

A CULTURAL INTERPRETATION OF THE SOUTH KOREAN
INDEPENDENT CINEMA MOVEMENT, 1975 – 2004

BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Acknowledgements	iv
	Abstract	v
Introduction		1
	Endnotes	20
Chapter I	South Korean Cinema in the 1970s	22
	Frozen Times and Resistant Minds	23
	The Visual Age Group	26
	The Cultural Center Generation	34
	Endnotes	40
Chapter II	The Small Film	45
	The Small Film Festival	46
	The <i>Minjung</i> Discourse and Its Application in Youth Culture	48
	The <i>Minjung</i> Discourse and the Small Film Festival	53
	The Small Film Movement: A Re-Articulation of New Cinema Discourse	58
	Endnotes	63
Chapter III	The Three Faces of the People's Cinema	66
	The Imagined <i>Minjung</i> Community	66
	The People's Cinema: An Extension of Cinema	74
	The People's Cinema: An Activist Cinema	86
	The People's Cinema: The National Cinema	102
	Endnotes	118
Chapter IV	The Woman's Film	128
	The Woman's Film	129
	Han Ok-Hee and the Kaidu Club	132
	Kim So-Young: Modernity, Women, and the Fantastic	141
	Byun Young-Ju and Ryu Mi-Rye: From History to the Personal	154
	The Woman's Film: The Solidarity of the Defeated	165
	Endnotes	168
Chapter V	The Independent Documentary Movement	173
	Kwangju Video: The Ground Zero of Documentary	174
	Kim Dong-Won: A Case of Documentary Humanism	181
	The Post-"Age of Resistance" Documentary	195
	Endnotes	203
Epilogue		206
	Endnotes	217
Selected Bibliography		218

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Michael Baskett, Chairperson

A Cultural Interpretation of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement, 1975-2004 examines the origin and development of the independent cinema movement in South Korea. The independent cinema movement refers to the films, film theories, film-related cultural activities that emerged as a way to document social realities, to advocate the freedom of artistic expression, and to represent the voices of marginalized social identities. My dissertation is the first attempt in English film scholarship on Korean cinema to explore the history of non-commercial filmmaking conducted in the name of cinema movement from 1970s to 2000s. The primary sources of investigation for this research include films, books, and archive materials. The hitherto unpublished memories and historical information obtained from the direct interviews with the independent filmmakers add originality to this dissertation. Investigating the independent cinema movement offers new perspectives on the cultural study of national cinema movement and the existing scholarship of South Korean cinema.

This dissertation questions the dominant historiography regarding South Korean cinema which centers on the 1960s as the ‘golden age’ of South Korean cinema and the 1990s as its

renaissance. This position tends to dismiss the intervening decades of the 1970s and 80 as the ‘dark age’ of the national cinema. Defying the conventional view, this study shows the presence of the new generation of filmmakers and young *cinephiles* who launched a series of new cinema movements from the 1970s onward. In this regard, the 1970s should be reinterpreted as the period that marked the genesis of the new wave consciousness in the history of South Korean cinema.

Second, this study analyzes the history of the independent cinema movement as a dialogic process between domestic cultural discourse and foreign film theories. The filmmakers who initiated the independent cinema movement drew on Euro-American art cinemas, New Latin American Cinema, and the feminist films from the West to incorporate them into the domestic cultural context, producing the new concepts such as the Small Film, the People’s Cinema and the woman’s film. This fact challenges the national cinema discourse which presupposes that the history of South Korean cinema is established within the closed circuit of the national history and traditional aesthetics. My dissertation helps create an alternative perspective by which to see the construction of national cinema as fundamentally an interaction between indigenous popular discourses and international film new waves.

Finally, this dissertation takes into consideration the active roles of the independent filmmakers. It examines the films and manuscripts produced by the filmmakers to see how they invented and elaborated their positions about cinema movement in the given cultural field in each period. It pays attention to the cultural field where the filmmakers are conditioned between what they wanted to visualize and what is externally granted. Viewing an established cultural field as a hegemonic construction, this study also investigates the way in which transformation occurs from one cultural field to another.

Introduction

This dissertation is a study of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement from 1975 to 2004, and the films, theories, and cultural activities that have constituted the history of the movement. The South Korean Independent Cinema Movement refers to a broad range of filmmaking practices initiated by young intellectuals and student filmmakers in the mid 1970s, who viewed the film medium as an instrument to document social realities and as a platform for the voices of the lower classes.

Through an examination of the development of the cinema movement that spans three decades, this study aims to challenge the prevailing notion that South Korean cinema in the 1970s only produced “low quality films”¹ which continued to account for commercial films of the 1980s before the coming of New Korean Cinema in the early 1990s. It shows that it was actually in the 1970s that a new wave of filmmakers emerged to improve upon South Korean cinema not only in its aesthetics but also in its popular appeal. The new wave filmmakers focused on developing indigenous film theories, resisting authoritarian military politics, and appealing to the youth culture of the day. These efforts carved out a unique cultural arena in the 1970s, where the independent cinema movement was launched. This study illuminates these cultural aspects to propose a revisionist view of the 1970s as the period that marked the genesis of new wave cinema in the history of South Korean cinema.

The dissertation also questions the view that the independent cinema movement developed as a nationalistic activity devoted to construct an ideal form of national cinema. This view tends to see the cinema movement as a domestic invention that has little do with foreign

film practices. However, in this study, I argue that the cinema movement emerged and progressed as a dialogic process between domestic cultural discourse and foreign film theories. The study presents the ways in which Euro-American art cinemas, New Latin American Cinema, and Western cine-feminism were respectively incorporated into the concepts of the Small Film, the People's Cinema, and the woman film, which appeared in the course of the cinema movement from the 1970s to 1990s. By presenting these global communications, this study redefines the independent cinema movement as an open field where domestic and foreign film discourses form ongoing dialogues to substantiate multiple voices across class, gender, and other social identities.

Problematic and Purpose

This study tackles approximately three decades from the mid 1970s to mid 2000s in the history of South Korean cinema. It contains the 1970s and 80s, relatively neglected periods in historical writings on the national cinema. Such indifference in the two recently published English volumes on South Korean cinema, *South Korean Golden Age Melodramas* (2005) and *New Korean Cinema* (2005) seems conspicuous because they deal with two distinctive periods, the 1960s and the 1990s, without giving serious attention to the intervening years. Nancy Abelmann and Kathleen McHugh, the editors of *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama*, say that “During the brief period from 1955 to 1972, a number of South Korean directors produced a body of work as historically, aesthetically, and politically significant as that of other well-known national film movements”² Abelmann and McHugh are convinced that “this remarkable body of Golden Age films” emerged “as the antecedent of the current renaissance,”³ which is, in our

context, to be called New Korean Cinema. Julian Stringer one of the editors of *New Korean Cinema* notes that “a distinct form of commercial film-making has indeed emerged” since the early 1990s in South Korea, and that “the cultural phenomenon which critics now routinely refer to as ‘New Korean Cinema’ is qualitatively different from the pre-1990s cultural cinema....” This remarkable silence about South Korean cinema in the 1970s and 80s induces us to conclude that the films in these periods were neither aesthetically worthy nor commercially successful.

Indeed, the belittlement of the 1970s and 80s echoes with the term ‘Dark Age’ (*amhŭkki*), which Korean scholars have routinely enacted to qualify South Korean cinema of the periods in question. Naming the 1970s “the darkest age of South Korean cinema,” film scholar Jang Mi-Hee enumerates the conditions of it as follows:

With the empowerment of the *Yushin* government [Park Chug-Hee regime] in 1972, the Film Law underwent another revision since the last revision in 1966. This fourth revision of the Film Law, which remained effective until 1979, implemented a license system replacing a registration system for film companies. (...) Advance notification of production schedule, a license system for film production, and rigorous registration requirements obstructed the growth of film production by individual producers, and the number of production companies dwindled down to 12.⁴

These conditions generated a detrimental effect on film industry until the early 1980s. Film critic Yi Jeong-Ha described the situation regarding commercial cinema of the early 1980s by stating that “only twenty or so production companies that survive through importing foreign films, twofold or threefold censorship practices that start with script, (...) and the filmmakers wandering in back alleys deprived of freedom of artistic creation.”⁵ What resulted was a perennial recycling of genre clichés, especially melodrama.⁶ Because of this, the term “low quality film” (*chŏjil yŏnghwa*) became the most widely adopted word to describe the 1970s South Korean cinema.⁷

The political, economic, and creative backwardness seems sufficient enough to account for the neglect of historical writings on the ‘Dark Age’ of South Korean cinema. However, it is also questionable who qualifies the period. The evaluative framework normally stresses the politico-economic environments as something that filmmakers were never able to surmount. Furthermore, the terms like ‘low quality film’ bears a strong sense of elitism that dismisses the potentially positive responses of actual viewers.

It should be noted that, as Jang Mi-Hee points out, the Dark Age of South Korean cinema exactly coincided with the governing period of the *Yushin* system (Oct 1972 – Oct 1979). Led by the then President Park Chung-Hee, the *Yushin* system neutralized the Korean Constitution and declared Martial Law. Under the system, all types of labor disputes including strikes were declared to be illegal, and any criticisms of the government and of the president were to be punished as a violation of national security.⁸ Therefore, it was natural for “the overwhelming majority of the labor movement, religious organizations, and the intellectual community, *Yushin* encapsulate[d] all that was evil and socially destructive about the Park Chung-Hee era.”⁹ According to Bruce Cumings, by the early 1970s South Korea had only developed a small-scale middle class and its politics had little connection with the emerging blue-collar work force.¹⁰ Under the circumstances, “students, intellectuals, and remnant aristocrats” imposed on themselves the duty to admonish and even resist the military regime.¹¹ By so doing, the intellectuals also constituted the major force to form and circulate the conventional view of the 1970s. Assuming that the freedom of expression was severely oppressed during that time, the overall qualification of the period made by the intellectuals must have been something equivalent to Dark Age.

The label of Dark Age in South Korean film historiography reflects the sense of impotency that intellectuals had in the face of formidable political oppression. Ha Kil-Chong, the film director who organized the Visual Age Group (*Yōngsang Shidae*) in 1975 exclaimed in the late 1970s, “Where is the place of Korean cinema in world cinema? Nowhere! Neither its seed nor its vestige is seen anywhere. Only a clumsy imitation and a dirty salesmanship prevail.”¹² This statement reads as a diatribe against the commercial cinema of the 1970s, however, at a deeper level, the blame is being laid upon the director himself not capable of overcoming the given situation. The name of Dark Age points to the unconsciousness of the 1970s filmmakers like Ha. The neglect of this period was, in a way, a consensual willingness by South Korean film historiographers who do not welcome the return of the repressed. The aforementioned two English books on the history of South Korean cinema aptly prove this point.

This study restores the buried aspects of the Dark Age in which young cineastes endeavored to reshape South Korean cinema by way of the independent cinema movement. It sheds light on the 1970s South Korean cinema and the subsequent development of the independent cinema movement in three respects. First, it attends to the fact that the filmmakers and movie-goers, who had a strong self-consciousness as a new generation of South Korean cinema, first emerged in the mid 1970s. This new film generation, mostly young filmmakers in their thirties and university students in their twenties, were eager to grasp advanced film art and advocated for the creation of a new wave of Korean film. Historical evidences for this point are to be found in the filmmaking groups such as the Visual Age Group (1975-1978) and the Kaidu Club (1974-1977), and also in the youth cultural activities at the time.

Second, the new film generation and the following independent filmmakers widely invested in foreign national cinema movements in order to rearticulate them within the context of South Korea. This study shows the way in which the members of the filmmaking groups in the 1970s tried to emulate Western cinema movements such as the French New Wave and New American Cinema. It also examines a youth cultural phenomenon in which university students utilized the French Cultural Center and the German Cultural Center in Seoul to have free access to contemporary European films. This collective activity took place because the foreign film importation quota imposed by the Park regime limited the students' viewing experiences. However, in the process, the students discovered New German Cinema epitomizing their own cultural aspirations. Its catchphrase "The old cinema is dead" provided a spiritual momentum for the establishment of the independent cinema movement in the early 1980s. The independent filmmakers in the 1980s drew on New Latin American Cinema to apply the latter's social realism to their activist films. Each chapter of this study discusses the historical junctures where foreign film discourses were implanted in the independent cinema movement.

Third, under successive military regimes (1972-1979, 1980-1987), the independent cinema movement provided a venue of resistance against the political oppression of the government, which includes censorial film policies. This study illustrates this process by explaining the way in which the idea of the People's Cinema (*minjung yŏnghwa*) emerged and was widely used throughout the 1980s. It defines the People's Cinema as a broad range of independent films which committed to authentic representation of the needs and aspirations of lower-class people (*minjung*). The general aim of the People's Cinema was to document the underrepresented aspects of the social realities of the lower class and to commit itself to the

popular struggle to transform the ruling system that feeds socio-political inequalities. This dissertation examines how the People's Cinema functioned as the axiomatic principle of social realism, and how its uniformity and male-centeredness were later challenged by sub-currents of independent filmmaking such as woman's film.

Methodology

This study is generally informed by neo-Marxist thoughts on history and culture. Referring to a range of contemporary Marxist theories that rectify orthodox Marxism, especially the rigid economic determinism, neo-Marxism acknowledges the value of an experiential approach that “examines the interpretation of autonomous subjectivity and processes of social and historical development.”¹³ This project also investigates the active roles, theoretical and practical, of the filmmakers in the historical development of the independent cinema movement. However, it does not confine its scope to the individual realm, but pays attention to the cultural fields where the individuals are situated between their own cultural aspirations and what is externally granted. It views the independent cinema movement as having progressed through a series of changes of such cultural fields, in each of which the filmmakers tried to visualize what they wanted to express with the available means that they found adequate. In this scheme, domestic cultural imperatives and foreign film theories occupied the two most important factors in the cultural fields.

British Marxist historian George Rudé provides a similar mechanism in his theory of popular protest. Rudé maintains that popular ideology is “not a purely internal affair and the sole

property of a single class or group.... It is most often a mixture, a fusion of two elements, of which only one is the peculiar property of the 'popular' classes and the other is superimposed by a process of transmission and adoption from outside."¹⁴ The "inherent" ideology such as popular beliefs or collective aspirations is merged with the "derived" ideology, a more sophisticated system of thought such as the philosophy of Enlightenment or Socialism.¹⁵ While the former may trigger a popular protest movement, it is the latter that is more "forward-looking" and leads the protest eventually to a revolutionary act.¹⁶ In the context of this study, Rudé's statement reminds us that while the cinema movements from the 1970s were triggered by the young film generation who felt the inadequacy of domestic cinema, the movements continued taking shape by communicating with foreign national cinema movements.

Rudé further argues that "all 'derived' ideas in the course of transmission and adoption suffer a transformation or 'sea-change': its nature will depend on the social needs or the political aims of the classes that are ready to absorb them."¹⁷ This point allows us to suppose that as long as there are social needs and political aims assigned to the intermixture of the indigenous and foreign discourses, it continues working and producing cultural outcomes of various levels. The South Korean Independent Cinema Movement underwent significant transformations through which independent cinema and imported film theories form renewed and varying relationships. In accordance with the nature of the final mixture of the two forces, the modes and contents of the independent films also changed and became diverse. The question remains as to how to grasp the configuration the mixture of the two forces.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony provides insight to this question. Hegemony refers to the leadership that dominant groups exercise throughout the society and is supported by

the spontaneous consent given by the rest of the society.¹⁸ According to Gramsci, this consent is “‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.”¹⁹ If the consent buttresses the hegemony and is historically established, then, hegemony may also change in the course of history. Gramsci adds that hegemony consists of three overlapping forms of leaderships; political, intellectual, and moral leaderships. Whereas the political leadership indicates practical politics, the intellectual and moral leaderships form “a unified ideological system,”²⁰ that is, a dominant ideology. This point enables us to conclude that hegemony changes when dynamics of the intellectual and moral leaderships change.

This study finds the hegemony model particularly effective in understanding the configuration of the intermixture of the indigenous and foreign discourses that constitute the history of the independent cinema movement. The erosion of commercial cinema in the 1970s granted a moral leadership to some pioneering filmmakers to initiate cinema movement, and this leadership was seldom questioned by the young film generation at the time. However, the absence of indigenous film theory made Euro-American art cinema discourse exercise an intellectual leadership to the filmmakers and young *cinephiles* as well. Therefore, the intellectuals with the knowledge of art cinema wielded hegemony to the progressive film community. However, with the coming of the 1980s and the emergence of social realism as a dominant narrative mode of independent cinema, the intellectual hegemony of art cinema was replaced by that of the People’s Cinema. The People’s Cinema also challenged the moral leadership of the intellectual few for not being able to represent the political and cultural interests

of lower classes. Instead, activist filmmakers, the majority of whom were university student or recent graduates, acquired the moral leadership.

Theories of South Korean cultural movements and New Latin American Cinema filled the content of the intellectual leadership in the period. In the mid 1990s, however, the moral and intellectual hegemony of the People's Cinema also faced a transformation because its dogmatic male-orientedness was challenged by women filmmakers, who utilized Western cine-feminism as a critical methodology. Thus, a central concern of this study is to capture the multiple aspects of the hegemonic changes that the independent cinema movement made in order to fulfill renewing historical and cultural imperatives.

Literature of the Field

The Korean Language Film Scholarship

It is a relatively recent phenomenon that South Korean film scholarship began to deal with independent cinema movement. It seems that the publication of *From Periphery to Center: A History of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement* (Byöngbangeso Chugshimūro, The Seoul Visual Collective, 1996) aroused scholarly interest in this field. It is, because before this book virtually no single volume addressed independent cinema in South Korea. The editors state that "since this is the first book regarding the history of the independent cinema movement, we tried not to advance our views as the members of the Seoul Visual Collective, and put our efforts only to compile the facts."²¹ True, the volume contains the history of the independent cinema movement from the 1970s to 1996 in a chronological order, and describes the history culminating in the emergence of the People's Cinema. The historiography focuses on arranging

historical facts and showing photos obtained firsthand from filmmakers. However, it should be noted that the Seoul Visual Collective itself played a primary role in building the independent cinema movement, especially the notion of the People's Cinema, from the early 1980s (the group was first established with the name the Seoul Cinema Collective in 1982). Being aware of this fact, the editors disclose a somewhat self-centered view in the first sentence of the book: "the history of the independent cinema movement started with the establishment of the Seoul Cinema Collective in 1982."²²

This sentence defines the essence of the book's historiography: the history of independent cinema converges upon the Seoul Visual (Cinema) Collective. With this overarching historiographical position, there is no further need to provide methodical accounts of the theories that sustained the independent cinema practices. Merely enumerating the sub-currents of the movement, the book fails to provide sufficient assessments on each variation in theory and practice. For instance, women's films are dismissed as a satellite, if not an aberrant, circling around the People's Cinema trajectory. Overstating that the People's Cinema as practice and the National Cinema Thesis as theory encompass the entire history of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement renders handicaps to the efforts capturing diverse undercurrents of the movement.

Kim Su-Nam's *Korean Independent Cinema (Hankuk Tongnip Yŏnghwa, 2005)* is a brief history of South Korean independent cinema. It covers almost the same periods as *From Periphery to Center*, but enacts a diametrically opposite view. In an attempt rectify the historiography that centers around the People's Cinema, Kim asserts that "to bestow the central position on the notion of the People's Cinema in discussing the history of Korean independent

cinema is a blatant distortion,”²³ and that “the People’s Cinema should be considered as a genre or a current in the entire history of Korean independent cinema.”²⁴ To support these arguments, Kim traces the origin of South Korean independent cinema to 1953 when the Theater and Film Department at Sorabol Art School began its annual presentation of student films. The event led to the organization of the Visual Society (Yöngsanghoe) in the same department in 1972.

Kim emphasizes that such initial history of independent cinema unfolded in pursuit of “pure cinema” (*sunsu yönghwa*),²⁵ that is, an artistic cinema free of any political intent. Kim’s favor of pure cinema seems obvious in his statement that “Personally, I believe that the People’s Cinema departed from the ethos of pure cinema and became another form of ‘New Village Cinema’ [*saemaül yönghwa*, government propaganda films during the Park Chung-Hee era], degenerating into a political cinema that serves ideology.” In Kim’s view, the People’s Cinema appeared as an aberrant rather than the norm in South Korean independent cinema and independent filmmakers should go back to the “universal truth of filmmaking” with the People’s Cinema collapsing at the end of the 1990s.²⁶

The ‘universal truth of filmmaking’ obviously indicates pure cinema. However, pure cinema is most similar to an authorial (auteur) cinema that represents the dominant view of Western bourgeois art. Thus, Kim’s intent is to recuperate the status of Western art cinema in opposition to the People’s Cinema as the major mode of independent filmmaking in South Korea. Such a purpose is confirmed in Kim’s statement that “The central subject for the discussion of film art should be about aesthetic revolution rather than about who makes, distributes, and dominates cinema.”²⁷ Limiting discourses on independent cinema to the realm of aesthetics is as much biased as giving central position to the People’s Cinema. Besides, as chapter 3 in this study

shows, the People's Cinema itself emerged as an attempt of aesthetic revolution. What is required in Kim's discussion is the cultural interpretation that moves beyond the confines of film texts and the attempts to read the ongoing negotiations between the film texts and the surrounding world.

The English Language Film Scholarship

The initial attempt to introduce the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement in Western academia is found in Min Eung-Jun et al.'s *Korean Film: History, Resistance, and Democratic Imagination* (2002). This book has a chapter entitled "Korean National Cinema in the 1980s: Enlightenment, Political Struggle, Social Realism, and Defeatism" that discusses the independent cinema movement in the 1980s. But the discussion here mostly repeats the same teleological historiography that *From Periphery to Center* utilized. It traces the initial period of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement back to the year 1980 when a group of students organized the Yalashyŏng Film Study Group at Seoul National University.²⁸ The collective produced a few short films mostly invested in social realism from 1980 to 1983. The writers of *Korean Film* erroneously qualify the Yalashyŏng Group as the starting point of the National Cinema Movement. But the fact is that in the course of the independent cinema movement the National Cinema Thesis did not appear until 1988. Such an anachronism seems to originate from an impulse to describe the independent cinema as a purely indigenous creation. But it not only vitiates the objectivity of the history in question but also mistakenly ignores the impact of the foreign discourses on the independent cinema movement.

The history of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement remains virtually untouched by Western scholarship. The existing literatures have tended to minimize the cinema movement's historical status in comparison to what is called New Korean Cinema in the 1990s. Such a lack of recognition is supposedly due to the fact that Western scholars have seldom had access to the independent films because of the absence of the film prints or English subtitles. What results is a virtual lack of knowledge of the independent cinema movement. It, in turn, generates the prevailing two views (1) that the independent cinema movement served at best as a preparatory phase before the advent of New Korean Cinema, and (2) that the independent cinema movement generally ended since the early 1990s when its practitioners began to be absorbed by the commercial cinema.

New Korean Cinema (2005) exemplifies these tendencies. Dividing the history of South Korean cinema into two eras of before and after the 1990s, Julian Stringer an editor of *New Korean Cinema* calls the films from the latter period New Korean Cinema, characterizing them as “qualitatively different from the pre-1990s cultural cinema.”²⁹ Stringer suggests two main reasons for this demarcation line. One is that commercial filmmaking in its genuine sense emerged since that time in South Korea. The other is that the films from 1992 onwards reflect the democracy achieved through civil governance installed in 1992 after three decades of military rule (1961-1987).³⁰ On the other hand, Stringer carves out the 1980s as “the years of intense democratization campaigns and the brief years of the art-political cinema movement.”³¹ This statement suggests a range of continuities between the 1980s and the 1990s in terms of development of the ‘New Wave’ cinema. The collective will to change the backwardness of the national cinema in the 1980s was relayed by the cultural force that brought about democracy and

the capitalization of the film industry in the 1990s. David E. James illustrates this point in the following statements:

[D]uring the *minjung* period, an affiliated, illegal, underground, agitational cinema nourished participatory social engagement and also fostered a generation of cinéastes who, in the period of liberalization that followed it in the early 1990s, created the vibrant New Korean Cinema that flourished from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s.³²

This passage advances the linear history in which the “*minjung* period” - the 1980s - prepared a committed army of young filmmakers who were to pave the ground for the renaissance of the national cinema in the 1990s. The view constitutes a teleological historiography, at the end of which socio-political liberalization leads to the flourishing of New Korean Cinema.

The liberalization model informs the capitalization of the film industry and the flourishing of New Korean Cinema are attributed to two facts. First, South Korean cinema can compete on an equal footing with Hollywood cinema at the domestic box office. Second, it has garnered major successes at foreign film festivals and actualized unprecedented scale of international distribution and consumption.³³ These two points imply that South Korea cinema at the age of New Korean Cinema has made it to the global market. Therefore, the post-1992 period that Stringer describes as the departure point of genuine commercial filmmaking corresponds to the globalization of South Korean cinema. However, this explanatory scheme presumes that the independent cinema movement in the 1980s was largely a parochial endeavor and came to fruition thanks to the globalization drive in the 1990s. What is missing in this picture is that the independent cinema movement in the former decade also arose in communication with a range of international ‘New Wave’ cinemas.

Lastly, Choi Jin-Hee's doctoral dissertation *Corporate Affluence, Cultural Exuberance: A Korean Film Renaissance and the 386 Generation Directors* also deals with New Korean Cinema. Choi points out the fundamental "internationality" of South Korean cinema in the 1980s. She labels the 1980s generation of *cinéastes* "the 386 Generation" and describes them as below:

The 386 Generation is the generation that was born in the 1960s and was enrolled in college during the 1980s. The 1980s within Korean history is marked as a decade of political turmoil and trauma. After witnessing the Kwangju massacre in 1980, college students spoke out against the military government and became actively involved in political demonstrations and pro-labor movements. The 386 Generation has become known as a politicized generation. The 386 Generation directors are also notably self-conscious of film style, having received specific training in film either in college or in film institutes subsidized by the government.³⁴

The 386 Generation are those who led the independent cinema movement in the 1980s. However, Choi characterizes the shared socio-cultural experience of the 386 Generation as the repository of the themes and styles that the filmmakers from the same generation would utilize in commercial filmmaking in the 1990s.

Choi maintains that the 386 Generation filmmakers' nationalistic engagements are prominent in popular genres. For instance, the blockbuster films *Shiri* (1999), *JSA* (2000), and *Taegukgi* (2004) together question the Cold War ideology that justifies the divided structure of the Korean peninsula.³⁵ Furthermore, the 386 Generation filmmakers learned and recycled the genres of other national cinemas, especially Hong Kong cinema of the 1980s and Hollywood films, and launched a "second Korean film renaissance,"³⁶ Choi's label for New Korean Cinema. Choi rightly points out that the 386 Generation had been aware of other national cinemas such as Hong Kong, Hollywood, and European Art cinema, well before they took the center stage of commercial filmmaking. But she briefly addresses the independent cinema movement and the

minjung discourse, and overlooks this movement in which the 386 generation filmmakers were actively involved in the 1980s.

Choi's study of the Korean film renaissance only deals with commercial films. Even so, the absence of the independent cinema movement in discussing the 386 Generation filmmakers generates the false impression that the cinema movement in the 1980s was totally absorbed by the commercial cinema in the 1990s. On the contrary, this study aims to show that the independent cinema movement and the *minjung* discourse fared well into the 2000s, creating thematic and stylistic variations.

Chapter Breakdown

The discussion is divided into five chapters. The first chapter focuses on describing the formation of the Visual Age Group (1975-1978) and the emergence of the Cultural Center Generation. It shows the historical situation in which Euro-American art cinema invoked a 'new wave' consciousness among the members of the Visual Age Group. Also, it investigates how the Oberhausen Manifesto of New German Cinema awakened the young *cinephiles* to the need of a new cinema movement. Along with it, this chapter brings out social, cultural, and political conditions of the 1970s to explain why this period was stigmatized as the Dark Age of South Korean cinema and how the view could be rectified. Lastly, this chapter shows the way in which the new film generation made the major force of the independent cinema movement of the 1980s.

The second chapter examines the Small Film Festival (1994) as the landmark event from which the independent cinema movement began. It locates the Small Film Festival the historical juncture where the intellectual and moral hegemony of the filmmakers in the 1970s gave way to

the student filmmakers who would initiate the independent cinema movement in the 1980s. To prove this point, this chapter reviews the contents of the films submitted to the film festival. It shows that the films under examination commonly utilize an existentialist theme in which student characters are identified with lower class people. It further discusses that the appearance of the lower class characters anticipated social realism that the subsequent People's Cinema would endorse.

The third chapter examines the People's Cinema as the dominant mode of the independent cinema in the 1980s. The central argument of this chapter is that the People's Cinema was never crystallized in one uniform way; rather, it included various modes of production and narrative strategies. Therefore, this chapter discusses the idea in its three major aspects. First, it reviews the initial period of the People's Cinema when it was received by independent filmmakers as an alternative form of cinema to commercial narrative cinema. The section also discusses the way in which the film theories from New Latin American Cinema was incorporated into South Korean people's culture movement (*minjung munhwa undong*) to produce the idea of the People's Cinema. Second, how student movement appropriated the concept to represent their political propaganda films is to be discussed. This section includes reviews on the major activist films produced during the 1980s and early 90s. Third, the National Cinema Thesis (*minjok yŏnghwaron*) is to be examined as a theoretical extension of the People's Cinema practices. This section also reveals the way in which film theoretician referred to North Korean film theories to design the National Cinema Thesis.

In the fourth chapter, the focus is placed on the woman's film as a sub-current of the independent cinema movement. The central argument is that women's films posed a counter

discourse to the male-oriented independent cinema practices. Tracing the origin of the woman's film to the mid 1970s when the feminist filmmaking group Kaidu Club was organized, this chapter examines four representative women filmmakers and their films. By reviewing the women filmmakers' actual experiences, this chapter shows the concrete aspects of gender conflicts in the independent cinema community. Also, the narratives and themes of the women's independent films are to be reviewed to show that women's films emerged as an extensive project to rewrite the national history in women's perspectives.

The fifth chapter concerns the independent documentary movement. It notes that documentary is one of the most enduring modes in the independent cinema movement. It proposes that the origin of the 1980s independent documentary movement in South Korea should be found in the Kwangju Video, the rough assemblage of television newsreels produced by foreign reporters. To illustrate the link between the Kwangju video and the independent documentary works that came after it, this chapter discusses Kim Dong-Won's *The Sanggyedong Olympics* (1988). It also discusses the progression of the independent documentary movement after the demise of the socio-political movements in the mid 1990s. *Repatriation* (Kim Dong-Won, 2004) and other works are to be reviewed for this purpose.

¹ Lee Ho-Geol, "South Korean cinema in the 1970s" in Yi Hyo-In, Yi Jeong-Ha (Eds.), *Korean Cinema: An Exorcism (Hankuk Yŏnghwa Ssitgim)*, Seoul: Yŏllinch'ekdŭl, 1995), p. 88.

² Nancy Abelmann and Kathleen Machugh, "Introduction: Gender, Genre, and Nation" in Kathleen Machugh and Nancy Abelmann *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), p. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴ Jang Mi-Hee, "South Korean cinema 1972-1979" in Joo Jin-Suk, Jang Mi-Hi, Byŏn Jae-Ran (Eds.), *The Dictionary of Korean Women Filmmakers [Yŏsŏng Yŏnghwain Sajŏn]* (Seoul: Sodo, 2001), p. 181.

⁵ Yi Jeong-Ha, "80s and 90s" in Yi Hyo-In, Yi Jeong-Ha (Eds.), *Korean Cinema: An Exorcism (Hankuk Yŏnghwa Ssitgim)*, Seoul: Yŏllinch'ekdŭl, 1995).

⁶ Lee Ho-Geol, "South Korean cinema in the 1970s," p. 89.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁸ Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 358.

⁹ Chun Soon-Ok, *They Are Not Machines* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), p. 19.

¹⁰ Bruce Cumings, p. 356.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Ha Kil-Chong cited in Yi Jeong-Ha, "80s and 90s" in Yi Hyo-In, Yi Jeong-Ha (Eds.), *Korean Cinema: An Exorcism (Hankuk Yŏnghwa Ssitgim)*, Seoul: Yŏllinch'ekdŭl, 1995).

¹³ Rober A. Gorman, *Neo-Marxism: the Meanings of Modern Radicalism* (Westport, London: Greenwood Press, 1982), p. 16.

¹⁴ George Rudé, *Ideology and Popular Culture* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1980), p. 128.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 130

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (Ed. And Trans.) (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci" in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.), *Gramsci and Marxist*

Theory (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1979), p. 193.

²¹ The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center: History of South Korean Independent Cinema* [*Byõnbangeso Chungshimũro*] (Seoul: Shigakkua Ŭnnũ, 1996), p. 12.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²³ Kim Su-Nam, *Korean Independent Cinema* [*Hankuk Tongnip Yõnghwa*] (Seoul: Salrim, 2005), pp. 4-5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72

²⁸ Min Eung-Jun, *Korean Film: History, Resistance, and Democratic Imagination* (Westport: Praeger, 2003).

²⁹ Julian Stringer, "Introduction" in Chi-Yun Shin & Julian Stringer (Eds.) *New Korean Cinema* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³² David E. James, "Preface" in David E. James & Kyung-Hyun Kim (Eds.) *Im Kwon-Taek: The Making of a Korean National Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2002), p. 13.

³³ See, Shin Jeeyoung, "Globalization and New Korean Cinema," in Chi-Yun Shin & Julian Stringer (Eds.) *New Korean Cinema* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 51.

³⁴ Choi Jin-Hee, *Corporate Affluence, Cultural Exuberance: A Korean Film Renaissance and the 386 Generation Directors*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Chapter I

South Korean Cinema in the 1970s

This chapter examines the events related to South Korean cinema in the 1970s, which paved the groundwork for the rise of the independent cinema movement in the 1980s. Traditionally, Korean film scholars have referred to the 1960s as the ‘Golden Age’ of the national cinema¹ and consider the 1990s as the beginning of ‘New Korean Cinema.’² While celebrating these two periods as glorious hallmarks in South Korean cinema history, the intervening decades, particularly the 1970s, have earned the label of the “Dark Ages,”³ highlighting the drastic decrease in film production and the overall debasement of quality in popular cinema during the time. This chapter introduces an alternative perspective on the period, focusing on the rise of a new generation of filmmakers who ushered in a ‘New Wave.’ In the commercial film arena, a group of literati-filmmakers formed the Visual Age Group (*Yöngsang Shidae*, 1975-1978) to start an art cinema movement. At the same time, a new generation of young *cinephiles* emerged seeking a new cinema to represent their own cultural needs and aspirations. This young generation, mostly college students, started to pay regular visits to the French Cultural Centre (Centre Cultural Francais) and the German Goethe Institute, both of which were located in Seoul, to watch European films, and, for this reason, called themselves the Cultural Center Generation. My research shows how the foreign ‘New Wave’ cinemas, such as the French New Wave, the New German Cinema, and the New American Cinema, enlightened the members of the Visual Age Group and the youths forming the Cultural Center Generation.

Frozen Times and Resistant Minds

That 1960s South Korean cinema is often considered to be the ‘Golden Age,’ while its following decade is usually considered as the ‘Dark Age’ of South Korean cinema is due to the fact that the number of films produced in the 60s grew while the 1970s demonstrated the opposite tendency. Another characteristic that places the former period in the limelight is the broad range of experimental genres that appeared during the 1960s. Director Yu Hyun-Mok’s *Aimless Bullet (Obalt’an, 1961)*, for example, attested to the existence of genuine native realism by depicting the poverty and hopelessness of the nation after the Korean War. Director Kim Ki-Yong’s *The Housemaid (Hanyŏ, 1960)*, on the other hand, presents virulent sexual fantasies sustained by hybrid stylistics that “act out the psychological angst and anxiety behind the nation’s rapid pace of industrialization.”⁴ Indeed, both filmmakers kept expanding their styles - realism and modernism respectively - in the ensuing decades, but the origin of their creativities is rooted in the vibrant atmosphere of the sixties.

Year/1960s	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
Number of Films Produced	92	86	113	144	147	189	136	172	212	229
Year/1970s	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Number of Films Produced	209	202	122	125	141	94	134	101	117	96

Table 1 – The number of film production in South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s⁵

The 1970s, however, marked a period of declining quality films, hence the title of the Dark Age.⁶ The deprecating label refers to the many tear-jerking melodramas, misogynistic barmaid (or ‘hostess’) films, and action films produced at this time containing prosaic anti-communist overtones. First released in 1968, *Bitter but Once More* (*Miwōdo tasi hanbōn*, Jung So-Yong, 1968) a prototypical South Korean family melodrama produced three more sequels in 1969, in 1970 and in 1971, testifying to the enduring appeal of the tearjerker to South Korean audiences.⁷ Although it started as a serious portrayal of the dark sides of society like *Heavenly Homecoming of the Stars* (*Byōldūleu Gohyang*, Lee Jang-Ho, 1974), social realism films in the 1970s gradually deteriorated into a series of so-called “hostess movies” that exploited the afflicted lives of barmaids and prostitutes in the narratives.⁸ During the same period, *Testimony* (*Chūngōn*, Yim Kwon-Taek, 1974) led off the production of action films with anti-communist themes. Essentially, three factors are responsible for the demise of the national cinema’s aesthetic originality and commercial vivacity: the military regime of Park Chung-Hee that kept rigid control over the film sector, the industry driven to seek profit through the acquisition of the foreign film importation quotas granted by the government, and the advent of television broadcasting in the realm of popular culture, which in turn caused a decrease in the number of movie-goers.

However, the differences between the two decades described above does not necessarily come from a “film movement”⁹ of the 60s in which auteuristic works such as Yu Hyon Mok’s and Kim Ki Yong’s films dominated the field. In other words, while a few experimental movies received attention for their creativity and originality, they were not the typical movies produced in the 1960s. In 1969, for instance, out of 229 film productions in total, 103 were melodramas

and 55 were action films.¹⁰ As such, the heyday of South Korean cinema more closely resembles the Classical Hollywood Studio era (1920s-1940s) rather than Italian Neo-realism. As was the case with studio-era Hollywood, the ‘Golden Age’ of cinema also enjoyed an uncontested monopoly on mass culture, even to the point that cheap quickies and blatant plagiarism of Japanese films barely faced public protest or legal consequences.¹¹ Under these circumstances, films such as *An Aimless Bullet* and *The Housemaid* stand out as a few notable exceptions rather than the norm.

South Korean cinema reached its zenith of film production in 1970 when it produced 231 films. However, these figures plummeted afterwards (Table 1). As South Korean film critic Yi Hyo-In points out, the large number of films produced in 1970 contests the rigid distinction between the rosy 60s and the dark 70s.¹² It also allows us to conjecture a certain level of continuity connecting the two. The genres that accounted for the majority of 1970s film productions were family melodramas, action films, and youth films, which had their origins in the mainstream cinema of the 1960s.¹³ It is said that the 1970s films were plagued by “a handicraft production method, a control of nation-wide distributions by a modicum of theatre owners and local entrepreneurs, an inability and irregularities of production companies, an obsolete film language, a spawning of rough-and-ready quickies and imitations, an awkward directing and crude scenarios, and a dearth of imagination.”¹⁴ Yet these problems were not unique to the 1970s alone: they too were remnants from the previous decade.

This leads us to conclude that by the time of the 1970s, South Korean cinema had to be fully aware of the general detrimental conditions that had surrounded its existence up to that moment. These conditions involved matters pertaining to official censorship, backward

cinematic technology, obsolete film language, an ineffective film industry, and Korean national cinema's lack of international status. However, the military regime enacted the film law in 1973 that regulated the number of production companies, domestic film production, foreign film importation, not to mention the content of the films themselves. As a result, it retarded cinematically critical minds of the day so that they could not produce anything notable. Nevertheless, precisely because of that specific political ambiance, the practical and theoretical activities to improve South Korean cinema took the forms of the resistant youth culture and intellectual movement. The following section discusses the Visual Age Group and the Cultural Center Generation in order to illuminate the contour of the critical cinematic activities in the 1970s.

The Visual Age Group

The Visual Age Group refers to the name of the filmmaking group founded by film critic Byun In-Shik and film makers Kim Ho-Sun, Lee Jang-Ho, Ha Kil-Chong, Hong Pa, and Lee Won-Se (who would later be replaced by Hong Eu-Bong) in 1975.¹⁵ This six-member organization led the three-year period of youth film movement that started with the declaration of the Visual Age Manifesto (*Yǒngsang Sidae Sǒnǒn*) on July 18, 1975 and ended with the summer issue of their quarterly magazine, *The Visual Age (Yǒngsang Sidae)*, published on June 30, 1978.¹⁶ South Korean film historian An Jae-Seok evaluates the Visual Age Group as a cinema movement whose participants shared “not only distinctive premises about film production, but also a form, mode, and theme unique to their own films.”¹⁷ Although all of its founding members

were in their thirties and represented a new generation in the then South Korean film industry, the Visual Age Group had to fight the obstructions of the older generation who were still influential at the time.¹⁸ However, the members of the group lamented over the “low quality commercialism” of South Korean cinema¹⁹ and bemoaned the lack of any artistic tradition of South Korean cinema.

