

Screening the Past: Historiography of Contemporary South Korean Cinema, 1998-2008

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ABSTRACT

Screening the Past: Historiography of Contemporary South Korean Cinema, 1998-2008
(Under the direction of Joanne Hershfield)

This dissertation examines cinematic representations of history on contemporary South Korean screen and the practices of film historiography in South Korea during a decade of democratic regimes are the subjects of this study. Between 1998 and 2008, during two liberal presidencies, the Korean film industry flourished and some of the most critical and traumatic events in the past were re-visited and re-visioned in popular films. *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* employ alternative re-writings of the past, present, and future to portray the experiences of Japanese colonial occupations. The Korean War is re-examined in a more ambiguous and critical light in *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, while *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation* strive for capturing people's history, not an officially imposed version of History, in telling of the Gwangju Democratization Movement. As complex social constructions, the films analyzed in this dissertation reveal that South Koreans are finally able to ruminate on their past in a less simplistic and more complex manner without censorship.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I. Introduction

Today, the South Korean film industry holds one of the most successful local film businesses outside of Hollywood.¹ Starting with *Shiri* in 1999,² many hugely successful indigenous films have filled the screens of South Korean movie theaters. In 2006, *The Host*, directed by Bong Joon-Ho, sold more than 13 million tickets nationwide in a country whose population was estimated at around 47 million. *Splendid Vacation*,³ the film that directly narrates the stories of the Gwangju Democratization Movement, one of the most traumatic events in recent South Korean history, attracted more than 7 million people to theaters in 2007. It had more admissions than Hollywood blockbusters like *Pirates of the Caribbean: at World's End*, *Spider-Man 3*, and *Harry Potter and the*

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the terms “Korea” and “Korean” in this work refer to South Korea and South Koreans, respectively.

² *Shiri* [*Shwiri*]. Dir. Kang Je-Gyu. 1999. Film.

³ The original title of the film in Korean, *Hwaryeohan Huega* [*Splendid Vacation*], is the name of the military operation in which Gwangju's citizens were attacked and killed on May 18, 1980. It was translated by the film production studio as *May 18* in English. Although the usual English title, *May 18*, is the date of the Gwangju Uprising, herein I use a translation of the original Korean title to emphasize its irony.

Order of the Phoenix,⁴ all released in the same year. Although the Korean film industry has a strong domestic appeal, compared with many other nations, it is still challenging for a local film to achieve more box office success than a Hollywood blockbuster. It was quite surprising to witness the success of *Splendid Vacation* over these Hollywood blockbusters, especially considering the gravity of the subject matter.

Splendid Vacation's narrative centers around two brothers, Minwoo and Jinwoo, Shinae (Minwoo's love interest), and Park Heung-Soo (Shinae's father).⁵ Based on the Gwangju Democratic Uprising, the film depicts events in chronological order as it portrays the lives of people in Gwangju, a small city south of Seoul in May 1980. In the spring of 1980, a government-sponsored massacre was inflicted upon the citizens of Gwangju when they resisted an illegal coup. Depending on sources, between 200 and 2,000 people were killed, including women and children. Although the exact number of casualties remains in dispute, it is widely acknowledged that a large number of innocent bystanders were killed in Gwangju. All but one of the main characters in *Splendid Vacation* die at the end.

The Gwangju Uprising is one of the most controversial chapters of modern South Korean history, and it played a crucial role in the democratization of South Korea. Some citizens were massacred, and others participated as killers, but most Koreans remained complicit by keeping their distance and feeling guilty about not being able to stop the tragedy. For years, the country's authoritarian regimes forbade speaking of the massacre,

⁴ *Pirates of the Caribbean: at World's End*. Dir. Gore Verbinski. 2007. Film., *Spider-Man 3* Dir. Sam Raimi. 2007. Film., and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Dir. David Yates. 2007. Film. For specific numbers of admissions, refer to Appendix.

⁵ In this work, Korean names are written as they are in Korea, surname first and given name second (e.g., Kim Soyoung) unless the person's name has already gained currency in English, with given name first, surname second (e.g., Kyung Hyun Kim).

and it is still a very sensitive issue. As Lee Chang-Dong, the director of *Peppermint Candy*, another film about Gwangju, has said, being the massacre's passive spectators made people feel like they were tacit collaborators.⁶ The Gwangju killings affected everyone in South Korea even though the victims came mostly from Gwangju.

Shot in black and white, the last scene of *Splendid Vacation* is a wedding ceremony for Shinae and Minwoo. It cannot be "real," since all the characters present at the wedding, except Shinae, were killed earlier in the film. Everyone is happy and smiling, but Shinae remains grim and stern. As the only survivor, she is left alone to endure sadness and despair for the rest of her life. The fictional Shinae represents those Koreans who live with the memory of Gwangju and bear the responsibility of carrying on its legacy. As Shinae requests in the film, Koreans will not forget those who courageously resisted injustice and died as a result. They will remember them.⁷

At the time *Splendid Vacation* was released, it was unexpected to see a production of a costly film directly portraying Gwangju because of the longstanding official prohibition against mentioning the Gwangju killings, in addition to the national shame and communal guilt over it. Even more surprising was the film's success. Ahn Sung-Gi and Kim Sang-Kyung, who played main roles in the film, are well recognized but not necessarily for their box office appeal. Nor does *Splendid Vacation* feature stunning visual effects or spectacles. A large portion of the audience for this film, which is set in the fairly recent past, was not even born when the events occurred. These seeming contradictions made me want to find out why *Splendid Vacation* was so successful and what this success means in the context of contemporary Korean society.

⁶ Kim Soyoung, "Do Not Include Me in Your 'Us': *Peppermint Candy* and the Politics of Difference." *Korea Journal* 46.1 (Spring 2006): 60-83. Print. This discussion is expanded in Chapter 3.

⁷ Shinae's actions in the film are discussed further in Chapter 3.

My study began with questions: What enabled this painful historical memory and sensitive political matter to be produced as a film? What made the film popular? And what did the viewers think about the film?

This dissertation, the result of those initial questions, examines the representations of critical historical events in recent South Korean films produced between 1998 and 2008. It analyzes the practices of film historiography in popular films during the decade under two liberal presidents, Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun.⁸ Historical films contribute to the construction of national narrative, and employ particular narrative and aesthetic strategies to promote certain political messages. I am particularly interested in the national narratives that these historical films uphold, and want to learn about the nexus between cinema, history, narrative, nation, and identity.

Historiography—“the study of the way history has been and is written”⁹—reflects concerns, assumptions, and perspectives of the present day. Interpretations of the past—that is, histories—speak to the needs of the present. There are no objective facts of the past; history is always mediated, subjective, and constructed via individual biases. History is always ideological; the study of past is also inseparable from discussions of identity, individual and communal.¹⁰ In the present work, I focus on the uses of the past in the present by closely examining cinematic representations.

⁸ Kim Dae-Jung was President of South Korea (Republic of Korea) from 1998 to 2003 and Roh Moo-Hyun was in office between 2003 and 2008. In terms of political regime changes in South Korea, refer to Appendix.

⁹ Conal Furay and Michael J. Salevouris. *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide*. Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1988: 223. Print.

¹⁰ Many scholars have argued about ideological bias and individual penchants for studying the past (most famously, Hayden White, along with Keith Jenkins, Patrick Finney, Louis O. Mink, Marc Ferro, Natalie Zemon Davis, Robert Rosenstone, and Marcia Landy, among others). I will further discuss the existing literature later in this chapter.

Of the vast number of important past events, only certain ones are chosen to be represented on film. Films about particular events are produced many times, while others are not made into movies at all. On the South Korean screen, subjects like the Japanese colonial occupation and the Korean War have been dramatized many times, whereas no cinematic representation of Gwangju was made until recently. By looking at the ten most popular domestic films for each year between 1998 and 2008 (110 films total), I observed that, while there are many films set in the past, only a few recurrent events play onscreen critical roles in South Korea's narration of national history. Three such historical events form the core of analyses in this dissertation: Japanese colonialism (1910-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), and the Gwangju Democratization Movement (May 1980). Two films on each event became popular during the decade in question: *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando*, *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, and *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation* respectively.¹¹

In today's South Korea, the official history that had silenced alternative and popular histories has finally given way to different versions of recounting the national past. No longer are different and dissenting voices ignored, dismissed, and muted. Cinema responds to this freer societal zeitgeist to represent more complex and ambiguous reflections of the national past. This dissertation aims to probe cinematic representations of history, especially, how the given historical films revisit these prominent events of the past and re-tell the national narrative for the citizens of the nation. I assert that the films

¹¹ *2009 Lost Memories* [Yi-Gong-Gong-Goo Loste Memoriz]. Dir. Lee Si-Myung. 2002. Film., *Hanbando*. Dir. Kang Woo-seok. 2006. Film. (*Hanbando* means the entire Korean peninsula), *Taegukgi*. Dir. Kang Je-Gyu. 2004. Film. (The original title in Korean is *Taegukgi Hwinalimyeo*, which literally means "Waving the *Taegukgi* [South Korean national flag].") The film was released in the United States with the title of *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War.*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*. Dir. Park Kwang-Hyun. 2005. Film., *Peppermint Candy* [Baakhaa Saatang]. Dir. Lee Chang-Dong. 1999. Film., and *Splendid Vacation* [Hwaryuhan Huegaa]. Dir. Kim Ji-Hoon. 2007. Film.

examined in this study employ specific cinematic strategies to engage history in different historiographic modes.

Commercially successful films are important, as I am interested in their receptions among the general public, that is, what ordinary Korean viewers thought of these films in their (re)interpretations of critical historical events.¹² While a more thorough examination of viewer reception must be reserved for a future study, I will occasionally incorporate online postings from audience members on the *Cine 21* website (<http://www.cine21.co.kr>), as I closely engage with filmic narratives to determine what kind of national narratives these films put forth and how the audience responded to them.¹³

Chapter 1, “The Return of Japanese Colonialism: Alternative Futures with Japan in 2009 *Lost Memories* and *Hanbando*”, discusses two films that re-present the nation’s painful past under Japanese colonialism. *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* picture alternative futures of Korea vis-à-vis Japan. Critical events in Korean history under Japan are either altered (*2009 Lost Memories*) or re-dramatized (*Hanbando*) to heighten the tension between the two countries, and the films strive to warn the domestic audience of the danger of repeating their traumatic history. In cinematic representations of history in *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando*, present and future are re-imagined because of the alternative past meddled with by Japan. Japanese colonialism of the past returns and haunts Korea’s present and future. I argue that *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando*

¹² Although this study does not intend to delve into the various audience responses to the films, it is useful to consider what the actual audience members thought of and felt toward the given films to anchor my analyses, as viewers’ comments and discussions address the issues of Korean national identity.

¹³ *Cine 21* is the most prestigious film magazine in South Korea; it is published weekly. The website of the magazine allows members to post their opinions about a given film, and lets them discuss it among themselves. I also occasionally refer to the reviews by film critics in the same magazine. <<http://www.cine21.co.kr>>.

ultimately fail to incorporate the complex contextual shifts between Korea and Japan, and resort to the simple dichotomy of good (Korea) and evil (Japan).

The second chapter, “The Korean War Re-visited in *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*”, examines how the Korean War is portrayed in *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*. By employing familiar generic conventions of Hollywood war films, *Taegukgi* is well wrapped in sleek cinematography and astonishing visual effects, and tells the universal story of two brothers swept away by a war. *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, in contrast, re-visits and re-visions the War with fantastical imaginations grounded upon specific cultural context. Cinematic fantasy is utilized to de-familiarize the familiar war for the local audience and thus, particularly appeal to them.¹⁴ In re-telling the War, the dichotomy between good and evil does not seem too obvious and clear-cut. The enemies, North Koreans, are likeable and sympathetic, while South Koreans and Americans commit horrific acts of violence and brutality. Women remain voiceless, powerless victims, as mostly in Korean cinema, and stand in opposition to the more complex portrayals of male characters. *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* successfully combine the familiar (spectacular battle scenes, gruesome violence, and recognizable characters, among other elements) and the unfamiliar (ambiguous binary and cinematic fantasy). Fantastical moments in *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, especially, enable presenting unlikely peace and virtue in the midst of a horrific war.

The Gwangju Democratization Movement is re-enacted in two recent films, *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation*, which garnered somewhat unexpected box office successes. Kim Young-Ho, the protagonist of *Peppermint Candy*, is a perpetrator

¹⁴ I use the term “defamiliarization” in the way that Russian Formalists have used it. To “defamiliarize” is to look at or examine something familiar from a different perspective. For further discussion of defamiliarization, see Victor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990. Print.).

in the mass murder of innocent civilians, but *Splendid Vacation* focuses on the victims of the killings, the people of Gwangju. While Young-Ho is a problematic figure who can be a victim and a victimizer simultaneously, the characters in *Splendid Vacation* are ordinary people who perished unjustly because they tried to defend themselves against an illegal coup. Dividing self and other becomes most difficult in the Uprising, compared to Japanese colonialism and the Korean War, as the majority of South Koreans, including the killers in this heinous crime, barely managed to survive under stifling authoritarian regimes. *Splendid Vacation*, however, resorts to the simple binary division of nameless and faceless soldiers as the reification of evil, and the people of Gwangju as their innocent victims. Nevertheless, Chapter 3, “The Gwangju Democratization Movement in Films: People’s History in *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation*”, concentrates on how these two films endeavor to value the stories of ordinary people and tell a “people’s history,” rather than relaying official history. Cinematic representation of the Uprising in *Peppermint Candy* is reflexive and self-conscious, while *Splendid Vacation* privileges people’s experiences of individual people, specifically citizens of Gwangju, the long-silenced victims.

In conclusion, I briefly discuss my future research interests in relation to the present dissertation, including my interests in examining such as trauma, blockbuster, melodrama, and national identity through audience studies, among other methodologies. Analyzing re-construction of critical histories is crucial to understanding contemporary South Korean society, and cinematic representations of history cannot be separated from conceptualizing national identity.

In order to fully comprehend South Korean historical films, it is necessary first to take a look at Korean history and the Korean film industry. In this introduction, I situate

my study within the sociopolitical background. Then I move on to the theoretical concerns that are central to my study. The literature review comprises: 1) theoretical approaches to history and historical films, 2) national cinema, and 3) recent publications on Korean cinema studies in English that are pertinent to issues of historiography on the Korean screen. I close with the analysis of a scene from *Peppermint Candy* and come back to the core concerns of this dissertation, the nexus between cinema, history, narrative, and identity.

II. Context: History, Politics, and Industry

The Korean Peninsula, which is bordered by China, Japan, and Russia, is home to a small country that has had to cope with numerous external pressures and forces. Modern Korean history largely consists of tragic events during which Koreans have often lacked the autonomy to decide their own fate. Many Korean films have revealed this sense of victimhood, powerlessness, and helplessness, both implicitly and explicitly.¹⁵

Since the late nineteenth century, when film was in its earliest stages, Korea has experienced many political, economic, and cultural upheavals, as have other East Asian countries. The nation, after almost five thousand years of autonomy, was forcibly annexed by Imperial Japan in 1910 and endured thirty-five years of colonization that ended in 1945, with Japan's surrender at the end of World War II. Only five years after Korea regained its independence, however, the Korean War began and lasted for 3 years.

¹⁵ Julian Stringer and Frances Gateward discuss this feeling of doomed fate that is pervasive in New Korean Cinema (Julian Stringer, "Introduction" in *New Korean Cinema*. Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer, ed. New York: New York University Press, 2005. Print., Frances Gateward, "Introduction" in *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema*. Gateward, ed. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. Print.).

