National Cinema as a System of Comparison

Nohchool Park
(University of Seoul)

ABSTRACT

This study reviews critical literatures regarding Asian cinema, focusing on studies of Japanese cinema, to show that Western scholarship on non-Western national cinemas have been divided into two approaches: traditionalism and modernism. It argues that such a division is not merely a critical tendency but indicative of the fact that a national cinema is an internally divided construct. To support the point, this study examines Chinese film studies conducted by Chinese film critics and the history of South Korean cinema during the 1970s and 80s. Then, it proposes the hegemony model to theorize the inner structure of national cinema. It finally suggests the possibility of comparative film study that the national cinema thesis may activate.

Key Words
national cinema, Japanese cinema, Asian cinema, hegemony, comparative film study

Introduction

The idea of national cinema seems untenable for a number of reasons. It presupposes the national contents that distinguish the films of a particular nation-state from those of other countries. Ideologically, there is no defining essential national characteristics waiting to be portrayed in film narratives.

The national is invented for mostly political purposes and changes in the course of history. Besides, national culture cannot be a unified whole but a consensus at the expense of various dissident voices. Thus, the inventiveness and multiplicity of the national may debunk the validity of national cinema. Despite such conceptual limitations, however, the established film scholarship has frequently enacted national cinema to review non-Western cinemas. By carving out, albeit imaginatively, national characteristics of given films, the notion allows us to speculate on differences between cinemas of various cultural backgrounds.

For instance, Kristin Thompson maintains that the concept of national cinema arose in Europe during the first decade after World War I as a part of the nation-rebuilding projects (259-260). Germany in particular formed the UFA (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft) trust as "a move to boost overall German [film] exports"(Thompson 296), assigning it the task "to protect the interests of German films on the world market in peacetime"(295). Although Thompson describes the UFA as an example of "internationalism" of the post-war European cinema (283), 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"(Thompson 282). While disparaging the German films that claimed to contain in it typical German contents, the French filmmakers and critics as well 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 (Thompson 282). Thus, the notion of national cinema originally held two axiomatic premises. First, national cinema is to be defined in relation to foreign cinemas. Second, a national cinema assumes either pre-given or at least unrepresented elements of the national to substantiate the cinematic representations.

But the two aspects of national cinema form a circular logic. If a national cinema is to be filled with national elements, national identity is to be confirmed by comparison with other national cinemas. That is, the existence of other national cinemas offers the ultimate condition that guarantees the national identity of a country's cinematic outputs. Like the Saussurian system of language, national cinema functions as a system which imposes the order of difference and comparison on films, rather than representing innate national substance of a film text. As a conceptual system for differentiation and comparison, the national cinema thesis has encouraged film scholars to find how an oeuvre of films produced in a particular country utilizes elements of the national to secure their cultural identity.

To a similar effect, Paul Willemen has proposed a comparative film study project. Hypothesizing that cinemas within a nation-state registers in it the processes in which the country adopts capitalism, Willemen poses the question regarding comparative film studies like this: "how do cinemas emerging from within different socio-historical formations negotiate the encounter between capitalist modernization and whatever mode of social-economic regulation and (re)production preceded that encounter?"(99) Willemen's query brings home to us the mechanism in which any national cinema becomes an annexation of dissimilar discourses. Willemen further suggests that all national cinemas' common experience, the encounter with capitalism, may be dramatized on the screen in the form of fantasy (108). The job of comparative film study is to find the ways in which the encounter is displaced, condensed, and secondarily elaborated in national cinemas (108).

This bibliographical study aims to show the inner structure of the concept of national cinema within the comparative context. It presumes that a national cinema bears in it a conflict between domestic and foreign cultural discourses, and that this division generates dynamism which motivates the changes of a national cinema in its form and content. By reviewing literatures on Japanese cinema conducted by Western scholars, this work first shows that overall studies on national cinema have been divided into two different directions:

traditionalism and modernism. For instance, aesthetic elements of the Heian period found in the pre-World War II Japanese cinema may validate a traditionalist approach to Japanese national cinema. On the other hand, the modernist view stresses the nation's rather contemporary experiences to show how its cinema reacts to the modern surroundings in order to construct unique stylistics of its own. Then it further examines Chinese film studies undertaken by Chinese film scholars to show that the fundamental division found in Western film scholarship on Japanese cinema repeats itself within the Chinese film study. But the division serves to open up dialogues between different national cinemas. This point will be discussed in detail in the last part of this study, which tackles the history of South Korean cinema in the 1970s and 80s.