In its founding declaration in 1975, the Visual Age Group decried the current status of their national cinema and clarified their self-imposed mission as follows:

The new cinema of a new generation should be a gust of fresh wind that blows off the old skin, that is, a sharp-edged javelin aiming at pharisaic authoritarianism. Has a single case of cinema movement such as ‘Nouvelle Vague’ or ‘New Cinema’ ever risen in this country? (...) For this reason, here we six residents of the ‘visual republic’ will present a ‘young perspective’ through a convergence of our diverse cinematic individualities, and proclaim to be the protector of the silver screen by putting our hearts and heads together to seek new aesthetics and values of visual images.²⁰

The literary allusions like “the old skin” and “pharisaic authoritarianism” do not enumerate the problems deeply rooted in the old practices of the domestic cinema. However, Byun Yin-Shik, the only movie critic among the six founding members of the Visual Age Group, had already addressed the particulars in a major criticism of South Korean cinema in his *The Rebellion of Film Aesthetics (Yŏnghwamiŭi panran, 1972)*, three years before the establishment of the group. Byun’s reproach appears most vitriolic against South Korean cinema’s customary plagiarism of Japanese films. Tracing the origins of this plagiaristic history back to the 1920s when Korea’s budding film industry was formed under Japanese imperialism, Byun argues that the following forty years (1930s-1960s) of Korean film history never rid itself of the practice of copying, to the extent that even contemporary youth films, the most successful genre during the 1960s to the early-1970s in South Korea, merely presented characters who have “immigrated from the

Japanese reality.”²¹ Such a bastardization of the domestic cinema might have resulted from the sheer profit-seeking mentality prevailing in the film industry. Additionally, Byun claims that the lack of resistant spirit on the part of the filmmakers is also partially responsible for this consequence, since the South Korean film society hardly protested against the governmental censorship or commercial imperatives.²² Byun’s diagnosis is better understood in light of the politico-economic circumstances of the 1970s in which South Korean cinema was situated and eventually the Visual Age Group emerged.

The government had tight control of the movie industry as part of its agenda for media control. The fourth revision of the Film Law in 1973 reinstated a license system for the registration of a film production company, which confined the number of companies to somewhere between 14 to 20 until the fifth revision of the film law in 1984 and gradually consolidated a monopoly structure in the film market.²³ The monopoly structure thwarted any new entry of potential companies, which, in a sense, hindered the film industry from adjusting itself to the changing media environment.²⁴ Even the licensed companies were required to make “national policy films” (*kukch’aek yŏnghwa*) and “quality films” (*wusu yŏnghwa*): the first being a propaganda genre designed to proliferate ideas of anti-communism and industrialism; the second meant to espouse national ideologies and showcase traditional culture.²⁵ The term ‘quality’ had more to do with traditional and nationalistic value the government wanted to promote than with filmic quality *per se*. The then Park Chung-Hee government provided funding for these productions and the films made that way were distributed in the same way as other commercial films. On top of that, double-censorship practice, which blue-penciled original

scenarios first and then also cut out the resulting film, severely hampered filmmakers' artistic creativity.

The film industry was passive and conforming.²⁶ A licensed company contented itself with the foreign film importation quota granted in accordance with the number of national policy films and quality films that it produce within a year. Domestic films were not able to compete with foreign films' marketability. For example, in 1978, a domestic film *The Woman I Betrayed* (*Naega Bŏrin Yŏja*) ranked second at the year's box office with 375, 913 admissions. But the highest grossing film of the year was *The Spy Who Loved Me* (USA), which drew 545,583 people, while *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope*" (USA) attracted 347, 258 South Korean movie-goers. Even *Doctor Zhivago* (USA) was re-released attracting admissions of 319, 544.²⁷ These figures illustrate the degree to which the South Korean film industry relied on the foreign film (mostly Hollywood films) importation quota. Under such circumstances, domestic mainstream film production degenerated into a huge reprocessing plant of generic clichés. It propagated melodrama and action films that catered to the carnal desires of mass audiences. Apart from these two major genres, film production companies also capitalized on 'literary films' (*munye yŏnghwa*), cinematic adaptations of established literary works. This seemingly artistic creation was also largely designed to meet the demands of the quality film system, which functioned as the route to the acquisition of the foreign film importation quota. Therefore, commercial in nature, even literary films were not different from other genre conventions. Statistics from the Korean Film Institute in 1978 sum up the overall situation: out of 117 domestic films produced in that year, 48 films were melodramas, 37 films were action films, 12 were national policy films (anti-communism propaganda), and there were 12 literary films (the

categories are not mutually exclusive).²⁸ The majority of the films were either government-sponsored or market-driven.

To the Visual Age Group (1975-1978), the contemporary state of South Korean cinema was marked only by complicity between the institutional control of the government and the commercial interests of the film industry. The authoritarian air of the government filled both the political environment as well as the film industry in which the group had to survive. However, their solution was rather idealistic: they believed that well-made artistic films would eventually overcome the plight South Korean cinema was going through by ultimately winning more audience and critical acceptance.²⁹ Ha Kil-Chong,³⁰ a founding member of the group, argued that new cinema should not content itself with passive representations of socio-cultural phenomena, but must make efforts to lead the masses to a greater awareness of and active reflection upon the established value system and moral standards.³¹ This view was inspired by new cinema experiments from the Western world to which Ha and his colleagues subscribed. The presence of European art cinema, the French New Wave and the New American cinema enabled the Visual Age Group to envision a new Korean cinema that would reflect immediate realities surrounding Korean society.³² However, the most notable achievement in the process was the Visual Age Group's advocacy of film auteurism. Introducing new cinema movements from Europe and the U.S., Ha Kil-Chong maintained,

A common characteristic of these new cinemas is that the proponents of the new cinema spirit, on the one hand, agree that filmmaking is an artistic activity performed through a composite process, but on the other hand, they take film as an artistic link between the man and the medium, that is, an individual act of artistic creation.³³

Ha concludes the manuscript by noting that “film is the mirror of reality, therefore, the filmmaker is required to create a balanced spiritual system within a reality by projecting his own experience of the reality onto a visual language.”³⁴ As such, realism and auteurism stood out as the kernel of the spirit of the Visual Age Group.

Six members would make 11 films under the name of the Visual Age Group.³⁵ Even though they employed a variety of themes and contents, each of the directors made a self-conscious effort to find new cinematic languages. For example, director Hong Pa contributed three films, *Woods and Swamp* (*Sup-gua Nūp*, 1975), *When Will We Meet Again?* (*Ōdisō muōtyi doeō dashi mannari*, 1977), *Fire* (*Bul*, 1978) to the Group. In the first two, Hong breaks the conventional sequencing of time in the film narrative by equally juxtaposing the past and the present within the same temporal dimension.³⁶ Film critic Kim Sa-Kyum stated that Hong’s *When Will We Meet Again?* described the subjective conflicts between memory and oblivion, in an aesthetic style similar to Alain Renais’s works.³⁷ Lee Won-Sae’s *Flower and Snake* (*Kkotqua Baem*, 1875) and Ha Kil-Chong’s *The Ascension of Hannae* (*Hannae-eu Sūngchōn*, 1977) presented the Korean folktale about grudge and revenge and the Buddhist idea of reincarnation in their narratives, respectively. Adaptation of such indigenous subjects was part of the group’s attempt to find “Korean-style imagery.”³⁸ Thus, the films of the Visual Age Group focused on creating their own idiosyncratic filmic images so as to demonstrate that filmmaking was beyond a simple weaving of separate images into a narrative structure. Thematically, their films tended to probe subliminal aspects of humanity and human relationships such as castration anxiety or repeated destiny, the themes that had rarely been dealt with in South Korean cinema up until then.

As such, the Visual Age Group's film auteurism appeared like pioneerism, which they used to raise their national cinema to an artistic level on par with cinema movements worldwide. Ironically, however, their self-imposed mission found its most formidable obstacle neither in censorship nor in the industrial establishment, but in the reception of the audience. Most of their films turned out to be box-office failures, so that the group's pioneer spirit eventually died out. The organization fought to maintain the momentum by recruiting new faces into their films, but their general strife toward the realization of South Korean art cinema "failed to widen the belt of consensus among ordinary audiences."³⁹

The Visual Age Group promoted realism and auteurism as *the* condition for new South Korean cinema. However, their films largely focused on creating stylistic auteurism at the expense of realism, focusing on indirect stories such as folk tales or Buddhism rather than reflecting what was actually going on at the time. Otherwise, considering their modernist themes of alienation and existentialism, it might be fair to say that they rendered subjective realism rather than social realism. Before joining the Visual Age Group, director Lee Jang-Ho made his impressive debut with *Heavenly Homecoming of the Stars* (*Byöldüleu Gohyang*, 1974) the narrative of which concerns a tragic life of a barmaid and is obviously based on social realism. Ha Kil-Chong also made *The March of Fools* (*Babodüleu Haegjin*, 1975) in his pre-Visual Age Group period, and it proved a powerful social satire orchestrated by documentary-style realism.

Both films marked the start of a movement hailed by college students in the 1970s as 'young cinema.'⁴⁰ Nevertheless, it was difficult for the directors to maintain cutting-edge social realism in the face of the censorial bureau. For the Visual Age Group directors, stylistic auteurism provided an asylum where their artistic creativity and critical minds could thrive

without limitation. In this sense, the idea of art cinema was not only the matrix of their creativity but also the prison that kept them from describing socio-political realities of the day.

The Visual Age Group echoed the common fate of other progressive intellectuals living in 1970s South Korea. Sociologist Kim Dong-Chun pointed out that the resistant block of intellectuals and politicians who waged social movements against the military government barely tried to debunk nationalism, industrialism, and the propaganda of Korean-style democracy, which had ideologically sustained the military regime.⁴¹ Their concern remained within the domain of methodology as to how to achieve those ideological goals by merely pointing out how the government was deviating from their methodological ideal. Likewise, the Visual Age Group only highlighted their ideal of film as a well-made art, while barely challenging the underlying system that advanced its own version of a well-made film, the quality film (*wusu yǒnghwa*).

Even though the members of the Visual Age Group were not able to realize their vision, they were the first to consciously proclaim a cinema movement and attempt to bring a change in the status quo of the movie industry of the day. Aside from their vision of directors as authorial artists creating and leading a new art cinema movement to revive South Korean cinema, they also served to awaken a pioneering spirit resulting in populist reverberations in university students in the 1970s. The emergence of the Cultural Center Generation came out as a part of the consequence.

The Cultural Center Generation

The Cultural Center Generation (Munhwawŏn Saedae) is a self-explanatory term: *munhwawŏn* refers to ‘cultural center’ and *saedae* denotes ‘generation.’ The combination of a spatial concept and a temporal noun may sound clumsy, but its signification is precise and informative. The Cultural Center Generation indicates an anonymous group of youngsters in the 1970s, mostly university students who found a particular usage of the French Cultural Centre and the German Goethe Institute as a route to reach scholarly and cultural works produced in Europe, which were otherwise unobtainable in the official domains of South Korean academia and popular culture. In cinema, the Cultural Center Generation refers to those individuals who paid regular visits to the cinematheques of the two cultural centers in order to view French and German films screened under the aegis of those two countries.

The importance of the Cultural Center Generation lies in that it historically bridged the critical minds of the Visual Age Group in the 1970s and its populist transformation in the Small Film generation of the early 1980s (discussed in chapter 2). The Cultural Center youths hailed Ha Kil-Chong’s *The March of Fools* (1975) and worshipped European modernist films just as the Visual Age Group did. Yet the Cultural Center Generation was not a deliberate organization of enlightened intellectuals so much as a spontaneous youth cultural phenomenon. Although it is impossible to provide full coverage of individuals who claimed membership in the Cultural Center Generation, it is evident that the collective experience of the cultural center cinematheques nurtured a new era of South Korean cinema.⁴² In the process, the Oberhausen Manifesto of the New German cinema provided a spiritual impetus to some members of the

Cultural Center Generation, who would find their generational catchphrase in the Manifesto's final statement, "The old cinema is dead." Those who were galvanized by the Manifesto would wind up launching the Small Film festival in 1984.

South Korean film historian An Jae-Seok comments, "Epitomized in mini-skirts, blue jeans, and long hair, various other signifiers of the 1970s [South Korean] youth culture was a expression of counter-cultural resistance against the [military government's] *Yushin* System (i.e., Reformation System), as well as a representation of a swinging culture of city life to the youth of South Korea, which was then at the outset of industrialization and modernization."⁴³ However, An goes on to state:

The governing power was so rigid that it could not tolerate even a hint of American-style liberalism, and wielded the power of censorship on the cultural activities of the youth. ... [I]mmediately after establishing "The Committee on the Artistic and Cultural Morality" in 1975, the government forbade the publishing and broadcasting of 440 popular songs on the ground that they did not suit the recently implemented "Judging Principles and Directions for Popular Songs." ... The tide made a ripple effect onto the film society, so that many filmmakers were forced to leave their work. Lee Jang-Ho, film director and a member of the Visual Age Group also got embroiled in the opium-smoking indictment.⁴⁴

The arbitrary measures to purge even a hint of rebellion found its justification in the military government's central mode of domination the *Yushin* System which implemented in 1972 "made any criticism of the regime a violation of national security."⁴⁵ The national system was also capitalistic, insofar as entrepreneurial activities, especially those of big conglomerates, served the state's architecture of export-driven national economy fundamentally adverse to the laboring class.⁴⁶ The quoted incidents were a case of vandalism that resulted from the combination of political authoritarianism and economic interventionism perpetrated on the arena

of popular culture and its associated industries. Movie industry also suffered a mutilation of their artistic expressions in their products.

Under these circumstances, foreign cultural centers, whether they were European or not, provided semi-official avenues for foreign cultural works that escaped the Korean government's official censorship. These centers were established by their home governments for the purpose of introducing their culture to Koreans. The French Cultural Centre had operated its own cinematheque called *Salle Renoir* since its installment in 1968 in Seoul, South Korea.⁴⁷ However, it was in 1977 when the center built its "Cine Club" that South Korean film scholars began holding weekly sessions for film screenings and discussions in front of unidentified participants.⁴⁸ *Salle Renoir* provided a "liberated district" where a full gamut of French cinema was screened: to name a few trends, they introduced surrealism of the 1920s, poetic realism of the 1930s, the French New Wave of the 1950s-60s, and the Post-New Wave of the 1970s.⁴⁹ As such, the uninterrupted history of French cinema was delivered to cultural center audiences.

Jean Luc Malene, the incumbent President of the French Cultural Centre as of 2006, mentioned,

"The French Cultural Centre provided an open window through which foreign cultures, and the current issues of Europe and other countries as well were delivered to South Korea which was at the time under the oppression of military control. And, of course, the method was film. Introduced in the main were the French New Wave films such as those of Godard, Trauffaut, and even Buñuel who sought refuge in France from Spain for political reasons" (Korean translation).⁵⁰

Malene alluded that the French New Wave films provided a major repertoire that left an indelible mark in the memory of the Cultural Center Generation. It is more likely, however, that most of the French (and other European) films shown at the center also impressed the young South Korean viewers. After all, there is no apparent reason to surmise that Jean-Luc Godard's

Breathless (*À bout de souffle*, 1960) to look more fresh and innovative than, for example, Jean Cocteau's *The Blood of a Poet* (*Le Sang d'un poète*, 1930) to the eyes of the audiences, the majority of whom had scant knowledge of the histories and trends of world cinema.

As flocks of students visited the French Cultural Centre to watch French movies and expressed a growing interest in the historical and critical background of French cinema, the center established the Cine Club in 1977. The Cine Club, which conducted somewhat focused film studies on a regular basis, might have transmitted the historical significance of the French New Wave to the South Korean watchers. The French films the cultural center imported served to expand the horizon of the audiences' filmic experience and catered to their taste for European culture.

When the German Goethe Institute commenced the East-West Cinema Club in 1978, it seemed to follow the French example to reach out to Korean university students. The German Goethe Institute even created a study-abroad scholarship in order to attract the same audiences who flocked to the French Cultural Centre.⁵¹ Thanks in part to such incentive policies, the East-West Cinema Club achieved immediate growth drawing around 300 South Korean members who would participate in a broad range of theoretical studies and translations including 8mm filmmaking.⁵² Despite its less-than-a-year life span (the club fell apart when the interest died out and majority of the students stopped coming), the East-West Cinema Club gave birth to numbers of notable ramifications such as the three issues of *The East-West Cinema Bulletin* and the East-West Cinema Study Club, a film study group organized by the former student members of the East-West Cinema Club.⁵³ This student group left its mark in the form of a quarterly journal called *Frame 1/24* (1980) and a short film entitled *Bridge* (*Dari*, 8mm, 1983).⁵⁴

Korean histories are silent as to how the East-West Cinema Club produced diverse accomplishments in comparison to the French Cultural Centre's Cine Club, which had first stood out as the locus of the Cultural Center Generation cinephiles. No historical record written in Korean seems to have raised this question. Kim So-Young (film director and critic), Chung Sung-Il (film critic), and Kim Eui-Suk (film director), who all had joined the cinema club activities of the foreign cultural centers and became the main organizers of the Small Film festival in 1984, commonly pointed out that they had found a spiritual connection in the Oberhausen Manifesto of the New German Cinema, and that the Manifesto inspired the idea of a new cinema in the young cinephiles.⁵⁵ The Oberhausen Manifesto must have had a certain appeal to the minds of the Cultural Center visitors that the French cinema lacked.

The films by Wim Wenders, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Alexander Herzog impressed the Cultural Center Generation in much the same way as the French films did. However, one crucial difference lies in the fact that the New German Cinema proclaimed a complete rupture "against the mass-produced entertainment industry of the Nazi period and the 1950s, against the visual pleasure of lavish productions, and against the ideology of the economic miracle."⁵⁶ French cinema had barely gone through any historical hardship as its cultural center's repertoire displayed. Most importantly, the South Korean students made the connection between Nazi Germany and their own military government and between the collapse of the commercial German film industry and the degradation of the 70s South Korean film industry.⁵⁷ Some passages of the Oberhausen Manifesto verify this assumption.

The collapse of the commercial German film industry finally removes the economic basis for a mode of film-making whose attitude and practice we reject. ... This new cinema needs new forms of freedom: from the conventions and habits of the established industry, from intervention by commercial partners,

and finally freedom from the tutelage of other vested interests. ... The old cinema is dead. We believe in the new.⁵⁸

According to Chung Sung-Il, the Oberhausen Manifesto enjoyed a wide circulation among the cinema club participants either in its original German or in English translation. When the aforementioned interviewees stressed the emotional impact they received from the Oberhausen Manifesto, particularly from the final statement, “The old cinema is dead,” they commonly recited this sentence with a slight variation, “The father’s cinema is dead.” This slip of the tongue might reflect their critical sense of the times when the patriarchal dictatorship was governing. Consequently, the Cultural Center Generation and its reception of the Oberhausen Manifesto paved the road for the Small Film movement in the early 1980s.

¹ See, Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann, *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005)

² See, Shin Chi-Yun and Julian Stringer, *New Korean Cinema* (New York: New York University Press, 2005)

³ Jang Mi-Hee, “South Korean cinema 1972-1979” in Joo Jin-Suk, Jang Mi-Hee, Byŏn Jae-Ran (Eds.), *The Dictionary of Korean Women Filmmakers [Yŏsŏng Yŏnghwain Sajŏn]* (Seoul: Sodo, 2001), p. 188.

⁴ Kim Kyung-Hyun, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 208.

⁵ This table is made based on the information from, Park, Chi-Yŏn. “The Policies and Industry of South Korean Cinema in the 1960s-70s” in Yi Hyo-In et al (Eds.), *A Study of South Korean Cinema History 1960-1979 [Hankuk Yŏnghwasa Kongbu 1960-1970]* (Seoul: Yich’ae, 2004), p 153, p 178.

⁶ Jang Mi-Hee, p. 188.

⁷ Lee Ho-Geol, “1970s South Korean cinema” in *A Study of South Korean Cinema History 1960-1979*, (Seoul: KOFA, 2004), p. 91.

⁸ Ibid., p. 96.

⁹ Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelman, *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2005), p. 2.

¹⁰ Yi Hyo-In, “1960s South Korean cinema” in *A Study of South Korean Cinema History 1960-1979* (Seoul: KOFA, 2004), pp. 32-33.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 32-37.

¹² Ibid., p. 37.

¹³ Lee Ho-Geol, Ibid., pp. 89-91, 104-106.

¹⁴ Jang Mi-Hee, Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁵ An Jae-Seok, *A Study on the Visual Age Group as a Youth Film Movement [Chŏngnyŏn Yŏnghwa Undongŭirosŏi ‘Yŏngsang Shidae’ae taehan Chŏngnyŏn Yŏnghwa Undongŭirosŏi ‘Yŏngsang Shidae’ae taehan Yŏngu]* (Seoul: Chungang University, 2001), unpublished MA thesis

¹⁶ An, Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ An, Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁹ An, *Ibid.*, p. 36.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²¹ Byun In-Shik, *The Rebellion of Film Aesthetics [Yŏnghwamiŭi panran]*. (Seoul:Taegŭk, 1972), p. 265.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 270-271.

²³ Park Ji-Yeon, "The policies and industry of South Korean cinema in the 1960s-70s" in *A Study of South Korean Cinema History 1960-1979* (Seoul: KOFA, 2004), pp. 166-167.

²⁴ Jang Mi-Hee, *Ibid.*, 182.

²⁵ The national policy film system was installed in 1975 and the quality film system in 1976. South Korean film scholar Park Chi-Yŏn explains, "The reinforcement of the quality film system was an outcome of the military regime's authoritarian ruling, which turned outrageous after the Park Chung-Hee government had been put into crisis due to challenges within and without since 1975. (See Park Chi-Yŏn, "The policies and industry of South Korean cinema in the 1960s-70s" in *A Study of South Korean Cinema History 1960-1979*] (Seoul: KOFA, 2004), pp. 144-185.

²⁶ It does not mean that there was no reaction to the stagnation of film culture and industry. For instance, in a symposium held in August 1978 under the title of "South Korean Film Symposium," filmmakers who attended raised a unanimous voice over the problems such as the quality film system, the foreign film importation quota, the domestic film production quota, and other institutional and technical issues. (*Yŏnghwa*, 1978, September & October, vol 55, p, 96) However, their general position on the matters was contained within the level of invoking a more cooperative attitude from the government.

²⁷ *The Almanac of Korean Cinema* (Seoul: Korean Film Institute, 1978), pp. 47, 61.

²⁸ *The Almanac of Korean Cinema* (Seoul: Korean Film Institute, 1979), p. 104.

²⁹ An, *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁰ Ha Kil-Chong (1941-1979) remains a cultural icon born out of the 1970s South Korean cinema. His *The March of Fools (Babodŭleu Haengjin, 1975)* presented college students' youthful idealism and its ultimate defeat wrapped in an aura of social oppression. The film made an instant box-office success and the director himself emerged as an idol among college youths. In the late 1960s, Ha went to the U.S. to study film theory and production at UCLA. It is reported that Ha and Francis Ford Coppola stood out as the two best students in the UCLA film program. However, Ha's first film after his coming back to South Korea, *A Treasure Pot (Hwabun, 1972)* got embroiled into a plagiarism dispute due to its similarities to Pierre Paola Passolini's *Teorama* (1971). In an interview with me, a South Korean film critic, Chung Sung-Il, asserted that Ha's plagiarism of Pazzolini was obvious since it was highly likely that Ha had chances to see *Teorama* while he was in the U.S. However, it is still possible to view the film as an extension of Ha's effort to implant the spirit of European art cinema into the South Korean soil. His early death at the age of thirty-eight buried the chances of his artistic talent coming to maturity and has only nurtured a legendary aura around his life and directorial career. Ha Kil-Chong's filmography is as follows:

A Treasure Pot (Hwabun, 1972), *Fidelity* (Sujöl, 1974), *The March of Fools* (Babodüleu Haengjin, 1975), *I am Looking for a Wife* (Yöjarül Ch'atsümnida, 1976), *The Ascension of Hannae* (Hanaeeu Süngch'ön, 1977), *Heavenly Homecoming of the Stars; part II* (Sok Byöldüleu Gohyang, 1978), *Byöngtae and Yöngja* (Byöngtae wa Yöngja, 1979).

³¹ Ha Kil-Chong, "New generation, New Cinema, New Spirit", *The Visual Age* [Yöngsang Sidae] (Summer 1977), p. 28.

³² An, *Ibid.*, pp. 43-46.

³³ Ha, *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁵ The following is the filmography of the Visual Age Group: *Woods and Swamp* (*Sup gua Nüp*, Hong Pa, 1975), *Flower and Snake* (*Kkot gua Baem*, Lee Won-Se, 1975), *California 90006* (*Kaeliponia 90006*, Hong Eu-Bong, 1976), *Alright, Alright, Today is Fine* (*Gürae Gürae Onüleun Annyöng*, Lee Jang-Ho, 1976), *I am Looking for a Wife* (*Yöjarül Ch'atsumnida*, Ha Kil-Chong, 1976), *The Street of Women* (*Yöjadulman Sanün Göri*, Kim Ho-Sun, 1976), *When Will We Meet Again?* (*Ödisö Muöt'yi Doeö Dashi Mannari*, Hong Pa, 1977), *The Ascension of Hannae* (*Hannae eu Süngchön*, 1977), *The Winter Woman* (*Gyöul Yöja*, 1977), *Day and Night of Komerican* (*Komerikan eu Nat gua Bam*, Hong Eu-Bong, 1977), *Fire* (*Bul*, Hong Pa, 1978).

³⁶ An, *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴¹ Kim, Dong-Ch'un, "Oppositional Ideologies of Democratic Movements in the 1960s and 1970s" in Chung Hae-Gu (Eds.), *Ruling ideologies and Oppositional Ideologies of South Korean Politics* [*Hankook Chungch'iü jibae ideologiwa daehang ideology*] (Seoul: Yöksabipyöng, 1994), pp. 246-247

⁴² It can be said that the population of the Cultural Center Generation accommodated potentially every youths who belonged to the age group between late-teens and early-thirties during the 1970s. However, most of them must have lived or have attended schools in the metropolitan area in and around Seoul, the capital of South Korea as both the French cultural center and the German cultural center were located in the capital city. A newspaper report disclosed some names of celebrities who confessed to have owed their viewing and learning of French cinema to the French cultural center since the 70s. The names included Jung Ji-Young (director, *White Badge*), Jang Gil-Su (director, *Silver Stallion*), Bae Chang-Ho (director, *Whale Hunter*), Pak Guang-Su (director, *Black Republic*), Kim Hong-Jun (director, *Jungle Story*), Gang Jae-Gyu (director, *Shiri*), Guak Jae-Yong (director, *My Sassy Girl*), Pak Chan-Wook (director, *JSA, Old*

Boy), Kim Ji-Woon (director, *The Foul King*), Chung Sung-III (film critic), Yang Yun-Mo (film critic), Jön Yang-Jun (programmer of Pusan International Film Festival as of 2006), Ahn Söng-Gi (Actor). (Im Yin-Taek, “Pürangsü Munhwawon: Sine Kizü Yokmang Chaeudön Nolitö”, *The Hankyoreh*, Jan 19, 2006) This list shows that the major force of South Korean cinema since the late 1980s onwards has been filled with the Cultural Center Generation.

⁴³ An Jae-Seok , “Youth culture and the Visual Age Group” in *The Dictionary of Korean Women Filmmakers*] (Seoul: Sodo, 2001), p, 204.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 205.

⁴⁵ Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun* (New York: Norton), p. 358.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 183.

⁴⁷ Chung Sung-III, “The French cultural center...culturally liberated district or a melancholic ghetto in the Park Chung-Hee Period” in *The Hankyoreh*, January 19, 2006.
http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/culture/culture_general/96163.html.

⁴⁸ The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* [*Byönbangesö chungshimüro*] (Seoul: Shigakkua Önö, 1995), p. 19.

⁴⁹ This information came from my personal interview with Chung Sung-III made on August 2006. Chung Sung-III entered college in 1978 and would later become a leading South Korean film critic. Chung launched a film weekly *Kino* in May 1995, and its publication would be over on July 2003.

⁵⁰ *The Hangyeoreh*, Jan 18, 2006

⁵¹ According to my interview with Chung Sung-III on August 2006, approximately 500 people participated in club activities hosted by the German cultural center. The German cultural center started around 10 study clubs such as the Hegel study club, the Kafka study club, and so on. The idea of establishing the cinema study club was at once catalyzed by the success of the French cultural center cinematheque and encouraged by the expectation that films would attract the South Korean people more easily than the books written in Germany. The study-abroad scholarships offered to the club activity participants was a powerful incentive, since the military government strictly regulated the moving in and out of the country. The liberalization of travel-abroad laws would be enacted as late as 1988 in South Korea.

⁵² The Seoul Visual Collective, Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

⁵⁵ This information comes from the interviews I conducted with the interviewees on a personal basis during August 2006. Kim So-Young has been both an active feminist filmmaker and a film scholar since 1984. She was a founding member of a women’s filmmaking coterie, Baritö, in 1989. A documentary,

Women's History Trilogy (2000-2004) remains her major work. Kim Eui-Suk has made a successful career as a commercial filmmaker. His *Wedding Story* (1991) has been recorded in South Korean film history as the first case of a "project film" budgeted by a conglomerate investment.

⁵⁶ Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: the Key Concepts* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 181.

⁵⁷ Chung Sung-Ill, Personal interview with author, 3 August 2006

⁵⁸ Thomas Elsaesser, *New German Cinema: A History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers UP, 1989), p. 21.

Chapter II

The Small Film

This chapter discusses the idea of the Small Film that first emerged as the catch phrase of a short film (8mm or 16mm) festival called the Small Film Festival (*chagŭn yŏnghwajae*) held by a group of university students in 1984. The students set forth the motto ‘Small Film’ as an expression of their collective will to create a new identity of South Korean cinema. The proponents of the Small Film positioned themselves against the ‘big’ commercial films that did little more than recycling genre clichés such as melodrama, action movie, and cold-war propaganda. The advocates of the Small Film claimed that South Korean commercial cinema was not able to represent the realities of the day. Instead, they maintained that a new cinema was to pertain to the realities of *minjung*. Literally signifying ‘people,’ the term *minjung* specifically refers to lower classes such as peasants, manual laborers, and the urban poor. The period of the early 1980s was characterized by mass movements against the military rule, specifically the Kwangju Uprising in May 1980. Witnessing the political mobilizations of grass roots, intellectuals and university students found the potentiality of social progress in the power of people. In so doing, they conceived of the ideal vision of humanity in the menial lives of *minjung*: common people’s agrarian collectivism appeared morally superior to intellectuals’ petty bourgeois individualism. The central argument of this chapter is that the Small Film movement, the harbinger of the independent cinema movement in 1980s, established its foundation on the *minjung* discourse.

The Small Film Festival

The Small Film Festival under the motto of “Let Us Protect Small Films!” was held at the National Theatre of Korea in Seoul on July 7-8, 1984. The term “Small Film” technically referred to the 8mm or 16mm short films as opposed to the ‘big’ 35mm commercial film format; but rhetorically it signified an “open cinema that reinterprets [social] reality in a critical perspective and presents future-oriented alternatives.”¹ The promoters of the Small Film Festival reworked the catchphrase as “socially and cinematically resistant films (*sahoejŏk yŏnghwajŏk daehang yŏnghwa*),”² which connoted two important tenets of the Small Film movement: the social consciousness of film content and the innovativeness of film language. Considering the nationwide censorship by the military government, it was a bold move to organize the event with such an expressive purpose.

Forty-seven organizers,³ mostly university students and graduates, put their passion and heads together in order to launch this short-film festival without any financial support from the government or corporations. By way of roundtable discussions among the organizers, six final entries (out of sixty-four) were chosen to be screened in front of approximately 2,000 anonymous viewers.⁴ At that time in South Korea, the 8mm and 16mm films were a novel medium so that only a small number of cinematic artists and film students had access to them because of their scarcity and high price. The festival organizers shared the belief that, in contrast to other theatrical and literary arts, the film medium had barely earned its due respect as an autonomous art form in the South Korean cultural atmosphere by the time. Therefore, the Small Film Festival was intended to be such a large-scale event that it could draw the interest of the

artists engaged in other art forms. The festival actually garnered enthusiastic responses from South Korean art community, especially from those liberals who opposed the military regime: Park Bul-Tong, a renowned leftwing painter and woodblock artist, contributed a drawing to decorate the front page of the festival pamphlet. As such, the Small Film Festival was an unprecedented cinematic event that affirmed the viability of non-commercial filmmaking and created a common bond among the young cine-artists.

Underneath the façade of festivity, however, the Small Film Festival filled itself with its own patricidal desire that reflected the Oberhausen Manifesto. Chung Sung-Il, one of the co-hosts, remarked on the “three fathers” that the Small Film movement had implicitly challenged: that is, Former President Park Chung-Hee, South Korean commercial cinema, and the film departments in universities.⁵ The year 1984 marked the fifth year since the assassination of former president Park Chung-Hee, which had signaled the collapse of the two decades of military dictatorship (1961-1979). A new military junta led by Chun Doo-Hwan arose to crush a series of democratic movements unleashed by Park’s death. Culminating in the Kwangju Uprising in May 1980, the dramatic unfolding of the domestic political events served to awaken the young generation to a socio-political consciousness. And the enduring military rule kept the image of Park Chung-Hee as a tyrannical “national father” alive in the minds of the youths of the day. To designate commercial cinema as the second father seems understandable in that the student filmmakers must have loathed the backwardness of domestic films just as the members of the Visual Age Group did. Nevertheless, the institutional film education as the third object of their patricidal desire seems rather a stretch. Chung made it clear that in the eyes of the Small

Film promoters, university film departments had only churned out quasi-avant-garde, gibberish films, too solipsistic to relate to any social realities of the day.⁶

That the three-father mentality was actually functioning was proven by the fact that the forty-seven organizers were mostly the affiliates of the Cultural Center Generation who detested the existing commercial cinema and governmental restrictions on freedom of artistic expression. The organizers of the Small Film Festival were also under the intellectual umbrella of the Visual Age Group that had left significant critiques on South Korean cinema. Notably, quite a few were film majors at regular universities with short-film awards won in the Korean Youth Film Festival (held annually since 1975).⁷ Others were graduates attending Korean Academy of Film Arts, the government-sponsored institution established in 1984. There were also some members of student filmmaking organizations such as the Seoul Cinema Collective (Sŏwul Yŏnghwa Chipttan, est. 1982) and the Cinema Field ‘Uri’ (Yŏnghwa Madang ‘Uri,’ est. 1984). What brought all these students from different backgrounds together was the *minjung* discourse, an emphasis on the lives of the people.

The *Minjung* Discourse and Its Applications in Youth Culture

The term *minjung* normally indicates the social stratum made up of the lower classes such as “laborers, farmers, small-scale commercial operators and the urban poor.”⁸ Yet this term has been charged with additional political meanings since the industrialization drive set in motion in the early 1960s in South Korea. On the one hand, *minjung* bears in it the hardships that the lower classes had to endure to survive the political oppression and economic inequality in the course of

the industrialization period. On the other hand, it also connotes latent energy of the commoners, which resists tyranny and brings in democratic reform at the end. Progressive intellectual in South Korea have theorized the notion of *minjung* in this perspective: and they have claimed themselves to be the mouthpiece of the lower-class people.

Historian Kang Man-Gil traces the conceptual origin of *minjung* to the period of Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945). Kang notes that Shin Chae-Ho, a prominent leader of national independence movement, in his manuscript entitled *The Declaration of the Korean Revolution* (1923) described *minjung* as “those who suffered directly from Japan’s colonial rule” but advanced themselves as “the leading force of the national movement (...) as the March First Movement (March 1, 1919) demonstrated.”⁹ Interpreting Shin’s statements, Kang maintains that *minjung* forged “a confederation of classes that included intellectuals, peasants, workers, and even petit bourgeoisie who suffered from and struggled actively against colonial rule.”¹⁰ From Shin’s and Kang’s views, one may extract three characteristics of *minjung*: suffering in life, purposefulness in action, and plurality in composition.

The idea of *minjung* drew a renewed interest from intellectual community in the 1970s when the Park Chung-Hee regime pushed industrialization drive relying on and at the expense of cheap labors provided by unskilled workers. The direful living conditions in which manual laborers, petty farmers and the urban poor were left epitomized the existential condition of *minjung*. In November 1970, Jeon Tae-II, a sewing factory worker, committed a self-immolation calling for labor justice. This incident astounded the intellectuals and students who were sympathetic about the dreadful labor conditions in which the majority of manual workers were situated. The death of Jeon Tae-II called for an action on the part of the intellectual circles.

Literary groups proposed the idea of people's literature (*minjung munhak*). Renowned poet Shin Kyung-Lim in his *Literature and People (Munhakkwa Minjung, 1973)* defined the goal of the people's literature as "to integrate the emotion and thought of people" and "to create literature of people and for people taking its root in the living spirit of the people"¹¹ (here, the term *minjung* is translated into people in English). Yet the primary purpose of the people's literature consists in the actualization of "realism" that "should not stop at passive representation of the spirit of people" but must lead them to the understanding and fulfillment of their historical tasks.¹² What is called *minjung* realism as such was highly influenced by Marxist socialist realism, especially that elaborated by Georg Lukács.

In lined with the people's literature movement, university students paid attention to a more energetic side of *minjung* as the repository of indigenous national culture. They tried to recuperate the vitality of the folkloric *minjung* culture which had been supposedly buried in the course of Japanese colonial rule, the national division, and the military dictatorships. The students imposed on themselves the task "to revive the lost art of the people and 'return' the revived folk-cultural items to the people, the true owners of folk culture."¹³ For instance, they adapted traditional mask dance (*talchum*) into creative mask dance (*changjak talchum*) in which the actors satirically reenacted real-life issues regarding society and politics. Mask dances were usually performed in the form of courtyard play (*madang nori*). The student actors favored the courtyard play because it had no demarcation line between actors and audiences. The open form of courtyard play effectively invited audience participation and "a sense of communal solidarity" among all participants: the rapport was often induced to "the energy to struggle together against the exploitive ruling class."¹⁴ Anthropologist Choi Chung-Moo maintains,

[T]he methodology of the *minjung* culture movement is essentially a rereading of history as history of the oppressed *minjung*'s struggle and a representation of that history as a paradigm of change. (...) [I]n the history thus reread, hitherto marginalized people enter the central arena or become agents of history." [The *minjung* culture movement] "opened up an alternative epistemological space."¹⁵

The *minjung*-oriented alternative epistemological space suggested by Choi can be paraphrased into *minjung* discourse. Given that discourse refers to "a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it,"¹⁶ the *minjung* discourse refers to the world view that sees the history, culture, and politics of Korea in the interest of *minjung*. Certainly, the original producer of the *minjung* discourse should be the people themselves. In reality, however, it is intellectuals who created and enriched the discourse through such activities as history writing, literary creation, and cultural movements. This fact suggests that the intellectuals constructed the *minjung* discourse as a counter-cultural paradigm by which to resist governing ideologies such as militarism and industrialism.

Partly intellectuals and partly reserved labor force, university students were extremely perceptive to the social inequities suffocating the lives of the working classes. Throughout the 1970s, anti-government democratic movements hardly effected mass mobilization, but were limited to the unorganized activities of underground student groups. Under the circumstance, the social movements often degenerated into factional conflicts, earning little support from grassroots people. The situation underwent a drastic change when the death of Park Chung-Hee sparked a series of democratization drives conducted by university students across the country. The students initiated the "university democratization movement" (*hakwŏn minjuhwa undong*) with the aim to oust the professors who had collaborated with the military regime. In May 15, 1980, around 100,000 students gathered around the Seoul Station in Seoul to call for the

rescindment of the martial law and for democratic reform.¹⁷ Chung Sung-Il, one of the Small Film Festival promoters, said that “an infinite number of participants made the event an earthshaking incident because such a large-scale multitude had been unimaginable by the end of the 1970s.”¹⁸ The sudden and short upsurge of mass mobilizations was called the “Spring of Seoul.” It was short because the democratic movements were soon to be trampled down by the new military *coup d'état* led by Chun Doo-Hwan in 1980. The massacre committed by the government-sent paratroopers to civilians in the city of Kwangju from May 18 to 27 in 1980 was the prelude to the empowerment of the Chun military regime.

The violent suppression of the civil demand of democracy in Kwangju, which would later be called the Kwangju Uprising, caused a rapid popularization of the *minjung* discourse among university students. They felt indebted to the civilian victims and thought that they should pay the debt of being alive: the method of payment was to transform themselves into *minjung*. Student activists ended underground sectarianism unique to the 1970s student movement and took to popular movements to represent the voices of the weak of the society. As the same time, ordinary students copied the life style of the lower classes. They created the youth culture typical to the 1980s, in which the students favored cheap liquors, poor-quality cigarettes, and worn-out clothes, while imitating the speech and behavior of the farmers and factory workers: all these elements of the youth culture were derived from the students' desire to identify themselves with *minjung*. Mask dance and courtyard play obtained a renewed meaning as a symbolic action for the students to pledge solidarity with the people. The students also regarded the struggle and integrity of the workers engaging in strike as the manifestation of the sublime aspect of humanity. Sociologist Kim Won states;

In the subculture constructed by South Korean university students in the 1980s, the *minjung*, who were deficient of their own class culture much less a social power in the political and civil arena, were credited with the position of the practitioner who would perform a significant social role in the future. (...) [However] the *minjung* was not a scientific term rigorously defined from the start, but an imagined entity whose substance would be restructured and reinvented through practices of student communities.”¹⁹

Indeed, the 1980s youth culture invested itself with the *minjung* discourse to create and maintain its distinctive sub-cultural identity. Thus, the *minjung* discourse and the general cultural activities performed by the university students maintained a mutually enriching relationship throughout the 1980s.

The *Minjung* Discourse and the Small Film Festival

The Small Film Festival evidences the emerging *minjung* discourse as a new paradigm for the 1980s youth culture rooted in universities. Apart from the fact that the festival promoters were university students and recent graduates, it is worth noting that the newly inaugurated Chun Doo-Hwan administration enacted the Measure for School Autonomy (*hagwŏn hayulhwa choch'i*) on 21 December 1983, only six months before the Small Film Festival.²⁰ As a result, the police forces that had been permanently stationed on school campuses (since Park's regime) retreated, approximately 100 professors who had been forced to retire by the military government retook their positions, and 1,300 students who had been expelled on charges of student activism were allowed to return.²¹ Thanks in part to this, the students' intramural activities were invigorated and the Small Film Festival seemed to come out as one of the consequences.

