, cultural diversity, which is widely commensurable with multiculturalism, is integrated into human rights in this way: *They, migrants* are not wrong, just different from *us, native Koreans* like other minorities who are described above. Therefore, *we, native Koreans* should not discriminate against *them, migrants*. Instead, *we* have to change our own attitude toward *them*. *We* have to protect *them* as social minorities. At this point, human rights share a similar logic to that of multiculturalism: inclusion of minorities and respect for cultural

differences for multi-ethnic/racial democracy.[27] Actually, those films depicting migrants focus on problems related to human rights such as exploitation in the workplace and various obstacles in the society wrought by poverty, cultural differences, racism and ethno-centrism.

However, the problem is that this kind of representation accentuates individual victimisation and erases structural questions, while appealing to audience's sentiment. For instance, a short animation named *Shine Shine Shining* (*Syapangsyapang Syalalla*, Kwon Mi-jeong) in *If You Were Me: Anima Vision 2* (*Pyŏlpyŏl Iyaki 2 - Yŏsŏt Pich'kkal Muchikae*, 2008) shows the struggle of multicultural family through the viewpoint of a young girl whose mother is a Filipina. The young girl tries to hide her mother's ethnic origin owing to her fear of being teased by her classmates, while her mother tries to appreciate others' help although their helps often let her in the position of a poor victim. The animation specifically emphasises the young girl's hallucination which is an apparatus to show her fear. In the process, audiences are induced to sympathise with her fear and the tough life of a multicultural family wrought by Koreans' bias. As well, *Muhamad, the Diving King* (*Chamsuwang Muhamatŭ*, Jeong Yoon-cheol) in *If You Were Me 3* (Sepŏntchae Sisŏn, 2006) describes a day of an illegal migrant worker, Muhamad from Southeast Asia. He works in a deteriorating workplace. The film keeps juxtaposing his impoverished life in South Korea with his previous pastoral life in his hometown. Muhamad's glorious title as a diving king in his hometown, which means

[27] Matthias Koenig and Paul De Guchteneire, *Democracy and Human Rights in Multicultural Societies*. (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd, 2007): 5

his freedom there, is contrasted with his confined life in South Korea. In this way, the film appeals to its audience's sentiment to sympathise with illegal migrant workers' loneliness and breathlessness. Although the project's aim is to awaken cultural sentiment in terms of human rights, this also reveals the limitations of the project. In this project, migrants and Asian others become passive objects who need to be protected by Koreans. In this regard, some scholars assert the need for migrants themselves to be the agents in their rights movement, overcoming the limitation of being the objects of human rights-based movements among native South Koreans.[28]

Cross-over between commercial and independent filmmakers

The changes occurring in the Korean film industry during the 1990s also made it possible for commercial filmmakers to engage with the human rights film project. Nam Kyu-seon illustrates the development of Korean cinema as one of the reasons why human rights films can be made: "Although it was not easy to cast directors and film crews since the production would be voluntarily conducted, the power of Korean cinema which had been developed recently animated the production."[29]

As Nam mentions, the circumstances of film production in South Korean cinema had rapidly changed in the 1990s. Lots of film schools were founded around the middle of the 1990s and every year these new schools

[28] Gray, "From Human to Workers' Rights: The Emergence of a Migrant Workers' Union Movement in Korea.": 298

[29] Kim, "Inkwŏnyŏnghwa P'ŭlochekt'ŭ Kihoek Namkyusŏn (Human Rights Film Producer Nam Kyu-Seon)."

produced a number of graduates who had professional knowledge in filmmaking. Most of these graduates wanted to learn more things about practical film production since they did not have enough experience in the film industry. As a result of this influx of graduates, there was a sudden abundance of human resources who could willingly join the NHRC project even though it was not a major film project.[30]

Meanwhile, the revision of film law gave directors more freedom of expression compared to the previous decades. In fact, the most significant censorship was conducted by capital, not by law during this time. Also it was generally believed that an omnibus film could be made with a low budget and as a result with less risk. Diffrient points to the pervasion of transnational omnibus projects such as *Three…Extremes* (Fruit Chan, Takashi Miike, Park Chan-wook, 2004) and *Tokyo!* (Bong Joon-ho, Leos Carax, Michel Gondry, 2008) as the inspiration behind the NHRC's human rights omnibus projects.[31]

Likewise, the omnibus projects, with their generous funding arrangements, allow filmmakers an opportunity to do new things and experiment without feeling overburdened since they do not have full responsibility even if the film does not succeed at the box office. Park Chan-wook, a participant in the first film, says "I was thinking it would be

[30] Since the 1990s, the circumstances of film production have rapidly changed. Darcy Paquet notes the keywords of Korean film system in the 1990s as reduced censorship via the revision of film law, the growth of film capital such as the involvement (and exit) of *Chaebŏl,* the subsequent entrance of venture capital, the emergence of large-scale national distribution companies with multiplex cinema, the growth of film culture such as launching film festival and film school, and so on, Paquet, "The Korean Film Industry: 1992 to the Present." In various ways, the 1990s is the age of the upheaval of South Korean cinema.

[31] Diffrient, "If You Were Me: Human Rights Discourses and Transnational Crossings in South Korean Omnibus Films."

nice if I could make shorts and features by turns. Thus when I was proposed to make this film, I had no reason to refuse it."[32] Indeed, there were few opportunities other than the NHRC to make short films supported by external funding sources at this time, even though commercial directors wanted to make short films. However, the activation of the production of omnibus films enabled commercial filmmakers to engage with making short films.

Moreover, the fact that this film was a kind of a propaganda film supported by a governmental organisation did not matter to the participants. Film critic Byun Seong-chan points out that

> The film is produced as the form of a propaganda film from its birth. Paradoxically, six filmmakers are bestowed the biggest freedom of creation because of that reason. In order to overcome a general prejudice that a propaganda film is always boring, the principle that the film consciously chooses is "separation but simultaneously co-existence". [...] The essence of their voluntary passions presumably comes out of these: the freedom of expression which directors can hardly have within commercial films and the freedom from the obsession of commercial success.[33]

As Byun mentions, the filmmakers could claim more freedom for themselves, since they did not have pressure from investors who wanted to make profit from their films. As well, these filmmakers could take the

[32] Lim Beom, "Yŏsŏs Kamtokŭi Inkwŏnyŏnghwa P'ŭlochekt'ŭ: Pakch'anukŭi <mitkŏna Malkŏna Ch'antŭlaŭi Kyŏngu> (6 Directors' Human Rights Film Project: Park Chan-Wook's Never Ending Peace And Love)." In *CIne21*, (22 November 2002). http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/15290

[33] Byun Seong-chan, "Kachang Sŏngkongchŏkin Omnipŏsŭ Yŏnghwa <Yŏsŏskaeŭi Sisŏn> (The Most Successful Omnibus Film, If You Were Me)." In *Cine21* (20 November 2003), http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/21971

opportunity to create aesthetically challenging films. Moreover they could deal with unfamiliar topics which were not easily allowed in commercial cinema.

While the first project tried to attract commercial filmmakers, the forthcoming projects let independent filmmakers participate in the projects. In fact, not only the human rights project but also other omnibus films which were funded by governmental or public organisation at this time tried to combine independent and commercial filmmakers. However, independent filmmakers do not seem to have same purposes as commercial filmmakers since their most urgent problem is not the freedom of expression, but the budget which makes filmmaking possible. As a matter of fact, when working for these omnibus projects, independent filmmakers find themselves trying to make a film more commercially while commercial filmmakers try to make their films more experimental. For instance, Kim Gok and Kim Sun brothers, who were regarded as experimental or extremely independent filmmakers, made a first attempt to produce a narrative drama with *Bomb! Bomb! Bomb!* in *If You Were Me 3* (Sepŏntchae Sisun, 2006). This film later became a stepping-stone for them to make a commercial film.[34] On the other hand, Park Chan-wook attempted to render new camera angles in his short film, which might not

[34] In an interview, they said like this: "We have been thinking to make a commercial film for a few years. […] A Film must meet audience. A film is for people, even though they can ignore the film. […] When we were planning to make a commercial film, we had an opportunity to make a human rights film named 'Bomb! Bomb! Bomb!'. This was sort of experiment for us to see if we can make a narrative drama. After finishing the film, we recognised there was less difference [from our previous styles]." Go Kyung-seok, "Int'ŏpyu: <hwait'ŭ> Kimkok, Kimsŏn Kamtok 'Aitol+ŭmak+holŏ Kyŏlhapi Kachang Ŏlyŏwŏssta' (Interview: Kim Gok Kim Sun in White 'The Most Difficult Thing Was to Combine Idol, Music and Horror.'" In *10 Asia*, 21 June 2011. http://tenasia.hankyung.com/archives/8416.

be allowed in a commercial film. It seems that when working as part of an omnibus project, commercial filmmakers think they can make a film in freer circumstances and independent filmmakers think they can make a film in more stable circumstances.

As a result, the boundary between commercial and independent films, which was fairly clear before the advent of the omnibus film, has become since more and more blurred. Now a single director can be simultaneously both a commercial filmmaker and an independent filmmaker, especially in the case of young directors just starting their careers. Subsequently, the topics covered in *Choongmooro*[35] have become much more diverse. While the top box-office record holders were mostly blockbuster action films in the last decade, recently hit-makers at the box office are changing into more diverse sizes, genres and topics including multiculturalist issues. In this way, after prosperity of omnibus projects aiming for social engagement like the human rights film, the demarcation between the commercial and independent film scenes in South Korea are blurred in terms of their human creators and their subject-matter.

Around the early 2000s, the tendency to make omnibus projects and resulting crossing over between commercial and independent cinema enlarged the space in which a variety of topics could emerge. The emergence of commercial films depicting Asian others and the increase in multicultural films in South Korean cinema can be understood in this

[35] Like Hollywood, this word represents the South Korean commercial film industry.

context. The human rights film project which benefited from the change in the Korean film industry has also stimulated this cross-over tendency.

Filmic representation and negotiation

As aforementioned, the Human Rights film project focuses on universal values, the celebration of diversity and the culturalisation of political issues as well as generating industrial repercussions. However, it is not true that all films simply reflect this discourse without hesitation. In particular, the initial stages of the project served to forge the discursive sphere of the representation of Asian others in terms of human rights and to build filmic spaces of negotiation within the desire of state, authors and audiences. In order to examine these dynamics in their initial stages, two films about Asian migrants will be discussed here: Park chan-wook's *Never Ending Peace and Love* (Mitkŏna Malkŏna Ch'antŭlaŭi Kyŏngu, 2003) and Kim Dong-won's *Jongno Winter* (Jongno Kyŏul, 2005). Park is one of the most renowned commercial filmmakers in South Korea, while Kim is also a prominent filmmaker, with a nickname of "the father of Korean independent documentary." These two films have influenced other films aesthetically, discursively and industrially and have contributed to the construction of the representational sphere of Asian others. Moreover, in this process, the discursive and aesthetic strategies around the representation of Asian others are formed and re-formed.

Never Ending Peace and Love

Around 2003, the suffering of Asian others became a big issue in South Korea, with a particular focus on illegal migrant workers who cannot go back to their countries after the expiration of their working visas due to wages they were owed by their employers or debts created when they came to South Korea. In particular, the 2002 announcement of governmental policy to postpone repatriation by 2003 if illegal migrant workers register themselves at the immigration office ignited an outcry among migrant workers since the policy did not change any structural problem but instead aimed to control the number of migrant workers. If not many, several independent films – mostly documentary films - such as *We Are Migrant Workers* (Ulinŭn Ichunotongchata, Na Doo-kyoung and Man-i, 2002) adopted this issue as their subject matter. The inclusion of the issue of the plight of Asian migrant workers into the human rights film at that time would reflect on this social reality.

Park Chan-wook's *Never Ending Peace and Love* is also based on the true story of Chandra, a female immigrant worker from Nepal, who had been unfairly confined to a mental hospital in South Korea for six years. Koreans, except some residents in specific areas such as Ansan, had had few opportunities to encounter Southeast Asian migrants in their everyday life and thus Koreans who met Chandra thought she was an insane Korean woman who made weird sounds when she spoke poor Korean or fluent Nepali. Prior to Park's film, the miserable story of Chandra was dealt with several times in other media. The director said he felt guilty for his ignorance when he heard about her story through other

media.[36] Subsequently, the film interrogates Koreans' ignorance toward Asian others.

In particular, the film is filtered through Chandra's viewpoint, which enables viewers to see *the ugly Korean society* from the other's viewpoint. This was a technological choice rather than aesthetic one in the first place. When Park decided to make a film about Chandra, the biggest problem was, according to him, to find a foreign actor who could act very well. It seemed impossible to find a good actor due to the lack of budget and time. To avoid casting a foreign actress, about ninety percent of the film consists of shots from Chandra's viewpoint.[37] Here is an irony generated: in order to make a film which shows the reality of Asian migrant workers, Park could not cast an Asian migrant actress since it would reduce filmic reality. This raises an ethical question about filmic reality, but the use of Chandra's viewpoint seems to be the result of the director's negotiation between the ethics of representation of others and the acceptability to film audience.

Yet, this strategy has consequently become a means to subvert the prevalent way of representing Asian others in media. Asian others in media were usually objects to be seen, not agents to see. On the contrary, in Park's film, the migrant protagonist possesses her own view, and indeed, she is the only gaze holder. However, since most scenes consist of

[36] Oh Dong-in, "Yesulŭn Chongchong P'ilyoe Ŭihae Ch'angchotoenta (Art Is Sometimes Created by Needs)." In *Human Rights*, (August 2003). http://webzine.humanrights.go.kr/user/sub/monthly.do?magazine=2003.08#.
[37] Lim, "Yŏsŏs Kamtokŭi Inkwŏnyŏnghwa P'ŭlochekt'ŭ: Pakch'anukŭi <mitkŏna Malkŏna Ch'antŭlaŭi Kyŏngu> (6 Directors' Human Rights Film Project: Park Chan-Wook's Never Ending Peace And Love)."

shots from Chandra's viewpoint, the audience cannot see her on screen, except in the prologue and epilogue scenes which portray Chandra's real hometown. Put differently, the film is filled with the viewpoint of an invisible and mis/un-recognisable subject. In this sense, her viewpoint gains an omniscient position like god. This effectively bestows on her the ability to grasp social contradiction that cannot be seen by *us, Koreans,* in everyday life.

However, her viewpoint is only a means to scrutinise the inner side of South Korean society and, thus, is an empty signifier itself. In the film, Chandra cannot explain herself and what she suffered because she cannot speak Korean. Instead, she can only murmur or speak in Nepali which is not translated in Korean. The film intentionally does not provide subtitles and thereby the audience can feel similarly uncomprehending and uncomprehended as Chandra might feel in South Korea. Yet, by no means can the audience hear her own voice, either. Here she functions like a window. In other words, while she does not know what happened to her, she remains only as a medium.

And here is an irony. According to Thomas Elsaesser, "irony is dialectical in intent and invariably points out a potentially significant gap or break between the signifier and the signified."[38] In the film, Chandra's gaze is omniscient and simultaneously empty. At this point, the irony is generated. She holds the only viewpoint in the film but she is the only person who cannot understand the situation. Therefore, the holder of the

[38] Thomas Elsaesser, "The Cinema of Irony." In *Monogram*, no. 5, 1973: 1-2

omniscient viewpoint in the film is directly the author and the audience, not Chandra. The audience encounters the reality of South Korean society via the empty gaze. Rhetorically and practically Chandra is the medium itself.

Indeed, irony is the way in which Park recognises the South Korean society and human beings. In several interviews, he says that he enjoys creating irony in his films. To him, irony makes people take care to discover the complexity of human nature.[39] Keith B. Wagner further explains that irony is the way in which Park's political stance reveals itself since political representation in neoliberalism is more indirect and complicated because of the nature of neoliberalism itself.[40] In *Never Ending Peace and Love*, Park reveals the irony existing in the representation of Asian others. As previously mentioned, it is important to understand the relationship between the emergence of neoliberalism and the rise of Asian others in Korean society. As well as the ironical situation around Chandra in the film, irony which is generated in the process of production and by Chandra's viewpoint indicates the tactic by which Park ciriticises Korean society and indirectly shows his political stance.

In the meantime, another political stance of Park's is evinced by the way that Chandra's viewpoint becomes fragmented by the means of separation of parts of her body such as a hand from her whole body. Her

[39] Marcin J. Sobczak, "The Producer's Work: An Interview With Park Chan-Wook." In *The Huffington Post*. 2015. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marcin-j-sobczak/the-producers-work-an-int_b_6157594.html.
[40] Keith B. Wagner, "Fragments of Labor: Neoliberal Attitudes and Architectures in Contemporary South Korean Cinema." In *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema: Capital, Culture, and Marxist Critique*, edited by Jyotsna Kapur and Keith B. Wagner. (New York; Abingdon : Routledge 2011): 221

voice was also fragmented from her body. Wagner says that neoliberalism in Park's films is characterised by fragmentation. For instance, in *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (Poksunŭn Naŭi Kŏt, 2002), Wagner avers "the contemporary workforce of Park's neoliberal Seoul lacks the clarity and stamina to counter, or at the very least ability to challenge, the IMF's restructuring. In the neoliberal present of Park's South Korea, work is taken away and its employees are forced to pursue individualistic labour production, or more crudely, predatory action to attain and produce their own brand of capital."[41] Similarly, in *Never Ending Peace and Love*, the invisible protagonist in front of the camera is more alienated and fragmented, which emphasises the neoliberal character of Park's film.

However, this irony and fragmentation are resolved and compensated by the images of Chandra's idealised hometown. The opening and closing sequences in *Never Ending Peace and Love* consist of events in Chandra's hometown. In these sequences, we see a peaceful village located in the countryside. When the Korean film crews visit her, a village festival is ongoing. In the festival, village people are singing, dancing, drinking and laughing. The rural scenery looks pure and uncontaminated, as opposed to the bleak scenery of the globalised city, Seoul. The scene of Chandra's hometown was shown in colour while the scenes in Seoul are filmed in black and white.

The idealisation of others or other cultures is, however, problematic since it postulates culture as a fixed term. Paul Willemen

[41] *Ibid.*: 227

points out that "[o]ne very negative result [of multiculturalism] is that 'ethnic' groups will be imprisoned within a restrictive and fossilised notion of culture."[42] Rendering Chandra's hometown as an idealised place, this film is in danger of causing further misunderstanding of Asian others and of deepening the dichotomy between 'ours' and 'others'. Regarding this dichotomy, Willemen denounces hierarchy in multicultural discourse:

> By insisting on the discreteness and the separateness of the 'other' cultures, the host culture conspires with the conservative upholders of an imagined 'ethnicity' to draw lines around those 'other' cultural practices, ghettoising them. And in that way, the host culture can reaffirm its own imaginary unity and the illusion of its own specialness and authenticity.[43]

As a matter of fact, the idealised vision of Chandra's hometown is seized from an immanent orientalist viewpoint. That is the place which still has purity and a strong regional community which South Korea does not have any more. As the director says, shooting in Nepal and meeting Chandra made for a kind of reflective activity for his own ignorance.[44] Thus, to encounter her face in the last scene seems to be a kind of ritual of forgiveness and relief. However, this kind of characterisation can reinforce hierarchies already present in the multicultural discourse in South Korea. By creating a cultural boundary between Asian others as the symbol of purity and South Koreans as the symbol of corruptness, other films

[42] Willemen, *Looks and Frictions*: 207
[43] *Ibid.*: 207
[44] Oh, "Yesulŭn Chongchong P'ilyoe Ŭihae Ch'angchotoenta (Art Is Sometimes Created by Needs)."

depicting Asian others have frequently repeated this dichotomy between *them* and *us*.

Jongno Winter

Despite commercial and critical success, *If You Were Me* was condemned by independent filmmakers and human rights activists since the first project excluded film activists who had worked for human rights.[45] For this reason, independent filmmakers started to engage with the project from the second round of filming onwards. Like Park Chan-wook's film, Kim Dong-won's *Jongno Winter* is based on a true story and critiques Koreans' ignorance toward immigrant workers, but it directly urges the government to revise its policy on overseas Koreans. In other words, its political stance is more explicitly and aggressively rendered than *Never Ending Peace and Love*. The greater politicisation seems to be feasible due to Kim's self-awareness that independent filmmakers are filming for the purpose of social engagement.[46]

Jongno Winter is a short documentary about Kim Won-seop, a Korean Chinese (Chosŏnjok) who died on the street in Seoul in 2002 of hunger and exposure. He had worked for several years in South Korea as a registered worker and, after his visa expired, he fell into illegal status like many others. He wanted to return to his hometown but could not leave due to his former employer withholding his wages. When he died on the

[45] Oh, "Interview with Kim Dong-Won, a Director Who Made Jongno Winter in If You Were Me2"

[46] Lee Joon-soo, "Int'ŏpyu: Inkwŏnyŏnghwa 'Tasŏskaeŭi Sisŏn'e 'Jongno, Kyŏul'lo Ch'amyŏhan Kim Dong-Won Kamtok [Interview: Director Kim Dong-Won of Jongno, Winter in If You Were Me 2]." In *Media Daum*. 2005. http://feature.media.daum.net/society/article02212.shtm

street, he was on the way back home after seeing his employer and claiming his wages. Through his story, the film describes the harsh life which Chosŏnjok undergo and abases the hierarchical policy of Korean government at that time.

In an attempt to approach the truth of the day Kim died and the reality which the Chosŏnjok face, the film restages this event by means of re-enactment and interviews with the dead man's acquaintances. Similar to *Never Ending Peace and Love,* the re-enacting scene is filled with Kim's viewpoint and voices. Through this re-enactment, the bleak scenery of Seoul that Kim might see on the day is portrayed. His murmuring voice, acted by another Chosŏnjok illegal worker, could not reach South Koreans and thereby he died without any help. This re-creation of viewpoint in a documentary-like film meant to represent Asian others is used as a proficient strategy to give the position of the gaze-holder to Asian others who did not reveal their voices and viewpoints in mainstream South Korean society. As well, this clearly captured the cruelty of South Koreans toward strange others through the others' eyes. This filmic strategy is a reversion of viewpoint or return of the suppressed like a dream projected on screen.

While the reversion of viewpoint aims to see the inside of South Korea from others' eyes, close-up shots function as a means of self-reflection so as to look into South Korean society and Koreanness. The film tries to follow other Chosŏnjok's faces. At their gathering after Kim's death, the camera tries to take close-up pictures of people's faces. The Chosŏnjok characters' faces are full of agony and grief. Here the film forces

audiences to closely see the faces of Aisan others we easily disregarded in reality. Kim So-young points out that the discovery of the other's face by modern philosophers such as Levinas and the invention of close-up shot in a film are not contingent in the modern era.[47] According to Kim, the process of the invention of close-up shot coincides with a growing willingness to encounter otherness and remind the subject's of its own vulnerability.[48] Levinas remarks that "other's face in front of me exists as the most exposed, most vulnerable, and most expressive aspect of the other's presence."[49] Therefore, the other cannot be reduced into 'me' and the encounter with their faces reminds me of 'my' vulnerability. In this regard, Kim Dong-won's documentary shows the vulnerability inside South Korea through close-ups on the faces of Asian others.

Furthermore, the film directly urges political action on this problem. The film ends with a political message demanding the revision of the law to allow every ethnic Koreans to enter South Korea. Before 2004, the Korean government did not admit overseas Koreans from China, former Soviet Union and some in Japan (i.e. *Jainichi*) as members of the South Korean nation-state and dealt with them like other foreigners in contrast with other overseas Koreans such as American Koreans, who were given a free right of return. A man in the film criticises this inequality toward Koreans abroad, pointing out that ethnic Koreans from poor countries do not have the right to come across to South Korea while other

[47] Kim, "Tainchong, Tamunhwa Sahoe: Ŏlkul, K'ŭllochŭŏp, Koemulsŏng [Multiracial and Multicultural Society: Face, Close-Up, Monsterness]."
[48] *Ibid.*
[49] Bruce Young, "Emmanuel Levinas and 'the Face of the Other.'" 2008 http://english.byu.edu/faculty/youngb/levinas/face.pdf

ethnic Koreans from rich countries can hold these rights. This is the part of the film where Kim directly reveals his political assertion, showing the contradiction and hypocrsy in the ideology of a single Korean ethnicity.

Like *Never Ending Peace and Love*, *Jongno Winter* also visits Kim Won-seop's hometown in order to trace his life. His hometown is an ethnic Korean village in Northeast China. The village is continuously transformed, following the global flow of capital, especially influenced by the proliferation of the so called South Korean dream. The film maintains a critical tone, saying the effect of globalisation is more severe and destructive to peripherial areas like Kim Won-seop's hometown. Village people have undergone the reduction of population and families are about to be destroyed. The image of sweet home has disappeared after people left for Seoul in other to follow their Korean dreams. Those who left home often disappeared and never came back, as the village people witnessed.

However, *Jongno Winter* cannot escape the criticism that the film describes the past of the Chosŏnjok as an idealised model and a mythology. In fact, the nostalgic and mythologised collective memory replaces the sence of lost hometown and frustrated dreams in the film. Yanbian, Kim's hometown, where the Korean Chinese community is located, was built during the Japanese colonial period. Village people complained that they – in fact, their ancestors – contributed to the liberation of Korea from Japan at that time, but now they are neglected by the South Korean government and people. At a flashback scene, three women – a wife, two daughters – were shaking hands toward camera. Obviously, this camera's viewpoint is Kim Won-seop's one. It might be the

day he left. As the camera tracks back, the women become far away and indistinct. So the idealised home is forever lost and only exists in the past as a form of mythologised memory.

As seen in these two films in the early stage of the project, films produced by the NHRC clearly aim to show the harsh life of Asian migrants and raise questions about mainstream South Korean society through others' viewpoints. However, these films also reinforce the negative factors of multiculturalism through their strategies of idealisation and their depiction of Asian others as pure victims. This strategy is acknowledged by other directors who engage in later NHRC projects.

Expansion of the series

After the success of the first project, the NHRC has kept producing the series. At the first stage, the NHRC insisted on making omnibus films but, as the interest in the omnibus project reduced, the NHRC started to make a feature film with one director. In addition, after the change of regime from a progressive party to a conservative party, the governmental policy for human rights has also changed. The budget for film production was reduced by half, and, as a result, the human rights film which was usually produced every year became a biennial project.

With several exceptions,[50] most films in the series have focused on general issues of discrimination under the name of human rights. However, the fifth omnibus project focuses more on the discrimination

[50] *If You Were Me 4* (Sisŏn 1318, 2008) aims for the younger generations' human rights while *Juvenile Offender* (Pŏmchoi Sonyŏn, Kang Yi-kwan, 2012) focuses on juvenile crime and *Fly, Penguin* (Nalala P'engkuin, Lim Soon-rye, 2009) focuses on a female housewife.

against Asian others such as North Korean defectors and South East Asian workers. Although there is some demand for dealing with specific issues,[51] that seems to be a tacit agreement amongst the participants that these issues are regarded as urgent at that time rather than compulsory.

Then, how does the representation of Asian others change from the first film to the fifth one? The most distinct change is to avoid simply depicting Asian others as pure and innocent victims. The South Korean media have often stereotyped Asian others in this way. This is the main idea of multiculturalism promoted by governmental policy. In a way, this strategy can help to protect Asian others from social discrimination. However, it also deepens bias against them, emphasising the demarcation between *others* and *us*. Recently, many film critics and directors have criticised this representational strategy. Instead, contemporary films try to capture 'real' images of Asian others.[52] By the same token, *If You Were Me 5* (Sisŏn Nŏmŏ, 2010) attempts to show more dynamic characters. This thesis considers three films in the fifth project: *Two Teeth* (Ippal Tukae) directed by Kang Yi-kwan, *Nima* (Nima) by Boo Ji-young and *Banana Shake* (Panana Sweikŭ) by Yoon Sung-hyun.

While the early versions of the project produced by the NHRC often describe Asian others as innocent victims as mentioned above, these

[51] The directors in *If You Were Me 5* said there is no limitation or demands for choosing subject matter. Bae Jang-soo, "Inkwŏnyŏnghwa 'Sisŏn Nŏmŏ' 5inŭi Kamtok (5 Directors in If You Were Me 5)." In Sports Khan (1 May 2011). However, as Kim Dae-seong, one of directors of the series, says that he was proposed to make a film about the disclosure of private information, it seems there is demand in terms of subject matter at least in the fifth series. Kim Yong-eon, "Sine T'ok'ŭ: Sangŏpyŏnghwalamyŏn Ilŏhke Kyŏlmalchischi Moshaesskesschi [Cine Talk: I Couldn't Conclude like This If the Film Were a Commercial Film]." In *CIne21*. (26 April 2011) http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/65733

[52] However, it is an impossible idea that films can show their "real" images.

three shorts try to avoid such simple depictions. Instead, they are trying to reify Asian others' images. In *Banana Shake,* for instance, Albin, a Filipino worker at a house moving company, steals a ring from his customer's luggage and then falls into trouble. These kinds of negative images have been avoided in their representation since some television shows and newspapers used to present Asian others as evil or criminal, and it was generally believed that their negative images on screen might reinforce discrimination against them. However, in this film, it becomes difficult to blame Albin for committing a crime due to the behavior of Bong-joo, a South Korean worker at the same company. Albin confesses his crime to Bong-joo because Albin feels guilty about the fact that Bong-joo trusted Albin's innocence when Albin was suspended as a crimal by his colleagues due to his ethnic difference. However, Bong-joo trusted Albin's innocence because Bong-joo also stole some jewels from the same customer. Therefore Albin's ethnic difference does not matter any more in his crime. Also Albin becomes a crimal and simultaneously a victim of Bong-joo since Bong-joo does not confess his crime despite Albin's confession. Yoon Sung-hyun, the film's director, says "I saw a number of documentaries depicting migrant workers. I felt that they were inclined into one way. […] Of course, I don't think it is bad to help them because [South Koreans think] they are pitiful. However it also includes prejudiced views toward them. On the bottom of these views, there is a premise that *they* are different from

me."[53] Therefore, the film refuses to view migrants as objects of pathos, and emphasises they are not different from South Koreans.