Since the ceasefire agreement in 1953, the Korean peninsula has remained divided into North and South. For years after the split, South Korea struggled to achieve a democratic nation-state under military dictators, including Park Chung-Hee and Chun Doo-Hwan.¹⁶

After almost three decades of military dictatorship, Roh Tae-Woo was elected by popular vote in 1988 in Korea's very first democratic presidential election. Roh achieved a relatively easy victory because of vote-splitting between his two primary opponents (Kim Young-Sam and Kim Dae-Jung, each of whom became president successively after Roh). Considering Roh, a former army general, as the first democratically elected president of South Korea is difficult, however, because both he and the previous president, Chun Doo-Hwan, were deeply involved in the 1979 coup and the 1980 Gwangju Massacre. Roh's presidency, with its roots in mutiny and treason, is considered to be a transitional period in South Korean political history.

In 1993, South Korea finally witnessed the inauguration of Kim Young-Sam, its first civilian president since Rhee Syngman's resignation in 1960. However, the legitimacy of Kim's government as a truly democratic regime has been severely criticized because of his collusion with the political power of former military leaders in order to win the election. Both Roh and Chun were tried for treason during Kim's presidency. And although Roh was sentenced to 22 years, 6 months in prison, and Chun was sentenced to death, they were quickly pardoned by the next president, Kim Dae-Jung, whose term lasted from 1998 to 2003.¹⁷ Although many continue to blame Chun and Roh

¹⁶ Refer to Appendix.

¹⁷ Ironically enough, Kim Dae-Jung was sentenced to death and imprisoned indefinitely under Chun and Roh's regimes. Both Chun and Roh served some time in prison for treason, but have denied involvement in the Gwangju killings. Under the current South Korean constitution, presidents are only allowed a single term of five years.

for the Gwangju Massacre, to date no one has been punished or even charged for the crime. Both Chun and Roh still deny any involvement in the Gwangju killings.¹⁸

At the beginning of his term, Kim Young-Sam announced several grandiose policies to promote the so-called culture industry in Korea. However, no budget for these initiatives was allocated until Kim Dae-Jung's presidency, despite the country's state of economic crisis at the time. Regardless of the financial hardship the nation was experiencing, Kim Dae-Jung established a public funding system to support the film industry. Because of this and other actions taken during his regime, Kim Dae-Jung is widely recognized as the first properly democratic president since the end of the Korean War, and the first leftist president in South Korean history. Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000 for his efforts to normalize relations between South and North Korea, Kim is also credited for his sponsorship and encouragement of South Korea's film industry. His presidency marked the beginning of Korean cinema's ability to deal with politically sensitive subjects; for example, former president Park Chung-Hee's assassination, labor union movements, and anti-government demonstrations. This policy continued under Kim's successor, Roh Moo-Hyun, whose presidency lasted from 2003 to 2008; however, Roh relaxed domestic protections of the country's film industry in concession to American demands against fierce local oppositions.

As part of the 2007 Free Trade Agreement between the United States and South Korea, the Roh regime reduced the mandatory number of days during which Korean theaters were obliged to screen domestic films.¹⁹ Resistance to the reduction was strong,

¹⁸ At the end of *Splendid Vacation*, an intertitle states that no one has been charged for the 1980 Gwangju Massacre.

¹⁹ Almost every single FTA meeting brings fierce domestic oppositions in South Korea, as Koreans view the Agreement as giving in to the aggressive demands of the U.S. government. Lowering the protections for

and understandably so, because the film industry had been a fervent political ally of the leftist Roh's presidency. Starting in 1966, the number of days was set at 146, even during military regimes, as an attempt to limit the aggressive, hegemonic domination of Hollywood. In spite of furious domestic resistance, however, in 2007 the number was reduced to 73. Nonetheless, today's South Korea continues to be one of the few countries in the world that keeps a "screen quota" system to protect its domestic film market (others include the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Pakistan, and most of the South American countries).²⁰

Under the liberal regimes of Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun, from 1998 through 2008, the country managed to recover from a severe economic crisis, and its domestic film industry flourished. Among the box office hits produced during this era were historical epics featuring guy-next-door protagonists that drew critical attention. The success of the South Korean film industry that began during this decade is credited to numerous factors, including liberal cultural policies, lenient censorship, supportive production atmosphere, and government financial sponsorship. Although censorship was still present, regulations covering the film industry became significantly flexible during this time. In contrast to previous conditions under military dictatorships, governmental

indigenous products often results in difficulties and hardships for already disenfranchised groups in Korean society, such as farmers and blue-collar laborers. For further discussions of the FTA between the U.S. and South Korea, refer to *The Proposed U.S.-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA): provisions and implications* by William H. Cooper (Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2008. Print.), *U.S. Trade Issues: A Reference Handbook* by Alfred Eckes (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009. Print.), *South Korea-U.S. Economic Relations: Cooperation, Friction, and Prospects for a Free Trade Agreement* by Mark E. Manyin (Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2006. Print.), and *15 Minute Coffee Break: South Korea-U.S. FTA-Vision 2030* by South Korean Government Information Agency (Seoul, Korea. 2006. Print.).

²⁰ Kim Dong-Ho et al. *The History of Korean Film Policy*. Seoul: Nanam Publishing, 2005. Print.

control during this era focused on depictions of violence and nudity rather than politically sensitive matters.²¹

Since the first film screening in Korea in 1903, the Korean film industry has grown in tandem with its close ties to government sponsorship and management. According to Seung Hyun Park, “In a sense, the history of film industry protections in South Korean cinema is a history of regulation.”²² Yet, the industry itself has never been completely controlled by politics; production, distribution, and export/import companies have been and are still privately owned and run, although at times they have been required to register with and acquire permission from the legislation. With the exception of the years 1973 to 1984 (under the Park Chung-Hee and Chun Doo-Hwan regimes), film production companies have been able to register and produce films as long as they had 50 million won in capital (approximately \$50,000 U.S.). Today, thanks to political leniency and vast numbers of enthusiastic Korean film lovers, South Korea has established one of the strongest local film markets in the world, outside of Hollywood and Bollywood.²³ For example, *The Host* (2006), directed by Bong Joon-Ho, the most financially successful film in South Korean history, commanded a domestic audience of 13 million—quite impressive, considering that the estimated total population of South

²¹ Ibid.

²² Seung Hyun Park. “Korean Cinema after Liberation: Production, Industry, and Regulatory Trends,” in Gateward, ed. *Seoul Searching*: 15.

²³ The following sources are written in Korean: Kim Sunah. *Korean Cinema as Strange Border* (Seoul: Communication Books, 2006. Print.), Kim Dongho et al. *The History of Korean Film Policy*, Kim Mihyun et al. *Korean Film History* (Seoul: Communication Books, 2006. Print). English-written articles include Seung Hyun Park, “Korean Cinema after Liberation” in *Seoul Searching* and Darcy Parquet, “The Korean Film Industry: 1992 to the Present” in Shin and Stringer, eds. *New Korean Cinema*.

Korea was about 47 million at the time.²⁴ Presently, South Korea boasts a population of 49 million under the guidance of its current president, Lee Myung-Bak.²⁵

III. Research Design of the Study

In my examination of representations of Korean history in films, I focus on South Korean films produced between 1998 and 2008, a period in which two leftist liberal presidents held office.²⁶ Korean film scholars, such as Kim Mihyun, Kim Sunah, and Kim Soyoung, have asserted that the Korean film industry during this period was thriving and prosperous both financially and critically, achievements attributed in part to the minimal governmental interferences of the time. From the many historical events depicted in films that became successful between 1998 and 2008, I have chosen three major events that were portrayed more than once: Japanese Colonialism (1910-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), and the Gwangju Massacre (May 1980).

By no means are these the only recent major historical events filmed during the decade in question. These events were depicted onscreen at least twice among the top ten most financially successful domestic films of their respective years. All of these films were commercial films produced with mid- to high-level production values and targeted toward the general public, with wide distribution and exhibition. It would be difficult for any Korean to be completely unaware of these films, given their popularity. All of these

²⁴ Kim Mihyun et al. *Korean Film History*. <<http://www.koreanfilm.org/kfilm06.html>>.

²⁵ <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ks.html#Econ>>.

²⁶ Refer to Appendix.

films deal with major historical events, and they all achieved at least a moderate level of box office success.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I have chosen to examine six of these films within their sociopolitical contexts, in addition to closely looking at the historical events they depict. I strive for a truly historical analysis of text, as textual analyses are always already social and historical. Films should be understood within the context of culture in a particular time frame; they are inseparable from the societies that produce them.²⁷

At this time, my study is one of the few English-language studies of contemporary South Korean cinema, especially with a focus on the traumatic histories of Korea on film. It focuses on these films' different modes of historical engagement and the specific cinematic devices they employ. The study covers the decade of 1998 through 2008, the period in which the South Korean film industry operated under the least amount of governmental control. By analyzing these films within the time span during which they were produced, I maintain that one can learn about not only the histories they represent but also the time and space of the filmic productions as well.²⁸ This dissertation is about historiography on screen between 1998 and 2008 in South Korea, and how these cinematic representations of the past are closely connected to the Korean national identity in contemporary society. Discussions of history, narrative, cinema, historical film, national cinema, and Korean cinema are especially relevant to this study, and thus I

²⁷ A truly historical poetics is pursued under the tradition of Russian formalists, such as Mikhail M. Bakhtin and Pavel N. Medvedev (Bakhtin and Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Trans. Albert J. Wehrle. Boston: Harvard University Press, 1985. Print.).

²⁸ Marc Ferro makes a similar argument about cinema and history, which is discussed later in this chapter. Marc Ferro. *Cinema and History*. Trans. Naomi Greene. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988. Print.

examine the existing literature in these fields and endeavor to situate these films within their various contexts.

IV. Theoretical Discussions

i) History, Narrative, Cinema, and Historical Films

History is not about objective facts of the past but a particular narrative of the past; and the majority of historical accounts are in a narrative form. What matters is not the facts of the past, but rather what kinds of meanings are attached to those facts.²⁹ Such meanings are not intrinsically attached; they are given, which means that interpretations of the same past can differ, depending on the shifting social contexts of the time in which the history is recorded or—as with historical films—re-presented. History is about how the past is remembered, not necessarily about how the past really was.³⁰ This is why the meanings of past events are fought over and different readings of history vie with one another. As Marcia Landy puts it, history has become “a battleground of competing positions” and “familiar events and images from the past are invoked as rallying points, as forces for cohesion and consensus in the interests of national solidarity.”³¹

Narrative construction of history and its political implications should be taken into consideration in analyzing history. The analyses of historical films should also be

²⁹ Hayden White’s *Metahistory* had an irreversible impact on the study of history and questioning the authority of an “official historiography”. Hayden White. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975. Print.

³⁰ Hayden White. *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957-2007*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010: xiii. Print.

³¹ Marcia Landy. *Cinematic Uses of the Past*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996: 2. Print.

concerned with their narrative constructions and ideological orientations. I am particularly interested in how cinematic representations of the past serve contemporary needs. As Keith Jenkins claims, some readings of certain histories dominate because they reinforce the needs of dominant social groups. Historiography, according to Jenkins, thus requires the study of power relations, embedded in the construction of historical texts.³²

Geoffrey Roberts asserts that historical narratives reveal “shifting present-day concerns, cultural concepts and ideological forces, personal and political prejudices.”³³ Historical narratives are also profoundly connected to the formation of national identity.³⁴ How a certain historical event is narrativized in a given film is important because its narrative strategies put forth particular national narratives. Therefore, I analyze narratives both within and outside of the films. I also examine the dominant and competing ideologies conveyed by these films on their textual and contextual levels.

After probing narrative strategies of selected films, I consider the political messages of these particular narratives in social contexts. Some films present a clear-cut division between self and other, good and evil, while in others this binary division becomes more ambiguous and problematical. Through the presentation of a clearly identifiable external enemy, representing the past can safely hold onto the familiar dichotomy. By conveying particular interpretations of the past, historical films not only reflect the reality of their production but become the ideological expressions of filmmakers as well. Marc Ferro and Pierre Sorlin who have pioneered the study of

³² Keith Jenkins. *Re-thinking History*. London: Routledge, 1992. Print.

³³ Geoffrey Roberts. “Introduction: The History and Narrative Debate, 1960-2000” in Roberts, ed. *The History and Narrative Reader*. London: Routledge, 2001: 15. Print.

³⁴ Although the discussion of the nexus between history, nation, identity, and national cinema is almost inevitable in this study of historical films, I mainly focus on the uses of the past in the present and the ways that these particular histories are visualized in given films. Therefore, the discussion on national cinema and national identity is marginal in this study. I hope to explore the subjects further in the future.

cinematic representations of history, believe that society is not merely reflected on film but actively participates as a historical agent.³⁵ Historical films, therefore, are valuable as manifestations of the present (that produced these films) as well as the past (that is reproduced in them).

Historical film is a form of history-writing with a narrative on screen; it is “a mode of writing a history of times past.”³⁶ With its different mode of representation, historical film is historiography on screen. This visual writing of history on screen is an interpretation of the past in the present, which should be understood within its contemporaneous sociopolitical contexts, just like written historiography.³⁷

Since its inception, cinema has represented historical events, figures, lives, and time periods, because it reveals certain “truths” about the societies in which films are produced, regardless of filmmakers’ intentions.³⁸ Cinema refuses to be confined within a singular ideological orientation. Most films contain a crack or fissure in the hegemonic ideology conferred by filmmakers or society. Cinema is a source of conflicting, disjointed information, much like history itself. Cinema reveals truths about reality, yet its portrayals of both truth and reality are often incoherent.

³⁵ Ferro used the term, “film as a historical agent,” in his *Cinema and History* book. See also Pierre Sorlin’s *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980. Print.).

³⁶ Mike Chopra-Gant. *Cinema and History: The Telling of Stories*. London: Wallflower, 2008: 10. Print.

³⁷ Hayden White believed that a historical film should be studied in its own right, and coined the term “historiophoty,” versus historiography. Robert Rosenstone makes a similar point and argues that history *can* be represented in visual images and filmic discourses. According to Rosenstone, representations of history in cinema should be examined from a different perspective from written historiography (Hayden White. “Historiography and Historiophoty” *The American Historical Review* 93.5 (December 1988): 1193-1199. Print., Robert Rosenstone. “History in Image/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film” *The American Historical Review* 93.5 (December 1988): 1173-1185. Print.).

³⁸ Both Marcia Landy and Marc Ferro discuss the early cinema and its desire to represent history. Ferro, *Cinema and History*., Landy, *Cinematic Uses of the Past*.

The specificity of the medium of cinema itself needs to be considered as well in discussing historical films. Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery have perhaps best summarized the complexity of the medium of film:

Film is a complex historical phenomenon (an art form, economic institution, technology, cultural product) which, since its inception, has participated in many networks of relationship. In other words, film is an open system. It is not just a set of components forming a whole, but an interrelated set of components that condition and are conditioned by each other.³⁹

Cinema is a social production, not a simple mirror of reality.⁴⁰ Ironically, however, in representing the past, film does reflect the reality of the present when a historical film is produced. Historical film is a materialization of the past in the present; what is on-screen is an expression of the present reading of the past.

A historical film can reveal much about the society that has produced it, more so than the past society it portrays. For example, Marc Ferro maintains that *Alexander Nevsky* (1938, Sergei Eisenstein) tells us as much about the Soviet Union under Stalin (the era of the film's production) as it does about the Russian Middle Ages it depicts. According to Ferro, image delivers not only a message but also information about the behind-the-scenes entities who created the message.⁴¹ No matter how hard a filmmaker tries, the final outcome—the film—almost always fails to deliver a consistent and integrated point about the subject.

In “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni put forth seven categories to sort out films, depending on their ideological orientations: (a) films

³⁹ Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery. *Film history: Theory and Practice*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1985: 16-17. Print.

⁴⁰ Robert Stam makes a similar point. Robert Stam. *Film Theory: An Introduction*. Malden, M.A.: Blackwell, 2000. Print.