In addition to the external circumstances, the overall contents of the films submitted to the festival testified to their identification with the *minjung* discourse. The contents contained (1) an inexorable exhibition of lower class life; (2) a description of the youth as an alienated entity just as much as the *minjung* was; (3) a criticism of the modern society based on its anti-populace nature. The six final entries submitted to the festival were *South of the River* (*Kangŭi mamtchok*, Jang Gil-Su), *Doors* (*Mun*, Suh Myung-Su), *Pannori Arirang* (Seoul Cinema Collective), *The Eve* (*Jŏnyajae*, Hwang Gyu-Duk), *Shelter City* (*Ch'ŏnmak doshi*, Kim Eui-Suk) and *Tears of a Monk* (*Sŭngŭi nunmul*, Choi Sa-Kyu).²²

South of the River (16mm, b/w, 14 min.) depicts a vagabond couple: the husband makes a living as a temporary construction worker while the wife operates a makeshift chophouse built near the construction site. As the film title *South of the River* indicates, the spatial backdrop identifies the area called Kangnam that lies south of the Han River in Seoul, where since the 1970s skyscrapers have arisen to make the place the locus of South Korean rapid industrialization and it has flourished economically as a result. In the middle of the narrative there is a montage sequence that cross-cuts the shots in which the wife serves wine to construction workers and the husband becomes infuriated about her presumably loose behaviour. From this basic conflict the film extracts three climactic moments: in the opening sequence the husband with a kitchen knife in his hand chases after the wife who tries to run away from him; the two dramatically reconcile at the moment of the man's knife swinging; but the ending repeats the situation of the first scene implying that the couple's embattled life has to continue. The on-location shots captured on the black-and-white film obviously echo Italian neo-realist films. However, the thematic point lies in the sense of alienation that is present not only between the

two main characters but also between the buildings of Kangnam and the people who actually built the place, but would never be able to share the capitalistic richness that the Kangnam area represents. According to director Jang Gil-Su, who trained as a disciple of the Visual Age Group, *South of the River* tapped into the audiences' consciousness on the harmful effect of developmentalism and the problem of the urban poor.²³ The film was initially screened at Yonsei University in 1980 and enjoyed a wide circulation across student film festivals that included the Small Film Festival.²⁴

Pannori Arirang (8mm, colour, 18 min.) is a documentary that records a performance of a courtyard play entitled *Pannori Arirang*. The film betrays the film-makers' self-consciousness about the technique and theme of their work. With no off-screen commentary, the narrative weaves through intermittent voices of interviews with the actors and with the audiences. The screen alternates between the still shots and moving pictures taken in the make-up room, from the rehearsal and from the actual performance. But the visual and the aural contents do not match but rather constitute two separate discourses. Kim Yong-Tae, one of the organizers of the Small Film Festival, appraised the audio-visual discord as being orchestrated to generate an "estrangement effect" that "induces the viewer's mental participation into the film."²⁵ The central question the film poses is who should be the main audience of the courtyard play that mainly deals with the life of *minjung*. A voice-over sardonically remarks, "Eggheads would be the main audience." The ensuing commentary made by the interviewer continues, "Then, all your performances that aim to represent the *minjung* would be a mere masturbation" since nobody on and under the stage could claim the status of *minjung*. Consequently, the estrangement effect of

Pannori Arirang attempts to objectify the *minjung* discourse by addressing the ontological gap between *minjung* and the upper middle class that consist of students and intellectuals.

Pannori Arirang was a group project made by the Seoul Cinema Collective founded in 1982. The main body of its members was from the Yalashyǒng Film Study Group that had started as a student film-making club in Seoul National University in 1979. Out of six films that the Yalashyǒng Group made during 1980–83 and left synopses, three were about coming-of-age issues that university students of the day confronted; another two presented pickpockets to delineate the dark side of society; and the last one had a rather abstract subject – free will and human liberation. This filmography reveals that the student films began to construct a thematic framework in which the student characters are ontologically identified with the *minjung*: both entities mostly appear to be existential heroes who wander at the edge of mainstream society.²⁶

The Eve (8mm, 30 min.) presents a student character who has to live through aimless ennui before being drafted into mandatory military service. If the conscription were to imply the military system, the protagonist's spiritual wandering could allegorize the collective sentiment of the youth at the time. *Shelter City* (16mm, colour, 30 min.) falls into the same category of an existentialist theme. Two young men leave home in search of an "island," the symbol of their utopia. However, those "alienated and deserted" people cannot share their feeling with each other and fail to develop a human bond between them, and the image of "an insect confined in a glass" makes an allusion to the existential condition of the characters.²⁷ *Tears of a Monk* (16mm, b/w, 15 min.) delineates "religious ardour and Buddhistic emancipation toward redemption." Although addressing a religious theme, this film makes an existentialist cinema *par excellence* as it tackles in earnest the individual's spiritual journey.²⁸ These three films seem to stand apart

from the *minjung* realism, that is, what *South of the River* represents. Instead, they place the youth characters in the common existential dilemma that originates from the conflict between the individual and society. However, the existentialist theme might have been the only mode of expression allowed for the young film-makers who otherwise could not enunciate the social oppression of the day.

Lastly, *Doors* (16mm, b/w, 12 min. 30 sec.) appears as a social commentary that pronounces the inhumane anonymity of urban life. A schoolboy is desperately looking for a rest room, stepping in and out of buildings he encounters on his way home. But every bathroom the boy is lucky to find is locked, and his attempts of urination on the roadside are spotted and stopped by adult passers-by. Inserted into the boy's odyssey are the pictures of shop windows that display garish ornaments. The message is clear that despite its ostensible abundance, capitalism is unable to meet even the most fundamental of human needs. The circumstance in which the boy is situated reverberates with the film's existentialist theme. Meanwhile, the film also reflects some elements of *minjung* discourse in certain montage shots that contain the pictures of the countryside. Yi Chong-Hak interprets the montage scene as an "antithesis" to the urban life.²⁹ The antithesis may implicate the healthiness of labour and collectivism and utilizes *minjung* discourse in its own way.

In conclusion, the Small Film Festival entries commonly deal with the individuals who struggle to find the meaning of their existence in the world that stands only at the expense of human dignity. In this general set of themes, the *minjung* appears as the victim of inhumane developmentalism (*South of the River*), as the existential counterpart of the youths who cannot

find the route to speak for themselves (*Pannori Arirang*, *The Eve* and *Shelter City*), and as the bearer of the counter-discourse against capitalism (*Doors*).

The Small Film Movement: A Re-articulation of New Cinema Discourse

Kim So-Young, who physically presided over the two-day event of the Small Film Festival, asserted that as long as the underlying keynote of the Small Film Festival had been “The father’s cinema is dead,” then, it had little to do with the Visual Age Group or any other preceding cinema movements in South Korea.”³⁰ Kim went on to argue that the promoters of the festival were hardly affiliated with rather innovative commercial filmmakers and their films in the early 1980s such as Yim Kwon-Taek’s *Mandala* (1981) and an ex-member of the Visual Age Group Lee Jang-Ho’s *A Fine Windy Day* (*Baram Bulŏ Choŭn Nal*, 1980): the first was a road movie with a strong auteuristic bent that concerns two Buddhist monks’ ascetic practices; and the second signaled the rejuvenation of realist cinema by portraying three young men’s struggling lives in Seoul.

In fact, *Mandala* displays an existentialist theme and the theme of *A Fine Windy Day* bears a strong affinity with *minjung* discourse. The question arises as to whether these films partook in the same discursive paradigm to which the Small Film movement subscribed. Kim Eui-Suk, who presented *Shelter City* at the Small Film Festival, mentioned that “the Small Film promoters paid respect to those fresh-style films but did not identify themselves with the early 80s’ commercial filmmakers” and that “Yim Kwon-Taek was too old to be considered part of a new generation and Lee Jang-Ho was after all a commercial filmmaker.”³¹ Nevertheless, such an

exclusive definition of membership loses support in face of several inconvenient facts. For instance, the Seoul Cinema Collective, whose members contributed *Pannori Arirang* to the Small Film Festival, had published an anthology entitled *Toward a New Cinema (Seroun Yŏnghwarŭl Wihayŏ)* in 1983. The book was soon to become “a must-read work among young cineastes in the 80s.”³² The book contained a full array of new cinema discourses from the West and other continents: Russian revolutionary cinema, Italian Neo-realism, French New Wave, British Free Cinema, New German Cinema, New American Cinema, documentary movements, and cinemas of Latin America and Africa. In effect, it was the Visual Age Group that imported those new cinema discourses earlier in order to set out a South Korean version of new cinema, suggesting that the Small Film generation in its formative stage did not draw a clear distinction from its predecessor. Secondly, quite a few participants in the Small Film Festival dismiss the possibility of entering commercial filmmaking. At least three out of the six names who directed the final entries of the festival later became commercial filmmakers: they are Jang Gil-Su (*South of the River*), Hwang Gyu-Duk (*The Eve*), and Kim Eui-Suk (*Shelter City*). The directors who joined commercial filmmaking eventually became the driving force of New Korean Cinema in late 1980s.

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)’s theory of hegemony helps illuminate the historical significance and developing process of the Small Film Festival as the initial moment of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement in the 1980s. Gramsci set forth the concept of hegemony to explain the way in which the ruling class of a given society ideologically dominates subordinate classes. Hegemony is defined as the ability of the ruling class “to articulate the interest of other social groups to its own.”³³ More generally, hegemony refers to the leadership

that “particular socio-economic group exercises (...) in such a way that the subordinate groups see that it is in the general interest to collude with that construct”.³⁴ Thus, hegemony works by eliciting unanimous consent among the subordinate subjects. It should be noted, however, that the consent is not to be acquired only through political leadership that the ruling group supposedly wields. It is actually the tripartite union of “political leadership and intellectual leadership and moral leadership” that enables the realization of hegemony.³⁵ While the political leadership reflects the actual power-relationship among the classes, the intellectual and moral leadership serves to form “a unified ideological system”³⁶ that is, dominant ideology. It then follows that certain hegemonic system is liable to transformation as long as its intellectual and moral leadership changes: regarding this point, Gramsci asserts that for a hegemonic transformation, the intellectuals have to be in charge of the intellectual and moral reformation.³⁷

A new cinema discourse can be compared to a form of hegemony in that it also stands upon the political, intellectual, and moral imperatives. The Visual Age Group, for instance, denounced the authoritarian politics and lamented the lack of art cinema tradition in South Korea. The group tried to build their own counter-hegemony in opposition to the established political and industrial hegemony surrounding South Korea cinema. A distinctive part in the process was that they relied on Euro-American art cinema discourse to exercise an intellectual leadership in constructing new South Korean cinema. To some extent, their efforts succeeded in forging a new hegemonic space into which some segments of the 1970s youths, especially the Cultural Center Generation were drawn. However, the moral dimension of the Visual Age Group’s cinematic hegemony is rather complex. Their political positioning clearly informed their moral ground, but the group was never able to secure their own moral foothold differentiated from the dominant

nationalistic morality: the Visual Age Group's "Korean-style imagery" simply echoed the military government's "Korean-style democracy." Moreover, the fact that the Visual Age Group activities were confined to the boundary of commercial cinema further deteriorated its moral leadership. The hegemony of the new cinema discourse sustained by the Visual Age Group largely relied on the literati-members' intellectual leadership, which was possible since only a handful of intellectuals had access to the knowledge on foreign film art during the 1970s in South Korea. This fact, in turn, explains why the Visual Age Group had a great esteem for film auteurism rather than considering cinema as a popular culture medium.

On the other hand, the promoters of the Small Film Festival re-articulated the new cinema discourse for which the Visual Age Group had already laid the groundwork. In the beginning, the group's intellectual leadership was nearly unchallengeable insofar as there was no other alternative paradigm to the discourse of Euro-American art cinema. However, the Visual Age Group hegemony was to be increasingly contested in terms of its political and moral leaderships. During the interregnum between the death of the former dictator, Park Chung-Hee, and the empowerment of the new military junta, the university students keenly realized the limits of intellectuals regarding their political clout against the military mobilization: instead, they came to espouse the power of the people or *minjung* as the engine of social transformation. Likewise, in the eyes of the Small Film generation, the Visual Age Group would never be able to surmount the weak-mindedness and opportunism attributed to intellectuals. It was at this moment that the Small Film generation appropriated elements of the Oberhausen Manifesto in order to carve out their hegemonic position in opposition to the preceding new cinema discourse. The publication of the Seoul Cinema Collective's *Toward a New Cinema* (1983) provides a

circumstantial evidence that the young film generation made an exhaustive effort to find its own new cinema discourse, but was not able to completely depart from the intellectual leadership exercised by their predecessor.

The absence of political and moral leadership in the Visual Age Group and the springing challenges by the young generation against Western new cinema discourses gave birth to the situation in which *minjung* discourse presented itself as an alternative to the new cinema discourse that had been supported by the Visual Age Group. The merit of *minjung* discourse was its double-edged subject, *minjung*: it guaranteed political progressiveness and moral superiority to the Small Film generation. However, in terms of intellectual leadership, the Small Film movement stood in an embryonic stage: the tenets of social consciousness and innovativeness of film language did not go far from the Visual Age Group hegemony. Such condition partly explains why quite a number of the Small Film Festival participants would join commercial filmmaking within years to come. Nevertheless, one can say that the Small Film movement and the Small Film generation successfully constructed their autonomous hegemony, because their *minjung*-oriented cinematic realism was an unprecedented artistic notion that acquired wide currency among South Korean independent filmmakers and commercial filmmakers as well. Immediately afterwards, the needed intellectual leadership in the Small Film movement would be found in the notion of the People's Cinema (*minjung yŏnghwa*).

¹ The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* [*Byunbangeso Chungshimūro*] (Seoul: Shigakkua Önnö, 1996), p. 26.

² Ibid.

³ *From Periphery to Center* provides the names of the forty-seven organizers as follows:

Ahn Dong-Kyu, Ch'oe Sa-Gyu, Ch'oe Yöng-Hak, Han Chung-Sök, Han Sang-Jun, Hong Ki-Sön, Huang Kyu-Dök, Hwang Hye-Kyöng, Hyön Ch'ang-Sök, Jeon Ch'an-Il, Jeon Yang-Jun, Jeong Che-Hyöng, Jeong Hüng-Sun, Jeong Söng-Hön, Jeong Söng-Il, Jo Chae-Hong, Kang Han-Sup, Jang Gil-Su, Jang Ju-Shik, Kim Chae-Su, Kim Eui-Suk, Kim Hong-Su, Kim Il-Wu, Kim Jae-Hee, Kim So-Young, Kim Sök-Hun, Kim Yong-Tae, Kuak Jae-Yong, Kuön Yöng-Rak, Mun Myöng-Hee, Mun Wön-Rip, Oh Byung-Chöl, Pak Gön-Sup, Roh In-Hwa, Shin Chöl, Shin Dong-Min, Shin Süng-Su, Sö Myöng-Su, Song Mi-Hye, Yi Dök-Shin, Yu Jee-Na, Yi Sae-Min, Yi Yong-Bae, Yi Jeong-Guk, Yi Jong-Hak, Yi Ha-Yöng, Yim Chong-Jae. (Alphabetical Order)

⁴ I gathered the numerical information from the interviews I conducted with Kim Eui-Suk, Yi Yong-Bae, and Chung Sung-Il on August 2006. A South Korean daily newspaper, *Hankook Ilbo* had a report on the Small Film Festival and confirmed the number of the initial entries as Sixty-four. (*Hankook Ilbo* on July 5, 1984, cited in *From Periphery to Center*, p. 65.)

⁵ Chung Sung-Il, Personal interview with author, 3 August 2006

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Korean Youth Film Festival was basically a government-sponsored student-film competition. Many university students who majored in film and audio-visual communication used this official route to draw recognition to their short films and to prepare themselves for a career in the areas of film and broadcasting after graduation. According to Kim Eui-Suk, who received a special award at the 7th Korean Youth Film Festival in 1981, most films exhibited in the event tended to be works of audio-visual experiments with their popular subject being the beauty of Korean cultural assets. (This information came from my interview with Kim on August 2006, and Kim's article entitled "The Current Phase of the Korean Youth Film Festival and the Occupational Positions of the Former Awardees" <"Hankook Ch'öngsönyön Yönghwajaeu Yangsanggua Susangchadüleu Chinch'ul Yangsang"> in *Movie* [*Yonghwa*], July-August, 1983, pp 26-29)

⁸ Kim Hyung-A, "Minjung Socioeconomic Responces to State-led Industrialization" in Kenneth M. Wells (Ed.), *South Korea's Minjung Movement* (Honolulu: Hawaii UP, 1995), p. 40.

⁹ Kang Man-Gil, "Contemporary Nationalist Movements and the Minjung" in Kenneth M. Wells (Ed.), *South Korea's Minjung Movement* (Honolulu: Hawaii UP, 1995), pp. 33, 35.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 35.

¹¹ Kim Yong-Rak, "The Thesis on Minjung Literature" in Chung Ji-Ch'ang (Eds.), *A Thesis on Minjung Culture* [*Minjung Munhwaron*] (Kyöngsan: Yöngnam University Press), p. 282.

¹² Ibid., P. 283.

¹³ Choi Chung-Moo, “The Minjung Culture Movement and Popular Culture” in Kenneth M. Wells (Ed.), *South Korea’s Minjung Movement* (Honolulu: Hawaii UP, 1995), p. 111.

¹⁴ Choi, Ibid, p, 115.

¹⁵ Ibid. p, 117.

¹⁶ Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies* (London: Sage, 2001), p. 136.

¹⁷ Kang Jun-Man, *Promenade of Modern Korean History: 1980s I* [*Hankook hyöndaesa sanch’aek: 1980 nyöndaee-I*] (Seoul: Inmulgua Sasangsa, 2003), p. 103.

¹⁸ Chung Sung-Il, Personal interview with author, 3 August 2006

¹⁹ Kim Won, *Memory of the Things Forgotten* [*Yithyöjin Kötdule Daehan Giök*] (Seoul: Yihu, 1999), p. 15.

²⁰ Kang Jun-Man, *Promenade of Modern Korean History: 1980s II* [*Hankook hyöndaesa sanch’aek: 1980 nyöndaee-II*] (Seoul: Inmulgua Sasangsa, 2003), p. 171.

²¹ Ibid.

²² The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* (Seoul: Shigakkua Önnö, 1996), pp. 65-66.

²³ Jang Gil-Su, *South of the River in The Spellbound Memories, Independent Cinema* [*Maehokui Kiök, Tongnip Yöngghwa*] (KIFV: Seoul, 2001), p. 21.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Kim Yong-Tae, *Pannori Arirang in The Spellbound Memories, Independent Cinema* (KIFV: Seoul, 2001) pp. 48-49.

²⁶ The analyses of the film narratives introduced in the paragraph are based on the synopses that *From Periphery to Center* collected. According to the datum, the Yalashyöng Group made twelve short films during 1980-1983: *From Periphery to Center* shows the synopses of six films out of the twelve. The film titles and their abbreviated contents are as follows: *A Two-Story Bed* (*Yichüng Ch’imdae* - daily lives of two self-boarding students); *Tragedy of an Extra* (*Aekstraeu Biae* – a story of a pickpocket); *Music* (*Ümak* – tackles music in terms of the emancipation and free will of human beings); *A Closed Box* – an existentialist fable about university); *They Also Like Us* (*Güdüldo Urichöröm* – a social-realist approach to three pickpockets); and *Exit* (*Chulgoo* – a student news reporter’s realization of surrounding social reality).

²⁷ The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* (Seoul: Shigakkua Önnö, 1996), p. 189.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Yi Chong-Hak, “Doors” in *The Spellbound Memories, Independent Cinema*] (KIFV: Seoul, 2001) p. 46.

³⁰ Kim So-Young, Personal interview with author, 7 July 2006

³¹ Kim Eui-Suk, Personal interview with author, 11 July 2006

³² Yi Chŏng Ha, “The Past of the South Korean Independent cinema”] in Yi Hyo-In and Yi Chŏng-Ha (Eds.), *South Korean Cinema: An Exorcism [Hankook Yŏnghwa Ssitgim]* (Seoul: Yŏlinchaekdŭl), p. 150.

³³ Chantal Mouffe, “Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci” in Chantal Mouffe (Ed.), *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1979), p. 183.

³⁴ Hayward, *Cinema Studies: the Key Concepts* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 185.

³⁵ Mouffe, Ibid., p. 179.

³⁶ Mouffe, Ibid., p. 193.

³⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Political Writings 1921-26*, Q. Hoare (Ed. and Trans.), (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1978), pp. 60-61.

Chapter III

The Three Faces of the People's Cinema

This chapter discusses the notion of the People's Cinema (*minjung yŏnghwa*) that defined the development of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement during the 1980s. The independent filmmakers, mostly university students, claimed their filmmaking practice to be a politically resistant action against the Chun Doo-Hwan military government (1980-1987). Preceding experiments for a new cinema such as the Small Film movement gradually gave way to the idea of filmmaking as a politically resistant action in the mid 1980s. The student filmmakers began to apply the *minjung* discourse more actively to their filmmaking. In addition, they probed the cases of oppositional filmmaking developed in other countries: New Latin American Cinema provided the most adequate example for South Korean independent filmmakers to emulate because of the shared experiences of military dictatorship. The idea of the People's Cinema thus originated from the intricate dialogues between student movement, the *minjung* discourse and the theories of resistance filmmaking. In pursuit of film that represents the needs and aspirations of the masses, the independent filmmakers applied a range of variations to the People's Cinema in its theory and practice.

The Imagined *Minjung* Community

The Small Film Festival held in 1984 added an important cultural element to the body of youth culture by establishing a place for cinema in universities during the early 80s. Participants

in the Small Film Festival took the lead in launching cine-clubs on college campuses.¹ Some founded film societies entitled Open Cinema (*yöllin yönghwa*) to study and develop theories that were of practical help to actual filmmaking.² The narrative imagination displayed by the “Small Films” was a unique combination of youth culture and *minjung* discourse in which the youth’s existential dilemmas were identified with the lives of the lower classes.

However, this alternate cinematic practice established by the new ideas of the Small Film and the Open Cinema were soon intercepted by an emerging notion of the People’s Cinema (*minjung yonghwa*). By definition, the People’s Cinema refers to a cinema that documents the underrepresented aspects of social realities such as the people’s struggles to fight socio-political inequalities created by the ruling class. The People’s Cinema surfaced as a practice of the *minjung* discourse in the film arena. But one must consider the socio-political, cultural, and historical conditions in South Korean society at that time to understand how People’s Cinema garnered support from the entire independent cinema camp by mid-decade. A brief history of the activities of the university students between 1980 and 1985 is presented here to illuminate that historical context: particularly, the way in which university students comprised the majority of production and consumption of the *minjung* discourse and its cinematic offshoot, the People’s Cinema.

The May 17 *coup d’état* in 1980 when Chun Doo-Hwan declared nationwide martial law and banned all political activities dealt a devastating blow to the democratic forces. Meetings of the National Assembly were called off. Universities were closed down in fear of insurgency. Opposition party leader Kim Dae-Jung and hundreds of democratic leaders, politicians, and students, were rounded up on the fabricated charges of a rebellion conspiracy.³ With newspapers

and TV stations merely acting as mouthpieces for the military junta, university students were placed at the vanguard of popular resistance. The students started to conspire against the state by creating their own culture of resistance and struggle. Elements such as values, customs, and identity formation coalesced to form a movement culture which set itself against the students' "enemies."⁴ Yi Yong-Bae, the producer of the independent film *The Night before Strike* (*Parup Chonya*, 1990), called the students of the day an "unfortunate generation" citing their loss of opportunity to study and counting himself as part of that.⁵

That universities served as the locus of social movement in the early 1980s youth movement culture should alert us to the fact that the students felt they had to break out of their social class as intellectuals in order to serve the needs of the general citizenry. The notion of *minjung* was a desirable option because in light of social movement the constituents of *minjung* were seen as the major segment of the nation's population deprived of their own means of production, exploited by the ruling classes, and marginalized in the mainstream political transactions. Laborers, peasants, and the urban poor were considered as the major components of *minjung*.⁶ Students began to re-identify themselves as *minjung* by denouncing liberalism and elitism and then by idealizing the lifestyle of workers. The students reminisced about past peasant uprisings while affirming the values of self-sacrifice and collectivism as being intrinsic to the *minjung* spirit. By promoting mask dances and courtyard plays on occasional intramural events, the university students reminded themselves of that former oppression and related to their own movement experience. School campuses were transformed into counter-cultural spaces where elements of working-class lifestyles were extensively imitated as a way for the students to

perform a utopian imagination which Korean sociologist Kim Won calls the “imagined *minjung* community.”⁷

It may have been imagined, but this cultural sphere cumulated a sense of self-righteousness through *minjung*-oriented social engagements. In August 1980, the Chun Doo-Hwan military government implemented “The Guiding Principle for the Purification of Labor Union”⁸ to oust the union leaders resisting military rule. Furthermore, the government enforced corporate unions in place of trade unions and banned third party intervention in labor disputes to halt growing nationwide unionism.⁹ Underground labor activists trained in student movement infiltrated sweatshops to unionize workers and lead labor movement. During the early 1980s, approximately 3,000 student-turned-labor activists operated in industrial complexes in the Metropolitan areas.¹⁰ Solidarity between student activism and labor movement bore significant results on July 1985, when ten different corporate unions located in the Kuro industrial complex in Seoul waged a combined strike against the anti-union policies of the company named Daewoo Apparel.¹¹ The combined strike was an unprecedented event in the history of South Korean labor movement. Student activists devoted to labor movement later became a popular theme in such social realist films as *Kuro Arirang* (Park Jong-Won, 1989) and *The Night before Strike* (1990).

The South Korean student movement is known for the ferocity of their protests against the military rule and the US’s clandestine support of it. For instance, Kim Eui-Gi, a student of Seogang University in Seoul, took his life by leaping from a six-story building on May 30 in 1980. His will appealed to the public by calling attention to the tragedy of Kwangju.¹² On March 13 in 1982, a group of theology students in Pusan set fire to the U.S. Information Agency reportedly to draw public attention to the role of the U.S. Army in dispatching military forces to

Kwangju during the Uprising.¹³ On May 1985, a group of university students from Seoul forcibly occupied the U.S. Cultural Center as a symbolic action to accuse the US government of its support for the South Korean military junta.¹⁴ Seemingly extremist, such vanguardism in fact seemed unavoidable because students had no other ways to draw attention from mass media. Between 1980 and 1985, student activism remained the singular force in South Korea that dealt with the issues such as the Kwangju Uprising and America's interventionist foreign policies.

The Chun Doo-Hwan regime took active countermeasures against the student protests. Policies of constant surveillance and espionage on the activities of student leaders led the headquarters for public security in the South Korean Army to implement the so-called "Green Project" (as opposed to red, which symbolized communism) between 1981 and 1983.¹⁵ This project was designed to press male students involved in the student movement into military service. Once drafted, they were forced to recant their previous activities in the student organizations and interrogation was accompanied by illegal torture and physical abuse. The most egregious cases occurred when military supervisors forced select draftees to return to their former student bodies to collect inside information - those who resisted at times had to die.¹⁶

The Chun regime placed a comprehensive ban on periodicals and books they considered potentially subversive. The government nullified as many as 172 periodicals on July 1980, and suspended publication of 233 books and 298 pamphlets under the pretext that "the publishers and organizations, which produced those proscribed books, are suspected of disseminating and praising the activities of anti-South Korean communist societies abroad, and of making the texts that aim to criticize capitalism on behalf of North Korea and other anti-South Korean organizations and to instigate violent revolutionary struggles as well as labor disputes."¹⁷

Needless to say, university students were the major consumers of those forbidden texts. Undaunted, student activism eventually drove the ruling Democratic Justice Party that stood proxy for the military government to promote the School Stabilization Law in July 1985, which proposed legislation to legalize the arrest, detainment, and edification of student activists without a warrant.¹⁸ Although the opposition party, the New Democratic Party, thwarted the implementation of the School Stabilization law, that such legislation was even attempted demonstrates the extent to which the student movement and the military government were at odds with one another.

Two interviews the author conducted suggest that even non-activist students were equally sympathetic toward the building of an imagined *minjung* community in the sphere of their youth culture. Yun Sang-Min attended Seoul National University between 1983 and 1991 and Kim Min-Hee went to Chonnam National University in Kwangju between 1979 and 1983.¹⁹ Seoul National University and Chonnam National University were the two schools where student movement was most active throughout the 1980s. Both acknowledged no personal involvement in any organized activity of the student movement. But when asked whether they felt disoriented from movement culture and sought individuality in the consumption of youth culture, they answered that they had established general support, materially and emotionally, for the movement's actors. Yun stated, "At least in my case, I did not hold any adverse sentiment against the student movement at all because the outrageous political situation made the movement activities a matter of life and death. I just felt bad for my activist colleagues for not joining them." Yun and Kim pointed out that the rampant censorship practices extremely narrowed the

scope of youth culture, to say nothing of popular culture: therefore, commercial popular culture helped to compensate for the deficiency of resources for youth culture at universities.

However, Kim Min-Hee described commercial cinema of the day as “being crude in titles, contents, and even in posters, so that viewing a domestic movie at a theater, usually released at third-rate movie theatres, was regarded as a shameful act for a college student.” Commercial cinema, together with television and radio broadcasts and newspapers, was another victim of the censorship practices. Kim’s remark affirms that movement culture and the *minjung* discourse remained as the primary resource for the general development of the youth culture in the 1980s.

The practitioners of the people’s literature (*minjung munhak*) and the people’s cultural movement (*minjung munhwa undong*) incorporated the popular protests such as the Kwangju Uprising and labor movements into their artistic works. Progressive literary critics agreed on the radical statement that “the practice of literature should ultimately be committed to the cause of political movement.”²⁰ This position led to the view that the literary attempts to capture the needs and aspirations of the people should be undertaken not by the petit bourgeois literati but by the working-class people. A prominent verification of the literary thesis came out in the form of a collection of poems entitled *The Dawn of Labor* (*Nodongüi Saebyök*, 1984). Its author, Park Noh-Hae was a leader in underground labor movement who received no recognition from the literary community by the time. His poems shocked the establishment with an accomplished artistic facility that encapsulated the lived realities of laborers. *The Dawn of Labor* was immediately hailed as a living testimony to labor literature in its truest sense. This resulted in the “Park Noh-Hae phenomenon”²¹ which sparked a series of intellectual debates within the people’s literature camp. Critical debates converged on discriminating the major force of social

transformation between petit bourgeois intellectuals and the working class, and on classifying the fundamental conflicts underlying South Korea's political economy at that time. University youth culture built upon an imagined *minjung* community was the main arena where the massive consumption and regeneration of the artistic and intellectual discourses took place.

The origin and development of the People's Cinema are to be found in the context of the literary and artistic movements of the 1980s, which reflected the demands of the social movements and enriched university youth culture. The people's cinema appeared on a continuum with the Small Film and the Open Cinema, but it redirected the general desire for an alternative cinema to the immediate political needs of the day. Therefore, this chapter sees the people's cinema as a normative principle on which a variety of film-related views, themes, and aesthetics converges, so long as they address the underrepresented aspects of social reality and the aspirations of the lower class.

Depending on the way in which the idea was concretized in film practices, three distinctive aspects of the people's cinema can be discerned. First, the People's Cinema was originally a theoretical application of *minjung* discourse, by which independent filmmakers experimented with new types of filmmaking including film documentaries. Second, the student filmmakers used the idea of the People's Cinema to invest their independent films with political propaganda. Third, the theories and practices of the People's Cinema inspired the National Cinema Thesis in the independent cinema sector.

The People's Cinema: An Extension of Cinema

The People's Cinema was first mentioned in the anthology entitled *Toward a New Cinema* (*Seroun Yŏnghwarŭl Uihayŏ*, the Seoul Cinema Collective, 1983). The book utilizes the terminology as a reference to the revolutionary popular cinema that New Latin American Cinema had developed in the 1960s. And the idea of the People's Cinema is interpreted to have diverse meanings depending on different theoretical strands of the Latin American Cinema Movement. For instance, elicited from the Brazilian Cinema Novo, the People's Cinema indicates the popular cinema intended to "raise consciousness among the people in order to disclose the coercions imposed on them and to awaken the people to take action against such exploitative conditions."²² In the account of the Bolivian Ukamau Group, however, the People's Cinema informs Jorge Sanjinés's concept of a revolutionary cinema that "materializes in the filmic acts in which Bolivian people create and play the most urgent stories of their own, whereas the operations of the Ukamau Group members are limited to providing their experienced and systematic filmmaking skills for the people."²³ Thus, the People's Cinema initially appeared in South Korea as a literal translation of the general doctrines of New Latin American Cinema.

Toward a New Cinema anthologizes articles written by non-Korean authors in regard to 'new wave' film movements which include the French New Wave, Italian Neo-Realism, the British Free Cinema Movement, New German Cinema, New American Cinema, New Latin American Cinema, and post-colonial African cinema movement. Among these, New Latin American Cinema seemed particularly appeal to the Seoul Cinema Collective, so that the group would later publish a separate volume entitled *A Thesis on Cinema Movement* (*Yŏnghwa*

Undongron, 1985). This book is devoted to the discussion of Third Cinema as the ideological plank of New Latin American Cinema. Even in this book, however, the idea of the People's Cinema is not much elaborated, nor is it highlighted as an autonomous mode of film production. Rather, the small-group filmmaking draws more attention as a practical method of people-oriented cinema.

Hong Man examines the small-group filmmaking in his essay, "The Small-group filmmaking Movement" included in *A Thesis on Cinema Movement*. Hong maintains that this method is the essential part of contemporary South Korean cinema movement not only because filmmaking is a collective activity, but also because the movement requires the expediency and mobility that only a small unit of filmmakers can realize. The expediency and mobility enable small-group filmmaking to capture "the processes of realizing democracy in the society and restoring dignity in people's lives."²⁴ The task of the group-oriented filmmakers, as Hong states, is to be faithful to "the historical consciousness, ideology, and sentiment of the *minjung* community which consists of the laboring class, and to participate in what is spontaneously going on within the *minjung* community."²⁵ Here, the term *minjung* is not necessarily the translation of the people endorsed in Latin American cinema, but is closer to the Korean concept of *minjung* as conventionally used in the people's cultural movement in South Korea. Hong suggests that the Bolivian Ukamau Group should be used as the prototype for small-group filmmaking, but makes no attempt to further define the People's Cinema. Hong does not seem to feel the need to provide the detailed account of the People's Cinema, presumably because the small-group filmmaking method already presupposes the *minjung*-oriented filmmaking.

Film critic Yi Jeong-Ha affirms that the People's Cinema together with the small-group filmmaking method were the two major accomplishments of South Korean independent cinema that remained in parlance to the mid 1980s.²⁶ Yet it is still questionable how the People's Cinema positioned itself as the platform theory that led the independent cinema movement throughout the 1980s, whereas little effort was initially given to defining the Korean version of the People's Cinema apart from the Latin American people's cinema.

It seems that people's cinema and revolutionary popular cinema originated in the practices of New Latin American Cinema practices were immediately 'naturalized' into the *minjung* discourse in South Korea. The terminologies such as the people's literature (*minjung munhak*) and the people's art (*minjung misul*) had already been widely used by intellectuals and university students when the idea of the People's Cinema was introduced in the early 1980s. When Hong Man claimed that the filmmakers working in small-group units must acquaint themselves with the *minjung* community, such an injunction had already been accepted by the artists engaged in other *minjung*-oriented arts.²⁷ That is to say, if Latin American revolutionary cinema emphasized pedagogic filmmaking and heuristic content, it was far from a new idea to the South Korean filmmakers who had already been familiar with the similar methodologies through other *minjung*-oriented arts. Once ensconced into the *minjung* discourse, South Korean People's Cinema did not need further edification from its Latin American forerunner, but continued to develop on its own responding to domestic conditions.

It should be noted that the People's Cinema initially had the singular aim to realize a politically driven, propagandistic cinema. The goal of the People's Cinema thesis was not to narrow the scope of cinema into propaganda; rather to explore new territory in cinematic

discourse. The people's literature presented a model for the People's Cinema to canvass this uncharted territory.

Film director Jang Sun-Woo issued "Exploring the People's Cinema" ("Minjungyŏnghwau Mosaek") in a 1985 roundtable discussion that investigated the possibility of the People's Cinema in the cultural context of South Korea.²⁸ Starting with a brief assessment of South Korean cinema as "something that should not be left as it stood,"²⁹ commentators pointed to the perennial stagnation of the domestic Korean film market. For example, between 1980 and 1985 in South Korea, the commercial viability of domestic films gradually weakened in an inverse proportion to the dramatic upsurge of the popularity of Hollywood films.³⁰ In 1985, the top three films in box office were *The Killing Fields* (USA, [925,994]), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (USA, [808, 492]), and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (USA, [639, 098]). These were followed by two South Korean films: *The Deep Blue Night* (*Gipgo puleun bam*, [495, 573]) and *Eo Woo-Dong* (*Ŏdong*, [479, 225]).³¹ The predominance of Hollywood films in the domestic box office further aggravated apprehensions that the U.S. would ultimately demand an unconditional opening of the South Korean film market - policies to that effect were set in motion in 1985. Referring to the ongoing short-film movements such as the Small Film, Jang points out that "the current demands calling for the artistic as well as commercial recuperation of South Korean cinema appear extensive and fundamental."³² In Jang's view, the People's Cinema arose as a "comprehensive and historical concept that encircles such demands and a wide spectrum of the cinematic movements that urge the amelioration of the national cinema."³³

The concepts by which Jang distinguished the new wave of the People's Cinema from mainstream South Korean cinema are those of *daejung* (the masses) and *minjung* (the people).

Whereas *daejung* indicates the masses in industrial society, who tend to be “consumeristic, homogenized, quantifiable, liable to manipulation,” *minjung* stands for “independence, creativity, both individual and collective ideals.”³⁴ The dynamism underpinning *minjung* defies the wholesale characterizations tagged to the collective entity such as “political subjugation, social discrimination, and moral inferiority.”³⁵ This broad outlook on *minjung* entails a plural description of the People’s Cinema as “something that is not entirely a proponent of particular social class, nor necessarily a political cinema, nor univocally a pursuit of moral truths.”³⁶ Adding that, “*minjung* is the total sum of living lives,”³⁷ Jang seems to posit *minjung* as a form of collective consciousness or of Hegelian *Geist*.

The *minjung* consciousness, in other words, indicates a spiritual vitality in the face of the oppression of the homogenizing forces in modern society. Given that *minjung* (the people) refers to more than just a specific social class, *daejung* (the masses) also bears the potential to become like *minjung*. To do so, however, a catalyst is necessitated to activate the *minjung* spirit in the collective minds of the *daejung*. Jang believes that the People’s Cinema would be that catalyst: “The People’s Cinema means a living cinema. It is the cinema that facilitates resistance, awakening, unification, and jubilation”³⁸

Jang offered as an example of the People’s Cinema *Declaration of Fools* (*Babo Seoneon* Lee Jang-Ho, 1983) because “The camera’s eye of this film ... leveled at the people’s aspiration for solidarity. And the same camera’s eye demonstrated the possibility of dismantling the humdrum form of the established cinema and of creating a new one.”³⁹ But, *Declaration of Fools*, in fact, ignores the verisimilitude of acting and the linear temporality in narrative construction.

Portrayed in this unconventional diegesis is the tragic fate of two male vagabonds and a prostitute the proxy characters of the people. Jang's point is that the film took the perspective of the people in order to capture the life of the people and this attempt necessitated the deconstruction of the traditional cinematic narrative.

In his discussion of an acting style that would ideally fit into the People's Cinema, Jang discredits Stanislavsky's method as "an extreme conservatism that places the highest regard on the prosaic world of everydayness" and an emotionalism which suggests the misconception that "the inborn character determines the human's social status."⁴⁰ Instead, he emphasizes the "corporeality" of acting, arguing that the acknowledgement of the corporeality of acting enables the objective representation of the surrounding world and brings the world closer to liberation.⁴¹ In fact, the corporeal acting style reminds us of elements of repertory theatre like the Italian *Commedia dell'arte*, in which stock characters play satiric farces before local audiences. At the same time, courtyard play, the major repertory of the people's cultural movement, renders itself to be the Korean equivalent to *Commedia dell'arte*.

Although Jang never makes reference to the people's literature, he states that "The People's Cinema cannot depart from the theories and cumulated achievements in *minjung*-oriented arts in general." The most striking text illustrating the influence of the people's literature on Jang's concept of the People's Cinema is the poet Kim Chi-Ha, whose critical work "Satire or Suicide" had reputedly launched the people's literature thesis in 1970.⁴² Kim drafted "Satire or Suicide" in an attempt to criticize the poems of Kim Su-Young who represented resistant literature in the 1960s. While conceding that Kim Su-Young devoted many of his works to

denounce the petit bourgeois consciousness as the ideological cause of mass corroboration with fascism and consumerism,⁴³ Kim Chi-Ha claimed that Kim Su-Young's criticism of the petit bourgeois unwittingly buried such positive aspects of *minjung* such as "wisdom, bottomless power, and fortitude."⁴⁴ Underpinning this claim is the argument that "the petit bourgeois should not be conceived of as a social stratum or a class, but as an element of *minjung* that symbolizes and coalesces into a form of consciousness."⁴⁵ This statement precisely corresponds to Jang Sun-Woo's thesis of *minjung* as a collective consciousness in film. Echoing the "perspective of the people" in Jang's analysis of *Declaration of Fools*, Kim further maintains that "the poet is obliged to trust the people, [...] and to enter into *minjung* community in order to identify him/herself with the people."⁴⁶ Furthermore, Kim draws attention to conflicts, montage, symbol, and ellipsis found in Korean folkloric ballads as the possible *modus operandi* of the people's poetry.⁴⁷ These literary tactics also prefigured the stock characters and nonlinear narrative that Jang noticed in *Declaration of Fools* as possible techniques of the People's Cinema.