Two other films also appeal to this sense. *Nima* depicts the main character as a temporary worker without emphasising her racial difference. *Two Teeth* also presents a North Korean defector as a colleague with a main actor, not focusing on North Korean defectors' distinguished character and their tough situation. Although the prejudice or discrimination against them remains in the plots of these films, themes like unpaid jobs or repatriation, which frequently occupied the main plots of previous films depicting Asian others, disappear here. Jang Byung-won says "*Two Teeth* definitely tells a story about North Korean defectors. However, it is difficult to categorise this film into contemporary films depicting North Korean defectors since this film does not have any interest to disclose the defectors' suffering."[54] Therefore, it can be said that these films attempt to depict their protagonists differently from the previous stereotyped images as absolutely good or pitiable people who must be cared for by South Koreans. Put differently, they try to tell that Asian others are not *others* any more.

The other change in this series lies in the relationship between South Koreans and Asian others. In fact, solidarity between them is a popular storytelling device in contemporary South Korean cinema.

[53] Lee Soo-ah, "'Sisŏnnŏmŏ'lo Pon Yuk'waehan 'Pananasweik'ŭ': Yunsŏnghyŏn Kamtok Int'ŏpyu (Interview with Director Yoon Sung-Hyun: Exiting 'Banana Shake' in If You Were Me." In *Frontier Times*, 26 April 2011. The emphasis is from this author.
[54] Jang Byung-won, "[chŏnyŏngkaekchan] Sisŏnŭi Kyoch'alo Tangsinŭn Ŏtie Sŏissnŭnka [Where Are You Standing on the Crossroad of Viewpoints]." In *CIne21*, 19 May 2011. http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/65956

However, the previous way seems still hierarchic since films frequently depict them as an object to be protected or a means to enable subjects' self-reflection. On the contrary, these three films in *If You Were Me 5* show relationships between South Koreans and Asian others as friendship or even conspiratorial ones. In *Nima*, a Mongolian migrant woman and her new South Korean colleague who work as cleaners at a motel, for example, witness a Korean woman in trouble and try to help her. This makes their employer angry, but they start to protest against the employer together. In the first place, their relationship is a little bit hostile to each other due to their ethnic and cultural differences but during their struggle against their employer, they overcome their differences. In this film, the possibility of solidarity stems from their similar gender and class. Similarly, two main protagonists can be posed in the same position by means of sharing a secret crime in *Banana Shake*. While pathetic emotion was emphasised in the representation of Asian others before, here sympathy and solidarity with each other arises in its place.

Of course, these films also have limitations, since Asian others still need their Korean partners to show their lives. That is, Asian others can be seen only as a buddy genre. However, these changes can make it possible to imagine that they live with South Koreans in their daily lives. They are not strangers any more in South Korea.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have briefly addressed the intention of human rights film production and examined how the discourse around Asian others is forged

within the discourse of human rights. As well, this chapter has focused on the South Korean cultural policy and its authorial negotiation. The main tactics of the NHRC and human rights film focus on the cultural aspects of human rights and celebrate social diversity by embracing various social minorities. These tactics are intertwined with the form of multiculturalism propagated by governmental policy. However, as the earlier several short films depicting Asian others in the human rights omnibus films show, the emphasis on diversity under the name of human rights often alludes to the bias against Asian others, leaving them in the position of objects who need help and protection from South Koreans. Subsequently, this kind of representation ensures South Korean's superior position. On the other hand, recent projects are questioning this idea of difference. Rather, they are emphasising similarity and equality between South Koreans and Asian others. Although these films have not changed the concept of human rights, this change in the recognition is noteworthy in the situation that many films representing Asian others still emphasise Asian others' victimised position and Koreans' role to protect them.

Chapter 5. The Cultural Politics of Independent Films and the Representation of Asian Others

Asian others have become one of the topics frequently dealt with in Korean independent films. This chapter delves into the representation of Asian others in light of the cultural politics of Korean independent films. Korean independent films have been strongly linked to the Korean democratisation movement and the *Minjung* movement of the 1980s from its inception. The engagement of independent films and filmmakers in these social movements opened up a new burgeoning era of independent films in the 1990s as was exemplified by the inauguration of the KIFV. Simultaneously, the change of independent films in the 1990s also stabilised their systems of production and distribution. Now, independent films are widely subsided by state organizations or conglomerates without contradicting their manifesto ideas of "independence from system and capital." Moreover, the digitalisation of filmmaking has increased the number of individual independent filmmakers who can afford to make films within small private groups and with small budgets. The proliferation of Film festivals and art cinemas enabled the release of independent films into public spaces, allowing them to reach a far larger number of audiences. Accordingly, the initial manifesto from independent filmmakers was inevitably to change.[1]

[1] Here system means a power structure in Korean society as well as the mainstream industrial production and distribution system. In the definition of an independent film, the KIFV declares in its inauguration manifesto that they are independent from film capitals, censorship, commercial film formula and language, and hegemonic regime in politics. KIFV,

As their initial linkage to social activism weakened and thereby their definition needed to change, independent films have desperately tried to find their legitimacy to distinguish them from their counterparts since the millennium (see below). In particular, amid the proliferating belief that South Korea has shifted from military dictatorship to full democracy since the inauguration of the Kim Dae-jung government, independent films have faced the need to revise their activist strategy.

Regarding this condition that recent independent films encounter, this thesis links the representation of Asian others to the efforts by independent filmmakers to find their' legitimacy in the post-*Minjung* or global era. The post-*Minjung* era indicates the era in which the strong agenda of social change disappeared after 1987, the year when the intensive *Minjuhwa* (or democratisation) and labour movements took place.[2] This thesis argues that the increasing number of representations of Asian others needs to be considered as a post-*Minjung* symptom which aims to sustain the legitimacy of independent films' social engagement, which was promised in the KIFV's inauguration manifesto, which said that "although it is an old-fashioned and awkward question, we should ask what an independent film is since the spirit of the independent film should be conserved although its external appearance could shift depending on periods."[3] Taking the independent film *Bandhobi* (Pandupi, Shin Dong-il, 2009) as its main case study, this chapter explores how contemporary

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"Ch'anglipsŏnŏnmun [Inauguration Manifesto]."

[2] Lee Namhee, "From Minjung to Simin: The Discursive Shift in Korean Social Movements." In *South Korean Social Movements: From Democracy to Civil Society*, edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Y. Chang. (Oxon, NY: Routledge, 2011): 41

[3] KIFV, "Ch'anglipsŏnŏnmun [Inauguration Manifesto]."

independent films address cultural politics by the appropriation of Asian others.

Brief history of South Korean independent films and film activism

In order to understand the cultural politics of independent films in the representation of Asian others, it is necessary to understand the development of Korean independent films, since Asian others' emergence on screen took place amid the industrial and cultural shift in the position of Korean independent films. In terms of the origin of Korean independent film, there are several discordant opinions. Some endorse the opinion that it began in the early 1970s. For instance, the Seoul Independent Film Festival 2004 introduced several short films that were produced in the 1970s as the origin of Korean independent films.[4] Similarly, Park Nohchool choose the year 1975 when several films including short films and experimental films were produced outside the commercial film system.[5] On the other hand, some scholars like Ho Hyun-chan argue for the early 1980s as the origin point of independent Korean films, as this was the time when film activism was flourishing.[6] This discordance stems from their differing definitions of what is an independent film. While the former focuses on the formal, aesthetic aspects of independent films, the latter emphasises its historical formation which was ignited by social movement.

[4] On the program note, the festival introduces the short film *From Morning to Evening* (Ach'imkwa Chŏnyŏk Sai, Lee Ik-tae, 1970) as the oldest short, experimental and independent film that we can watch now. SIFF, 2004

[5] Park Nohchool, "A Cultural Interpretation of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement 1975 2004." Ph.D dissertation (Kansas: University of Kansas. 2009).

[6] Ho Hyun-chan, *Hankukyŏnghwa 100nyŏn [A Hunread Years of Korean Cinema]*. (Seoul: Munhak Sasangsa, 2000)

For the purposes of this thesis I locate the starting point of Korean independent films in the 1980s, as this was the point at which self-consciousness about independent films and groups of independent filmmakers began to form. This was also the period when the discourse around film activism and aesthetics began to gain traction. This period is especially important since the leading practitioners of this film movement are now the leading group of filmmakers on both the independent and commercial cinema scenes in South Korea.

In the early 1980s, several significant groups of film activism were formed. Amongst them, one noteworthy current was the so called *Munhwawŏn Sedae* (the generation of foreign cultural councils). At the time, there were not many opportunities to watch foreign films in South Korea apart from Hollywood films. Thus, each foreign cultural council held screenings of their domestic films to promote their national culture.[7] Through these screenings, cultural councils settled down as the cultural centre of cinephiles in the early 1980s.[8] Yet, councils were not only screening places showing these foreign films, but also public spaces where moviegoers could gather, share their opinions on films they saw and search for alternative forms of mainstream cinema. Amid these gatherings, the discussion of the film movement had been started.

The other influential current was from small sized groups, based in universities, who were trying to make alternative forms of Korean cinema, introducing film theories from all over the world, with a specific

[7] Amongst them, the most popular ones were Japanese, French and the US cultural councils.
[8] Film critics Jeong Seong-il, Kim So-young and a film director Park Chan-wook refer to themselves as a *Munhwawŏn Sedae*.

preference for Latin American film theory, into the Korean context and pursuing amateurism in their filmmaking.[9] Besides these small groups in universities, there were also independent activist groups, gathering outside campuses. The Seoul Film Collective (*Sŏul Yŏnghwa Chiptan*) which was inaugurated in 1982 serves as a representative example of the small sized cinema groups from that time. In particular, the Seoul Film Collective was fascinated with the *Minjung Yŏnghwa* (people's film), an aesthetic movement that was influenced by the *Cinema Novo* developed in Latin America in the 1960s-70s.[10] In this way, the Korean film movement of the early 1980s was characterised by small communities working to subvert or overcome the conventions of previous Korean cinema and to claim a role for cinema in the socio-political context, focusing on the ideas of the *Minjung Yŏnghwa-ron* (the theory of people's film).

Yet, the film movement based on small sized communities encountered social change in the mid-1980s and started to speak out its concern to the society more loudly. In 1986, for instance, the Seoul Film Collective changed its name to the Seoul Visual Collective (*Sŏul Yŏngsang Chiptan)* in order to garner the attention of more people outside of its existing small community and to embrace other visual cultural domains, which meant a switch-over from the intimate community it had worked to

[9] Lee Hyo-in, *Yŏnghwayŏ Ch'imŭl Paet'ŏla* [*Let Cinema Spit Out*]. (Seoul: Yŏnghwaŏnŏ, 1995); Kang Suk-yoon, "A Short History of Korean Independent Film." In *Independent Film (English Version)*, no. 6, 2000.

[10] Seoul Visual Collective (*Sŏul Yŏngsang Chiptan*), *Pyŏnbangesŏ Jungshimŭro: Han'guk Dognip Yŏnghwaŭi Yŏksa (From Margin to Center: The History of Korean Independent Films)*. (Seoul: Sikakŏnŏ, 1996)

build, to a more public organization. The Seoul Visual Collective clarified its activist characters in its establishing declaration:

> [C]ontemporary cultural movement should make an effort to abolish the factors of anti-people, anti-democracy, anti-nation embedded into current society by means of the continuous acquisition of *Minjung-sŏng* (peoplehood) as well as the development and dissemination of the mode of *Minjung-sŏng* by a proper art form. As a part of cultural movement, film movement should adhere to this point. Put in another way, production and distribution through solidarity with *Minjung* will be a process of art production as a progressive type. As well, progressive behaviors by the community members should require a sense of *Minjung* and simultaneously play a critical role to complete *Minjung Yŏnghwa* (people's film) and solve the problems of our nation and country.[11]

In the turbulence caused by 1987's *Yuwŏl Hyŏkmyŏng* (June Revolution) or *Minjuhwa Hangjaeng* (Democratisation Uprising) in tandem with the *Palwŏl Notongcha Taetuchaeng* (August Great Labour Struggle), these burgeoning film movements also faced the flow of social change. In the relation with the Korean democratisation movement, there was severe suppression of independent films through censorship or the National Security Law. In particular, filmmakers including Kim Dong-won and the members of *Jangsangotmae*[12] are frequently imprisoned in the name of violating the National Security Law. This law gave the ruling party

[11] Seoul Visual Collective (*Sŏul Yŏngsang Chiptan*), *Pyŏnbangesŏ Jungshimŭro: Han'guk Dognip Yŏnghwaŭi Yŏksa.*

[12] The group of independent filmmakers. They produced several feature films, leaving the directors anonymous and just giving the production company name as its producer title to avoid censorship.

a good excuse to oppress the freedom of expression, and thereby the acquisition of the freedom of expression became the most urgent issue for independent films by the early 1990s. Due to this shared experience, the concept and 'spirit' of independent Korean film is strongly tied up with the 1980s film movement, and intertwined with the social movements of the time. In a sense, independent films are the result of attempts to find an alternative cinema that was thematically and aesthetically differentiated from mainstream Korean cinema of the time. However, under the repression of freedom of expression by the government, alternative films needed to engage in the social movement. In other words, independent films had to have some of the characteristics of a film movement as well as those of a social movement.

Paradigm shift from *Minjung* to *Simin*

After the 1980s' turbulence of social movement, South Korea entered the 1990s with a comparatively democratised atmosphere. In particular, the appearance of civil governments such as the Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung regimes since 1993 have required social activists to change their agendas. In a sense, this changed atmosphere weakened the influence of social movements, as can be seen in the appearance of *Piuntongkwŏn Haksaenghoe* (non-organized student union) at the end of 1990s, which was one of the strongest sectors of social movement over the 1980s. However, this does not mean that activism disappeared. The 1990s was the era to rebuild the agenda of social movement and the era of a

paradigm shift from *Minjung* (people) to *Simin* (citizen).[13] It is argued that the era of *Minjung* society corresponds with the paradigm of production, characterised as being ideological, instrumental, tainted and activist-centred, while the era of *Simin* society corresponds with the paradigm of consumption, indicating the opposite characters of *Minjung* society.[14] Yet, Nancy Abelmann argues that these two are not totally distinguishable and that the *Simin* movement embraces some of the features of the *Minjung* movement.[15] Indeed, the *Simin* movement is the expansion of the *Minjung* movement, extending the agenda of social movement to include various social agents such as women, young people, LGBT citizens, and migrants, coining the term "recognition struggle".

This was also the case in Korean independent films that were of strong relevance with social movement from their inception. The favorable atmosphere toward independent films in the 1990s drove filmmakers to found the KIFV, whose leaders mainly came from the 1980s film movement. Simultaneously, however, independent films faced difficulties in defining themselves, and their mission, which once aimed to expose social contradictions. In addition, independent films depicting private issues or pursuing the trappings of genre films have increased owing to the digitalisation of film production. Even newly established film schools influenced by Korean films' prosperity in the early 2000s have produced a number of non-commercial films and subsequently

[13] Lee, "From Minjung to Simin: The Discursive Shift in Korean Social Movements."
[14] Nancy Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996): 234
[15] *Ibid.*: 234-235

accelerated the privatisation of independent films. In this situation, the failure to attract an audience at Indie Forum, one of the powerful independent film festivals since 1996, and contrarily the sudden rise of Mise-en-scene's Short Film Festival, whose purpose was to exhibit entertaining short films, incited discussions on the definition and role of Korean independent films since 2000.[16]

As a matter of fact, this seems to be an inevitable question raised by the stabilisation of independent films. *Toklip Yŏnghwa* (independent film) was a name chosen from amongst various names which indicated similar films, as a direct translation of the Western independent film.[17] According to Kim Myung-jun, the declaration of the term was a way of sidelining other terms which could not be reduced into *Toklip Yŏnghwa*, such as *Taehang Yŏnghwa* (alternative film), *Yesul Yŏnghwa* (art film), *Chakŭn Yŏnghwa* (small budget film), *Tanpyŏn Yŏnghwa* (short film) and *Silhŏm Yŏnghwa* (experimental film), and was part of a universalising process aiming to follow the Western capitalist flow after the end of democratisation struggle.[18] In a similar vein, Park Young-a remarks that the term *Toklip Yŏnghwa* which was settled on in the post-authoritarian era (the 1990s) eventually altered and neutralised the formally radical terms used to describe these films such as *Undong Yŏnghwa* (activist film)

[16] Won Seung-hwan, "Toklipyŏnghwalŭl Hyanghan Tu Kachi Sisŏn (two Perspectives toward Independent Films)." In *Culture News* (30 June 2004). Cited in the homepage of Seoul Visual Collective.
[17] Kang Suk-yoon, "A Short History of Korean Independent Film."; Kim Myung-joon, "Toklipyŏnghwa Ilŭmchiskiŭi Yŏksa (Independent Film, the History of Naming)." In *Toklip Yŏnghwa*, no. 36, 2008
[18] Kim, "Toklipyŏnghwa Ilŭmchiskiŭi Yŏksa (Independent Film, the History of Naming).: 56

and *Minjung Yŏnghwa* (people's film) which were preferred by film activists.[19]

The "unexpected alliances between filmmakers, the state, new-found contributors of capital and audience"[20] and thereby the changing circumstances of filmmaking have incited polemics on independent films during the first decade of the 2000s. A number of film festivals and magazines have held symposiums to discuss the identity of independent films since 2000. Some of them lament that the independent film has lost its distinguished aesthetic and authorial vision and subsequently identifies itself with low-budget commercial cinema. For instance, Maeng Soo-jin comments on the concern about the tendency of popular independent films to focus on entertaining and commercial potential, regarding this as a *Yŏnsŏnghwa* (softening) of independent filmmaking caused by the enlargement of the opportunities of screening of Korean independent films.[21] Park Young-a also points out that independent filmmakers now "choose to communicate their political sensibility in very personal ways,[22]" which has similar meaning to Maeng's idea of "softening".

Debates on the identity of independent films culminated when an independent documentary film, *Old Partner* (Wŏnang Soli, Lee Choong-ryul, 2008) garnered an unprecedented success with 3 million admissions

[19] Park, "New Activist Cultural Production": 197
[20] Park Young-a, *Unexpected Alliances: Independent Filmmakers, the State, and the Film Industry in Postauthoritarian South Korea*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014): 164
[21] Maeng Soo-jin, "Chikŭm, Ulieke Toklipyŏnghwalan Muŏsinka: Hankuk Toklipyŏnghwaŭi Yŏksalŭl Malhata [What Is Independent Films to Us, for Now?: Talking about the History of Korean Independent Films]." In *Yŏnghwa Ch'ŏnkuk [Korean Film Archive Webzine]*. (30 December 2011)
[22] Park, "New Activist Cultural Production": 199

in its first theatrical release. Some championed the film's success, saying that its big success stem from the demand for diversity, and therefore other independent films also needed to be free from the political obsession if they want to attract audiences.[23] On the other hand, some documentary filmmakers denounce the film for distorting "the credibility" of independent films, which is essential to independent documentaries.[24] Yet, the focal point in this debate is actually focused on different perspectives toward documentary filmmaking, or what Chris Berry calls "the socially engaged mode vs. the commodity mode."[25] Berry differentiates between some East Asian independent documentaries and other regions' independent documentaries and then argues that those East Asian documentaries are highly engaged in social struggles and their primary audiences are the subjects of the film themselves.[26] The strong legacy of Korean independent documentaries and feature films eventually lay in their socially engaged mode.

However, as Park Young-a argues, now these two modes cannot be clearly differentiated anymore since the circumstances surrounding independent films have dramatically changed during last two decades: the rise of a political atmosphere favorable to independent films and the change of screening venues to include international film festivals and art cinemas rather than the student unions, trade unions or local communities

[23] Yang Sung-hee, "Old Partner (Wonang Sori) and Korean Independent Films." In *Koreana: Korean Art and Culture,* 2009: 57-58
[24] *Ibid.*: 58
[25] Chris Berry, "The Documentary Production Process as a Counter-Public: Notes on an Inter-Asian Mode and the Example of Kim Dong-Won." in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 4 (1), 2003, 139-44
[26] *Ibid.*: 141

which were the most prominent screening setting during the military regime due to censorship.[27] Therefore, now filmmakers address general audiences who are not presumed to endorse films' theme or to be familiar with films' topic.[28] Park asserts, however, that activist filmmakers regrouped under the banner of independent films when they faced these changes.[29] Therefore, the debate around *Old Partner* shows this process of complex negotiation in these changing circumstances to find self-identification amongst independent filmmakers since 2000 rather than proving that independent filmmakers gave up their former socially engaged mode.

In an attempt to build a legitimacy differentiated from commercial films, independent filmmakers now seek to diversify the subject of their films.[30] As aforementioned, in the post-*Minjung* or post-authoritarian era, multiplied voices which were suppressed such as those from subordinated genders, generations and races have now come to the surface. Independent films with a strong legacy of social engagement and with the purpose of building alternative aesthetics also embrace these multiplied voices, in particular those of social minorities.[31] In a round-table talk held by the weekly film magazine *Cine21*, where film critics discuss South Korean films in the first half of the year 2011, film critic Nam Da-eun points out that one of the main topics of the independent films released

[27] Park, "New Activist Cultural Production": 194
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] *Ibid.*: 197
[30] Park, *Unexpected Alliances*: 135-136
[31] For further information, see Park, *Unexpected Alliances*.

around 2009-2011 is *T'acha* (others) and, furthermore, these films share a common ethical stance not to intervene others' life.[32]

What I would argue through all these discussions on independent films is that Asian others are the most frequently chosen topic amid these attempts to rebuild cultural politics of independent films in the turbulence of post-authoritarian era and thereby to confirm their legitimacy. In other words, independent filmmakers' interest in Asian others succeeds their precedents from the 1980s as well as reflect on the shifting paradigm from the *Minjung* movement to the *Simin* movement. Asian others are linked to various social movements such as labour movement or feminist movement. In particular, Asian others, especially migrant workers who are relatively newcomers in South Korean society, are often compared to former *Minjung* who were exploited by their employers and suppressed by the authoritarian government.[33] The struggles of migrant workers coincide with citizenship struggles or recognition struggles such as the LGBT movement or women's movement, which are invested in extending the emancipatory project of previous struggle for democracy in the 1980s. Therefore, those films depicting Asian others inherit a strong legacy of *Minjung* cultural movement as well as negotiate with the changing political and industrial atmosphere. In what follows, this thesis delves into an independent film, *Bandhobi,* so as to explore its negotiation with the

[32] Jang Young-yeop, "2011nyŏn Sangpanki Hankukyŏnghwa Kyŏlsan - Nam Daeun, Ahn Sihwan, Jang Byung-Won Chŏnyŏngkaekchan Nonkaek 3in Taetam [A Round Table with Three Film Critics, Nam Daeun, Ahn Sihwan and Jang Byung-Won: Summary of Korean Cinema in the First Half of 2011]." In *Cine21*. (7 July 2011) http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/66588

[33] Doucette and Prey, "Between Migrant and Minjung: The Changing Face of Migrant Cultural Activism in Korea."

activist legacy and the newly emerging circumstances through the representation of Asian others.

Case study: *Bandhobi*

Bandhobi, which portrays a friendship between a South Korean teenage girl and a Bangladesh migrant male worker in South Korea, is one of several independent films depicting Asian others which appeared in 2009, the year when four independent feature films simultaneously and unprecedentedly adopted migrant workers' issues as their main subject matter. [34] The sudden boom in interest in these issues amongst independent films was by no means unexpected. At that time, migrants including illegal workers and foreign brides became hot topics of discussion in both conservative and progressive camps. Since 2006, when president Roh Moo-hyun declared South Korea to be a multi ethnic/racial society, the government officially began conducting a multicultural policy.[35] Meanwhile, there were long-lasting protests by migrant workers in 2003-2004. During this protest, South Korean film activists joined the protest and ran film production workshops for the participants in the protest and subsequently Migrant Workers Television (MWTV) and the Migrant Worker Film Festival (MWFF) were organised in 2006.[36] In

[34] *Korean Cinema 2009* publicised by the KOFIC notes that one of phenomena among 2009 independent films is to embrace the others of Korean society such as foreign migrant workers or North Korean defectors. Choi Kwang-hee, "Review of Korean Films." In *Korean Cinema 2009*, edited by Daniel D. H. Park. (Seoul: Korean Film Council 2010): 16

[35] Kim, "Racism in the Global Era: Analysis of Korean Media Discourse around Migrants, 1990–2009."

[36] Doucette and Prey, "Between Migrant and Minjung: The Changing Face of Migrant Cultural Activism in Korea."

addition, several short films, documentaries and TV shows dealing with Asian others prior to the release of independent feature films in 2009 were also produced. Therefore, the appearance of independent films depicting Asian others coincides with an abundant discourse, in both media sources and real struggles on the subject of multiculturalism and the plight of migrant workers.

Amongst them, *Bandhobi* most aggressively reveals its political voice. This film was directed by a filmmaker of the 386 generation – a generation symbolic of the 1980s social movement, literally those who were born in the 1960s, attended universities in the 1980s and were in their thirties when the term was coined in the late 1990s. Shin Dong-il, the director of this film, did not participate in any film activist group, but shared the experience of social movement in the 1980s with those who did. He started his film career in 2001 at Korean Academy of Film Arts. Therefore, he is in between those who engaged in film activism in the 1980s and the new independent filmmakers emerging in the post-authoritarian era. Accordingly *Bandhobi,* as his third feature film, reflects the negotiation previously mentioned in the changing political and industrial circumstances.

Indeed, Shin Dong-il is often regarded as one of the most political directors in South Korea.[37] Through his 'relationship trilogy' (*Kwankye*

[37] Ji Seung-ho, "Shin Dong-il: Kin Hohŭpŭlo Tŏ Mŏlli Naakata [Shin Dong-il goes further with a deep breath]." In *Kamtok, Toklipyŏnghwalŭl Malhata: Nam Daeun, Byun Seong-chan, Ji Seung-ho Int'ŏpyuchip [Filmmakers Talk about Independent Film: Nam Daeun, Byun Seong-chan and Ji Seung-ho's Interview Book]*, by Seung-ho Ji, Daeun Nam, and Seong-chan Byun. (Seoul: Suta publisher, 2010); Lee Dong-jin, "<Bandhobi>ŭi Kamtok, Shin Dong-Ilŭi

Sampuchak) – *Host and Guest* (Pangmuncha, 2005), *My Friend and His Wife* (Naŭi Ch'inku Kŭŭi Anae, 2006), and *Bandhobi* – he clearly exhibits his political stance. In particular, what makes his films political is the use of mockery. Mockery is also the strategy employed by Shin to persuade the audience to agree with his political assertion in a humorous manner, while maintaining an aesthetic distance from the propaganda film. In this regard, mockery is a way to reveal his political stance as well as to negotiate with changing industrial circumstance in which the presumed audience of the film do not necessarily have the same political stance as the director.

In the meantime, the objects of mockery are not limited to politicians, but also include the former social agents of the 1980s' movement. Shin first mocks the conservative government of the day. For example, a main character in *Host and Guest* drops a piece of dirty toilet paper on the newspaper whose front page shows the president Lee Myung-bak, and this scene is shown as a close-up shot so as to mock President Lee. Yet, the elite group from his generation who were once the most progressive participants in social movements but are now a comfortably established middle class who have become increasingly conservative is also the object of his mockery. For instance, in *Host and Guest*, the main protagonist is described as an elite man who has progressive ideals but is patriarchal and secular in his everyday life, namely *Ip-jinbo*, a Korean nickname which indicates a person who speaks politically progressive words but is actually conservative in their own

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Chŏnchaeng [The War of Shin Dong-Il, a Director of Bandhobi]." *Lee Dong-Jin Tot Cŭm [Lee Dong-Jin Dot Com]*. 9 July 2009. www.leedongjin.com

lives. Another example is in *My Friend and His Wife*, which portrays a political renegade who has switched from the left to the right after he graduated from university. These characters in both films are members of the 386 generation. The director, who himself comes from that generation, does not hide his disappointment in this generation.

Notably, both films involve visitors to the main protagonists who provoke and mock the generation: a pure evangelist who keeps his own belief as a conscientious objector to military service in *Host and Guest* and an impoverished old friend who represents the proletariat in *My Friend and His Wife*. They are others who invoke and question the subjects' ethical responsibilities. Actually, these films are about how the main protagonists respond to the calling of others who are vulnerable but moral. Therefore, these others represent the *Minjung* to whom the 386 generation should respond. In a similar vein, the Asian migrant worker who visits South Korea in *Bandhobi* resembles and symbolises the *Minjung* in the global era.

However in *Bandhobi*, the host who has a guest is not from the 386 generation, but instead is a teenage girl who is waiting to be morally awakened rather than being already morally decayed. Subsequently, the relationship between the host and the other is slightly different from Shin's previous two films. In other words, *Bandhobi* shares a similar political stance and strategy with Shin's former two films in its mockery of privileged people, i.e., South Korean natives this time, but goes further to search out new political agents against social contradictions through two social minorities: a member of the young female generation as a member

of a sexual, and gender minority and Asian others who dwell in South Korea as a racial minority. This is the way of extending independent films' social engagement in the post-*Minjung* and global era. However, in the process of searching for new political agents, the young female South Korean generation as a host is summoned as a new political and moral citizen, but the Asian other remains in the position of guests who cannot be included as a citizen. Before I develop this point, I will explain some background information of this film's production and exhibition in order to understand the political and industrial circumstances surrounding these independent films depicting Asian others.

Like most films dealing with multicultural issues, *Bandhobi* obtained financial support for its pre-production stages from a state organization, KOFIC, and also from the independent film production support program of the entrepreneur, KT&G Sangsangmadang. In a way, this success in obtaining financial support is based on the governmental policy since 2006 to pursue multiculturalism. Although the fund from KT&G Sangsangmadang is not a public fund, it pursues public interests to some extent, since the project itself is characterised as support program rather than business, and the committee members of the program are from independent film organizations who formerly and/or now engage into film activism.[38] This means there was consent form within both a government institute and the independent film scene that multicultural issues were urgent component of social justice.

[38]This is based on the personal experience of this author who worked at KT&G Sangsangmadang and involved in the project.

However, with the aim of theatre release, the film also faces the pressure to attract an audience. The juries' statement of the KOFIC support system – that independent films need to have more commercial factors since the support is supposed to help films' theatre release – clearly exemplifies this.[39] Indeed, the competing demands of pursuing the public interests as well as commercial benefits is, in a sense, what each film depicting Asian others subsidised by state or other funds has to negotiate. Based on this background, let us see how *Bandhobi* presents its political stance to attract as large audience as possible.