⁴¹ Ferro. *Cinema and History*.

thoroughly imbued with dominant ideology, (b) films that deny ideological assimilation, (c) films that are not explicitly political but become so, (d) films that are explicitly political yet do not effectively criticize the system, (e) films that seemingly cater to dominant ideology but turn out to be ambiguous, (f) “live cinema,” and (g) the other kind of “live cinema.”⁴² The third category, the so-called “against the grain” films, has been one of the most contentious, as films within this category are not explicitly political in content but criticize political ideology through their aesthetic forms. While useful, Comolli and Narboni’s categories are not comprehensive enough, as a film can never nicely fit into a single category without any contradictions or overlaps. It is also problematic to decide which film falls under which category, as the decision unavoidably discloses the desires of individual scholars.⁴³ Although Comolli and Narboni deride most films as being “imbued through and through with the dominant ideology in pure and unadulterated form,”⁴⁴ a film—whether it serves the dominant ideology or not—can exercise an enormous impact on people once it is widely viewed.

A film can be extremely influential about its topic when it becomes popular among the general public. When a film deals with a historical event, it often causes re-examinations of the given history. The power of cinema to affect people, which can also be interpreted as the power of visual media overall, lies in its place in the public sphere and its accessibility to the masses, unlike the archaic and convoluted language of history

⁴² Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni’s “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism” in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, ed. *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. 5th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999: 752-759. Print. The article was originally published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1969.

⁴³ Roland Barthes draws a similar division between work and text in his article “From Work to Text”. I believe that the decision to split a work and a text cannot be free from the subjective perspective of a scholar. Roland Barthes. “From Work to Text” in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*. Josué V. Harari, ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979: 73-81. Print.

⁴⁴ Comolli and Narboni 755.

books.⁴⁵ One critic has even gone so far as to say that the power of movies is greater than the power of good or evil.⁴⁶ Precisely because of the impact a historical film can have on people's understanding of the past, Mike Chopra-Gant demands a scrutinizing look at historical representations onscreen:

Based loosely on history but forgoing the complexities and contradictions of history in favour of other narrative and dramatic considerations, while also having an almost unique power to shape popular perceptions of what 'really happened', the historical film provides a seductive appearance of historicity that all too easily translates, in the popular imaginary, to a faithful rendition of historical events that, in reality, it can never be. For this reason attempts to represent history on film must always be regarded with a highly critical eye.⁴⁷

The (re)interpretations of historical events presented in historical films endow the past with new and different meanings; moreover, these new meanings can be more important than the past itself.⁴⁸ Contemporary historical films play a critical role in allowing people to revisit, remember, and reinterpret history.

Marcia Landy's explication of common sense and folklore is especially relevant to these matters. In her study of cinematic uses of the past, Landy employs Antonio Gramsci's conception of common sense to identify "how popular representation relies on strategies—particularly affective strategies—to presume that there is a shared

⁴⁵ Thomas Elsaesser makes a similar point regarding the place of film's belonging to the public sphere. See Thomas Elsaesser in "Subject Positions, Speaking Positions: From *Holocaust*, *Our Hitler*, and *Heimat* to *Shoah* and *Schindler's List*" in Vivian Sobchack, ed. *The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television and the Modern Event*. New York: Routledge, 1995: 145-183. Print.

⁴⁶ "*Schindler's List* proves again that, for Spielberg, there is a power in the world that is greater than good and greater than evil, and it is the movies. He is hardly alone in this cinéaste's theodicy." From Leon Wieseltier. *The New Republic* January 24, 1994, quoted by David Thompson, *Film Comment* March/April 1994:44, quoted by Thomas Elsaesser 166.

⁴⁷ Chopra-Gant 96-97.

⁴⁸ "In other words, what is at issue here is not the facts of the matter regarding such events but the different possible meanings that such facts can be construed as bearing." Hayden White, "The Modernist Event" in *Persistence of History*, 21.

experience.”⁴⁹ This sense of shared experience helps people assign particular meanings to their pasts; the creation and repetition of folklore is one such affective strategy. The ways that the past is officially narrated, however, are not guaranteed to match the ways that people remember the past; instead, gaps between official history and popular history are frequent. It is the popular history represented in films that I intend to explore in this project.

Like folklore, cinema plays a significant role in popular memory and helps naturalize certain memories as commonsensical. This commonsensical popular history provides an agreed-upon, if unofficial, image of a nation’s shared past. However, the past cinema represents is not necessarily consistent with a nation’s popular, communal past. Cinema is “a pastiche of conceptions about the world” in which conflicting ideas about history reveal themselves.⁵⁰ I will analyze what kind of histories these historical films represent in each chapter.

Within the genre of historical films, many film historians have proposed various sub-genres and have privileged one group of films over others. Pierre Sorlin and Leger Grindon, for example, separate historical film from costume film, and Andrew Higson criticizes heritage film as lacking political engagement.⁵¹ Brian McFarlane and Stephen Crofts berate period film as a wasted opportunity that could have provided a useful re-

⁴⁹ Landy 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 1.

⁵¹ Costume film, heritage film, and period films are all sub-categories of historical film. According to Sorlin, Grindon, and Higson, costume film and heritage film focus on the look of the past rather than promoting useful reflection on the past and the arbitrariness of historical representations. Pierre Sorlin. *The Film in History.*, Leger Grindon. *Shadows of the Past: Studies in the Historical Fiction Film*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994. Print., Andrew Higson. *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain*. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1995. Print., Brian McFarlane. *Australian Cinema 1970-1985*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1987. Print., and Stephen Crofts. “Shifting Paradigms in the Australian Historical Film” in *East-West Film Journal* 5.2 (1991): 1-15. Print.

interpretation of historical events. Period films, according to McFarlane and Crofts, heavily rely on chances and coincidences.

In his study of various historical films, Robert Rosenstone suggests standard historical film and postmodern history film as two valuable categories. Standard historical film personalizes the past by focusing on individual stories rather than their historical context and emotionalizes the past by offering a neat ending. Postmodern history film, by contrast, is self-conscious in regard to its own constructive nature and encourages questioning of the very past the film presents. By revealing the arbitrariness of the filmic representation, the postmodern history film defies a unified and homogeneous narrative of the past and promotes alternative visions of history. While helpful, Rosenstone's categories do not effectively explain all the chosen films in this project. They often belong to standard and postmodern history film at the same time. Rosenstone's classification is of most use in the discussion of *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation*, and it will be further developed in Chapter 3.⁵²

This dissertation focuses on the contemporaneous South Korean society that enabled the productions and successes of these historical films. Close analyses of the films will inform us more about the current societal status of South Korea than the past event portrayed in them. Thanks to lenient production environments, these films could freely reflect the concerns and issues of South Korean society today, re-examine the deep-rooted clear-cut dichotomy between self and other, and thus present some of the most complex and conflicted characters in Korean film history.

⁵² Rosenstone first broaches the categories of standard historical film and postmodern history film in his *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. Print.). Later, he modifies the categories into mainstream drama and innovative drama in *History on Film/ Film on History: History: Concepts, Theories and Practice* (Harlow, U.K.: Pearson, 2006. Print.).

ii) National Cinema

Because of the nature of historical films that represent past events and reinforce the sense of collective identity to the people of a nation, the discourse surrounding national cinema is particularly germane to this dissertation. Kathleen McHugh nicely summarizes the discussions of nation, nation-state, and national identity that are pertinent in this context:

Nations arise from interactions, whether material or discursive. The nation, as nation-state, says no; it defines its contours by negation, articulating who is not a citizen, what acts are forbidden, where its territory and authority begin and end, what freedoms will be taken away from those who transgress its laws, and what limits will shape the flow of currency, traffic, and communications. Yet the state's negations coincide and overlap with the affirmative interactions that comprise the nation as homeland, interactions that involve knowledge, imagination, memory, and identification.⁵³

Nation facilitates inclusion and exclusion, acceptance and negation, and homogeneity and specificity, as tools with which to control its citizens effectively.⁵⁴ During hard times, it is easier to underscore the necessity of harmonious national unity. For solidarity within a community, whether local or national, it is always expedient to invent a common enemy. In the case of Korea, Koreans only need to remember how brutal and atrocious their lives (or the lives of their parents, grandparents, et al.) were under Japanese occupation. Such memories can be stimulated, or inculcated, by a long tradition of Korean historical films

⁵³ Kathleen McHugh. "South Korean Film Melodrama: State, Nation, Woman, and the Transnational Familiar," in McHugh and Nancy Abelmann, eds. *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State University, 2005: 17. Print.

⁵⁴ Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar have a similar discussion in their introduction of their book. Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar. *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. Print.

that feature Japanese characters as the ultimate antagonists.⁵⁵ The historical events and their cinematic representations I discuss here also present the dichotomy between Korean and Japanese, self and other. This binary division, however, becomes more challenging as the boundary between good and evil becomes more difficult to draw.

Throughout Korean history, Japan has always been the most convenient enemy; Japan is the definitive Other to Koreans.⁵⁶ The Japanese colonial period provides some of the most popular settings for historical films in Korea, presumably because of Japan's role as an undeniable opponent.⁵⁷ This tendency becomes somewhat complicated in the case of the Korean War, because the conflict was originally a civil war, despite the involvement of foreign forces. Whether the combatants were from the North or South, they were all Koreans. Although North Koreans still make the binary division possible, filmic representations of South Korean attitudes toward North Korea and North Koreans are gradually shifting.⁵⁸ When representing the Gwangju killings, however, it becomes even more difficult to present the unambiguous perpetrator because the involved parties and bystanders were not only Koreans, they were South Koreans.

The difficulty of clearly representing the “good guys” and the “bad guys” has been one of the most salient reasons used for suppressing representations of Gwangju, aside from the fact that the South Korean military dictators who engineered the massacre

⁵⁵ Most famously, Sergeant Mori (played Lee Ye-chun) in Kim Ki-young's *The Sea Knows* (1961) was a well-recognized evil Japanese character. Lee's career blossomed after this role.

⁵⁶ In Kathleen McHugh's terms, the Japanese represent everything that Koreans are not.

⁵⁷ Michael Robinson summarizes Koreans' strong antipathy toward Japan effectively in his article, “Contemporary Cultural Production in South Korea: Vanishing Meta-Narratives of Nation” in *New Korean Cinema*: 15-31. The general attitude toward Japan and the Japanese among South Korean youth today is shifting rapidly, however, and is much more complex than it used to be. I discuss Robinson and this changing relation between Korea and Japan further in Chapter 1.

⁵⁸ For future research, I would like to focus on cinematic representations of North Koreans on the South Korean screen since the end of the Korean War.

remained in power for years afterward. In representing the Gwangju Massacre, anyone can hardly be shown completely free of guilt. Even though many people were not directly engaged in the killings, they were unable or unwilling to do anything to stop them. Most Koreans share this sense of culpability about what happened in Gwangju in 1980, as demonstrated in the films depicting the uprising. Among the historical films discussed in this project, cinematic representations of the Gwangju movement are most troubling in conceptualizing the ideas of cinema, history, and nation.

Cinema, history, and nation have much in common in that the way they are defined is perpetually shifting. Although cinema is a valuable apparatus for representing national history, cinema does not merely reflect its social background; cinema and society interact and influence each other. Discourses about nations also change according to shifts in social and institutional power structures.⁵⁹ In other words, cinema constitutes “an essential part of a *process* of defining nations,” as Alan Williams puts it.⁶⁰ Cinema and other mass media provide “essential arenas for conflicting interest groups to quarrel over the definition of the ‘nation.’”⁶¹

In one of the most-cited articles in the field of national cinema studies, Andrew Higson concurs: “Cinema never simply reflects or expresses an already fully-formed and homogeneous national culture and identity, as if it were the undeniable property of all national subjects.”⁶² Instead, some of the struggles of national cinema originate from a

⁵⁹ Berry and Farquhar 6.

⁶⁰ Alan Williams’s “Introduction,” in *Film and Nationalism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002: 4. Print. Italics in the original.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Andrew Higson. “The Concept of National Cinema” in Alan Williams, ed. *Film and Nationalism*: 63. The article was first published in 1989. *Screen* 30.4 (Autumn 1989): 34-46. Print.

nation's own internal conflicts. Nor does every national subject share an equal sense of culture and identity; inner differences and tensions are always present within national subjects.

Alan Williams maintains that cinema offers an illusory world of homogeneous, empty time and space, and thereby falsifies an integrated vision of both nation and national history. Revisiting and reconstructing a nation's history is a perfect way to invent nation as "an imagined community."⁶³ If "[t]he nation exists to some extent because it is narrated," cinema has a major role in narrating the nation.⁶⁴

The subject of national cinema is contentious within film studies. Benedict Anderson's ideas about national formation have been particularly influential, especially his analysis of promoting imagined community via mass media.⁶⁵ It is tempting to apply the notion of media utilization as a method of bonding an entire nation under one sense of communal identity to the study of national cinema. Of course, there are numerous ways of thinking about nation, its origins, and its formation, but Anderson's idea has understandably dominated national cinema studies. Because cinema is a very powerful medium which moves people emotionally as well as intellectually, films can indoctrinate a sense of collective feeling about any number of topics.

⁶³ In his article, Williams uses Benedict Anderson's famous notion of imagined community. There are different theoretical positions on nation and its formation. Some scholars, like Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Ernest Gellner, assert that nation is created by historical necessity, while others, like Steven Grosby and Clifford Geertz, maintain that it is part of human nature to formulate social groups with common characteristics like history. Anthony D. Smith considers nation as a social process, and national identity as "a matter of the rediscovery and authentication of already existing myths and symbols with collective values" (quoted in Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie's "Introduction" in *Cinema and Nation*. Hjort and MacKenzie, ed. London: Routledge, 2000:6. Print.).

⁶⁴ Berry and Farquhar 6. This idea of nation being narrated is most famously raised by Homi Bhabha's anthology, *Nation and Narration*. (London: Routledge, 1990. Print.).

⁶⁵ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London; New York: Verso, 1983., 1991 (new ed.). For the examples of media, Anderson uses newspapers; in this case, it is film.

Discourses on national cinema are germane to this study because historical films have been assumed to provide members of a nation with a common history and identity. In this process, a supposedly singular narrative of national history is manipulated in order to unite the nation. In practical terms, this means that some historical events are repeatedly chosen to be represented on film, so that the general public will remember them in a particular way, while other events are continually ignored (which supposedly means that the general public's memories of them are abandoned or suppressed). Because Japan and North Korea have been sure enemies of South Korea during its authoritarian regimes, anti-Japan and anti-Communist North Korea sentiments have been popular subjects for historical films. Depicting the Gwangju killings was certainly unpopular and controversial, however, because of the nature of the massacre and the public's communal guilt about it.

Examining cinematic representations of these historical events enlightens us about (re)interpretations of the national past in contemporary Korean society. The ways that viewers of these films discuss them reveal their sense of being Korean today. The belief that national cinema is supposed to represent national history and identity sounds reasonable, yet because the discourses of national cinema are never simple, it is widely understood that no clear definition of national cinema exists,⁶⁶ especially when so many films are produced through the means of multinational/transnational production. It is undeniable, however, that films can “*reflect and keep in circulation* values and behaviors associated with a particular nation.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Alan Williams, Andrew Higson, Tom O'Regan, Thomas Elsaesser, and Chris Berry to name a few, all seem to agree that it is impossible to construct a clear definition of national cinema.

⁶⁷ Williams 8. Italics in the original.

Almost every national cinema of today has to contend with Hollywood, the Goliath of the film world. Even though cinema has always been an international/transnational medium, most contemporary national film industries have to battle merely for survival under Hollywood's overwhelming dominance in domestic markets.⁶⁸ Tom O'Regan maintains that national cinema strives to "*compete with, imitate, oppose, complement and supplement* the (dominant) international cinema," by which he means Hollywood.⁶⁹ O'Regan's summary is succinct: "This makes Hollywood a particularly important term of reference."⁷⁰ Higson agrees, when he asserts that the challenge of national cinema lies in establishing "some sort of balance between the 'apparently incompatible objectives of a national cinema—to be economically viable but culturally motivated.'"⁷¹ How to make a film that is commercially viable yet culturally appealing to an indigenous population is perhaps the central question for any national filmmaker working outside of Hollywood.⁷²

According to Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, the academic discourse of national cinema scholarship suffers from the Eurocentric notion of national cinema studies, just as national film industries struggle against Hollywood. Yoshimoto argues that the discipline

⁶⁸ Tom O'Regan argues the case of Australian cinema against Hollywood in detail. See Tom O'Regan, "Australian Cinema as a National Cinema," in Williams, *Film and Nationalism*, 89-136. The chapter is reprinted from *Australian National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1996. Print.).