Both the people's poetry proposed by Kim Chi-Ha and the people's cinema characterized by Jang Sun-Woo posit the idealistic *minjung* discourse as a practical means to dismantle old systems of political oppression and artistic convention. This mirrors Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin's interpretation of the serial novel, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, written by French humanist François Rabelais (1484-1553). Bakhtin describes Rabelais's novelistic vision in the following way.

It is necessary to destroy and rebuild the entire false picture of the world, to sunder the false hierarchical links between objects and ideas, to abolish the divisive ideational strata. It is necessary to liberate all these objects and permit them to enter into the free unions that are organic to them, no matter how monstrous these unions might seem from the point of view of ordinary, traditional associations.⁴⁸

Conjuring up “the logic of realistic folkloric fantasy,”⁴⁹ this Rabelaisian picture, as Bakhtin diagnoses, “is polemically opposed to the medieval world, in whose ideology the human body is perceived solely under the sign of decay and strife”⁵⁰ and where “ascetic other-worldly ideology”⁵¹ holds sway. The static outlook of the medieval world in which the vitality and corporeality of the folkloric world is denied, strongly evokes the South Korean military dictatorships (1961-1979, 1980-1987) against which Kim Chi-Ha’s people’s poetry and its offshoot, Jang Sun-Woo’s People’s Cinema successively struggled.

Despite its broad conceptual scope, Jang’s essay articulates the People’s Cinema as the threshold of a new horizon of cinematic expression. However, it is unclear how much Jang’s theorization of the People’s Cinema directly affected the independent cinema camp. Along with his independent debut with *Seoul Jesus* (*Seoul Hwangje*, 1986), Jang himself started his directorial career in the commercial cinema sector. After some impressive social commentaries such as *The Age of Success* (*Sönggong Shidae*, 1988) and *Lovers in Woomuk-Baemi* (*Woomukbaemi-ui Sarang*, 1990), Jang has developed ever-renewing generic and stylistic experiments since the 1990s onwards. *The Road to the Racetrack* (*Kyeongmajang Kanun Kil*, 1991), for instance, employed a circular narrative structure, earning the title of the first postmodern film in South Korean cinema. *Timeless Bottomless Bad Movie* (*Napun Yöngghwa*, 1998) experimented with a staged documentary in which real-life juvenile delinquents act their own real-life situations. *Lies* (*Gojitmal*, 1999) sparked heated debates over its inexorable description of sexual sadomasochism. If, as Jang noted, the People’s Cinema were “multi-

dimensional, multi-vocal, multi-changeable,”⁵² what is most faithful to the thesis would be none other than Jang himself.

While “Exploring the People’s Cinema” was a speculative inquiry inspired by the people’s literature toward an extension of cinema, the small-group filmmaking is as an applied mode of the People’s Cinema. In “The Small-group filmmaking Movement” (1985), Hong Man advocated the method as a corollary film movement that would develop in pursuit of expedient and *bona fide* representations of the people and their lives. The most palpable characteristic of the small-group filmmaking is the rule of equality in the filmmaking process; no single individual is allowed to wield directorial authority over the rest of film crew.⁵³ Criticizing auteurism, small-group filmmaking attributes the role of each member of the film crew to that individual’s “choice and concern,” according to which assignments such as directing, shooting, lighting, and others are equally distributed among the crew.⁵⁴ A rule-of-thumb calculation based on the number of the assignments suggests that a small-group filmmaking unit be comprised of at least five individuals and ten at most. Subject matters may vary from labor issues, rural problems, and living conditions of the urban poor to broader subjects of national politics, civil concerns, and women’s issues.⁵⁵ A small-group filmmaking group is usually committed to one particular subject matter which defines the character and scope of filmmaking activities of the group.⁵⁶

Apart from anonymous student filmmaking groups, the Seoul Cinema Collective (1982-1986) was first organized by a group of professional independent filmmakers, heralding small-group filmmaking as the major mode of independent cinema production.⁵⁷ For *Water Tax* (*Surisae*, Feb 1984), the member of the collective experimented with staged documentary in

which the real participants of a farmers' protest came out to reenact the actual event. Given the fact that the people who were involved in the protest retold and reenacted their own experiences, *Water Tax* is strongly reminiscent of the Bolivian Ukamau Group's *Courage of the People* (1971), in which the survivors and witnesses of the 1967 massacre by Bolivian Army on the striking miners reenacted the dramatic re-presentation of the event. The Seoul Cinema Collective was reorganized into the Seoul Visual Collective in 1986: the popularization of video equipment since 1986 accounts for the word change from 'cinema' to 'visual.' The following quotation from the founding declaration of the Seoul Visual Collective testifies to the encounter of the small-group filmmaking and the notion of the People's Cinema:

The cultural movement at current stage should be devoted to eradicate the anti-national, anti-democratic, and anti-popular elements in our national culture, by making ceaseless efforts to attain the *minjung*-oriented contents and to promote the *minjung*-oriented artistic forms. As a subdivision of the cultural movement, the cinema movement should also actualize the progressive mode of artistic creation through the practices of the film production and distribution in solidarity with *minjung*. In this process, the members of the Seoul Visual Collective will take active part in the acquisition of the *minjung* spirit, in the completion of *the People's Cinema*, and in the resolution of the problems intrinsic to our society.⁵⁸

A monumental work produced by the Seoul Visual Collective was *Blue Bird (Parangsae)*, 1986), another staged documentary tackling agrarian problems. A crew of filmmakers dispatched by the Seoul Visual Collective moved to the countryside and recorded the rural lives of actual farmers in poverty and debt.⁵⁹ To make sure that the content of the film is *minjung*-oriented, the filmmakers cohabited with their subjects for a designated period. In the production notes for *Blue Bird*, the crew members left a statement as below.

We believe the production process of *Blue Bird* was an opportunity to measure and become convinced of the direction and feasibility of the People's Cinema. It is because this film was made as we lived and experienced

the life and struggle of our brother farmers, and was screened and critically reviewed by these same people. We entered a new horizon of filmmaking where experiential gap between producers and viewers becomes minimized.⁶⁰

Certainly, Latin American revolutionary cinema movement influenced the implementation of small-group filmmaking in the independent cinema movement in South Korea, as evidenced by the similarities between the Seoul Cinema Collective's *Water Tax* and the Bolivian Ukamau Group's *Courage of the People*. However, small-group filmmaking, especially its participatory method into local communities, can also be placed within the general rubric of the people's literature. For instance, as early as early 1980s, literary critic Kim Do-Yeon in his "Toward an Expansion of Literary Genres" paid attention to the fact that South Korean literature was confronting a new phenomenon in which the closed circle of literary elites gave way to amateurs in the production of literary works.⁶¹ Following this phenomenon was the diversification and production amount of the new literary genres such as biographical essay, reportage, and political tracts created by ordinary working-class people.⁶² The democratization of literary production in turn enabled collective literary creations by small-scale literary groups.⁶³ Although different groups stood for different artistic visions, the subject matters commonly concerned the struggling lives of the working-class people.⁶⁴

Considering that the expansion of literary genre was to secure realism captured by non-professional writers, it seems not entirely incidental for Hong Man a proponent of small-group filmmaking to regard film documentary as the most effective mode to capture authentic aspects of the filmed subjects. In addition, Hong stresses the democratic way of the distribution of the films acquired through the small-group filmmaking method.

The distribution routes that the small-group filmmaking crews have to find and develop are diverse. All the locations and its neighborhoods where the people documented by films are living may transform into the place for public film screening. ... The purposes of the film screening can also be diverse: not only for public viewing, the films may function as a legal testimony, or as a part of the program for a massive political gathering”⁶⁵

This statement reveals elements of media activism built in the characteristics of small-group filmmaking. Although Hong mainly addresses film, he must have also had the video medium in mind because his essay was written after 1986 when video equipments had began to be popularized in South Korea. Therefore, it would not be far-fetched to argue that small-group filmmaking signaled the rise of media activism in South Korea. But more importantly small-group filmmaking extended the horizon of South Korea cinema by adding documentary to ordinary filmmaking practice: until the mid 1980s there was no history of documentary filmmaking as a social commentary in South Korea.

From 1980s to early 1990s, the independent cinema virtually monopolized documentary filmmaking either for political propaganda or for social criticism. The sharper the critical edge of the independent documentary was honed, the more censorial restriction it had to face. To take the Seoul Visual Collective's *Blue Bird* for example, two producers of the film Hong Ki-Seon and Yi Hyo-In were arrested by the police on the charge of not providing the script for the review of the censorship bureau: the police was originally suspicious of the film content breaking the National Security Law.⁶⁶ This incident remains as one of the landmarks that launched the independent documentary movement in the 1980s. Chapter 5 will discuss the history of the independent cinema movement.

The People's Cinema: An Activist Cinema

From mid 1980s to early 1990s, student filmmakers produced a series of independent films that denounced the military regime and advocating popular protests against it. The term “activist cinema” best describes independent cinema practice because the films articulated political messages designed to raise the public awareness about the socio-political issues of the day. There is no definitive record showing that the producers of the activist cinema regarded their filmmaking as an actualization of the People's Cinema. Rather, it seems that they saw the activist mode of filmmaking as a radical branch of short-film practices.⁶⁷ While the term “university cinema” (*taehak yŏnghwa*)⁶⁸ emerged to indicate the independent activist films, it remains unclear how the term gained currency among the filmmakers on the front and to what degree it was used to identify the movement.

That said, the notion of the People's Cinema informed to a large extent the development of the activist cinema. Yi Hye-Young's “The University Cinema Thesis: Its Debates and Present Condition” (1985) illustrates this. Yi maintains that “since the multitude of students do not belong to any particular social stratum nor class, they are able to seek, albeit within a limited scope, the social truisms independent of the ruling ideologies”⁶⁹ and that “since there is no other organized forces that can legitimately confront the military dictatorship, the political engagement of the university students accordingly strengthens.”⁷⁰ Consequently, it is the students' innate characteristics such as ideological self-reflexivity and political voluntarism that make them build solidarity with *minjung*, the victims of global capitalism.⁷¹ This syllogism enables us to see that

the affinity with *minjung* was one distinctive feature of the university cinema.⁷² Yi further argues that “the theory and practice of the university cinema cannot stand without the premise that the student filmmaking will lead to a social movement” and that “the *minjung*-orientedness of the university cinema should transform into the *minjung* spirit when it moves out of the school boundary.”⁷³ These statements confirm that the university cinema is the form of activist cinema and comes under the rubric of the People’s Cinema.

The activist cinema developed the characteristic modes of production, narrativization and distribution. First, the student filmmakers organized extramural associations to surmount the lack of the finance and technical equipments. The bigger a students’ cooperation was, the more refined and politically articulate its outcome. Second, despite the films’ outward advocacy of *minjung*-oriented activist cinema, the narratives normally advanced the main characters ontologically swinging between the lower class and petit bourgeois intellectuals. Third, in defiance of the governmental censorship, the producers of the activist films utilized underground routes offered by student organizations and labor unions to meet with select audiences. It is also notable that the illegal exhibitions of the films served to create a unique film spectatorship based on the ideological and emotional solidarity between filmmakers and audiences.

The first case of the activist cinema can be found in *The Mountains and Rivers Resurrected* (*Puhwalhanŭn Sanha*, 8mm, 90min) produced by Yonsei University General Student Council in 1986. It came out as an agitprop that compiled the scenes of the Kwangju Uprising and other popular protests. This film was to be indicted by the national security police on the charge of demagoguery. The police reportedly assumed that the producers of the film also had made *Blue Bird*, although the student council had no connection with the Seoul Visual

Collective. The allegation against *The Mountains and Rivers Resurrected* was soon to be dropped; however, the prosecutory measures enacted by the police testify that the film medium acquired a sufficient level of recognition as a propaganda instrument in student activism.

The student filmmakers who initiated the activist cinema adopted the small-group filmmaking as the major mode of film production. It was a natural option because of the chronic shortage of money and production equipments. But the same conditions led the groups of student filmmakers to join together to form the General Association of the University Filmmakers (Taehak Yŏnghwa Yŏnhap, 1987-1991) in May 1987.⁷⁴ On the next month, the members of the association held a film festival under the title of "Toward an Open Cinema" (hereafter, the Open Cinema Festival).

Out of the fifteen short films submitted to the Open Cinema Festival,⁷⁵ *For a Talented Young Man* (*Injaerül Uihayŏ*, 8mm, 45min, Dir. Jang Yun-Hyun, 1987) is notable in that it prefigured the typical narrative of the activist cinema in which the male protagonist is forced to undergo psychological and physical ordeals to be reborn into an activist hero. The narrative concerns the main character Woo-Young, a literary major who is presently under ferocious police interrogation because of the poem he has written with an anti-establishment theme for an underground magazine. The opening scene shows a police agent who tortures Woo-Young into confessing the whereabouts of his activist companions. In accompany with a series of images in which the police person commits violence to the hero, Michael Jackson's *Beat It* flows as background music. The rhythmic mixture of diegetic sounds of battering and screaming with the background music alludes to the presence of the U.S. as the ultimate mastermind behind the military dictatorship and its oppressive political engagements. Into the present in which Woo-

Young is brutally questioned a flashback sequence is inserted to show how he became first affiliated with literary activism. The following is the dialogues that Woo-Young shares with his school senior who persuades him to join the underground literary circle.

Woo-Young: I am not much informed about political matters. Not only that, I myself have been indulged in a crude Western culture. I like sweet Coca Cola better than rice tea or barley tea. I am more used to heavy metal than to courtyard play or *pansori* [traditional ballad performance]. Then, how can I denounce such things as cultural imperialism?

Senior: My wits aren't better than yours. What you're saying might be the dilemma all of us have fallen into. But what is more important is that time is not waiting for us. ... We have to correct our fallacies while fighting our enemies.

Woo-Young: Be that as it may, we cry out "Down with the dictatorship", but then next moment we find ourselves infatuated with the pro baseball or such low movies like *Rambo*. ... After all, I can't hurl rocks against comprador capitals and their anti-labor policies, while at the same time wearing blue jeans of Levis and Nike. We can't be so hypocritical.

The overriding presence of American culture makes Woo-Young unsure about the effectiveness of activism against the military government. At a deeper level, however, the dialogue makes us question about what the US's cultural imperialism has to do with student activism against the military regime in South Korea.

Although the remarks seem to touch upon the matter of neo-colonialism in general, they also point to a particular history that defined the ideological direction of the student movement. By the mid 1980s it was well known among intellectuals and students that the U.S. Army supported the military engagement in the Kwangju Uprising. This fact was regarded as the living testimony of the US's neo-imperialist policies that advocate the military government. In response to it, the progressive intellectual community developed the theory of neo-colonial, state-monopoly capitalism to define the politico-economic structure of South Korea. Now, the

direction of the popular movement, as the intellectuals and students maintained, must be geared toward the subversion of the neo-colonial, state-monopoly capitalism. The interlocution between Woo-Young and his senior seems to have tapped into the topical doctrine of the student movement.

Woo-Young's psychological conflict is resolved when he identifies himself with *minjung* and decides to join student movement. To document this internal transformation, the film displays a series of still shots taken from the actual scenes of popular protests. Notable is the picture of Park Jong-Chul, the real-life student activist who was arrested and tortured to death by the police. Park's death evoked nation-wide repercussions which resulted in the June Civil Uprising in 1987. The June Civil Uprising took place across the country and forced the Chun Doo-Hwan government to submit to the public demand for direct presidential election in 1988. In the climatic sequence of the film, the protagonist finds himself undergoing water torture that obviously echoes Park Jong-Chul's death.

Not yielding to the torture, Woo-Young saves his integrity as well as his activist friends. His will as a student activist is manifested in the film's postscript that reads, "Now I move out of a closed room toward a public square." This poetic phrase is advanced as a piece of Woo-Young's literary work, but epitomizes the prophetic vision shared by actual student activists of the day. Given that there is no hope of immediate release, Woo-Young's individual struggle ("a closed room") seems to be pointless. Yet the true hope lies in social reform to be performed by collective struggle ("an open space"), although right now the realization of the social reform should be postponed to an indeterminate future.

Those who submitted *For a Talented Young Man* and other activist films for the Open Cinema Festival organized the filmmaking collective named Jangsangot Mae (1988-1993) in order to make a feature-length film with activist theme. The corroborative investment gave rise to its first feature, *Oh! Republic of Dream* [hereafter, *Republic of Dream*] (*Oh! Kkumui Nara*, 16mm, 90min, Dir. Yi Eun, Jang Dong-Hong, Jang Yun-Hyun) in 1988. This film tested the limits of the established cinematic conventions in South Korea in several ways. It came out as the first film in South Korea that dramatized the Kwangju Uprising with an explicit anti-US theme.⁷⁶ It also brought about the first legal case in which the Film Law was enacted to control the production and distribution of the 8mm and 16mm films. The Film Censorship Board accused *Republic of Dream* of breaking two provisions regarding the Film Law: first, the 4th provision limited filmmaking business to the legally registered companies; second, the 12th provision stipulated that for public exhibition a film should pass the review to be conducted by the Film Censorship Board.⁷⁷ Thanks in part to the legal dispute the film drew more than 100,000 viewers across the country,⁷⁸ although each screening had to risk the blockade of the exhibition place and the confiscation of the film by local polices.

The narrative of the film adds a tragic tonality to the typical narrative of activist cinema. The protagonist Chong-Su attends Chonnam National University in Kwangju when the civil uprising breaks out in the city. He is portrayed as an activist student engaged in underground movement activities and teaching in the night school for teenage workers. His devotion to social activism has earned a great deal of respect from his pupils especially Ku-Chil the shoeshine boy. The camaraderie built between Chong-Su and Ku-Chil continues to the climactic moment when the paratroopers launch the final attack against the civilians who are willing to die a heroic death.

At the last moment, however, Chong-Su gets unnerved by fear and deserts the militia base leaving behind Ku-Chil. On the other hand, the ten days (from May 18 to 27) in the “liberated” city allows Ku-Chil to appreciate a “true democracy” which Ku-Chil describes in the statement that “Nobody contemptuously called us lousy shoeshine boys. Even the college students treated us as their equals calling us comrades. I won’t live like a petty street boy anymore. I will do my part to protect this hard-earned democracy.” Ku-Chil’s awakening to a communal democracy makes a stark contrast with Chong-Su’s betrayal of the same value. Thus, Ku-Chil’s universe, the ideal *minjung* community, is set apart from that of Chong-Su, the opportunistic intellectual who shows only an ideational understanding of *minjung*.

Leaving Kwangju, Chong-Su makes a clandestine journey into Tongduchŏn a military town built around an US Army camp. In Tongduchŏn, smugglers and prostitutes are living a parasitic life on the bounty of American soldiers. The underclass people have an acute sense of their living condition, but they cannot escape from the control imposed by the US Army. The theme of American domination is reaffirmed in the flashback sequence in which Chong-Su, while in Kwangju, is reading a wallposter that reports the departure of U.S. battleships from the port of Okinawa to the Korean peninsula. One of Chong-Su’s associates says in soliloquy that the U.S. Navy has been deployed in support of the Korean Army, not the people of Kwangju. In addition, the ending scene zooms in on an American flag fluttering over the U.S. Embassy building in Seoul. Implied in this iconography is the apocalyptic condition in which South Korea has fallen into the clutches of the neo-imperialistic U.S. All in all, the overly pessimistic narrative enunciated by the intellectual narrator fails to capture multiple aspects of the lower-class people. The storytelling places too much emphasis on exploring the self-consciousness of

the protagonist, stereotyping *minjung* either as the living proof of communal utopia (Kwangju) or as the subalterns who cannot speak for themselves (Tongduchŏn).

For a 16mm independent film, *Republic of Dream* garnered a phenomenal popular success. It was reportedly screened more than five hundred times in 150 different places across the country.⁷⁹ But more importantly, *Republic of Dream* served to dismantle film censorship in South Korea. In response to the indictment against their film, the members of Jansangot Mae filed a legal appeal to the Constitutional Law, claiming that the 12th provision of the Film Law which justifies the film censorship in the preproduction phase is a violation of freedom of speech. The top court decided the case in favor of the complainants in 1996. In the aftermath of this historical judgment, the Film Censorship Board was officially liquidated in 1999.

The next project Jansangot Mae produced was *The Night before Strike* (*Parup Chonya*, 16mm, 90min, Dir. Yi Eun, Yi Jae-Gu, Jang Yun-Hyun, Jang Dong-Hong, 1990). After *Republic of Dream* had proved the popular attention that may be given to a feature-length film in the 16mm format, *The Night before Strike* came out as a reaffirmation of such a potentiality of independent cinema. The highest regards paid to the film came from the fact that it made the first feature-length film, independent or commercial, that tackled labor issues. Whereas *Republic of Dream* relies on the student activist character as the agent who witnesses and testifies the heroic deaths of the people in Kwangju, *The Night before Strike* minimizes the role of an intellectual interlocutor and advances the laborers who independently grasp labor problems and defend their trade union.

In fact, the emergence of the *minjung* protagonists in *The Night before Strike* addresses the changes in socio-political atmosphere in the late 1980s. When the members of Jangsangot Mae conceived the film project on February 1989, South Korea was still in the aftermath of the massive eruptions of labor struggles that had started in July 1987.⁸⁰ After the June Civil Uprising in 1987, which realized the abolishment of the military rule and the installment of direct presidential election, approximately 3,000 labor conflicts exploded in July and August in the year.⁸¹ This so-called Great Struggle of Workers resulted in the multiplication of labor unions; the number of which surged from 2,752 in June 1987 to 4,086 in December 1987, to 6,142 in 1988, and to 7,783 in 1989. In tandem with the growth of the labor movement, the subject matters of the people's literary movement were gradually channeled into labor issues.

The foundation of the monthly literary journal entitled *The Labor Liberation Literature* (*Nodong Haebang Munhak*) in April 1989 epitomized the new trend of the people's literature. Literary critic Cho Jung-Hwan in his "The Proclamatory Thesis of the Labor Liberation Literature," presented in the journal held that "For a new dimension of literary practice, the current literary movement has been required to acknowledge the growth of the people's movement, especially the labor movement which has made rapid progress since the beginning of the 1980 (...). In order to realize the aim, the literati are obliged to keep in touch with laboring classes via political party and to get armed with the labor class ideology."⁸² This view maintained a critical distance from traditional *minjung* theory that included non-ruling classes. By singularizing the labor class, Cho's thesis aimed to demarcate the line between the laboring classes and the anti-labor forces as the last front of social conflict in South Korea.

The thesis of the labor liberation literature solicits a comparison with anti-Americanism that permeates the ideological universe of, for instance, *Republic of Dream*. Regarding all the *minjung* strata as potential victims of the neo-colonial machinations by the U.S., *Republic of Dream* avoids placing any hierarchy among the components of *minjung*. Singled out is the role of the intellectual agent who plays a mouthpiece, albeit fragile, for the needs and aspirations of *minjung* as a whole. Replacing the opposition of the people vs. neo-colonialism that defines the cosmology in *Republic of Dream*, the labor liberation thesis puts forth the opposition of the labor class vs. anti-labor class forces in the analysis of the politico-economic structure of South Korea. These two distinctive views, in fact, represented the two different ideological perspectives that the movement circles adopted in explaining the fundamental conflict of South Korean society: national conflict and class conflict. The Kwangju Uprising in 1980 provided a proof of the national conflict model, whereas the stream of labor struggles since 1987 seemed to validate the class conflict model.

When Jangsangot Mae started the production of *The Night before Strike* in 1989, an increasing number of artists had already begun to portray labor disputes in their literary creations. For instance, Pak Noh-Hae, a renowned labor activist and poet, gave out twelve poems in the aforementioned *The Labor Liberation Literature*. Ten out of the twelve works portray the embattled lives of sweatshop workers and exhort the laborers' anti-capitalistic struggles and unionism.⁸³ The narrators of the poems commonly maintain the first person perspective, making it appear that the poems are actual laborers' personal statements. The narrativization that presents the real-life struggles of laborers also accounts for the creative principle of *The Night before Strike*.

The plot concerns a group of laborers working for a metal processing factory. The opening scene entitled "Fall 1987" summons up the memory of the Great Struggle of Workers in 1987. An anonymous man agitates, albeit abortively, his co-workers for a combined action to improve the sub-human conditions of the dining facilities that the factory management operates. Yet the voice of instigation merely echoes in the air, implying the absence of a union that could organize such a demand.

A year has passed from the initial event to the present in which the hazardous working environment, let alone low wages, still plagues the workers: the factory workers keep a low profile to avoid layoff. The labor-management conflict is disclosed in casual dialogues between employees: "To the managers, we are not humans. We are like dogs. Nobody would find machines as cheap as we are." However, the factory owner's remarks enable us to assume the relentless treatment that the workers have to face: "Union?! Over my dead body! The student bastards have made such a fuss about democracy or something. Now the factory bastards are following their way? No way!"

A turning point comes when Wan-Yik, a student-turned-labor activist, joins the group of workers to persuade them to build a union. Wan-Yik at first sight appears as the activist hero who is assigned to take up the entire process of union building. But the story avoids such conventional narrative typical to activist cinema by giving the task of union building to Won-Ki a genuine blue collar worker. Won-Ki is a three-dimensional character who hides his anguish over the hazardous working condition and the unorganized workers' weakness, whereas Wan-Yik remains as nearly a stock character who follows movement line without showing any internal conflict. Wan-Yik's greatest contribution to the plot building takes place when the police

arrest him on the charge of “ideologically impure” actions and this incident awakens the workers’ consciousness about the need of union.

The narrative also employs an indecisive character Han-Su who enables us to see the multiple and even self-contradictory aspects of *minjung*. Reminiscent of Chong-Su the feeble-minded student activist in *Republic of Dream*, Han-Su does not seem to be an activist hero at first sight. During the preparatory phase of union building undertaken by his colleagues, Han Su even works as a spy for the factory managers. He tries to justify his action citing that he is obliged to support his younger brother and soon to be married. However, his fiancé Mi-Ja, a female worker in another factory presently on strike, encourages Han-Su to participate in the building of labor union. The fateful encounter between labor and capital takes place in the climatic sequence in which the union organizers occupy the factory building to wage a sit-in as the last resort to fight the management. But the hired union breakers outnumber the workers and eventually quell down the protest. Infuriated by the atrocities of the suppression, Han-Su takes the initiative of another wave of the workers’ protest, heroically emerging as the new union leader.

The story of *The Night before Strike* revolves around Hans-Su’s transformation into a union leader after witnessing the selfless efforts of his associates to launch a democratic union and the merciless measures taken by factory managers to repress the workers. 360-degree panning shots are frequently used to capture the collective actions of the union builders. As the narrative approaches the ending, the camera uses increasingly more close-ups and medium close-ups in order to arrest the internal landscape of the main characters, particularly Han-Su. The final shot captures Han-Su’s torso occupying the center of the screen which symbolizes the birth of a

hero. Ironically, in this close-up shot, collectivity the built-in character of *minjung* evaporates so as to highlight the birth of an individual hero. The efforts to organize a union is headed by Won-Ki and his comrades; but their endeavors do not so much lead to the construction of union as pave the way for the birth of the new leader Han-Su. The narrative progression as such is designed to lead audiences to identify with the psychological development of the individual protagonist. It follows then that the film repeats psychological realism endorsed in Hollywood cinema rather than socialist realism demonstrated by, for instance, Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike* (1925).

With all its merits and limitations, *The Night before Strike* evoked sensational responses. First of all, the Film Censorship Board enacted the 4th and 12th provisions of the Film Law, as was the case with *Republic of Dream*, to make illegal the public exhibition of *The Night before Strike*. The persecution indicted the film on the ground that "the story instigates strike and justifies third party intervention in labor dispute that the Labor Law prohibits."⁸⁴ Jangsangot Mae pressed ahead with public screenings that started on April 8, 1990. On the second day (April 9) of exhibition, the riot police forced into the exhibition place Art Theatre Hanmadang in Seoul and took the celluloid film and the projector as well.⁸⁵ Yi Yong-Bae the producer of *The Night before Strike* and Kim Myung-Gon the representative of the Art Theatre Hanmadang became wanted by police for the instigation of strike.⁸⁶ The incidents sparked a stream of protests by the members of Jangsangot Mae and other cultural-movement organizations. The resistant acts unfolded in the forms of public campaign against the legal enforcement and the open screening of the film through university campuses and labor unions.

One should make reference to the prosecutors' investigation records to see the way in which the prosecutory authorities monitored the illegal exhibitions and accompanying activities of the independent filmmakers. Although such investigation records are not provided for a civilian's reference, it is beyond doubt that the leaders and regular members of the filmmaking groups were under constant surveillance of the police as was often the case with labor activists and student movement leaders at the time. Nevertheless, no case of lynching or of murder committed against the filmmakers by secret police was reported during the period between the June Civil Uprising in 1987 and the year 1992 when the civilian rule started: this five-year period was governed by the president Roh Tae-Woo, one of the leaders of the 1980 military coup. The president Roh was elected through the direct presidential election in 1987 immediately after the June Civil Uprising. The then representative of the ruling Democratic Justice Party, Roh proclaimed the general democratic reform plan entitled the June 29 Declaration in June 1987. Roh and his party designed the reform plan in order to subdue the fervor of the civil uprising. Thanks in part to the measure of democratization, brutal suppression of civilian actions such as the massacre in Kwangju of 1980 became practically impossible after 1987 in South Korea. As we have seen in the cases of *Republic of Dream* and *The Night before Strike*, the prosecutory actions against the independent cinema were limited to the boundary of the Film Law. Despite all that, public screenings of the films often entailed battle-like scenes in which riot police blockaded the exhibition spots to be confronted by the participants' organized resistance: in most cases, such confrontation ended up with a number of people wounded or taken to police stations.

A particular mode of film spectatorship arose in the course of public screenings. University students and union workers filled up the majority of audiences. Due to the threats of

police infiltration, the audiences had to be on the constant lookout for the action to withstand the police force. Under the circumstance, the film screening in itself became an act of political resistance; the filmmakers and the audiences built an emotional solidarity that hardened in proportion to the intensity of outer oppression. Yi Yong-Bae provides an on-the-spot description of the open screening. Some of Yi's recollection deserves a lengthy quotation to understand the filmmaker-viewer solidarity.

There were enormous responses. A number of workers went to so much trouble to pay a visit to the university campuses where open screenings were taking place. Some of were even arrested. Donation boxes, being constantly passed around the audience, were filled with coins and paper bills. We conducted an open-air screening in the Acropolis Square of Seoul National University, which required a special device for 16 mm film projection. Fervor, sweats, suspense, and tears always accompanied each viewing session. It was a common scene that at the finale of the film, audiences sang together *The Way of Laborer* (the theme song of *The Night before Strike*), sharing their residual emotions. I vividly remember the scene in which some women workers clasped the hands of the projectionists to console their hardships but to equally encourage them an unyielding struggle for film exhibition. The members of the cast had to receive a great number of people asking for autographs. Actually, the majority of the actors had been either extras in *Chungmuro* (the locus of commercial filmmaking in South Korea) or nameless performers of courtyard play, but they also were deeply moved by the welcoming audiences.⁸⁷

The open exhibition and its inevitable filmmaker-audience camaraderie characterized the practice of activist cinema until the early 1990s. Jangsangot Mae resumed its momentum to launch another activist cinema, *Opening the Closed School Gate* (*Tatchin Kyomunül Yölmyö*, Dir. Yi Chae-Gu, 16mm, 86min, 1992). Set in the teachers' struggle for building the Teachers Union in 1989, the story concerns a progressive high school teacher and a group of students under his mentorship: they are committed to a protest against the undemocratic management of the school authorities. *Opening the Closed School Gate* did not surpass *The Night before Strike* in terms of the number of audiences it drew. However, when the Film Law once again banned the public screening of the film, Jangsangot Mae took advantage of the case together with the case of

Republic of Dream to appeal to the Constitutional Law citing that film censorship violates the freedom of speech: as mentioned earlier, Jangsangot Mae won the legal case in 1996 and the Film Censorship Board was dismantled in 1999. Jangsangot Mae was disbanded in 1993.

The active period of Jangsangot Mae from 1988 to 1993 was filled with inflammatory moments of South Korean history: to name a few, the June Civil Uprising in 1987, two presidential elections in 1987, 1992, the fall of the former Soviet Union in 1989, and the empowerment of the first civilian government in 1993. The political fervor that decorated this particular segment of history must have been the staple food for sustenance of the activist cinema. Chung-nyun,⁸⁸ another student filmmaking collective organized in 1990, attempted to relay the fervencies that *The Night before Strike* had evoked in its debut film *Mother, I am Your Son* (*Ömöni, Tangshinŭ Adül*, Dir. Yi Sang-Yin, 16mm, 84min, 1991). Echoing Maxim Gorky's revolution novel *Mother* (1907), the film presents a student activist and his mother, an urban proletariat who grows into a resistant *minjung* character. Juxtaposing the ordeals that the son endures in his movement activities with the process of the mother's awakening to the righteousness of the activism, the plot recycles the typical narrative that unfolds through the interaction between the intellectual agent (the son) and the *minjung* character (the mother).

Mother, I am Your Son came instantly into the clutches of the Film Law and failed to acquire the permission of public exhibition. Chung-nyun's next step was to enforce the illegal open screenings across university campuses just as Jangsangot Mae did with *The Night before Strike*. During April 1991, *Mother, Here I am Your Son* took the chances of open screening in nine different regions across the country.⁸⁹ The blockade of the riot police accompanied every

single case of open screening; and a great deal of tear gas and hurling stones were exchanged between the two parties.

As a freshman attending the University of Seoul in 1991, the author attended the exhibition of *Mother, I am Your Son* that took place in the 1500-seat school auditorium. Prior to the projection of the film, one of the members of Chung-nyun mounted on the stage and chanted, "Down with the Ro Tae-Woo regime!" with other anti-government slogans; in response, the audiences repeated the slogans expressing the sense of solidarity. During the exhibition, the scene came up in which the main characters sing *Mt. Baekdu* the theme song of the film, and the viewers started singing along with the characters on the screen. While the *esprit de corps* was being built in the auditorium, an army of students were piling barricades outside the building to block the encroachment of the police. Shortly afterwards, the drama of activism unfolded both within and without.

The People's Cinema: The National Cinema

In 1989, Yi Hyo-In and Yi Jeong-Ha drafted and published the National Cinema Thesis (*minjok yŏnghwaron*) in an attempt to outline the general tasks of the South Korean cinema movement. They maintained that the preceding terminologies for new cinema, such as the Small Film, the Open Cinema, and the People's Cinema, were employed without sufficient theoretical elaboration. Therefore, they submitted the National Cinema Thesis, claiming it to be the first indigenous film theory for new cinema derived from the socio-cultural conditions of South Korea. Despite its self-claimed distinction from the preceding nomenclatures that qualify new

cinema, the National Cinema Thesis is to be deemed as an extension of the People's Cinema practice. It is because instead of providing the examples of the films that may belong to the category of the National Cinema, the designers of the National Cinema Thesis invest the existing independent films made in the name of the People's Cinema with new political and ideological meanings.

The National Cinema Thesis can be interpreted in three respects. First, it came out as an indigenous film theory built upon the considerations of the political economy involving South Korean cinema. Second, its theoretical spectrum covers not only independent cinema but also established commercial cinema with its practitioners. Third, it adopted the film theories developed by Kim Jong-Il the leader of North Korea. The last point may vitiate the claim of being 'indigenous' that the first point stresses. However, the meaning of indigenous may vary depending on how the meaning of the 'national' in the National Cinema Thesis defines the divided state of the Korean peninsula.

The conceptual distinction between the idea of national cinema used in Western film theories and that of *minjok yŏnghwa* needs to be clarified. *Minjok yŏnghwa* literally translates into national cinema or nationalist cinema: here, the capitalized terminologies, National Cinema and the National Cinema Thesis are used to refer to *minjok yŏnghwa* and *minjok yŏnghwaron* respectively in English.

Kristin Thompson maintains that the concept of national cinema arose in Europe during the first decade after the World War I⁹⁰ as a part of the nation-rebuilding projects conducted by European countries such as Germany and France in the attempt to recuperate the market power of their domestic films. Germany in particular formed the UFA (Universumfilm

Aktiengesellschaft) trust as “a move to boost overall German [film] exports,”⁹¹ assigning it the grandiose task “to protect the interests of German films on the world market in peacetime.”⁹² Although Thompson describes the UFA as an example of “internationalism” of the post-war European cinema,⁹³ such a government-initiated institution was more like a survival tactic of domestic German cinema in opposition to Hollywood films. The French film industry was equally, if not more, desperate because “[b]y the end of the war, the Hollywood product had taken over the bulk of French screening time and French producers, already weak, feared additional competition from the stronger German industry.”⁹⁴ On the one hand, French critics belittled the German films that claimed to contain in it typical German contents. But on the other hand, the French filmmakers and critics as well also began to explore the repertoire of France’s cultural resources to find indigenous subject matters which might be internationally marketable in the name of French cinema.⁹⁵ In Thompson’s view, the notion of national cinema originally held two axiomatic premises. First, national cinema was defined in relation to other non-domestic cinemas. Second, a national cinema assumed either pre-given or at least dormant national identity to substantiate the cinematic representations.

In the course of the mid 20th century, the two premises underlying national cinema were faced with a number of inconvenient facts. According to Andrew Higson, international co-productions, cross-national trades of actors and directorial talents, and more recently the multi-national identities captured in cinematic imaginations have made us rethink the film medium as a fundamentally “transnational” product.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the national cinema has been largely accepted as a valid concept that upholds national identities of films and characterizes different national cinemas. That the notion of national cinema still prevails represents the condition that

Hollywood cinema is wielding peerless commercial clout on the international film market. Non-Hollywood films pit themselves against Hollywood cinema in order to secure their unique cultural identities which are usually equated with national identities.

Stephen Crofts lists seven modes of national cinema in light of film production. 1) European-model art cinemas - "cinemas that differ from Hollywood, but do not compete directly, by targeting a distinct, specialist market sector"; 2) Third Cinema - "those that differ, do not compete directly *but* do directly *critique* Hollywood"; 3) Third World and European commercial cinemas - "European and Third World entertainment cinemas that struggle against Hollywood with limited or no success"; 4) ignoring Hollywood - "cinemas [such as those of Hong Kong or 'Bollywood'] that ignore Hollywood, and accomplishment managed by few"; 5) imitating Hollywood - "Anglophone cinemas that try to beat Hollywood as its own game"; 6) totalitarian cinemas - "cinemas [of Fascist Germany or North Korea] that work within a wholly state-controlled and often substantially state-subsidized industry"; and 7) regional/ethnic cinemas - "regional or national cinemas whose culture and/or language take their distance from the nation-states which encloses them."⁹⁷ In Crofts's scheme, apart from the totalitarian cinemas and the regional/ethnic cinemas, five out of the seven types of national cinema are defined by the competitive relationship with Hollywood cinema.

Crofts's typology leads us to a more fundamental question concerning the ideology that serves to canonize particular features of the national while rejecting and marginalizing others. Regarding the ideology issue, Susan Hayward remarks,

Culture is made up art, among other things. That art, however, is almost exceptionally class-inflected within Western societies and is predominantly middle-class. Therefore, issues of identity in discourses will be primarily framed and focused within the particular notion of a 'national' identity. National identity and, thereby, unity will tend to mean middle class consciousness; the rest will be difference/otherness.⁹⁸

In a similar way, Ian Jarvie maintains that in the formative stage of Western nationalism the problem was "how to bring the inchoate masses [liberated from the traditional hierarchies] to accept the sense of nation and culture possessed by the elites?"⁹⁹ In other words, the political elite designed and orchestrated nationalism for the continuation and dominance of their leadership.¹⁰⁰ Considering that the political elites tended to stand for the interests of the new emerging bourgeois class, it is middle-class bourgeois nationalism that comprises the established national identity in cinema.

Of course, attention must be paid to the manifestations of non-bourgeois elements of national cinema. Aside from European cinema movements such as the French New Wave and Italian Neo-realism in which non-standard film language and social realism challenged institutionalized bourgeois realism, the most determinate anti-bourgeois nationalism is to be found in the idea of Third Cinema in New Latin American Cinema. Based on Frantz Fanon's dictum that "a national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which people has created itself and keeps itself in existence,"¹⁰¹ Third Cinema endorses the "cinema of subversion," which positions itself against the films upholding bourgeois ideology and politics, and champions national struggles against neocolonial forces.¹⁰² Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, the major proponents of Third Cinema, proclaim that only two concepts of cinema compete with each other: the cinema of the imperialist, bourgeois rulers and the cinema of the anti-colonial

nations.¹⁰³ Despite the strict dichotomy, the thesis of Third Cinema enables us to see that nationalism addressed by cinema stands upon a fundamental conflict between bourgeois ideology and anti-bourgeois ideology.

Elicited from the discussion thus far are two pairs of oppositions that the concept of national cinema implicates: Hollywood cinema vs. non-Hollywood cinema and bourgeois nationalism vs. non-bourgeois nationalism. To understand the National Cinema Thesis, one may project it against the two conceptual binaries from which the idea of national cinema is originated.

The National Cinema Thesis first appeared in two seminal essays: “The Imminent Task and Duty of National Cinema” by Yi Hyo-In and “The Organizational, Practical Duty and Task of the National Cinema Movement” by Yi Jeong-Ha. Both articles were printed in the journal entitled *National Cinema I (Minjok Yŏnghwa I, 1989)*. A year later, Yi Hyo-In published “The National Cinema Movement: How Can It Lead South Korean Cinema?” in *National Cinema II (1990)* for a theoretical elaboration of the original thesis.