Through its portraying of a Korean teenage schoolgirl, Minseo and a Bangladeshi migrant worker, Karim, *Bandhobi* deals with various social contradictions which social minorities encounter in contemporary South Korean society: rabid enthusiasm to English education, a feeling of alienation of young high school girl in a single mother family, illegal employment of youths and migrants, racism, post-colonialism, discrimination and exploitation to migrant workers, and bureaucratic school. As such, the film approaches and illustrates social contradictions in various dimensions. This reflects the contemporary political tendency toward diversity and multiplicity of voices in post-*Minjung* era, as Lee Nam-hee argues.[40]

In particular, the film denounces South Koreans' sub-imperial desire. In the first place, the female protagonist, Minseo, expresses racism

[39] Park Hyo-jin, *2008nyŏn Sangpanki Toklipyŏnghwachechakchiwŏn Sŏnchŏngkyŏlkwa Palp'yo (The Result of Pre-Production Support System in the First Half of 2008)*. KOFIC. 2008. http://www.kofic.or.kr/kofic/business/prom/promotionBoardDetail.do?seqNo=864.
[40] Lee, "From Minjung to Simin: The Discursive Shift in Korean Social Movements."

to the Southeast Asian migrant worker, by refusing to sit next to him on the bus and walk together on the street. She even tries to get through a crisis by using South Korean's general bias that migrant workers are potential criminals when she was accused for her own pilfering. On the other side, she obsesses about native English education, which is cast as a colonial desire in the film.

Yet, Minseo's contradictory and hierarchal attitude toward foreigners is denounced by Karim. One day, Minseo introduces her English teacher to Karim. As a Western white man, the teacher makes a joke about Korean women's craze for foreign men, which is actually allowed only to white men. Karim blames Minseo, saying that Korean women, represented by Minseo, fall into the role of colonial subjects, although he subjectively translates the English teacher's word from "Korean women are so sweet" to "Korean women is so easy to make love."[41] In this sense, Karim becomes the other who acknowledges the subject's guiltiness and vulnerability.

In addition, Karim is the other who teaches Minseo how to treat others and thereby awakens the subject's morality. When Karim visits Minseo to cook for her, Karim teaches her how to treat a guest, saying "in our culture, hosts never ask visitors to leave and just let them stay at home when visitors want to leave." While this is a direct criticism toward the way the South Korean immigration laws treat migrant workers in an exploitative manner and then throw them away by means of deportation,

[41] Kim So-young points out Karim's subjective translation reflects on his gender bias from his religion background. Kim So-young, "Chŏnyŏngkaekchan: Kŭlŏhke Kŭnyŏnŭn Ipanginŭl 'Ch'ehwa'haessta [Cine Talk: She 'Embodies' a Stranger like That]." In *Cine21*, (31 July 2009). http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/572522009

his words also emphasise absolute hospitality toward others on a personal level.

However, the film's main concern is not to illustrate social contradictions or to resolve those contradictions, but to find a new political subject who can fight against those contradictions. In the first place, it is expected that the two social minorities in the film should become new political subjects who can fight for social justice. They share experiences of the contradictions in the imperial hegemony and male centrism of South Korea. From this vantage point, they have the potential to break out the sub-imperial desire and social contradictions together. Yet, the film fails to make both social minorities be social agents in Korean society in the post-*Minjung* era by leaving Asian others outside Korean society.

This is illustrated by Shin's employment of two different representational strategies toward the two protagonists. In the case of Minseo, she is representative of those who are radical enough in politics. She watches radical news clips and she can also mock Karim's corrupt employer for reading a conservative newspaper. In this regard she has progressive opinions in politics but is not progressive in her real life, and in this way, some critics argue that Minseo is the successor of the 386 generation protagonists in the directors' former two films.[42] However, as the director denies this idea,[43] there is an explicit difference between the 386 generation male protagonists in the directors' former two films and

[42] Ji, "Shin Dong-il: Kin Hohŭpŭlo Tŏ Mŏlli Naakata [Shin Dong-il goes further with a deep breath].": 71
[43] *Ibid.*

the high school girl in *Bandhobi*. She is the only one in the film who can accept differences between others and herself, and is eager to listen to others' voices. From this vantage point, she can be a new political agent against existing social contradictions. As a matter of fact, there exists an expectation toward young teenage girls as new political agents amongst progressive scholars and media outlets. A year before the film's release, there was a massive public demonstration named the Candlelight Protest. Ignited by the issue of importing beef from the United States, the protest became the biggest demonstration to reclaim democracy since 2000. In particular, the fact that the protest was autonomously led by citizens, not by activist groups, inspired leftists. Simultaneously, young high school girls called candlelight girls became symbols of the protest, and furthermore, symbols of democracy, of ethics and of new political agents envisioning a brighter future for Korea.[44] As the director himself agrees and other film critics endorse,[45] the image of a candlelight girl overlaps the image of Minseo in *Bandhobi*. Subsequently, several reviews for the film

[44] According to Han Yoon-hyung, the consecutive failure of the progressive parties in the 2007 president election and in the 2008 National Assembly election frustrated leftists and they lamented the political ignorance of young generations. However, the emergence of candlelight girls gave the leftists a sense of hope that Korea's political future for the leftists would be brighter when young schoolgirls become voters. Han Yoon-hyung, "Wŏltŭk'ŏp Chuch'ewa Ch'ospulsiwi Sai, Pulanŭi Setaelŭl Malhanta : Kangchelo Kyuchŏngtoen Ch'ŏngnyŏnsetaeŭi Pokchapmimyohame Taehae (Talking about the Generation of Fear between the World-Cup Subject and the Candlelight Protest: On the Identificaion of Youth Generation Which Is Complicatively Defined)." In *Munhwa Kwahak*, no. 62 (summer, 2010). Also see these articles: Choi Hyun-sul, "Ch'ospulsonyŏwa Sinhwaŭi Wich'i (Candlelight Girls and the Position of Myths." In *Onŭlŭi Munyepip'yŏng*, no. 70 (Automn 2008); Choi Young-hwa, "'Ch'ospulsonyŏ'wa 'Paeunnyŏcha'ka Namkin Kwachetŭl (Tasks Left Behind by 'Candle Light Girls' and 'Educated Women')." In *Yŏ/Sŏng Ilon*, no. 19 (December 2008).

[45] Ji, "Shin Dong-il: Kin Hohŭpŭlo Tŏ Mŏlli Naakata [Shin Dong-il goes further with a deep breath]."; Lee, "<Bandhobi>ŭi Kamtok, Shin Dong-Ilŭi Chŏnchaeng."; Kang Byung-jin, "<Bandhobi> Naeka Yŏki Issŏyo, Uli Sonŭl Chapayo [Bandhobi: Here I Am. Let's Hold Hands]." In *Cine21*. (30 June 2009). http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/56811; Ko Kyung-tae, "Etit'oliŏl: Ch'ospulsonyŏŭi Chaelim [Editorial: The Resurrection of a Candlelight Girl]." In *Cine21*. (12 May 2009). http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/56254

evaluate her as the most political teenage female character in the history of Korean film.[46] In a way, the film is about growing-up of young girl to be a progressive political agent through encountering vulnerable other and responding on him.

However, the film's way of depicting Asian others needs more discussion. In a way, the film attempts new strategies that distinguish it from other films depicting Asian others. Firstly, unlike other films depicting Asian migrant workers as the objects of South Koreans' protection or rescue, the film emphasises the friendship and similarity between South Korean girl and migrant workers through parallel editing such as Karim's working hand for family catering and Minseo's working hand for self catering.[47] Moreover, unlike other independent films, the film casts Mahbub Alam, a Bangladesh migrant media activist for the lead role. That was actually appreciated by groups representing migrant workers.[48] As Lee Jasmin, a Filipino actress, contends, it is believed that it has not been a welcome idea to South Koreans that foreigners with darker skin than Koreans could appear on a big screen.[49] Therefore, the casting of a real migrant worker from Southeast Asia is unprecedented and makes a crack in the previous conventions of South Korean film culture.

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[46] Kang, "<Bandhobi> Naeka Yŏki Issŏyo, Uli Sonŭl Chapayo [Bandhobi: Here I Am. Let's Hold Hands]."; Ko, "Etit'oliŏl: Ch'ospulsonyŏŭi Chaelim [Editorial: The Resurrection of a Candlelight Girl]."

[47] Kang, "<Bandhobi> Naeka Yŏki Issŏyo, Uli Sonŭl Chapayo [Bandhobi: Here I Am. Let's Hold Hands]."

[48] Doucette and Prey, "Between Migrant and Minjung: The Changing Face of Migrant Cultural Activism in Korea."

[49] Han Ji-yoon, "Che 4hoe Tamunhwayŏnghwache Kaemak, Lee Jasmin 'Tamunhwa Sŏnt'aek Anin Hyŏnsil' [The Forth Multicultural Fillm Festival Opens Up, Lee Jasmin Saying 'Multiculture Is Not a Choice but Reality].'" In *Kukmin Ilbo*. 27 June 2012

Yet, the way of depicting Asian migrant workers in the film is still stereotyped and objectified. While Minseo has a distinguished temper, Karim cannot slough off the stereotyped images rendered by other films depicting migrant workers: he is smart, diligent, responsible, kind-hearted but exploited by Korean employers. In this regard, Derek Elley criticises that the film renders Karim as "overly nice, passive figure, quietly accepting the quotidian slight that a largely monoethnic society like Korea's unthinkingly makes."[50] In particular, Karim remains moral by means of refusing Minseo's mis-transmitted hospitality twice: Minseo tries to give him a sexual service which is learned from her workplace in order to make a male adult happy as a reward to Karim's food service. And then, she decides to marry Karim in order to prevent him being deported.

At this point, Kim So-young notes the collision between two different representational modes in the film: the conventional mode used in the representation of the life of a migrant worker versus the non-conventional mode deployed in the representation of a teenage girl.[51] Kim further argues that the collision of these two different modes had the possibility to form a new field of complex, ambivalent and non-symmetric stories, that is, create a field where race, sex and gender encounter each other on an even footing, but in the end, the film failed to change the tone of the predominant discursive sphere.[52] Actually, when the film ends, Karim is powerlessly deported, following the conventional image of

[50] Derek Elley, "Review: Bandhobi." In *Variety*. (2 November 2009). http://variety.com/2009/film/markets-festivals/bandhobi-1200477632/

[51] Kim, "Chŏnyŏngkaekchan: Kŭlŏhke Kŭnyŏnŭn Ipanginŭl 'Ch'ehwa'haessta [Cine Talk: She 'Embodies' a Stranger like That]."

[52] *Ibid*.

ordinary hard-working victim without changing the representational frame or strategy. He can only change and awaken a Korean citizen who can be a future agent for social change in South Korea.

The other problem is a fixation with the other's culture. Following Karim's comment about the absolute hospitality in his culture, the film introduces two Bangladesh cultures. One is an Islamic ceremony, which is inserted without relevance to the other scenes or narrative, and the scene does not explain even Karim's character, either. The other is a culture of eating food with hands. Later, in the last scene of the film, Minseo visits a Hindi restaurant alone and then follows Karim's way of eating by using her hands. Although she gives up after a trial, this scene implies that they finally became true friends, the meaning of the film's title, *Bandhobi*. After Minseo's mis-transmitted hospitality, the respect for the others' culture is the answer Minseo finally finds out in order to respond to Karim's acknowledgement of absolute hospitality. This idea is also the main point of South Korean multicultural policy. However, as a result, this doctrine confines Asian others into the fixed image of their culture which is imagined by South Koreans. In a similar vein, Paul Willemen warns of the danger of this kind of representational strategy, saying

> One very negative result is that 'ethnic' groups will be imprisoned [...] within a restrictive and fossilised notion of culture. In this way, such groups are condemned to repeat the rituals of ethnic authenticity,

> regardless of how uncomfortable many members of those so-called communities may feel with them.[53]

Therefore, although this film summons two social minorities as the agents of resistance against social contradictions, migrant workers remain in the marginalised domain and subsequently cannot be inducted into the community of equal citizens. In a different context, Lee Namhee acknowledges "the citizens' movement without citizens.[54]" While regarding the main issue of migrant worker's struggle is to achieve citizenship and/or an equal right to citizenship, this otherised and stereotyped representation explicitly exhibits the citizens' movement without citizens. Asian migrants are excluded from the domain of civil society in this way and the possibility to subvert the sub-imperial hegemony proclaimed in the film remains latent and becomes feasible only in a latent condition.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the process by which Korean independent films sought to position their idiosyncrasy within the sphere of cultural politics. Encountering industrial and socio-political changes during last two decades, Korean independent films have enlarged their terrain through the appropriation of Asian others along with the legacy of socio-political intervention which was built through the history of Korean independent films. By examining *Bandhobi*, I have argued that Asian

[53] Willemen, *Looks and Frictions*: 207
[54] Lee, "From Minjung to Simin: The Discursive Shift in Korean Social Movements.": 51

others are deployed in these films so as to build a new identity of independent films in the cultural politics of the post-*Minjung* era. Yet, as we see, Asian others are still excluded from joining and making a shift into the arena itself, and thereby remains others.

In this situation, there emerge several independent filmmakers who seek to change this stereotyped representation, such as the case of *If You Were Me 5* which was in chapter 4. As well, recently some migrant people have tried to make films that depict their own stories through the support of some public media centres and film festivals such as the Women's International Film Festival in Seoul. Although this thesis does not deal with these self-representational films since they are still in development, this kind of enlargement of agents and the diversity of representational strategies would hint at the possibility of overcoming this hierarchal representation.

Chapter 6. Multiculturalism and the Consumption of Asian Others in Korean Commercial Cinema

> More and more Korean movies, including *Pacemaker* by director Kim Dal-joong [...], are taking on the theme of multiculturalism that is changing the face of Korean society. In 2010, one out of ten marriages has a foreign spouse, while the number of children from multicultural families has grown seven-fold from 25,000 in 2006 to 160,000 in 2010. And this trend is being portrayed more frequently on the silver screen.[1]

> Media production trends have changed since multicultural issues came to the core of TV and film contents. As the myth of one single ethnicity is being broken and the thought of "foreigners = the White" is being disappeared, our lounges and cinemas are filled with stories about today's multicultural Korean society or multicultural characters.[2]

This chapter investigates how contemporary Korean commercial cinema appropriates multiculturalism and consumes Asian others through an examination of two films — *Punch* (Wandŭki, Lee Han, 2011) and *A Wonderful Moment* (aka *My Little Hero*) (Mai Riť ŭl Hiŏro, Kim Seong-hoon, 2012). Prior to these films, multicultural issues were generally a topic exclusive to independent films. Of course, there were several precedent commercial films depicting Asian others such as *The Innocent Step* (Taensŏŭi Sunchŏng, Park Young-hoon, 2005) and *Typhoon* (T'aep'ung, Kwak Kyung-taek, 2005). However, these films did not have a multiculturalist approach towards Asian others. Rather, the characters

[1] "Multiculturalism a New Theme in Korean Movies." In *Chosun Ilbo,* 13 January 2013.
[2] Yoon Go-eun, "Multi-culture comes into the core of TV and cinema." In *Yonhap News*, 9 January 2012

from other Asian countries took over the traditional role of a South Korean woman in romance[3] or portrayed transnational action heroes in the post-cold war era.

Yet, since 2010, multicultural issues such as multicultural family or migrant workers have penetrated into Korean commercial cinema. In particular, the box office success of *Punch* in 2011 has proved the commercial potential of multicultural issues. As the above citations indicate, these films depicting multicultural issues are now given attention as one of the significant emerging trends in contemporary Korean cinema and often categorised, like a genre, as *Tamunhwa Yŏnghwa* (multicultural film). The attention given to these films is brought together with the discourses around the globalisation of Korean 'national cinema', specifically the Korean interests in Asia wrought by the success of Korean popular culture in the region. In other words, multicultural films sit well with the increasingly transnational and globalised tendency of contemporary Korean cinema.

Amongst multicultural films, the two films examined here introduce multicultural families in which the parents are constituted of a

[3] Kim So-young pays attention to this disappearance of South Korean women in contemporary Korean cinema and links it to the emergence of Korean blockbuster in the era of Post-IMF. According to Kim, South Korean women who contributed to the development of Korean economy in the 1970s' industrial period, which means that South Korean women were the subjects of production, now shifted to the market values or exchange values in the period of the economy of scale, and subsequently, other Asian women take over previous Korean women's places. Kim, "Salachinŭn Namhan Yŏsŏngtŭl: Hankukhyŏng Pŭllokpŏsŭt'ŏ Yŏnghwaŭi Muŭisikchŏk Kwanghak [Disappearing South Korean Women: Unconcious Optics in Korean Blockbuster]." In *Hankukhyŏng Pŭllokpŏsŭt'ŏ: At'ŭllant'isŭ Hokŭn Amelik'a [Korean Blockbuster: Atlantis or America]*, edited by Soyoung Kim. (Seoul: Hyeonsil Munhwa Yeonku, 2001): 24

South Korean native man and foreign-born woman.[4] In fact, the multicultural family is one of the main objects on which Korean multiculturalism focuses, as much as igniting multiculturalist policy in South Korea – the 2005 visit of Hines Ward, a child of multicultural family, stirred up the recognition of the second generation in multicultural family and the following year, president Roh Moo-hyun declared South Korea a multicultural society and pursued a multicultural policy.

The two films dealt with here share similar ideas of multicultural family crisis and suggest how to resolve the crisis. To do so, the films underscore the role of the South Korean male protagonist as the symbolic patriarch of the multicultural family. In this chapter, I argue that these two films contribute to the building of a gendered Korean national identity and a paternal multiculturalism by means of re-establishing patriarchal relationships within the multicultural family.

Multicultural family and gendered multiculturalism

Before moving to the case studies, at this juncture I would introduce an understanding of multiculturalism in Korean society so as to see what kind of multiculturalism is accepted or denied in these films. Multiculturalism and multicultural policy in Korea have a tendency to focus on 'legal', 'permanent', 'gendered' migration that is reduced to the image of the multicultural family. The term of the multicultural family was suggested by an NGO to the government in 2003. Before that, *honhyol* (mixed-blood)

[4] In this definition, the families of which parents are both foreigners are often (or saying, mostly) disregarded.

was widely used, but due to the word's discriminative inflection, the NGO suggested a term 'the second generation of multicultural family' and the government officially adopted it.[5] However, as we will see "multi-cultural" (*Tamunhwa*) is often used to mock the second generation of multicultural family in classrooms,[6] the discrimination against the multicultural family cannot be solved by a simple change of terminology. Park Jung-bo and Cho Yong-man explain that the multicultural family is officially only a family between a South Korean citizen and a foreign bride, excluding the families between foreigners of different nationalities, denizens or families consisting of a South Korean mother and a foreign born father.[7] Citing that argument, Kim Hyun-mee deplores the exclusiveness of Korean multicultural policy.

> While 'multicultural family' was used in the past as an umbrella term to refer not only to foreign bides but also to marriages between foreigners who migrated to Korea and *Sae teo* people (North Korean defectors), the law actually limits its support only to "legal" marriage migrants. […] All of these are intended for the *assimilation*[8] of foreign women into Korean society.[9]

[5] Kim Hyun-mee, "The State and Migrant Women: Diverging Hopes in the Making of Multicultural Families in Contemporary Korea." In *Korea Journal* 47 (4), 2007: 102
[6] Kang Byung-cheol, "Education, the Root of Multicultural Society." In *Seoul Newspaper*. (14 May 2013)
[7] Park and Cho, 2006. Officially, foreign brides or grooms have equal rights in South Korea, but most supporting programs in multicultural policies have focused on female spouses.
[8] The emphasis is from the original text.
[9] Kim, "The State and Migrant Women: Diverging Hopes in the Making of Multicultural Families in Contemporary Korea.": 106

Here, multiculturalism in the government policy is only meaningful when members can contribute to the production and reproduction of traditional Korean nationality.

Meanwhile, the multicultural family itself needs to be scrutinised in historical contexts. Mary Lee indicates that "only a few years ago Amerasian *honhyol* (mixed blood between American and Asian) were the only known inter-racial subjects in Korea and were considered shameful, regrettable by *products of US-Korea state relations*.[10] Today, however, a more recent generation of *honhyol* controversially referred to as 'Koreasians'[11] (mixed blood between Korean and Asian) from brokered international marriages are regarded in state discourse as a potential national asset." [12] Therefore, the discrimination against multicultural families is related to Korea's post-colonial history and gender issues. As a matter of fact, there has been a stererotype in South Korean society that Amerasians are generally born of a union between Korean women, mostly sex workers, and American male soldiers. This gendered view is also discovered in the law which made it difficult for foreign husbands to achieve Korean citizenship while their female counterparts could automatically attain Korean nationality before 1998.[13] Now, both male and female foreign spouses can claim a temporary residence visa with their spouses' reference and then can apply for citizenship after three years.

[10] The emphasis is from this author.
[11] She uses this term as a negative connotation.
[12] Lee, "Mixed Race Peoples in the Korean National Imaginary and Family." In *Korean Studies* 32 (1), 2008: 57
[13] Timothy Lim, "Who Is Korean? Migration, Immigration, and the Challenge of Multiculturalism in Homogeneous Societies."

However, this policy also forces foreign spouses, in particular, female spouses, to be silent and stay indoors, even while enduring domestic violence and exploitation.

As the multicultural family becomes a central issue at the discursive and practical levels of multiculturalism, a number of so-called "multicultural films" in South Korea also pay attention to the multicultural family. These films make an appeal to the audience in two general ways: celebration of multicultural and multi-ethnic society; denouncement of discrimination against multicultural others and the request for the enlargement of the concept of Korean-ness, embracing the second generation of multicultural families.[14] The two films dealt with here depict multicultural families formed by marriages between a Filipino woman and a Korean man. Indeed, Filipino and Vietnamese women are the representative images of foreign brides through brokered international marriages in South Korea. Both films mainly depict the second generation of the family, which is one of the core issues of multiculturalism.

Punch, familism and multicultural family

Punch is based on a youth novel of the same title, which was acclaimed by both audiences and critics.[15] So far, the film is listed as the top box office

[14] For instance, *Papa* (Han Ji-seung, 2012) and *Pace-Maker* are included into the former while *A Wonderful Moment* is included into the latter although most films do not exclude one from another.

[15] *Changbi*, one of the biggest publishers in South Korea, has published a series of youth novel since 2007 and thereby leads the youth novel market. A novel named *Wandŭki,* same with *Punch*'s Korean title, is published as a part of the series, and so far this is the most successful one amongst other youth novels of the series, recording 0.62 million copies sales. Hwang

film amongst films dealing with multicultural issues. According to statistics by the KOFIC, *Punch* achieved great domestic success with total admissions of 5.3 million (which is more than 10% of the total population), recording the first rank in the box office for one month. As well, the total number of screens showing the film slightly increased from 463 to 576 during first 10 days of its release.

Yet, the success of *Punch* was exceptional and surprising at that moment in South Korea.[16] The film's success does not directly indicate that multiculturalism is easily accepted by its South Korean audience. This is evinced by the film's marketing strategy. The film tried to look like a coming-of-age movie, without officially mentioning the multicultural family at its centre. The film's trailer only focused on the relationship between Wandŭk, a high school boy, and his class teacher. When the actors of the film were interviewed, they carefully used pronouns such as 'it' or 'that moment' in order to avoid using the term 'multicultural family'.[17]

Ultimately, in its marketing strategy the film adopts an apolitical manner by means of foregrounding coming-of-age genre trappings that are more palatable to the South Korean audience than using its status as a multicultural film as its selling point. This is not limited to just the film's

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Yoon-jung, "Changbi Youth Literature Publishes its 50th edition." In *Yonhap News*. (14 May 2013).

[16] The headlines of newspapers described the film's success like this: "Something Unusual" (My Daily, 30-12-11), "Punch Hit the Jackpot!" (*Newsen*, 31-12-11). Also the film's marketer, Lee Yoon-jeong, was awarded of the best marketer in the third Film Awards of the Year for the reason that she contributed to the film's unexpected box-office hit.

17 See Yoo Ain's interview. "[K'ŏpŏsŭt'a] 'Wandŭki' Yoo Ain Int'ŏpyu Yŏngsang ([Cover Star] 'Punch' Yoo-Ain's Interview Clip)." In *TV Cine21*.
http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/67823. Accessed in 24-05-2013.

marketing strategy. The overall tone of the film avoids using a serious manner toward the multicultural family and instead keeps a humorous manner throughout. This is thought highly of by several film critics. For instance, a film critic, Jeong Ji-wook illustrates one of the reasons for the film's success that "based on the proved original novel, the film clearly and comfortably depicts a heavy theme such as a multicultural subject-matter and youth story which can be mawkish or boring."[18] Chris Berry also says that it is fortunate that the film does not indulge in self-righteousness but instead attracts the audience by maintaining the tension between two main protagonists (a teacher and young man).[19]

I agree the film effectively renders a multicultural subject matter with more familiar codes such as comedy and coming-of-age genre to the audience and thereby more people can access the theme with less resistance. However, this strategy also reveals the limitation of multicultural films that cannot foreground their main issues. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam point out that a number of big-budget anti-apartheid films disguise themselves as apolitical, humanist, liberal and thereby universal genre films in order to appeal to Eurocentrism of the audience.[20] Likewise, *Punch* disguises itself as a 'simple' coming-of-age film. Furthermore, the film suggests that family itself is a means of resolution and as a result resorts to familism. This is still problematic because the

[18] Ra Dong-chil, "The Power of Original Novel: Wandŭk Flies." In *Kookmin Daily* (30 October 2011)
[19] Chris Berry, "Save the Panda: The 14th Far East Film Festival." In *Senses of Cinema.* 2012. www.sensesofcinema.com.
[20] Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*: 186-187

family summons a strong father in the film and again presupposes fixed gender roles.

The film features a family struggling with poverty and displays conflict and reconciliation between the main protagonist Wandŭk and his abnormal but warm-hearted neighbours. The film's plot is as follows: Wandŭk, a high-school student who lives with his hunchback father and a mentally disabled man named Min-gu in a shabby and narrow house on a rooftop, is a troubled student at high school. He is bothered by Dong-joo, his class teacher who lives next to his house. One day, Wandŭk hears from Dong-joo that his mother, who has been known to be dead, is actually alive and a Filipina. Shocked, Wandŭk refuses to meet his mother at first. However, after he meets her due to a plot by Dong-joo, he accepts her as his mother. In the end, his mother reunites with Wanduk's family and he fulfils his own dream to be a kick-boxer.

The film tells a story about Wandŭk's family and his neighbor, following Wandŭk's viewpoint. The main protagonist, Wandŭk, is portrayed as an immature young boy while those who live around Wandŭk are eccentric, poor or disabled but ultimately warmhearted adults. Therefore, the film is a coming-of-age movie that shows the immature boy coming to understand the complicated and mature world of adults. In the film, Wandŭk is the only narrator. This young narrator can see only negative sides of people and has lots of complains. He cannot understand their positive sides because he is too young to see things from their point of view. This is why the audience cannot fully trust the narrator although most of the film's story is delivered by the young narrator.

Despite this strategy, however, there are omniscient viewpoints present in the film. In a scene in a bus terminal where Wandŭk and his Filipina mother part after a day trip, Wandŭk hugs his mother, which implies that he finally accepts and forgives his mother from his heart. At the moment, the camera looks down them out of the window. This scene is then followed by Dong-joo's returning home at night. Dong-joo, who knows Wandŭk went to meet his mother, looks down Wandŭk's empty house with smile. Thus, I argue that the looking down omniscient viewpoint in the previous scene belongs to Dong-joo. In other words, the seemingly omniscient viewpoint is actually Dong-joo's. Therefore, Dong-joo becomes a controller of events almost like a god here. In addition, Dong-joo becomes an alternative father to Wandŭk, and takes over the role of Wandŭk's father who often leaves home in order to go out and make money. Wandŭk's father has some good traits, but is incompetent as a patriarch due to his disabled body. His incompetence causes the crisis of the family: The Filipina mother leaves and Wandŭk feels isolated. However, the father's incompetence is compensated by the emergence of alternative patriarch. When the father leaves home, he asks Dong-joo to take care of Wandŭk. This alternative father has more power than Wandŭk's biological father due to his position as a teacher and his able body. Put differently, the family crisis triggered by an absent or incompetent patriarch is sutured by means of summoning a stronger patriarch to take over from the real one.

While the family crisis is recovered by the emergence of alternative patriarch, the film places the multicultural family into the

context of the local community. The village where Dong-joo and Wandŭk live is a densely built-up area for lower classes. Illegal migrant workers, disabled people, those who have less social status, and those who are struggling with poverty are their neighbors. Dong-joo recovers the local community by responding to them and secretly helping or loudly fighting for them. Dong-joo's response is actually to celebrate those who are poor but live their lives diligently. Here, Dong-joo represents the South Korean elite. Therefore, Dong-joo's role urges South Korean elites to respond to social minorities. A migrant woman is also summoned under the name of these poor but good people who need help from South Korean elites.

At this point, the film raises a question about political correctness. According to Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, political correctness is arbitrarily used but still functions significantly to represent others so as to avoid further complex ideological troubles.[21] Indeed, political correctness at times becomes a safe way to avoid criticism about the relevance of identity politics. It often results in the only possible representation of social minorities being unrealistically positive ones. Multiculturalism that is centered on formal political correctness is often undermined as it casts multicultural subjects as a pure victims or as passive objects to be protected.

Ostensibly *Punch* denounces the formal political correctness embedded in multiculturalism. This is illustrated by Dong-joo's cynical manner toward education and law. He is known as an eccentric teacher in

[21] Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*: 340-342

the school since he does not respect his students or follow his senior teacher's rules. However, he cares for his students in his own way and encourages his students to build their own future instead of obeying the school's conventions such as going to top colleges. Moreover, he often mocks the monotonous and invalid education. This criticism goes further toward formal multiculturalism. In spite of the prevalence of multiculturalism and multicultural education, the discrimination in the classroom does not disappear.[22] Dong-joo's uncontrolled behavior mocks the supposedly up-to-date multicultural education since students are compelled to obey the rules rather than to autonomously choose and adopt them. This is typified by Dong-joo's criticism of the oxymoron of 'mandatory autonomous night class.' In addition, he also denounces multiculturalism under the limit of a law. When he is arrested for hiding illegal foreign workers, he cynically says "is it illegal to be with foreign workers? How can it be a law?" Therefore, his cynical manner towards the previous education and law leads him to denounce formal multiculturalism in South Korea and instead urges an approach to multiculturalism and multicultural family which takes a humanist rather than a judicial way.