⁶⁹ Ibid. 95. Italics and parentheses in the original.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 91.

⁷¹ Higson, "Concept of National Cinema," 58. Here, Higson quotes Thomas Elsaesser from *New German Cinema: A History*. London: British Film Institute, 1989. Print.

⁷² Christina Klein makes a convincing claim about a particularly successful case of a South Korean filmmaker, Bong Jun-Ho, in terms of balancing between Hollywood aesthetics and indigenous subject matters. I will discuss Klein's argument further in later chapters. Christina Klein, "Why American Studies Needs to Think about Korean Cinema, or, Transnational Genres in the Films of Bong Joon-ho." *American Quarterly* 60.4 (Dec 2008): 871-898. Print.

of film studies in Western academia has exploited other national cinemas to reinforce the hegemonic position of Hollywood, and, moreover, that Kurosawa Akira and Japanese films have served to support this hierarchical dichotomy. While studying European cinema entails complex analyses of contextual backgrounds, Japanese cinema is evaluated by constructing “a linear historical narrative describing a development of a cinema within a particular national boundary whose unity and coherence seemed to be beyond all doubt.”⁷³

Rey Chow’s critique on the binary opposition between scholars of particular area studies and those of Western cultures is also pertinent here:

...while [authors dealing with Western cultures] are thought to deal with intellectual or theoretical issues, [authors dealing with non-Western cultures,] even when they are dealing with intellectual or theoretical issues, are compulsorily required to characterize ... their intellectual and theoretical issues by way of a national, ethnic or cultural location. Once such a location is named, however, the work associated with it is usually considered too narrow or specialized to warrant general interest.⁷⁴

In European and American university film studies departments, Japanese films have always occupied a singular position. Even though Japanese cinema might have certainly been utilized to support the hierarchy of East and West, and might have served to highlight the superiority of the West, it has also been treated differently than other East Asian national cinemas. While I believe that Yoshimoto’s rejection of the perverse, tacit Orientalism aimed at Japanese cinema is legitimate, it is also incontestable that Japanese directors and films have long been revered and even accorded a unique level of

⁷³ Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto. “The Difficulty of Being Radical: The Discipline of Film Studies and the Postcolonial World Order” in *Japan in the World*. Masao Miyoshi and H. D. Harootunian, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993: 338. Print.). Yoshimoto elaborates this argument further in *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000. Print.). Fortunately, the recent publications on Korean cinema discussed in this chapter demonstrate a serious commitment to consider various contextual factors in their examinations of given films.

⁷⁴ Rey Chow quoted in Berry and Farquhar 14. Rey Chow. “Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem” 4-5. *boundary 2* 25.3 (1998): 1-24. Print.

fetishization and objectification. Therefore, I believe that examining recent studies of Chinese and Korean cinemas is particularly worthwhile. All three of these countries belong to the same region, East Asia, yet serious academic interest in Chinese and Korean cinemas is fairly new.

Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar describe the formation of Chinese cinema and its history. China, like Korea, endured a long fight against various imperial forces at the turn of the century:

Both the national and the modern territorial nation-state were part of a Western package called *modernity*, as was cinema, which followed hot on their heels. Like elsewhere, when Chinese grasped the enormity of the imperialist threat they realized that they would have to take from the West in order to resist the West. The nation-state was a key element to be adopted, because this modern form of collective agency was fundamental both to participation as a nation-state in the “international” order established by the imperialists and to mobilizing resistance.⁷⁵

Berry and Farquhar’s discussion of Chinese national cinema is useful to the Korean context: both nations experienced similar aggression from the West and Japan and received cinema as a Western import. Berry and Farquhar also broach the notion of “cinema and the national,” instead of national cinema, and assert that the national provides a larger analytical framework for the study of national cinema. Not only is the national a multiple entity, constructed similarly to national identity, both must be maintained in spite of challenges. Whether or not one agrees with Berry and Farquhar, they successfully argue the necessity to negate the conceptualization of national cinema as the expression of “distinct and separate national culture.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Berry and Farquhar 2. Italics in the original.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 3.

Because national cinema serves to define and maintain nationhood, “the process of defining national cinema is *dynamic* and perpetually *unfinished*.”⁷⁷ If a distinct characteristic of national culture can be found, national cinema uses it as “an asset”; similarly, national history provides a “common currency” with which indigenous filmmakers can appeal to domestic audiences.⁷⁸ Andrew Higson argues that history provides “the necessary basis of the national narrative,” and cinema is a perfect instrument “for retelling this national narrative.”⁷⁹ Higson also maintains that patterns of consumption have been ignored in the discourse of national cinema, and emphasizes that understanding audiences is crucial to national cinema studies. Public perceptions of national identity and history can be examined not only through the ways they are captured in films but also through the ways people talk about such films. In the future, I would like to investigate how historical films are discussed among contemporaneous Korean audiences.

The discussion of national cinema is pertinent to this dissertation, because studying the historiography of a nation almost always speaks to the perception of national history and identity among the people. How cinema, history, and nation are defined always shifts depending on the context, and they all need each other to delineate themselves. In this study, cinema, history, and nation are all relevant. Cinema plays a critical role in defining nations and provides a space for the expression of competing ideas. By re-visiting some of the most important historical events in Korean history, the selected films here suggest a more complex understanding of the nation’s past.

⁷⁷ Williams 6. Italics in the original.

⁷⁸ O’Regan 118-119.

⁷⁹ Higson 62, quoting Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*.

Examining existing studies of Korean cinema is of use in this context of national cinema studies. I now move on to the study of Korean films in English publications.

iii) Korean Cinema

Although a great number of national cinema studies to date have fallen into the trap of overstressing the uniqueness of national cultures, since the late nineteenth century many Asian national cinemas have in fact endured a similar trajectory of chaotic political upheavals and rapid economic development. South Korea, and therefore South Korean cinema, is no exception.

At this time, only a handful of books about Korean cinema are available in English. However, recent years have witnessed an increased interest in Korean cinema along with a more visible availability of Korean films worldwide. My study will be one more addition to the sparse English-language scholarship on Korean cinema studies, and its unique contribution lies in its specific focus on representations of history in recent commercial films during the particular decade.

One of the first scholarly works in English was Hyangjin Lee's *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Culture, Identity and Politics*.⁸⁰ The book supplies an overview of Korean cinema since 1903 and includes a rare discussion of some North Korean films; the chapters are organized according to themes of gender, nationhood, class, and cultural identity in both the North and South Korean film industries. Lee concentrates on how

⁸⁰ Hyangjin Lee. *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Identity, Culture, and Politics*. Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 2000. Print.

contemporary Korean society rearticulates its national past in its cinema.⁸¹ To Lee, representations of the past in cinema mirror Korea's current political, social, economic, and cultural conditions. As a close study, Lee examines one of the most popular folktales in Korea, *Chunhyangjon* [*The Story of Chunhyang*], and its numerous cinematic adaptations. Filmic representations of this story over decades reveal dominant ideologies of gender, class, and traditional family values in Korea, and indicate that some of the values resulting from these ideologies remain unchanged. It is also quite intriguing to identify the different foci of North and South Korean films that narrate the same story. Lee strives to situate contemporary Korean films within their contexts, which this study also aims to do.

An anthology of work about one of the most respected directors in South Korea is *Im Kwon-Taek: The Making of a Korean National Cinema*.⁸² In more than four decades, Im, "the father of New Korean Cinema," has produced more than a hundred films, and is still working. The anthology covers how Im has managed to survive, in spite of severe hardships caused by military censorship, financial strain, and Hollywood hegemony, to produce films with appropriate, timely subjects that appeal to domestic audiences.⁸³ Although the articles in this anthology are aware of the problem of auteur studies, they are mostly interested in locating a given film by Im within his entire body of work, and are concerned with Im's status as a filmmaker representing the South Korean film

⁸¹ Ibid. 90.

⁸² David E. James and Kyung Hyun Kim, eds. *Im Kwon-Taek: The Making of a Korean National Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State University, 2002. Print.

⁸³ See below for discussion of New Korean Cinema.

industry. My study does not focus on a particular director, yet I agree that filmmakers can and do represent a certain tendency of a national film industry.

Kyung Hyun Kim's *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* explores representations of men in contemporary Korean cinema.⁸⁴ Kim maintains that male characters portrayed in New Korean Cinema reflect South Korea's turbulent sociopolitical contexts since the 1980s and also demonstrate a crisis of masculinity within an isolated, authoritarian culture. Although South Korea has become more liberal and democratic, many recent Korean films have attempted to portray men as empowered and vigorous, because social anxiety over male identity remains pervasive. In his analysis of social and historical contexts, Kim asserts that many recent Korean films show the nation's omnipresent angst over political instability, destitution, brutal authority, and random violence. According to Kim, this sense of uneasiness is symptomatic of a post-traumatic society's continuing struggle for modernity. His trope of self-loathing men is pertinent to some of the films I examine in this study. While the chosen films of Kim's book illustrate interesting character arcs by male protagonists, female characters of recent Korean films also need serious consideration. One of my future research interests is to examine representations of women in recent Korean films.

*New Korean Cinema*⁸⁵ is another anthology on the subject of recent Korean films. The appellation itself is in contention, although most of this volume's contributors seem to agree that Korean films produced after the early 1990s, under civilian governments, are fundamentally different from the films of the previous era, which were produced

⁸⁴ Kyung Hyun Kim. *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004. Print.

⁸⁵ Chi-Yun Shin and Julian Stringer, eds. *New Korean Cinema*.

under totalitarian regimes. Some contributors emphasize the commitment of both the Korean New Wave of the early-to-mid 1980s and the New Korean Cinema of the 1990s to depicting “authentic” Korean content. Notwithstanding the murkiness of the term “New Korean Cinema,” generational shifts since the 1990s, among filmmakers as well as audiences, cannot be denied. The authors are dedicated to examining these changes in recent Korean films and to investigating the contexts of political difference, industrial adjustment, generic transformation, and civil society.

In *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*,⁸⁶ Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelman argue that the South Korean film industry between 1955 and 1972 produced a body of work that is as “historically, aesthetically, and politically significant as that of other well-known national film movements such as Italian Neorealism, French New Wave, and New German Cinema.”⁸⁷ These authors explore the “national specificity” of Golden Age Cinema (1955-1972) by carefully examining South Korea’s sociopolitical contexts during that era. Their main interests are cinematic representations of gender relations, uses of genre, and close observations of what Golden Age Melodrama has uncovered about Korean national cinema. This study of South Korean Golden Age melodrama is closest to my study, in that both examine texts produced within a certain period of time. The genre in which I am interested, however, is historical film, while McHugh and Abelman focus on melodrama.

⁸⁶ Kathleen McHugh and Nancy Abelman, eds. *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005. Print.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 2-3.

The most recent anthology thus far on Korean films, *Seoul Searching: Culture and Identity in Contemporary Korean Cinema*,⁸⁸ chooses three dominant genres in recent Korean cinema, “melodramas, big-budget action blockbusters, and youth films,” and concentrates on modifications of generic conventions made by such films in order to cater to domestic audiences. The editor, Frances Gateward, asserts that Korean filmmakers have masterfully employed Hollywood’s traditional genres to depict Korean lives that are acutely grounded in nationally specific contexts. One interest common to this work’s contributors is the nonlinear narrative structure of recent Korean films, which they identify as a characteristic of recent Korean cinema. According to Gateward, the fragmented storytelling in many contemporary Korean films “functions as a trope representing postmodern crises and trauma.”⁸⁹ Genre-bending is also recognized as one of the traits of recent Korean films.

Darcy Paquet’s *New Korean Cinema*,⁹⁰ which records the transformation of the Korean film industry along with sociopolitical changes in South Korea, focuses on external factors that affect film production, such as governmental censorship and Hollywood’s direct distribution to Korea. Paquet examines some of the key directors of New Korean Cinema, including Hong Sang-Soo, Kim Ki-Duk, Park Chan-Wook, and Bong Joon-Ho, within appropriate historical contexts, and recognizes the continuity between their works and other classics such as *Sopyonje* and *Peppermint Candy*.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Frances Gateward, ed. *Seoul Searching*.

⁸⁹ Gateward 10.

⁹⁰ Darcy Paquet. *New Korean Cinema: Breaking the Waves*. London: Wallflower Press, 2009.

⁹¹ *Sopyonje*. Dir. Im Kwon-Taek. 1993. Film.

In *The South Korean Film Renaissance*, Jinhee Choi pays attention to recent Korean cinema in terms of the country's film industry, and offers plausible causes for the phenomenal success of Korean films both domestically and internationally.⁹² Choi's account of the vicissitudes of corporate capital and its involvement in the film industry is especially thorough and convincing. She provides close case studies of several genres—blockbusters, gangster cinema, romance films, teen pics, and high-quality films—and probes their generic development and industrial formations in relation to the overall industry. Most notably, Choi examines and predicts the fate of the South Korean film industry in the face of ever-powerful forces of globalization.

All of the above works acknowledge the necessity to examine contexts thoroughly in order to assess filmic texts fully (e.g., South Korea's sociopolitical insecurity, rapid economic growth, the financial crisis of the late 1990s, and other historical traumas). Many also note Korean films' formal experimentations, which both utilize and challenge Hollywood's hegemony. Their analyses, which inform readers about Korean national cinema and Korean identity, are more or less similar to what I am trying to accomplish with this study, in that we all acknowledge the necessity of situating filmic texts within their social backgrounds.

Some key words that describe contemporary South Korean society are “compressed modernity,” “turbo capitalism,” and “normalized traumas.”⁹³ Modernity is a

⁹² Jinhee Choi. *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010. Print.

⁹³ The term “Compressed Modernity” was used in Chang Kyung-Sup's article and widely circulated among the writers in South Korea and “Turbo Capitalism” was mentioned in *The Global Trap* and became extremely popular among Korean intellectuals. The term was also quoted in Cho Han's article. Srinath Jayaram, one of my colleagues, mentioned “Normalized Traumas” during a conversation to describe the status of South Korea and I believe it is an appropriate description of contemporary South Korean society. Chang Kyung-Sup. “Compressed Modernity and Its Discontents: South Korean Society in Transition,” *Economy and Society* 28.1 (1999): 30-55. Print., Hans Peter Martin and Harold Schumann. *The Global*

multifarious concept whose definitions can vary drastically, depending on which theory one subscribes to. There is no doubt, however, that while the process of modernity took several centuries in Euro-America, it occurred in Korea within a few decades. Despite the widespread destruction of the Korean peninsula during its 3 years of civil war (1950-1953), within 50 years South Korea had achieved rapid economic development and had become a relatively strong economic force in the global economy. Yet, Korea's recent past is full of traumas, among them colonial domination under Japanese imperialism, the division of the peninsula, the Korean War, authoritarian dictatorships, and civilian massacres. As the result of being subjected to politically motivated brutality and economic destitution, generations of Koreans have lived with a sense of victimhood and doomed fate. Even today, trauma seems almost inherently figured into Koreans' lives, and traumatic experiences are normalized. Contemporary South Korean cinema should be situated within these particular social, political, economic, cultural, and historical contexts.

Korean films have indisputably helped corroborate a unified vision of national identity by representing/re-presenting historical traumas. At first these films were made and distributed in service of the nation-state's dominant ideology. The South Korean government provided only one official version of history in order to stifle internal differences and conflicts. Under the nation's first two liberal presidents, however, Koreans were exposed to alternative histories. As a result, the notions of a stable and coherent nation, national culture, and national identity have encountered new and unexpected challenges. The purpose of this dissertation is to consider how these counter-

Trap: Globalization and the Assault on Prosperity and Democracy. London: Zed Press, 1997. Print., Haejoang Cho Han. "'You are entrapped in an imaginary well': the formation of subjectivity within compressed development—a feminist critique of modernity and Korean culture." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1.1 (2000): 49-69. Print.

narratives have been visualized and narrativized in massively popular films. I believe my study will complement existing ones because of its specific concentration on popular historical films produced between 1998 and 2008.