The period when the National Cinema Thesis was proposed and drew serious attention from the independent cinema community coincided with a watershed moment in the history of South Korean film industry. The fifth revision of the Film Law in 1985 adopted a registration system in place of a licensing system to deregulate the film production business.¹⁰⁴ More importantly, the revised law abolished the foreign film importation quota which had been granted to major production companies with the capacity of making at least two films a year. The separation of the foreign film importation from the domestic film production business allowed for an unprecedented market space for international cinema. The number of imported films

rapidly increased from 20 to 30 on the average between 1981 to 1985, rising to 50 in 1986, 84 in 1987, 175 in 1988, and 264 in 1989.¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, the domestic market share of imported films rose from 65.8% in 1985 to 79.8% in 1989, 67.0% in 1986, 73.0% in 1987, and 76.7% in 1988.¹⁰⁶ By contrast, the domestic share of the film market plummeted from 34.2% in 1985 to 20.2% in 1989 via 33.0% in 1986, 27.0% in 1987, and 23.3% in 1988.¹⁰⁷

As such, South Korean film production was unshackled from a licensing system only to face with an uphill struggle against foreign films, the majority of which consisted of Hollywood cinema. To make the situation even worse, the first U.S. and South Korea film negotiation in 1985 reached the agreement that the South Korean government should open its domestic film market to US-based film production companies by 1987.¹⁰⁸ In order to legalize the US-South Korea consent, the South Korean government enacted the sixth revision of the Film Law in July 1987. In January 1988, the government officially permitted foreign film companies to conduct direct distribution as well as advertisement and production of their films in South Korea. The United International Pictures (UIP), the joint management by Paramount, Universal, and MGM/UA, began direct distribution with *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, Paramount, 1987) in 1988 in Seoul.¹⁰⁹ During September and October in 1988, South Korean filmmakers in solidarity with the employees in film industry began a series of protests against the direct distribution, calling the UIP the “public enemy” of South Korean cinema.¹¹⁰ The Association of Korean Film Directors issued a declaration entitled “Down with American Cinema!” on September 17,¹¹¹ and on September 23 all the first-run movie theatres in Seoul held a combined shutdown in defiance of direct distribution.¹¹² The protests culminated on October 27 and 28 when the Committee in

Demand of the Abolishment of Direct Distribution and the Establishment of Domestic Film Production Law carried out a public campaign in front of the House of Representatives.¹¹³

The National Cinema Thesis should be examined in these politico-economic conditions in South Korea in 1988. Yi Jeong-Ha, in his "The Organizational, Practical Duty and Task of the National Cinema Movement," (1989) pointed out the "colonized nature" of South Korean film industry, which was revealed in "the domestic cinema constantly outmaneuvered by foreign cinema, the film production capital only accruable by selling the purchase rights of foreign films, and instability of the industry structure, a complete dearth of national capital for domestic film production, and a generally low-level of wages for the employees in film industry."¹¹⁴ To this anti-neocolonial view, the stream of spontaneous protests against direct distribution of Hollywood cinema assured a strong possibility of the cinema movement that would mobilize not only the independent cinema sector but also the people employed in commercial film industry. Addressing *minjok* or the single national identity shared by all Koreans, the National Cinema Thesis regards all types of domestic filmmaking practice as the parts of potentially nationalistic movement against the cultural foray of alien forces, especially Hollywood cinema.

Thus, the key polemic of the National Cinema Thesis resides in the united front built across the commercial film industry and the independent cinema sector. Yi Hyo-In in "The Imminent Task and Duty of National Cinema" (1989) argues that the preceding independent cinema theses such as the Small Film, the Open Cinema, and the People's Cinema limited their scope to noncommercial films.¹¹⁵ Resulting from such a sectarian attitude, as Yi argues, was "the solipsistic way of thought which is imbued with imperialist ideologies such as art for art's sake or film auteurism, and isolated from the other sectors of social movement."¹¹⁶ To Yi, the films

like *Republic of Dream* only serve to reduce the imperialist nature of the U.S. foreign policies to the realm of psychological conflict of a petit bourgeois intellectual.¹¹⁷ If it is the case, the film becomes a far cry from the work that meets “the demand of the agitation and propaganda for social reformation initiated by the labor class.”¹¹⁸ Yi Jeong-Ha makes a similar diagnosis on the activities of the Seoul Cinema Collective (1982-1986) and its accomplishments like *Blue Bird* (1986). Yi Jeong-Ha maintains that “the filmmaking activities of the collective have stood on the petit bourgeois ideology, which contains the revolutionary theme of the People’s Cinema within the screen and never allows the working class audiences to take up actual revolutionary actions.”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, Yi Hyo-In says that the popularity of *The Night before Strike* was obviously an accomplishment made by the independent cinema sector, but the film’s Hollywood-style narrative revealed an ideological limitation.¹²⁰

The second most important tenet of the National Cinema Thesis is that the national cinema movement should be conducted “as a way of the working class movement, in the perspective of working class, and in the interests of working class.”¹²¹ The identity of working class upholding the National Cinema Thesis corresponds to anti-bourgeois nationalism implicated in the Third Cinema thesis. However, the National Cinema Thesis files a caveat that mere efforts to portray working people on the screen are prone to be a condescending form of petit-bourgeois individualism. This point slightly differentiates the National Cinema Thesis from its Latin American counterpart. With all the variations in different national contexts, the practices of Third Cinema have overall sought a revolutionary cinema movement in the very act of filmmaking. For instance, Jorge Sanjinés, one of the founders of the Ukamau Group in Bolivia, maintains that bourgeois ideology underlying Western concept of art does not easily change, but

filmmakers may purge it “through contact with the people, by integrating them into the creative process, by elucidating the aims of popular art, and leaving off with individual positions.”¹²² The filmmaking process and the resulting film product as a whole should be considered to be the ultimate locus where cinema movement against bourgeois ideology and imperialism takes place. Yi Jeong-Ha maintains that the Third World cinema movements like Third Cinema arose partly under the influence of “revolutionary auteurism” in the West, so that they defy a mechanical application to the South Korean context.¹²³

Unlike Third Cinema, the notion of working class in the National Cinema Thesis refers to not only the subject of a revolutionary cinema but also the working people who are engaged in a variety of film-related institutions: the companies engaged in film production and distribution, the governmental administrations involved in making cultural policies and film law, and the laboratories creating cinematic art and technicality. It follows that the united front endorsed in the National Cinema Thesis should be the solidarity among the entire people working for all cinema institutions. Forwarding the united front and the working-class initiative as the prerequisite for cinema movement, the National Cinema Thesis claims that the two guiding principles are to penetrate into the actual filmmaking and social movement which “national filmmakers”¹²⁴ are required to undertake in order to reform film industry and the cultural bureaucracy.

Yi Hyo-In, in his discussion of creative methods to realize the National Cinema, asserts that “the practitioners of the National Cinema should be the national filmmakers who have internalized the working-class world-view and the working-class ideology.”¹²⁵ He goes on to argue that “the narrative of the National Cinema is to portray the working-classes’ struggle for

national liberation and its revolutionary accomplishments” and that “the theme of the National Cinema is to address how to interpret and submit our national problems.”¹²⁶ For the narrative elements, Yi suggests the typical settings, typical characters, and typical events by which to realize the “national theme” in the most effective way.¹²⁷ To sum up, the following four principles sustain the practical methods of the National Cinema Thesis: the working class ideology, the people’s perspective, the national theme, and the typicality of narrative elements.

In their accounts of the National Cinema Thesis, Yi Hyo-In and Yi Jeong-Ha barely mention the *Juchae* Doctrine, the ruling principle of communist North Korea, and *On the Art of Cinema* (*Yŏnghwa Yesullon*, 1973), the treatise attributed to Kim Jong-Il as an extension of the *Juchae* Doctrine to film art. Some circumstantial evidences confirm the influence of Kim Jong-Il’s film theory on the four principles that the National Cinema Thesis advocates. An in-depth discussion of the *Juchae* Idea and its artistic application lies beyond the scope of this study. However, *National Cinema I*, the printed vehicle of the National Cinema Thesis, provides an introductory study on film theory developed in North Korea. Under the title of “North Korean Film Theory,” the article discusses the state policies in promotion of literary creations in North Korea. The guiding principles of literary creation in North Korea are “the execution of the Chosun Labor Party’s policy on art and literature, the allegiance to the Party as well as labor class and the people, the adherence to socialist realism, and the cultivation and innovation of traditional national culture.”¹²⁸ Aside from the Party-related provisions including socialist realism, the remaining principles stress the allegiance to labor class and the people, and the enrichment of national culture. These befittingly correspond to the three creative principles

advocated by the National Cinema Thesis: the working class ideology, the people's perspective, and the national theme.

With regard to the principle of typicality in the National Cinema Thesis, its forerunner is found Kim Jong-II's *On the Art of Cinema*. Published in April 1973, *On the Art of Cinema* accentuates the importance of the typical character on numerous occasions as is shown in the following passage:

A human question raised by literature can be settled correctly only through representative human images which can serve as examples for people in their lives and struggles. Therefore we can say that the value and significance of any human question raised by a literary work is determined by the virtues of the typical character who plays the main role.¹²⁹

Kim further suggests that the typical character acquires most realistic portrayal in a typical life, so that "works of art and literature should always give a rich and detailed description of typical lives, in which people are shown as they really are."¹³⁰ Kim concludes this rationale by arguing that "the typical life our people today is expressed in their noble struggle for an independent and creative existence. Indeed, a revolutionary life is the most typical life, one which is lived in the main current of historical progress."¹³¹

One finds another striking similarity between Kim Jong-II's film theory and the National Cinema Thesis in the role of film director. At first, the following remarks show the general notion about film director that Kim conceptualizes in *On the Art of Cinema*.

In the capitalist system of filmmaking the 'director' carries that title, but in fact the right of supervision and control over film production is entirely in the hands of the tycoons of the filmmaking industry who have the money, whereas the directors are nothing but their agents.¹³²

[By contrast] in the socialist system of filmmaking, the director is [...] the chief who assumes full responsibility for everything, ranging from the film itself to the political and ideological life of those who take part in filmmaking. [Therefore,] the director becomes the commander of the creative group and pushes forward the creative work as a whole in a coordinated fashion, giving precedence to political work and laying major emphasis on working with people who make films.¹³³

Besides, although Kim hardly mentions film auteurism developed in European art cinema, he takes a critical stance on the notion by stating that “the director should not be over-egotistical in his analysis and judgment of a production” since “ignoring the opinions of other creative workers” will hinder “the establishment of a firm consensus on any production.”¹³⁴ In short, Kim Jong-Il’s socialist film theory prescribes two qualifications of film director. First, film director should always work with the creative production group in which the division of work is well established. Second, the director works as the ideological leader for the members of the filmmaking group: this point differentiates the director in the socialist system of filmmaking from the director as a corporate agent or an individualistic artist in the capitalist system.

Yi Hyo-In said that he had been most impressed by the dictum of North Korean film theory to place a high value on ideology and group production over artistry and individual work.¹³⁵ It seemed to him to be a strong alternative to customary filmmaking in South Korea, which in Yi’s view had been deeply plagued by “the personal apprenticeship, morally degenerate contents, low technical quality, and the tendency to trivialize the social obligation of art.”¹³⁶ Indeed, Yi’s commentary on the role of film director practically repeats Kim Jong-Il’s view on the same subject.

The director should push forward the cinematic creation in which ideology and theme unfold in the narrative under the guidance of revolutionary world view. In order to perform this task, the director should be in charge of the general progression of artistic creation, the management of the creative group, and the

ideological guidance for the group members. All of these roles will lead the director to greater historical and societal tasks. In a word, the director should not merely supervise the theme of a film and call 'Ready! Action!' complacently out of the bourgeois ideology.¹³⁷

The National Security Law (est. 1948) in South Korea has outlawed practically favorable approaches to the doctrines officially circulated in North Korea. By the time that Yi Hyo-In and Yi Jeong-Ha submitted the National Cinema Thesis in 1989, Kim Jong-Il's writings on cinema were not available in bookstores nor in school libraries in South Korea. Yi Hyo-In testified that Baek-Bong Mungo, a pro-North Korea Japanese publishing company, translated Kim Jong-Il's manuscripts on the directing and acting in film art into Japanese, and that the Ministry of Reunification in South Korea came to the possession of a copy of Japanese translation in its resource for public reference.¹³⁸ Also available at the library of the Ministry of Reunification was a monthly journal entitled *Chosun Cinema* published in North Korea.¹³⁹ Thus, Kim Jong-Il's film theory obtained in Japanese translation and in *Chosun Cinema* provided the venue for Yi Hyo-In and Yi Jeong-Ha to formulate the practical methodology of the National Cinema Thesis.

The cold war machines like the National Security Law prevented the flow of information on North Korea into South Korean intellectuals. Yi Hyo-In, for instance, said that he had not seen a single work of North Korean film before Kim Jong-Il's film theory electrified him to conceive the National Cinema Thesis.¹⁴⁰ The deficiency of knowledge about North Korea drove the intellectuals and students to access to Japanese texts or North Korean radio broadcasts in order to envisage the realities of North Korea. In the process, the *Juchae* Doctrine increasingly won the minds of student activists: an underground tract first introduced the *Juchae* Doctrine in 1985.¹⁴¹

The principle of *juchae* (meaning autonomous body) endorses *chajusŏng* (self-reliance) as the most important attributes of the people and, by extension, of the nation-state. It is also North Korea's state ideology implemented to justify the communist state's anti-American policies; this aspect strongly appealed to a large segment of the people involved in political activism in South Korea. It seems natural that Kim Jong-Il's film theory based on the *Juchae* Doctrine came convincing to the designers of the National Cinema Thesis, who were wary of the menace of direct distribution of Hollywood cinema since 1988. Yi Hyo-In described this situation by saying that he saw the "light" in the North Korean discourse.¹⁴²

Further researches are desired to grasp how the clandestine encounter of two Koreas in the name of the National Cinema evolved in the later development of South Korean cinema. One may approach this query from the standpoint of the two original missions of the National Cinema Thesis: building the united front and establishing the working-class hegemony in cinema movement. Yi Hyo-In assessed that the National Cinema Thesis served, most of all, to make the need of cinema movement be accepted as an important part of the social movement between the late 1980s and the early 1990s. He also said that the thesis awakened a great number of labor unions to the use of the film and video media for the purpose of "conscientization" of workers.¹⁴³ If Yi's evaluation is correct, the thesis seems to have made a level of contribution to developing the working-class hegemony in cinema movement.

More accomplishments are visible in light of the building of the united front. Yi Hyo-In and Yi Jeong-Ha founded National Cinema Institute in 1988: its subdivision Hankyoreh Film Factory became a founding member of the Korea Independent Film & Video Association in 1990. In the area of commercial cinema, Korea Assistant Directors Union was organized after the film

directors' collective protest against direct distribution. The most far-reaching legacy of the National Cinema Thesis would be the idea of national 'cultural sovereignty.' South Korean film society has enacted the notion in its consistent struggle for the preservation of the screen quota system from 1988 to the present.

¹ In the aftermath of the Small Film festival, aside from the pre-existing Yalashyŏng (1980) in Seoul National University and Tolbit (1983) in Korea University, eight more student cine clubs were formed across universities in Seoul: Kŭrimja Nori (Shadow Play, Kyunghee University, April 1985); Pilŭm Aat (Film Art, Myungji University, April 1985); Yŏnghwa Kongdongchae (Cinema Community, Seogang University, April 1985); Ulrim (Echo, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, April 1985); Yŏngsan Chon (Visual Village, Sungkyunguan University, 1985); Yŏnghwa Pae (Film Company, Yonsei University, 1985); Nue (Nue, Ehwa Women's University, 1985); Sonagi (Shower, Hanyang University). See the The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* (Seoul: Shigakkua Önnö, 1995), 27.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

³ The historical events of this paragraph were collected from the two sources: the chronology of South Korean politics 1979-1980 in, Donald N. Cark ed. *The Kwangju Uprising: Shadows over the Regime in South Korea* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1988), p. 12; and Kang Jun-Man, *Promenade of Korean Modern History: 1980s I [Hankook Hyöndaesa Sanch'aek: 1980 Nyöndaek-I]* (Seoul: Inmulgua Sasangsa, 2003), p. 200.

⁴ Kim Won, *Memory of the Things Forgotten [Yithyöjin Kötdule Daehan Giök]* (Seoul: Yihu, 1999), p. 128.

⁵ Yi Yong-Bae, Personal interview with the author, July 12, 2006

⁶ Kim Won, p. 93.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

⁸ Park Sae-Gil, *A Rewritten History of Modern Korea 3 [Tashi Ssünün Hankuk Hyöndaesa 3]* (Seoul: Tobaegae, 1992), p. 139.

⁹ Kang Jun-Man, p. 179.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.179-180.

¹¹ Park Sae-Gil, p. 151.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁵ Kang Jun-Man, *Promenade of Korean Modern History: 1980s II [Hankook Hyöndaesa Sanch'aek: 1980 Nyöndaek-II]* (Seoul: Inmulgua Sasangsa, 2003), pp. 70-72. The green color was supposed to oppose the red color, which was associated with the communist activities. On mass media and in governmental proclamations produced during the 1980s and afterwards, the events related to the student activism were claimed to have connections with communism and/or North Korea's anti-South policies. Although it is

true that Marxism and other communist ideas inspired South Korean student activism during the first half of the 1980s and that the North Korean leader, Kim Il-Sung's "Juche Ideology" started to dictate the major portion of South Korean student movement since 1986, on many occasions, the legal regime of the military government witch-hunted the student leaders on the fabricated charges of pro-North activism in order to justify their own illegal proceedings to capture the anti-government activists.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 72-74.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 292.

¹⁹ I conducted the interviews by exchanging emails with the designated interviewees during Dec 26-29, 2006. I have decided to give pseudonyms to the interviewees for the purpose of privacy protection. The other personal information provided here establishes fact. The interviewees are:

- Yun Sang-Min (male) – Yun attended the Department of Metal Engineering at Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea, between Mar 1983- Feb 1991 (military service during 1986-1989); he is a doctoral student at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, U.S., as of December 2006.

- Kim Min-Hee (female) – Kim attended the Department of Education at Chonnam National University, Kwangju, South Korea, between Mar 1979- Feb 1983; she is a doctoral student at the Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, U.S. as of December 2006.

²⁰ Im Wu-Gi, "The Debate on the Destruction and Expansion of the Literary Genres" in *A Compendium of Great Debates in 1980s' South Korea [Palshipnyondae Hankuksahoe Daenonjengjip]* (Seoul: Chungang Daily Press, 1990), p. 186.

²¹ Han Gi, "The National Literature Debate" in *A Compendium of the Great Debates in 1980 [Palshipnyondae Hankuksahoe Daenonjengjip]* (Seoul: Chungang Daily Press, 1990), p. 180.

²² The Seoul Cinema Collective, *Toward a New Cinema [Seroun Yŏnghwarŭl Uihayŏ]* (Seoul: Hangminsŏ, 1983), p. 240.

²³ Ibid., p. 248.

²⁴ Hong Man, "The Small-Group Filmmaking Movement" in *A Thesis on Cinema Movement [Yŏnghwa Undongron]* (Seoul: Hwada, 1985), p. 215.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 219.

²⁶ Yi Jeong-Ha, "The Way of the Independent Cinema" in Yi Hyo-In, Yi Jeong-Ha (Eds.), *Korean Cinema: An Exorcism [Hankuk Yŏnghwa Ssitjim]* (Seoul: Yŏllinch'ekdŭl, 1995), p. 149.

²⁷ For example, in "Toward an Expansion of Literary Genres", an influential essay that came out in 1984, Kim Do-Yeon pointed out that the following critical concepts characterized South Korean literature and

its practices at the turn of 1980s: practical literature, literature of the living, the quality of everydayness, the quality of the popular, the quality of expediency, the quality of mobility, the guerilla spirit, movement, collectivism, community. These words are strongly reminiscent of the People's Cinema practice of New Latin American Cinema. See, Kim Do-Yeon, "Toward and Expansion of Literary Genres" in *Toward and Expansion of Literary Genres* in Söng Min-Yeop (Ed.), *A Thesis on Minjung Literature [Minjung Munhakron]*, eds. Söng Min-Yeop (Munhakkua Chisungsa: Seoul, 1984).

²⁸ The participants of the discussion were Kim Kyu-Dong (a member of the film censorship bureau), Lee Jang-Ho (director), Jang Sun-Woo (director), Kim Myong-Gon (actor), Jeon Yang-Jun (a member of the Seoul Cinema Collective), Cho Jae-Hong (assistant director), Yi Yon-Ho (reporter). See, Jang Sun-Woo, "Exploring The People's Cinema" in *Practical Literature [Shilchon Munhak]* (Spring, 1985), p. 147.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The following table shows the rise and fall in the number of film audiences in South Korea between 1980 and 1985.

A	B	C	D	E	F
1980	75		53,770,415	25,429,699	28,340,000
1981	87		44,443,122	21,346,232	22,937,410
1982	97		42,737,086	21,914,424	20,780,259
1983	91		44,036,000	17,539,164	26,483,052
1984	81	24	42,917,379	16,886,914	27,630,045
1985	80	27	48,098,263	16,425,345	31,662,560

Indexes:

A—Years, B—the Number of Domestic Films Produced, C—the Number of Foreign Film Imported, D—the Year Total of the Number of Film Audiences, E—the Year Total of the Number of Domestic Film Audiences, F—the Year Total of Foreign Film Audiences

The table is from *The Almanac of Korean Film* (Korean Film Institute, 1985), p. 45.

Hollywood films accounted for the majority of film importation. For example, in 1984, out of twenty-six foreign films in total, twenty films were from the U.S., four were from Hong Kong, and the last two were from Italy and China respectively. See *Almanac of Korean Film* (Korean Film Institute, 1984), p. 85.

³¹ *The Almanac of Korean Film* (Korean Film Institute, 1985), p. 45.

³² Jang Sun-Woo, "Exploring the People's Cinema" in *Practical Literature* (Spring, 1985), p. 148.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 149.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 150

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 154.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Sung Min-Yup, "The Minjung Literature Thesis in Progress of Formation" in Sung Min-Yup (Ed.), *A Thesis of Minjung Literature [Minjung Munhakron]* (Munhakkua Jisungsa: Seoul, 1984), p. 12.

⁴³ Kim Chi-Ha, "Satire or Suicide" in Sung Min-Yup (Ed.), *A Thesis of Minjung Literature [Minjung Munhakron]* (Munhakkua Jisungsa: Seoul, 1984), p. 25.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 30-31.

⁴⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel", *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (Austin: Texas UP, 1981), p. 169.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 175.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 171.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Jang Sun-Woo, "Exploring The People's Cinema" in *Practical Literature [Shilchon Munhak]* (Spring, 1985), p. 157.

⁵³ Hong Man, "The Small-Group Filmmaking Movement" in *A Thesis on Cinema Movement [Yŏnghwa Undongron]* (Seoul: Hwada, 1985), p. 221.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 226.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ The Seoul Cinema Collective was reportedly named after Bolivian Ukamau Group. The Korean translation of Ukamau Group is Ukamau Jiptan. The original Korean name of the Seoul Cinema Collective is also Seoul Yŏnghwa Jiptan. Although I am using two different English words, group and

collective, in order to distinguish the Seoul Cinema Collective from Ukamau Group, the Korean term, *jiptan* applies to both organizations in their Korean appellations.

⁵⁸ The Korean version of this part of the founding declaration made by the the Seoul Visual Collective is available on the internet website: <http://www.lookdocu.com/entry>

⁵⁹ The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* (Seoul: Shigakkua Önnö, 1996), p. 29.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Kim Do-Yeon, "Toward and Expansion of Literary Genres" in Sung Min-Yup (Ed.), *A Thesis of Minjung Literature [Minjung Munhakron]* (Munhakkua Jisungsa: Seoul, 1984), p. 105.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 105-128.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁶⁵ Hong Man, "The Small-Group Filmmaking Movement," p. 232.

⁶⁶ The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* (Seoul: Shigakkua Önnö, 1996), p. 30.

⁶⁷ For example, in 1985, Yi Hye-Yöng in "A Thesis on the University Cinema" claimed that the independent films by university students should be the instrument of representing the lower classes. But in this discussion Yi never uses the term People's Cinema. See, Yi Hye-Yöng, "A Thesis on the University Cinema" in *A Thesis on Cinema Movement [Yöngghwa Undongron]* (Seoul: Hwada, 1985)

⁶⁸ Yi Hye-Young, "A Thesis on the University Cinema" in *A Thesis on Cinema Movement [Yöngghwa Undongron]* (Seoul: Hwada, 1985), p. 243.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁷⁴ The known participants of this associative body were Yalashyöng (Yalashyöng, Seoul National University), Tolbit (Stone Light, Korea University), Kūrimja Nori (Shadow Play, Kyunghee University); Pilūm Aat (Film Art, Myungji University); Yöngghwa Kongdongchae (Cinema Community, Seogang University); Ulrim (Echo, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies); Yöngsan Chon (Visual Village, Sungkyungan University); Yöngghwa Pae (Film Company, Yonsei University); Nue (Nue, Ehwa Women's University); Sonagi (Shower, Hanyang University); Ŭllae (Spool, Sangmyong Women's

University); 8mm Shilhŭm ; 8mm Shilhŭm Yŏnghwa (8mm Experimental Film, Kunkuk University); Hwalsapae (Hwalsapae, Hansung University). Most of the university filmmaking groups were organized around 1985 after the Small Film Festival in June 1984. It is reported that the General Association of the University Filmmakers was an outcome of the united efforts of the students who witnessed the Blue Bird Incident and the subsequent trials. See, the the Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* (Seoul: Shigakkua Önnö, 1996), pp. 31-32.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

⁷⁶ An independent filmmaker, Kim Tae-Young's two films, *Mr. Kant's Exhibition* (*Kantssiui Balpyohoe*, 16-mm, 35-min, 1987) and *The Waste Land* (*Huangmuji*, 16-mm, 90-min, 1988) preceded *Oh! Republic of Dream* in handling the Kwangju Uprising and anti-Americanism. Both works concern the characters who suffer from traumatic memories of the violence in Kwangju. Mr. Kant's Exhibition foregrounds Mr. Kant, once a military man who got mentally deranged as he was forced to kill a teenage girl in Kwangju. In a similar fashion, *The Waste Land* presents a runaway soldier from the Kwangju Uprising, who floats into a military town around the U.S. Army base. Through encounters with the Korean pimps and prostitutes who live off American soldiers, the protagonist reaffirms the true face of America, the neo-colonial mastermind. The story ends with the hero committing a self-immolation in the Mangwöldong cemetery where the victims of the Kwangju Uprising are buried. Saturated with the themes of existentialism and religious redemption, the two films stand a step aside from the typical narrative of the activist cinema.

⁷⁷ The Board of Morality in Performance Arts was established in 1975 and dismantled in 1999.

⁷⁸ The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* (Seoul: Shigakkua Önnö, 1996), p. 33. However, the precise number of the viewers that *Republic of Dream* drew has remained nebulous. Yi Young-Bae, a former member of Jangsangot Mae, estimated 200,000, while Hong KI-Sun, a former member of The Seoul Visual Collective, reckoned 300,000. See, Association of Korean Independent Film & Video, *The Spellbound Memories, Independent Cinema* (KIFV: Seoul, 2001), p. 191; p. 217. Yi Yong-Bae recalled that most of the places for public viewing of *Republic of Dream* were the buildings in universities. It is because the university campuses made it easy to mobilize armies of co-students to guard the viewing places from the forays of riot police. (My interview with Yi Yong-Bae on August 2006)

⁷⁹ The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* (Seoul: Shigakkua Önnö 1996), p. 33.

⁸⁰ The project of *The Night before Strike* was first submitted on February 1989 and was finished on March 1990. Association of Korean Independent Film & Video, *The Spellbound Memories, Independent Cinema* (KIFV: Seoul, 2001), p. 220.

⁸¹ Kang, Jun-Man. *Promenade of the Modern History of South Korea: 1980s III* [*Hankuk Hyöndaesa Sanch'aek-1980s III*] (Inmulgua Sasangsa: 2003), p. 181.

⁸² Cho Jung-Hwan, "The Proclamatory Thesis of the Labor Liberation Literature" in *The Labor Liberation Literature*, Vol. 1, April 1989, p. 246.

⁸³ One of the remaining two described anti-Americanism and the other dealt with the rural problem.

⁸⁴ *The Korea Times* (April 10, 1990) cited in The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* (Seoul: Shigakkua Önnö, 1996), p. 86.

⁸⁵ *Mal* (June, 1990) cited in The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* (Seoul: Shigakkua Önnö, 1996), p. 86.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Kim Myung-Gon began his career as a theatrical actor and made his film debut with *The Proclamation of A Fool (Babosünön, Yi Chang-Ho, 1983)*. The Roh Mu-Hyön government in South Korea appointed Kim as the Minister of Culture in March 2006.

⁸⁷ Yi Yong-Bae, Email interview with the author, July 11, 2006

⁸⁸ The founding members of Chung-nyun came from four universities such as Kyunghee University, Hanyang University, Seoul National University and Seoul Institute of the Arts. See, Association of Korean Independent Film & Video, *The Spellbound Memories, Independent Cinema* (KIFV: Seoul, 2001), p. 223.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Kristin Thompson, “Nation, national identity and the international cinema”, *Film History* (Vol 8: no 3), pp. 259-60.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 281-296.

⁹² ‘Die Trustbewegung’, *Lichtbildbühne* 11, 6 (9 Feb 1918): 20. Cited in Kristin Thompson, “National or international films?”, *Film History* (Vol 8: no 3), p. 295.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁹⁴ Emile Vuillermoz, ‘Le film allemand’, *Cinémagazine* 1, 2 (28 Jan-3 Feb 1922): 5-6 Cited in Kristin Thompson, “National or international films?”, *Film History* (Vol 8: no 3), p. 282.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Andrew Higson, “Limiting Imagination of National Cinema” in Mette Hjort, Scott Mackenzie (Eds.), *Cinema & Nation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 63-74.

⁹⁷ Stephen Croft, “Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s” in Alan Williams (Ed.), *Film and Nationalism* (New Brunswick & New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 25-51.

⁹⁸ Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993, 2005), p. x.

⁹⁹ Ian Jarvie, “National Cinema: A Theoretical Assessment” in Mette Hjort, Scott Mackenzie (Eds.), *Cinema & Nation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 80.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, Inc, 1968), p. 233.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid. pp. 34-35.

¹⁰⁴ Cho Chun-Hyung, “South Korean Film Industry and Policies: 1980-1997” in Yu Ji-Na et al (Eds.), *A Study of South Korean Film History 1980-1997* [Hankuk Yŏnghwasa Kongbu 1980-1997] (Seoul:Ichae, 2005), p. 155.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 156.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 165.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 168.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Yi Jeong-Ha, “The Organizational Practical Duty and Task of the National Cinema Movement” in *National Cinema I* [*Minjok Yŏnghwa*] (Seoul: Chingu, 1989), p. 61.

¹¹⁵ Yi Hyo-In, “The Imminent Task and Duty of National Cinema”, *National Cinema I* [*Minjok Yŏnghwa*] (Seoul:Chingu, 1989), p. 14.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

¹¹⁹ Yi Jeong-Ha, “The Organizational Practical Duty and Task of the National Cinema Movement”, *National Cinema I* [*Minjok Yŏnghwa*] (Seoul: Chingu, 1989), p. 58.

¹²⁰ Yi Hyo-In, Email interview with the author. 19 March 2007.

¹²¹ Yi Hyo-In, “The Imminent Task and Duty of National Cinema”, *National Cinema I* [*Minjok Yŏnghwa*] (Seoul:Chingu, 1989), p. 14.

¹²² Jorge Sanjinés and the Ukamau Group, *Theory & Practice of a Cinema with the People*, (Trans.) Richard Schaaf (Willimantic: Curbstone Press, 1989), p. 39.

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¹²⁴ Yi Hyo-In, “The Imminent Task and Duty of National Cinema”, *National Cinema I [Minjok Yŏnghwa]* (Seoul:Chingu, 1989), p. 33.

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¹²⁹ Kim Jong-Il, *On the Art of Cinema* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2001), p. 7.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., p. 113.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 113-115.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 117.

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¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Yi Hyo-In, “The Imminent Task and Duty of National Cinema”, *National Cinema I* (Seoul:Chingu, 1989), p. 40.

¹³⁸ Yi Hyo-In, Email interview with the author. 19 Mar 2007.

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¹⁴¹ Kang Jun-Man. *Promenade of the Modern History of South Korea: 1980s III [Hankuk Hyŏndaesa Sanch'aek-1980s III]* (Inmulgwa Sasangsa: 2003), pp. 186-187.

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Chapter IV

The Woman's Film

This chapter discusses the woman's film as a distinctive part of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement. The space that the woman's film occupied in the field of the cinema movements from the 1970s to 2000s is characterized by the condition in which efforts to realize new cinema or non-commercial independent cinema were fundamentally male-oriented. The Visual Age Group in the 1970s, for instance, capitalized on the worn-out narrative of melodrama in which female characters fall prey to male sexual desire or tragic love affair that serves to restore patriarchal order. In a similar way, the independent cinema in the 1980s, which normally rendered labor movement, student activism, and anti-Americanism, hardly addressed women's issues. The woman's film in this historical context refers to women's independent films that, first, challenged the stereotypical description of women in mainstream commercial cinema and, secondly, endorsed women's issues in defiance of male-centrism in the independent cinema sector. In this sense, the woman's film may claim itself as the independent cinema *par excellence*. The male-oriented historiography of the South Korean independent cinema movement has tended to dismiss the woman's film as a satellite of the cinema movement, failing to see the uniqueness of the alternative cinematic discourse that the woman's film has constructed. This chapter aims to explore the terrain of the cinematic discourse that the films made by independent women filmmakers from mid-1970s to early 2000s established.

The Woman's Film

The only Korean terminology which corresponds to the woman's film is *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa*. Meaning women in general, *yŏsŏng* refers to a socio-culturally constructed female identity and connotes roles and activities by women in societies. *Yŏsŏng yŏnghwa*, therefore, indicates the films that render women's social experiences. The earliest example of the self-claimed *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa* is found in a film advertisement that described *A Woman Judge* (*Yŏp'ansa*, Hong Ũn-Wŏn, 1962) as "the best *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa* in this year."¹ Based on a scandal in which a woman judge committed suicide, *A Woman Judge* has been considered as a move beyond the melodramatic confines to more "serious" realities involving contemporary women. This illustrates that *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa* from its inception appealed to the social consciousness of viewers.

Yŏsŏng yŏnghwa reemerged in the 1980s when some male commercial filmmakers, such as Chung Ji-Young who directed *A Woman of Crisis* (*Ũgiŭi Yŏja*, 1987) and Park Chul-Soo who made *Mom* (*Ŏmi*, 1985), tackled women's issues especially those of prostitution, extramarital affair, and domestic violence.² Still the representation of women and women's issues in *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa* of the 1980s normally adopted a visual style that catered to male voyeuristic desire. By the 1990s, however, *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa* enlarged its scope with the coming of nationwide civil democracy and partly due to the massive influx of film feminism from the West.³ Since that time *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa* has functioned not only as the tool of cinematic representation of women's issues but also as the critical discourse by which to reinterpret the female spectatorship relatively marginalized in South Korean film historiography. In valorizing such newly found female

spectatorship, film director/critic Kim So-Young has assimilated *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa* with Anglophone “woman’s film,” and utilized the latter to indicate, on the one hand, “the alternative cinema oriented toward women’s issues” such as feminist cinema in the 1990s, and on the other hand, commercial films addressed to female audiences such as the 1960s melodrama.⁴

The present discussion focuses on the original ethos of *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa*: social consciousness. Although South Korean melodrama appealed to women audiences, it is evident that these films were incapable of raising consciousness among the female viewers about the socio-political conditions in which they were situated.⁵ This may explain why the appellation failed to earn recognition among filmmakers and audiences during the 1960s and the 70s, the heyday of melodrama. Until its nominal resurgence in the 1980s, the ethos of *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa* was encapsulated in such expressions as *yŏsŏng munjae* (women’s problem) or *yŏsŏng ūishik* (women’s consciousness). Both terms indicated the growing self-consciousness among South Korean women with regard to the patriarchal base of the state’s dominant ideology that dismissed women as virtually second-rate citizens. The institutional discrimination against women intensively unfolded in the 1970s; the decade marked the genesis of the women’s movement in South Korea.

The women’s movement took the form of democratic trade unionism. In 1972, for example, Ju Kil-Ja was elected as the first female president of a trade union in South Korean history, replacing the male leader of the pro-management union at the Dong-Il Textile Company in the city of Incheon. One incident, which incited international as well as nationwide repercussions, occurred in February 1978 when the company dispatched a gang of thugs and

male scab workers to raid the election for union officers; the candidates were mostly female workers. *Asian Labor* reported the incident as follows:

The [election] meeting could not be held because the union room was being ransacked by a gang of thugs, who included male workers at the plant. When the women appeared, they were beaten and kicked and buckets of excrement were thrown at them, rubbed into their clothes and into their faces. Policemen who had been called to the plant by the management stood by and watched without interfering. When the women appealed to them for help, the policemen shouted at them to keep quiet. ... The workers at the Dong-II plant, and all others who attempt to organize themselves democratically to bargain collectively with their employers and stand up for their rights, face a strong and well-managed alliance of management, government and certain union officials, whose mechanisms for suppressing the workers' demands are brutal and effective.⁶

Later known as the Dong-II incident, this incident revealed how the women workers had to confront not only the dictatorial state and the unfriendly corporate management, but also the abusive male colleagues who blindly resented the female leadership in the formation and management of the labor union. The double-bind that even differentiated the social status of the working class women from that of their male companions also offered a crucial problematic in the formation of the “social consciousness” of South Korean women in general. The 1970s emerged as the period in which the newly acquired *yŏsŏng ŭishik* (women's consciousness) manifested itself in women's social actions as well as artistic activities including filmmaking.

The term woman's film in the following discussion refers to *yŏsŏng yŏnghwa* that was originated from women's social consciousness. The establishment of the woman's film cannot be considered apart from the bearer of social consciousness, that is, women film directors. Film directors are also a product of history and register their personal experiences of the given historical period into their film texts. This rationale allows for the historicity of the woman's film. The thematic and mode of the woman's film change following the transformation of the women's consciousness and the emergence of new generation of women filmmakers.

This chapter examines four women independent filmmakers, Han Ok-Hee, Kim So-Young, Byun Young-Ju, and Ryu Mi-Rye. Each person initiated a new trend of the woman's film from the 1970s to the 2000s: Han is from the 1970s, Kim began independent filmmaking in the 1980s, Byun and Ryu represent the woman's films of the 1990s and 2000s, respectively. They commonly attended universities where they developed a keen sense of social consciousness, especially of women's issues of their times. The filmmakers also left sizable writings on the idea and practice of the woman's film, which enable us to see how they understood women's issues and tried to render them in their film works. Most of all, each person created the unique style and theme of the woman's film at her time and thereby influenced on its subsequent development.

Han Ok-Hee and The Kaidu Club

The Visual Age Group shows the limitation as well as outcome of cinema movements in the 1970s: it insinuated the 'New Wave' consciousness into the minds of young *cinephiles* at the time, but their scope of new cinema was limited to the idea of art cinema rooted in Europe and the U.S. The art cinema upheld by the Visual Age Group was so broad a concept that it failed to specify any political or ideological objective in filmmaking. Furthermore, its members subscribed to film auteurism which is most compatible with bourgeois individualism that hardly advocates any collective identity. The films and thoughts submitted by the Visual Age Group appealed to the youths by catering to their longing for a new culture beyond the oppressive reality of the military regime. The new culture, in this case, was geared toward the 'universal' standard of Western culture encapsulated in Western art cinema. The Visual Age Group never called the young generation by the name of a political subject or a particular collective identity,

because the two commonly aspired to a new cultural citizenship not in parochial reality in Korea but in the global territory of art.

It is notable that independent women filmmakers who claimed to stand for the woman's film appeared contemporaneously with the Visual Age Group in the 1970s. Suffering from the cultural poverty of the 1970s, the independent women filmmakers also yearned for Western ideals of political liberty and artistic freedom. But patriarchal male-centrism prevailing in the militaristic society allowed little chance for women to initiate any action: different from the Visual Age Group members, women filmmakers enjoyed no access to directorial position in commercial cinema. Han Ok-Hee, an independent woman filmmaker from the time described such discrimination as the one that "almost drove her crazy."⁷ This double fetter, cultural impoverishment and gender discrimination, led some of independent women filmmakers to take a drastic action by articulating the identity of woman in their film works. In so doing, the women filmmakers placed the particularity of women against the universality of art cinema. The woman's film in the 1970s evidences the emergence of identity politics in the history of South Korean cinema movement. The matter of identity politics required intensive intellectual as well as artistic inquiries on the part of the women filmmakers regarding the relationship between filmmakers, filmed objects, and viewing subjects. Such efforts are relatively well documented in the films and cultural activities made by Han Ok-Hee and the Kaidu Club.

Han Ok-Hee debuted as a founding member of the Kaidu Club (1974-1979), a women filmmakers' collective. Proclaiming itself to be a "woman's experimental film group," the Kaidu Club appeared as a pioneering action committed by women artists, virtually unprecedented in South Korean cultural history. Named after "Kaidu" the legendary Mongolian empress,⁸ the Club

put forward three notable artistic visions. First, the group expressed the members' shared antagonism against "feminine melodrama," which saturated woman's film genre by that time.⁹ Second, echoing "Off Broadway" and its anti-establishment ethos, the Kaidu Club attempted an "Off *Chungmuro* [the locus of the South Korean film industry]" movement in which they believed that short, experimental films would invalidate the hackneyed conventions of the cinema industry. Finally, the club proclaimed a "feminist film movement" in which some of their films tapped into the growing women's consciousness in South Korean society.