However, despite its criticism against formal multiculturalism, the film is not free from the obsession with political correctness with regards to its representation of Asian others. The film portrays a Filipina mother and Indian migrant worker named Hatsan as nice and diligent victims. Put

[22] Kang, "Education, the Root of Multicultural Society."

another way, the film is aggressive enough to challenge the 'normal' way of portraying Koreans, but is too passive to change the 'normal' way of representing Asian others. Furthermore, these positive images are problematic since the images reinforce paternalism and national hierarchy. The images of Asian others in *Punch* are passive victims who are waiting for help from South Korean natives, especially elites like Dong-joo. This could drive another fantasy of the South Korean man as the savior of Asian others and thus could accentuate sub-imperialism.

Meanwhile, the film embraces the multicultural family within the context of the alternative family. The alternative family is rendered here as another form of a 'normal' family based on patriarchy, heterosexual monogamy and blood-ties. The alternative family has been suggested by several Korean films such as *Five Is Too Many* (Tasŏtŭn Nŏmu Mana, Ahn Seul-ki, 2005), *The Birth of a Family* (Kajokŭi T'ansaeng, Kim Tae-yong, 2006) and *My Wife Got Married* (Anaeka Kyŏlhonhaett'a, Jeong Yoon-soo, 2008) in order to overcome the obsession with strong family-ties in South Korea.[23] Wandŭk's family consists of non-blood-tied members, which indicates that Wandŭk's family is an inclusive one, while the traditional Korean family is characterised as exclusionary. Here, the film adds multicultural elements to the alternative family. In doing so, the film enlarges its concept of the alternative family against an 'ethnically and nationally' originated traditional family. This newly constructed

[23] Kang Sung-ryul, "Hankuk Yŏnghwae Nat'anan Kachokchetoŭi Pyŏnhwa [Changes in the Korean Family as Seen in the Movies]." In *Yŏksa Pip'yŏng [History Review]* 86. 2009.

alternative family is confirmed by means of having meals together. An Ji-yoon points out:

> The completion of a family is often committed by showing a scene of having meals together in films. *Sik-gu*, which literally means a group which has meals together in Korean, is a term to indicate a family. Therefore, the films depicting alternative family often render a scene in which family members have meals together, which results in the reinforcement of family-ties.[24]

When the mother returns home, Wandŭk's family invites Dong-joo and their neighbours for a meal. They share food together, come to understand each other, and finally become members of a family as *Sik-gu.* After dinner, they happily dance together. This dancing scene is shot in a home-movie style, emphasising 'a sweet home'. In this way, the film celebrates the birth of an alternative family which includes non-blood-tied members and non-Korean ethnic members. In the next scene, Dong-joo opens a multicultural centre in which all the village people are eating and drinking. Here, the local community becomes an enlarged alternative family in which the multicultural family harmoniously resides.

However, Wandŭk's alternative family fails to change the norm of traditional Confucian family. The authoritarian father has to be a breadwinner. The benevolent and warm mother prepares food for her family. Therefore, in the film, the multicultural family safely settles down

[24] An Ji-yoon, "Alternative Families in New Korean Cinema." In *JOINT EAST ASIAN STUDIES CONFERENCE East Asian Societies in Transition: Challenges and Connections* (Nottingham: The University of Nottingham, 2013).

within the existing systems of patriarchy and familism. Joo You-shin defines familism amidst the history of Korean development in order to build its nationality.

> In Korean society, the family system and the ideology of familism have a dominant influence over the social structure and policy, as well as individual psychology and daily life. This is because, in Korean society where Confucian patriarchy has been traditionally dominant, the individual ego is the "familial ego" and one's identity is determined strictly within the family and family relationships. Furthermore, the rapid modernization that marks Korea's modern history was possible because families reproduced and provided a steady supply of labor for society. Therefore, families functioned as the main conduit for national and social control and suppression.[25]

In *Punch*, Wandŭk grows up to form familial ego. All the members of Wandŭk's family and his neighbours contribute to the local community by using their own abilities. Also Wandŭk stops idly wondering about and instead actively pursues his dream of becoming a kick-boxer. Here, familism is a safe device to enable the audience to embrace the multicultural family. Like this, the multicultural family is safe and acceptable because it can function as a unit within the established cultural norms of the community and nation.

A Wonderful Moment: paternal multiculturalism

[25] Joo You-shin, "The Representation of the Family in Korean Cinema." In *Korean Cinema: From Origins to Renaissance*, edited by Mi-hyŏn Kim, 213–19. (Seoul: CommBooks 2007): 213

Kim Seong-hun's debut feature film, *A Wonderful Moment* shows the relationship between a musical director, Il-han, and his young partner, Young-gwang, who is the son of multicultural family. Based on the scenario which was the winner of the first edition of the 'CJ Azit-Project S,'[26] a project to support new storytellers, the film explicitly raises questions about multiculturalism. As a matter of fact, the film was not successful in the box office, as the KOFIC's statistics show: *A Wonderful Moment* has recorded only about 0.2 million total admissions. However, this does not diminish the film's influence on the discursive sphere of multicultural films. Ji Dae-han, the actor who played Young-gwang, who is a second generation of multicultural family himself, was given the award for best breakthrough act at the Baik-sang Art Awards 2013, and subsequently *A Wonderful Moment* and the second generation of multicultural family attracted substantial media attention.[27]

Yet, the film is a growing-up story of a sassy South Korean man through encountering the son of multicultural family. A humble musical director, Il-han, dreams of being a famous musical director but does not do his best. One day, he receives an offer to join an audition program which selects a main actor for a state-sponsored blockbuster musical. In the program, Il-han is supposed to team-up with one of participants and to

[26] CJ is the biggest film production and distribution corporation with nationwide multiplex chain in South Korea.

[27] *The Daily Sports* deals with the predicament which the second generation of multicultural family faces, introducing Ji Dae-han as a Korean Billy Elliot. "Ji Dae-Han, a Boy of Multicultural Family, Becomes Korean Billy Elliot." In *The Daily Sports* (9 May 2013). Furthermore, Cho Youn-kyung indicates it is an unusual accident that the boy in a multicultural family is awarded. Cho Youn-kyung, "A Great Accident Happens: Multicultural Boy Ji Dae-Han Is Awarded a Breakthrough Actor." In *Newsen* (May 9, 2013).

coach him. If the participant becomes a winner, Il-han can take on the role of the musical director. Yet, he comes to choose Young-gwang, the child of a multicultural family by chance since the choice is done as a form of a blind audition. On the other hand, Yong-gwang wants to be an audition star in order to look for his missing father. Il-han does not like Young-gwang because he thinks Young-gwang's dark skin could be an obstacle to his attempt to win the competition. However, as Il-han knows Young-gwang's passion and talent, he opens his mind and does his best to coach Young-gwang. Finally, Young-gwang wins the audition, overcoming several obstacles.

The film tries to articulate multicultural family within so called loser movie (*lusŏr yŏnghwa*).[28] After the 1997 economic crisis in Asia, a number of workers lost their jobs and subsequently faced the crisis of family corruption. As a result, a slew of films after 1997 have dealt with the crisis of men who lose their social and familial positions. These films are categorised under the term "loser movie". In numerous loser movies, main characters – almost always males – are placed in a low position in terms of class, economic and cultural status. Here, men's frustration triggered by their failure to enter the normal economic system or to ascend in social status is, however, compensated by the rescue of (or being rescued by) female characters and then their masculinity is restored at least under the patriarchal system.

[28] There are different opinions about the definition of loser in South Korea, but the term, *loser yŏnghwa* is widely consumed and circulated in the contemporary Korean media.

Since 2000, the role of object-to-be-rescued (or the one to rescue male protagonists) in the representational sphere has been extended from native South Korean women to include non-native ethnic Koreans and other Asian women. For instance, *Failan* (Song Hae-seong, 2001) shows that Kang-je, a humble gangster who is marginalised from society, restarts his life after his fake Korean Chinese wife, Failan, died. Kang-je and Failan got married several years before the death of Failan, in exchange for money for Kang-je and legal citizenship for Failan. Yet, they met each other only once, when they took a marriage photo together. Before she dies due to illness in South Korea, however, Failan sends a letter to Kang-je, saying "thank you for marrying with me. You are the kindest people in the world." Owing to her words, Kang-je feels responsible for her and his masculinity is restored through the journey to take her ashes back. This is also the case in other films such as *My Wedding Campaign* (Naŭi Kyŏlhon Wŏnchŏngki, Hwang Byung-guk, 2005) and *Innocent Step* embracing a North Korean defector and a Korean Chinese girl respectively. Analysing the three films previously mentioned, Kim Kyung-hyun argues that:

> South Korean production of North Korean subjects [and Asian subjects] continues to serve the interests of a South Korea that is trying to come to terms with an internal psychic and economic crisis of the anxious male subject. That anxiety is itself a displaced symptom that engages the neighboring nation's women without being either conscientious or reflective about them.[29]

[29] Kim, *Virtual Hallyu: Korean Cinema of the Global Era*.: 109

Kim further remarks that this interest helps to reinforce national identity rather than diminishing it through resurrecting the South Korean man as a political agent.[30] In this way, restoring manhood in South Korean cinema contributes to the rebuilding of a gendered Korean nationality. Shin Mina also critiques the tendency of contemporary independent films based on multiculturalism to reinforce paternalism and the rehabilitation of Korean manhood.[31] Thus, multiculturalism in these films contributes to the building of new Korean nationality to some extents, but it is one coinciding with older forms of paternalism and masculinity.

In *A Wonderful Moment*, the loser character is also remasculinised by the fantasy of rescue. However, this time it is not a female character whom the male character should rescue, but a second generation of multicultural family in a predicament. Through this transition from a domestic female via ethnic Korean minorities to a child of multicultural family (and quite often migrant workers), Korean cinema has contributed to the display of a gendered Korean nationality on the global stage.

A Wonderful Moment describes the story of Il-han's growing-up from a self-indulgent man to a generous and mature man. Il-han once had a promising future but has fallen to a children's musical theatre director after the failure of a big-budget musical performance. However, he thinks that this failure was not his fault, but that he was just unlucky. Even in the audition, Il-han expects to find an already established boy as his partner in order to recover his heyday. He only desires to be famous. However, he

[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Shin Mina, *Imagining Racial Otherness: Multicultualism and South (east) Asian Migrant Workers in Korean Cinema*. (Michigan 2012). www.ii.umich.edu/ncks.

unintentionally teams up with Young-gwang, who has a darker face than Korean natives. Disappointed by Young-gwang's skin colour, Il-han loses his own passion for the show. However, as he knows Young-gwang's talent and passion, he comes to remember his forgotten dream and passion as well. At last, he willingly sacrifices himself for Young-gwang's victory and rescues his soul from the secular world.

The film's setting of the blind audition is a metaphor of Il-han's blindness and misrecognition towards multicultural families. At this point, the film urges the audience to see the reality of the children of multicultural families. Il-han becomes blind in his desire for fame and, thus, he cannot see Young-gwang's passion and despair. Indeed, in the first scene, Il-han's manager lobbies the audition company to let Il-han participate in the show program. The manager asks Il-han to come together but Il-han does not turn up. Instead, Il-han is spying on them with binoculars on the opposite building. The reluctance to directly face the reality is also a critical point towards "forced" multiculturalism. Il-han tries to make the audience think Young-gwang as a pitiful product of a second generation of multicultural family so as to get more votes from the audience of the show. He pretends to understand the difficulty of multicultural family on TV, but he does not care about those problems behind the camera. Il-han is the last one who becomes aware that Young-gwang is hurt during his training. Il-han is totally unable to see the scene in front of him and even does not want to know what is happening. Thus, the setting of 'blind audition' is a device to indicate South Koreans'

ignorance of the multicultural family and their simple understanding of multiculturalism.

In addition, the film denies a tolerant view towards multicultural families. It says what multicultural families need is not consideration or understanding, but equality or universal rights as human beings. Egalitarianism and/or universalism are discussed as one of the most urgent issues in the discourses around multiculturalism. On the brink of the final stage of the show, Young-gwang faces a crisis to give up his dream since it is known that his mom is preparing for returning to the Philippines with Young-gwang because their status as a Korean citizens is unstable if they don't have a Korean husband/father – but indeed it is because the show's sponsors believes that a non-pure-blood ethnic Korean is not qualified for the musical named *The King of Choson*, i.e., the king of the ancient dynasty of Korean ethnics. The vice producer of the show, Seong-hee, who secretly supports Young-gwang with sympathetic feeling, attempts to persuade Young-gwang's mom to stay in Korea. She says "let's tell the producer of the program and other competitors about your situation with sincerity. I believe that they can understand Young-gwang's situation." At that moment, Young-gwang's mom rebukes Seong-hee, asking in return "why should we be understood by you guys?" As Jeong Hee-jin problematises, the natural rights of humans "cannot be given consideration by other people."[32] The film asserts that their rights are

[32] Jeong Hee-jin, "Column: Contradiction betwen consideration and rights." In *Kyoung-hyang Newspaper*. (17 January 2013)

respectable not because they are pitiful but because they have their own rights as human beings.

On the other hand, the film raises questions about Korean-ness, that is, who can be Korean. The film directly challenges the concept of Korean-ness by means of putting the issues about whether a child with a different skin colour can represent South Koreans or not centre stage, because the audition in the film picks an actor for the role of a King in an ancient dynasty of ethnic Koreans. Here the king in an ancient dynasty is a symbol of ethnic Koreans. Suggesting a citizen of the Korean nation-state or *Kukmin* (people of nation state) instead of an ethnic Korean, the film raises its voice to assert that those who are not 'pure' blood Koreans are also Korean *Kukmin*. When Il-han realises the program's producer and sponsor have a conspiracy to expel Young-gwang from the show, Il-han goes to the producer and yells. "Tell me why Young-gwang cannot take charge of a main title role. When he grows up, he will pay a tax and go to the army like us. He is a *Kukmin* just like us. What's the difference between us and Young-gwang?" Here, the film asserts 'they' have same rights with 'us', as long as 'they' are given equal duties of a nation's people. Thus, the film asserts a higher legitimacy for Korean society for *Kukmin* than for people simply of Korean ethnic origin.

Yet, Il-han's understanding of multiculturalism is based on the duties of Asian others' rather than on their rights. In other words, they could be Koreans only as long as they can contribute to the nation-state. The multicultural family is inevitable to sustain Korean society now and therefore Koreans needs to accept them as Koreans. This is the official

strategy of the government in order to integrate multi-ethnics into Korean society as well. Yet, as previously argued, this policy has produced hierarchal and discriminative policies toward Asian others and subsequently Asian others have remained in a marginalised position.

As well, *A Wonderful Moment* holds on to the perspective of gendered multiculturalism. I propose the concept of paternal multiculturalism to explain the film. Paternal multiculturalism is a term designed to explain multiculturalism without abandoning paternalism and patriarchal system. As previously mentioned, multiculturalism in South Korea has developed, especially since 2000, in relation to the shortage of population such as labour force and new generation as well as sexual imbalance. Put another way, multiculturalism is demanded for production and reproduction to sustain the production of capital and the continuation of a patriarchal system in South Korea. In research on South Korean comedy films, Jeon Min-seong pays attention to the trinity of family, capital and state in building Korean nationality.[33] Indeed, in order to sustain its economic system and build a new nationality, multicultural policies concentrate on the unit of family. In a similar vein, Timothy Lim argues that multiculturalism should not harm the South Korean nationality and should be helpful to safely maintain the pre-existing

[33] Jeon Min-seong, "Minchokkukka Kŏnsŏl Sikiŭi Kachok, Kukka, Chaponŭi Yŏkhake Taehan Yŏnku : 1960~1970 Nyŏntae Ch'oŭi Namhan K'omiti Yŏnghwalŭl Chungsimŭlo [A Study of the Imagination in South Korea Comedies during 1960s-1970s: Focus on the Dynamics of the Family-State-Capital during Nation-Building Period]." MA dissertation. (Seoul: The Korea National University of Arts, 2005)

structure.[34] Yet, the pre-existing structure is already gendered. Therefore, like the Korean nationality established by the exploitation of women and other ethnics, multiculturalism as an expansion of Korean nationality is based on a male-centric system. Therefore, paternal multiculturalism is a term to indicate ethnic hierarchy and hypocrisy, in terms of gender, which is immanent in the multicultural discourse in South Korea.

A Wonderful Moment, like *Punch*, does not give up paternal centrality by maintaining the centrality of a father's role. In the film, Young-gwang's aim in attending the audition is to look for his missing father. Since a father has a key role in defining their children's nationality in South Korea, Young-gwang's intention to find his father stems from his desire to be recognised as a registered Korean. However, it is revealed that Young-gwang's father intentionally left his family and did not want to meet Young-gwang. When Young-gwang knows the truth, he is very disappointed, saying that "without a father, I cannot be a perfect Korean. I would be forced to go to the Philippines." In the first place, this line challenges the Korean governmental policy that emphasises the father's role in the determination of their children's nationality. Yet, the film suggests a quasi-father figure to replace a biological father rather than attacking patriarchy and the hypocrisy embedded in the Korean multicultural discourse. When comforting Young-gwang, the vice producer Seong-hee says "don't worry. Il-han can protect you from leaving South Korea." In this scene, Il-han takes over the role of Young-gwang's

[34] Lim, "Who Is Korean? Migration, Immigration, and the Challenge of Multiculturalism in Homogeneous Societies."

biological father, who is no more eligible as a father. Here the biological father is nullified due to his irresponsibility.

As a matter of fact, this transposition is very customary to South Koreans since it is believed that a king, teacher and father are identical to each other (*kunsabu-ilche,* literally meaning that a king, teacher and father shares one body) under the influence of Confucian culture. In this regard, Il-han can easily transit from his role as a teacher to the role of a (substitute) father as well. Therefore, the film does not give up its patriarchal imagination, suggesting that the role of Young-gwang's biological mother in the film is not sufficient enough to protect her child. This is also the case for a quasi-mother, Seong-hee. She persuades Il-han to solve out Young-gwang's difficulty rather than doing by herself. In the film, ethnic minorities still need a father.

At the end, Il-han fails to finish the show with Young-gwang due to his immoral behaviour in the past. He is blackmailed, being told to "let Young-gwang drop out of the audition. Otherwise, your cheating in the past will be disclosed to the public and you will lose everything." However, he chooses to give up his own position for the sake of Young-gwang. Following his choice, he fails to achieve his dreams of fame and money, but he recovers his morality by means of his own sacrifice. Thus, this failure does not mean that he has failed in his role as a father. His role as a teacher or quasi father is advocated by the story of the musical in the film that is based on real historic events in which a prince overcomes his all barriers and becomes a King. In the history, it is known that the prince misses his incompetent father who was killed when the prince was young. That is, the

prince can still admit and miss his dismissed father. Therefore, this is another kind of South Korean male losers' compensation by finding their own moral purity via ethnic minorities. By means of protecting Young-gwang, Il-han retrieves his moral purity and consequently restores his masculinity.

However, Young-gwang remains abstract and objectified. Although the film depicts a multicultural family in various predicaments, Young-gwang is described as a symbol of absolute purity. His voice is dubbed voice by another singer and the resulting unmatched lip-synch when Young-gwang sings makes him more abstract and artificial. Although this derives from a technical problem, it looks like a minority who does not have its own voice. In particular, the film's argument that the concept of Korean-ness should be widened to include other ethnic Koreans is about a problem of reception. Here, Young-gwang becomes an object which should be recognised by Korean pure-blood natives. The form of audition accentuates this manner since audition attendants have to pass through screening in each stage in front of jury members and the audience. Therefore, the second generation of a multicultural family is re-objectified and captured by the judges' viewpoints – here, the judges function as a law, whether symbolically or practically. The form of audition itself demands unilateral judgement and benevolence. There is no room for mutual understanding and communication.

To conclude, the film seems to oppose the existing bigoted form of singular Korean-ness. Yet, the film still tries to put multiculturalism under the patriarchal nation state by means of setting up a relationship between

a father and a son. The Confusion tradition supports this idea here. Therefore, the story in which the child of multicultural family becomes the king of the ancient Korean is not the opposite of Korean nationality. Rather, it is advocating for a new Korean nationality as a global nation state.

Conclusion

In South Korean commercial cinema, Asian others and multicultural families have become more and more popular topics during the last decade. In particular, the critical and commercial success of *Punch* paved the way for multicultural films' favourable reception in the domestic film market. *Punch* and *A Wonderful Moment* also criticise the conventional strategy of Korean multiculturalism by mocking formal political correctness and the pathetic views toward Asian others respectively. In addition, *Punch* suggests alternative family wherein multicultural family and social minorities can dwell while *A Wonderful Moment* embraces the second generation of multicultural families in the name of *Kukmin* (nation people) who can contribute to the development of nation. In a way, it would be helpful to dismiss discrimination against the multicultural family by means of criticising the previous multiculturalism in practice and embracing the multicultural family within the South Korean family or nation. However, as examined above, multiculturalism and Asian others in these two films are still consumed within contexts of patriarchy and family centralism. That further forges a paternal multiculturalism that again reinforces gendered Korean national identity. In this way, Asian others are

safely accepted by South Koreans without harming the patriarchal values of the family that underpins the values of gendered Korean nationality and ethnic nationalism. Yet, that nationalism is precisely the obstacle which Asian others face in Korean society. I will further argue this point in the next three chapters.

Part III. Ethnic, Cultural and National Positions

Chapter 7. Male Crisis and the Reconfiguration of Labour: the Rrepresentation of Migrant Workers

As South Korea has transformed from a country of emigration in the 1960-70s into a labour importing country since the late 1980s, foreign migrant workers have become one of the most important workforces in South Korea. Migrant workers, mostly from Southeast and South Asia, have had to endure terrible working conditions including low wages, no insurance, violence from their employers, unpaid overtime work and unreasonable deportation by the Korean government as well as South Koreans' racism against them. Their predicament has attracted the attention of Korean filmmakers since the late 1990s. In particular, after film activists' involvement in the 2003-2004 sit-in demonstrations by migrant workers, the number of films dealing with migrant workers has increased dramatically.[1]

As I argued in the previous chapter, South Korean multicultural policy has a tendency to focus on multicultural families and marriages in which at least one participant (mostly woman) is regarded as a permanent resident. Comparatively, migrant workers, specifically illegal migrant workers, who are mostly temporary residents, are often excluded from the discussion of multicultural policy. Jamie Doucette and Robert Prey point

[1] In particular, the MediAct (public media centre) involved in the demonstration and taught migrant workers how to make films. For further information, see Doucette and Prey, "Between Migrant and Minjung: The Changing Face of Migrant Cultural Activism in Korea."

out that the Korean government's multicultural policy begins by differentiating foreign brides from migrant workers.[2] This apparently discriminatory policy has come about because the government does not want labour issues to be connected to multiculturalism.[3] Furthermore, Kevin Gray remarks that this governmental policy aims to sustain ethnic and racial homogeneity by means of denying the 'worker-ness' of migrant workers and keep rotating them.[4] Subsequently, the early stage of the movement of migrant workers in South Korea focused on their demands for human rights and inclusion under the remit of the doctrine of multiculturalism.[5]

Responding to the active movement of migrant workers, films depicting migrant workers address the limitations of multiculturalism by appealing to South Koreans' sense of human rights. Intriguingly, this appeal became more feasible through South Koreans' projection of their labour crisis to the predicament of migrant workers. In this process, it is confirmed the comparative superiority of male South Korean workers and thereby the sympathy with them and subsequently, a sub-imperial desire operates. This chapter examines how this sub-imperial desire operates via the representation of foreign migrant workers through two films, *Himalaya Where the Wind Dwells* (Himallaya Parami Mŏmunŭn Kot, Jeon Soo-il, 2009, hereafter referred to as *Himalaya*) and *He's on Duty* (Banga?

[2] Doucette and Prey, "Between Migrant and Minjung: The Changing Face of Migrant Cultural Activism in Korea."
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] Gray, "From Human to Workers' Rights: The Emergence of a Migrant Workers' Union Movement in Korea.": 304
[5] Moon, "Strangers in the Midst of Globalization: Migrant Workers and Korean Nationalism."

Banga!, Yuk Sang-hyo, 2010).

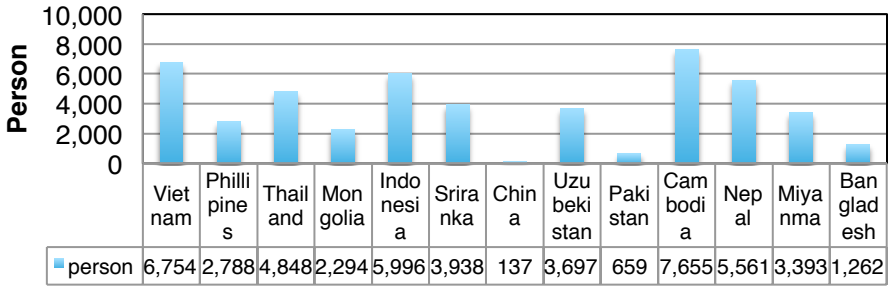
At this point, it is worth stating that the popular representation of migrant workers is already a well-established stereotype, as is the representation of South or Southeast Asian male workers despite the increasing number of female workers and overseas Koreans especially Korean Chinese workers in the workplace. In other words, the representation of migrant workers of all kinds reflects South Koreans' biased attitudes toward race and, specifically, gender. The stereotyped characterisation of migrant workers as men stems from the fact that Korean working class is traditionally represented as participating in male centric manufacturing work. However, the current tendency in global movements of labour is toward a feminisation of migration.[6] South Korea also receives numerous female migrant workers annually, who mostly work in the domestic or service industries. Therefore, the fact that the representative image of the migrant worker is male shows the gender hierarchy embedded in the representation of migrant workers.

The status of foreign migrant workers in South Korea

From 1994, the Kim Youngsam government began to conduct industrial training programs for foreign workers in order to fill a labour shortage

[6] Moon Hyun-a, "Gŭlropŏl Sahoe Pyŏnhwa Sok Chentŏhwatoen Tolpom Nodongŭi Ihae (Understanding Gendered Care Work in the Global Social Change)." In *Tolpom Nodongchanŭn Nuka Tolpwa Chuna? (Who Care For Care Workers?)*, by Jin-ju Jung et al.. (Seoul: Hanul Academy, 2012); Yayori Matsui, *Women in the New Asia: From Pain to Power*. Translated by Noriko Toyokawa and Carolyn Francis. (New York: Zed Books Ltd, 1999)

that was especially acute in small and medium sized manufaturing factories. This was the first official invitation for foreign workers to come to South Korea. This policy attracted numerous workers from across Asia to enter South Korea. Amongst these Asian migrants, most foreign workers who have found employment in the manufaturing and agricultural industries have been from South and South East Asia from the initial stages of his migration up to now (see Table 7-1).[7]



	Vietnam	Philippines	Thailand	Mongolia	Indonesia	Srira nka	China	Uzu beki stan	Paki stan	Cam bodia	Nepal	Miya nma	Ban glad esh
person	6,754	2,788	4,848	2,294	5,996	3,938	137	3,697	659	7,655	5,561	3,393	1,262

Table 7-1. Nationality of Foreign Migrant Workers in 2012. Statistics from the *E-Nara Chip'yo* (e-Country Index), www.index.go.kr

When they came as trainees, these migrants could not enjoy benefits such as the four major forms of insurance (employment insurance, occupational health & safety insurance, medical insurance and national pension program) and the three main worker's rights (unity, collective bargain and collective action).[8] In addition, the trainee visas only allowed these migrants to stay from 6 months to 12 months without extension. As a result, some of these migrants fell into an illegal status after their visas

[7] The number of Korean Chinese migrant workers is excluded from this statistics since they attain special visa for overseas Koreans (H-2 visa). The Korean Chinese are one of the biggest groups of migrant workers now.

[8] Gray, "From Human to Workers' Rights: The Emergence of a Migrant Workers' Union Movement in Korea."

expired. Their illegal status forced these migrant workers to work under harsher conditions and lower wages compared to the legal work in which they had been engaged. In addition to these legal difficulties, they also had to endure racial discrimination and xenophobic reaction from native South Koreans.

As the trainee system created more and more illegal migrant workers regardless of the South Korean government's intention, and came in for criticised from international organizations who claimed that in this system South Korea disrespected democracy and human rights, the Roh Moo-hyun government enacted the Employment Permit System (EPS) in 2003 which took effect in 2004.[9] The EPS is a system designed to "allow employers who have failed to hire local workforce, to legally employ foreign workers."[10] Foreign migrant workers who came through the EPS are supposed to achieve an E-9 visa[11] which is for low skilled workers. E-9 is renewable for a maximum of four years and ten months. If their employers want to extend their contracts with their foreign employees for more than the maximum durations, the foreign employees were obliged to first leave South Korea, and then return to their place of work on a new visa.[12]

Yet, the EPS could not solve all the problems of the previous trainee system. Julia J. Shin argues that the EPS has limited labourers'

[9] Kim, "Racism in the Global Era: Analysis of Korean Media Discourse around Migrants, 1990–2009."
[10] The Webpage of the EPS. www.eps.go.kr/ph/inde.html. Accessed in 17th August 2014
[11] The other considerable members of foreign migrant workers are overseas Koreans especially from China. They are given to H-2 visa which is a visa for overseas ethnic Koreans.
[12] The Webpage of the EPS

mobility and caused social exclusion due to foreign migrant workers' temporary status.[13] Indeed, under this system, foreign migrant workers cannot change their workplace at will. Moreover, although they can theoretically renew their E-9 visa after expiration, it is not easy to come back to their workplace in Korea owing to long queues for work. Because of this, a lot of these migrant works whose visas expire instead choose to overstay and enter illegal status.[14] In addition, these migrants also have to endure their employer's exploitation and unfair treatment since the employer has complete authority to decide whether they will extend their migrant workers' contracts (and subsequent visas) or not.

In this situation, the agenda for activist movements among foreign migrant workers is shifting away from an emphasis on human rights to a focus on labour rights. Indeed, their rights as workers are still denied. The supreme court of South Korea did not allow the formation of a migrant workers' union for more than ten years for the reason that some of their members were illegal residents. Although the supreme court finally affirmed migrant workers' union in the spring of 2015, the Ministry of Employment and Labour has postponed the certification of the Migrant Trade Union, for the reason of the ability of the union to undertake political action.[15] The denial of this certification clarifies that the South Korean government wants to keep foreign migrant workers away from organised labour struggles. In a number of ways, the films dealt with

[13] Julia Jiwon Shin, "The 10 Years Old Employment Permit System in Korea: Problems and Prospects." *Chonnam Tribune*. 18 November 2014.
http://tribune.cnumedia.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=12009
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] On 19 August 2015, the Migrant Trade Union in Korea is officially approved.

below respond to the government's policy of multiculturalism by appealing to human rights and to South Koreans' benovolence to help alleviate labour issues.