V. Conclusion: Peppermint Candy, Cinema, History, Narrative, and Identity

Cinema is a complex social construct rather than an imitation of reality. A film is a work of art, economic commodity, and mindless entertainment simultaneously. Marc Ferro is right to assert that society is not passively reflected on film but is “an active agency creating its image on film.”⁹⁴ In discussing *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation*, two films that portray the Gwangju Uprising, Ferro’s gratitude toward the historian-filmmaker is particularly pertinent: “thanks to popular memory and oral traditions, the historian-filmmaker can give back to society a history it has been deprived of by the institution of History.”⁹⁵ As a dynamic participant in its own context, cinema, especially historical films, takes its viewers to a new terrain of history, previously silenced or forgotten; history is re-produced within and outside of cinema.

Any analysis of a text should be situated within its cultural and historical contexts. I strive for a truly historical analysis of text, and truly historical poetics are always already social and historical, under the tradition of Russian formalists.⁹⁶ As Mikhail Bakhtin and Pavel Medvedev have said about literary scholarship, film analysis

⁹⁴ Ferro 19.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 20.

⁹⁶ Stam 194. Stam is borrowing from Bakhtin and Medvedev.

cannot be completed outside the context of culture of a given epoch; it is inseparable from socio-cultural life and ideological horizons.⁹⁷

By depicting crucial historical moments onscreen, the films I examine in this study make an effort either to support a cohesive single vision of the past or to provide different narratives (alternative or revisionist or counter-history or participatory). Some of them try to portray an event that still generates conflict. The Japanese in *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* are an undisputed enemy who never fail to unify Koreans to fight against them. These films underscore national harmony by offering the simplistic division of “Us” versus “Them,” although even they cannot suppress the inner conflict and fissures within “Us.”⁹⁸

To borrow Homi Bhabha’s phrase, *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* are exemplars of pedagogical history; they are the history written by the powerful, in which there is no room for narratives of the marginal. Today’s nations, however, are beginning both to accept the “double-time-ness” of their histories and to attempt to validate the performative. A nation’s temporality should consider both the pedagogical, supplied by the dominant, and the performative, stories of and by minorities.⁹⁹

The North Koreans in *Welcome to Dongmakgol* are much more likeable and easy to identify with than the Japanese. Furthermore, in this film, South Korean soldiers exhibit monstrous atrocities that older war films never portrayed or even alluded to.

Rather than attempting to convince the viewers of the clear-cut division between “Good”

⁹⁷ I am referring to Stam and his understanding of Bakhtin and Medvedev. Stam applies their discussion of literature to film (Stam 199).

⁹⁸ I will discuss these conflicts and fissures further in Chapter 1.

⁹⁹ Homi Bhabha. “DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of modern nation” in *Nation and Narration*: 293.

and “Bad,” and “Us” and “Them,” *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* blame the Korean War itself as a monster which turned ordinary people into killing machines. The war is depicted as gruesome and horrific as always, yet the ways the war is portrayed are more complex and ambiguous than in previous Korean War films.

I assert that *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* reveal visions of the past that are both conservative and regressive by creating alternative past/present/futures that depict Korea remaining a Japanese colony; and *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* suggest revisionist perspectives that disclose intricate and multifaceted reflections on the civil war that occurred within the Korean peninsula.¹⁰⁰ In portraying the Gwangju Uprising, *Splendid Vacation* has been accused of commodifying a traumatic event and immersing the viewers with cheap emotional theatricality, although some argue that the film offers an important opportunity for Koreans as a community to recall and mourn the shameful past.¹⁰¹ *Peppermint Candy* deals with the same historical event but takes the very different approach of blurring who is to blame and be found guilty. Yet, even *Peppermint Candy*, a film that complicates and challenges conventional historiography of progress-driven national narrative, cannot avoid resorting to simplistic gender dichotomy. All six films under discussion expose discrepancies and incoherence in their contents, in that their ideological messages are often inconsistent. It is impossible, therefore, to sort these

¹⁰⁰ This discussion is further developed in Chapter 1 and 2, respectively.

¹⁰¹ Critic Bryan Cheyette accuses *Schindler's List* of emotional theatricality. See Cheyette's "The Uncertain Certainty of *Schindler's List*" in *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler's List*, ed. Yosefa Loshitzky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997): 226-238. Print. Cheyette asserts that the film fails in containing the uncertainties and complexities of the Holocaust and resorts to crass sentimentalism and Manichaeian oppositions. I see a parallel between *Schindler's List* and *Splendid Vacation* and I discuss this further in chapter 3. Most reviews by film critics were critical of *Splendid Vacation*, but some general audience members commended the film, mostly its attempt to directly deal with the Gwangju massacre. I have already addressed some of the similar issues here in my introduction.

films neatly into Comoli and Narboni's categories. It can be argued that they belong to more than one category at the same time.

History has long been used to imposing particular collective identities upon community members. National history was supposed to unite the members of a nation together under their country's common narrative, yet now it must cope with the daunting task of embracing the stories of the long-ignored, dismissed, and silenced. More and more often, the existence of minorities whose stories have been overlooked is recognized, and History¹⁰² strives to incorporate their stories into national narratives.

Official history is not the only history available in South Korea today. Thanks to the country's hard-won democracy, contemporary South Korean society can challenge History. History is only a narrative imposed by its victors, not the facts as they happened; it is about how events are narrativized, not about the facts of the events per se.

Whether or not we realize it, we all historicize. To someone, at any given time, we describe past events of our personal experiences, social upheavals, and national news. As Ahmet Gürata and Louise Spence have indicated, however, description is never neutral, ideologically or cognitively.¹⁰³ And often, most of our historiocizations do not have an impact on anyone else except a few individual listeners. When a different

¹⁰² Marc Ferro uses History with a capital "H" in contrast to history with lower-case "h." To him, History is not just any version of past accounts but the officially sanctioned history. See Ferro's *Cinema and History*.

¹⁰³ Ahmet Gürata and Louise Spence. "In Focus: Non-Western Historiography?: A Polemic. Introduction." *Cinema Journal* 50.1 (Fall 2010): 131. Print.

perspective of the past is visualized on the screen in a commercially viable film,¹⁰⁴ the influence of this particular historicization can be enormous.¹⁰⁵

Historical films have been used to spread a sense of unity, harmony, and progress among members of the nation for years, yet Koreans now live in a time in which films containing alternative historical narratives are produced, and distributed, and become popular. Revised and new understandings of the past suggest changes in nation's present and future.

Like history and cinema, nation is also a site of multiple, conflicting temporalities. David Martin-Jones argues that narrative time in many national cinemas is reflective of national time.¹⁰⁶ We are now living in a time and place in which history, nation, and cinema embrace plurality and struggle to visualize dependable, coherent temporalities. Although the ubiquity of postmodernism, transnationalism, and globalism seems to justify this disorder and uncertainty, I maintain that the current juncture renders it even more critical to come to terms with one's national history and national identity, which is already a strong imperative because of the human desire to preserve collective identity and community. Although the definitions of all these terms are so slippery that exact meanings for "history," "identity," or "nation" cannot be pinned down, I believe that these concepts remain vital to our perceptions of who we are.

¹⁰⁴ By "commercially viable film," I mean a film to which the regular audience has relatively easy access because of extensive distributions and exhibitions.

¹⁰⁵ The public release of *Schindler's List* and its subsequent success rekindled general interest in the Holocaust worldwide. For further debates, refer to Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust*.

¹⁰⁶ David Martin-Jones. *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National contexts*. Edinburgh, U.K.: Edinburgh University Press, 2006. Print. Several contributors to Frances Gateward's *Seoul Searching* make a similar observation, that many recent Korean films are narrated through a jumbled chronological order.

I close with a detailed discussion of a scene from *Peppermint Candy* because of the power the film has over me to this very day. *Peppermint Candy* depicts how the life of one man irrevocably transforms after his deployment to Gwangju in May 1980. It begins with a troubled man, Kim Young-Ho, standing in front of an oncoming train and yelling, “I want to go back!” Although he cannot go back, the film takes its audience back to Young-Ho’s past from 3 days to 20 years before.

In reverse chronological order, the audience witnesses Young-Ho’s life from age twenty to forty, and in the process realizes that the 1980 Gwangju Uprising was the ultimately decisive moment for him. Before Young-Ho’s deployment to Gwangju, as part of his mandatory military service, he was a naïve youth. In Gwangju, he accidentally kills a high-school girl. Afterward, he becomes a torture expert and an abusive husband who makes his living by taking advantage of South Korea’s tumultuous sociopolitical upheavals.

In addition to featuring an unlikeable protagonist, *Peppermint Candy* takes another unconventional strategy by narrating its story backward in time instead of starting at a predictable “beginning” and moving forward. Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient praise *Peppermint Candy*’s reverse chronology as a challenge to the conventional narrative structure of hegemonic Hollywood storytelling. They regard the film’s unusual structure as its attempt to de-colonize itself from Hollywood imperialism.¹⁰⁷ Martin-Jones extends these observations by claiming that films like *Peppermint Candy*—the time-image films constructed in non-linear narrative cinematic time—are connected to the notion of alternative national identity, and that such formal

¹⁰⁷ Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient. “Forgetting to Remember, Remembering to Forget: The Politics of Memory and Modernity in the Fractured Films of Lee Chang-dong and Hong Sang-soo,” in *Seoul Searching*: 115-140. Print.

experiments express “the difficulty of narrating national identity at a time of historical crisis or transformation.”¹⁰⁸

This particular scene is in the penultimate chapter of *Peppermint Candy*, set in Gwangju, May 1980. In this segment, Young-Ho is still an innocent young man who has just killed a girl by accident. It is a dark, silent night. His face is in close-up, lit by the lanterns of his fellow soldiers. The lights on his face are harsh and they constantly move around. Realizing what he has just done, Young-Ho holds the girl’s motionless body and tells her, over and over, to wake up and go home. He weeps. The unmoving camera captures him shaking the corpse and crying. His eyes and nose are running. Tears are all over his face and his voice trembles as he repeatedly begs the girl to get up and go home. The scene is short, but it feels like it lasts for a very long time.

It is extremely distressing, almost to the point of physical pain, to watch a man break down like this. If the audience knows anything about the 1980 Gwangju Massacre, this scene makes it even more difficult for them to decide whether to sympathize with Young-Ho or hate him. Although I did not know much about Gwangju when I first watched *Peppermint Candy*, I found the scene utterly heartbreaking. I remember the first time I saw this film alone, in a small theater in Seoul, in the winter of 2000, and how this film affected me in a visceral way. I have re-watched *Peppermint Candy* many times since, but it still has a powerful impact on me.

¹⁰⁸ Martin-Jones 1. Employing Gilles Deleuze’s theory of the time-image and the movement-image from his two cinema books, Martin-Jones finds an intriguing link between cinema and national identity. According to Martin-Jones’s interpretation of Deleuze, in movement-image cinema, the temporality of a film is less important than actions taken by the protagonist. The narrative is driven by the protagonist and his or her action is justified by carefully prepared causality. In time-image cinema, the temporality of the film (i.e. time itself) is the center of the narrative; or better yet, the tense of the film in a particular moment, the passing of the time, is more critical than the narrative itself. Gilles Deleuze. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. Print., *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. Print.

Regarding cinema's affect on its viewers, a traditional model of psychoanalytic theory presupposes the position of the hypothetical spectator and his passive absorption into cinema. Crudely put, the screen functions as a mirror and the spectator regresses into infancy.¹⁰⁹ However, this model has been severely criticized because its passive spectator is allowed no active participation, let alone resistance. Nor does it take into account actual people in the theater who have individual and possibly transgressive racial, sexual, gender, national, ethnic, and religious orientations.¹¹⁰ While psychoanalysis remains useful for its considerations of universal human desire, the experience of cinema by real audience members is a much more complex process.¹¹¹

In the scene described above, the camera shows Young-Ho's face from a distance (a point-of-view shot from the stance of his nameless fellow soldiers). I observe Young-Ho as an outsider. Although I feel terrible for him, I am relieved that I can be an observer, not a participant. This heart-wrenching pain of this scene, however, does not let me keep a comfortable distance from Young-Ho.¹¹² I believe that this unnamed, visceral reaction is the collective guilt shared by Koreans who lived through the 1980s.

¹⁰⁹ The idea of psychoanalytic spectatorship and Lacanian film analysis is most famously represented in Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975): 6-18. Print.

¹¹⁰ In her groundbreaking book on audience reception of the horror genre, Carol Clover argues that both male and female viewers experience empowerment through the actions of the "final girl." Carol J. Clover. *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. Print. One of the classic articles on resisting spectators is Manthia Diawara's discussion of his own experience as a black man watching *The Birth of a Nation* (Dir. D. W. Griffith. 1915.). Manthia Diawara. "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance." *Screen* 29.4 (Autumn 1988): 66-76. Print.

¹¹¹ Some of the most highly regarded methodologies of recent reception theory include an ethnographic approach, achieved through interviews and surveys, for example. The classic literature includes Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984. Print.) and Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1985. Print.).

¹¹² Murray Smith meticulously records the process of the audience's engagement with characters. Using Smith's terms, I recognize and align with Young-Ho but I do not feel allegiance to him; I do not identify with him. Instead I observe Young-Ho from a distance and sympathize with him. However, it is very

Until this moment in the film, Young-Ho is very unlikeable and almost despicable, even though he is the protagonist with whom we are supposed to identify. In this scene, we finally learn about this life-shattering incident and things start to make sense, yet it is too late to start to like him. Still, it is unimaginable for me to accuse Young-Ho of murder, even though he does kill the girl. Young-Ho is also a victim of the 1980s in South Korea; I do feel sorry for him. The scene evoked such an intense agony from me because I see Young-Ho as a familiar portrayal of “Us”—that is, ourselves, Koreans.

Although I was a little child when the Gwangju Massacre occurred, I am no stranger to having to endure the suppression of individual rights to the supposed greater good of a totalitarian society. In a way, in watching Young-Ho, I am relaying my personal experience of having lived under a stifling authoritarian regime. In a way, I *am* identifying with Young-Ho on a deeper and more visceral level than ordinary viewers, not only because of my identity as a Korean but also as someone who knows or who thinks she knows what Young-Ho is going through.

For such a long time, history literally meant pain and suffering to most South Koreans.¹¹³ One might still be able to accuse Young-Ho of his various crimes, yet most Korean audiences know what it was like to have to carry out daily life in the 1970 and 1980s in South Korea, like Young-Ho did. Therefore, it is difficult not to identify with

difficult to decide whether or not I adopt his feeling as my own (empathy). I am using Smith’s terminology here. I discuss Smith further in Chapter 3. Murray Smith. *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema*. Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon Press, 1995. Print.

¹¹³ For instance, a recent book titled, *Our Silenced Contemporary History: Search for Mysteries in Korean Modern History* (Jung Gil-Hwa and Kim Hwan-Gyun et al. Seoul, Korea: Haenaem, 2006. Print.) focuses on the tragic moments of recent Korean history that have been suppressed. One author maintains that the common beauty of Korean art reflects its tragic history, and calls it a beauty of tragedy and heartbreak (Kim Yuk-Hoon. *Living Textbook of Contemporary Korean History*. Seoul, Korea: Humanist, 2007. Print.).

Young-Ho to a certain degree if you are a Korean watching this scene. For the supposedly greater good of the community, society, and nation, individuals' needs and happiness were sacrificed and ignored. Young-Ho is an unfortunate yet familiar trope of the self-loathing man in Korean cinema and society.¹¹⁴

Contemporary South Korean cinema has begun depicting this history full of pain and suffering. I am interested in this portrayal of history on screen as well as what these historical films tell us about today's South Korea. This dissertation examines the representation of history in recent South Korean films from 1998 to 2008. It investigates the practices of film historiography during the decade under two liberal presidents, with specific attention to how cinema narrates the story of nation and the modes of historical representation it employs.