Including Han Ok-Hee, all other members like Kim Jum-Sun (painter), Yi Jeong-Hee, Han Sun-Ae had reportedly graduated from Ewha Woman's University, one of the major educational institutions in Seoul, South Korea.¹⁰ Considering that advanced education does not necessarily entail progressivism in art, it seems more feasible to attribute the avant-gardism inscribed in the ethos of the Kaidu Club to the socio-cultural atmosphere in which overall South Korean women were situated in the 1970s. As the Dong-Il incident emblematically informed, the Kaidu Club ultimately positioned itself against political dictatorship and male chauvinism. The Park Chung-Hee military rule kept a tight rein on politics and the entire social system itself remained a retroactive patriarchy. Under the circumstances, women had limited access to the job market. For example, Han testifies that a woman who had a graduate certificate from college or a post-graduate school was not legally eligible to apply for a job in the mass media such as broadcast station or newspaper company, because the job postings in that area normally limited the qualified applicants to the males who had completed four-year college education and military service.¹¹ According to Han, the Kaidu Club was an outcome of such cultural aspects antagonistic to women.¹²

Given that military service and occupational commitment constituted the male social domain, as Han suggests, youth culture functioned as the only space in which female university students were allowed to think and act outside the dominant ideology. The mode of self-expression accorded to the female students differed from that of female workers; as was the case with the Dong-Il incident, the female workers in the 1970s relied on collective actions like unionism to make their economic demands and by so doing were able to sustain their class identity. By contrast, the women students were far from being organized as a collective whole, and they were disparagingly relegated to the status of a privileged few exempt from the immediate concerns of the day.¹³ The problem was that the female students were denied access into the established social order: the only way was to get married into the upper-middle class. In any case, neither the dominant system nor the working class identity could provide them with legitimate membership. Thus, the “women’s youth culture,” which Han carves out of 1970s youth culture, indicates a highly contested arena where marginalized women intellectuals strove to affirm their gender identity via cultural activities. Han Ok-Hee’s biographical account helps us to locate some aspects of the women’s consciousness developed by the female intellectuals in the 1970s.¹⁴

While majoring in Korean literature at Ewha Woman’s University (B.A. 1967- 1971, M.A. 1971-1973), Han also had a keen interest in progressive sociological subjects such as the women’s suffrage movement in the West and New Leftism. The biography of Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst and the writings of Angela Davis and Herbert Marcuse drew young Han Ok-Hee in her early twenties into contemporary activist thoughts, especially radical feminism. Asked why she became passionate about radical politics, Han mentioned that her turbulent family history -

her father's remarriage and her sister's tragic marriage life - awakened her to social responsibility, rather than personal responsibility, for women's problems. Prior to filmmaking, Han's actions for the cause of feminism mostly took the form of her critical writing. Starting with "The Current Status and Future of the Women's Liberation Movement" in the yearly *Ewha* in 1971, her journalistic approach culminated in "Man and Woman, the Mirage of Equality" in *Chosun Daily* in December 1974, which was viewed as "scandalous" because of its exaltation of extreme leftwing politics and Angela Davis's radical feminism.¹⁵ Han recalls that the article drew sharply divided responses; "Brave!" on the one hand but "Crazy!" on the other, even alienating a number of male friends who had previously adored her.¹⁶ The anti-communism propagated by the then military government may account for the disorientation that her former friends felt about Han's argument. Befriending the sociology students at her *alma mater* also enabled Han to access underrepresented social aspects, the most prominent of which was the self-immolation of the sweatshop worker Jeon Tae-II in demand of labor justice in November 1970.

Nevertheless, Han's radical writings and acute social consciousness hardly posed a practical threat to the patriarchal establishment. Han notes that the social environment at the time had so many taboos and restrictions for a woman to achieve self-realization. The contradiction between individual radicalism and social conservatism reveals the ironic fact that Han's cutting-edge progressivism was only possible because it held little prospect for any broad-based social movement. But the supposed lack of popular appeal in Han's radicalism provided the cause that would make the Kaidu Club design a series of public events to relate their films to the far-flung masses.

Han's initial encounter with experimental cinema took place incidentally in 1973 when she went to the short-film exhibition presented by the Film Laboratory (Yöngsang Yöнкуhoe 1971-1974), the avant-garde filmmaking group established by the Sogang University graduates. The experimental films instantly led Han to make up her mind to perform film art in her own right. In 1974, she organized a filmmaking collective, the Kaidu Club, in corroboration with other female members of the Film Laboratory like the painter Kim Jum-Sun. Notably, Kim Jum-Sun viewed film as an extension of painting: she applied oil colors or nail scratches onto the celluloid to explore the resultant visual effects. Another member Yi Jeong-Hee devoted her works to social criticism and anti-establishment themes. Thus, the members of the Kaidu Club covered the wide spectrum of stylistic and thematic idiosyncrasies, so much so that their works hardly converged on one single aesthetic principle.

However, they felt a shared antagonism against the sexist contents of the commercial cinema. Han points out that the so-called "hostess films" were one of the most popular film genres in the 1970s in South Korea, and that she and her associates loathed the tendency for being regressive and misogynistic. The Kaidu Club avoided artistic transactions with the Visual Age Group (1975-1978), the prime mover of the art cinema movement in the 1970s. In Han's view, the member directors of the Visual Age Group were after all the most popular filmmakers in the commercial cinema sector. Many of their films catered to the debased male chauvinism by showing female characters' degeneration into prostitution as in Lee Jang-Ho's *Heavenly Homecoming of the Stars* (*Byöldüleu Gohyang*, 1974) and Kim Ho-Sun's *Youngja on the Loose* (*Yöngjaüi Chönsöngshidae*, 1975). Based on this fact, Han maintains that the Kaidu Club and the Visual Age Group had different ideological bearings.

The Kaidu Club made sensational debut with The First Experimental Film Festival, which took place on the roof garden of the Shinsaegae Department Store from July 27 to 31, 1974 in Seoul.¹⁷ Not only the first women's film festival in South Korea, the event was also the first experimental film festival in the history of South Korean cinema.¹⁸ Han Ok-Hee showed *Rope (Patuchl)* and *Repetition (Chungbok)*; Kim Jum-Sun, *Film 74-A* and *Film 74-B*; Yi Jeong-Hee, *XXOX*; and Han Sun-Ae, *Over*.¹⁹ In addition, the members exhibited eight collective works including *The Song of Massacre* and *Elevator*, and introduced some works by Ed Emshwiller the American avant-garde filmmaker.²⁰ The overall style of the films bore a strong flavor for iconoclasm such as Han Ok-Hee's *Patchul (Rope)*, which featured a piece of umbilical cord to suggest the birth of a human, but soon it transforms into an animated picture then into a hanging rope to indicate the same person's death.²¹ *The Song of Massacre* shows graphic pictures of animal slaughter, which, as Han recalls, allegorized the socio-political conditions of the day. All of the mind-altering visuals attracted ordinary viewers who crammed into the roof garden. Although audiences felt disoriented by the films and their "chaotic and metaphysical" qualities,²² professional artists generally hailed the works. Avant-garde artist Jeong Chan-Seung described the films as "a sharp razor carving out the ossified layer of consciousness."²³

The Second Experimental Film Festival on May 23, 25 in 1975 presented only three works: Han Ok-Hee's *Three Mirrors (Saegaeüi Köul)*, Kim Jum-Sun's *75-13*, and Yi Jeong-Hee's *Nevertheless, We Should Leave Once Again (Küröna Urinün Tashi Chulbal-haeya Handa)*.²⁴ The reduced scale was reportedly attributed to some members having married and left the group. Nevertheless, the remaining members did not deviate from the initial motto of avant-gardism and feminism. In 1976, Han Ok-Hee, Yi Jeong-Hee, and Yu Yyon-Hee staged street

performances of exorcism rite in some business quarters in Seoul, once again raising the plaudits of the multitude. A year later in 1977, the core members produced a multi-media show entitled *No Title (Mujae)* through the combined use of film, theatre, and performance art. However, due to the original members' opt out, the collective finally dissolved in the very year.

The commercial print media remained friendly toward the activities of the Kaidu Club throughout its four-year life span because the group's unconventional films and activities provided good news copy. Immediately after the First Experimental Film Festival, *The Weekly Korea* covered the event under the title of "A Banner of Revolt against 'Male Snobbism'" in which renowned film director Yu Hyun-Mok was quoted as saying "The films by the Kaidu Club will stand in comparison with the entries in the international film festivals." *The Weekly Women's* report "An Act of Revolution: Only the Unconquerable Women Accomplish the Art" stated that "This world's first women's experimental film collective makes it a point to rebel against the established male-oriented ideas in order to recuperate the women's lives in the creative art." Although media attention publicized the Kaidu Club, it also tended to relegate its works into the realm of eccentricity. This point is proved by Han's statement that the majority of the established filmmakers in *Chungmuro* disparaged the Kaidu films with prejudice and sarcasm. Han recalls a meeting in which a producer working for a commercial film company denounced her and the general activities of the Kaidu Club.²⁵ In another case, a famous publisher approached her with a book proposal which turned out to be only a way of sexual seduction.²⁶

Under the circumstances, it was only natural for Han Ok-Hee to seek the opportunities to move abroad. According to Han, the Kaidu members were well aware of the women's film festival initiated by Agnès Varda in the mid 1970s in Europe, although it was impossible for

them to participate in such an international event. After the United Nations designated the year of 1975 as the International Women's Year, the United States Information Service (USIS) held a seminar entitled "Women and the World of Cinema" in Seoul, in which Han joined together with other women filmmakers like Pak Nam-Ok.

As was described in the discussion of the Cultural Center Generation in the 1970s in chapter 1, the Goethe Institute provided an important venue for the Kaidu members to exhibit their films and to view contemporary German films. Han developed interest in the German Expressionist cinema; it explains why she decided to leave for Germany to further her film study in 1980.

Her departure was timely because a new generation of the woman's film armed with social realism and documentary emerged in the early 1980s. Although Han showed high regard for the social realism and the women's documentaries of the 1980s,²⁷ the women's films of the decade did not preserve the Kaidu Club's legacy of experimental film. At least, one can see that the Kaidu Manifesto written with the following poetic words forerun and presaged radical feminism that would emerge as late as the early 1990s in South Korea, two decades after the demise of the Kaidu Club.

Our lover is dying now/After taking ten tablets of quinine/Meanwhile, I have been staggering all day,
wandering like a mad dog under the sun.../The fools/The thousand masks blindly following the authority/Go
Away/From our paradise, I (=H₂O)²⁸

The intervening years between the Kaidu Club and the 1990s feminist film were to be filled by feminist intellectuals who utilized the film medium draw popular attention to women's issues. Kim So-Young was one of the leading figures of the period.

Kim So-Young: Modernity, Women, and the Fantastic

Kim So-Young is one of the major figures who have led the women's independent cinema since the early 1980s. Korean film journal *Movie (Yŏnghwa)* covered the roundtable talk of the twelve new students of Korean Academy of Film Arts in March 13, 1984, and Kim appeared as one of the twelve students in the report.²⁹ In fact, however, Kim also acted as the mistress of ceremonies for the Small Film Festival on July 7-8, 1984.³⁰ The Small Film Festival marked the genesis of a new film generation in the 1980s concerned with social consciousness and stylistic innovativeness of film art, but was devoid of any consideration of gender-related issues. In 1989, Kim launched Bariteo, the independent women filmmakers' collective organized under the motto of "Let us solve women's issues through film screen."³¹ Between 1984 and 1989 Kim So-Young's career developed along key factors, cultural and intellectual, that influenced the theory and practice of the woman's film.

The women's movement from the late 1970s till the mid 1980s developed in conjunction with the *minjung* cultural movement which viewed the working class as the ultimate social force to initiate democratic reform. The women's movement regarded the working class women (*minjung yŏsŏng*) or the lower class women (*kichŭng yŏsŏng*) as the central subjects for carrying out women's liberation. On the surface, the rediscovery of working class women seems to highlight a significant theoretical advancement in the 1980s women's movement. First, the concept of the working class women implies a class division between the middle-class women and the working class women who resist their being absorbed into liberalism with which the upper-middle class intellectuals saturated the women's movement by then. Second, by opposing

itself to the working class men (*minjung namsöng*), the working class women served to disclose male chauvinism hidden under the monolithic working class identity. Thus, the working class women constitute a distinctive social identity whose interests are linked to the issues of class and gender politics. Despite the political potentiality, however, the working class women barely arose to form a unified voice in the political arena in the 1980s. Instead, the class and gender issues in which the working class women were involved provided the themes for cultural and intellectual activities that advanced the agendas for the women's movement. The independent woman's film provided one venue for such activities.

Nue (1985~), a group of student filmmakers at Ewha Woman's University, exemplifies the filmmaking geared toward the representation of the working class women. Like other university filmmaking groups that espoused social activism as the sole purpose of filmmaking, the Nue members also agreed that their films must document the fundamental conflicts of the society and the suffering of *minjung*, the most marginalized and oppressed people.³² In practice, however, Nue's films focused on women's issues since "women's issues not only become particularly acute to the female students [at Ewha Woman's University], but also they usually fail to form a serious matter to the eyes of males."³³ For instance, the group's first work *The First Departure* (*Shibal*, 16mm, B/W, 10min, 1985) delineates the burdensome life of a working woman who has to bear the labors at the work place and at the household as well.³⁴ The storyline intends to denounce the belittlement of household labor imposed on women without reward. Another film *A Graduation Thesis* (*Cholŭp Nonmun*, 8mm, Color, 17min, 1987) tackles the issue of prostitution. The production notes for the film show that the student filmmakers approached the subject matter as "a societal and structural problem and a form of female oppression

perpetuated by the male-centered dominant ideology.”³⁵ As late as 1988, Nue widened the scope of the filmic representation of women to countryside, factories, and urban slums.³⁶ That way, the narrative discourse that Nue constructed gradually bore some discernable characteristics: first, it conceives of the working-class women as the victim of society; second, the victimization of women poses a “structural” problem that the male-oriented society inevitably engenders; third, it implies that the transformation of the social structure will bring out the liberation of women. The structure determinism accounts for not only the narrative discourse of the Nue films but also the general doctrine of the women’s movement in the 1980s.

Kim So-Young admitted that Nue had paved the groundwork for the woman’s film as a autonomous domain within the independent cinema movement in the 1980s.³⁷ But it is hard to say that Kim agreed with structure determinism as a means to substantiate the narrative discourse of her own films. The two short films that Kim made during the mid 1980s offer a clue for us to understand her artistic position in the movement. *Fantasy in the Winter* (*Kyŏul Hwansang*, 1985), Kim’s graduation piece for the Korean Academy of Film Arts, utilizes surrealism to adapt *Kongmudohaga* an ancient Korean fable to the reality of contemporary South Korea. The original story tells of a woman who tries to save her deranged husband drowning into a river. Except for the storyline, there is virtually nothing known about the back story. Into this narrative frame from ancient times, *Fantasy in the Winter* inserts three symbolic characters: a female factory worker replacing the woman character, a male union activist instead of the husband character, and a factory manager for the representation of institutionalized oppression. The female protagonist inscribes a poem entitled *The Winter Republic* into her dead lover’s gravestone who has been murdered while engaged in labor movement. She then kills the factory

manager in retribution. The narrative pronounces her as the bearer of consciousness (the inscription of the poem) and action (the murder of the factory manager) in the course of labor movement. By positing the story into the oldest narrative ever known in Korea, the film allegorically re-imagines the national history in woman's perspective. As such, *Fantasy in the Winter* stands apart from the narrative discourse devoted to the "realistic" representation of women's issues. It also bypasses the structure determinism upheld by the films of Nue. Kim So-Young focuses on the female subjectivity where an alternative mode of socio-historical representation resides. How other women filmmakers responded to *Fantasy in the Winter* is not known, but the film's poetic and fantastic narrative prefigured her later works that would reconstruct Korean women's history in the fantastic mode.

Her second film *The Blue Requiem* (*Purŭn Chinhongok*, 1987) is a music drama featuring a small girl who is realizing her own female sexuality. Here again, the narrative withdraws from realism to center on the experimental amalgamation of the music and the visual designed fantastically to portray female sexual identity. The affirmation of female subjectivity is an underlying theme in the Kim's later works. Yet Kim's Bariteo period is also noteworthy because her filmmaking experiences in that era reveals how her films developed in competition with the dominant modes of cinematic expression and the sexist bias spread in the independent cinema sector.

Bariteo (1989-1992) inherited Nue in the tradition of the woman's independent cinema. The members of Bariteo consisted of the professional women filmmakers having worked either in the film industry or in the independent cinema sector, and some female graduate students at film schools.³⁸ Kim So-Young, acting as the leader of the group, directed the first project entitled

Even a Little Weed Has Its Name (*Chagŭnpuredo Irŭm Itsŭni*, 16mm, 42min, 1990). The story concerns the female office workers, focusing on the instability of their employment and gender discrimination against female employees.³⁹ The narrative is divided into two parts: the first portrays a married woman whose daily life is troubled due to a double bind of child care and office work; and the second dramatizes a personal memoir written by an actual female worker. In terms of subject matter, *Even a Little Weed...* echoes Nue's first project *The First Departure* that also handles the struggle of a female office worker. Besides, Kim clarified that the film was originally part of a bigger project on working class women including female office workers, factory workers, and farmers.⁴⁰ Bariteo only elaborated the narrative discourse which Nue constructed in the service of the women's movement.

Nevertheless, Byun Young-Ju, who had participated in the making of *Even a Little Weed...* as a camera operator, offers an interesting comparison with *The Night before Strike* (Jangsangot Mae, 1990), which was shot during the same period. Byun stated, "whereas *The Night before Strike* unfolds through a rigid binary opposition between the good [the unionists] and the evil [the corporate management] which enables the viewers to get lost in the excitement of drama, *Even a Little Weed...* maintains an introspective position admitting the reality the film captures is also a reflected reality."⁴¹ True, the narrative of *The Night before Strike* rests on psychological realism that upholds the male protagonist's awakening to labor movement. *Even a Little Weed...*, on the contrary, relies on self-reflexivity in narrative formation, which avoids any privileged viewing position. While *The Night before Strike* utilizes the dominant mode of cinematic address fostering the "passive receptivity," *Even a Little Weed...* invites a "more active

and questioning position”⁴² to the thematic discourse. In this respect, the film indirectly resists the structure determinism characterizing the works by Nue.

The fact that Kim endeavored to realize the woman’s film as an alternative cinematic practice is also sustained by her acute sensibility of sexist bias in the independent cinema sector. Pointing out that the shooting of *The Night before Strike* by Jansangot Mae and *Even a Little Weed...* by Bariteo were concurrent, Kim recalled that Jansangot Mae’s male members denounced Bariteo as being “sectarian,” because some female members had moved out to join the Bariteo project.⁴³ According to Kim, the reason was not Bariteo’s cliquish attitude so much as a lack of understanding on the part of the male filmmakers. Introducing her own experience at the Korean Academy of Film Arts where an instructor of camera operation, dreading “bad luck,” never allowed female students to even touch the cameras, Kim suggested that the male filmmakers also relegated the women’s films⁴⁴ and filmmakers to a secondary status in comparison with the “urgent” subject matter that *The Night before Strike* dramatized. One may detect inter-group confrontation in an anecdote in which, as Kim later recounts, derogatory remarks were exchanged between the two groups: Bariteo called Jansangot Mae “chicken” (*jangdak* meaning a chicken while Jansangot Mae means a hawk), whereas Jansangot Mae named Bariteo “laundry place” (*Paletō* a pun meaning the place for laundry).⁴⁵ Even so, Kim and other Bariteo associates took their part to alleviate antagonism by offering assistance to the production of *The Night before Strike*.⁴⁶ Yi Yong-Bae, the then representative of Jansangot Mae, admitted initial apathy among the male independent filmmakers toward the woman’s film. Yet he added that the transactions between Jansangot Mae and Bariteo served to “enlighten” the members of Jansangot Mae to women’s issue, which in turn made them to decide to advance

the female protagonist in the group's next output *Opening the Closed School Gate* (*Dathingyomunül yŏlmyo*) in 1992.⁴⁷

Despite efforts to implant the woman's film into the independent cinema, Bariteo underwent a sudden shift in 1991, which led to the equally sudden liquidation of the group in 1992. After its second project *Our Children* (*Urinae Aidül*, video, 40min, Do Sung-Hee) and one more video work *Let's Go, Women of this Land*, further video works by Bariteo were contributed to the labor movement. *The Battle Line* (video, 53min, 1991, Do Sung-Hee) recorded the history of labor movement that had erupted in the Hyundai Heavy Industries, and *For Our Song to Echo around the Okpo Bay* (video, 40min, 1991, Hong Hyung-Suk) appeared as a work of video activism that captured the ongoing strike in the Daewoo Shipyards. Although the directors of these two works were the members of Bariteo, the production credits were attributed to the Association of Documentary Workers the temporary solidarity of independent filmmakers to chronicle the labor movement in progress. The video documentaries barely addressed women's issues, and were more like homage to the wave of the labor movements ignited by the organization of the Alliance of Democratic Trade Unions in January 1991. Film historian and critic Byun Chae-Ran interpreted this "transformation (and final dissolution) of Bariteo" as a result of "the habitual practice of the progressive movement to put aside the women's movement as a mere division of the social movements as a whole." Along with the abrupt demise of Bariteo, Kim So-Young also became invisible and claimed no credit in the labor movement documentaries.

In 2000, Kim broke a decade of visual silence to release a documentary entitled *Koryu: Southern Women, South Korea*. This video work was soon to be followed by two sequels, *I'll be*

Seeing Her (2002) and *New Woman: Her First Song* (2004), the three works comprise *The Korean Women's History Trilogy*. As its title implies, the serial devotes itself to restore previously articulated histories of Korean women especially since Western modernity had impacted the formative period of the nation-state. As a way to approach the trilogy, one may draw on the two books that Kim had worked out prior to the documentaries: *Cinema: The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology* (1996, hereafter *Cinema*); and *Fantastic Korean Cinema: The Specters of Modernity* (2000). In many respects, these volumes indicate that Kim's ideational perspective has expanded beyond the sociological confines of the women's movement, and equipped itself with an ethnographic angle to probe the multiple layers inscribed in the history of South Korean cinema.

Cinema notes as one of the primal scenes of Korean cinema the postwar Seoul where Western modernity began to erode pre-modern remnants and to drive the city dwellers toward newly developed urban spectacles.⁴⁸ Drawing on Karl Marx's dictum, "All that is solid melts into air" which Marshall Berman reappraised to depict the experience of modernity,⁴⁹ Kim describes modernity in Seoul as basically an ironic experience in which the promise of hope and adventure coexisted with the dread of disruption and ambiguity.⁵⁰ South Korean cinema was initially situated in such Janus-faced modernity and registered in it the anxiety about social mobility and the confusion of gender roles.⁵¹ Upon this premise, Kim invites readers to see, for instance, in the 1960s films how vividly the people of the period are living modernity, and how the characters in the films fall prey to militarization, industrialization, modernization, but they also commit rebellious actions against such powers.⁵² Kim here suggests a new assignment that

South Korean film studies have to undertake and implicitly challenges the established historiography of realism.

The following excerpt is from “Realism in South Korean Cinema” written by Hong Ki-Seon, one of the leading figures of the independent cinema movement in the 1980s.

The 1970s were the period when many problems surfaced in our society. Contradictions innate in the coercive industrialization set in motion from 1960s started to transform into real social problems in an all-out manner. The blind, uncritical reception of Western life-style permeated every corner of society. Rampant materialism and the ways of thought in pursuit of Western values caused a radical break with tradition and a complete moral devastation.⁵³

Historically, the 1970s that Hong describes as a moral wasteland is not much different from the 1960s that Kim portrays as the age of mobility and vivacity. Hong actually assesses the majority of South Korean films from the 1970s as well as the 1960s as having only left negative influence since they have failed to “realistically analyze and criticize the society” depicted above.⁵⁴ But still, Kim maintains the film texts from the same period are open to a range of interpretations. In the preface to *Fantastic Korean Cinema*, Kim decries the preoccupation with realism in film dramaturgy on the ground that “although it once temporarily played a progressive role, now it connives to perpetuate the position of the ruling thought.”⁵⁵ If realism claims that “historical changes, conflicts and contradictions are rendered textually within developments of consciousness on the part of characters,”⁵⁶ Kim may problematize that South Korean cinema has conventionally advanced male protagonists to embody those characters, and therefore the prioritization of realism must stand on “male-suprematism.” It is out of her sensibility about the pitfalls of realism that Kim mobilizes cine-feminism in her two books to dismantle the fundamental male-oriented-ness in the mainstream historiography of South Korean cinema and to rewrite it in woman’s perspective. In addition, if realism is a narrative effect to be obtained

through linear temporality and definite closure, its ultimate aim is to minimize the room for an alternative reading or reading against the grain. This is why Kim tries to reinstate the long-time marginalized fantastic Korean cinema in which, as Tzvetan Todorov points out, “imperfect tense and modalization” engenders ambiguity in the entire film text.⁵⁷

To sum up, the narrative space that Western modernity opened up in post-war South Korean cinema has begged emancipatory readings, but the mainstream film historiography based on realism has stifled such efforts. In order to rectify the tendency, Kim proposes to enact cine-feminism to relocate women in and out of the national cinema and to mark the fantastic as an alternative style to realism.

The Korean Women's History Trilogy is the visual adaptation of Kim's ideas with regard to women and cinema. Part I - *Koryu: Southern Women, South Korea* begins with the narrator Kim's journey to *Kosung* the hometown of her grandmother. On surface, the narrative seems to be structured around the trajectory of the journey. However, aside from revisiting the traces of the deceased grandmother, the itinerary is not specifically goal-driven. The journey in itself is to question how to understand and uncover the grandmother's life story buried in the locale where Kim used to live and in her granddaughter's memories. Early in the film when Kim's way to *Kosung* observes the remains of a beacon that flashed signals during pre-modern periods, the voice-over comments by stating, “Now people say this beacon was the first digital medium. But it was also for men to communicate with each other.” This statement begs further questions as to how women in the past communicated their stories. Kim summons up the memory by stating her grandmother was a skilled writer of *ŏnmun chaemun*, a memorial address in the Korean alphabet. It was a literary genre popular among elite women of the ruling class of the Chosun dynasty.

While Chinese characters functioned as the official mode of literal communication among the male elites, the *ŏnmun* alphabet provided a tool for literary enunciation (versus oral enunciation) for women. Its producers were primarily married daughters who encapsulated the lives of their deceased mothers in their memorial addresses. The resulting documents constructed a form of cross-generational women's history.

The restoration of the women's literary genre, however, is not entirely in the service of proving an uninterrupted women's history in opposition to that of men. Rather it poses a challenge against the very notion of linear history which by nature advocates the histories of the dominant subjects such as nation, men, and the ruling class. Thus, women and their voices serve to debunk the myth of linear history and liberate multiple histories and historical subjects from its confines. This point is cemented by the interview with an overseas Chinese woman who married a Korean man and settled in *Kosung*. Speaking in both Chinese and Korean, she instantiates a personage who freely crosses the threshold between the two languages, and by so doing becomes liberated from the mother tongue an ideology underpinning the linear national history.

The overseas Chinese woman in Korea points to the fundamentally diasporic status of women seemingly settled down within the boundary of a single nation-state. The narrative proceeds to depict another female subject who is a native Korean but now living in the U.K. She and her younger sister have inherited a tea shop from their parents. Portraying the younger one currently managing the place, the story concerning the family seems to converge around the difference in geography that two siblings have faced. However, as the succeeding interviews reveal, it is the younger sister who was originally meant to move abroad to study music, with the

plan being aborted due to the deaths of the parents. The older sister, in opposition, says that an extended stay in a foreign culture has intensively awakened her to the “Koreanness” imbedded in her character. If diaspora refers to a dispersion of people from their original homeland, it materializes not only in the older sister’s physical immigration, but also in the internal immigration that the little sister’s planned study abroad might have facilitated in her mind. Thus, the title of the documentary *Koryu*, presented in the opening sequence, means “temporary abode in a foreign land, migration, and the cycle of life and death,” and designates the existential diapora in which every woman presumably has been conditioned at the margins of the national history.

If *Koryu: Southern Women, South Korea* sheds light on the liminal area where women have inhabited while not being subsumed under any “canonical” histories, then the two sequels of *The Korean Women’s History Trilogy*, *I’ll be Seeing Her* (2002) and *New Woman: Her First Song* (2004), show how the women have “lived” the area. *I’ll be Seeing Her*, for instance, focuses on the female spectatorship that was constructed in favor of film melodramas since the late 1950s. Although the genre has perennially been dismissed as “weepies” and failed to raise critical attention, the documentary shows that film melodramas have provided rare occasions for women audiences to move outside the household and utilize movie theatres as a public sphere where women build solidarity across social strata. By extension, the documentary draws attention to filmmaking practice as a privileged arena in which a woman’s self-expression is enabled more actively than in other spaces of cultural practice. The narrative ends with the illustration of a variety of women’s films made after 1990s in South Korea. In this way, *I’ll be Seeing Her* intends to portray the historical period between the 1950s and now as a synchronic

space where the exchanges of meanings and pleasures between women are constantly occurring in the present tense and never dry up in the course of history.

The theme of women's inter-generational rapport repeats itself in *New Woman: Her First Song*, a film that features the life of Na Hye-Suk, one of the first "New Women" and female intellectuals in Korea. Na Hye-Suk's advocacy of women's liberation in the 1930s when she strove to establish her career as an artist performing Western-style painting in the face of male conservatism are juxtaposed with the present in which contemporary feminists are waging the same struggle that Na had begun half a century ago. Here again, women's history does not decline, but consistently regenerates itself developing new meanings in each generation.

Kim So-Young's *Korean Women's History Trilogy* offers a eulogy in honor of familiar women's experiences reified in Korea's modern history. As Julia Lesage characterized feminist documentary film, it serves to "elicit our reflection on both the specificity of the subjects' and our lives, and on the difference between these cinematic representations and those of dominant cinema."⁵⁸ The trilogy has also surmounted the elitism and factionalism to which the elements of the women's movement since the 1980s have been liable. By carving out a diasporic space in which women's history has been ensconced, Kim's documentaries have successfully verified the representational discourse that sustains the wide spectrum of women's history in its entirety. However, the authenticity of the contents of the documentaries is heavily dependent on Kim So-Young's authorial persona either as a narrator or as an interviewer. The intermittent appearances of cartoons and animated pictures, which are intended to debunk pseudo-realism of documentary images, reinforce the presence of the author as an active interlocutor. Thus, Kim takes the

position of an “educator” who endeavors to awaken viewers to the specificities of women’s history.

In conclusion, while Kim has found a liberating quality in Western modernity implanted in post-war South Korean cinema, she also draws on the ethos of Enlightenment, another face of Western modernity. Considering that the consciousness-raising has been the most favored task in the women’s movement since the 1980s, Kim So-Young is still considered a legitimate representative of the woman’s film of the 1980s.

Byun Young-Ju and Ryu Mi-Rye: From History to the Personal

Despite the uninterrupted flow of the woman’s films since the mid 1970s, it wasn’t until 1993 when the woman’s film in South Korea recognized Euro-American feminist cinema. Kim So-Young stated:

In 1993 South Korean feminist cultural workers made an attempt to introduce Euro-American feminist film practices to South Korean audiences. Information and reviews of films by feminist filmmakers Chantal Akerman, Helke Sander, Michelle Citron, and Sally Potter were disseminated in film magazines, public lectures, and books. In addition, the women’s video festival *Riddles of the Sphinx* screened Euro-American feminist avant-garde works.

In 1997, the Women’s Film Festival in Seoul was launched as the first film festival devoted to women’s issues. From 1993 to 1996 was the period in which pre-existing women’s film practices tried to reach the public and feminist cultural workers utilized public screenings of Euro-American feminist films as a litmus test to measure the public receptivity of films that deal with women’s issues. However, the question remains why these attempts started as late as in 1993.

The year 1993 witnessed the inauguration of the first civilian government led by the newly elected president Kim Young-Sam. Although Kim Young-Sam had built his career as a “democratic warrior,”⁵⁹ his empowerment was largely the result of a the merger among three parties, the ruling Democratic Justice Party and two oppositional parties such as the Republican Party and the Democratic Party in January 1990. The Democratic Justice Party led by the then president Roh Tae-Woo aligned itself with the former military dictatorship (Roh himself was one of the leaders of the December 12 *coup d'état* in 1980), and thus the dissolution of Kim’s Democratic Party due to its alliance with the pro-military administration simply meant Kim’s betrayal of the pro-democracy movement currently engaged in preparation for upcoming 1992 presidential election. Under the circumstances, Kim’s election (in competition with the opposition leader Kim Dae-Jung) entailed liquidations of the movement organizations. This also created a vacuum, previously occupied by ‘grand paradigms’ such as the *minjung* discourse, but now empty of any alternative discourse. It is at this time when feminism and feminist film practices made inroads into the established but fundamentally challenged movement paradigms.

This condition is reminiscent of post-1968 socialist movement in France. Assessing the revolutionary events during May and June 1968 in France as “the greatest general strike in the history of the European proletariat,”⁶⁰ Alex Callinicos brought to light the post-1968 evolution of orthodox Marxism as below:

The development of the women’s liberation movement in particular posed problems for orthodox Marxists, since many feminists argued that the struggle against sexual oppression transcended class divisions and could not be conducted within the framework of a socialist party.⁶¹

In the wake of this crisis [the eruption of the women’s liberation movement] many argued that the development of revolutionary consciousness would depend less on a centralized party winning the support of the majority of workers than on the evolution of a cluster of loosely-structured movements each combating a particular form of oppression.⁶²

In the post-1968 socialist movement in France, the significance of the women's liberation movement lay not only in its alternativeness to orthodox Marxism but also in its epistemologically destructive force against the centralizing mode of thought. Applied to the post-democratic movement in the early 1990s in South Korea, the feminist thoughts operated in such a way that they challenged male chauvinism permeating the movement sectors, and served to revalidate the women's history hitherto marginalized by the centralizing perspective of national history. Kim So-Young's *Korean Women's History Trilogy* (2000, 2002, and 2004) has provided a typical example of the film practice armed with such feminist commitments.

However, any attempt to find a uniform version of women's history is also likely to fall prey to the centralizing mode of thought that dismisses various possible subjective views. This dilemma intensifies in the documentary genre where what is at stake is the authority and objectivity of the information contained, whereas such attributes may mythologize the content as the singular truth. *The Korean Women's History Trilogy*, for example, opens up the diasporic space where women's histories deny being subsumed by the overarching male national history. But the persuasiveness of the general argument is secured by the director Kim So-Young's intellectual persona which reveals itself via her role as a narrator and interviewer. In other words, the narrator/interviewer takes the center of the enunciative position, but hardly discloses her divided self. The undivided speaking subject is equal to the bearer of the Cartesian perspective. The Cartesian perspective taken up by the female subject still privileges the desire to obtain the unified whole of women's history. Consequently, as long as the narration of the woman's documentary relies on the omniscient, unified, female, speaking subject, it would not be capable of entirely freeing itself from a centralizing worldview.

Some documentary works of the woman's independent cinema since the mid 1990s demonstrated an increasing self-consciousness pertaining to the narrator's enunciative position. Former Bariteo member Byun Young-Ju, for instance, introduced *A Woman Being in Asia* in 1993 which addresses the issue of institutionalized sex tourism (*kisaeng kwanguang*) in Cheju Island. In order to obtain firsthand information, Byun and her crew approach and interview the prostitutes working for Japanese male tourists. The candid dialogues between the filmmakers and anonymous prostitutes allow the former to obtain first-hand information about the world of sex tourism, while at the same time engendering a female camaraderie between the two sides. The closer their relationship becomes, the more details about the exploitative condition in which the prostitutes are placed become disclosed. Later recalling the interviewing process in her memoir entitled *A Woman Being in Asia* (1995), Byun recounts that she has felt like a fish out of water in front of the interviewees. And then she asks herself,

Why is it that? It must have resulted from the matter of relationship. That is, the relationship between the camera operator and the viewed person. [If we cannot surmount this unidirectional representation] then, what is the purpose of our meeting? What are we trying to talk about? For only reason that we are equipped with a camera, we are allowed to take the position to commit violence or coercion to the interviewee to confess her story. What is the honest nature of such superiority?⁶³

These queries call into question the psychological detachment that a documentarian normally maintains from the interviewees to secure objectivity. Byun's dilemma is that she and her crew members established mutual trust and solidarity with the female informants, but now must view the women at a distance on behalf of objectivity. Reflecting on this dilemma, Byun realizes that despite her own female identity, she has continued to view the matter of prostitution as something irrelevant to her own life.⁶⁴ In this attitude, the representational objectivity and emotional detachment are enacted as a device to legitimize the documentary's non-engagement

in the issue in question. What the camera captures through the uninvolved eye ends up with a didactic criticism and fails to link the meaning of the documented subject matter to the viewers' immediate realities. With this conclusion, Byun admits that "I am a woman," and decides that "We should re-view the prostitution issue in women's perspective."⁶⁵ *A Woman Being in Asia* shows the process in which the crew members gradually shift their attitude from that of lukewarm impartiality to earnest partisanship toward the women and their lives. Thus, the documentary forsakes the omniscient voice-over of a panoptic narrator but employs an unsettled female subject which eventually opts for female partisanship.

Byun's film documentary series *The Korean Comfort Women Trilogy: The Murmuring* (1995), *Habitual Sadness* (1997), and *My Own Breathing* (2000), deals with the buried history of Korean comfort women forcibly conscripted by the Imperial Japanese Army during the Pacific War. The process of camaraderie building between the filmmakers and the filmed subjects functions as the major mode of narratology in the works. Its theme bears similarities with that of Kim So-Young's *Korean Women's History Trilogy*. But characteristic about *The Korean Comfort Women Trilogy* is its way of approach to the traumatic national history; it focuses on the ongoing present of the survivors in which each one of them wages struggle against the memory of forced prostitution, and joins in the collective action to denounce the war crime and to demand an official apology from the Japanese government. Byun and her crew avoid serving as the mouthpiece for the former comfort women, but participate in their daily lives so as to maximize the space for the women to speak for themselves. The effect is that the comfort women history does not ossify in the past, but constantly renews itself in the survivors' present lives, striking up implicit dialogues with the viewers.

In this sense, *Habitual Sadness* the second installment of the trilogy is significant because the production of the film was initiated by the request of one of the former comfort women. The survivors of the wartime sex slavery lived together in a place called the Sharing House (*nanumŭi jip*); and after it had moved outside of Seoul, the residents asked Byun Young-Ju to document their lives in the new environment. Now “media-savvy” after the shooting of the preceding work *The Murmuring*, the Sharing House members are able to orchestrate their own images the way that they want to be featured to the viewers. The following conversations are exchanged in the midst of the shooting between Byun and Kim Soon-Duk, one of the former comfort women:

Byun: Why did you ask us to film you while carrying these pumpkins?

Kim: Because we grew them ourselves. We wanted you to film the harvest.

Byun: How do you think you’ll look in the film?

Kim: What do I expect?

Byun: How’d you like to be seen?

Kim: As someone who works like a cow

Byun: Are you serious?

Kim: That’s why I painted a cow.

To work like a cow presents an ideal image that Kim has desired to incarnate in her own life. Actually she has lived her life that way and now wants to inscribe it into the filmic image. The question is why she bothers to imprint such a plain fact on film. It is most probably because of Kim’s memory of forced prostitution which tainted her psyche and the honest life that she wanted to live up to. The traumatic national history and a personal truth pose a conflict which Kim tries to visually eliminate by forwarding her image of “working like a cow.” Yet the film also contextualizes Kim’s desire as such and suggests that the female subject and the women’s history can be conflicting and making an on-going dialogic relationship with each other.

Byun Young-Ju's *Korean Comfort Women Trilogy* marked a transition period from the "grand narrative" of the woman's film in the 1980s and 1990s, which focuses on socio-historical issues regarding women, to the "personal narrative" that examines the psychological and interpersonal realm in the daily lives of women. Having begun in 1997, Women's Film Festival in Seoul has provided an important venue where an annual output of women's independent documentaries meets with ordinary viewers. One of the most frequently appearing subject matters in the films of the festival is family or particularly mother. In the handling of the subject matter the personal narration is normally enacted to evoke sympathy in the minds of the viewers, instead of advancing an argument or imparting certain knowledge. In this regard, Ryu Mi-Rye and her documentary *Life Goes On* (2003) deserve examination.

Ryu entered Korea University to study Korean history in 1989, and immediately became involved in the student movement. She committed herself to the political activism for six years until her graduation in 1995. During the period, the independent film *The Night before Strike* and other works of labor literature nurtured her aspiration to become a labor activist.⁶⁶ However, she did not involve herself in any type of labor movement after graduation, but worked for three years as a typist and reporter for the progressive journal *The National Art (Minjok Yesul)*. Ryu says that the relinquishment of the initial vision resulted from her defeatism and disillusionment with organized activities.⁶⁷ In 1998, at the age of 28, Ryu made a drastic career change toward documentary filmmaking in the assessment that "In the advancement of social movement, visuals rather than letters shall make the stronger appeal to the popular masses."⁶⁸ Ryu's career change coincided with the general decline of the political movement after the two presidential elections in 1994 and in 1997. During this period, women's films became gradually geared

toward the personal narrative, a newly charted discursive territory where the political becomes the personal and *vice versa*. Ryu's initial works, the *I am Happy* series, emblematically portray this transition.