Discourses on Japanese Cinema

The Euro-American critical discourses on Japanese cinema have moved through several phases, while each having advanced significant issues. One of the main issues involving the Japanese film discourse concerns whether Japanese cinema has constituted its own style rooted in Japan's unique national history. The initial critical approaches to Japanese film history generally took a positivist approach in which original characteristics of Japanese cinema were to be found in the tradition of Japanese popular arts and in Japanese film auteurs who had inherited and preserved the "Japaneseness" of their national cinema by way of, for instance, tutelage system.

Joseph Anderson's and Donald Richie's *The Japanese Film: Art and Industry* exemplifies this early historiographical position. Defining Japanese film industry as "directors' cinema"(19) the authors provide a chronology of Japanese film directors whose artistic visions are clarified nowhere else than in their films. According to Anderson and Richie, the *benshi* tradition in the early Japanese cinema made a determining impact on the practices of the country's film production and consumption in subsequent periods. *Benshi*

appears as a successor of on-stage reciters or musicians who performed *joruri* or *nagauta* for Kabuki and Bunraku, a stage performance and a traditional doll-drama, respectively (23). *Benshi* did not stop at a mere explanatory role of silent films, but interpreted moving images in order to create coherent stories out of them. It means that stories construed out of one film may vary depending on interpretations of different *benshi* figures. *Benshi* performers were beloved by the audiences as an artist and eventually "the *benshi* rather than the film became the box-office attraction"(25).

The *benshi*'s archetypal role as an authorial film artist was relayed by film directors: in this way, the development of Japanese cinema would be attributed to the talents of film directors. It is reported that Norimasa Kaeriyama, an innovative early-day filmmaker, introduced the long, medium, and close-up shots, together with realistic acting style, to Japanese cinema in the 1910s (Anderson and Richie 36). Such a lofty status of the director has been guaranteed within the unique operative mechanism of Japanese film industry, which Anderson and Richie call the "director system"(346). This director system has been in turn sustained by a tutelage system through which established directors mentor assistant directors, teaching them accumulated heritages of Japanese film style. Consequently, the notion of director's cinema accounts for the peculiar Japanese outlook on life in the national cinema.

Noel Burch's *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in Japanese cinema* focuses on the visual style of Japanese cinema and its historical consistency until the 1970s Japanese films. Burch's innovative view is that once major aspects of Japanese aesthetic were consolidated between the ninth and twelfth centuries, they survived even into the 1970s Japanese cinema determining "Japan's principal modes of filmic representation"(26). Analyzing a Heian poetry, Burch argues that "the 'Japanese mind' rejects linearity and the 'transparency of the signifier'"and that the inscription of the signifying process in the text constitutes the essential characteristic of Japanese art, part of which is Japanese cinema (47). Ozu Yasuziro's films, for example, are filled with seemingly abrupt pillow shots and de-centering visual

matches. However, they are the results of Ozu's loyalty to the Japanese spatial orientation which respects "the entire (not linear) experience of space in the most essential respects"(160). In a similar fashion, Mizoguchi Kenji's autographical usage of long shot, as part of "distancing system" in Burch's term, bears a direct influence of Bunraku the traditional doll theatre (227).

According to Burch, all of these aesthetic consistencies between the traditional Japanese arts and Japanese cinema became possible thanks to the absence of any significant political revolution in modern Japanese history. However, socio-political turmoil in Japan in the aftermath of World War II bears witness to "the most eccentric cinema of revolt that the world has known"(331): this statement indicates Japanese New Wave cinema from the 1960s to 70s. One example is Oshima Nagisa's films that dramatize the conflict between Japan's traditional values such as collectivism and humanistic individualism rooted in the West.