As Marcia Landy aptly states it, cinematic representation of popular history is “a fusion of current and practical strategies of survival couched in clichéd, proverbial language characteristic of commonsensical approaches to knowledge.”¹¹⁵ I focus on the ways that certain historical films portray the lives of people caught in the middle of traumatic events. My interests lie in how history is depicted in these popular films, how social contexts shape the portrayal of particular historical traumas on screen, and how these films serve the needs of contemporaneous political agendas. Through close examinations of texts and their contexts, I will analyze how specific films negotiate the notions of history, nation, and identity, and what they disclose about South Korea and Koreans today.

¹¹⁴ I will expand on the trope of self-loathing men in Chapter 3. Kyung Hyun Kim's discussion of *Peppermint Candy* is especially useful to this context.

¹¹⁵ Landy 1.

CHAPTER 2

THE RETURN OF JAPANESE COLONIALISM:

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES WITH JAPAN IN

2009 LOST MEMORIES AND HANBANDO

I. Introduction

In 2002, South Korea witnessed the moderate success of a rare science-fiction blockbuster film, *2009 Lost Memories*.¹¹⁶ Its climactic scene shows the protagonist, Sakamoto, enraged over the death of a little boy he has befriended.¹¹⁷ The child has died after being shot by Sakamoto's former colleague in the JBI (Japanese Bureau of Investigation). In the next sequence, the film shows Korean independence fighters being ruthlessly killed underground, as the Japanese enjoy street fairs and fireworks above ground. Action in these two locations is presented in slow motion through parallel editing, over solemn background music. As the film cuts back and forth between these two very different spaces (one above ground and the other below), the extreme contrasts between the Japanese and Koreans become more than clear.

¹¹⁶ According to <<http://www.koreanfilm.org/kfilm02.html>>, *2009 Lost Memories* was the seventh most successful domestic film of 2002. Reportedly, 2,263,800 South Koreans watched this film in theaters nationwide, including 882,400 in Seoul.

¹¹⁷ Sakamoto, an ethnic Korean who identifies himself as Japanese, is an elite police officer working for the Japanese Bureau of Investigation. At first, Sakamoto's Japanese identity is stable and uncontested, but his loyalty to Japan is challenged as the narrative develops. Ultimately, he chooses to become Korean and join the Korean independence fighters. The name of the little Korean boy Sakamoto befriends is Minjae; Sakamoto has unknowingly killed Minjae's father earlier in the film. Guilt-stricken, Sakamoto feels especially responsible for Minjae's well-being, and thus his anger at Minjae's death is understandably intense. I discuss the character of Minjae later in this chapter.

A close-up, still in slow motion, captures Sakamoto screaming and holding the corpse of the little boy. In the next shot, his antagonist, the Japanese man Saigo, is enjoying the street fair with his wife and little daughter. This sequence of brutal killings and happy family moments emphasizes the radical difference between the lives of Koreans and Japanese. Its emotional excess is a part of both the film's spectacle and catharsis; one could assume that the latter owes much to the eagerness of its Korean audience to hate the Japanese with the slightest encouragement.

Toward the end of the Japanese colonial occupation of Korea (1910–1945), especially after 1937, Japan exploited the Korean population “in unimaginably brutal ways”; by 1945, as many as 3.5 million Koreans were working abroad for Japan “in the worst jobs in mines and factories” or as “cannon-fodder for the Japanese military.”¹¹⁸ Michael Robinson appositely describes the understandably bitter Korean sentiments that developed through the nation's colonial experience:

Perhaps the most brutal memory revolves around the tens of thousands of Korean women who were lured or conscripted outright into the so-called *wianbu* (Comfort Corps), a system of forced prostitution that serviced the sexual needs of the Japanese military in China and south-east Asia. It is small wonder then that the Koreans cultivated a hatred for the very mention of the period of Japanese rule in the post-war era. And even a half a century removed in time, these wounds, cultural, spiritual and physical, remain only partially dormant and liable to painful reopening at the least provocation.¹¹⁹

Koreans' lives under these 35 years of Japanese occupation have been represented very frequently in Korean popular media. Antagonism toward Japan seems almost requisite for Koreans, as various social, cultural, and educational apparatuses regularly and persistently restage acts of cruelty and brutality committed under Japanese colonial

¹¹⁸ Michael Robinson. “Contemporary Cultural Production in South Korea: Vanishing Meta-Narratives of Nation” in *New Korean Cinema*: 21-22.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

imperialism. These include the prohibition against using Korean language, forceful changing of Korean names to Japanese ones, exploitation of male and female labor, and sexual slavery of the so-called “comfort women,” among other atrocities. Even though some might lament that today’s South Korean youth are immersed in Japanese popular culture and have almost forgotten the colonial relationship between the two countries, it is a fact that two expensive blockbuster films that overtly promote anti-Japanese sentiment were recently produced.

In this chapter, I discuss two popular films that deal directly with the painful past of Korea’s colonial experience, *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando*.¹²⁰ *2009 Lost Memories* hypothesizes a Korea still under Japanese occupation in 2009 through the story of a young Korean-Japanese man awakened to fight for Korea’s independence.¹²¹ *Hanbando* imagines a not-too-distant future in which Japan presents a substantial threat to the unification of North and South Korea. While neither of these films were box office flops, their profits were disappointing, considering their huge production costs, producers’ high expectations, and pre-release media hype.

An examination of *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* should be situated within the contexts of contemporary Korean politics, economy, and culture, as well as the historical landscapes of Korea, especially vis-à-vis Japan. I argue that these two films simplify the complex place Japan continues to occupy within Korean national identity. The clear, simple dichotomy of Japan as aggressor and Koreans as victims does not encapsulate the two countries’ multifaceted, fast-shifting relationship. This naïve, crude point of view seems partly responsible for the films’ somewhat disappointing box office

¹²⁰ *Hanbando* literally means the entire Korean peninsula.

¹²¹ *2009 Lost Memories* was theatrically released nationwide in February 2002, so 2009 represents the near future.

results. As illustrators of the difficult, intricate nature of the Korea-Japan relationship, *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* speak to the contemporaneous understanding of Korea's national identity.

Since Korea's liberation in 1945, curricula about the Japanese occupation have been one of the most critical portions of modern history in the official Korean educational system.¹²² Especially in their middle- and high-school history textbooks, Korea's schools meticulously document the war crimes committed under Japanese imperialism and the pain and suffering of Koreans during that time. Examples of Japan's wrongdoings abound (the ones written about most often include the assassination of Empress Myeongseong, the military conscription of Korean men and women, and the plundering of Korean natural resources, especially rice). In addition, the sporadic yet consistent confrontations of and violent attacks against Japan by Korean resistance movements are highly praised.¹²³

However, at the same time, Japan also occupies a prominent position in Korea's popular culture. Many stores in Myeong-dong, one of Seoul's busiest districts, are staffed with Japanese-speaking clerks, display Japanese signs, and play Japanese songs both inside and outside. Shopkeepers try to entice Japanese tourists, and Japanese shoppers are

¹²² Anti-Japanese sentiment is strongly ingrained in almost every aspect of Korean social life. Students are taught about Japanese colonialism; local sites of anti-Japanese activities are well preserved and resistant patriots revered; and any competition against Japan, particularly in sports, draws much attention. Also, Korean media thoroughly publicize any remarks made by Japanese right-wing politicians about the colonial period.

¹²³ Almost all of the Korean high-school history textbooks I examined, from the 1950s through the current era, emphasize atrocities committed under Japanese imperial colonialism. The only positive aspects of Japan's modernization they mention are the development of its nationwide railroad system and standardization of measures, and even these improvements are credited solely to Japan's intention of maximizing its exploitation of Korea. During the 1970s and 1980s, history textbooks were published by a single government agency in Korea. Even in the 1990s, Korean history textbooks were printed by a single authorized publisher. Other publishers have been allowed to print history textbooks since the late 1980s, but all of the books still require official approval from the government. See, for example, *Korean History I, II* (Korean History Textbooks for High School). Seoul: Moongyobu, Daehan Textbook, 1970, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1980, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1996. Print.).

almost always present somewhere on the street corners, where Japanese brands and stores are easily found. A mega-bookstore in Seoul, Kyobo Moongo, is fully equipped with a wide range of current Japanese products, including magazines, novels, CDs, and DVDs of Japanese TV shows and films. Today, Japan is wholly accessible to and ready to be consumed by all Koreans if they desire.¹²⁴

Generic anti-Japanese feelings are still strongly inculcated in Korea today, yet Korean youth enjoy Japanese popular culture more than ever. The roots of this incongruity lie deep in Korea's past, especially the twentieth century imperial period under Japan. Despite the colonial nature of the Japanese occupation and its central place in Korea's national memory, Koreans have learned to believe that the politics, economics, and culture of their nation have always been superior to Japan's. Thus, from the Korean perspective, before colonization Korea's relationship to Japan was as a translator or mediator of sophisticated, refined systems, including Confucianism, Buddhism, pottery, calligraphy, art, and literature. Instead of crediting the origins of these systems to China, which of course was the center of regional power and advanced culture in East Asia for centuries, Korea has claimed its own position of superiority (based in part on its proximity to China). According to Koreans, it was Korea that transmitted precious knowledge and skills to an underdeveloped Japan.

But this sense of superiority has been all but completely reversed in the past hundred years, as Japan set itself up as the greater regional power. Despite lingering resentment from its former colony, and despite the political and economic restructuring it

¹²⁴ The discussion of the Korean Wave, i.e. the popularity of South Korean pop culture in Japan, is highly interesting, yet not crucially relevant in this context. Although not as popular as Japanese popular culture in Korea, Korean pop culture is accessible and available in Japan as well. Kino Kuniya, a mega bookstore in Tokyo, is also fully equipped with Korean books, magazines, CDs, and DVDs of Korean television shows and movies. If a customer wants to purchase an item that the store does not have, a special order can be placed and the store can generally make the item available.

was forced to undergo after World War II, Japan has retained its position of regional authority politically, economically, and culturally. Korea, by contrast, underwent a devastating civil war (1950-1953) that resulted in the division of its territory, and strived to escape from post-war destitution under decades of military dictatorships.

Although the colonial wounds were unhealed and still fresh, all things Japanese meant advanced, reliable, and sophisticated. A Korean might hate Japan as a nation-state, yet he or she would purchase a Japanese import with confidence. Being Korean is almost equivalent to disliking or even detesting Japan, and this antipathy toward Japan seems almost a necessary part of Korean national identity.¹²⁵ It is also undeniable, however, that many Koreans, especially today's youth, see Japan's cultural products as fashionable and attractive.¹²⁶ I assert that these conflicting reactions are central to examining *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando*.

2009 Lost Memories presents Korea as a colony of the Great Japanese Empire in the present (2009). Instead of surrendering unconditionally to Allied forces (as in actual history), the Japan depicted in the film was one of the Allied nations in World War II, and the atomic bombs that in reality were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki are dropped on Berlin instead. The protagonist of the film, Sakamoto, is ultimately forced to

¹²⁵ Many contemporary history books still focus on detailed descriptions of atrocities and brutalities committed under Japanese colonial power. (See, for example, Hahn Young-Woo. *Re-visiting Our History*. 2nd ed. Seoul: Gyeongsewon, 2003. Print., Noh Yong-Pil. *A Discourse of Korean Modern History*. Seoul: Hanguksahak, 2007. Print.). The author of *Re-writing Contemporary Korean History*, Park Se-Gil, goes further to assert that, under Japanese occupation, Koreans were like slaves, and they need to remember that shameful history in order not to repeat the past (Park Se-Gil. *Re-writing Contemporary Korean History* Vol. 1, 2, and 3. Seoul: Dolbegae, 2002. Print.).

¹²⁶ For further discussion of the prominence of Japanese popular culture across Asia, refer to Leo Ching's "Imaginations in the Empire of the Sun: Japanese Mass Culture in Asia" in *boundary 2* 21.1 (Spring 1994): 198-219. Print., "Give Me Japan and Nothing Else!": Postcoloniality, Identity, and the Traces of Colonialism" in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99.4 (Fall 2000): 763-788. Print. See also Darrell William Davis's "Japan: Cause for (Cautious) Optimism" in *Contemporary Asian Cinema*, ed. Anne Tereska Ciecko (New York: Berg, 2006): 193-206. Print.

choose between fully embracing his Korean ethnicity and abandoning it in favor of his Japanese acculturation; rather predictably, he decides to become Korean. Sakamoto enters a “Time Gate,” fixes “false” history, and returns events to their actual progression.

In *Hanbando*’s narrative, not only does Japan directly oppose the unification endeavor between North and South Korea, but Japanese military intimidation of the South Korean government also jeopardizes the Korean economy and political sovereignty. The film’s reenactment of the assassination of Myeongseong Hwanghu (Empress Myeongseong) certainly incenses Korean audiences—an effect not very difficult to achieve.¹²⁷ The majority of viewers’ postings mention how infuriated they became while watching the re-dramatization of the empress’s murder.¹²⁸

These films’ visualizations of volatile Korean memories are clearly intended to be deeply provocative. Some of the earliest scenes in *2009 Lost Memories* feature one of the most exciting and proud moments in recent South Korean history but twist it for shock value. Lee Dong-guk, a star soccer player on the 2002 South Korean World Cup team, is shown celebrating right after he has scored a goal in a crucial game. But even in this black-and-white shot, the flag on his uniform is in vivid red—and it is a Japanese flag,

¹²⁷ The assassination occurred early in the morning on October 8, 1895. At that time, Korea’s Joseon Dynasty was caught in the pre-colonial struggles of foreign powers such as Russia, Japan, and the Qing Dynasty of China, among others. Miura Goro, the newly appointed Japanese minister to Korea, orchestrated the assassination. A group of samurai sneaked into the Imperial palace in Seoul and killed Myeongseong Hwanghu. Her body was desecrated in the north wing of the palace. The empress was considering turning to Russia or China as an attempt to counter Japanese interference in Korea. She was 43. Peter Duus. *The Abacus and the Sword: the Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. Print.

¹²⁸ For actual postings, refer to Appendix.

not a Korean flag. It is impossible not to react to this explosive appropriation of a cherished national symbol.¹²⁹

The reenactment of Empress Myeongseong's murder in *Hanbando* is both brutal and graphic: a woman without any weapons to protect herself and her equally helpless entourage are mercilessly slaughtered. According to official history, the queen was murdered by a group of samurai and her corpse was cremated immediately afterward in the palace courtyard. In the film's overly dramatic, exaggerated, stylized recreation, the empress remains prim and proper until her last breath and marks her honorable death with a conscientious speech that imparts advice to the emperor, even as she is being stabbed and cut. Knowing the imminent danger, she does not attempt to flee in advance of the attack; instead, she marches to the king's court to bid him one last farewell. It feels entirely appropriate, after watching this adaptation of the very well-known event, for Koreans to become full of anger and hatred toward Japanese imperial forces, if not toward Japan as a whole.¹³⁰

In order to get Koreans to stand by their national myth of homogeneity and cohesiveness, the Japanese have been utilized as the most convenient and easily identifiable enemy on Korean screens for years.¹³¹ However, today's Korean cinema

¹²⁹ South Korean film critic Lee Dong-Jin points out *Hanbando*'s dangerously binary message, and Park Pyong-Shik maintains that *Hanbando* presumes that local viewers will be enraged simply because they are Koreans. Park argues that the film is simplistic and foolhardy. See <http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?id=17071>.

¹³⁰ Many comments from the audience mention that, after watching the reenactments of the assassinations of Ahn and Myeongseong Hwanghu, they felt enraged. These dramatizations of very well-known historical events still have the power to affect viewers deeply because of the role Japan has played in the formation of Korean national identities. For the actual postings, refer to Appendix.