Divided into two installments, *I am Happy* (*Nanŭn Haengbokhada*, 2000) and *Friends: I am Happy 2* (*Chingu: Nanŭn Haengbokhada 2*, 2001), the *I am Happy* series seems similar to *The Korean Comfort Women Trilogy* in terms of its mode of narration. In order to minimize the intervention of the camera, the director Ryu cohabits with a group of the handicapped who attend *The House of Fellowship* (*Hamkae Sannŏn Saesang*), a workshop and day care facility for people who have mental disabilities. In so doing, she intends to record everyday situations with which those living in the facility have to be faced.

In *I am Happy*, for example, Ryu follows Sang-Hun an autistic patient to make sure that he arrives home safely. Sang-Hun gets distracted by a street vendor selling rice cakes and Ryu out of sympathy buys him a piece. The next day, however, this act places her under a torrent of admonitions from the facility instructors, who worry that Sang-Hun would keep visiting the vendor anticipating constant giveaways. In *Friends*, Ryu revisits the same people to document their efforts to make their own living. Yet this time again she has to confront unexpected situations. At one time, Ryu sees a person named Kwang-Su get isolated by colleagues because of his unsophisticated communication. Another patient called Kyung-Su steals money from Kwang-Su and feigns innocence, which results in the temporary suspension of all the housemates from coming home.

The documenting of the daily occurrences is not solely intended to awaken the viewers to the realities surrounding the disabled people. Rather it focuses on Ryu herself and the change of

her view on the issue of the disabled. After witnessing the theft incident, Ryu confesses, “I hardly imagined such a thing would happen between the disabled people. Considering that the conventional attitude toward the handicapped is either patronizing them as pitiable or mythologizing them as pure humans, now I realize that I too have fallen into the same mistaken beliefs.”⁶⁹ This type of indeterminate speaking subject is a far cry from an omniscient narrator. Feminist film critic So Yun points out that the narrative of the *I am Happy* series “does not press the director’s opinion but only reveals her experiences as they unfold, and in that sense it resembles ‘feminist writing.’”⁷⁰ Indeed, if feminist writing valorizes “disorder and chaos” as opposed to “universal, totalizing” logo-centrism of male writing,⁷¹ the indeterminate speaking subject would most adequately embody the feminist writing in documentary narration. This point proves itself in Ryu’s next project *Life Goes On* (2004).

Originally entitled *Mommy... (Omma...)* in Korean, the documentary *Life Goes On* captures the story of Ryu’s mother who has lived as a single parent for two decades and is currently engaged in a love affair. Ryu the narrator tries to advocate her mother’s choice, but, at a deeper level, finds herself still wanting the mother to remain single and to keep to self-sacrificing motherhood. This contradiction deepens when Ryu becomes a mother herself and realizes how hard it is to be a “good mom.” In the opening narration, Ryu states:

For a long time, marriage wasn’t for me. It seemed impossible for a woman documentarist to juggle family and work. It became harder after I had a baby (Yu Ha-Eun, 3). I carried her around on the job, but eventually put her in a day-care center. I’d thought of asking mom (Park Sa-Shim, 63) to baby-sit, but she’d begun a new life. I start the film caught between guilt over my child and disappointment at mom. If I came to terms with her so different from average mothers, perhaps I’ll feel less guilty towards my child.

Ryu confesses that it is through marriage that she has been awakened to “womanliness” (*yŏsŏngsŏng*) or to her identity as a woman filmmaker.⁷² Nevertheless, as the narration affirms, the female identity that Ryu has found is self-contradictory and multi-vocal.

The rest of the narrative consists of numerous spontaneous interviews with the mother and other family members including an older sister living in Russia. What this inter-family discourse reveals is the sense of love and hatred, which each one of the family has maintained in one way or another. One scene in which Ryu holding the camera talks with her sister in Russia proves the point:

Sister: What do our sisters have against mom?

Ryu: Big sis said, Look how much Mr. Ahn (the mother’s boy friend) loves his family, but mom, she only cares about her boy friend and not us.

Sister: Mom’s not affectionate enough? I’ve always thought our whole family is desperate for affection. Mom wants affection from us, too. She wants us to be warm and nice to her. And we, *vice versa*. We all want affection but don’t give it. So I feel sorry for her, but I understand sisters, too. Oh, I don’t know.

The dialogue barely establishes any ideological stance such as familism or feminism. It only discloses the painful feeling that originates from unrequited love. In the psychological perspective, however, the disclosure of trauma constitutes the first step in the healing procedure. The interviews and monologues in *Life Goes On* register the process of confession and mental recuperation on the part of the filmed subjects. In this regard, the indeterminate and contradictory position of the narrator should be viewed as a strategic device designed to insert as many confessions as possible into the narrative.

Ryu has indicated as her films’ *raison d’être* the representation of “the women situated in a warped and distorted life, the images of a mother divided between ideal and reality, and all other conditions of women’s existence in which discrete female voices converge.”⁷³ Underlying

this position is Ryu's unique definition of feminism as "the attitude to persistently side with the weakest and the most powerless in the world."⁷⁴ She recalls that actual feminist critics showed only a lukewarm response to *Life Goes On* at its premiere, pointing out that the story does not manifestly uphold the mother's position.⁷⁵ On the contrary, female audiences have hailed at the documentary because, according to Ryu's analysis, the mother character bears a universal appeal.⁷⁶ Thus, the key aspect of Ryu's documentaries consists in empathy across film and audiences. Interestingly, in a 2006 interview, Kim So-Young claimed "South Korean women's films are dead" on the ground that not many filmmakers were committed to the ideal of the woman's film anymore.⁷⁷ Under the circumstances, the emphatic value that Ryu stresses may designate a ground zero of the woman's film, on which a new generation of the woman's film would stand.

Ryu Mi-Rye's narration of afflicting family history in *Life Goes On* echoes Han Ok-Hee (the leader of the Kaidu Club)'s personal memories of her father's remarriage and her sister's tragic marital life. Han stated that her traumatic family history motivated her to study feminism and practice experimental films that concern women's issues. Kim So-Young's *The Korean Women's History Trilogy* and Byun Young-Ju's *The Korean Comfort Women Trilogy* point to the fact that such a family trauma that Han had to endure is not an isolated case, but a collective experience shared by all women who have lived the vicissitudes of modern Korean history. In line with the preceding women's films, Ryu Mi-Rye's works like *Life Goes On* revisits the family trauma on a personal level. In fact, the family trauma outlines the thematic trajectory of the women's films discussed in this study. South Korean anthropologist Kim Seung-Kyung maintains that "Many aspects of women's position in contemporary South Korean society are

rooted in Neo-Confucianism,” and that traditional Korean Neo-Confucianism stressed that “A woman’s only proper roles were within her family and household, and she was instructed to defer to her father until she married, to her husband during her marriage, and to her son when she became widowed.” The family trauma characterizing the South Korean woman’s film records how women’s real-life experiences in South Korea render conflicts with the ideal of Neo-Confucianism. In this context, it is still important to see that the woman’s film not so much claims a down-and-out negation of the family system as tries to restore multiple voices buried under the façade of the familial ideal. This also may explain why the woman’s film represented female subjects within *minjung* rather than discarding *minjung* discourse entirely. Thus, the woman’s film has found its particular role in diversifying people’s voice in the filmic representation of *minjung*.

The Woman’s Film: The Solidarity of the Defeated

The three-decade history of the woman’s film discussed thus far has left one of its important elements untouched: public response. As is often the case with independent films, accurate numerical information such as the number of audiences mobilized for a film is unobtainable in inquiring the public response to the woman’s film. However, the woman’s film is the one constituent of the independent cinema movement which has made intensive and most successful efforts to bring the independent cinema to the eyes of the anonymous public. As early as the 1970s, the Kaidu Club conducted public events such as the experimental film festivals (1974, 1975), a series of street performances (1976), and a multimedia show (1977). The events

were received as an eye-opening experience, if not scandalous, to the general public as well as mass media at the time. The enduring impact of the Kaidu Club activities can be perceived in Han Ok-Hee's memory that "Even in the 2000s, some decades after the Kaidu Club, I meet a number of people who remember the Kaidu Club and its activities in the 1970s."⁷⁸ Such a direct encounter between the independent cinema and the public was two decades ahead of Jangsan Gotmae's *The Night before Strike* which reportedly attracted 300,000 viewers.⁷⁹

Byun Young-Ju's *The Korean Comfort Women Trilogy: The Murmuring* (1995), *Habitual Sadness* (1997), and *My Own Breathing* (2000) made another breakthrough in enlarging the scope of public access to the independent cinema. Throughout the production processes of the first two films, Byun and her crew conducted a fund-raising campaign called the 100-foot film membership.⁸⁰ A 100-foot film member is to provide the filmmaking crew with the amount of money equal to the price of a 100-foot-long film stock. 175 people participated as 100-foot film members for *The Murmuring* and 426 people for *Habitual Sadness*.⁸¹ This viewer-turned-producer system was able to maximize its popular appeal when *The Murmuring* became the first non-commercial independent film to be released in commercial theaters. The film was screened in three theaters such as Dongsung Cinematech, Picasso, and Lumière from April 29 to June 2 in 1995 in Seoul.⁸² *Habitual Sadness* and *My Own Breathing* were also screened in commercial theaters across major cities including Seoul and Busan. The ending credit of each film showed the full list of the 100-foot film members who contributed to the production of the documentary. This way, the trilogy garnered a phenomenal popular attention not only to the films but also the issue of comfort women under Japanese colonial rule.

It would be unfair to say that only the woman's film has made earnest and successful attempts to reach general audiences. Nevertheless, considering the overwhelming number of male filmmakers in the independent cinema sector, the popular appeal that the women's films have realized remains as an unsurpassable contribution to the development of the independent cinema up to the present. This fact, on the other hand, means that women filmmakers still feel blocked and are looking for more venues to share their issues and experiences as women with others. Asked who the target audiences are, Ryu Mi-Rye mentions "women like herself," that is to say, "each one of women who was in despair somewhere in her life, who ever gave up something she valued, and who ever felt helpless in the face with the situation that she couldn't surmount with the power and effort of her own."⁸³ Defeat may epitomize women's destiny in male-chauvinistic society, but their voices cannot be buried completely. The woman's film evidences this truth.

¹ Byun Chae-Ran, “The Woman’s Film in the 1980s” in Ju Jin-Suk, Jang Mi-Hee, Byun Chae-Ran (Eds.), *The Dictionary of Women Filmmakers* [Yŏsŏngyŏnghwain Sachŏn] eds. (Seoul: Sodo, 2002), p. 272. As far as woman filmmaker goes, Pak Nam-Ok (1923~) has been reputed to be the first female director in South Korea. Pak made *The Widow* (*Mimangin*) made in 1955.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kim So-Young, “The Maid, Madame Freedom, and Women” in Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelmann (Eds.), *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2005), p. 189.

⁵ Byun Chae-Ran, p. 272.

⁶ Chun Soon-Ok, *They Are Not Machines* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 127.

⁷ Han Ok-Hee, Email interview with the author, Mar, 28, 2009

⁸ An Jae-Seok, “Women’s Experimental Film Group the Kaidu Club” in Ju Jin-Suk, Jang Mi-Hee, Byun Chae-Ran (Eds.), *The Dictionary of Women Filmmakers* (Seoul: Sodo, 2002), p. 202.

⁹ Han Ok-Hee, “About the Kaidu Experimental Films in the 1970s” in introduction to brochure *The Spellbound Memory: Independent Cinema, vol.1 1970-1980* [Maehogu Kiŏk Tongnip Yŏnghwa, vol. 1 1970-1980], p. 9.

¹⁰ An Jae-Seok, “Women’s Experimental Film Group the Kaidu Club”, p. 203. The number of the students who attended colleges and universities throughout the 1970s were reported as 891,328. Out of this, only 42,000 were female students. *Chosun Daily*, 25 October, 1999, 10.

¹¹ Han Ok-Hee, “About the Kaidu Experimental Films in the 1970s”, p. 9.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Kwon In-Suk, *The Republic of Korea is the Army* [Taehanminkukŭn Kundaeda] (Seoul: Ch’ŏngnyŏn, 2005), p. 131.

¹⁴ The autobiographical facts have been compiled from the email interview that the author conducted with Han Ok-Hee on 26 July 2007.

¹⁵ Han Ok-Hee, Email interview with author, 26 July 2007

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ An Jae-Seok, “Women’s Experimental Film Group the Kaidu Club”, p. 203.

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- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Han Ok-Hee, “About the Kaidu Experimental Films in the 1970s”, p. 9.
- ²² An Jae-Seok, “Women’s Experimental Film Group the Kaidu Club”, p. 203.
- ²³ Han Ok-Hee, “About the Kaidu Experimental Films in the 1970s”, p. 10.
- ²⁴ An Jae-Seok, “Women’s Experimental Film Group the Kaidu Club”, p. 203.
- ²⁵ Han Ok-Hee, Email Interview, 26 July 2007
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ An Jae-Seok, “Women’s Experimental Film Group the Kaidu Club”, p. 202.
- ²⁹ “The Talk of the Trainees in the Korean Academy of Film Arts” in *Movie (Yŏnghwa)* 9, April (1984): 38-42. The Korean Academy of Film Arts was established on March 1984 as a government-sponsored institution to educate film artists in order to foster domestic film industry.
- ³⁰ Kim So-Young, Personal interview with author, 7 July 2006
- ³¹ Byun Chae-Ran, “‘Yŏnghihoe’ the first coterie of women filmmakers, and ‘Bariteo’ the women’s film collective” in Ju Jin-Suk, Jang Mi-Hee, Byun Chae-Ran (Eds.), *The Dictionary of Women Filmmakers* (Seoul: Sodo, 2002), p. 274.
- ³² Mun Jeong-Hee, “Nue: the Student Filmmaking Collective in Ehwa Women’s University” in *Movie (Yŏnghwa)*, March (1988): 134.
- ³³ Ibid., p. 135.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Kim, Personal interview, 7 July 2006
- ³⁸ Byun Chae-Ran, “‘Yŏnghihoe’ the first coterie of women filmmakers, and ‘Bariteo’ the women’s film collective”, p. 274.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 275.

⁴⁰ Anonymous author, “Cultural-Artistic Movement for Women’s Liberation” in *Women and Society* (*Yösönggua Sahoe*), vol. 1 (1990): 18.

⁴¹ Pyön Yöng-Ju, *To Live As a Woman in Asia* [*Ashiaesö Yösönguro Sandanüngöt*] (Seoul:Hapyöngsa, 1995), p. 73.

⁴² Annette Kuhn, *Women’s Pictures* (London & New York: Verso, 1994), p. 155.

⁴³ “Cultural-Artistic Movement for Women’s Liberation”, p. 25.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Kim, Personal Interview, 7 July 2006

⁴⁶ Anonymous author, “Cultural-Artistic Movement for Women’s Liberation”, p. 25.

⁴⁷ Yi Yong-Bae, Personal Interview, 12 July 2006

⁴⁸ Kim So-Young, *Cinema: the Blue Flower in the Land of Technology* (Seoul: Yöhlhwadang, 1996), pp. 112-113.

⁴⁹ See, Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988)

⁵⁰ Kim So-Young, *Cinema: the Blue Flower in the Land of Technology*, p. 113.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 127.

⁵³ Hong Ki-Seon, “Realism in Korean Cinema” in *Toward a New Cinema* [*Saeroun Yöngghwarül Uihayö*] (Seoul:Hakminsa, 1983), p. 300.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 301.

⁵⁵ Kim So-Young, *Fantastic Korean Cinema* (Seoul: Ssiatul Ppurinün Saram, 2000), Preface.

⁵⁶ Annette Kuhn, *Women’s Pictures* (London & New York: Verso, 1994), p. 136.

⁵⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca & New York: Cornell UP, 1975), p. 38.

⁵⁸ Julia Lesage, “The Political Aesthetics of the Feminist Documentary Film.” in *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 3, no. 4 (1978): 507-23.

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- ⁵⁹ Kang Jun-Man, *Promenade of Modern Korean History: 1990s I* [*Hankuk Hyōndaesa Sanchaek 1990s-I*] (Seoul: Inmulgwa Sasangsa, 2006), p. 16.
- ⁶⁰ Alex Callinicos, *Is There A Future For Marxism?* (London & Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1982), p. 12.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*
- ⁶³ Byun Young-Ju, *To Live As a Woman in Asia*, pp. 137-138
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- ⁶⁶ Ryu Mi-Rye, Email interview with author, September 17, 2007
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁸ So Yun, “A Friendly Gaze at Social Minorities” in Heo Eun-Young (Ed.) *A Bandit with her Camera* (Seoul: Aigong, 2005), p. 106.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- ⁷¹ Laurie A. Finke, *Feminist Theory, Women’s Writing* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 6.
- ⁷² Ryu, Email Interview, 17 September 2007
- ⁷³ Ryu Mi Rye, “Challenging Cinderella” Interview by Yi Chong-Hee and Chōng Yūn-Ju. Directed by Seoul Traffic Broadcasting System, 17 August 2006
- ⁷⁴ Ryu, Email Interview, 17 September 2007
- ⁷⁵ Ryu Mi Rye, Personal interview with author, 11 September 2007
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁷ Kim So-Young, Personal interview with author, 7 July 2006.
- ⁷⁸ Han Ok-Hee, Email interview with author, 28 March 2006.
- ⁷⁹ Kim So-Min, “‘Independence Day’ of the Independent Cinema,” *The Hankyoreh*, http://hanimovie.cine21.com/Articles/article_view.php?mm=009001000&article_id=15325, 1 April 2009

⁸⁰ “From The Murmuring to My Own Breathing”, *Cine 21*, 14 March 2000
http://www.cine21.com/Article/article_view.php?mm=005001001&article_id=31364, 2 April 2009

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ryu, Email Interview, 17 September 2007

Chapter V

The Independent Documentary Movement

This chapter discusses the independent documentary movement as one of the major currents of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement since the mid 1980s. Apart from television documentaries and the pro-government newsreels, the tradition of film documentary in South Korea did not begin in earnest until the emergence of filmmaking collectives in the mid 1980s: the collectives used the mode of documentary to record gritty social realities. Documentary drew particular attention from the independent filmmakers during the formative period of the People's Cinema. As was shown in "The People's Cinema: An Extension of Cinema" in Chapter 3, the independent filmmakers experimented with film documentary for the materialization of the People's Cinema. Driven by this activist intent, independent documentarians utilized small group filmmaking and employed social actors to reenact real-life stories. These documentaries normally dealt with the social problems such as farmers' protest. The initial efforts developed into the formation of semi-professional documentary filmmaking organs such as the Seoul Visual Collective (est. 1986) and later the Green Images (est. 1991). The early activist documentaries drew little popular interest. Exhibited across college campuses, the documentaries barely reached general audiences, failing to make significant social impact. However, it is necessary to look at another origin of the documentary movement in the 1980s. Kwangju Video, anonymous compilations of film/video footages capturing the Kwangju Uprising in 1980, emerged as the first documentary that proved a popular impact of documentary in South Korean society. In this chapter, I focus on the process in which the independent

documentary movement developed in response to Kwangju Video. This chapter illustrates how Kwangju Video generated three basic tenets of the independent documentary movement: anti-statism, *minjung* communalism, and the mode of collective production. It also describes how independent documentaries applied variations to the original tenets in the context of socio-political change in 1990s and early 2000s.

Kwangju Video: The Ground Zero of Documentary

One of the earliest examples was the Seoul Cinema Collective's *Pannori Arirang* (8mm, Color, 18min), first presented at the Small Film Festival in July 1984. In many respects, this film is an experimental piece using asynchronous image and sound. A group of courtyard play actors perform on and off stage throughout the narrative which is constructed only by off-screen sound and behind-the-scene interviews. For instance, a series of still images from a rehearsal are juxtaposed with the voice of an off-screen interviewer asking an actor who the target audience is, to which he replies, "Eggheads are the main audience." University students or intellectuals utilized courtyard plays to represent the needs and aspirations of people. However, if the audience is made up of the same intellectual "eggheads," then, how does the play claim to advocate the *minjung*? As the interview subsequently admits, the whole performance is "mere masturbation" catering to the intellectual audiences. *Pannori Arirang* as a documentary does not attempt to answer the question of how people represent themselves, forsaking the rhetorical devices as linear narrative, voice-over narration, and the synchronized image and sound, all are attributed to the institutionalized mode of documentary. The result is a sense of skepticism

pointing to the fundamental inability of representational media, film as well as performance art, to capture the reality of the lived experience of the people or *minjung*.

In subsequent works, the Seoul Cinema Collective would continue to seek an effective way of representing *minjung*, eventually using social actors to reenact the problems that they were facing. *Water Tax* (1984) and *Blue Bird* (1986) utilized this mode of reenactment to portray rural problems.¹ *Blue Bird* reportedly was shown not only to university students but also to farmers on nearly twenty occasions.² Despite such efforts, however, the crude style and sprawling narrative overshadowed the original intent, and the films ended up being at best an agitprop. The mode of reenactment dismisses the observational style and only emphasizes the lack of the actual event and the actual images of *minjung*. Whereas *Pannori Arirang* at least constituted a self-conscious effort to criticize this absence, the later works tried to compensate for it by employing real-life actors.

That the Chun Doo-Hwan regime (1980-1987) imposed the control over the mass media may account for the absence of *minjung*; the governmental censorship targeted the potentially seditious elements in the visual images of *minjung*. Sociologist Cho Hee-Yun notes that the Kwangju Uprising marked the start of socio-political movements in the 1980s in South Korea,³ because the incident revealed the military regime's rule of terror and the collective power that ordinary people could wield for democratic reform.⁴ Although socio-political interpretation like Cho's of the Kwangju Uprising have rarely considered the public responsiveness to the pictures taken from the incident, the last step that the Chun regime took to complete the military action was to hide and distort the visual records of the incident. The following is an excerpt from a secret document made by the U.S. National Security Agency on June 25, 1980:

Chun Doo-Hwan has issued a personal order to government investigators to find either photos or films in which the scenes of student or civilians beating soldiers are taken. The intention is to offset the images of the atrocities that the paratroopers inflicted on civilians, which foreign news agencies such as Time and Newsweek have reported. Another intention is to use the photos to arrest the personages involved in anti-government activities. However, no such things have been found so far. It is presumably because residents in Kwangju resist cooperation with the delegates of the government. Therefore, in efforts to find visual evidences that may embellish the military action or demonize the Kwangju civilians, Chun has commanded the Korean Embassy in Japan to obtain the videos of the Kwangju incident that Japanese television stations have broadcasted.⁵

The government controlled all visual materials of the Kwangju Uprising, stopping domestic television broadcasts and newspapers from reporting the “truth of Kwangju” throughout the 1980s.⁶ The intellectuals and students who survived Kwangju or learned the truth planned to make the tragedy known; such actions paved the groundwork for democratic activism in the 1980s. In the process, the images of the uprising undermined the legitimacy of military rule while intensifying the passion of activists, journalists, and the general citizenry to see the images taken on the spot. In this regard, *Pannori Arirang*’s deconstructive narrative reflects the dilemma between the desire to represent *minjung* crusaders in Kwangju and the absence of actual visual evidence of the incident.

It was under these circumstances that a series of Kwangju Video emerged constituting the independent documentary movement in the mid 1980s. Kwangju Video refers to rough assemblages of video recordings of the Kwangju Uprising taken by foreign reporters. Since several different versions of the video footage exist, which were edited and distributed via underground routes, it is impossible to specify who participated in making the video. Unlike the social documentaries produced by identifiable filmmaking collectives, Kwangju Video, because of its gritty realism, enjoyed an unparalleled popularity among anonymous viewers. Public screenings of Kwangju Video were important parts of the anti-government movement, never

failing to agitate viewers who were dumbfounded and mortified at the scenes of violence and death of civilians by the army.⁷ The video's unequivocal political message and popular appeal made it a watershed work of the documentary movement.

The military government could not completely block foreign journalists' access to Kwangju in May 1980. ARD-NDR (West Germany), NHK (Japan), as well as newspapers and broadcasting stations from the U.S. were there.⁸ German reporter, Juergen Hinzpeter (ARD-NDR) sneaked into Kwangju two times on the 19th and the 23rd of May to tape the scenes of massacre and resistance.⁹ These pictures were first aired in Germany, but Korean expatriates living there saw "(...) bloodstained Korean national flags placed on coffins, dead bodies bearing scars of daggers and bullets, the Kwangju people waging demonstration, (...) and students and civilians indiscriminately beaten by the soldiers." (English translation of original Korean)¹⁰ Later, Hinzpeter recalled that "I had never witnessed such a horror before Kwangju. I had not seen such miserable sights even while working as a war correspondent in Vietnam. I often had to halt operating the camera feeling suffocated at the atrocities."¹¹ Ironically, Hinzpeter's film testimonials would be re-imported to the home land by South Korean priests who viewed the television news about the Kwangju Uprising in Germany. Kong Jee-Young, a former student activist turned renowned novelist, describes the situation involving the Hinzpeter films in one of her novels:

At that time I saw a priest on the television. He was living in Germany then. He said he had sent the news [of the Kwangju Uprising] back to his friends in Korea after seeing it on German television that was showing the footages of Kwangju routed by Hinzpeter. Other priests even took the risk of incarceration as they brought the Hinzpeter footages to Korea, so that we could edit the [Kwangju] video. As such, the combination of the works of this German reporter and the efforts of certain Korean priests living in Germany shed light to the truth amid darkness.¹²

Similarly, NHK (Japan), CNN (US), and ITN (UK) broadcasted images of the Kwangju Uprising.¹³ These scenes provided source materials for the attempts to create a solid narrative out of the scattered images. As a result, at least four versions of Kwangju Video were produced before 1985: McGill University in Canada edited a 20-minute documentary with English narration; some anonymous members of the Korean Catholic Church produced *Oh! Kwangju* a 25-minute documentary with Korean narration based on the scenes from the McGill University documentary; the Association of the Japanese Church compiled a video clip with Japanese narration; and the Kwangju Archdiocese of the Korean Catholic Church produced a 70-minute long documentary entitled *When the Days of May Come Again (Owöl Kūnali Tashiomyōn)*.¹⁴ The Hinzpeter footage reportedly made up the essential parts of *When the Days of May Come Again*.

The General Student Council of Korean University organized public exhibitions of *Oh! Kwangju* and the documentary with Japanese narration during the school's May festival in 1985 as the first open screening of Kwangju Video.¹⁵ Starting with Korea University, the viewing of Kwangju Video would become a major ingredient in political rallies and school festivals across universities. Catholic churches in the cities of Seoul, Pusan, Kwangju, Suwon, Inchon, etc provided another venue where *When the Days of May Come Again* and other versions of Kwangju Video met general audiences. The public exhibition of Kwangju Video reached climax when Myong Dong Catholic Cathedral of the Seoul Archdiocese held two screenings in May 1986 and May 1987 to commemorate the Kwangju Uprising. In 1986, Ki Choon, the president of the Youth Association of Myong Dong Cathedral, recalls that the Cultural Hall in the Cathedral building was packed with viewers silenced by the scenes of atrocity.¹⁶ Ki adds that "the screening took place five times a day and each time attracted around 500 viewers, the maximum

number the Cultural Hall could accommodate. Because of that, there were also many people who did not get to see the video”¹⁷ Ki’s experience is far from extraordinary. The following statement reads like a childhood vignette but also describes an explosive popular attention devoted to Kwangju Video.

The members from the village cathedral said that the floor of the cathedral’s kindergarten building had collapsed. An unexpectedly great number of people flocked into the building to see Kwangju Video, and the bottom of the building could not uphold the weight. This incident would remain as talk of the town for a long time. During the mid 1980s when I was a fourth-grader, what brought people over to the cathedral was nothing other than the video of the Kwangju Uprising reportedly made out of foreign broadcasts. Our village priest, affiliated with Catholic Priests’ Association for Justice, put Kwangju Video on the screen in the cathedral kindergarten and exhibited the photos displaying the scenes of the Kwangju Uprising in the courtyard.¹⁸

It was on university students that Kwangju Video had the strongest impact. Screening sessions were often a rite of passage for freshmen. Upper classmen (*sōnbae*) showed the video to freshmen (*hubae*) as a crash course to convince them of the military rule’s fundamental character as the “enemy of the people.” The images captured in Kwangju Video worked as a “shock treatment” to the juniors, many of whom as the seniors intended would feel a sense of total disillusionment with the Chun regime and soon devoted themselves to student activism. Kim Sae-Jin attended Sogang University in the mid 1980s and discusses the psychological impact the video had on university students at the time.

My first experience in college, which came as a sheer shock to me, was the 5·18 video [Kwangju Video]. (...) By that time, I was naïve enough to believe the government announcement that North Korean spies had instigated the people in Kwangju to start a riot. But the video showed quite the opposite. What I saw was the soldiers beating civilians to death and a woman crying hugging her son’s dead body. The video left a traumatic impression and definitive impact on my school life. (...) At first, I even suspected that my seniors might have fabricated the images; but I soon found an NHK video in the library, which confirmed Kwangju Video as truth. I kept crying for two nights and three days over the fact that I had been cheated by those in authority, having lived an ignorant life only studying.¹⁹

The “shock effect” came from the iconography of soldiers deployed in military action, people engaged in political rallies, and the national flag covering coffins. The three icons - the soldiers, the people, and the national flag – became the major symbols of South Korean statism orchestrated by the military governments (1961-1979, 1980-1987).

Situated within the clash of statism versus anti-statism, Kwangju Video established a few distinctive themes: the works of the succeeding independent cinema movement elaborated the themes throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Independent documentaries were intent on countering government propaganda on military statism, economic developmentalism, and anti-communism. While the military regime spread these ideas as its *raison d'être*, the independent documentaries strove to undermine them to ideologically topple the government. Kwangju Video debunked the statist ideology of the ruling power and influenced the thematic tendency of ensuing independent documentaries. Second, the independent documentaries validated the communalism of ordinary people as an alternative to statist ideology. What is called the *minjung* communalism proclaimed such a purpose, echoing the fact that the people in Kwangju led an isolated struggle but actualized an ideal form of communal democracy. Also, because no single individual could claim the authorship of Kwangju Video, documentary makers avoided putting their authorial stamp on their works, relegating their names to a secondary status after the filmed subjects or the name of a filmmaking collective.

Kwangju Video found an immediate heir not in the works of existing filmmaking collectives such as the Seoul Cinema Collective, but in the work entitled *The Sanggyedong Olympics* (1988). The ending credits of *The Sanggyedong Olympics* show the residents of the *Sanggye* district as its producer/director, but the actual director was Kim Dong-Won, a

commercial filmmaker. Kim was neither politically-oriented nor documentary-minded during the initial stages of his career, but a short visit to the *Sanggye* district awakened him to the social role of film. *The Sanggyedong Olympics* was a work of gritty realism documenting the government-sponsored demolition of slums and the residents' protest against it. This video documentary evoked such an explosive social response that it singlehandedly heralded the independent documentary movement in the 1980s. Kim's subsequent works took the lead in the development of the documentary movement in the course of the 1990s and beyond. However, most of all, Kim's works are worth examining because they have secured and developed the three legacies of Kwangju Video: anti-statism, the *minjung* communalism, and the mode of the collective production.

Kim Dong-Won: A Case of Documentary Humanism

Kim Dong-Won graduated Sogang University in February of 1978 and earned a MA in mass communication (1978-1984), Kim tried working in several commercial films, *Declaration of Fools* (*Babo Seoneon*, Lee Jang-Ho, 1983), *A Shattered Name* (*Sansani Pusuöjin Yirümiyö*, Jeong Ji-Young, incomplete project), and *Seoul Jesus* (*Seoul Yesu*, Jang Sun-Woo & Sun Woo-Wan, 1986).²⁰ The script for *Declaration of Fools* was rejected by the censorship authorities because of its potentially "anti-social" content. The resulting film completely revised the original story even to the point of breaking conventional realist narrative. Kim recalls that the experience dampened his ardor for filmmaking.²¹ Kim also submitted two scenarios of his own to the company only to be declined on the ground of their lack of marketability.²² Thus, the

governmental film policy plagued by censorship and the hit-or-miss production method rampant in the film industry made Kim disenchanted with commercial filmmaking.

Kim's early career suggests that he avoided cinema movement of any kind, although he frequently visited the French Cultural Centre and the Goethe Institute to savor European films in the late 1970s: this was motivated by artistic taste rather than the passion for film movement.²³ Throughout the 1980s, Kim never saw any works that belongs to New Latin American Cinema: he remembered seeing *Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) on video in 1983 and got impressed by the film's anti-war message.²⁴

The production of *The Sanggyedong Olympics* was started nearly accidentally. At the request of the priest Jeong Il-Woo, Kim visited the slum area called *Sanggyedong* or the *Sanggye* district in Seoul in October 1986. The requested work was to videotape legal evidences with which to document illegal violence committed by the police in the forced eviction of the slum residents. Since the late 1970s, some Catholic organizations had been leading the social movement for the urban poor. Jeong Il-Woo, an activist for the cause, was seeking a video operator to record the scenes of forced eviction, and Kim was the one he found. Kim stayed a day in the *Sanggye* district to shoot video footage. However, he found there was no sound. He returned the next day to capture the needed sound; but this time, according to Kim, "it took years before coming out of the district again."²⁵ Kim witnessed the battles between the slum residents and mobsters hired by a demolition company which were backed by city authorities and the police.

I felt the eyes of the slum residents on the back of my head. "Let's spend only another night here," I decided. Thus, I stayed there not because I needed more video footage, but because I just couldn't ignore the hardships of the people. (...) I felt ashamed of myself, thinking that some people had to suffer such destitution while I had vexed myself over the choice between studying abroad and *Chungmuro* [the place for

commercial filmmaking]. The next day, I saw another wave of battle between the residents and the thugs, and I couldn't escape the place again for a few more days. In the end, I decided to stay in the *Sanggye* district and learn about the world. Under the circumstance, video recording was only a marginal purpose.²⁶

The video documentary, *The Sanggyedong Olympics*, first appeared in 1988 as a rough-hewn compilation of video images that Kim, together with some residents of the *Sanggye* district, captured from the lives of the slum dwellers between 1986 and 1988. Here, the term "Olympics" denotes the Seoul Olympics in 1988, for which the government had implemented the housing project that was purported to replace the old shacks built in and around the Capital area with new apartment buildings. The policy lacked a relocation plan for the residents and any monetary compensation for these people who would become homeless as result of the project. The new-housing plan employed a coercive measure to drive out the native population in the *Sanggye* district; and the conflict was inevitable.

The struggle of the slum dwellers entailed a series of hand-to-hand combat police and hired gangsters, which eventually made authorities prepare a shelter area for evictees. The camera in *The Sanggyedong Olympics* accompanies the people's exodus to the temporary dwellings in the city of Puchŏn near the Capital area. It captures a scene in which city officials visit the place to issue the order not to build any shacks, on the ground that the area will be within view of the Olympic torch road. Ahn Eun-Jeong, one of the evictees at the time describes the situation:

In January 1988, after the turbulent year of 1987, out of 78 households who had temporarily sought a shelter in the Myongdong Catholic Cathedral, 35 families moved to the *Kogang* district in Puchŏn. Despite precarious circumstances, we purchased an approximately 90 square yards of land where to build a community called *Poram Maül* (the Fruitful Village) with money we had earned and saved with much toil. However, the place would never be fruitful. The Central District Office, which had originally permitted the construction of makeshift camps, annihilated the half-built wooden houses on the pretext that the untidy constructs would spoil the scenery around the Olympic torch road. Now, we had to dig holes underground instead of erecting camp sites, where we actually would live for almost a year thereafter.²⁷

Such a housing policy resulted from the government's excessive investment in the 1988 Seoul Olympics. The Chun regime promoted the Seoul Olympics in hopes that if successful, the event would neutralize the stigma of the military *coup d'état* in 1980 and the ensuing tragedy in Kwangju. However, the Olympic torch road scene in *The Sanggyedong Olympics* discloses the hypocrisy underlying the governmental propaganda, echoing the anti-statism in Kwangju Video.

Kim taught evictees how to operate the camera and let them shoot what they chose. The documentary intersperses the footage taken by the slum residents in the narrative. This might account for why the ending credits appoint the *Sanggye*-district residents as producer/director. Technically, *The Sanggyedong Olympics* adopts elements of cinema verite - blurry images without continuity belie any aesthetic consideration. For example, the camera at times falls onto the ground, remaining far behind moving objects. More often than not, the camera loses the focal point and shows only empty space. Some minimal effort to clarify the theme is apparent in the opening sequence where shots of a TV commercial of the Seoul Olympics are intercut with clashes between the residents and combat police. In the absence of direct interviews, Kim's narration only draws a narrative out of the sporadic images. However, it is precisely this minimal level of directorial intervention that establishes an authenticity equivalent to that of Kwangju Video.

The verite style of *The Sanggyedong Olympics* operates on the assumption that any directorial intervention may undermine the validity of the image. This presumption suggests a social realism in which the people as a collective whole claim the paramount status as the bearer of the truth. Kim, himself a Catholic, denies any direct influence from socialist aesthetics or the *minjung* literary theories on the style of his video documentary.²⁸ On the contrary, he points out

Christian doctrines as the motive of his work²⁹; it seems to be the case because, as mentioned earlier, the movement for the urban poor had been initiated by Catholic organizations. However, social realism and Christian doctrine in *The Sanggyedong Olympics* coalesce into the ideal of communalism. From the scenes of struggling lives of the urban poor, *The Sanggyedong Olympics* carves out a communalism as the singular element that upholds the slum occupiers' solidarity. The communalism is advanced not only as a survival tactic of the people against state violence, but also as the ethos of the people's lives in opposition to capitalistic development. The communalist ideal presaged Kim's consequential unity with the independent cinema movement that espoused social realism; Kim was elected as the president of the Association of Korea Independent Film & Video in 1990.

Reportedly, Kim originally made five prints of *The Sanggye-dong Olympics*: three were leaked to social activists who visited the *Sanggye* district.³⁰ This clandestine initial release soon gave birth to a mass copying and viewing of the work in student-activist groups and in Christian organizations. It is impossible to investigate how many "pirated" copies have been in circulation and how many people have actually seen *The Sanggyedong Olympics*. It is obvious, however, that despite preceding works such as *Pannori Arirang* (1984), *The Sanggye-dong Olympics* had far-reaching influence on the 1980s independent documentary movement. Many filmmakers who were in college during the late 80s have confessed that *The Sanggyedong Olympics* had virtually made them to choose the filmmaking career. For instance, Byun Young-Ju, who entered Ewha Women's University in 1985, recalled that she was shocked to see *The Sanggyedong Olympics* and decided to become a filmmaker.³¹ She directed *To Live as a Woman in Asia* (1993) as a joint project with Kim Dong-Won.

Together with Byun Young-Ju and others, Kim founded the documentary making collective the Green Images (Purun Yöngsang) in 1991. Under the banner of the “community for documentary making,”³² the Green Images grew into one of the most prolific independent documentary collectives of the 1990s. Each member is free to initiate his/her own projects, while the other members provide technical supports based on an evaluation of the project and the division of labor. The majority of the films made by the Green Images members are credited as a collective, rather than identified by individual director. Such collective labeling serves to realize the ideal of communalism in documentary production.

Kim continued to pursue the issues with the urban poor in a documentary series entitled *The Haengdangdong People* (*Haengdangdong saramdül*, Part I - 1994, Part II - 1997) which consummated Kim’s endeavors to give visual voice to the issue of the inner city housing situation and its victims. Relaying the theme of *The Sanggyedong Olympics*, *The Haengdangdong People* sheds light on the lives of the lower-class people in the *Haengdang* district, another slum area in Seoul to be destroyed under the demolition policy. However, unlike *The Sanggyedong Olympics*, *The Haengdangdong People – Part I* (video, 31min) uses stabilized camera movement and utilizes female voice narration to soften the potentially instigative visual contents. Departing from the cinema verite style, the documentary is intent on revealing slum demolition policy as a show and representing the living conditions of the residents. The most prominent theme imbedded in the narrative is the communalism that unites the people in the *Haengdang* district. The opening title starts with an excerpt from a diary written by Yim Ok-In, a slum resident turned anti-demolition activist:

The Community Alliance of Tenants has let me get to know many people who would have been only strangers, were it not for our collective struggle. I came to know many things thanks to the fellowship I had with them. As I come To think of it, the Community Alliance of Tenants has become my home and its members my family. I love the community just like my family. – The 3rd Quarter Leader, Yim Ok-In.

This opening title is immediately followed by another narration that says:

Three thousand and five hundred households used to live in the *Haengdang* district. Before being expelled by the slum demolition policy, the area prided itself with many community-oriented programs which had been nearly extinct in other areas in Seoul. In May, the annual Dano festival would hold a village singing contest. There was a community nursery that would take care of the children for free for the households where both parents were working. Most of all, it was the benevolent hearts of the residents that made the people understand each other and be even concerned about their neighbors' daily living, and became the source of pride for the *Haengdang* district. However, now the slum demolition policy has uprooted these people's livelihoods.

Communalism confronting state development is repeated here as in *The Sanggyedong Olympics*. However, in *The Haengdangdong People*, communalism appears less as a passive and static value in danger of extinction and more as an active and dynamic objective that would replace capitalist developmentalism. And the slum demolition only intensifies the treacherous elements of the latter.

The narrative of *The Haengdangdong People* develops in three phases: first, the presentation of an ideal urban community; second, the threat of demolition to this ideal community; and third, renewed solidarity among the slum residents. Along with the progression of the narrative, the film unfolds the residents' gradual awakening to the need of collective struggle against the state enforcement. It displays acts of civil disobedience, through which the residents resist forced eviction, demanding from the city authorities the residents' rights to rent newly-built apartments and temporary shacks where to stay during the construction of the apartments. When the city authorities accept all of the demands, the degree of communalism among the residents is no longer merely an effort for survival; it becomes an empowering life

principle overcoming individualism and the vices of capitalism. *The Haengdangdong People* – Part II subtitled *Another World* delineates how the ideal of communalism materializes in the lives of the people of the *Haengdang* district.