Himalaya Where the Wind Dwells and ethnographic views towards Asian Others

Himalaya shows the crisis of a South Korean middle class man, Mr. Choi and its resolution through his journey to the Himalayas. In this process, Himalaya is otherised through the South Korean man's ethnocentric view. The main protagonist, Choi is a goose father, which is a South Korean term to indicate a man who lives alone, supporting other members of his family who live abroad – mostly in English speaking countries – to help with their children's studies. *Himalaya* starts with Choi's dismissal from his company. He then visits his younger brother who runs a small factory and learns that Dorugy, a Nepali worker in the factory who once helped Choi's house move, has died in an accident. The next scene shows his trip to Nepal in order to deliver Dorugy's ashes to his family.

The film foregrounds Choi's fear, isolation and desire for the reunion of his families. According to Joo You-shin, the situation of the 1997 economic crisis was characterised by the collapse of the middle class and the idealisation of family values and subsequently films made after this period describe the dismantling of the traditional family and the attempts

of men to resurrect their traditional family in crisis.[16] Actually, a male crisis caused by an economic crisis has become one of the main recurrent themes in South Korean cinema of the 2000s. In particular, the male crises triggered by the economic crises have been intertwined with their crises in patriarchy. *Himalaya* shows Choi's fruitless attempt to suture the broken ties of his own family. Choi's family cannot maintain traditional family values such as sharing their lives and living together. Even worse, Choi's role as a goose father is about to fall apart since he has lost his job. The increasing numbers of goose fathers in South Korea has stirred up concerns about the crisis of patriarchy in the South Korean society as a whole.

Moreover, as a leading actor, Choi Min-sik's image on screen has been that of a middle class man facing family crises, reinforcing Choi's character in *Himalaya*. The film purposely gives its protagonist the same name as the real actor who plays him. Choi is one of the representative actors who remind the audience of a middle class patriarch that is not strong but weak and frustrated in its attempts to reconstruct older value systems. His previous filmography illustrates his recurring roles as a father, husband or fallen middle class man: an incompetent and tame husband who can do nothing despite his wife's affair (in *Happy End,* Haep'i Endŭ, directed by Jung Ji-woo, 1999), a Korean hood who has a Chinese

[16] Joo, "The Representation of the Family in Korean Cinema."

paper wife[17] (in *Failan* directed by Song Hae-sung, 2001), a genuine painter who is destined to fall to corruption due to a periodical backdrop (in *Painting Fire,* Ch'wihwasŏn, directed by Im Kwon-taek, 2002), a middle class man with a young daughter (in *Old Boy,* Oldŭ Poi directed by Park Chan-wook, 2003), an egoistical musician who is forced to work for money as a school teacher in a remote mining town (in *Springtime,* Kkot P'inŭn Pomi Omyŏn, directed by Ryu Jang-ha, 2004) and a former Olympic medalist now adrift on the street to support his family (in *Crying Fist,* Chumŏki Unda*,* directed by Ryoo Seung-wan, 2005). Across his career, Choi has consistently represented middle class men who encounter upheavals of their lives.

Meanwhile, the influx of foreign migrant workers has often been pointed to as the main cause of South Korea's labour crisis, as can be seen in the prevalence of hate speech against migrant workers.[18] Leesong Heeil argues that the crisis of [the economic] system needs a scapegoat such as migrant workers to serve as the main culprit of Koreans' labour crisis.[19] Films dealing with Asian migrant workers have seemingly fought against this abhorrence of migrants by identifying South Korean male workers with migrant workers. *Himalaya* also shows this kind of identification. In the film, the middle class man in crisis is compared with a Nepali worker.

[17] A paper wife is a Korean term which indicates a wife only on document. This contract marriage was popular for foreign women who wanted to work in South Korea but had difficulties in getting a work visa through legal methods.
[18] See chapter 2 of this thesis.
[19] Leesong, "[Leesong Heeilŭi Tisŭt'op'ialoput'ŏ] Hyŏmowa Ŏkapŭlo Ssŭn Namsŏng Taesŏsasi ([From Leesong Heeil's Distopia] Men's Odyssey Written with Abhorrence and Oppression)." In *Cine21*. (12 May 2015) http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/79849.

Rather than portraying their relationship as a competitive one, Asian migrant workers characterised in the film as mirror images of contemporary, embattled South Korean workers. Choi and Dorugy, the dead Nepali worker, are described as victims of the global flow of capitalism. Both live alone and work hard in order to support their overseas family. However, both have lost their roles in the family, Choi by losing his job and Dorugy by dying. Therefore, although Choi's journey aims to return Dorugy's ashes to his home, his journey also represents his own returning home. Here Himalaya's plateau becomes Choi's imaginary homeland. In this way, Asian others are appropriated and consumed as the intimate, rather than threatening, other.

Compared to Seoul's metropolitan scenery, the world of *Himalaya*, and Dorugy's hometown in particular, is described as a pre-modern, nomadic, uncontaminated and primitive area far from secular modern life. According to Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller "the representation of the Arab or Asian as mysterious, exotic, and seductive [that is, Orientalism] was coupled with the idea that they were inherently barbaric, criminal, and dangerous, *set outside the time from of modernity, poised in a timeless space*."[20] In *Himalaya*, the place of Asian others is portrayed as religious, mysterious and seductive and thereby as the lost past of South Korea itself.

The lost past is exhibited from the point of ethnographic and tourist view in *Himalaya*. This is related with the way that colonialists

[20] Ponzanesi and Waller, *Postcolonial Cinema Studies*: 2. The emphasis is from this author.

view their colonies. Here, Choi holds the position of ethnographer who enters a strange and marvelous world. This shows how orientalism and self-orientalism operate in the representational sphere. As pointed out, "the fifth generation of Chinese cinema" and other East Asian films often stimulate orientalism by means of exhibiting their recent past as exotic, nostalgic and primitive places.[21] This ethnographic self-representation and self-orientalist attractions are, needless to say, the product of post-colonial world. And South Korean films are not an exception to this rule. Choi Chungmoo points out the logic of nostalgic tourism, taking an example of *Sŏp'yŏnje* (Im Kwon-taek, 1994).

> *Sŏp'yŏnje* presents a wide slice of everyday life from Korea's recent past, offering a visual tour of a time when things Korean were being replaced by commodities of Western origin and everyday life was marked by a confusing array of hybridity. These items of daily life are the sites of social memory. For the film's spectators, these nostalgic devices work, not because the past is seen as utopian but because it offers Korean spectators the place of safety. [22]

While *Sŏp'yŏnje* tried to find their nostalgic past in small, rural Korean cities, now South Korean films locate their lost past in remote areas of other Asian countries. This shift gives more security to the South Korean

[21] Chris Berry, "Introducing 'Mr Monster': Kim Ki-Young and the Critical Economy of the Globalized Art-House Cinema." In *Post-Colonial Classics of Korean Cinema*, edited by Chungmoo Choi. Irvine, (CA: Korean Film Festival Committee, University of California, 1998); Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema,* 1995.
[22] Choi, "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea.": 21

viewer and confirms South Korean's contemporaneity against the pre-modern rest of Asia due to its physical distance.

In particular, the current Asian migrant workers are often compared to Korean workers' wretched past. Yayori Matsui points out two important stages of labour migration within Asia. The first, starting from the 1970s, refers to Asian workers who went abroad to the Persian Gulf to work in oil producing countries. Most of these emigrants were men who engaged in the construction industry.[23] At that time, lots of Korean male workers also went to the Gulf area, specifically, Saudi Arabia. The second wave started in the 1980s and featured mass movements toward countries such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore which were rapidly developing economies.[24] Therefore, the contemporary foreign migrant workers in South Korea are often compared to the past Korean migrant workers in Saudi Arabia. This translated position of Korean labours makes South Koreans sympathise with the plight of Asian migrant workers in a way, but simultaneously makes South Koreans feel that their economic predicaments are over.

To distinguish South Koreans from Asian others, *Himalaya* often divides Choi's space from the space inhabited by these others, who are Nepali, by a door, window, or wall in a frame. Here, Choi is cast as an observer who sees the scenery through his viewfinder. The different scenery seen by Choi through a window is strange, obscene or exotic. For

[23] Matsui, *Women in the New Asia: From Pain to Power*. Translated by Noriko Toyokawa and Carolyn Francis. New York: Zed Books Ltd.: 45-46
[24] *Ibid.*

instance, one day Choi wakes up and sees the landscape through a window. Following this scene, a goat tied-up by several village men emerges on screen. Then, one of them slashes the abdomen of the goat and puts his hand inside it. The goat is killed in a twinkle and left alone. The camera that shows the face of the goat in pain slowly pans and finally pictures Choi watching this scene through the window. Here, Choi takes the position of an ethnographic observer with a safe distance from these barbarian and obscene scenes. Moreover, the film's casting accentuates the ethnographic impact of this sequence. *Himalaya*'s cast consists almost entirely of indigenous people except for Choi Min-sik as Choi. This casting strategy is suggested by Choi Min-sik, saying that "this film does not need professional and trained actors, but just needs to show the natural image of Nepal such as wind, mountain, and dust."[25]

Furthermore, *Himalaya* revolves around Choi's journey as a religious pilgrimage that is intertwined with an ethnographic expedition. The film repeats several songs and words that express a religious belief in the healing capability of the Himalayas. There are several scenes showing people praying and singing to show their belief in the power of Great Nature. The songs are like these, which are taken from the several sequences of the film:

> There's a temple down the mountain. The Sound of prayers can be heard. Souls are carried in the wind. And the wind stops in the gorge (in

[25] Moon Seok, "[k'ŏpŏsŭt'a] Choi Min-Sik ([Cover Star) Choi Min-Sik)." In *Cine21* (15 June 2009). http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/56624

the song of Dorugy's father).

> Wind from the East blows to the North. Strong winds are blowing. Wind makes tears well in my eyes. I looked for you in busy city streets but found you here in mountains. We prayed to the gods – the mother of the gods in Korean translation – and returned to the homeland […] Muktinath, the freedom temple of prayer (in the song of a shepherd).

In these songs, Himalaya is depicted as the place where the wind comes from and the power of the wind to carry on and purify our souls [Wind makes tears in my eyes]. This cleansing wind is contaminated in modern city life [I looked for you in busy city streets but…]. This concept is also evident in the words of Dorugy's son: "Over that mountain. There wind stays. This wind carries karma of this life to there and every karma is healed there and we can meet our soul." When Choi goes up to the mountain toward Dorugy's home, Choi suffers from altitude sickness. This scene was shot with a long take and a long shot, showing the human being's weakness before grandiose nature. Therefore, his entrance into nature becomes an ascetic practice of a fallen human being corrupted by modern urban life.

This kind of religious epiphany opens up a healing space for the South Korean man, Choi. In the film, he meets a white horse, which is, like the wind, a messenger of gods. When Choi first sees a white horse, he does not recognise it as significant, but just passes by. However, when he sees the white horse again, he follows the horse and finds a route over the

mountain. This belated recognition signifies that Choi finally achieves his moral and religious relief as his time in the Himalayas passes. After his return from the mountain, he lies near death at Dorugy's house. Although the film does not show what happens to Choi exactly, it can be inferred that his karma is healed and he meets his own soul there. The suggestion of Himalaya as a place of healing from the wounds inflicted by modernity provokes a strong sense of cultural nostalgia.

Yet, cultural nostalgia always poses a danger in an orientalist palette.[26] In *Himalaya,* Choi, a man who is sick of city life and is in a crisis of family corruption wrought by globalisation, found his imaginary hometown in the presumptive past with his nostalgic and orientalist view. Historically, the orientalist and ethnographic views have been developed within Western colonialism.[27] In *Himalaya*, the colonial desire operates by the appropriation of Asian others. The others first come to Choi, full of agony, represented by a migrant worker's death and the poor life of Dorugy's family. Next, they come to Choi, full of marvelousness, represented by the Great Nature. Finally, they heal Choi's karma. In this process, Asian others are the seen, rather than seeing objects, reflecting colonialist desire for receptive others. Here, the South Korean man takes over the role of ethnographers in the colonial era.

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[26] Aaron Gerow, "From the National Gaze to Multiple Gazes: Representation of Okinawa in Recent Japanese Cinema." In *Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power*, edited by Laura Elizabeth Hein and Mark Selden. (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003): 277.

[27] Laura Catalán Eraso, "Reflecting Upon Interculturality in Ethnographic Filmmaking." In *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 7 (3). 2006. http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/137

Moreover, this colonial desire also operates through feminising indigenous peoples. Choi Chungmoo argues that "the West has constructed the Orient and the non-west as a feminine or primitive Other to define the West as a centre of masculine civilization […] [and] this differential relationship between the metropolitan self and the colonized Other has often been articulated in terms of gender."[28] In *Himalaya*, the people of Dorugy's village follow matriarch for the reason that the village has a polyandrous tradition stretching back to their nomadic origins. This is contrasted by the modern system of monogamy and becomes one of the factors that comfort the patriarchs who are about to fail in his attempts to support his family. Here, Dorugy's wife, the matriarch of Dorugy's family, becomes an object of Choi's respect. Additionally, when Choi is sick after meeting the white horse, Dorugy's wife keeps praying and washing his body with warm water so as to save him from death. Here the crisis of a patriarch is healed through the actions of a matriarch and contact with nature.

However, regardless of who is the savior and who is being saved, the fantasy of rescue is a nationalist desire that reflects an imperialist world order. The man whose family members live in the United States in order to gain an English education for their children implies that the family cannot help but follow the imperial powers of the world and South Korea still depends on the imperial power. This evokes the sense of a weakened South Korean national identity versus the powerful hegemony

[28] Choi, "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea.": 14-15

of the West. This weakening of the South Korean national identity is, however, compensated by its imagined origins in remote Asian countries.

In this way, *Himalaya* does not hide its sub-imperial desires. In the film, the migrant workers who are placed in predicaments including family splits and even the death of its members are identified alongside, rather than being depicted as being in competition with, the labour crisis of South Korean middle class man. However, Koreans' crisis, which was wrought by the global flow of capital is overcome through the consumption of Asian others and appropriation of them as Korea's lost social memory, as Choi Chungmoo stated above. *Himalaya* safely poses the masculinised South Korea in opposition to Western modernisation as well as in opposition to the Asia of *pre-modernity* and thus placing itself into a sub-imperial position.

He's On Duty and the birth of a national hero

He's on Duty is the first commercially successful film dealing with Asian migrant workers, reporting about a million (973,279) admissions.[29] In contrast to other films which depict migrant workers in a serious manner, *He's on Duty* is a film full of humor and follows the process by which a seemingly useless and stupid man becomes a hero who saves minorities. The hero is a South Korean man named Banga while the minorities he saves are mostly the Asian migrant workers who work with him. In this

[29] From the website of the Korean Film Council (www.kofic.or.kr)

way, the film also takes part in the remasculinisation of the Korean national identity by the appropriation of migrant workers. *He's on Duty* explicitly foregrounds the contemporary labour crisis in South Korea. Banga, an unemployed man who is himself a domestic migrant worker who has moved from a rural area to a city, is desperately, but unsuccessfully, looking for a job. However, when he disguises himself as a Bhutanese, he finally gets a job. This setting illustrates several dimensions of contemporary labour problems in South Korea. Firstly, the setting indicates the reality in which Asian migrant workers, in particular those who are in illegal status, endure inferior working conditions such as low wages. Therefore, the South Korean man who is not competitive with other South Koreans in the job market might have a chance to compete with Asian others. Secondly, this setting also shows the sense of crisis among South Korean men, and their fears that they have to compete with other Asians on a level playing field. A good example of this kind of anxiety appears in a scene that shows people in the daily job market. In the market, unemployed migrant Asians and South Koreans are competing with each other whenever a headhunter calls. This again means that the working conditions get worse and worse due to the excessive competition. Seemingly, the film would tackle this excessive competition by showing collaboration and friendship among the prospective workers. However, this friendship becomes feasible thanks to the benevolence of South Koreans rather than solidarity with Asian others.

The film strongly critiques globalisation and neoliberalism

through this spectacle of excessive competition. The clear awareness of neoliberalism as the reason of deteriorating labour conditions is again presented by Banga during a phone call with his mother, who lives alone in Banga's remote hometown. During this phone call, Banga tells his mother a lie, saying that he has been scouted by a foreign company. He says he could not resist the demand for him to become a herald of neoliberalism. Contrary to what he tells his mother, however, the scene shows the opposite images (see the figures below): He tried to get a job but failed. One day, Banga is misrecognised as a Southeast Asian due to his appearance and he finally gets a job. In this way, the film explores the contradiction within neoliberal ideals by means of the felicitous but contradictory synchronising of Banga's lying and the reality of his position.



Banga's line: You know I am always one of a kind.

The scene: job talk in a company (Banga is the smallest one and this scene indicates that he is not competitive at all)

Figure 7-1



Banga's line: Every company wanted me, thus I couldn't decide where to go.

The scene: in a daily job market. Banga is desperately looking up job advertisement.

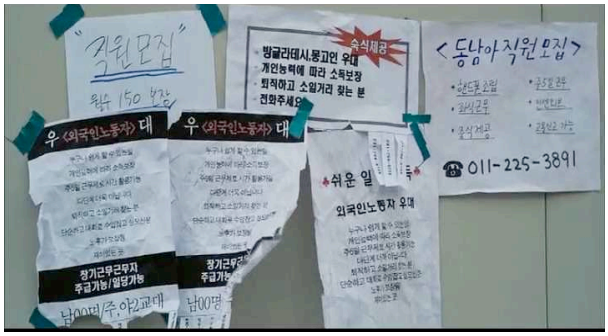
Figure 7-2



Banga's line: One day, a foreign company headhunted me. At that moment, I realised. The world is wide and there are many things to do.

The scene: An employer mistakenly thinks Banga as an Asian migrant worker and gives a wage to him.

Figure 7-3



Banga's line: Five oceans and six continents beckoned to me. Global neoliberal economy encouraged me to be its herald.

The scene: Help wanted advertisement saying "wanted Southeast worker", "priority for foreign workers"

Figure 7-4



Banga's line: Therefore, I decided to work at this foreign company.

The scene: Banga disguised as a Bhutanese worker

Figure 7-5

Arif Dirlik argues that global capitalism represents the universalisation and homogenisation of the globe as well as the fragmentation of the globe and that this contradiction is much discovered in the local level.[30] As the locus of the contestation between global desires and local resistance,

[30] Arif Dirlik, "The Global in the Local." In *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, edited by Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996)

South Korean society forces a male worker to live in this contradiction as the scene above demonstrates. In fact, global capitalism does not hide its fragmentation. Dirlik points out that each individual (economic) act is localised and concrete while its management (by global capitalism) becomes supranational and abstract.[31] Banga's imaginary explanation to his mother serves as the abstract labour in the global company (This is an abstract labour in the sense this is imagined) is indeed based on the concrete labour by migrant workers (This is a concrete labour in the sense this is visually seen and conducted by a real agent). While he understands the global capital or white-collar office workers who are paid high wage as the heralds of neoliberalism, the real heralds of neoliberalism are the migrant workers from developing countries. Neoliberalism is only feasible through the exploitation of lower paid workers and migrant workers as the film vividly shows. Thus, the film shows a local hero, Banga, as a site of resistance against global capitalism.

To do so, the film evokes a nostalgia for the pre-industrialised world. Banga and Yong-cheol, who is the only friend Banga has, are both domestic migrant workers who have moved from a rural village to a city to pursue a dream of success in a city, but their dreams do not seem to come true. Their dream is a modern time's one, from a time when the city was booming and full of new jobs, especially in the 1970s. At that time, lots of rural people moved to cities but failed to find work and ended up marginalised as urban poor. Banga and Yong-cheol also want a glorious

[31] *Ibid.*

homecoming after making big money but this dream seem to be permanently deferred. In particular, they do not look like contemporary people but rather like people just bursting out from the past. Although Yong-cheol tries to dress fashionably, he almost always wears flamboyant clothes that are no longer fashionable. Banga looks even more unfashionable. Due to his uncouth clothes and clumsy behavior and speech, many people misrecognise him as a migrant worker who hails from a poor Asian country. While this reflects Koreans' racist imagination that other Asian countries are unfashionable, unsophisticated and clumsy, this also shows that Yong-cheol and Banga are those who hold on to rural and nostalgic values. Therefore, Banga's becoming a hero against global neoliberalism implicates the return to past values as a way of resisting the deleterious effects of contemporary capitalism.

While Banga and Yong-cheol are described as those who lag behind the development of modern capitalism, migrant workers are described as victims of global migration. In this way, Asian migrant workers take over the position once occupied by South Korean workers in the era of industrialisation in the 1960s-70s. In other words, Asian workers' migration, wrought as it has been, by forces of globalisation is the mirror image of previous waves of Korean migration wrought by modernisation. The Asian workers who work together with Banga frequently talk about their Korean dreams but their dreams do not seem to be realised, either. Here the dream of domestic migrant people in the era of modernisation is altered by the dream of another border-crossing

people in the era of globalisation.

However, the film resolves this predicament by lording it over the seemingly useless South Korean man as a hero, while leaving Asian migrant workers as objects to be saved by South Koreans, which suggests the minority group is inherently inferior. In the first place, Banga becomes a hero amongst his Asian colleagues by masquerading as an ethnic other for the reason that he knew much more about Korea than other Asian migrant workers. He is elected as the president of migrant workers' union. However, his role as a hero is precarious because the heroism was achieved by disguising himself and more importantly his national identity. Even Yong-cheol has a plot to make money by swindling migrant workers while Banga connives in Yong-cheol's wrongdoing. When Rose, a Vietnamese woman with whom Banga falls in love, appears looking for a Korean native man to be her marriage partner for a green card marriage to achieve Korean citizenship, Banga's heroic position becomes more questionable since in this situation Korean nationality is a prerequisite to achieve marriage to a beautiful woman and subsequently to complete heroic status.

Therefore, the film demands that Banga become a true hero by throwing away his mask of an Asian other. Frustrated by his masquerade, and thereby his failure to couple with Rose, Banga and Yong-cheol decide to go back home with the money they earned by defrauding Banga's colleagues. However, Banga's colleagues including Rose are arrested by immigration officials and are about to be deported back to their home

countries. At the last moment, Banga gives up his plan for a glorious homecoming with big money and returns to his colleagues. After the truth about his nationality is disclosed, Banga lets his former colleagues escape from the immigration office. The scene in which Banga saves Rose by fighting against the staff of the immigration office is specifically highlighted with slow motion, dramatic music and fade-out. These are apparatuses deployed to celebrate the birth of a true hero.

As a matter of fact, Banga succeeds the tradition of Korean hero movies that contrast to Hollywood superhero movies. As Korean filmmaker Kim Gok points out, heroes have been either stupid or pathological in Korean films.[32] Kim further argues that this phenomenon indicates the impossibility of the emergence of a Korean superhero in the style of Marvel Comics and finds the reason in the postcolonial condition of South Korea, saying that:

> I forgot one, the only one condition that cannot be permanently completed although other conditions are fully filled. That is the historic event that the military leadership [over the Korean peninsula] was claimed by the US army owing to Korea's geopolitical and economic specificity. Let's ask which one is more realistic whether Hong Kil-dong [a Korean traditional hero in a novel in the 1700s] with a Korean national flag is called for or Superman with blue eyes and the Stars and Stripes is called for when Aliens comes to Korea? Of course, the latter will be. […] I realised that […] Korean hero has been impossible since

[32] Kim, Goksaŭi Asulachang: Uli Sitae Chintcha Yŏngungŭn Nukulkka [Goksa's Pandemonium: Who Is a True Hero in Our Age?]." In *Cine21*. (5 September 2014). http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/77872.

the Korean War [in the early 1950s].[33]

In a similar vein, Adrian Gombeaud points out that the prevalence of a hero/heroine with bodily handicap in Korean cinema reflects aspects of the nation's history such as the separation of Korean nations and the migrant people dislocated from their hometowns by urbanisation, and finally Korean cinema founds a new form of heroism by responding to the nation's history through physically disabled men.[34] As Gombeaud precisely observes, contemporary Korean cinema frequently features a fallen character and shows their fragility and frustration. Then, for a certain reason, the character courageously responses to the challenges they face and confront its destiny or enemy. In this way, South Korean hero films celebrate their characters' rebirth as a hero who recovers their daily life and subsequently is enlisted into the labour force of the nation. To sum up, this fragile and clumsy hero is a product of a traumatic national history and their success often links to the resurrection of strong national identity. In case of *He's on Duty*, this is evident in the way in which Banga becomes a true hero by recovering his Korean nationality.

However, Asian others are confined to an inferior area where they powerlessly wait to be saved by the South Korean hero. The weakness of Asian others is vividly visualised in two scenes from *He's on Duty*. First of

[33] *Ibid.*
[34] Adrian Gombeaud, "[Oesinkichak'ŭllŏp] Sinch'e Changaewa Yŏngungchuŭi ([Forigen Journalist's Club] Body Handicap and Heroism)." In *Cine21*, 24 February 2005. http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/28699.

all, the film shows Banga's Asian colleagues who are imprisoned awaiting their forced deportation. The camera smoothly pans across them trapped behind prison bars. Their faces are full of despair and grief without any hope. At that moment, Banga appears and they look up Banga over the prison bars. This scene contrasts Banga the rescuer with his Asian colleagues who cannot do anything in prison but helplessly wait for the emergence of a hero.

The second scene features a Vietnamese party. Rose, an illegal immigrant who is literally waiting for a South Korean hero to save her by giving her Korean citizenship, invites Banga to a Vietnamese party held by a Vietnamese community. Following Banga's viewpoint, the camera shows Rose wearing a stereotypical tight traditional Vietnamese costume at the party. At that moment, she becomes a fetishised oriental object from the viewpoint of Banga (and the audience). Producing fetishism and stereotype is, according to Derek Hook, a colonial imperative to delegate others' differences to consumable and knowable objects.[35] Here, the otherness of the Vietnamese woman is transformed into a consumable fetishised body, ensuring South Korean man's superior position by bestowing on him the power of the colonial gaze.

In the meantime, like other South Korean films depicting migrant workers, *He's on Duty* ostensibly underscores the multicultural recognition of other cultures in the country. This is evinced in the scene

[35] Derek Hook, "The Racial Stereotype, Colonial Discourse, Fetishism, and Racism." In *The Psychoanalytic Review* 92 (5), 2005.

depicting a singing contest for foreigners. In general, the contest is shown as the peak of the policy of assimilation and a place to give applause and recognition to foreigners who sing Korean songs – mostly old-fashioned ones such as a *teuroteu*.[36] This is a kind of test to examine how much they are assimilated into Korean culture and the participants who can fluently speak Korean often become the objects of spectacle. Banga's colleagues also choose a popular traditional Korean popular song in order to win a cash prize. However, when they stand on the stage, they start to sing a Bangladeshi song that one of his colleagues likes to sing when they are working. In this way, the film seemingly emphasises the importance of cultural diversity and reciprocal co-existence. In other words, the film embraces a multicultural agenda rather than following government's policy of assimilation.

However, by electing as its hero a South Korean man who is about to fail in his life and by degenerating Asian others into the passive objects of South Korean rescue, it is alluded to in the film that the reciprocal co-existance in the film becomes feasible only when Asian others are under the control of South Koreans and thereby make sure that they do not threaten the national identity of South Koreans, but can contribute to the rebirth of the nation. In this way, Asian others are appropriated and consumed so as to confirm the sub-imperial position of South Korea.

[36] A *teuroteu* similar with Japanese *enka* is regarded as a national popular song that was booming until the early 1990s.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that sub-imperial desire emerges in contemporary South Korean films depicting Asian migrant workers by accentuating their otherness. Since 2000, Korean films have frequently portrayed a crisis among contemporary South Korean men in the aftermath of the 1997 economic crisis. This economic crisis caused the reconfiguration of the labour market and as a result numerous South Korean workers underwent the crisis of losing their jobs. Subsequently, family crisis came soon after. These crises in the domestic realm threatened South Korea's national identity. Therefore, Korean films depicting a crisis of masculinity in both their workplace and at home have tried to resurrect Koreans' sense of their own masculinity. Eventually, the masculine crisis and its overcoming has become a popular theme in Korean cinema since the early 1960s when the process of urbanisation started in earnest.[37] During the period of industrialisation, South Korean women, who started to burst out from the domestic area to the public one, were often employed in Korean cinema so as to ensure the continuity of South Korean men's patriarchal position and thereby posed as being under the control of South Korean men.

[37] For further information, see Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*; Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann (eds.), *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005); Kelly Y. Jeong, *Crisis of Gender and the Nation in Korean Literature and Cinema: Modernity Arrives Again* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010): and Bae Juyeon, "Kwihwan Mot'ipŭlosŏŭi Tolaon Silichŭ Yŏnku : 1960~1970nyŏntae Namhanesŏŭi Minchok Kukka Tamlon Hyŏngsŏngkwa T'alsikmin Tonghakŭl Chungsimŭlo (A Study on the Series of the Returned: The Discourse of Nation-State in South Korea and the Dynamics of Decolonization in the 1960s-70s)." (Seoul: Korea National University of Arts. 2006)

In the period of globalisation, migrant workers from other Asian countries are often welcomed in South Korean cinema to compensate for South Korean men's frustration and then to confirm the imaginary position of South Korea as a sub-empire. In *Himalaya Where the Wind Dwells*, a South Korean man projects his sense of crisis onto the tragic death of an Asian migrant worker. However, his sense of crisis is overcome through his nostalgic and ethnographic appropriation of a remote Asian country as his imagined lost hometown. In *He's on Duty*, although the film denounces the assimilationist policies embedded in the government's multicultural remit and asserts a respect for cultural diversity, a South Korean's fatigue from competing with global workers is appeased by means of saving Asian migrant workers, which subsequently animates the frustrated Korean man in his new role as a hero. In this process, Asian others are posited in an inferior position by South Koreans while South Korea claims for itself a superior position over other Asian countries.

Chapter 8. Homogeneity and Heterogeneity: the Representation of North Korean Defectors

This chapter examines contemporary South Korean films depicting North Korean defectors. In contrast to other ethnic and racial minorities in South Korea such as Southeast Asians migrants, North Korean people and overseas-born ethnic Koreans such as Chosŏnjok (Chinese-born Koreans) and Koryŏ-in (in general, Russian-born Koreans) are generally considered in South Korea as being of the same national (and ethnic) origin as native-born South Koreans under the name of *Han Minjok* (ethnic Koreans). In this regard, mainstream South Korean media emphasises South Koreans' brotherhood with North Koreans and appeals to native-born South Koreans to help them with humanity and fraternity. Therefore, due to this erasure of difference, these defectors are often underrepresented in the discursive sphere of Korean multiculturalism, showing the hierarchy inherent to South Korean multiculturalism.