¹³¹ The archetype of pure evil Japanese characters in South Korean films has been a staple since the nation's liberation in 1945. Films that pitted the Japanese as the ultimate Other against heroic Korean protagonists were especially popular in the 1960s. Of the hateful, atrocious Japanese characters that are a very familiar trope of South Korean films, one of the most famous is the Japanese officer Mori in *The Sea*

should consider the complex contextual relations of Korea and Japan. As a start, Japanese characters in Korean films can be more multifaceted than simply being the ultimate Other, yet both *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* seem to be stuck in the entrenched dichotomy. While being Korean almost requires one to detest anything Japanese, it is inevitable for Koreans to realize that Japan is their critical ally in many areas in international politics, especially in trade, as Korea's economy heavily relies on its import and export business with Japan. Simply put, being Korean demands one to come to terms with the nation's intricate and contradictory relationship with Japan.

Most regular reviewers of both films remark that *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* espouse particular versions of nationalism and patriotism and use anti-Japanese sentiment among the audience as a selling point. The loosely organized and unlikely narratives are at the core of another common unfavorable review. However, most reviewers agree that these films evoke a certain sense of loyalty, devotion, and patriotic mindset, and suggest that others go see the films "if you are Korean." This assertion returns to the critical role Japan plays in the national identity and national narratives of contemporary South Korea. *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* endeavor to address the complexity of recent Korea-Japan relations and do reflect these sociopolitical changes to some extent, but not sufficiently.

It is noteworthy that both films are set in the near future. *2009 Lost Memories* employs science fiction conventions, such as time travel and technologically advanced gadgets, more directly than *Hanbando* does; these conventions and the future settings are critical narrative strategies in both of these films. According to Steve Neale, science

Knows, played by Lee Ye-Chun. Lee became a big star after his role in this film. (Kim Hwa. *Korean Film History*. Seoul: Da In Media Pub., 2003. Print.).

fiction is a “fiction that takes place in the future or introduces some radical assumption about the present or the past”¹³² and “always functions as motivation for the nature of the fictional world, its inhabitants, and the events that happen within it, whether or not science itself is a topic or theme.”¹³³ Both *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* are cautionary “tales of the future”¹³⁴ that warn Koreans of coming dystopias that include an annihilated Korea, devoid of national sovereignty and facing grave threats from Japan.

Time travel is one of the most fascinating hypotheses of science fiction films. It allows the fantasy of escaping from historical determinism and offers a metaphorical solution to the issues and concerns of the present.¹³⁵ Its ideological function is built on “the hero myth” because the one who travels in time realizes that “history is made in one’s own image.”¹³⁶ Sean Redmond goes further regarding time travel in science fiction films:

If the modern world produces a particularly acute identity crisis and existential schizophrenia, then time travel allows one to come to face to face with one’s own doppelgänger, alter ego, or mirror reflection. When one time travels one is searching for wholeness, for metaphysical answers to the confusion at the core of the self and to the terrifying plight of the human condition.¹³⁷

¹³² Steve Neale. *Genre and Hollywood*. London: Routledge, 2000: 100. Print. Neale is borrowing Richard Hodgson’s definition of science fiction here (1959: 30). Richard Hodgson, “A Brief Tragical History of the Science Fiction Film,” *Film Quarterly* 13.2 (1959): 30-9. Print.

¹³³ Ibid. This is Neale’s argument.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ “The time travel film sometimes offers the fantasy of escape from *historical determinism* in favour of a typically Hollywood celebration of the ideology of individual freedom: ‘no fate’ as Sarah Connor (played by Linda Hamilton) writes, emphatically, in *Terminator 2*”. Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska. *Science Fiction Cinema: From Outerspace to Cyberspace*. London: Wallflower, 2000: 27. Print. Sean Redmond also argues that science fiction allows us to “metaphorically address the most pressing issues and themes that concern people in the present”. Sean Redmond, “The Origin of the Species: Time Travel and the Primal Scene” in *Liquid Metal*: 114. Sean Redmond, ed. *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Film Reader*. London: Wallflower, 2004. Print.

¹³⁶ Redmond 114.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 114-115.

2009 Lost Memories transports audiences to a past in which Japan has altered its own history (the past that Koreans are very much familiar with) at a high cost to Koreans. By traveling through a Time Gate, the film's hero, Sakamoto, is able to stop the Japanese from meddling in "the truthful history." By the film's end, the present is corrected so that the dire future events seen by the audience at the beginning of the film cannot occur.

In *2009 Lost Memories*, the device of time travel cleverly presents the visions of alternative history. By being able to go back to past, the characters of science fiction films fundamentally modify the past, the present, and thus the future. The very action of traveling through time causes many inevitable discrepancies and paradoxes, yet *2009 Lost Memories* conveniently skips this problem and underlines that it is, yet again, Japan and the Japanese who intervene and ruin the past, present, and future of Korea and Koreans.¹³⁸

Time travel is not a feature of *Hanbando*, but turmoil and uproar caused by Japan are resolved thanks to the efforts of Korean nationalists such as the president, who is not given a specific name, and the protagonist, Choi Minjae. *Hanbando* is not traditional science fiction, as its narrative does not utilize any imaginary technologies, but it is set in a near future in which the governments of North and South Korea re-connect a railroad that has been closed for more than a half-century. The film opens with the re-opening ceremony, at which the leaders of the North and South are seated side by side. It is a moment long awaited and dreamed of by families separated into North and South Korea since the end of the Korean War. The future settings of both films are important. They

¹³⁸ For more discussion of time travel, refer to *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. (Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, ed. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2003.) and *Science Fiction and Philosophy: From Time Travel to Superintelligence*. (Susan Schneider, ed. Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Print.).

remind their audiences of Japan's role in recent Korean history, present alternative futures, and function as warnings not to repeat the history.

II. Contextual Background

i) The Past

2009 Lost Memories and *Hanbando* greatly hinge on the preexisting knowledge of the domestic audience, who are well aware of the difficult and conflicting nexus between Korea and Japan. Especially their assumption about the way Koreans feel toward Japan, or rather the way Koreans are supposed to feel toward Japan, is critical to the success of the inflammatory narratives these films employ. In order to understand the historical background *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* significantly count on, it is necessary to examine the past relations between Korea and Japan.

The Joseon Dynasty of Korea, a sovereign state founded by Taejo Yi Seong-gye in 1392, faced one of its most serious challenges from foreign powers in the late nineteenth century. Despite strong resistance, Joseon became a battleground for competing imperial forces. Joseon was able to establish *Daehan Jeguk* [the Korean Empire] in 1897, but ceded its diplomatic sovereignty to Japan in 1905 with the signing

of the Eulsa Treaty.¹³⁹ In 1910, the Joseon dynasty finally collapsed under Japanese annexation.¹⁴⁰

Just before annexation, however, on October 26, 1909, a key Japanese politician, Ito Hirobumi, was assassinated at the Harbin train station in China by a young Korean nationalist, Ahn Jung-Geun. Ito was considered the mastermind behind the first stages of Korea's colonization, which began in the 1890s; until almost right before his death he served as the first Resident General of Joseon. After resigning his post in June 1909 because of Japanese political intrigue, Ito travelled by train to Japanese Manchuria, where he was scheduled to meet a Russian representative. After firing six shots into Ito, Ahn reportedly dropped his gun, yelled for Korean independence, and waved a Korean flag that he had taken out of his pocket. Without any resistance, Ahn was arrested on the spot and transferred to Japan to be tried. In spite of his request for execution as a prisoner of war, he was ordered to be hanged as a common criminal on March 26, 1910, in Port Arthur, then known by the Japanese name Ryojun.¹⁴¹

Ironically, Ito was a supporter of a slow, moderate process of colonization, but the takeover of Korea was implemented immediately after his death, with annexation becoming official on August 22, 1910. Some believe that Ahn's assassination of Ito was

¹³⁹ On 17 November 1905, the Eulsa Treaty, or Japan-Korea Protectorate Treaty, between the Empire of Japan and Korea was signed; it was heavily influenced by the result of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). By making Korea a protectorate of Japan, the treaty granted Korea's diplomatic sovereignty to Japan. In 1910, Korea was fully annexed by Japan. See Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword*.

¹⁴⁰ 29 August 1909 is the date when the treaty of *Hanil Hapbang Neugyak*, a coerced treaty of Korea's annexation to Japan, was signed. The event is also called *Gyeongsul Gukchi*, which means "The Humiliation of the Nation in the Year of the Dog." The day is remembered today as *Gukchi-il*, that is, "The Day of National Shame." See *ibid*.

¹⁴¹ These historical events are also discussed in Duus's *The Abacus and the Sword* and Alexis Dudden's *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005. Print.).

partly responsible for this rapid, fierce seizure.¹⁴² Today, not only do the educational and societal systems of Korea commemorate the actions of Ahn and other “honorable patriotic men”¹⁴³ who sacrificed their lives to resist Japan, but paying tribute to independence activists and patriots is one of the essential practices of Korean national identity.

Both *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* heavily depend on dramatized reenactments of pivotal historical events that are almost immediately recognizable to the domestic audience. Although the deaths of the two important political figures in them are indisputably accepted as official history, the two films treat the assassinations quite differently. The empress, portrayed as a defenseless royal woman, is slaughtered unlawfully by assassins in her palace, while Ito is “justifiably” killed by a Korean nationalist hero on colonized soil (albeit in another country). Both of these very well-known murders have been romantically dramatized many times in various media.¹⁴⁴

2009 Lost Memories and *Hanbando* endeavor to evoke historical traumas of colonial experiences through sentimentally portrayed scenes. As characters are dying, emotions are heightened and tears drop; sad background music intensifies the impact; the slow-motion action embellishes and elongates the sequence. The films’ blatant usage of extended slow motion to manipulate audience responses, however, has rightfully been

¹⁴² Duus provides additional detail about Ito’s political influence and the impact of his assassination.

¹⁴³ In Korean, Ahn is called *Euisa* [Honorable/Moral Man].

¹⁴⁴ As one of the monumental assassinations committed by independence movement fighters, Ahn’s action has been re-enacted in numerous TV shows, films, and plays in both South and North Korea. The killing of the empress has been shown in extremely popular music videos, TV shows, and films. Most recently, a film about the fictional love story between the empress and the chief of her guard was released in South Korea in September 2009: *Like Flame, Like Butterfly* [*The Sword with No Name*]. Dir. Kim Yong-gyun.

derided as banal and trite.¹⁴⁵ One cannot help but notice and even resent the forced, dragging pace of the films when sympathetic characters (especially women and children) are shot to death, when a protagonist lectures about what it means to act appropriately as a Korean, or when a reigning monarch remains stoic during her own assassination. The most climactic scenes of *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando*, the killing of Ahn and massacre of the Korean freedom fighters, and the assassinations of the empress and emperor, also use slow motion with melancholic soundtracks.

By utilizing these cinematic strategies, *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* compel their audiences to accept fictionalized presentations of events as alternative futures that are very likely to happen if we are not careful. Through the use of visual and aural cues, these films try to influence audiences to respond with rage. Although these attempts are transparent at best, such reenactments still have the power to provoke gut reactions that are deeply ingrained in Koreans' sense of national identity.¹⁴⁶

ii) The Present

Although relations between South Korea and Japan were officially normalized in 1965 with the payment of some reparations by the Japanese government,¹⁴⁷ the importation of Japanese popular culture into Korea was banned until 1998. During this time, however, many Japanese TV shows, films, and animation series were unofficially

¹⁴⁵ Many reviews of *2009 Lost Memories* on the *Cine 21* website have expressed frustrations over repetitious slow motion and melancholic background music. For actual postings, refer to the Appendix.

¹⁴⁶ Some of the reviews directly refer to these visceral reactions. For actual postings, refer to the Appendix.

¹⁴⁷ Korea normalized its diplomatic relations with Japan in 1965 under Park Chung-Hee's presidency. The decree is officially called "Korea-Japan Diplomatic Normalization" (Korea-Japan Conference, 1965).

plagiarized; some Japanese TV shows and films were pirated on VHS cassettes by college students and other ardent fans. All of these practices ceased in the late 1990s when the Korean government under President Kim Dae-Jung officially allowed the import of Japanese popular cultural products.¹⁴⁸ Now, in 2011, Japanese novels, magazines, music, anime, TV shows, and films are very popular among Korean youth and easily accessible to anyone in South Korea.¹⁴⁹

Conversely, Korean popular culture has made inroads into Japan and other Asian countries. For example, in the early 2000s, the phenomenal popularity in Japan of a Korean soap opera called *Winter Sonata* made its male star, Bae Yong-Jun (mostly known as *Yonsama*), one of the highest-earning actors in Asia. (Bae is still widely recognized and popular throughout the region, although his subsequent TV shows and films have not been as successful as *Winter Sonata*.) Consequently, Korean cultural products now draw more attention from the general Japanese population than they did in the 1990s. Known as the Korean Wave [*Hanryu*], the craze was short-lived in Japan but did balance a bit the two nations' cultural exchange, which had been primarily one-sided, as Japanese pop culture was pervasive in Korea while there was virtually no interest in Korean culture in Japan. Even though Japanese culture in Korea remains much stronger

¹⁴⁸ The legal importation, distribution, exhibition, and sale of Japanese cultural products began in South Korea on 1 January 2004.
<http://www.cine21.com/Article/article_view.php?mm=001001001&article_id=20864>.

¹⁴⁹ For further discussion of trans-national traffic of East Asian popular culture, refer to *Media Consumption and Everyday Life in Asia*, ed. Youna Kim (New York: Routledge, 2008. Print.), *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*, ed. Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008. Print.), and *Popular Culture, Globalization and Japan*, ed. Matthew Allen and Rumi Sakamoto (London; New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.) among others.

than Korean culture in Japan, each country's culture is increasingly becoming familiar to and valued by the other.¹⁵⁰

On the political spectrum, an average citizen of Korea cannot be turned away from recollecting the nation's painful past with Japan. Japanese politicians make remarks that infuriate Korean nationalists from time to time. For example, a former Japanese secretary of foreign affairs has stated that both Korea and China preferred to be occupied by fellow Asians rather than by Euro-Americans, and that this preference forced Japan to endure the responsibility of caring for neighboring nations.¹⁵¹ In what is perhaps an even more bald-faced lie, the governor of Tokyo Province has stated that the "comfort women" who were conscripted into prostitution for the entertainment of Japanese soldiers during World War II volunteered knowingly, without coercion.¹⁵² Although their statements evoked tremendous anger and hatred among Koreans, these Japanese politicians suffered no official consequences. Koreans tend to believe that the political hegemony of Japan is controlled by right-wing conservatives who are the direct political descendents of

¹⁵⁰ According to *Cine 21*, the most prestigious film magazine of South Korea, there are two to four Japanese films shown in mainstream movie theatres in Korea at any given time, while there are only a few art-house theaters in Tokyo that regularly screen Korean films. Occasionally, a hugely successful South Korean film gets a nationwide distribution in Japan, but Japanese films in Korea are still more easily available than the other way around.

¹⁵¹ <<http://www.hankyung.com/news/app/newsview.php?aid=200903120492g>>, <<http://www.newbook.co.kr/new/view.asp?num=23350>>.

¹⁵² <<http://blog.naver.com/na2sky?Redirect=Log&logNo=80121226983>>, <<http://www.hani.co.kr/section-003100002/2005/03/003100002200503301351686.html>>. For academic studies of Japanese politicians' comments on the past, refer to Alexis Dudden's *Troubled Apologies among Japan, Korea, and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. Print.) and *Japan's Reversed History [Ilbonyi Guggooro Sseuneun Yeoksa]* by Kumoh History Education Committee (Seoul, Korea: Joong Ang Media Publishing, 2003. Print.).

influential politicians who, from Koreans' perspectives, were war criminals in World War II.¹⁵³

Anti-Japanese activities in South Korea are omnipresent in Koreans' daily lives as well. Just one example is the demonstration against the Japanese government that has been held in front of the Japanese Embassy in Seoul every Wednesday at noon since January 8, 1992.¹⁵⁴ A few survivors of the comfort women unit, now in their 80s and 90s, together with other supporters, began this protest to demand a formal apology for the crimes committed against them. So far, no apology has been offered.