Another World shows the former slum residents now cultivating a self-sufficient commune in a temporary housing allocated by the city for people while new apartments are being built. The same woman narrator stresses, “we, the slum residents, have acquired not only the right to rent the new apartments, but also our dear community which is moving toward a world that nobody has ever dreamt of but is definitely worth living in.” Building an ideal commune starts with restoring the community-oriented programs of which the people of the *Haengdang* district had been lamenting the loss. The village singing contest, the public day-care center and the monthly communal meeting are reinstated to fill the new fabric of the communal life. More importantly, the credit union and the cooperative textile factory are introduced to realize economic self-reliance of the community. The documentary eulogizes the achievements via the narration that normally starts with the denomination “we,” identifying the voice with that of the people. The narrative never deviates from the theme of communalism and ends with the dictum that community building should be the way of new social movement. Consequently, *Another World* renders the *Haengdangdong* community as a harmonious cosmos free from any self-contradictions.

Kim Dong-Won utilizes the cinema verite style in *The Sanggyedong Olympics* to address the social reality in which slum residents were conditioned as a fundamentally self-contradictory and unstable universe. However, with *The Haengdangdong People* series, the cinema verite evaporates and a steady camera and a linear narrative occupies the slum community to convey

the sense of stability rather different from *The Sanggyedong Olympics*. Film critic Kim Sun-Aha summarizes the story of the *Haengdangdong* series, “The residents of the *Haengdang* district have waged collective resistance against the logic of capitalism and acquired the faculty to manage the community with vitality, sharing, and love. By so doing, they have emerged as a heroic subject who undertakes the last resistance of our time.”³³ However, she goes on to argue that “the [female voice] narration functions as the agent that streamlines the causality and linearity of the narrative, leaving no room for multiple voices within the community to be represented.”³⁴

In a sense, Kim Sun-Aha’s criticism on the *Haengdangdong* series evokes the role of documentary as a “discourse of sobriety.”³⁵ According to Bill Nichols, the discourse of sobriety refers to such serious disciplines as economics, politics, education, etc, and it normally hypothesizes the reality as something “direct, immediate, (and) transparent.”³⁶ The concept also accounts for the relationship that documentary makes with its surrounding realities. As Nichols stresses, the discourses of sobriety including documentary seldom validate “‘make-believe’ characters, events, or entire worlds.”³⁷ Kim Sun-Aha describes the *Haengdangdong* series as “romantic humanism” that merely degenerates the work into a political propaganda.³⁸

In response to the comments, Kim Dong-Won replies that he intended to highlight the “hope” which slum residents were able to savor after the years of struggle.³⁹

Of course, there were conflicts of interest among the people. But I thought it would be better to elicit a hopeful future from those who had undergone a long time of struggle. Why on earth do we make documentaries? Why do we make film after all? (...) I think there is no reason for us to make film other than the fact that our works can move the hearts of viewers.

Kim seems to consider emotional impact as the most important element of a documentary. The realm of emotion exceeds the discourse of sobriety that is expected to appeal to reason. Although Kim Sun-Aha dismisses the emotional appeal as an attribute of propaganda, it is undeniable that every documentary has the thrust of “visceral appeals that work to rouse audiences.”⁴⁰ When Kim says he wishes the sense of hope is contagious among viewers, he unwittingly points to a particular mode of documentary spectatorship, or what Jane M. Gaines would call, political mimesis. Political mimesis means the operation of mimetic desire that a documentary may stir up in the minds of the audiences by manipulating the visual and the auditory. For example, Gaines argues that there is “an aspect that ‘kicks in’” in the images of “the thrall of group song, the heat of battle, bodily strain, and physical resistance.”⁴¹ Applied to the *Haengdangdong* series, political mimesis operates in such a way that anti-capitalistic utopianism upholding the slum community may electrify the viewers to make it real in their own surroundings.

Indeed, the discourse of sobriety and political mimesis constitute the two sides of the same coin in documentary. The above debate only tackles the question of which direction the center of gravity should move. What is significant about the interlocution, however, is that it suggests a change in the mode of representation of the independent documentary. Both *The Sanggyedong Olympics* and *The Haengdangdong People* were a product of documentary activism that values the documentarian’s participation in the acts of filmed subjects. Political mimesis might be an emotional remnant that the participatory mode elicits from the minds of viewers. Activism as the initial ethos of the independent documentary movement gradually gave way to what Bill Nichols would call observational mode.⁴² Along with the demise of the military rule in the 1990s, this observational mode emerged to emphasize a speculative distance between

the camera and the object. It served to rejuvenate the independent documentary as a discourse of sobriety. Nevertheless, the observational mode did not neutralize the established thematic triangle of the independent documentary movement: anti-statism, communalism, and social-realism but rather brought in a new way of approach to the themes. Kim's documentary is no exception in terms of the change of representational mode.

Repatriation (Songhwan, 2004) came out as Kim's first work to adopt the observational mode of representation. This video documentary covers the stories of some long-term communist prisoners in South Korea. Dispatched by the North Korean regime during the Korean War (1950-1953) and its aftermath, the communist prisoners in the South had long been a forgotten scar of the cold war politics in the Korean peninsula. The narration of *Repatriation* says,

In 1972, there were 500 long-term communist prisoners in the South. About 350 were converted by the conversion scheme since 1972. Nineteen long-term prisoners died due to the conversion scheme. Another one hundred and seventeen long term prisoners died of illness in prison. By the end of 1999, 102 have been released as unconverted.

The documentary attempts to uncover the human histories behind these numerical facts. Actually, the issue of the long-term communist prisoners has remained a politically explosive topic in South Korea as it involves a number of thorny questions pertaining to the nation state's postwar politics, such as anti-communism, the state violence, and human rights. In this sense, the subject matter comprehensively applies itself to the established thematic triangle of the independent documentary movement - anti-statism, communalism, and social-realism – in one way or another. What draws our attention is the mode of representation that Kim enacts to address this all-encompassing matter.

Repatriation starts with Kim's retrospective narration that goes as follows:

I first saw them [long-term communist prisoners] in the spring of 1992. Although the 'Age of Resistance' had already passed, the military dictatorship remained in power. Those who had committed their lives to revolution went their separate ways after the fall of the Eastern bloc. I had believed documentaries could change the world, but now that I had my own family protect and care for, I had to face mundane temptations.

Kim maintains a dispassionate attitude about the "Age of Resistance," which obviously refers to the 1980s when, for instance, *The Sanggyedong Olympics* galvanized young revolutionary minds. Now, Kim himself admits that documentaries may not be able to change the world. This retrospective speech, however, does not so much affirm the bankruptcy of progressivism as allows an observational distance for the narrator to contemplate the change in the surrounding world. The observational distance equals to Kim's emotional distance that is somehow saturated with the narrator's own world view: there may be others who do not agree that the age of resistance has ended. Kim's observational position reflects his will not to side with any doctrine and dogma that substantiated the bygone era. What results from such personalized observational distance is not objectiveness *per se* but an attitude of indecisiveness or ambivalence toward the filmed subject. The attitude of ambivalence reveals itself in the opening sequence when Kim feels "terrified" on being introduced to "unconverted North Korean spies," but on the other hand becomes "intrigued" to bring out his camera to document them. In deciding to document the ex-prisoners, Kim makes his mind to move beyond the preconceptions formed against them and to capture their human faces. To do this, his objective camera neither sympathizes with their lives in the past nor passes judgment on their ideological pursuit. This objective positioning proves to be particularly effective in presenting diverse human stories across ideological lines, while not losing belief in ultimate social progress.

In addressing the matter of the long-term communist prisoners, the documentary introduces the case of state violence that the military regime clandestinely installed a program called the conversion scheme to forcibly make the communist prisoners to renounce their beliefs. Ironically, the conversion scheme was facilitated by the North-South Joint Declaration of 1972, a landmark event that affirmed the two Korean states' desire for reunification. In order to prove the superiority of the governing system to its counterpart, the Park Jung-Hee regime in the South dispatched its secret police to purge political offenders in the state prison. The result was the extremely coercive measures that inflicted indiscriminate beatings and torture on communist prisoners in the attempt to coerce them to relinquish their ideological beliefs.

It is against this historical background that *Repatriation* presents the two former long-term prisoners, Cho Chang-Son (72) and Kim Suk-Hyung (87). The narrator and cameraman Kim Dong-Won has a chance to meet Cho and Kim in the spring of 1992 and decides to chronicle their lives: the filming would end when the two persons, together with other former communist prisoners, are officially repatriated to the North in the fall of 2002. The story of the ten-year period includes dramatic reunions between the men and other former prisoners. The majority of them begin communal living with the help of religious organizations and civilian charities. Their present lives cannot exist apart from their past of three to four decades of imprisonment haunted by the conversion scheme. For this reason, the social movement sector receives them as living testimonies to state-terrorism, exalting them as the heroes who have defended their ideological allegiances. Yet the conservative sector of the society still stigmatizes them as detestable communists who threaten the state's ideological foundation. It is interesting to see that ordinary people, many of whom are families and relatives of the former long-term

prisoners, show an ambivalent attitude toward them. For example, the immediate families of Kim Sun-Myung, who had been released in 1999 after 45 years of imprisonment, refuse to see him resenting the state-imposed discriminations they have had to endure due to the guilt by association with the communist prisoner. The most heart-breaking scene occurs when Kim Sun-Myung is allowed to have a short reunion with his nearly centenarian mother: some days after the meeting she dies. Other families repeatedly refuse to accept Kim until he becomes repatriated to the North in 2002. Such divided receptions of the long-term communist prisoners allow us to see how institutionalized anti-communism persists in the form of collective phobia even in the age in which political oppression and resistance are no longer viable.

The long-term communist prisoners may be a cold-war legacy, not capable of make any meaningful influence in contemporary South Korea. Their eventual repatriation to the North, one of the agreements reached in the 2001 summit between the two Korean leaders, seems to be an inevitable outcome of the post-cold war geopolitics, rather than the triumph of human will. *Repatriation* shows that the police arrested Kim Dong-Won three times during the shooting of the documentary for illegal video production and distribution. But, as Kim narrates, the police's original intent was to press charges against Kim for breaking the National Security Law. Nevertheless, such experiences do not lead Kim to sympathize with the North or the ideological position that the long-term prisoners have held. The National Security Law is forwarded as a mere case of outworn anti-communism and a pale reflection of currently nonfunctional communist prisoners.

With painstaking efforts not to side with any political positions, *Repatriation* offers an honest portrayal of South Korea's socio-political landscape after the "Age of Resistance."

Following the ex-prisoners for ten years, the noncommittal camera rediscovers humanism as a prevailing force over all other ideologies. In this sense, the observational mode of the documentary may account for the necessary emotional space for the director to reaffirm his faith as a documentary maker: “I think there is no reason for us to make film other than the fact that our works can move the hearts of viewers.”⁴³

The Post-“Age of Resistance” Documentary

Historically, the ten-year period from 1992 to 2002 that Kim Dong-Won’s *Repatriation* recounts witnessed many changes not only in the socio-political milieu but also in the practice of the independent documentary movement. The initial works of independent documentary intermittently appeared in the early 1980s, usually forming 8mm that contained the life struggle of the urban poor or needy peasants, and the images of student demonstrations against the military regime. The majority of these films used underground routes of labor unions, churches, and student organizations to reach the audiences. The three themes, anti-statism, communalism, and social realism, gradually consolidated into the central theme of the independent documentary movement.

The film documentary as the instrument of social activism developed into the early 1990s without fundamental challenge. Besides, the wide distribution of video camera and VCR during the mid 1980s barely drastically increased the number of independent documentaries with activist intentions. Around 1993, along with the empowerment of the civilian government and the decline of social activism, a new documentary consciousness that valorizes a wide spectrum

of individual directorial style emerged. Indeed, the new documentary consciousness did not actually overshadow the thematic triangle, but, individual documentarians now less obliged to activism began to experiment with diverse subject matters and styles to enrich the preexisting themes. In addition, democratization of the society allowed leeway for the independent documentarians to approach the formerly taboo issues and figures.

Hong Hyung-Sook's video documentary *Doomealee: A New School Is Opening* (1995) provides an exemplary work that represents the transition period of the independent documentary movement. Since the documentary aims to criticize the government's educational policy, its overall theme falls under the category of anti-statism. Yet the observational mode of representation posits *Doomealee* as more than straightforward activist propaganda. *Doomealee*'s objective perspective focuses in on the people of Doomealee (Doomeal village) not as helpless victims of the government's opportunistic administration but as self-reliant subjects who make the fate of their own community. This storyline obviously echoes the theme of communalism.

Doomealee is a farming village under the jurisdiction of Kyunggi Province, South Korea: the collective spirit and the healthy code of traditional morality still prevail in the village. In 1994, the head of the village receives an official notification from the provincial authorities that Doomeal elementary school will be forced to close due to the chronic deficiency in the number of students. The planned shutdown of the school forms a part of the more extensive measure called the Merger and Abolition of Minor-Scale Schools enacted by the Education Ministry since 1988. The bureaucratic exploitation brings about immediate resistance from the people. The conflict between Doomealee and the educational authorities emerges in the way that whereas the former claims the small school cultivates an optimal condition for children's education, the latter

insists that only schools supplied with sufficient facilities and licensed teachers are qualified for serving the children. Underlying the controversy is the farmers' deep-seated bitterness against the government's internal policies that have constantly neglected farming districts.

Doomealee: A New School Is Opening documents the villagers who rise in collectivity to solve the school problem during the period between November 1994 and May 1995. At first, the Doomealee representatives file a lawsuit against the local education authorities for closing of the elementary school without the people's consent. Despite the attempt, the legal case ends with the defeat of the plaintiffs. It is at this point that the villagers begin to cooperate to survive the crisis and to recuperate its self-esteem and communal solidarity as a farming village. Although the legal action ends in failure, it starts a far-reaching ripple effect to other small-scale schools under threat of forced shutdown. *Doomealee* shows that the people's struggle in the Doomeal village ignites a grass-root movement across the country to redeem small-scale schools: how the movement unfolds is covered in the next installment, *Doomealee: The First Step* (2000).

Although *Doomealee: A New School Is Opening* chronicles roughly six months of the Doomealee people's movement activities, its sequel *Doomealee: The First Step* contains four years of the villager's lives in the aftermath of the official closedown of Doomeal elementary school. As the time passes, the grown-up children who once attended Doomeal elementary school have become teenagers. The young generation, as the interviews show, become as the historical agent who memorize and transmit the village's history, especially the past of the collective struggle. The documentary crew spent four years in the Doomeal village, making the documentary; the close relationship they developed with the villagers functions a prime factor to draw candid dialogues from the interviewees.

The cohabitation of the documentary crew with the villagers as the filmed objects has its origin in the early history of the independent documentary movement. The forerunner of the Seoul Visual Collective, the production company of *Doomealee* was the Seoul Cinema Collective formed in 1982. The latter started as a group of amateur filmmakers who had been committed to student filmmaking while in college and currently regrouped to initiate progressive cinema movement. The Seoul Cinema Collective turned into the Seoul Visual Collective in 1986: the term “visual” was chosen to recognize the newly introduced video technology as a promising instrument of cinema movement. The initial work of the collective was *Blue Bird* (1986), a filmed reenactment portraying dire poverty of peasants. In the production of *Blue Bird*, the filmmaking crew actually participated peasant life in order to obtain better understanding of and emotional affinity with the people of the farming village. Thus, cohabitation with the subjects anticipated the production method that the Seoul Visual Collective would be specializing from 1990 and on.

Director Hong Hyung-Sook joined the Seoul Visual Collective in 1987. Her early works included *The Battle Line* (*Chŏnyŏl*, 1991) and *Record of the 54 Days of the Summer* (*54 Yil, Kŭ Yŏrŭmŭi Kirok*, 1993), and bore strong labor activist overtones. *Doomealee: A School Is Opening* was Hong’s first work that dealt with an issue of her personal interest, the problem of public education. Thus, *Doomealee* triggered a diversification of the subject matters of the independent documentary from the mid 1990s.

While *Doomealee* is a case of which the observational mode of representation replaces propaganda of the preceding independent documentaries but still reaffirms the grass-root communalism, Yi Kyung-Sun and Choi Ha Tong-Ha’s *Patriot Game* (*Aekukcha Gaeim*, 2001)

offers a unique account of anti-statism through the use of digital images. In many respects, *Patriot Game* (2001) falls under the category of the post-“Age of Resistance” documentary that Kim Dong-Won’s *Repatriation* exemplifies. *Repatriation* casts a reflective look at the ideological hostility between military statism and anti-communism reified in the minds of the general populace even in the age of Korean détente. In comparison to it, *Patriot Game* questions the foundation of Korean nationalism that sustains both South Korean statism and North Korean communism.

The two directors reportedly spent three years conducting interviews with one hundred people (mostly intellectuals) to ask them about nationalism and why they thought it wielded a singular impact on Korean politics. The simplest answer is that the right wingers occupied the ruling elite and fostered a form of nationalism based on the myth of pure blood. The closest ideology to this Korean nationalism is fascism. *Patriot Game* debunks pure blood nationalism to reveal it as the ideological ruling apparatus that at times justifies even violence to suppress opposition. Satire and witticism function as the rhetorical tools to befoul the nationalist discourse upheld by the right-wingers. The opening sequence starts with the national anthem played against a background of stock images that the South Korean public television has utilized to represent Korean national identity. Then the audio-visual flow is suddenly intercepted by the digitally mastered kaleidoscopic images in which, for example, the national flag is juxtaposed with an animated skeleton, mocking the sanctimoniousness surrounding the preceding sound-images. In a similar fashion, the background music of Korean national exercise is played while the screen shows two digitalized human-flies imitating the gymnastic exercise. Considering the fact that most South Korean adults have grown up regularly performing the Korean gymnastic

exercise, originally institutionalized by the Park Chung-Hee military regime in the attempt to emulate Japanese gymnastic exercise, the digital orchestration of the burlesque image is intended to satirize statist nationalism internalized in the minds of ordinary Koreans.

The post-“Age of Resistance” documentaries tend to refrain from showing allegiance to any political position. Instead, they probe the realities of the present times in which old political directives, conservative or progressive, have revealed their limitations and nothing can be done to make them effective. In *Patriot Game*, the pure-blood nationalism embedded in the movement discourse also comes under critical scrutiny. For instance, the directors conduct an interview with Kwon Jung-Hee (1936-2007), a renowned nationalist who had devoted himself to the cause of rebuilding the national spirit of Korea. One of Kwon’s well-known acts was to chase after Ahn Doo-Hee (1917-1996) who had murdered Kim Gu (1876-1949), a respected national leader during Japanese colonial era. For this reason, Kwon was well received by social movements as a model patriot. However, in the interview, Kwon claims that the marriage between Koreans and foreigners should not be allowed because it would defile Korean blood. Kwon’s statement suggests that military fascism and the movement discourse in South Korea have shared the same base ideology of pure-blood nationalism. In this case, even the movement discourse, albeit seemingly progressive, can be prohibitive and exclusivistic rather than liberating as far as it is confined to the nationalist ideology.

Patriot Game never tries to present an alternative to nationalism. It only stresses the prospect of the progressive movement to be undertaken by the labor class. The reasoning is that the death of nationalism is equal to the death of the ideological hegemony which is built by both the state and the movement elite. Yet the interests of the working-class people have little to do

with the ideological imperative of nationalism; therefore, the labor-class hegemony may arise where nationalism declares bankruptcy. Here, the new horizon of the progressive movement points not to the new historical phase that historical materialism dictates, but to an empty space which is filled with a wide range of creative thoughts and actions. The labor class that *Patriot Game* endorses is reminiscent of the village people of *Doomalee*; the documentary also sees the ordinary people as the reservoir of social movements. The labor class and the village people do not equip themselves with any dogmatic ideology but simple exist as a force moving toward a better future. From this characteristic one may sense the shape of the universe toward which the post-“Age of Resistance” documentary gravitates: it is the universe where the dynamics of social change are still at work not in the form of social science but in the form of human hope (which again echoes humanism of the Kim Dong-Wong documentaries).

Kim Yun-Shik, a renowned South Korean literary critic, has left the following remarks in his evaluation of the literary works that portray the lives of former student activists in the aftermath of the Age of Resistance.

Why did the idea of society in the Marxist sense appear so important [to the student activists in the 1980s]? Wasn't it because the people at the time were actually threatened by fear of death? (...) The efforts to overcome such a horror could not be the work of an individual but of a collective. And this is why the notion of society held importance then and bears a renewed significance now. From this perspective, it is worthwhile to review the theme of “hope.” The secession of the former associates from the movement line, the miserable lives of the former hardliners, and the affliction of conscience that the converts feel in seeing their comrades from the past, all of these in literary narratives constitute a fantasy called hope. (...) The notion of society is nothing other than the object of this transcendental desire [the fantasy called hope]. Therefore, society (the object of revolution) should not be interpreted as a material body to be conquered but as a transcendental entity of its own. Society functions as the most reliable foundation for humans who are destined to be stuck in an unstable world full of despair and solitude. Thus, society is equal to mutual understanding and trust among its members.⁴⁴

Here, society is not a palpable object of social science but a metaphysical container of values such as mutual understanding and trust. The idea of hope simply refers to the human will to

imagine that society. But it is only instinctive for humans to desire a community based on honest communication. Thus, hope becomes a human instinct. *Patriot Game* and *Doomealee* present the labor class and the village people respectively as the living testimonies of such a hope. Consequently, the post-“Age of Resistance” documentaries are trying to clear away the encrusted dirt such as propagandism and nationalism to find the essence of new hope.

¹ The Seoul Visual Collective, *From Periphery to Center* (Seoul: Shigakkua Ōnō, 1996), pp. 66-71.

² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³ Cho Hee-Yun, “A Kaleidoscopic Panorama in the Formative Period of the Subjects of Social Reformation in 80” *A Compendium of the Great Debates of the 1980s* (Seoul: Chungang Daily Press, 1990), p. 30.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Kang Jun-Man, *Promenade of Korean Modern History: 1980s I*, p. 181.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Nam Tae-Jea, Yi Chin-Pil, “The Independent Documentary that Blossomed Amidst Cataclysmic Realities” in Independent Documentary Study Group (Ed.), *South Korean Independent Documentary [Hanguk Dongnip Dakyumentari]* (Seoul: Yedam, 2003), p. 27.

⁸ *The Hankyoreh*, 10 December 1988, p. 12.

⁹ Yi Yong-Tae, “Hinzpeter, the Hero of Kwangju Video” in *Yi Yong-Tae’s Dialogue* [electronic bulletin board], s.l. 24 September 2003 [cited 8 November 2007]. Available from <http://blog.korea.kr/medialyt>

¹⁰ Kim Yong-Chool, *German Arirang [Dogil Arirang]* (Seoul: Essay, 2006), p. 232.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹² Kong Ji-Young, “The Voice Echoing Around the Ear” in *The Field of Stars [Pyōdūlūi Tūlpan]* (Seoul: Changbi, 2004), p. 88.

¹³ *The Hankyoreh*, 10 December 1988, p. 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Kim Yong-Un, “War, the Name Never to be Eurogized” in *Ohmynews*, 31 May 2002 [available from <http://www.ohmynews.com>], cited in Nam Tae-Jae & Yi Jin-Pil, “The Independent Documentary Born in the Storm and Stress” in *Korean Independent Documentary* (Seoul: Yedam, 2003), p. 25.

¹⁹ Kim Won, *Memories of the Things Forgotten* (Seoul: Yihoo, 1999), p. 172.

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- ²⁰ Kim Dong-Won, "I am positive about the future of independent cinema" Interview with Kang Sök-Yun, *Quarterly Journal of Korean Independent Cinema* (January 19 2004)
- ²¹ Kim Dong-Won, Personal interview with the author, 29 July 2006
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Kim Dong-Won, "I am positive about the future of independent cinema" Interview with Kang Sök-Yun, *Dongnip Yöngghwa* (January 19 2004)
- ²⁷ Kim Hee-Chul, "I learned a true life in the streets of June 1987" *The Hankyoreh* 7 July 2007
- ²⁸ Kim Dong-Won, Personal interview with the author, 29 July 2006
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ This information is found in *From Periphery to Center* a video documentary (dir. Hong Hyung-Suk, 1997) that narrates the history of South Korean independent cinema.
- ³² www.docupurun.org
- ³³ Kim Sun-Aha, "The Haendangdong People 1, 2, and the Mannerism of South Korean Independent Documentary" in *Quarterly Korean Independent Cinema* vol 5 (May 30 2003)
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1991), p. 3.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 4.
- ³⁷ Ibid., p. 3.
- ³⁸ Kim Sun-Aha, "The Haendangdong People 1, 2, and the Mannerism of South Korean Independent Documentary" in *Quarterly Korean Independent Cinema* vol 5 (May 30 2003)
- ³⁹ Kim Dong-Won, "I am positive about the future of independent cinema" Interview with Kang Sök-Yun, *Quarterly Journal of Korean Independent Cinema* (January 19 2004)
- ⁴⁰ Jane M. Gaines, "Political Mimesis" in Jane M. Gaines, Michael Renov (Eds.), *Collecting Visual*

Evidence (Mineapolis & London: Minnesota UP, 1999), p. 99.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴² Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1991), p. 33.

⁴³ Kim Dong-Won, "I am positive about the future of independent cinema" Interview with Kang Sök-Yun, *Quarterly Journal of Korean Independent Cinema* (January 19 2004)

⁴⁴ Kim Yun-Shik, *An Expression of South Korean Novels in the 1990s* [*90 Nyöndaek Hankook Sosöli Pyojöng*](Seoul: Seoul National University, 1994), pp. 592-593.

Epilogue

A Bit Bitter (*Saeng-gang*, dir. Jeong Ji-Woo, 14min, 1996) is an independent film that portrays the daily life of a woman whose husband is working on the staff of a labor organization. While the man devotes himself to the public duties of labor movement, the wife's living is confined to the domestic area where household chores, child care, and a part-time knitting work constitute the woman's underappreciated role. The oblique camera angles with asymmetrical framings serve to capture this seemingly normal but deeply alienated relationship. But even the pretence of normality collapses when the wife hears a recorded female voice in her spouse's pager: a woman colleague of the husband has left the message to deliver the schedule of his business trip with a bit of romantic overtone. Here, the cause of labor movement equivocates about the oppression on women in the private arena.

The degree of "subversion" in *A Bit Bitter* appears significant, considering that the film was made by Chung-nyun the filmmaking group that produced *Mother, I am Your Son*, an agitprop for student activism, in 1991. *A Bit Bitter* debunks the myth of labor movement, or, by extension, the socio-political activism in general. What results is the exposure of micro oppressions involving women, daily lives, and various social institutions. Such narrative configuration indicated the way of evolution that South Korean independent cinema would follow along with the gradual demise of the People's Cinema. Departing from the causes of socio-political movement, the independent films broadened their spectrum in the theme and narrative in the course of the 1990s. However, the change was far from the evaporation of the

filmmakers' critical mentality, but the shift of intention from the "conscientization" of the people to the identification with them. Individual perspectives in place of the collective whole started to prevail; in the process, diverse aspects of the ideology, culture, and politics in contemporary South Korea become the object of cinematic scrutiny. The People's Cinema gave way to more moderate, neutral terms like the Independent Cinema (*tongnip yŏnghwa*). Yet the original ethos of the independent cinema movement from the 1980s not so much subsided as multiplied and settled in personal activities of independent filmmaking.

Fourteen independent filmmaking groups and four individual filmmakers agreed to the formation of the Association of Korea Independent Film & Video (KIFV) in September 18, 1998.¹ The members of the association included prominent groups like the Seoul Visual Collective and Green Images with Kim Dong-Won as the president. The KIFV from its establishment has maintained the unparalleled status as the sole guardian of the needs and interests of independent filmmakers in South Korea. In its inaugural declaration, the KIFV members never use the term People's Cinema, although many of them were those who had endeavored to materialize the concept in theory and practice. In the declaration, "Independent Cinema" (*tongnip yŏnghwa*) is advanced as the overarching terminology to indicate all possible independent filmmaking practices.² Compared to the People's Cinema, the Independent Cinema appears to be more lenient concept that recognizes not only politically resistant films but also any other films as long as they have "good intention" and "sincerity" in them.³ Certainly, the declaration does not try to submit any rigorous definition of the Independent Cinema, but it is obvious that the activist intent embedded in the idea of the People's Cinema became gradually out of fashion among the independent filmmakers.

In the examination of the transition from the People's Cinema to the Independent Cinema, it can be illuminating to review the changes in the National Cinema Thesis. As stated in Chapter 3 in this study, film critics Yi Hyo-In and Yi Jeong-Ha submitted the National Cinema Thesis in 1988 as a theoretical guideline for the various People's Cinema practices. The thesis was particularly noteworthy because it was the sole theoretical work that streamlined the principles of the People's Cinema: for that purpose, Yi Hyo-In proposed four principles such as the working class ideology, the people's perspective, the national theme, and the typical narrative.

As late as 1994, Yi published an article entitled "Reformation and the New Way of the National Cinema Thesis", in which he reappraised the National Cinema Thesis as having been "aimless rather than hopeful, vandalistic instead of creative, and idealistic in place of realistic."⁴ For a way of the rectification of such fallacies, he suggests that "National Cinema now has to have many different sub-names, and, in that sense, the term Small Film, which had been in frequent use by the mid 1980s but forcibly marginalized by the activist filmmakers, should be recuperated."⁵ Yi's recognition of the idea of Small Film seems significant because it was originally proposed as an alternative to "big" commercial cinema. Yi's suggestion concedes that the People's Cinema and its theoretical extension the National Cinema ironically became a "big" entity as formidable as industry cinema at least in the independent cinema sector. The KIFV declaration must have been aware of the dilemma of which Yi Hyo-In perceived, and set forth the Independent Cinema under whose name to accommodate as many and various independent filmmaking practices as possible.

I propose the original four principles of the National Cinema Thesis - the working class ideology, the people's perspective, the national theme, and the typical narrative - as the guideline

in mapping out the themes and narratives of the Independent Cinema. It is true that the majority of the independent films made from the 1980s through the mid 1990s tended to stress, in one way or another, the working class ideology and the people's perspective. In applying the two directives into the plot, the films utilized the typical characters such as the laborer and student activist and the typical narrative that unfolds around the labor struggle and student activism.

The national theme drew a unanimous support not only from independent cineastes but also from the people involved with the industry cinema, as it was evidenced in the collective struggle against the UIP's direct film distribution in South Korea in 1988. To be precise, the national theme the National Cinema Thesis forwarded was based on a non-Hollywood, anti-bourgeois nationalism. However, the popular reception among the filmmakers diluted the conceptual specificity and took it as the cinema with pure national theme unadulterated by the Hollywood influence. In the aforementioned 1994 essay "Reformation and the New Way of the National Cinema Thesis" Yi Hyo-In brings up *Sopyonje* (Im Kwon-Taek, 1994), a megahit film that marked the renaissance of South Korean cinema in the 1990s, and asks if the film can be a model of the National Cinema. He answers in the positive on the ground that *Sopyonje* showed the possibility that "*our* cinema dealing with *our* story can be well received by *us*."⁶ (Italics mine) Even the standard bearer of the National Cinema Thesis calls for "us" as the homogenized national entity, unwittingly dismissing the possible non-national others created by the class and gender differences. The emergence of the Independent Cinema as the all-encompassing terminology indicated that the principles the National Cinema Thesis enacted to qualify "proper" independent cinema were gradually modified and resolved. Then it should be worthwhile to

examine how the modification and resolution of the old elements actually took place in the narratives of the independent cinema after the late 1990s.

I have reviewed 70 fiction films independently produced between 1998 and 2005: most of them received awards from the Seoul Independent Film Festival (SIFF). I have made a rather eclectic choice of some films for symptomatic readings of the currents of the Independent Cinema. Free from any ideological restraints such as the working class ideology, the films normally focus on individual protagonists who are situated in a multiple nexus of social relationship. For instance, *A Beautiful Wife* (dir. Yi Yu-Rim, 17min 20sec, 2004) concerns a working-class widow whose husband has presumably committed suicide in the middle of a labor strike. The coworkers of the husband urge the widow to testify the husband's death as a way of labor struggle. But the management also tries to settle the case as a mere accident. The wife's dilemma is that she is badly in need of money, the possible source of which is the compensation money granted to her when she agrees with the company. However, in that case the ongoing strike will seriously lose its momentum. None of the two sides cares about the wife's personal agony over the broken family. Intermittent flashback sequences show that the wife has been very much concerned about her family's wellbeing rather than that of the labor class. The final scene, in which the heroine reaches her last decision, relies on ambiguity and challenges the viewer's expectation because her decision is never revealed.

A Beautiful Wife seems at first to recycle the typical narrative about labor struggle, but it dramatically departs from the conventional storytelling by adopting a woman's intimate viewpoint. The cause of the labor movement carries little weight in the story. However, the pleasure and happiness of the woman come to the fore. In other words, the ideological frontline

that the typical narrative has built upon the confrontation between labor and capital implodes to reveal various obstacles that the individual has to face in protecting her personal security and wellbeing. Working class ideology is not much to her, but she has to find the ideology on her own to secure the personal realm of happiness. Obviously, the company management provides little help to her either. The personal appears to be *terra incognita* where lies the third realm that the two existing sides have barely dreamt of.

In detecting the contour of the personal, it is notable that the personal finds its distinctive role in women's films. We have already seen in chapter 4 that women's films contributed to recuperate women's personal voices buried beneath national history and the *minjung* discourse. Likewise, in the Independent Cinema women make the major voice to fill the newly found area of the personal.

Feel Good Story (dir. Yi Kyung-Mi, 36min, 2004) is the film about two female white-collar workers. Sharing the same office, the two are polar opposites in their characters: Ji-Young is keenly sensitive about the absurdities of the surrounding world, and Hee-Young is a naive and carefree person. Things are complicated when both receive a secret order from the president to falsify company documents making it appear that the company has made less profit in tax report. Ji-Young, echoing a student activist character in the People's Cinema, loathes the clandestine job but has to perform it to secure her living, while Hee-Young, suffering from financial difficulty, is on the happy side for extra income. As their interactions on duty intensify, a fire breaks out in the company building nearly killing the president. Although an incidental airing for rest keeps the two women safe from the fire, they become embroiled in a quarrel about the ongoing situation. Ji-Young cannot help resenting the controlling president, her patriarchal father, and the

capitalistic system that runs exploiting the unprivileged people like Hee-Young. The story finalizes with the women developing friendship with each other. This friendship hardly evolves into the class consciousness or the people's solidarity; but it only offers an evidence of the two persons' mutual understanding.

The personal rests on the individual subject detached from the single collective identity like the working class. Divided from the collective unity, the personal loses the former character once imparted by the collective whole: for example, a laborer as the intransigent male worrier. Now the personal becomes the field where the individual subject probes a new relationship with others. In other words, the personal unfolds the ideological junction where "I" and the "Other(s)" make intensive encounters. It follows that the personal stands on the coexistence of diverse individual subjects. Thus, the personal is fundamentally plural. With this characterization of the personal in mind, it is worth noting Michael Hardt's and Antonio Negri's description of the working class as below;

The concept of the working class has come to be used as an exclusive concept, not only distinguishing the workers from the owners who do not need to work to support themselves, but also separating the working class from others who work. In its most narrow usage the concept is employed to refer only to industrial workers, separating from workers in agriculture, services, and other sectors; at its most broad, working class refers to all waged workers, separating them from the poor, unpaid domestic laborers, and all others who do not receive a wage.⁷

If the working class ideology permeates the universe that the People's Cinema tries to establish, the personal focuses on the outside of it. And in the outside realm the personal finds the plural voices with which Hardt and Negri associate "the poor, unpaid domestic laborers, and all other who do not receive a wage," that is, social minorities in the broadest sense. In a similar fashion, the personal in the Independent Cinema unfolds in such a way that women's voices were the first

and foremost to be recuperated, but immediately afterwards social minorities such as the poor, the homeless, and the disabled came to occupy the narrative space.

A Starving Day (dir. Kim Dong-Hyun, 20min, 2004) portrays a day in the life of a handicapped man who has no means to support his little daughter. The hungry man wanders around the streets begging for coins or trying to steal empty houses. However, what he earns is nothing but a glass of water offered by an old woman. His last attempt of the day to break into a vacant house proves to be successful, but he finds neither money nor food within. He hopelessly falls asleep in the house, and later in the night he awakes to run away from the spot of the attempted theft. A tracking shot follows the man's desperate escapade and shows that while running his crippled body returns to a normal condition, implying that the water he drank that afternoon works a magic. The main character is described as a helpless victim in the society lack of a reliable welfare system. Thus the film calls attention to the unprivileged segment of the people, who may not have any representative but the camera.

Papa (dir. Lee Su-Jin, 14min 52sec, 2004) puts forward a father-daughter relationship. The daughter Min-Ju is an autism patient whose budding sexuality brings about unrestrained acts of masturbation. The father takes measures to control Min-Ju's physical desire by handcuffing her at first, and then by trying to buy some "sex donators" on the street: because of this unusual action a policeman arrests and detains him for a day. The last sequence makes a shocking turn by showing that the father has no choice but to have sexual intercourse with the daughter. This story is not about the taboo of incest, but about the matter of sexual desire of the disabled. *Papa* sheds light on the extremely overshadowed part of the society. But it obviously shows the thematic tendency that the personal elements of the Independent Cinema has adopted.

The emergence of the individual subjects equipped with the personal perspective does not necessarily mean that the *minjung* elements in the People's Cinema have completely disappeared in the Independent Cinema. Rather, the *minjung* becomes situated within complexity of social relationships. For instance, if *minjung* formerly evoked the uniform imagery of a male, politically conscious, and resistant figure, the individualized *minjung* takes up various roles in accordance with the immediate situations in which s/he is involved.

Bread and Milk (dir. Won Shin-Yon, 28min 8sec, 2003) depicts a suicide attempt of a railway worker who has recently received notification of layoff. His plan is to put his body on the railway to be run over by a passing train with the aim to disguise his intentional death as an industrial accident. In the meantime, his wife constantly calls him to find fault with his negligence of their injured son and his financial incapability. He eventually throws his cell phone away to lay himself down on the railway to die. A moment of comic relief comes when he has to leave the tracks in order to settle a sudden assault of diarrhea. When he comes back, however, he finds a body size rock is actually blocking the railway line. Without the cell phone he cannot contact the control center. Now, instead of a suicide attempt he begins to try for dear life to break the rock before an oncoming train collides with it. The ending shows that the man saves the train and returns home to his nagging wife and poverty. The *minjung* character is not just a laborer harboring resentment against the management or capital. He is also a loving father, an incompetent husband, and a lonely victim of the industrial structure. Thus the *minjung* character enlarges the scope of its self-expression by addressing various social relations and processes.

Relaying the People's Cinema, the Independent Cinema has transformed the cinema of resistance into the cinema of observation. Along with it the question of the national has also

changed its signification. The National Cinema Thesis as the theoretical guideline of the People's Cinema regarded the national as the principle to be materialized in the form and content of the resistant cinema. The more popular reception of the national in the industry cinema was also confined to the efforts to realize the cultural identity of Korea in the film narrative. The Independent Cinema, however, liberates the national from the politics of the resistance and cultural identity. Instead, the national merely functions as an invisible territory where the aforementioned social relations and processes reside. Since the individual subjects are constantly moving, breaking the old social nexuses and forming new ones, the national becomes a discourse which is always under the process of becoming. On his comments on the Third Cinema question, Paul Willemen says:

Cultural identity no longer precedes the discourse as something to be recovered; it is by trying to put an understanding of the multifarious social-historical processes at work in a given situation into discourse that the national-cultural-popular identity begins find a voice. Tradition(s) can no longer be seen as sacred cows: some are to be criticized, other to be mobilized or inflected (...). Nationalist solidarity thus gives way to the need for critical lucidity which becomes the intellectual's special task.⁸

The "intellectual's special task" to satisfy the "need for critical lucidity" also accounts for the role accorded to the South Korean independent cinema. The national is equivalent to the cultural field where the independent cinema works for a critical lucidity. However, the acquisition of the critical lucidity can be tricky given that the national is the discourse of constant becoming. The Independent Cinema is not a mirror reflecting the objects forming the national, but is the subject itself that fills the bowl of the national. The various human relationships that the films of the Independent Cinema capture in their narratives are nothing but the aspects of the national, the object of critical lucidity.

I have argued in the study that the rise of “new waves” in national cinema is formed in the interaction between foreign new wave discourse and domestic popular discourse. This thesis presupposes the fundamental division between the two elements, and proves befitting in the history of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement. On the other hand, it is also the case that such dichotomy was the conceptual tool for the independent filmmakers to build the aesthetic and expressive space of their own national cinema. Now the sense that the national is an unstable flow may vitiate the foreign/national split and render fundamentally unstable the establishment of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement. However, the emergence of the individual subject and the phantasmagoric human relationships that the individual character tries to rebuild, all these point to the new matrix where the independent cinema is taking root. As a result, the new amalgamations between the new and the old and between the foreign and the domestic will also appear in that cultural sphere.

¹ The Association of Korea Independent Film & Video (KIFV), *Korean Independent Film & Video* [*Hankuk Tongnipyŏnghwaŭi Modunkŏt*] (Seoul: KIFV, 1995), p. 27.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Yi Hyo-In, “Reformation and the New Way of the National Cinema Thesis” in *Vision and Pride of Our Cinema* [*Wuri Yŏnghwaŭi Mongsangua Oman*] (Seoul: Mingŭl, 1994), p. 48.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p.XIV.

⁸ Paul Willemen, “The Third Cinema Question” in Michael T. Martin (Ed.), *New Latin American Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1997), p. 241.

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