Opposing the traditionalist approach discussed thus far, David Bordwell in his *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* warns us not to fall into the cliché of traditionalism such as "Zen Buddhism" and "Japanese aesthetics" in explaining the uniqueness of Ozu Yasujiro's films: he claims that traditionalism usually lacks causal evidences (26-27). Instead, Bordwell maintains that Ozu's films can be located at the center of three concentric circles: the outermost circle is the general features of Japanese society while the middle one contains "such forces as Ozu's working situation, the film industry, and the proximate historical circumstances of his milieu"(17). The conditions of this middle circle are what Bordwell tries to explicate through his method of historical poetics. Ozu is considered to have worked with a "piecemeal style" which dissects each scene into short static shots, being akin to Hollywood cinema from 1917 to 1925, particularly the films by Fairbanks, Lloyd, Lubitsch, and William de Mille (23-24). Besides, the contents of Ozu's films make frequent reference to urban life style of modern Japan, which is quite opposite to the conventional identification of Ozu's films with "ascetic otherworldliness"(33). In discussing Ozu's "pillow shot," Bordwell holds that

"Ozu built his norms out of a revising and decentering of the American cinema"(158). These findings imply that the genealogy of the Ozu film should be found not in the mythical tradition of the Japanese art but in the down-to-earth historical realities.

David Desser's *Eros Plus Massacre* is to be seen as a theoretical effort to overcome style-centrism in Western discourse on Japanese cinema. Desser states that "too many approaches to Japanese cinema in general have tended to dehistoricize the Japanese New Wave" and that such efforts consist of "studies which show Japanese cinema's continuity with traditional Japanese culture" and "studies which attempt to prove Oshima's continuity with Ozu"(3). What Desser tries to retrieve in his study of the Japanese New Wave is the social, political, and cultural concerns in the 1960s in which the films in question were actively engaged. Relying on Renato Poggioli's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Desser characterizes the New Wave cinema not only as the product of political liberalization of the 1960s' Japan but also as a cinematic movement to challenge the tutelage system (the director-assistant director system) in the Japanese film industry (4-5). Indeed, various issues such as student movement, national identity, and gender problems are rendered in the New Wave films including *Night and Fog in Japan*, *Cruel Story of Youth*, and *The Catch*. Thus, Desser sees these social matters immanent in modern Japan as an intrinsic momentum for the directors to practice stylistic experiments in the New Wave cinema.

Tadao Sato's *Currents in Japanese Cinema* is significant in two ways: first, it was originally written in Japanese by a native Japanese film critic; second, it basically sees film as a mass medium that has fed on its popularity among Japanese audiences. Sato finds the unique Japaneseness of Japanese cinema in type characters and their tenacious popularity as public idols. The characters like Tateyaku the macho man and Nimaime the effeminate but sensitive man, both of which were originated in Kabuki, have persistently appeared in Japanese films catering to the changes and demands of public taste. Kurosawa Akira often employed Tateyaku characters to create "a new ideal of Japanese

manhood"(Sato 28), while Mizoguchi Kenji made use of Nimaime-type characters to ironically set off the tragic destiny of struggling heroines as in *Osaka Elegy* and in *Sisters of Gion* (Sato 22).

The public-relatedness of film culture is also emphasized in Sato's research on the 1960s' Japanese cinema. According to Sato, with the advent of television culture in the 1960s, "the movie theater audience came to consist largely of young bachelors who loved erotic and violent films, whose continued success in turn kept older men and women from movie theaters"(236). It explains the emergence of lone-wolf characters as well as the phenomenal success of yakuza films during the period. In short, avoiding such grand paradigms as politics, economics, and aesthetics, Sato restores commoners' history of Japanese cinema in the insider's perspective.