However, almost all North Korean defectors arriving in South Korea now encounter socio-economic and cultural discrimination. Even though there is still a general understanding that they are bound in a kind of brotherhood to South Koreans, they are usually forced to engage in low paid and physically-demanding jobs. Therefore, it seems contradictory to argue that South Korea is one of the few nation-states which is so ethnically homogeneous that it does not have any internal struggles for national identity. In this regard, films depicting North Korean defectors as

ethnically distinct from their South Korean "brothers" challenge this belief in ethnic homogeneity between the two nation-states and portrays individual tragedies wrought by the incompatibilities between the two different political systems. Some of these films further assert the statelessness (*Mukukjŏk-sŏng*) embodied by these North Korean defectors. Two films dealt with in this chapter examine the hypocrisy of the South Korean belief in ethnic homogeneity.

The Status of North Korean Defectors in South Korea

North Korean society has faced a series of systemic crises wrought by food shortages and isolation from the international community since the middle 1990s. Due to these crises and the oppressive nature of the North Korean regime, North Korean people have started to flee their country in ever greater numbers since the early 1990s. Due to the close proximity of the two nations, many of these defectors have come to South Korea. According to the South Korean Ministry of Unification, the number of North Korean defectors has increased dramatically since the middle 1990s and the total number of defectors passed 20,000 by 2005 (see Table 8-1). North Korean defectors represented almost 0.05% of the whole South Korean population in 2011. While the early waves of defection were male-dominated and largely for the reason of political defection, the increase of female defectors since the late 1990s seems to show that contemporary defection stems from the need for basic survival rather than political oppression.

/ Year	Past~'89	'90~'93	'94~'98	'99~'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11.11	Total
Male	564	32	235	564	513	468	625	422	509	570	612	666	578	765	7,116
Female	43	2	71	479	625	813	1,269	961	1,509	1,974	2,197	2,261	1,798	1,767	15,776
Total	607	34	306	1,043	1,138	1,281	1,894	1,383	2,018	2,544	2,809	2,927	2,376	2,532	22,892
Share of Female(%)	7	6	23	46	55	63	67	69	75	78	78	77	76	70	69

Table 8-1 Number of North Korean defectors who enter South Korea[1]

When defectors enter South Korea, they receive several forms of supports from the South Korean government. The introduction of the policy for the North Korean defectors from the South Korea Ministry of Unification's website is as follows:

> The South Korean government welcomes the entry of all dislocated North Koreans who desire to enter South Korea. The South Korean government consults with the governments of countries where North Korean defectors stay prior to their departure to South Korea. After entering the South, they are enrolled in various programs designed to help them adjust smoothly to South Korean society. For example, they receive vocational training, educational and financial support and various incentives that help them construct and maintain a sustainable livelihood. [2]

However, despite the hospitality policy from the government, the gap between the aims of this document and its practical application makes

[1] On the website of the Ministry of Unification, http://eng.unikorea.go.kr/CmsWeb/viewPage.req?idx=PG0000000536

[2] Ibid.

defectors' lives difficult. The governmental subsidies are too modest for North Korean defectors to afford to live in a big city. Also, since they are not familiar with the South Korean economic and cultural circumstances, it is not easy for newly-arrived defectors to find regular jobs. In addition, their distinctive accents and the antagonism among many South Koreans toward North Korean society can leave defectors feeling isolated.[3]

From the external "enemies" to the internal "others"

In order to understand the representation of North Korean defectors in contemporary South Korean cinema, we need to understand how North Korea has been depicted and used more generally within the context of South Korean ideology. This ideology has attempted to build national feeling toward North Korea in both positive and negative ways. A brief overview of this ideology will help to contextualise the representational strategies of contemporary films dealing with North Korean defectors.

North Koreans have been a focus for South Korean cinema for a long while. After the Korean War of 1950-1953, South Korean films often featured North Koreans on screen, especially in war films. Just after the war, the attitudes to depict North Koreans were quite diverse. However, as

[3] There are several reports on the situation of North Korean defectors in South Korea. Refer to: "Strangers at Home: North Koreans in the South" in Crisis Group in Seoul and Brussels, "Strangers at Home: North Koreans in the South - International Crisis Group." In *Asia Report* (208), 2011. http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/north-east-asia/north-korea/208-strangers-at-home-north-koreans-in-the-south.aspx.; Jeong Joo-sin, *T'alpukcha Muncheŭi Insik [The Cognition of the Problem of North Korean Defectors]*. (Seoul: Korean Studies Information Co., Ltd, 2007)

time went by, South Korean films began to reflect a growing anti-communist ideology, which was to some extent enforced by the South Korean government, although some films such as *Stray Bullet* (Obaltan, Yoo Hyun-mok, 1960) and *Holiday* (Hyuil, Lee Man-hee, 1968) tried to avoid antagonistic representation of North Koreans.[4] Notably, from 1972 to 1992, when political censorship was at its strongest in recent South Korean history, the representation of North Koreans became very difficult and depictions of North Koreans almost disappeared, except in anti-communist propaganda films.

However, after the great commerical success of *Shiri* (Kang Je-kyu, 1998), cinematic depictions of North Koreans have re-emerged in the sphere of representation, in line with the Kim Dae-jung government's 'Sunshine policy' (Haetpyŏt Chŏngch'aek) toward North Korea, which aimed to repair relations between the two countries. *The Spy Lee Chul-jin* (Kanch'ŏp Li Ch'ŏl Chin, Jang Jin, 1999) and *Joint Security Area* (Kongdong Kyŏngpi Kuyŏk Chei Esŭ Ei, Park Chan-wook, 2000) were both produced during that crucial period, and both were great box office hits. One of the reasons for this production boom was the emergence of new generations of filmmakers who refused to accept the traditional ideological stance towards North Korea. The 1990s saw the rise of a new generation called '*Sam-Pal-Yuk Sedae*' (the 386 generation), who were born in the 1960s, educated at university in the 1980s, and were in their thirties by the 1990s. While at university, these students had directly or indirectly

[4] Lee Hyang-jin, *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Culture, Identity and Politics*.: 118

common experiences of participating in the pro-democracy movement against the South Korean dictatorship, meaning that they were politically distinguished from previous generations of South Koreans, who had grown up under the dictatorship. According to Choi Jinhee, the rise of this new generation, as well as a different atmosphere brought about by the end of military government in the 1990s, enabled the success of Korean Blockbusters depicting North Koreans.[5] In contrast to their parents' and grandparents' generations, the filmmakers of the new generation seek to address the problem of national division without resorting to anti-communism, instead approaching the problem with humanism and nationalism. They question why 'we Koreans' hate each other even though the separation of the nation was not a Korean decision. They emphasise the similarities between North and South Koreans and their brotherhood. This tendency continued until the early 2000s driven by the commercial success of these films. Of course, the new approach of these films toward North Korea was timely and valid since it can be seen as a reaction against the former military government of South Korea's policy of anti-communism. However, with the emergence of North Korean defectors in South Korean society, their beliefs of ethnic homogeneity and sameness need to be reconsidered since North Koreans are no longer seen as external enemies or brothers but internal others.

The representation of North Korean defectors in contemporary South

[5] Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs.* 2010

Korean media

Contemporary South Korean media depict North Korean defectors through the lens of human rights and ethnic homogeneity. The common image of these defectors is that some of them drift on boats on the sea, while young children mug or beg on the streets, requiring South Koreans' help based on humanity and brotherhood. In newsreels, North Korean defectors are generally depicted as those who are exposed to risks; those who desperately attempt to climb the walls of the embassy of the Republic of Korea in China. This image gives the illusion that South Korea seems to be the absolute and final destination for these defectors, but it is not true that all North Korean defectors want to go to South Korea, and for even those who do want to settle down in South Korea, South Korea is not their final destination, but just temporary place for their next destination.

Other South Korean media depict North Korean defectors in a similar way. Photos by Choi Soon-ho, a photojournalist who works for the conservative newspaper *Choson Il-bo*, provide shocking images of a boy with both legs amputated in the process of defection and a group of defectors who are forced to cross a cold river without clothes to avoid detection. These photos reveal the risks of defection and ask questions about why some North Koreans are willing to take such risks. Hence, these representations invite criticism of the North Korean government, foster South Korean tolerance of North Korean defectors, and ask South Korea to embrace the idea of a single nation. Choi Soon-ho says in an interview:

"Some Koreans who have blood bonds with 'us'[6] are still wandering in China, while some of them cannot adjust to South Korean system although they have come to South Korea. Even others of them are drifting in other countries, not even South Korea or China. We, South Koreans, must care for them." [7]

Similarly, a TV documentary, *MBC Special: 30 Days' Reports of North Korean Defectors in China* (Empissi Sŭp'esyŏl: T'alpukcha 30ilkanŭi Chungkuk Hyŏnchi Poko, 2002), featured North Korean defectors who are hiding in China and shows its audience the inhumane living conditions the defectors are forced to endure, constantly under the threat of physical violence and human trafficking. The documentary's producer, Chae Hwan-kyu, states "We Koreans have always said that reunification is the unique and common wish of our nation, but to what extent can we understand North Koreans and willingly embrace them? At least, I wanted to seek for the answer." [8] Choi and Chae emphasise that the South Korean government and people should embrace North Korean defectors because both South and North Koreans belong to the same nation. At first glance, this seems like a criticism of South Korean intolerance toward North Korean defectors. However, it also reveals the superiority of the government of South Korea over its North counterpart and generates sympathy for those who live in this state of North Korean barbarism. Therefore, these media

[6] The emphasis is from this author.
[7] Park Yoon-sik, "10nyŏnkan K'amela Lenchŭe Tamŭn Han: Ch'oesunho Sachinchŏn (Han in a Camera Lens for a Decade: The Exibition of Photograph by CHoi Soon-Ho)." In *T'ongil Hankook* (November 2008): 90-91
[8] Chae Hwan-kyu, "Chŏnŏllichŭm / Chechakki - MBC Sŭp'esyŏl T'alpukcha, 30ilkanŭi Chungkuk Hyŏnchi Poko (Jounalism/Production Diary - MBC Special, the Report on North Korean Defectors in China for 30 Days)." In *Newspapers and Broadcasting* (September 2002): 132

coverage confirm South Korean feelings of superiority.

On the other hand, a tendency to describe North Korean defectors from defectors' own points of view has recently emerged in South Korean literature. By taking North Koreans' own viewpoints, these novels reveal different views of North Korea and the separation system, while earlier novels treated these issues as a problem specific to the Korean nation. A South Korean literary critic, Kim Hyo-seok points out that works such as *Baridegi* (Hwang Seok-young, 2007) and *Rina* (Kang Young-sook, 2006) depict the life of North Korean defectors as an opportunity for the understanding of contradictory globalised capitalism through these encounters with other refugees, whilst overcoming the specificity of the situation of Korea.[9] A serial novel, *Tchillekkot* (Multiflora, 2008) by Jeong Do-sang, describes the journey of a woman who leaves North Korea against her will. She wanders the border between China and North Korea and finally settles down in South Korea. Lee Kyoung-jae states that this novel depicts the general problem of refugees who are alienated from the universal modern social system, that is, the nation-state, let alone the specificity of the status of North Korean defectors.[10]

Criticism on capitalist Seoul from others' point of view: *The Journals of Musan* (Musan Ilki, Park Jeong-beom, 2010)

[9] Kim Hyo-seok, "Kyŏngkyeŭi Pop'yŏnsŏngkwa T'ŭksusŏng : T'alpukchalŭl Taesangŭlo Han Ch'oekŭn Sosŏltŭlŭl Chungsimŭlo (The Universality and Uniqueness of 'Border' : Focused on Recent Novels about North Korean Refugee)." In *Multicultural Contents Studies* 7 (2), 2009.
[10] Lee, "Sosŏl : Tchillekkoch'ŭl P'iuki Wihae P'ilyohan Kŏstŭl [What Multiflora Needs to Blossom]." In *Silchon Munhak* 92 (December 2008).

South Korean films made since the middle 2000s strongly use their own voices to critique a South Korean society which has relegated North Korean defectors to the status of internal others. This stands in stark contrast to earlier films dealing with North Korean defectors, such as *South of the Border* (Kukkyŏngŭi Namtchok, Ahn Pan-seok, 2006) and *Crossing* (K'ŭrosing, Kim Tae-kyun, 2008), which focus on the tragedy of separation. Films made more recently prefer to focus on the domestic problems of a South Korean society which is too driven by capitalism and too hostile to new comers. The hostility against North Korean defectors is well described in *Dance Town* (Taensŭ T'aun, Jeon Kyu-hwan, 2010). *Dance Town* includes a scene in which two policemen – one of whom becomes familiar with a North Korean female defector and then rapes her later – have a chat about North Korean defectors. The policemen complain that the South Korean government offers too much support to North Korean defectors even though South Korean people like them work hard but receive no subsidy from the government. Their jealous comments about North Korean defectors allude to the reasons for South Koreans' antagonism. This distrust stems from their sense of deprivation among South Korean people, and the precariousness of their economic situation. In this situation in which indigenous people cannot be guaranteed a secure socio-economic position, North Korean defectors begin to look like predators from outside, especially those who receive a governmental subsidy which was collected by tax from the pockets of South Koreans. This sense of crisis and growing antagonism manifests in the policeman's rape of the female defector, which serves to confirm the policeman's

priority of gender and class. In this way, the film criticises South Korean's sub-imperialism whose centre of power lies in South Korean men.

Meanwhile, a rush of modernity, consumption, and decision-making that rapidly overwhelms North Korean defectors are often reported as the plights that these new comers to South Korea encounter.[11] Therefore, as is true of films on migrant workers, these films are often criticisms of an inner society (South Korean society) from the viewpoint of outsiders to that community (North Korean defectors). For instance, in *Hello, Stranger* (Ch'ŏŭm Mannan Salamtŭl, Kim Dong-hyun, 2007) Jin-wook, the male protagonist who has just escaped from North Korea and now lives in Seoul, frequently loses his way home. Jin-wook's struggle to find his way around Seoul is a metaphor for the confusion of North Korean defectors since capitalist city life makes people lose their destinations and changes North Koreans' way of life. In this regard, it is a crucial point of the film that Hye-jung, a female North Korean defector who is still independent and cynical about the South Korean way of life works as a taxi-driver who is supposed to have good ability to find a passenger's house even in a strange village. Hye-jung tries to help Jin-wook, who is a new-comer in the city, not to lose his way both practically and rhetorically. Even though the film effectively criticises a South Korean society which is driven by capitalism and hostile to others the film, however, also has a problem in its depiction of North Korean defectors as pure and pre-capitalist. As South Korean film critic Kim Young-jin points out, this kind of

[11] Crisis Group in Seoul and Brussels. "Strangers at Home: North Koreans in the South - International Crisis Group."

"obsession by the willing for goodness" prevents audiences from understanding North Korean defectors as real people.[12]

In a similar vein, *The Journals of Musan* also denounces South Korean society from the viewpoint of a North Korean defector. The film, which is based on the real story of a North Korean defector Jeon Seung-cheol, deals with the process of his corruption in a capitalist city. The film is ostensibly about questioning the problem of ethnic identity and homogeneousness through Jeon's problems with his identity card number. Joen's ID number starts with 125, a number which is given to North Korean defectors and which has become an index of discrimination, however, the film reserves its strongest criticism for capitalism and globalism as the factors which corrupt Jeon. Put differently, this film shows how the North Korean defector cannot help becoming corrupt in order to adjust to the capitalist South Korean society. Thus, the film is a critique of the dehumanising effects of capitalism and makes an appeal for a restoration of the humanity which capitalism has stripped from its characters.

This anti-capitalist perspective can be seen in several scenes. When Jeon betrays his housemate, who is also a North Korean defector, by stealing his money, he buys new suits for church gatherings. These expensive clothes are a kind of symbol of his dream of success, which cannot come true at the beginning of the film. In other words, his

[12] Kim Young-jin, "Sŏnhan Ŭichiŭi Kangpak Anilkka? [Are These Films Obsessed by Willing for Goodness?]." In *Cine21*. (10 July 2009). http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/56871.

fetishised desire for material objects is fulfilled through the abandonment of his human nature's inclination toward goodness. Moreover, Jeon's friend who dreams of going to America is depicted as a snob. As such, the film bears cynical attitudes toward a capitalist desire which causes the corruption of the main protagonist. Eventually, the film continually emphasises Jeon's pureness in order to distinguish him from the film's other secular, capitalist characters.

In particular, the film focuses on the ever-changing scenery of Seoul, which has constantly developed as an index of capitalism and obliterated the concrete existence of human beings. For instance, there is an insert shot which shows the city under construction, which lasts for about one minute before the title of the film appears on screen. In this scene Jeon, a main character, makes his first appearance but he appears to be part of the landscape itself, not a character. In other words, he seems not to be a seeing subject, but an object to be seen (Figure 8-1).



Figure 8-1 ***The Journals of Musan***

In another scene, after he was beaten by hoodlums, Jeon stands in front of a ruined house from a deconstructed village which has been demolished for city development. In this scene Jeon looks like standing at the edge of a precipice. It would seem that he cannot stand in the centre of the main stage but is continuously expelled to the periphery of the city (Figure 8-2).



Figure 8-2 ***The Journals of Musan***

Therefore this film looks like criticism of the development of South Korea, and of the forces of capitalisation, globalisation and the dehumanisation that these developments seem to bring with it. There is a noteworthy assertion in terms of the relationship between the urban experience and the conflicted emotions of North Korean defectors. Eduardo Albrecht points out in his interviews with North Korean defectors that Seoul is not a stable city, but is rapidly developing and has continuously changed during the past few decades and these ever-changing circumstances add to the

feelings of isolation and confusion among North Korean defectors.[13] According to Albrecht, several interviewees stated that they miss their rural life and the fresh air in North Korea.[14] In a similar way, by showing a sequence of continuously changing sceneries of Seoul, the film demonstrates that the rapid development and capitalisation of cities are one of the major problems faced by North Korean defectors in South Korea

Meanwhile, the film's depiction of the isolation of North Korean defectors from the development of the capitalist city is in line with the depiction of the isolation found in previous South Korean films dealing with urbanisation made between the early 1960s and the late 1970s. This period of time is often called the era of *Kŭndaehwa* (modernisation) and *Sanŏphwa* (industrialisation) promoted under the Park Jeong-hee regime. More precisely speaking, the character, Jeon, seems like an extension of the classic Korean archetype of the working class character who had been a peasant, moved to the metropolis and then soon found themselves marginalised in the modern city. During the period of *Kŭndaehwa*, numerous young people moved from rural areas to the city in order to earn money. However most of them soon fell into low-status, and found themselves expelled to the periphery of the city. A number of films made during this period, such as *The Golden Days of Young-ja* (Yŏngjaŭi Chŏnsŏng Sitae, Kim Ho-sun, 1975), dealt with these problems of a growing underclass wrought by rapid urbanisation and industrialisation

[13] Albrecht, "Experiences of State, Family and Body amongst North Korean Defectors Living in Seoul." In *North East Asia Cultural Studies* 26 (1), 2011
[14] *Ibid*.

in serious manners. Similarly, in *The Journals of Musan,* Jeon – who came from Musan, a rural village located in North Korea – loiters on the periphery of Seoul which has rapidly developed into a global megacity. In other words, Jeon's position seems to mirror the ones of rural people from the countrysides in the era of *Kŭndaehwa*. While the latter occurred in the era of the modernisation or nationalisation which was based on the nation-state ideology of the developing countries in Asia after the Second World War, the former occurs in the era of post-modernisation or transnationalisation. That is, North Korean defectors or other migrant workers seem to be like postmodern versions of the low-class peasants of the past transplanted into a system of global exchange.

Another common factor shared by those films dealing with North Korean defectors and domestic migrant workers is the use of the confessional mode. Several films dealing with the problems of rapid urbanisation have prominently deployed confessional sequences from people who have been corrupted in modern cities, most of whom have been women. These people were often forced to confess by representatives of the law. Here the confession was a means of punishment by revealing females' secrets – even though the reception of these confessions has been quite different from what the authorities intended.

On the other hand, in *The Journals of Musan*, North Korean male defectors are forced to confess in the name of God and capitalism – In South Korea, capital is often metaphorically considered a god, and

Christians often represent the upperclasses. For instance, Jeon's housemate makes money by giving speeches about his suffering as a North Korean defector, which is a form of public confession. As well, Jeon also confesses in church that he killed his friend by accident in an attempt to protect his own food when he was in North Korea. At this moment, Sookyoung, Jeon's female employer at the *Karaoke* bar with whom Jeon falls in love alone approaches and asks him to become her friend. Before hearing Jeon's confession, she asks him to pretend that they don't know each other when they meet in the church because she did not want the other members of the church to know that her family runs a *Karaoke* bar where female workers are illegally hired to entertain male guests. This scene highlights the hypocrisy of religion and community, matching the mode of confession to the mood of the church. As a result, the confession is deployed as a means for outsiders to gain recognition by admitting their "otherised" positions. Even though confession sometimes plays a role of self-expression within a closed society, here the confession looks like a part of discipline as theorised by Michel Foucault.[15] South Koreans take a power like law or god as a means of hearing and controlling other Asians' voices, while Asian others are obliged to ask for benevolence by confessing their own stories and are placed in a lower social position.

However, we should not ignore the fact that this process of

[15] In terms of the construction of power in the West, Foucault remarks the role of confession, especially in the discourse of sexuality. According to Foucault, "since the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth. […] All this helped to give the confession a central role in the order of civil and religious powers." Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. Reissue edition. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978): 58

ruination of the working class during modernisation and urbanisation was a gendered one. Most of the workers who flew into the growing cities were women, and it was mostly women who fell into the lower class occupations at that time. Furthermore, the confessional mode is most often allocated to women in public as a form of punishment. Films such as *The Body Confession* (Yukcheŭi Kobaek, Cho Gueng-ha, 1964) and *The Golden Days of Young-ja* are good examples of this trend. Women in these films often resort to sex work or are punished after being blinded by avarice. In this regard, Choi Chungmoo points out the gendered nature of nation-building in South Korea.

> The capitalistic modernization project that the South Korean military regimes carried out attempted to emulate the metropolitan materiality. At the same time, these modernization projects demanded the sacrifice of South Korean workers in the name of the nation. Such capitalistic nationalism was legitimatized by the anti-colonial discourse, which paradoxically claimed spiritual superiority and masculine integrity, while imposing chastity upon its women.[16]

In a similar manner, the status of Jeon in *The Journals of Musan* reflects that of the postcolonial female body, which is marginalised and excluded from masculine society. His corruption actually stems from his failure to integrate into Korean male society and gain power. One day, he tries to

[16] Choi, "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea.": 12

protect a group of female defectors (who are employees at the *Karaoke* bar where he works) from sexual harassment by South Korean natives (who are the *Karaoke* bar's guests) in his workplace but fails. However, his reasonable disturbance is blamed by his employer for the reason that the guests felt uncomfortable. Additionally, he is excluded from a group of North Korean male defectors who are secular enough to accept capitalist commodities, as shown in their collections of US pin-up magazines and Nike shoes, and who dream of going to more capitalist cities. Here, South Korea is conceived of as an emblem of masculinised capitalism and Jeon who cannot be accustomed with this rule is placed in the position of the feminised other. However, like his elder female counterparts who moved to the cities to find work – it is implied through his confession that Jeon's defection might stem from poverty – he falls to corruption and loses his pureness at the end.

What is intriguing here is that Jeon is double-edged in terms of gender. To begin with, he is feminised in the process of capitalistic development and post-modernisation as previously mentioned. However, he is also feminised because he fails in his attempts to perform traditional masculine activities. He fails to protect the female defectors who suffer from sexual harassment by South Korean men in the *Karaoke* bar. Combined with his frustrations after failing to save his pet, his moral corruption stems from his frustrated attempts to achieve strong masculinity.

The emasculation of the North Korean defector was a recurring

tendency in South Korean cinema made during the military regime. Kim Kyung-hyun asserts that

> The emasculation and alienation of male characters offered strong political, economy, and cultural implications for both the intense industrialization and the harsh rule of military dictators from the 1960s to the 1980s. […] These men displayed rage, but they were only hapless victims who induced melodramatic viewer identifications. They commonly came from poor urban backgrounds, and they would leave for the countryside, the temples, and ultimately the woman's womb.[17]

Similarly, Jeon's emasculinisation emblematises the individual subjectivity suppressed by the globalisation and capitalisation of Seoul. However, as Kim further explains, this subjectivity, suppressed though it is, is only allowed to specific gender, men.

> With significant strides toward political democratization and modernization came new themes that emerged out of the crisis and the loss such radical changes ushered. The quest for the self in this new period hinged upon a specifically gendered position, one that mobilized the question of subjectivity as it relates only to men. While the cinema embraced and yearned for a new historical agent, the negotiation of a post-authoritarian sensibility and value system was structurally rewoven through gendered relations that

[17] Kim Kyung-hyun, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*. (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2004): 5-6

> reinforced masculine subjects. This recuperation of male subjectivity was necessary in order for Korea to cope with its rapid shift into modern, industrial, urban, and global nationhood.[18]

Therefore, the frustration experienced by the male character in *The Journals of Musan* on one hand underscores his sense of a crisis of identity and his otherised situation, but on the other hand urges the remasculinisation of the Korean nation including North Korean men in a system of predatory capitalist development. In this regard, North Korean defectors are again contained within a gendered national imagination which has gained strength in the era of transnational capitalism.

Statelessness and reunion with social minorities: *Stateless Things* (Julʼaktongsi, Kim Kyung-mook, 2011)

While *The Journals of Musan* criticises the inhumane capitalist development and asserts the need for the masculinisation of male others, one noteworthy tendency of the representation of North Korean defectors in contemporary South Korean cinema is the portrayal of the state's exclusivity, violence and subsequently the feeling of statelessness or, following Aaron Gerow's term, nationless-ness (*Mukukjŏk-sŏng* in Korean)

[18] *Ibid.*: 6

which the defectors experience.[19] These films do not claim to include Asian others in the reconstruction of the South Korean national identity. Instead, these films show that the ongoing belief in a homogeneous nation itself could be problematic for and even violent toward its people. In this kind of film, the otherness of North Korean defectors is accentuated rather than effaced, in order to criticise the idea of unified and homogenous South Korean national identity.

As a matter of fact, this critical tendency is a popular generic feature in contemporary South Korean action films. For instance, *The Suspect* (Yongŭi-cha, Won Shin-yeon, 2014) follows a North Korean defector who served as a special agent in North Korea before being abandoned by both countries. Even in some of these action films such as *Typhoon* (T'aep'ung, Kwak Kyung-taek, 2005) and *Poongsan* (P'ungsankae, Jeon Jae-hong, 2011), main protagonists – who definitely hail from North Korea – are allocated to neither North nor South Korea, but instead choose to live on the border between the two countries, underscoring their nationless state. In these films, the characters of North Korean defectors alter North Korean spies who populated earlier Korean films dealing with national separation. Now, instead of describing the tragedy of national separation, North Koreans' non-affiliation becomes one of the main themes of these films.

In particular, their non-affiliation is supported by their South

[19] Gerow, "Consuming Asia, Consuming Japan: The New Neonationalistic Revisionism in Japan.": 88

Korean counterparts who are also evicted from their state as exemplified in *The Suspect*, in which a South Korean agent from the National Intelligence Service (NIS) tries to arrest a North Korean defector but later try to assist the defector in departing South Korea after the South Korean agent of the NIS realises that he himself has also been exploited by state conspiracies. Although this reminds us of the limitations of the representation of North Koreans in that the defector still needs a male South Korean counterpart, these films seek to expose state violence, regardless of whether that violence is inflicted by the South or the North, and thereby aim to create a transnational or nationless imagination.

It is worth noting at this point that these films often cast actors as their main protagonists who have strong and classically attractive bodies and thereby include scenes to exhibit their bodies on screen. Although this is a typical genre convention of action films telling that these characters deploy these emblems of their masculinity to fight against their enemies, the exhibition of male bodies in recent action films depicting North Korean defectors also functions as an index of their nationless-ness since their bodies must get stronger in order to *endure* the violence of state and capital rather than to *conduct* violence, as Kim So-young points out.[20] In other words, their bodies are characterised as ones enduring, rather than inflicting, violence. In this regard, their bodies are prepared for escape,

[20] Kim So-young, "Chaponchuŭiŭi Mut: Chukŭmŭi Tŭlaipŭ, P'ongnyŏk, Inchichŏk Maep'ing' [The Capitalist Mood: Death Drive, Violence and Cognitive Mapping]." In 2011 Trans: Asia Screen Culture Institute Symposium. Trans Asia Screen Culture Institute. (Seoul: Trans Asia Screen Culture Institute, 2011)

deconstruction and death.[21]

This reminds us of what Aaron Gerow notes as the "emptiness of nationality" itself found in Japanese cinema depicting Okinawa. [22] Regarding Kitano Takeshi's films about Okinawa, Gerow points out that, with Okinawa as a place of death, Kitano's films develop the impossibility of national identity and the emptiness of nationality as a concept.[23] Similarly, the bodies present in South Korean action films mentioned above cannot be rejuvenated despite hard training, border-crossing, and the gaining new citizenship, due to a failure to settle down as a citizen, which is shown as a form of death, or even the impossibility of escape to another country. In this way, these films underscore the emptiness of nationality.

An independent film, *Stateless Things,* directed by Kim Kyung-mook shares this feeling of statelessness. In its most general definition, a stateless person is a person who has citizenship in no country. However, it is a term not limited to asylum seekers, stateless ethnic minorities, and refugees. Although some stateless people hold a legal citizenship, they cannot enjoy what other citizens of that nation enjoy. Indira Goris, Julia Harrington and Sebastian Köhn identify two kinds of stateless people: *de jure* (legally) stateless – those who are not considered nationals by any state under its laws – and *de facto* stateless – those who are stateless in

[21] *Ibid.*
[22] Gerow, "From the National Gaze to Multiple Gazes: Representation of Okinawa in Recent Japanese Cinema."
[23] *Ibid*.: 293-296

practice, although not in law.[24] For instance, North Korean defectors all over the world are categorised into the *de jure* stateless, while non-heterosexual subjects can be understood as being *de facto* stateless in countries where their marriages are not recognised by law.