While Sato's writings are more like a cultural history of Japanese cinema, *Reframing Japanese Cinema* (edited by Arthur Nolletti, Jr. and David Desser) mobilizes Western disciplines such as psychoanalysis, structuralism, and cognitivism in order to bring the myth of Japanese cinema under the analytic discourses of the West. Gosho Heinosuke's unique style of decoupage is understood in light of Ernst Lubitsch's influence on Gosho's films (Arthur Nolletti, Jr. 3-32). Robert N. Cohen reappraises Mizoguchi's *The Life of Oharu* as a patriarchal text that foregrounds the woman and her body as a fetishistic object (33-55). David Desser formulates a narrative structure in samurai films, which carry methodological parallels with Vladimir Propp's structural approach to Russian children's stories in his *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (145-165). The efforts to clarify all intents and purposes of the Japanese film style within the magnetic field of Western theories become obvious in two other studies. Kathe Geist argues that Ozu Yasujiro's style is an integral part of the narrative process and that "[Ozu's] frequent use of repetition and ellipsis do not 'impose their will' on Ozu's plots" but "they *are* his plots"(94). David Bordwell suggests that the decorative classicism found in the pre-War Japanese cinema was the consciously intended artistic style in an experiment done to transcend the denotative and thematic style (328-346). Thus,

Reframing Japanese Cinema forms a typical attempt that juxtaposes Western theory and Japanese practice.

Stephen Heath's "Anata mo" deserves attention because he tries to find filmic evidence that verifies the applicability of Lacanian psychoanalytic film theory not to a Western film but to Oshima Nagisa's *Death by Hanging*. Heath initially reminds us that Lacan stressed the evanescent quality of the look that leaves human subject in ignorance of what lies beyond appearance and eternally blocks the subject from encountering object *a*, the real (56-57). Then he goes on to argue that in *Death by Hanging* "the images [are] constantly displaced, pushing away, multiplying levels of discourse, breaking any unity of discursive position"(59). Since the hero's past or memory is reenacted by policemen while the reenactment's affinity with reality is continuously questioned, the narrative of the film "is emptied in the very time it is developed"(58). The resolution of the narrative is impossible just as the Lacanian real, object *a*, is eternally evanescent. According to Heath, this situation results in opening up the "political space of narrative film"(59) in which the linearity of narrative film lays bare its fundamental multiplicity and the myth of a unified subject is also challenged.

As mentioned earlier, anthropological approaches such as Noel Burch's tend to confine the discussion on Japanese cinema to the complicated and ill-defined category of Japanese cultural identity. David Bordwell in his "Our Dream Cinema: Western Historiography and the Japanese Film" questions the notion of Japanese cinema as a self-complete national artifact. He claims that the Western film scholars self-delusively project their wishful modes of film styles and filmmaking practices onto Japanese cinema, which in turn becomes *the* incarnation of pure avante-gardism, genuine auteurism, and all-out political radicalism. Bordwell draws attention to the fact that the cinema from its inception in Japan has been considered as "a distinctively Western gadget" while Hollywood movies have played a crucial part in the development of Japanese filmmaking (46-47). He also points out the labor-intensive and paternalistic management of the Japanese film industries

along with their suspicious yakuza connections to discredit the view that the masterful film auteurs with guaranteed artistic freedom have advanced distinctive Japanese film style.

To Bordwell, the perennial auteuristic view on Japanese cinema has been driven to find personal visions of film directors. In so doing, however, it fails to "relate film style to a conception of filmic construction in general; notions of form, function, audience experience, and extrafilmic relations"(52). In the discussion of Ozu Yasujiro's films Bordwell conclusively remarks that Ozu was a "modernist director" as is evidenced in his much exposure to and daring violation of the Hollywood editing style (54). Despite the ensuing refutations against his description of Ozu as a modernist, Bordwell insists that Japanese cinema in general not to mention Ozu's films has developed in a close relationship with foreign particularly Hollywood films. He believes that primary print data in Japanese, not the questionable personal investigations, will sustain this point.

Surmounting Dichotomy

The literatures discussed above show that the studies on Japanese cinema have been divided into two approaches: traditionalism and modernism. Such a dichotomy results from the lack of consideration of epistemology upholding the understanding of non-Western arts by Euro-American scholarship. The essays in the following can be viewed as attempts to overcome the dichotomy between the two positions. Forming a debate regarding critical methods on Japanese cinema, the studies find out Self/Other politics underlying the preceding studies on Japanese cinema. It is also notable that the spectrum of the debate moves beyond Japanese cinema to cover Asian cinemas including that of China. The terms like "dialogic" and "cross-cultural" are mobilized to equate the position of the examiner with that of the examinee.

Peter Lehman in his article "The Mysterious Orient, the Crystal Clear

Orient, the Non-Existent Orient: Dilemmas of Western Scholars of Japanese Film" provides an overview on the ways in which Western critical projects have been undertaken on Japanese cinema. According to Lehman, there are three types of biased visions on Japanese films. First, traditionalist critics such as Donald Richie and Paul Schrader tend to apprehend everything meaningful in Ozu's cinema with reference to its Oriental character and religion (6). The premise of this approach is that Japan is a mysterious place that can only be understood by proper guidance of special knowledge. Certainly, that knowledge is Western scholarship in which Japan remains as "the mysterious Orient" permanently waiting to be deciphered (6). Second, David Bordwell's formalist approach proposes the vision of the "crystal clear Orient" in which Ozu is defined as a modernist filmmaker being lined up with Dreyer, Eisenstein, and Godard (8). But positioning Ozu within the force field of Western modernism has "little or nothing to do with anything Japanese and a great deal to do with the favored projects of the Western analysts"(10). Lastly, depriving Japanese film of its national specificities constitutes "the non-existent Orient"(10). When Stephen Heath appraises Oshima Nagisa's *In the Realm of the Senses* as "the direct and ruinous remake"(10) of Max Ophuls' *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, he simply elides the consideration of Japan's cultural peculiarities. According to Lehman, all of these conceptualizations of Japanese cinema reflect only the current interests of Western academic film scholarship in one way or another. In this process, they become dismissive of Japanese perspectives on Japanese films.

Chris Berry's "Chinese Women's Cinema'" can be taken as a reply to Lehman's question. Berry attends to the unique feature of contemporary China's socio-political milieu against which he projects stylistic and thematic characteristics of the latest women's films from the country. "Democratic centralism" the dominant ideology in the People's Republic since 1949 upholds consensus and resists difference (Berry 9). For this reason, "the individual is a threat to consensus ideology" in China (13). The intensive female subjectivity in Chinese women's cinema makes Berry assume that the

films "valorize subjective experience by bringing it into discourse in a society and cinema where individual subjectivity has been resisted"(15). However, in that the heroines often become assimilated into their rural homes, the symbol of collectivism, the films do not seem to resist the consensus ideology although they attend to different voices within it (17). Berry concludes that Chinese women's film "is not individualist, it is divisive, insisting on the recognition of difference"(18). This view anticipates a cross-cultural film analysis based on dialogic process.

In "Problematizing Cross-Cultural Analysis," E. Ann Kaplan sees the cross-cultural film analysis as a dialogic process through which "theorists outside the producing culture might uncover different stands of the multiple meanings than critics of the originating culture just because they bring different frameworks/theories/ideologies to the texts"(42). Therefore it can be erroneous to blindly assault Western theoretical frames for being imperialistic. Looking for indigenous ways of thinking as the only route to correct reading of alien film texts can also be mistaken, because the idea of "correct reading" itself is questionable considering that "texts themselves hide their multiple and shifting meanings"(42). For a case study, Kaplan examines two Chinese films *The Legend of TianYun Mountain* and *Army Nurse* in the perspective of Western feminism. She tentatively concludes that the films "could be said to embody a new awareness of female subjectivity, along with a resistance of interpellation by the State"(46). Nevertheless, Kaplan is cautious about such interpretation because it disregards cultural specificities of Chinese society at various levels: for example, the mutual gaze between the male and female characters is more frequent than in American films; and the sexual relations may be put forward as a metaphor "for the broader political/social/intellectual frustration of both genders"(49). The point requires us to admit that a culture's multi-dimensional aspects such as the dominant representational modes, the socio-historical context, and the collective psyche of the people must be considered in the dialogic field of cross-cultural film analysis.