Stateless Things showcases both definitions of statelessness. *Stateless Things* depicts the lives of two young men, named Jun and Hyun. The film is divided into three parts. The first part is about Jun, a 1.5 generation North Korean defector.[25] He works in a gas station in Seoul with Sunhee, an illegal migrant Chosŏnjok worker. One day they rebel against their abusive boss. As a result, they are hunted by the boss. The second part of *Stateless Things* is about Hyun, the kept lover of a successful businessman, Sung-hoon. Hyun lives in an upscale apartment which Sung-hoon pays for. Sung-hoon is obsessed with Hyun although he cannot give up the "normal" life that is guaranteed him by keeping his married status. Hyun gradually becomes sick of their relationship. The last part of the film is about an encounter between Jun and Hyun.

The film firstly shows their different socio-economic positions and then interweaves these seemingly different characters under the name of stateless things in a careful manner. The contrast between the two character's lives is visually reinforced by film's cinematography. Hyun's part and Jun's part are filmed in two opposed styles. One is filmed with a

[24] Indria Goris, Julia Harrington and Sebastian Köhn, "Statelessness: What It Is and Why It Matters." In *Forced Migration Review.* (April 2009): 4

[25] The 1.5 generation North Korean defector is one who came to South Korea when she/he was a child with her or his parents, which implies that she/he did not much experienced about the North Korean regime and therefore her/his escape from North Korea was not based on her/his own decision. Most of them have been educated in South Korea.

handheld camera while the other is film with a fixed camera. This usage of different styles of camera footage serves to differentiate the two characters from each other.

Furthermore, the film does not allow for contact between the two main protagonists in the first and second parts. While Jun is forced to be adrift outside, Hyun is kept indoors. As a homosexual subject in a closet, Hyun is confined in his apartment. Even when he leaves the apartment, he goes to other enclosed places such as a *Karaoke* bar and a motel room. When Sung-hoon learns that Hyun is going out, he becomes angry. For Sung-hoon, their relationship should be invisible in public and only conducted in private. Sung-hoon's fear of discovery is also related to his fear of being "outed" as a gay man, which will result in the loss of his "normal" citizenship.

According to Seo Dong-jin, queer subjects in South Korea are forced to conceal their homosexual identity and "pass" as heterosexual subjects in public in order to avoid "contaminating" the homogeneity of public space, with expressions of queer identity relegated to the private sphere.[26] The strategy of keeping gay people out of the public sphere is well illustrated in the US by the Clinton administration's "Don't ask, don't tell" policy towards gay people serving in the military, which allowed homosexuals to serve in military, so long as they kept queer identity concealed. Denouncing Clinton's policy, Slavoj Žižek points out that

[26] Seo Dong-jin, "Inkwŏn, siminkwŏn kŭliko seksyuŏllit'i - hankukŭi sŏngchŏk sosucha untongkwa chŏngch'ihak (Human Rights, Citizenship and Sexuality)." In *Economy and Society* Autumn (67), 2005.

homosexuality is tolerated only if it is not revealed, and thus ”don't ask, don't tell” served only to keep gays in the closet.[27] Therefore, keeping Hyun inside is a way to deprive him of his full citizenship in public spaces.

On the contrary, Jun and Sunhee are mostly adrift outside. As Jun's statement that “Sunhee and I cannot find any place to stay together, so we cannot help departing from each other” obviously shows, Jun needs a shelter. However, they are alienated from the single ethnicity of mainstream society. While queer subjects like Hyun have to be hidden from public discourse, Jun and Sunhee are exposed to that discourse without the protection of sovereignty. When they drift around Seoul, they visit tourist attractions such as Seoul Tower and a palace. By visiting these spaces in this manner, they are positioned as foreigners in their own city.

It is worth remembering that Jun and Sunhee are not lost in a strange city during their wanderings. The film shows Sunhee and Jun using road maps on the street to decide where to go. However, the film does not show their journeys to the places they visit. After a scene in which they search for a place to go, the film shows a map of the place on google maps, and in the next scene, the two characters are already there. This way of shifting the protagonists' position in the city without showing how they get there demonstrates their intuitive ability to cognitively map the city.

In her analysis of *The Yellow Sea* (Hwang-hae, Na Hong-jin, 2011), Kim So-young links the border crossing body to the process of cognitive

[27] Žižek, “Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism.”

mapping.[28] Noting the post-Fordist features of neo-liberalism which accentuate flexibility and instability, Kim remarks that modern individuals are expected to be able to easily recognise and adjust to new circumstances.[29] While border-crossing bodies in contemporary Korean action films have to become strong enough to endure violence as aforementioned, the two main characters in *Stateless Things* are given the ability to cognitively map out a strange city.

Here, in the age of global capitalism, the border is rendered as a space which requires a cognitive awakening on the part of those who wish to cross them. Cognitive mapping is the ability that corresponds most closely with the era of cognitive capitalism. Cognitive capitalism requires its subjects to have a specific mapping ability in order to recognise the spatial relationship between subjects and totality. Frederic Jameson remarks that

> The Althusserian concept of ideology between subjects and totality now allows us to rethink these specialized geographical and cartographic issues in terms of social space – in terms, for example, of social class and national or international context, in terms of the ways in which we all necessarily also cognitively map our individual social relationship to local, national, and

[28] Kim, "Chaponchuŭiŭi Mut: Chukŭmŭi Tŭlaipŭ, P'ongnyŏk, Inchichŏk Maep'ing' [The Capitalist Mood: Death Drive, Violence and Cognitive Mapping]."
[29] *Ibid.*

international class realities.[30]

Therefore, Sunhee and Jun's cognitive mapping through their use of roadmaps implies their ability to recognise social and spatial relationships in South Korea. Cognitive mapping is of special significance for border-crossing bodies since they undergo displacement /emplacement and have to adjust new circumstances.

Yet, despite their capability for cognitive mapping, Sunhee and Jun cannot find their shelter, but are evicted from normal systems of exchange. Firstly, they are expelled from their workplace after rebelling against their immoral employer. However, Sunhee's illegal status makes it just as difficult for her to get out of the vicious exchange system as it is to get into the system in the first place. Jun also struggles to enter the legal exchange system. After Sunhee and Jun part ways, Jun flows into the 'abnormal' market that includes prostitution. The capitalism system of exchange forces them to put their bodies at stake in order to join "the game," whose rules they must follow in order to survive. In this way, the film problematises the system of transnational capitalist exchange as well as the violence the state can inflict on its "othered" subjects.

In this regard, Hyun and Jun are continuously trapped in the vicious circle of a system which only allows for their "bare life." This cycle is inscribed in the film's structure. In a sense, the structure of the film is

[30] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991)

closed, resembling a Mobius strip, where the outside cannot be distinguished from the inside. In the first scene of the first part of the film, Jun and Sunhee are riding a motorcycle, which is passing by a train. Then, the camera that follows Jun and Sunhee approaches the train and seems to jump into it. Inside of the train, Jun is distributing a promotional flyer. In fact, there is a time gap between outside and inside of train. Yet, the film seamlessly juxtaposes the present and the past in the same shot.

This elision of time difference through spatial movement also happens in part two. In the beginning of this second section, Hyun wakes up in a messy room and starts to take a video of the room. Then, the image captured by Hyun's camera is shown on the screen. When Hyun's camera shoots a door, a doorbell rings out of frame. This is followed by a shot of Sung-hoon coming in through the door, which is taken by the film's camera, not Hyun's camera. The footage shot by Hyun's camera is the present (or the future), while the footage shot by the "main" camera is the past (or the present). However, there is no obvious seam between the past and the present. These sequences demonstrate the power of the past to continuously penetrate the present and vice versa, to the point that there is no distinction between them. There is no outside. This closed structure accentuates the characters' confinement in the capitalist system. This sealed depiction thus begs a question: Can they break this vicious cycle, and if so, how?

The resolution to this dilemma is alluded to by the emphasis of the synchronicity amongst the stateless people in his film. Hyun and Jun

do not meet until the last part of *Stateless Things* and seem initially to be totally alienated from each other. However, they are continuously entering each other's space through the interference of fragmented shots and intertwined narration. For example, in part one when Jun and Sunhee go to the Seoul Tower, the voice of Hyun appears in subtitles. Jang Byung-won invokes Fredric Jameson's concept of the "irony of synchronous monadic simultaneity" in order to explain this interference:

> Irony of synchronous monadic simultaneity means that no one knows each phenomenon around the subject happens contemporaneously and links to other phenomena in the modern age since the subject cannot see a universe from the viewpoint of observer as detached from the self. Therefore, postmodern text utilises the narrative of contemporaneity as the means of narrativising the human condition.[31]

In this way, *Stateless Things* tries to map the synchronicity of minority experiences by means of the intervening of unmatched images and sounds with what shows on screen.

This becomes clear in the last scene of *Stateless Things*. In part three, Jun and Hyun finally meet each other in Hyun's apartment in order to commit suicide together. They close all exits and light coal briquettes. In the dark, they kiss and caress each other, waiting for death, which implies

[31] Jang Byung-won, "Otiopitiochŏk K'ŏmingaus [Coming-Out through audio & video]." In *Cine21* (22 March 2012) http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/69321

their bodies' union, and at that moment the time structure of the film starts to change. This unspooling of conventional time is rendered by rewinding the film: On the road where Jun once passed by, cars slowly move backward in rain – this rain implies it might be the same day Jun passed by in a rainstorm.

This reversed sequence is followed by a flashback, but with the roles of Jun and Hyun switched: Hyun stands where Jun had previously stood, and Jun stands where Hyun had stood. By deconstructing the conventional chronological time structure of these scenes, the film implies the possibility of survival and a way out of the closed system. In the end, one person survives the suicide attempt and the other dies: however, the film does not give a clear indication of which character survives. Therefore, this merging of death and rebirth might represent the symbolic rebirth of stateless people through a surrendering and unifying of their bodies.

Indeed, *Stateless Things* makes several references to twins and doubling. The Korean title, *Jult'aktongsi* means that both hen and chick should work together for hatching, from inside and outside. The director's statement for the catalogue of the 2011 Seoul Independent Film Festival remarks that the title also reflects the hope that young adults can overcome their economic predicaments and unstable future through their solidarity.[32] Here, Jun and Hyun's bodily contact as a form of complete recognition between minorities makes possible their solidarity and

[32] Seoul Independent Film Festival, 2011

coming-out of the system.

The empathy and solidarity between stateless things becomes one of main tropes in the depiction of North Korean defectors and efficiently shows the effects of state violence committed in the name of homogenisation of the nation. For instance, *Dance Town* also critiques a South Korean society which is harsh and unwelcoming to minorities, linking a female North Korean defector to a disabled man and a pregnant juvenile girl. This linking is not just limited to their relationship, but also provokes empathy and analogy among them. Their empathy is clarified when the North Korean defector finds out, after being raped by a policeman, that her husband has been beheaded in North Korea, while at the same time the pregnant teenage girl lays down to dry grasses in another place, as if she plans to commit suicide.

This kind of transference of sad emotions among the protagonists seems to indicate that the problems which North Korean defectors face are not limited to them, but the problems are also shared by various South Korean minorities. In case of *Statless Things*, the solidarity between minorities especially focuses on the criticism of the homogeneous nationality, regarding the demand for the heterogeneity of queer subjects. Therefore, the minority solidarity in *Stateless Things* is an attempt to intervene in the previous Korean systems which are characterised by homogeneity.

Conclusion

As the number of North Korean defectors in South Korea have increased during last two decades, they can no longer be understood as enemies nor estranged brothers but as internal others. The representation of North Korean defectors in South Korean media is generally understood through a focus on the problems of national separation. However, the films I have discussed in this chapter demonstrate that the predicament of North Korean defectors cannot be explained through such a singular focus. Instead, this issue should be considered through the context of worldwide migration across the globe as well as in the specific case of South Korea. As I investigated through an examination of *The Journals of Musa*n, some contemporary films have come to depict North Korean defectors as newcomers who are struggling to come to terms with urban life in a globalised era. However, these films often repeat an assertion of the need for a remasulinised national identity. Here the otherness of North Korean defectors is confined within the discourse of a national crisis, as once again examined in my exploration of *The Journals of Musan*.

Meanwhile, some films such as *Stateless Things* and several action films depicting North Korean defectors exhibit their irreducible otherness in order to problematise violence inherent to the ideology of a homogeneous Korean nation. In particular, *Stateless Things* questions the belief in the homogeneous national history by means of breaking up the chronological time structure of the film and juxtaposing heterogeneous parts of space-time within the same frame. Of course, the assertion of a

common national identity is in practice helpful to North Korean defectors against the everyday discrimination they experience in South Korean society. However, the hasty conclusion of same nation to erase their otherness can also erase and hide the violent reality of the ideology of homogeneous nationality. Therefore, the tactic of *Stateless Things* is noteworthy since it shows the possibility of co-existence while not lapsing into a reiteration of the existing and problematic belief in a national homogeneity.

Chapter 9. Searching for Traces of Absence: the Representation of Korean Diaspora in China and Central Asia

Non-native ethnic Koreans—especially those from China and Central Asia—are widely represented in the South Korean mediascape in comedy shows, TV soap operas and various genre films. Rendered as outsiders, they stand apart from the native Korean majority. Their linguistic and cultural differences are often used for comic purposes,[1] although their perceived innocence is sometimes admired by South Koreans. They are frequently depicted in settings of domestic privation or urban poverty, emphasising their underprivileged status.[2]

Such frequent coverage in popular culture reflects the recent phenomenon of returning ethnic Koreans affected by neoliberal world economic policies. Most non-native Koreans are descended from emigrants who moved from the Korean peninsula to China and Russia during the Japanese colonial regime. Their migration was caused by two factors: firstly, the Japanese occupation in the early twentieth century[3] and secondly, neoliberalism since the 1990s. Due to the time gap between two

[1] Yeon Seung, ""Utŭm Kodŭ"ro Sopidoenŭn Chosŏnjok (Chosŏnjok Is Consumed Only As a Comic Code)," In *Seoul Economy* (21 August 2013).

[2] For instance, *Hide & Seek* (Sumbakkokchil, dir: Huh Jung, 2013) presents a Chosŏnjok man and other South (east) Asian workers to allude to the fearful and gloomy mood of a shabby apartment on the brink of demolition, while *Secretly, Greatly* (Ŭnmilhage Widaehage, dir: Chang Ch'ŏl-su, 2013) uses a Chosŏnjok barber to represent innocent people in a poor village where North Korean spies secretly live.

[3] The earliest emigration to these regions was reported from the 1860s onward, before the Japanese occupation started (Oh Jung-eun et al., "Migration Profile of the Republic of Korea." IOM Migration Research&Training Centre, 2012. http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/MP_Korea.pdf: 50). Yet, most numbers of emigrants moved to China and Russia during the Japanese occupation period, and thereby I suggest Japanese colonisation is one of the main reasons for the early emigration.

events, these expatriated Koreans raise a question about Koreans' belief in ethnic nationalism. On the one hand, they are same with native Koreans in the sense of the *Han* ethnic.[4] On the other hand, they are otherised from the modern history of Korean nation after liberation in 1945. Therefore, they are Koreans with distinguished cultural and even national backgrounds. Here I will discuss how contemporary South Korean films explore these complexities through their representation of Chosŏnjok [Chinese-Korean] and Koryŏ-in [ethnic Koreans from Russia or Central Asia].

In the past, ethnic Koreans living in other Asian countries had few connections with South Korea due to the post-colonial regime or Cold War conditions,[5] and their representation in South Korean media has been largely absent. Recent Korean films depicting non-native ethnic Koreans ruminate on that absence, although it is rarely explored in the discursive sphere of cinema. This chapter examines how contemporary South Korean films depict the historical absence of Chosŏnjok and Koryŏ-in from Korean screens, allowing us to expand the discursive space hitherto restricted to the discussion of represented images.[6]

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[4] *Han* ethnics in general are known as one of Chinese ethnics, but Korean ethnics are called *Han* ethnics as well, with different Chinese character.

[5] While some ethnic Koreans returned after liberation from Japan in 1945 or after the Korean War, ethnic Koreans in China and Russia were initially reluctant to return since they believed their countries should be reunited (Yoon In-jin, "Understanding the Korean Diaspora from Comparative Perspectives", in Kim Shin-dong ed., *Multiculturalism in Asian Culture Forum*, 2006; Kim German, "Korean Diaspora in Kazakhstan: Question of Topical Problems for Minorities in Post-Soviet Space." In *Modernity and Nations in Eastern Europe and Central Eurasia (2)*, no. 89, 2003), and were later prevented from returning because of uneasy diplomatic relations between South Korea and China/Russia.

[6] Some scholars such as Kim So-young and Kim Young-jin argue that positive and negative images are two sides of the same coin. Kim, "Tainchong, Tamunhwa Sahoe: Ŏlkul, K'ŭllochŭŏp, Koemulsŏng [Multiracial and Multicultural Society: Face, Close-Up,

In particular, this chapter investigates the way in which films express time-space to represent the overseas Korean diaspora. Their absence in Korean history could be inscribed in the configuration of the diasporic space. As Hamid Naficy notes in *An Accented Cinema*, diasporic films differ in the way they deal with time and space. An accented cinema is a concept designated to comprehensively indicate such films like diapora and exile.[7] Naficy points out that accented films inevitably deal with placement since the process of border crossing is eventually related to emplacement and displacement.[8] Yet, the placement in accented films links to historical events, and thus the configuration of space coincides with time. In this sense, Naficy uses Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope (time-space). He suggests three types of the chronotope. 'Open chronotopes' exhibit utopian, idyllic and prelapsarian nature, linking to homeland. On the contrary, 'closed chronotopes' cathect control, distance and unfamiliarity, with relevance of host land. Lastly, he mentions 'thirdspace chronotopes'. Thirdspace chronotopes are transitional and transnational sites like borders, airports and train stations or transportation vehicles such as buses, ships and trains, relating to border crossing and epistoloarity.[9]

Monsterness]."; Kim, "Sŏnhan Ŭichiŭi Kangpak Anilkka? [Are These Films Obsessed by Willing for Goodness?]."Negative images of racial, ethnic, national others represented on screen can reinforce otherness, whereas positive images can reduce South Korean's bias against them. Yet positive images are often criticised because of stereotyped representations of victims or good people. Therefore positive images should also be considered as emphasising otherisation.

[7] Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*

[8] *Ibid.*: 152

[9] *Ibid.*: 154

Based on Naficy's categorisation, I expand the three types of chronotopes to the way of understanding the relationship between Korean diaspora and Korean nation. To do so, the chapter takes three films—*Let the Blue River Run* (P'urŭn Kangŭn Hŭllŏra, Kang Mi-ja, 2008), *The Yellow Sea* (Hwanghae, Na Hong-jin, 2010) and *Hanaan* (Hanaan, Pak Ruslan, 2012)—as its main case studies. The films investigated here also accentuate the way they show their own vision in terms of narrative time-space: *Let the Blue River Run* renders an everlasting mythical time-space (open chronotopes) to heal a historical absence, emphasising homogeneity amongst Korean ethnics, while *The Yellow Sea* represents borders as a fugitive time-space (thirdspace chronotopes) symbolising a discontinuity between homeland and host society. *Hanaan* (closed chronotopes and thirdspace chronotopes) shows a contemporary Uzbek society upon which ethnic Koreans' diasporic history is inscribed. In comparing these films, this chapter explores the unevenness of diasporic representation, revealing the impossibility of suturing that diaspora into a homogeneous Korean ethnicity.

Brief summary of the status of overseas Koreans in South Korea

In general, overseas Koreans receive permission to freely enter and depart South Korea, which is codified in the Act on the immigration and legal status of overseas Koreans (Hereafter, referred to as overseas Korean act) amended as of December 2000.[10] However, this free visit and the right of

[10] Refer to Korea Immigration Service. http://www.immigration.go.kr/HP/IMM80/index.do

sojourner did not include Korean Chinese and Koreans in Central Asian countries since this act limited the definition of overseas Koreans to those who left South Korea after the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948 and their decedents. Therefore, those who left the Han peninsula before 1948 were not recognised as overseas Koreans and, thereby, most Chosŏnjok and Koryŏ-in were excluded from the protection of this law. Subsequently, those who visited South Korea to find a job with a tourist visa or temporary working permission visa easily fell into illegal status. Before the amendment of the overseas Korean act in 2004 which expanded the legal definition of overseas Koreans able to get F-4 visas to include Chosŏnjok and Koryŏ-in, members of these groups demanded admission as overseas Koreans and by appealing to ethnic homogeneity. Their precarious status in South Korea around that time is well captured in *Jongro Winter* which I examined in chapter 4.

In 2007, Chosŏnjok and Koryŏ-in could receive visit and employment (H-2) visas that grants a stay of five years and three year's working in designated industries.[11] Yet, although these amendments improved the rights of Chosŏnjok and Koryŏ-in in South Korea, the law is still restricted to them by limitations placed on their age, skills and the industries in which they can work. Nonetheless, the population o Chosŏnjok and Koryŏ-in continues to grow. Now, Chosŏnjok constitutes the largest group of ethnic Koreans with foreign nationality residing in South Korea, reaching to 477,163 amongst the total number of 550,931 as

[11] Oh et al., "Migration Profile of the Republic of Korea.": 52

of 2012.[12]

While their legal status has improved, the recognition of Chosŏnjok and Koryŏ-in is still ambiguous and even discriminative. Unlike other overseas Korean compatriots, Chosŏnjok and Koryŏ-in are at times regarded as strangers rather than beings of the ethnicity. They are often regarded as criminals, killers or predators who steal native Koreans' jobs.[13] Female migrant brides from these groups, who are popular among Korean male grooms due to similarity of language and appearance, are also criticised as those who cheat naïve Korean rural men in order to just achieve Korean citizenship. Actually, they have more freedom of working and staying compared to foreign migrant workers who are not ethnic Koreans, yet they are treated worse than other overseas Koreans. Oh Jung-eun et al., remind us of their ambiguous position, saying that

> With respect to low skilled ethnic Korean immigrants [mostly from China and Central Asia], the debate on whether to mange and regulate them as foreign workforce or treat them equally with other Korean compatriots has been around for as long as migration of ethnic Koreans has appeared in the political arena. Current policy, while not taking an explicit position on this matter, takes into consideration of both views.[14]

[12] Korea Immigration Service. Recited in Hong Yihua, Korean Chinese in Multicultural South Korea: Identity Challenges and Korean Nation-Building. 2013: 16

[13] Crimes by ethnic Koreans especially from China are often generalised as the crime of the ethnic group, such native Korean's response on the case of a murderer, Oh won-chun like "scared of *Chosŏnjok*" or "How much do they [*Chosŏnjok*] despise our country?.""Pakch'unbong Owŏnch'un, Chosŏnjok Sarinma Ŏlgulsajin Hwadŭltchak [The Pictures of Chosŏnjok Murderers, Park Chun-Bong and Oh Won-Chun Scared]," In Newstown (13-12-2014). In addition, the relatively low paid employment of ethnic Koreans from China and Central Asia often causes antagonism from the native Korean workers especially in the construction industry. Refer to "<kuknae Chosŏnjok 70man> No-No Kaltŭng Nŏmŏya [<700 Thousands Chosŏnjok> Should Overcome the Conflict between Labours]," In *Yeonhap News*, (04 February 2015).

[14] Oh et al., "Migration Profile of the Republic of Korea.": 57

In their precarious position within South Korean society, these returning ethnic Koreans problematise the concept of ethnic nationalism based on ethnic homogeneity. As well, they also raise questions about to what extent and in what ways multiculturalism can be applied to South Korean society as a whole. Those films that will be dealt with below grapple with these questions, dealing explicitly with questions of sameness and otherness.

Let the Blue River Run, mythologised time-space of ethnicity

Based on a novella and a novel by Ryang Choon-sik and Kim Nam-hyun (two Chosŏnjok high school teachers in Yanbian, northern China) *Let the Blue River Run* was adapted and directed by South Korean independent filmmaker, Kang Mi-ja. Although the film generally remains faithful to the original texts, there are differences due to the altered medium and the different perspectives of the authors: The novels are written by Chosŏnjoks living in China, and the film is made by South Koreans from a South Korean homeland perspective. In this process, the Chosŏnjok, the novels' narrator, is otherised in the film.

The main theme of *Let the Blue River Run*—both the books and the film—novels and film is a critique of South Korean capitalism and inhumanity, as well as sadness for the destruction of the Chosŏnjok community. In the mid-1990s, Chosŏnjok literature describing social change via its connection with South Korea emerged as a new genre in fiction. Within this new genre, several works strongly criticise South

Korea's hierarchical attitudes towards Chosŏnjok and the inhumanity of its capitalism.[15] The original novels on which the film is based are positioned amongst these. Like the books, the film sketches out the rapidly changing Korean ethnic society in Yanbian under the influence of South Korea. The plot is as follows: Ch'ŏl-i lives with his father while his mother works in South Korea. He has a girlfriend named Sugi. One day, Ch'ŏl-i buys a motorcycle and this makes him distant from Sugi. In the end, they are reconciled, but the family hears news that his mother died in South Korea.

The film contrasts South Korea as an avaricious capitalist city to Yanbian as an uncontaminated idyllic area which is about to be encroached by South Korean capitalist invasion. This invasion is vividly shown through Ch'ŏl-i's classmates. While their parents suffer from hard working and exploitation in South Korea, they go crazy for South Korean goods, pop culture and capitalist values. Here South Korea is depicted as destroying the Chosŏnjok's communitarian virtue. The film thus criticises the infiltration of South Korean culture and economy into the community. The motorcycle Ch'ŏl-i bought culminates the sense of crisis. Here the motorcycle signifies materialist desire, triggered by money which has been sent by Ch'ŏl-i's mother, who is working in South Korea. Yu Meng-yao points out that this reflects the way South Korea facilitates material desires in the Chosŏnjok community.[16] In this way, the film shows new

[15] Choi Woo-gil, "The Korean Minority in China: The Change of Its Identity." In *Development and Society* 30 (1) 2001.
[16] Yu Meng-yao, 'Yellow Sea—A Floating Home of Chinese Korean Minority', in *Diasporas: Exploring Critical Issues*. presented at the Diasporas: Exploring Critical Issues, (Mansfield

connections to the capitalist homeland (South Korea) causing the growing materialism of the Chosŏnjok society.

Meanwhile, the film's chronotopes remind us of what Naficy calls 'open chronotopes'. Here, Tuman River and Paektu Mountain are summoned as the Great Nature, and subsequently, a place of healing. The Tuman River symbolises the Chosŏnjok community, connoting purification, healing and a noble sprit, shown in the dialogue, in narration and in images of the river. While Ch'ŏl-i becomes blind in his materialist desire after buying his motorcycle, Sugi retains the spirit of the river, eventually leading Ch'ŏl-i back to the place he belongs. In the first scene, they promise 'to be blue like the river forever', but when Ch'ŏl-i buys his motorcycle, the spirit of the river becomes contaminated.

The death of Ch'ŏl-i's mother Su-yŏn explicitly illustrates the threat posed by South Korea to the noble spirit of the blue river. Su-yŏn, like Sugi, symbolises the river. Here, the Korean nation is identified with feminised nature as Naficy argues that all accented films are feminine texts in a sense.[17] The film implies that Su-yŏn's departure for South Korea indicates the pursuit of the river's dream and a desire not to become stagnant, a dream that is frustrated in South Korea, alluding to the blue river's contamination. The story suggests that contact with South Korea will have negative consequences which will eventually bring about the destruction of the Chosŏnjok community.

However, the film confines the Chosŏnjok community into the

College, Oxford, UK, 2012)

[17] Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*: 154

prelasarian space. Put differently, South Korea is positioned in the contemporary time-space while Yanbian is rendered as the place which should be never-ever changing. In this regard, the meaning of Ch'ŏl-i's motorcycle needs to be reconsidered. What is problematic in the motorcycle is not just its connotations of materialist desire but its accentuation of the desire for mobility. The Chosŏnjok society should be never changing from the perspective of South Koreans. This becomes clear through the death of Su-yŏn[18] who crossed the border. In the film, mobility means death and destruction.

What causes the desire to confine the Chosŏnjok community in the prelapsarian place is the reversed position of the film's speaker. The film was made by South Korean filmmakers, which reverses the relationship between homeland and host society compared to that of the novels' Chosŏnjok authors. South Korea, the homeland of the Chosŏnjok, is presented as if it is host society while China, the host society of the Chosŏnjok, is obliterated in the film. Eventually, Yanbian is imagined as the idealised homeland of Chosŏnjok in the film, but actually the idealisation of Yanbian is done by South Koreans. In this regard, Kim Sohye describes the film as a 'reversed accented cinema'.[19] In this way, the film reverses the relationship between host society and homeland, erasing the absence of Korean diaspora in modern South Korean history as well as blurring the hierarchal relationship amongst Korean ethnicities.

[18] Su-yŏn's death is not clearly shown on sceen, but it is implied through close-up of Su-yŏn's face, standing on the rooftop when fleeing from immigration officers.
[19] Kim, "2000nyŏndae Ihu Hankuk Tokrip Yŏnghwa-ŭi Tiasŭp'ora Chaehyŏn-e Kwanhan Pip'anchŏk Koch'al [A Critical Review of the Representation of Diaspora in Korean Independent Films: Our School and Let the Blue River Run]."

This becomes clear through a description of Su-yŏn's time-space in reverse order until the setting reverts to the day she left Yanbian for Seoul. This reverse ends at the Tuman River, where her journey started. So the time-space of contemporary South Korea returns to the Tuman River of the past, depicting the river as the symbolic origin of Korea and reversing the relationship between homeland and host society as Yanbian becomes the symbolic homeland for South Koreans. Naficy remarks that the impossibility of return and the destruction of the homeland is substituted by means of "the structural authority and certainty that only nature seems capable of providing: timelessness, boundlessness, reliability, stability and universality."[20] The film searches for the place of stability which could not be found in the present in South Korea. Yanbian, the village of Chosŏnjok community, is confined as ideal homeland in the imagination of South Koreans. Here what Su-yŏn represents is South Koreans rather than Chosŏnjok. As well, those who lost their land are South Koreans, rather than the Chosŏnjok, who symbolise a lost South Korean past as the river becomes the mythologised and idealised origin of Korean ethnicity.