Chris Berry in "Our Problem Cinema: The Challenge of Japanese Cinema"

emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural film analysis. He initially tackles the "political/hermeneutic dilemmas"(195) built in the cross-cultural analysis. Berry argues that Bordwell undertook an exhaustive research on Ozu's cinema in his *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* only to dismiss theoretical values of all other preceding studies on the director's films (198). He goes on to argue that "although Bordwell acknowledges the vast body of Japanese writing around Ozu, he picks out those comments that suit his case and dismisses the rest in classic orientalist fashion"(196). What is important to Berry is the "examination of the reception of one's object-texts in their original culture of production and circulation"(196). Therefore, he emphasizes the linguistic and cultural knowledge on the part of film analysts (197). This point in turn prefigures the necessity of the new networking of area studies (Asian studies in Berry's case) and film studies.

Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto in his "The Difficulty of Being Radical: The Discipline of Film Studies and the Postcolonial World Order" throws a suspicious eye on the epistemological premise of cross-cultural film analysis; that is, the Self/Other binarism underlying Western film scholarship. To Yoshimoto, even Kaplan's tentative approaches to non-Western particularly Chinese films would at best end up being manifestations of the "arrogance of the radical European humanist conscience"(341-342). It is so because Kaplan's "tentativeness of informal discourse can become formal knowledge if one goes to and lives in China and becomes an expert in things Chinese"(341). The "structural dilemma" of cross-cultural analysis is that "while Western critics as subject can analyze a non-Western text as object, non-Western critics are not allowed to occupy the position of subject to analyze a Western text as object," and "whatever they say is interpreted and judged only within the context of Western discourses"(346). According to Yoshimoto, Western discourses on Japanese cinema have entirely depended on the Self/Other dichotomy regardless of an individual scholar's political and theoretical vision. Therefore, flourishing Western discourse on Asian cinema does not induce cross-cultural fertilization but simply reflects the expansion of the

hegemony of Western power/knowledge, "legitimating cultural colonization of the non-West by the West"(346).

Kaplan in her *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* argues that the dimensions of the cultural relationship between the West and the non-West are so complex that they should not be reduced to the Self/Other politics outlined by Yoshimoto. To Kaplan, Yoshimoto rules out the possibilities of "voluntary" cross-cultural exchange and of the Other's acquisition of the subject position (1997:152). Furthermore, Kaplan notes that the matter of the West/non-West power inequality implicit in film studies has been taken up by "male" film historians and critics (1997:152). It means that feminist positions like Kaplan's could reveal a new space for cross-cultural communication which has been ignored by male-centered criticism and historiography. Kaplan evokes the fact that Yoshimoto originally emphasized constructing "a new position of knowledge through a careful negotiation between the self and the Other"(1997:152). This new epistemological position, Kaplan believes, would be found somewhere in-between the polarized gender, ethnic, and cultural discourses.

The Case of Chinese Film Study

From the discussion thus far, one may notice that even the claims calling attention to the domestic voices for understanding Japanese and Chinese cinemas are prone to ignore that the indigenous views can also be multiple and contradictory. Non-Western films have developed in dialogues with Western especially Hollywood films, actively interrogating their merits and demerits. In this sense, what is most erroneous in the established scholarship on non-Western cinemas is the untested belief that there are pure non-Western attributes in them. One should be able to see the history and multiplicity of indigenous discourses produced in Asian countries on their own cinema. Several attempts to that effect have been made in Chinese film studies by

Chinese scholars.

Chinese Film Theory: A Guide to the New Era is an anthology of essays by Chinese film critics, each of which tackles the theoretical and aesthetical issues involving Chinese cinema. Bai Jingsheng in his 1979 article "Throwing Away the Walking Stick of Drama" asserts that dramatic structure based on conflicts between characters has been the primary factor for film evaluation by Chinese critics, and that such a tendency have unfairly dismissed technical elements such as the use of sound and image as insignificant (5-9). Bai's emphasis on the consideration of film technicality has generated a series of debates in Chinese film scholarship over the theatricality and literariness of cinema. For instance, Zhang Junxiang opposing Bai's position warns: "Don't ignore the literary value of film! To me, the low artistic quality of many films is not because their means of representation are clichés, but because their literary values are not high"(38).

The question remains as to whether Bai's view on the technicality of film medium shows a historical development in Chinese film theory or Zhang's stress on film's dramatic quality should be considered as an expression of true Chinese film aesthetics. Although a definitive answer is not easily available, it is clear that the question implies the conflict between form and content in film aesthetics. Whereas the consideration of film form solicits dialogues with foreign films, the respect for film content tends to highlight national characteristics, historical and cultural, in film narrative. Shao Mujun in "The Road of Innovative in Chinese Cinema" claims that "a study of the innovative road of Chinese film cannot be done without … [considering] current situation of world cinema, with special attention to Western film." At the same time, however, Yuan Wenshu holds that "as long as films reflect life, they are national"(110). Dialectical interactions between these two positions have produced the current issues of Chinese film theory.

Indeed, the discussions collected in *Film in Contemporary China: Critical Debates, 1979-1989* converge around such two opposing positions underlying contemporary Chinese film scholarship as those of traditionalism vs.

modernism, form vs. content, ideology vs. culture, and so on. But it is also notable that the conflict between the two perspectives has given way to pluralist positions. Zhong Dianfei, as an attempt to resolve the critical debate sparked by Bai Jingsheng's "Throwing Away the Walking Stick of Drama," claims that the "separation of film from drama is both necessary and inevitable, ···. Nevertheless, film and drama share some common principles. Consequently, the 'theory of divorce' serves only as a figure of speech by which to promote the progression of film itself"(10). In a similar fashion, other critics raise their voices to support compromise betweem formerly conflicting views in film criticism: Wang Zhongming mentions that "we cannot simply use the countryside to deny urban life and use the past to negate the present"(26); and Chen Xihe also says that "(the Chinese) cultural tradition, which arose in the environment of an agrarian civilization ··· must be revitalized into a new form of reality"(55). Li Shaobai places emphasis on the development of a consistent body of film theory in order to realize a practical assistance to Chinese filmmaking practices (176). For that purpose, Li claims that "the free expression of diverse scholarly viewpoints" should be guaranteed, which is to "let a hundred schools of thought contend"(177) in Chinese film scholarship.

Hegemonic Construction of South Korean National Cinema

Seeing from Chinese film critics' studies on Chinese cinema, it is obvious that at least two different approaches, reminiscent of traditionalism and modernism in Western scholarship on Japanese cinema, are involved in defining the characteristics of the national cinema. It means that a national cinema is not a unified whole but a fundamentally divided entity. But further studies are required to see how the different elements work within the field of one single national cinema. Here the hegemony model is to be proposed to explain the constructive mechanism of national cinema. The concept of hegemony proffered by Antonio Gramsci enables us to understand not only

the coexistence of different elements in a national cinema but also the change of dynamics among them. For theorizing the hegemony model, the history of South Korean cinema since the 1970s onwards offers another fitting example. South Korean cinema in the given period shows us how the national cinema is built upon the annexation of the domestic and foreign cultural discourses.

The 1970s is relatively neglected in historical writings on South Korean 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). 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"(2). This remarkable silence about South Korean cinema in the 1970sand 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 (*amhukki*), which Korean scholars have routinely employed to characterize 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 [Pak Jeong-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 twelve. (182)

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 evaluates the period. 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 (356). Under the circumstances, "students, intellectuals, and remnant aristocrats" imposed on themselves the duty to admonish and even resist the military regime (Cumings 356). 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 period led 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. Filmmaker Ha Kil-Chong 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"(Ha cited in Yi 78). But this diagnosis accounts for the cultural ground on which a new film generation who had strong self-consciousness about their national cinema emerged. Indeed, the young filmmakers in their thirties and university students in their twenties were eager to grasp advanced film art and advocated 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 (Youngsang Shidae, 1975-1978) and

the Kaidu Club (1974-1977), and also in the youth-cultural activities at the time.[8)]

It should be noted that the new film generation took in foreign national cinema movements in order to rearticulate them within the context of South Korea. The members of the filmmaking groups in the 1970s tried to emulate Western cinema movements such as the French New Wave and the New American Cinema. Besides, the 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 Pak Jeong-Hee government limited the students' viewing experiences. In the process, the students discovered New German Cinema representing their own cultural aspirations. Its catchphrase "The old cinema is dead" (Elsaesser 21) 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.