During the Japanese colonial regime the land to the north of the Korean Peninsula was regarded as the origin of Korean ethnicity by Korean nationalists like Shin Chaeho. According to Andre Schmid, Manchuria (the northeast part of China in which Yanbian is located) was subsumed into the imagination of the Korean nation of the time, and was

[20] Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*: 156

even "linked to its mythical progenitor, Tan'gun, [so that] a novel way of claiming Manchuria as central to the nation arose."[21] However, after liberation from Japan and in the subsequent the Cold War, Yanbian was expunged from the collective memory of Korean ethnicity and existed only in the nation's history. Therefore, the interpellation of the Chosŏnjok as the origin of the nation confines them to the past again, erasing the differences within the same ethnicities. Without directly addressing this transposition, *Let the Blue River Run* appropriates diasporic history as South Korea's own history, obliterating their absence and their different histories and reducing them to ethnic homogeneity.

At the end of the film, Ch'ŏl-i's family and Sugi find out about Su-yŏn's death. At the point of realisation, the film ends with a freeze-frame on Sugi's shocked face. The director and some critics point out the ending is an excuse to avoid idealizing or romanticizing the community.[22] However, I would say that it shows the film's desire to halt and preserve a moment of purity impossible to maintain by the family, which has suffered bereavement. The freeze-frame therefore confines their lives into non-contemporary time-space both physically and metaphorically, leaving them posed there. Although they are depicted as sharing their ethnicity

[21] Schmid, Korea between Empires, 1895-1919, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2002): 19

[22] The director says "some people who criticise the film would emphasise a return to an innocent period, but if that's what I'd wanted to say, I wouldn't have had a sad ending in the film." Jeong Jae-hyuk, "Intŏpwu: Kang Mi-ja, Yŏnpyŏn-ŭl Mihwahachi Anŭryŏ haetta [Interview: Kang Mi-ja says "I tried not to idealise Yanbian]." In *Cine21*. (29 October 2009) http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/57992. Film critic Maeng Soo-jin also supports this view, saying that the abrupt, shocking ending contradicts the expectations of a happy outcome and so the film reflects reality. Maeng Soo-jin, "Rivyu: P'urŭn Kangŭn Hŭllŏra (Review: Let The Blue River Run)," In *KIFV* 38, 2009: 79.

with the South Koreans, the Chosŏnjok community remains frozen in the past. Put another way, Chosŏnjok could be summoned under the name of same ethnicity but this becomes feasible by relegating them to an idealised version of South Korea's lost past.

The Yellow Sea,[23] discontinuous time-space

While *Let the Blue River Run* idealises the Korean ethnic community in China as the origin of the Korean nation, *The Yellow Sea* in contrast revolves around its otherness and irreducibility into one single ethnicity by rendering thirdspace chronotopes. The film depicts the journey of Ku-nam, a Chosŏnjok taxi driver, from Yanbian to South Korea, taking its cue from the action cinema genre and alluding to the impossibility of returning home. Like *Let the Blue River Run*, *The Yellow Sea* reverses the relationship between homeland and host society; Yanbian is the Chosŏnjok's home and Seoul is a strange city to them. However, *The Yellow Sea* depicts Yanbian as a bleak location rather than an idealised community, revealing the socio-economic predicament that the Korean diaspora faced.

The film consists of four chapters entitled 'Taxi Driver', 'Murderer', 'Chosŏnjok' and 'the Yellow Sea'. In Yanbian, Ku-nam is debt-ridden after his wife leaves for South Korea to obtain work. He accepts a proposal from Myŏn'ga, the boss of a Chosŏnjok gang, to go to South Korea and kill a Korean named Professor Kim to repay a debt and to see his wife – but his plan fails when another assassin kills the professor first and Ku-

[23] The film has a Korean version and a director's cut, or the overseas release, which deletes several scenes as well as adds a geopolitical explanation of Yanbian and South Korea. This thesis is based on the Korean release version.

nam is pursued as a suspect in the murder enquiry by the police and the real killers chase him because they want to erase any trace of their criminal act.

Yanbian is depicted as a place of lawlessness, tenuously linking the perception of Yanbian as an anarchic zone with the preceding Manchurian Western genre.[24] The film's mood is, however, much darker, showing a place filled with sickness and death rather than a place to inspire vitality. The sickness of the city is compared to a dog with rabies, which is a recurrent motif throughout the film. Ku-nam's voice-over narration in the opening scene says:

> When I was eleven years old, rabies spread throughout the neighbourhood. Our dog caught the disease. It bit its mother to death first, then it bit to death whatever it could kill with its mouth. When the neighbours prepared to kill it, it ran off. After a few days, that dog showed up again looking extremely thin. There was no strength left in its black eyes. But it stared at me like that for a while and then slowly lay down and died. I buried that dog behind the neighbourhood and the dog that was buried in the ground was dug up that night and eaten by the elders. The reason why I thought of that dog all of the sudden is because rabies which was never spread after that is spreading again. Rabies is spreading.

[24] Although the representation of Yanbian is a quite a new phenomenon in South Korea, the region's old name 'Manchu' was frequently presented as a lawless area in 1960s and 1970s South Korean cinema. Influenced by Spaghetti Westerns and Japanese Sukiyaki Westerns, South Korea developed a B-movie Manchurian Western (*Manchu Wesut'ŏn*) genre set during the Japanese colonial period (Oh Seung-wook, *Han'guk Aeksyŏn Yŏnghwa (*Korean Action Cinema), (Seoul: Salim, 2003). This B-movie action genre is mostly set in the Japanese colonial period and shows western style action. The anarchic space was rendered as a place to inspire *Hwal-lyŏk* (vitality) to those who can hardly imagine beyond border owing to the geopolitical condition in the Cold War and post-colonial era. Kim So-young, "Genre as Contact Zone: Hong Kong Action and Korean *Hwalkuk.*" In *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, edited by Meaghan Morris and Siu Leung Li. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). The Manchuria Western genre has almost disappeared since the 1980s but it was re-ignited when two films – *Dachimawa Lee* (Tachimawa Ri, Ryu Seung-wan, 2007) and *The Good, The Bad, The Weird* (Choŭn Nom, Nappŭn Nom, Isanghan Nom, Kim Ji-woon, 2008).

The narration shows the cruelty and voracity of people who could dig up a buried dog and eat it. The voice-over narration is followed by the image of the Yanbian's street dog market, where dogs salivate, bark and fight. As Ku-nam walks through the stalls, Myŏn'ga sits in the middle of the market surrounded by wild-eyed dogs as if he was their king. Here, Yanbian appears shrouded in sickness while Ku-nam identifies with the dead dog put down by humans.

Rabies is a metaphor for the significant social change South Korea wrought in Yanbian, evidenced through the destruction of family in the community. Ku-nam hears nothing from his wife for six months, and lives alone in the city while his young daughter lives with Ku-nam's mother in the countryside. Ku-nam is obsessed with the idea that his wife is having an affair in South Korea, depicted in a recurrent nightmare he has about his wife having sex with a stranger. Yu Meng-yau argues that this paranoid dream sequence shows South Korea to be a location of pleasure and consumption for Chosŏnjok people.[25] Ku-nam's nightmare also reveals a subconscious fear and simultaneous attraction of capitalism, sex and secular desire, which is signified by South Korea. The dream scene is composed of several fragmented cuts, and it recurs and begins to encroach into his life, standing as an expression of paranoid Yanbian, wherein South Korea has abruptly imposed itself onto people's lives.

Meanwhile, South Korea is represented as a place that feeds on

[25] Yu, 'Yellow Sea—A Floating Home of Chinese Korean Minority': 10

Yanbian's sickness as well as stimulating it. The film does not present the relationship between South Korea and the Chosŏnjok community as a simple attacker-victim one. Instead, both communities conspire to forward each other's interests. This is embodied in the characters of Kim T'ae-wŏn, a Korean gang boss, and Myŏn'ga, a Chosŏnjok gang boss. At first, they compete to kill Professor Kim and find Ku-nam, but they later negotiate to kill Ku-nam together. In this way, the South Korean black market and the Chosŏnjok's black market join forces.

However, the film also explores otherness, shown by the temporary and arbitrary nature of the gangsters' alliance which acts to emphasise their difference. While Kim T'ae-wŏn has sophisticated and civilised manners, Myŏn'ga and his men show extreme brutality and lack of control. Cho Seongyong remarks that:

> The biggest irony in the story comes from the fact that the urban South Korean gangsters are quite unprepared for the beastly brutality of Myŏn'ga and his less sophisticated men. Besides a hatchet and a knife, Myŏn'ga wields a big animal bone, which incidentally comes handy to him during one cringe-inducing fight scene, with no mercy to the guys who dare to stand on his way.[26]

The film's brutality, and Myŏn'ga's gang's use of 'uncivilised' tools such as axes, hatchets and an animal bone, fuelled controversy due to the film's negative portrayal of Chosŏnjok as uncivilised and violent people. Controversy continued after its press screening despite the director's

[26] Cho Seongyong, "A Taxi Driver Goes to South." In *Roeserebert* (March 17 2012). www.roserebert.com

explanation that it was simply a cinematic device, and he conceived this film out of affection for the Chosŏnjok.[27] However, I would argue that the violence actually emphasises the heterogeneity of the South Koreans and the Chosŏnjok community rather than representing the community as inherently uncivilised. The Chosŏnjok are dangerous to native South Koreans not because they are barbaric but because they are different from the South Koreans, who don't know how to tame them (Chosŏnjok). Ahn Si-hwan points out that:

> As it is shown that Professor Kim gives money to Ku-nam, we generally consider the Chosŏnjok as the objects of benevolence. By doing so, we try to tame Chosŏnjok who cannot be reduced into homogeneity within familiar images to us [South Koreans]. Myŏn'ga displays strangeness or the other side of Chosŏnjok's image which is oppressed under familiarity. […] If Myŏn'ga is the object of fear, it is not because he uses a big animal bone as his weapon, but because he presents otherness which cannot be tamed within the familiar images [of Chosŏnjok such as innocent victims or good and diligent people].[28]

The scene showing Myŏn-ga's brutality is included in the 'Chosŏnjok' chapter, which starts from Kim T'ae-wŏn's viewpoint (the other chapters start with Ku-nam's viewpoint). The brutality is therefore what Kim experiences, and from his viewpoint, Chosŏnjok represents a sense of otherness he cannot share. For instance, when Kim T'ae-wŏn encounters

[27] Kim Kyŏng-min, ""Hwanghae" Na Hong-jin Kamdok, "Chosŏnjok Piha? Aachŏng Itkie Mandŭn Yŏnghwa" (Na Hong-jin Says "Did I Abase Chosŏnjok? I Didn't Mean It")." In *Mydaily*. (20 December 2010)

[28] Ahn Si-hwan, "Chŏnyŏng kaekchan: Pungsokhwanŭn Chidokhayŏtŭna [Film Critics: Although the Scenery Is Harsh]." In *Cine21*, (13 January 2011a) http://www.cine21.com/news/view/mag_id/64386

Myŏn'ga's men at the hotel lobby they are neither cautious nor reticent, even in a strange city, showing that South Koreans have no control over the Chosŏnjok. The emphasis on their otherness paradoxically enhances the fact that the Chosŏnjok cannot be reduced to a homogeneous ethnicity.

While Kim T'ae-wŏn and Myŏn'ga represent South Koreans and the Chosŏnjok community, Ku-nam is someone who cannot be assimilated into either side. From this vantage point, Kim Soyoung[29] and Ahn Si-hwan[30] regard him as exemplifying a refugee or *homo sacer*. Outside the state's protection, Ku-nam represents those who cannot be perfect citizens of a nation, i.e. those who are on the border. Kim argues that a man who lives a life as *zoe* [a bare life] not as *bios* [a political life] drives himself to death.[31] Ku-nam considers he can never go home, saying 'I could not go back to China anyway, I will… die.' When he crosses the Yellow Sea from China to South Korea, he witnesses a woman's death on the ship. Like her, he dies while crossing the Yellow Sea en route to China from South Korea and is thrown into the sea, his death representing the unadorned life of border-crossing people like Ku-nam. Here, the Yellow Sea becomes a thirdspace that embodies a time-space of exchange of displacement and emplacement, discontinuation, death and otherness which cannot be retrieved under the name of homogeneity.

The film presents a cynical perspective on the idea of homogeneous ethnicity, rendered through a thirdspace chronotope

[29] Kim, "Chaponchuŭiŭi Mut: Chukŭmŭi Tŭlaipŭ, P'ongnyŏk, Inchichŏk Maep'ing' [The Capitalist Mood: Death Drive, Violence and Cognitive Mapping]."
[30] Ahn, "Film Critics: Although the Scenery Is Harsh"
[31] Kim, "Chaponchuŭiŭi Mut: Chukŭmŭi Tŭlaipŭ, P'ongnyŏk, Inchichŏk Maep'ing' [The Capitalist Mood: Death Drive, Violence and Cognitive Mapping]."

defined by the Yellow Sea. Here, the thirdspace is a place for discontinuity rather than bridging the historical absence. The film refuses to make the binary connection between South Korea as an attacker and the Chosŏnjok community as a victim or to celebrate ethnic homogeneity between two, instead showing a displaced man's death despite his attempt at resistance, revealing the impossibility for diasporic others to be homogenised.

Hanaan, Historicised time-space

Unlike other overseas ethnic Korean filmmakers, *Hanaan*'s writer-director Pak Ruslan made his film debut in South Korea. He was born in Uzbekistan into the fourth generation of a Koryŏ-in family, learned Korean language privately and majored in Korean literature before joining the production process of two Korean films[32] in Uzbekistan. He then entered a Korean university to study film.[33] *Hanaan* is his graduation work, and shows that the South Korean film industry has significantly influenced and conditioned his filmmaking. In fact, he is the first Koryŏ-in filmmaker to make his debut within the South Korean film industry and he clarifies his position within the South Korean film industry.[34]

At this point, *Hanaan* can be distinguished from *Let the Blue River Run* and *The Yellow Sea*. While the latter two films view a diasporic ethnic

[32] *Let's Not Cry* (Kwaench'ana, ulchima, dir: Min Byung-hoon, 2001) and *My Wedding Campaign* (Naŭi Kyŏlhon Wonjŏnggi, dir: Hwang Byung-guk, 2005)
[33] Hwang Sŏng-wun, "Intŏpwu: Yŏnghwa "Hanaan" Kamdok Pak Ruslan (Interview: Pak Ruslan, a Director of Hanaan)." In *Nocut News*. (8 October 8 2012)
[34] He could be compared with another ethnic Korean overseas filmmaker, Zhang Lu, at this point. Although both were involved in the South Korean film industry, and both make accented stylish films, Pak Ruslan identifies with a South Korean filmmaker and wants to make films within the South Korean film industry, while Zhang Lu refuses to be pigeonholed under one specific country – China, South Korea and North Korea.

community from outside the community, *Hanaan* depicts such a community from within. Pak is one of few filmmakers working within the South Korean film industry to allow the Korean diaspora to represent their own history and ethnicity,[35] setting a clear relationship between the South Korean homeland and the host society of Uzbekistan. Thus, with self-representation, his film targets native South Koreans rather than Koryŏ-in in Uzbekistan, showing the predicament of the ethnic minorities in Uzbekistan and the accented Korean ethnicity in South Korea.

Hanaan takes as its theme the social struggle of Koryŏ-in youths, centering on Stas and his friends in Uzbekistan and their sense of loss towards their homeland. Stas is working in a car park, preparing for his police entry exam and spending his days with his friends, Kaiso, Said and Xing. One day, Kaiso is killed in a violent incident. Six years on from Kaiso's death, Stas becomes a policeman. By chance, Stas arrests Kaiso's murderer, but his corrupt boss releases him. Bitterly disappointed, Stas quits his job and becomes a drug addict.

The film includes historical testimonies that are absent from the official histories of both Uzbekistan and (South) Korea. History is one of the key clues to understanding diasporic ethnicity, as Stuart Hall argues:

> Cultural identity [consisting] of diasporic ethnicity is otherness as an inner compulsion, which does not mean a history of an origin, but a

[35] There are of course several Korean non-native filmmakers who make films within the Korean film industry (with Korean capital) such as Yoichi Sai's *Soo* (Su 2007), Kim So-young's *Treeless Mountain* (Namu ŏmnŭn san 2008) and Zhang Lu's *Iri* (Iri 2008), but these films are characterised as transnational productions, rather than a part of the South Korean film industry.

> history of 'after the break' (The emphasis is from the original text) through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth, which is not an essence but a positioning.[36]

In the same vein, *Hanaan* depicts history as a collective memory of dispersion, contributing to the construction of a cultural identity which defines the presence of diasporic communities as a process of rewriting and even retrieving forgotten history.

The film starts with a scene in which the history of the Koryŏ-in is described. In this sequence, a Koryŏ-in man tells an old bedtime story to lull his daughter to sleep. "Once upon a time, good people had lived in a land far from here. One day, a bad man sent them away. Those people travelled by train for a very long while," he continues. "Some of them could not finish their journey. In the end, they arrived in a new land. After years and years, their descendants were born in the land, and finally you were born. The end." Then, the young daughter says "Not yet. You have to put a full stop."

This sequence offers a brief history of the Koryŏ-in, who were compelled by Stalin's forced relocation policy to leave their homeland and resettle in Central Asia (the Koryŏ-in is good people while Stalin is the 'bad man' in the story).[37] What is intriguing in this episode is the way it transcends the oral tradition of the history of the diasporic community. As

[36] Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora.": 237

[37] The association of Kazakhstan Koreans reported that during the forced transportations of people, the conditions in the trains were so appalling that many died en route. Yoon In-jin, "Forced Relocation, Language Use, and Ethnic Identity of Koreans in Central Asia", In *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 9 no. 1, 2000: 41.

Kim German[38] and Yoon In-jin[39] point out, due to the influence of the Soviet regime most ethnic Koreans living in Central Asia do not know the Korean language and the ethnic Korean community cannot develop in the region. This lack of homogeneity is recovered by oral history at the symbolic level. Naficy considers orality as one of the features of accented cinema, arguing that it recalls 'presence and immediacy in the system of absence.'[40] Oral history animates life as well as reviving homogeneity. Thus, although they are spoken in Russian, the stories preserve their own history from generation to generation and can help build and preserve cultural identity via collective memory.

Hanaan shows that the migratory history of the Koryŏ-in has influenced and defined its presence, linking the past mentioned in the oral history to the present Uzbek. Right after Kaiso's death, Stas and his friend visit Kaiso's grave. At first, the camera shows Stas and his friend in front of Kaiso's grave with a tight shot (figure 9-1). In the frame, audience can see only Kaiso's gravestone (figure 9-2). Then they stand up to leave. Now the scene is observed from a medium shot, showing the two men standing (figure 9-3). They start to walk and the camera pans in the other direction, following them (figure 9-4~9-6). When the opposite side of Kaiso's gravestone appears in the frame, the camera follows them no more (figure 9-7~9-8). As they disappear from the frame, other gravestones which stand against Kaiso's grave are shown, all of which bear *Koryŏ-in*'s

[38] Kim, "Korean Diaspora in Kazakhstan: Question of Topical Problems for Minorities in Post-Soviet Space."
[39] Yoon, "Forced Relocation, Language Use, and Ethnic Identity of Koreans in Central Asia"
[40] Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*: 121

portraits with traditional Korean costumes (feature 9-8). Most portraits look old, indicating that the occupants of the graves have been dead for a long time, so the film links death in the present to the historical momentum of Koryŏ-in, representing the cinematic historiography of the ethnic minority as an unfinished story. There are new stones not yet engraved which wait for other deaths, implying their future will not be any brighter.



Figure 9-1



Figure 9-2



Figure 9-3



Figure 9-4 Figure 9-5 Figure 9-6



Figure 9-7 Figure 9-8

What the film envisages here is loss and death. Koryŏ-in lost their lands and then their lives, as told in the film's opening sequence, and now Stas has lost his friends, his job and his future. Kaiso is murdered, Xing leaves for South Korea to study, Said commits suicide by overdosing and Stas

himself becomes a drug addict after he quits his job. The sad story of the Koryŏ-in is here rendered as an irrevocable history, in which the destruction of the youths' lives stems from changing social conditions based on ethnic struggles and financial hardship. By foregrounding social conditions such as drugs, delinquency and corruption in Uzbekistan—a newly independent nation-state—the film also embraces ethnic struggles as one of its tenets.

However, the characters' loss cannot be recovered despite the fact that they return to their homeland, Korea (South Korea in the film). At the end of the film, Xing invites Stas to South Korea. Stas decides to go, dreaming of a new life, but when he arrives Xing suggests they deliver drugs together, proving that their ideal *Hanaan* (a promised land in Russian) is not to be found in their homeland. The imagined homeland proves to be just another strange city to them, where connections to ethnicity no longer exist and the historical disconnection between homeland and ethnic community is irrevocable. The characters' destiny is set adrift in both the host society and the homeland, and this realisation is one of the principal sentiments of the film. The end of the film shows Stas looking at sea, which draws a thirdspace chronotope. Yet, thirdspace is not an alternative destination but the place of transition and transportation.[41] Therefore, the Koryŏ-in's journey for *Hanaan* is not yet 'ended' like the daughter's words in the opening sequence.

[41] Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*: 153

The attitude of the film towards its characters is one of distant empathy. Rather than showing point of view shots from Stas's perspective, the camera frequently follows Stas from behind, especially when he gets lost in terms of ethnicity or direction. Here the camera's viewpoint coincides with the writer-director's point of view. This becomes clear when the film shows Said's death. In a scene, Said, drug-addicted, shows up in a shabby garage, holding a bottle of vodka. Said once told Stas that mixing drugs with vodka brings a sweet death and thus his appearance with the vodka implies his suicide. Said walks along a narrow corridor. The camera follows him, but stops in the corridor. Said turns to the left and disappears out of the frame. The camera remains motionless for a while, then moves forward slowly again to follow Said. When the camera turns to the left, Said is lying down on the floor about to inject drugs. The camera shudders and begins to move back and forth. Finally, Said injects the drug and starts to drink vodka. At that very moment, the camera jumps forward and shows Said's face and body in an extreme close-up shot. After a while, Said stops moving and subsequently the camera pans down at his dead body. In this way, the film displays empathy whilst demonstrating the narrative's inability to intervene in the lives of the characters.

Here, the garage signifies a closed chronotope, holding both claustrophobia and claustrophilia. For the Koryŏ-in, the Uzbek society is a kind of prison. Yet, like Said, the only place they can take a rest is also a closed place. Although the film tries to rescue him out of the place, it ends to fail. On the one hand, this inability pertains to the limits of the medium itself, and on the other this scene emphasises the inevitability of tragic

destiny. Here, the scene symbolises the helplessness of the Koryŏ-in's life but displays empathy towards them because of their tragic history.

In this way, the film transfers the absence and exclusivity of the diasporic community, conjuring up a sense of absence through its historicised time-space. The people exist because they have a history. Although the historicised time-space makes sense of cultural identity as an exiled diaspora, the possibility of returning to earlier times is negated, as is the possibility of returning to an idealised homeland due to the gap that has grown between the homeland and the ethnic community. Instead, the exile's time-space as a place of the history sets the exile in the present, permanently delaying any return.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how South Korean cinema foregrounds the traces of absence of ethnic Korean diasporas in China and Central Asia, focusing on films' chronotopes. Those ethnic groups hold contradictory positions of both sameness and otherness in terms of ethnicity due to historical discontinuity wrought by post-colonial conditions. Sometimes, they are included in same ethnics as the part of ethnic nationalism and sometimes they are excluded from the sphere of ethnic homogeneity. Therefore, how to mange the historical absence of Korean's imaginary sphere determines the attitudes toward ethnicity.

The films discussed here are examples of contemporary Korean films managing historical absence in the representational sphere. *Let the Blue River Run* tries to suture the historical gap by means of setting the

diasporic community as the place of the origin of the Korean ethnicity. *The Yellow Sea* shows the discontinuity between the homeland and the host society, thereby emphasizing the absence. *Hannan,* in contrast, allows the diasporic community to represent their own ethnic history unseen by South Koreans, awakening the sense of absence of the diasporic subjects in the South Korean representational sphere. Although the ways in which the three films deal with that absence vary, they all show their awareness of the historical absence regardless of obliterating or attempting to redress it.

It would be still polemical and even not idealistic to reduce them into one side of sameness or otherness. Rather, as argued through case studies above, their return to South Korea problemtises the origin of ethnic nationalism and makes us reconsider nationalism and multiculturalism. Simple assertion of ethnic homogeneity is dangerous as much as otherisation of ethnic Koreans. What is expected in this thesis is to recognise the historical absence and to begin with the discontinuity.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the representation of Asian others in contemporary Korean cinema from 2003 and the relationship between this representation and the wider socio-political discourses in South Korea. The Asian others dealt with in this thesis include those who have come to South Korea from developing Asian countries for better economic opportunities or political freedoms, such as migrant workers, marriage migrants, ethnic Koreans from China and Central Asian countries and North Korean defectors. The increase in the Asian migrant population in Korea demands re-examination of Korean nationalism at the centre of which lies a belief in ethnic homogeneity. As a result of these changing demographics, the dominant Korean cultural policy has shifted away from nationalism toward an acceptance of multiculturalism and at the same time contemporary Korean cinema has started to embrace these demographic changes and multicultural policies into their representational sphere.

Korean cinema depicting Asian others has appealed for humanism toward the newcomers and cultural diversities in the vein of multiculturalism, often depicting them as pure victims of South Korean racism or diligent people who simply have different cultural traditions. On one hand, this strategy helps to protect Asian others from racism and seemingly respects their cultural differences. However, on the other hand, this representational strategy fixes the cultures of Asian others in a fossilised form by spreading stereotypical versions of their identities,

regardless of their various relationships with their own cultures as well as the various spectrum of their cultures *per se*.

Hence, this apparently benevolent multiculturalism disguises or reinforces Korean nationalism, concealing Koreans' bias toward Asian others that suggests that Asian others are innately culturally and economically inferior to South Koreans. Therefore, multiculturalism is not simply understood in opposition to nationalism or as a panacea for all tensions triggered by demographic changes.

Keeping in mind this complexity in the representation of Asian others under the strategy of multiculturalism, this thesis conducted a theoretical analysis of multiculturalism and its ambiguous usage in South Korea in chapter 1. Multiculturalism is literally understood as the respect for the cultural diversity. Yet, its application differs according to socio-political and historical contexts as well as gender, class and race.

Multiculturalism does have the potential to appease social collision among diverse racial, ethnic and cultural groups. By contrast, however, as the term 3-S multiculturalism exemplifies, it is often used as an excuse in order to avoid sensitive political issues and, as Slavoj Žižek warns, facilitates trans-national capitalist exploitation.[1] In addition, as Mika Ko points out, multiculturalism is often just cosmetic and limited to the consumption of other cultures and cultural identities.[2]

In the South Korean context, multiculturalism applies only to legal and permanent migrants so as to control its population and sustain its

[1] Žižek, "Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism."
[2] Ko, *Japanese Cinema and Otherness*: 171-172

“Korean-ness”. At this point, the Korean version of multiculturalism is linked to nationalism and through the otherisation of Asian others, and it confirms the sub-imperial position of Korea over other Asian countries. Here, sub-imperialism is another form of nationalism, which is forged through Korea's geopolitical relationships in the colonial and post-colonial eras of the twentieth century. Chapter 2 is dedicated to examining this historical formation of Korean nationalism and sub-imperialism in order to understand the political unconscious in the multicultural era.

Following this establishment of theoretical and historical background, chapter 3 introduced the industrial changes that alluded to the emergence of multicultural films in the early 2000s. This thesis suggested democratisation, deregulation, liberalisation, industrialisation, globalisation and regionalisation as the most significant prerequisites of the emergence of films depicting Asian others.

What follows these discussions of theoretical, historical and industrial contexts is textual analysis. Mostly supported by Korean state organizations, public funds or private production funds, the films examined in chapter 4 have greatly benefited from the establishment of a governmental multicultural policy. Films dealt with here negotiate between state-led policy, the demands of the cultural sphere and their aesthetic vision. These films often make appeals for the embracing of Asian others into the Korean nation and for their protection as pathetic victims. However, in this process, South Koreans become subjects who have responsibility for benevolence while Asian others are confined to fixed cultures and stereotypical images. Furthermore, by representing

their crisis as coinciding with crises in their South Korean male protagonists' finances and identity, some films reinforce the existing forms of male-centric ethnic nationalism and sub-imperialism. I assert that this filmic strategy is a paternal form of multiculturalism in chapter 6. Indeed, most films dealt with here focus on the inner problem of South Korean society through the appropriation of Asian others and urge changes in the minds of South Koreans rather than raising structural problems. In this process, Asian others are still represented in the abstract level and the possibility of solidarity and co-existence between Koreans and Asian others is diminished.

However, this does not mean that all films studied in this thesis simply reiterate the state-disseminated policy of multiculturalism or reproduce ethnic nationalism and sub-imperialism. As illustrated in several shorts in the latest *If You Were Me* omnibus film, Asian others are beginning to be represented more dynamically. Furthermore, combined with the problems that various social minorities face in South Korea, the solidarity and sympathy between ethnic/racial minorities and other social minorities are emphasised more and more, as evinced in *Stateless Things* and *Nima*. While multiculturalism often underscores homogeneity for ethnic Koreans such as expatriated Koreans and North Korean defectors, such films as *Yellow Sea* turn their attention to heterogeneity and otherness. This strategy reminds their viewers of a historical discontinuity which cannot be reduced to ethnic homogeneity and subsequently undermines ethnic nationalism.

All films except *Hanaan* in this thesis are produced by South Korean filmmakers. Therefore, the analysis presented across this thesis focuses on South Korean nation building and its response to the demographic change in the nation following the globalised flow of capital and people. Although there were few films being made by Asian others themselves when I started the research, now more and more films are produced by Asian others. Therefore, the further comparative study on self-representation of Asian others would be beneficial to the expansion of discursive sphere on the representation of Asian others. As well, it would be beneficial to expand the discussion of filmic engagement in socio-cultural discourse and practice that is presented here.

In sum, this thesis has examined the representation of Asian others in Korean film from the perspectives of nationalism, multiculturalism and sub-imperialism. To date, these films often have been discussed with reference to multiculturalism and nationalism. Yet, this thesis has aimed to draw attention to the emergence of sub-imperialism in South Korea by investigating the historical and trans-Asian context forged through colonial and post-colonial hegemony. This shift will hopefully trigger further academic discussion on the representation of Asian others with greater consideration of the regional and historical aspects of its development rather than seeing it as a new phenomenon appearing *ex nihilo* in the global era.

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