Under the Chun Doo-Hwan military regime (1980-1987) the independent cinema movement provided a venue of resistance against the political oppression of the government including censorial film policies. The idea of people's cinema (*minjung yonghwa*) was adapted from the New Latin Cinema Movement and widely applied to the independent filmmaking throughout the 1980s. People's cinema refers to a broad range of the independent films that committed to authentic representation of the needs and aspirations of lower-class people (*minjung*). The general aim of people's cinema was to document the underrepresented aspects of the social realities experienced by the lower class and the popular struggle to transform the ruling system that

8) For a detailed discussion on the South Korean film movements including the Visual Age Group, the Kaidu Club, and other youth-cultural activities from the 1970s to the early 1980s, see Nohchool Park, "The New Waves at the Margin: An Historical Overview of South Korean Cinema Movements 1975-84" *Journal of Japanese & Korean Cinema* 1:1 (2009), pp. 45-63.

engenders socio-political inequalities.[9)]

To understand the adaptation of the film movements from Europe and Latin America by South Korean filmmakers, one may refer to British Marxist historian George Rudé's 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"(128). 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 (Rudé 130). 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 (Rudé 130). In the context of South Korean film history, 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"(130). 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. South Korean cinema since the 1970s has undergone significant transformations through which independent cinema and imported film theories form renewed and varying relationships. In accordance with the

9) For a detailed discussion on the origin and development of people's cinema in South Korean film history, see Nohchool Park, "The Three Faces of People's Cinema: A Critical Review of the South Korean Independent Cinema Movement in the 1980s" *Acta Koreana* 12:2 (December 2009), pp. 21-51.

nature of the final mixture of the two forces, the modes and contents of the national cinema have also changed and become diverse. The question remains as to how to grasp the configuration of the mixture of the two forces.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony offers an insight to solve the problem. 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 (Gramsci 12). 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"(12). 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," that is, dominant ideology (Mouffe 193). 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 South Korean cinema. The erosion of artistic values by commercial values 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 cinemas exercise an intellectual leadership to the filmmakers and young cinephiles as well. Therefore, the intellectuals with the knowledge of art cinema wielded hegemony in 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 people's cinema. People's cinema also challenged the moral leadership of the art cinema for not being able to represent

the political and cultural interests of lower classes. Instead, militant filmmakers, the majority of whom were university student or recent graduates, acquired the moral leadership. Consequently, the independent cinema movement inspired by New Latin American Cinema came to take the intellectual leadership, calling for militant cinema as the ethos of the South Korean national cinema in the 1980s.

Conclusive Remarks

I have mentioned that the concept of national cinema provides a system of differentiation and comparison between cinematic outputs from various cultural backgrounds. Given that a national cinema is a hegemonic construct in which heterogenic cultural elements temporarily constitute compromise equilibrium, the comparison activated by such national cinema thesis should also be a continuously ongoing project. It naturally opens up the possibility of comparative film study. The comparative film study envisaged through the fundamental divisiveness underlying national cinema is to be conducted by considering the different discourses filling the national cinema in question. In practice, the mistaken belief that a national cinema has its unique contents offers no foundation for comparison between national cinemas. But the fact that a national cinema necessarily has in it the hegemonic formations of heterogeneous discourses enables us to see how such configurations operate and differentiate in diverse national cinemas. National cinema as a hegemonic construct also sheds light on the performative parts that the subjects of national cinema - filmmakers, critics, and audiences - actively play.

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