In 2001 and 2005, debate over the accuracy of Japanese history textbooks was at the center of regional contention among Korea, China, and Japan.¹⁵⁵ Korea and China argued that some Japanese history textbooks either minimize or completely omit Japanese crimes perpetrated upon colonized nations, for example the Nanking Massacre (1937) and Unit 773 (a World War II Japanese bioweapons research facility in China). From the standpoint of the Japanese, however, such textbooks are only some of the many different history books from which schools can choose. The Japanese also argue that, because these books are used to teach children, no graphic detail is necessary and, moreover, that this matter is a purely domestic issue in which no foreign government should attempt to interfere.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Japan's political system has long been controlled by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). A former Japanese prime minister, Abe Shinzo, is a grandson of Kishi Nobuske, one of the masterminds of Japanese military fascism. Kishi was also a founding member of LDP; his political influence and familial legacy are still powerful.

¹⁵⁴ <<http://www.viewsnnews.com/article/view.jsp?seq=441>>.

¹⁵⁵ This debate was still ongoing in 2010.

¹⁵⁶ Interestingly, a historian of modern China, Tani E. Barlow, maintains that even U.S. academia justifies Japanese imperialism. Barlow indicates that, even today, the publication of apologetics is not uncommon; for example, the claim that "modern" Japan had no alternative but to "expand," and thus that Japanese

Every visit made by the Japanese prime minister and members of his cabinet to the Yasukuni Shrine (a Japanese World War II memorial where many people whom Koreans consider war criminals are buried) touches another very sore diplomatic spot. Korea and China have issued an announcement of disapproval concerning the visits. Yet the Japanese consider the Yasukuni Shrine to be one of the most sacred national Shinto shrines and the resting place of many Japanese national heroes. During his term, Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro visited the shrine five times. Although he claimed that his last visit (in 2001) was a private affair, its significance was clear to both Korea and China.¹⁵⁷

Korea and Japan still compete over several minor issues as well, such as the Dokdo/Takeshima Island and the East Sea/Sea of Japan.¹⁵⁸ At the same time, there is plenty of evidence of political and economic cooperation between the two countries. Both countries also host U.S. military bases and experience a strong American presence in their politics, economies, cultures, and other aspects of everyday life. Politically and economically, they need each other to survive amid global competition. Both economies subscribe to an export-oriented growth model; South Korean dependency on foreign markets, especially those of the U.S. and Japan, is extremely high. Some believe that

imperialism is “a wholly explicable, even excusable imperialism.” Barlow maintains that this argument also functions to “erase U.S. culpability in aggressive post-Pacific War neocolonialism.” Tani E. Barlow, “Introduction: On ‘Colonial Modernity’” in Barlow, ed. *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997: 4. Print.

¹⁵⁷ Alexis Dudden’s book, *Troubled Apologies Among Japan, Korea, and the United States*, discusses many of these contemporary debates between Korea and Japan and the mediating role of the U.S.

¹⁵⁸ Dokdo/Takeshima is a small uninhabited island between Korea and Japan, which has been the center of territorial dispute between them. Currently the island is occupied by the South Korean navy. Also, a strait between Korea and Japan is called the “Sea of Japan” in internationally sanctioned maps. South Korea has been lobbying for years to change the name of the strait to the “East Sea.” Dudden discusses the Dokdo/Takeshima issue further in *Troubled Apologies*.

their co-hosting of the 2002 World Cup soccer tournament provided an opportunity for Korea and Japan to form an alliance, but the result is yet to be seen.¹⁵⁹

No matter what goes on in academic discussions about Korea–Japan relations, heightened tension and rivalry between the two nations during any sporting competition between Korean and Japanese teams or individual athletes are so extreme as to become almost corporeal. This effect has been witnessed in World Cup soccer games, the World Baseball Classic, and even in international figure skating competitions.¹⁶⁰

Because Japan’s colonial occupation of Korea cannot be easily identified with either colonialism or imperialism as these concepts are defined in Euro-American contexts, this domination is often called “colonial imperialism.”¹⁶¹ According to Robert J. C. Young, colonialism is an economically driven “activity on the periphery” that is at times hard to control, whereas imperialism operates from the center “as a policy of state, driven by the grandiose projects of power.”¹⁶² Imperialism is more of a concept or theory; colonialism should be analyzed primarily as a practice. Japan’s domination over Korea combined both.

Imperialism was originally referred to as “a political system of actual conquest and occupation, but increasingly since the beginning of the twentieth century it came to be used in its Marxist sense of a general system of economic domination, with direct

¹⁵⁹ *Japan, Korea and the 2002 World Cup*, edited by John Horne and Wolfram Manzenreiter (London; New York: Routledge, 2002. Print.), is one of many books on the subject. There have been further discussions, conferences, and publications among Korean and Japanese scholars.

¹⁶⁰ Kim Yuna (South Korea) and Asada Mao (Japan) are figure skaters of the same age who have been competing for years in various championships. Whenever they compete directly, the Korean public watches Kim with extra intensity and ardor, hoping that she will beat Asada.

¹⁶¹ Unlike theorization based on European colonial expansions, Japanese occupations combine both colonialism and imperialism simultaneously.

¹⁶² Robert J. C. Young. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001: 16-17. Print.

political domination being a possible but not necessary adjunct.”¹⁶³ Fitting the proper descriptive term to the Japanese occupation of Korea is problematic because the situation coalesced political domination and economic exploitation under the rubric of colonial imperialism; that is, Japan treated Korea as a settlement colony and an exploitation colony simultaneously, a situation which is more or less similar to the case of Africa under European colonization and imperial domination. Despite its belated entry into the colonial race, Japan’s domination and coercion of its rapidly growing colonies were quick and effective, thanks to a combination of political subjugation and economic manipulation.¹⁶⁴

Mark Driscoll points to the persistence of Eurocentrism even in the study of postcoloniality and the specificity of the Japanese empire during its colonial-imperial rule of East Asia. He suggests the term “postcoloniality in reverse,” instead, for the close analysis of Japanese colonial-imperial rules:

To a great extent, this Eurocentric trajectory moves backward and is reversed in the case of Japan’s empire in East Asia; the historical trajectory in East Asia can be said to begin with multicultural postcoloniality in the period of Japan’s colonial-imperial rule and end with an ethnoracially homogenized cultural nationalism. In other words, antithetical to the supposed exuberant expansion of multicultural postcoloniality in our (still stubbornly Eurocentric) contemporary world, historical conditions have dictated an opposed tendency in Japan and East Asia toward intensified homogenization, dehybridization, and monoculturalization—postcoloniality in reverse.¹⁶⁵

Japan’s colonial imperialism is considered somewhat aberrational, compared to European examples. Clearly, even in the theorization of colonialism and imperialism, Eurocentrism

¹⁶³ Ibid. 26. Here, Young is borrowing from Raymond Williams. Raymond Williams. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Fontana, 1988. Print.

¹⁶⁴ Dudden, *Japan’s Colonization of Korea*.

¹⁶⁵ Yuasa Katsuei. *Kannani and Document of Flames: Two Japanese Colonial Novels*. Translated and with an introduction and critical afterword by Mark Driscoll. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005: 22-23. Print.

remains the standard compared to the “abnormal” practices of Asians, in this case the Japanese. Without a doubt, Japan’s colonization of Korea was an exhaustive, meticulous process that affected almost every aspect of Koreans’ lives, even though the occupation itself lasted only 35 years. The lingering impact of Japan’s complete domination, which continues today, is partly why Korea is still having difficulty moving on to the next level of postcolonial nationhood.¹⁶⁶

Chungmoo Choi broaches the notion of colonization of consciousness, which she explains as “the imposition by the dominant power of its own world view, its own cultural norms and values, on the (colonized) people so that they are compelled to adopt this alien system of thought as their own and therefore disregard or disparage indigenous culture and identity.”¹⁶⁷ Colonization of consciousness, therefore, “perpetuates cultural dependency and colonial subjectivity.” In order for formerly colonized people to overcome this colonization of consciousness, Choi suggests a “self-reflective examination” of “material conditions and hegemonic forces that deters decolonization” from within.¹⁶⁸

People in postcolonial societies need to undergo self-scrutiny and thorough inspection of their consciousness. Such scrupulous self-examination is what Koreans need at this juncture and what these films should have provided. Instead, *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* resort to an easy dichotomy of “Us” and “Them,” self and

¹⁶⁶ I use the term “postcolonial” to refer to “a theoretical and political position which embodies an active concept of intervention within such oppressive circumstances” (Young 57). Postcolonialism is also the celebration and commemoration of the triumph over the colonial. I discuss Young’s concept of postcolonial further at the end of this chapter.

¹⁶⁷ Chungmoo Choi, “The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea,” in Tani E. Barlow, ed. *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, 350. Parentheses in the original. Choi’s article was originally published in *positions* 1.1 (Spring 1993): 77-102. Print.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 350.

other—the most convenient solution that Choi warns against. With the discussions of the postcolonial and colonization of consciousness in mind, let us move on to the actual films in question.

III. Two Films in Focus: 2009 Lost Memories and Hanbando

In this section, I discuss *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* in terms of their characters and various cinematic strategies designed to convince viewers to identify with the protagonists and believe the films' premises plausible. I compare and contrast the way in which the two films heavily rely on sentimentalism by featuring one-dimensional characters and resorting to the old dichotomy of good (Korea) and evil (Japan). In the end, *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* do not reflect complex sociopolitical contexts between Korea and Japan.

2009 Lost Memories is loosely based on a popular novel by Bok Geo-II, *Looking for an Epithet*.¹⁶⁹ Both the novel and the film start with an imaginary present in which Korea is still under Japanese occupation and Koreans are completely assimilated as Japanese. The novel and the film differ in several ways, largely because the film adopts a few tropes of science-fiction films but no such figures are present in the novel. The Time Gate, for example, which is a crucial plot device in the film, is entirely absent from the novel. Moreover, the protagonist of the novel is a Korean-Japanese family man who kills a Japanese man to protect his wife and daughter; he leaves home on the run so as not to

¹⁶⁹ Bok Geo-II. *Looking for an Epithet, I. II*. Seoul: Moonhakgwajiseongsa, 1987. Print. After the film was released, Bok sued the film production company for defamation of his novel. Although his work was widely recognized as the source of the film's narrative, Bok lost the case in court because there were also major narrative differences between his novel and the film (18 December 2002): <http://www.cine21.com/Article/article_view.php?mm=001001001&article_id=15973>.

be arrested. The film's protagonist, by contrast, is a single man, a Japanese citizen of Korean origin, as in the novel, but he works as a police officer investigating the crimes of *Fureisenjin*, Koreans who secretly fight for Korean independence.¹⁷⁰

The narrative of *2009 Lost Memories* follows the transformation of its protagonist, Sakamoto. As an elite Japanese special agent, Sakamoto does not doubt his Japanese identity, and completely dismisses his Korean ethnicity. Through a series of events, Sakamoto begins questioning the legitimacy of Japanese occupation and discovers Japan's schemes against Korea. By returning to and "correcting" the past, Sakamoto fixes the history, and thus the present is brought back to normal, "as it should be." Equilibrium is restored at the end with Sakamoto's absolute conversion from a young Korean-Japanese man who is oblivious of his "true" identity to a Korean independence fighter who rectifies Japanese wrongdoings.

Hanbando also set in the near future and begins with a hypothetical event: the ceremony for the re-opening of *Gyeong Eui Seon* (the railroad connecting Seoul and Euiju, a far northern city in North Korea). The train track, disconnected since the end of the Korean War in 1953, is being reconnected as a step toward the unification of North and South Korea. Japan not only refuses to participate in the ceremony but actually calls it off, claiming rights to the railroad lines based on documents imprinted with the royal seal of Emperor Gojong of Joseon (under duress) more than a hundred years before. While the heads of the North and South Korean governments wait, the cell phone of

¹⁷⁰ The protagonist of *2009 Lost Memories*, Sakamoto, is quick to label this group as terrorists in the beginning, but he joins them at the end. *Fureisenjin*'s lair is also literally located underground.

South Korean Prime Minister Gwon rings.¹⁷¹ On the phone, the Japanese foreign minister announces to Gwon that Japan cannot allow the railroad to re-open. Any Korean would find it insulting and outrageous to watch Japan either allowing or disallowing the opening of any railroad in the Korean homeland, a set of circumstances that directly evokes Korea's colonial past.

2009 Lost Memories depicts the present/future of a Korea that is still under Japanese occupation by altering Korean history. A critical event in the nation's past—Ahn's assassination—is meddled with and adjusted, and thus Korea's present/future is irrevocably transformed; the extensive colonial period has happened because of Japanese conspiracy against Korea. Visualizing Korean nationalists' worst nightmare, the film proposes Korea's alternative future by presenting an alternative past. Korea's future in *Hanbando* is even more dismal. Even without interfering with the past, Korea is under Japan's heavy control. *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* are the worst-case scenarios of Korean nationalists.

To represent Korea's bleak future as believable, both films employ documentary-style slides to set up diegetic backgrounds in their opening sequences. The films use news clips and black-and-white photographs to mimic the look of a documentary to establish the authority and authenticity of the "real history" they present. The very first shot of *2009 Lost Memories* is a close-up of a pocket watch; someone is watching the time closely while solemn, symphonic music plays in the background. Brief shots of a gun, bullets, and a newspaper article are shown, for foreshadowing, as the man watching the time prepares to leave his house. As the man arrives at China's Harbin train station, an

¹⁷¹ The South Korean government has both a president and a prime minister. A prime minister functions like a vice president, a position which does not exist in South Korean government. The president is elected through popular vote, while the prime minister is appointed by the president with approval from congress.

intertitle shows a date of October 26, 1909. The man, of course, is the famous assassin, Ahn Jung-Geun, who killed Japan's Ito Hirobumi, the first Resident General of the newly colonized Korea. By the time the film has established the particular time and place, there is no doubt about what will be reenacted. In Korea, Ahn is considered a patriotic hero who sacrificed his life to resist Japan's colonization scheme. When the audience is certain that they know what is going to happen, however, the film betrays their expectations. Ahn fails to shoot Ito and gets shot instead. Bleeding heavily, he falls to the ground. This opening sequence ends with a gory shot of Ahn's wounded head.

Various slides follow, over a background of pictures displayed documentary-style, with intertitles that look as if they have been created on an old-fashioned typewriter. This sequence of images, which mainly consists of authentic-looking news clips and photographs, attempts to create the validity and authority of the historical information on display. The purpose of the documentary format is to gain the audience's trust and secure their presumed objectivity. Here is the list of "historical facts" that the film presents:

- 1909 – Attempted assassination of Japanese General Ito Hirobumi. Assassin Ahn Jung-Geun killed on site.
- 1910 – Japan annexes Joseon, Ito Hirobumi inaugurated as the first governor of the Joseon colony.
- 1919 – Illegal protest against Japanese occupation at Pagoda Park suppressed (March 1).
- 1921 – Inoue inaugurated as the second governor of the Joseon colony.
- 1932 – Assassin Yoon Bong-Gil killed on the spot at Hongkou Park, Shanghai.
- 1936 – U.S. and Japan allied forces enter WWII.
- 1943 – Japan takes over Manchuria.
- 1945 – Atomic bombs dropped on Berlin. WWII ends.
- 1960 – Japan becomes a permanent member of the UN Security Council.
- 1965 – Japan launches its first satellite, Sakura 1, into orbit.
- 1988 – Olympic Games held in Nagoya, Japan.
- 2002 – Soccer World Cup held in Japan.

Then the title of the film comes onto the screen: *2009 Lost Memories*.

The sequences of images that precede the film's title shock the audience by offering an alternative history (Ahn's failure to complete the assassination of Ito). The film then cleverly builds on the audience's shock by subverting numerous historical facts so familiar that they are more than likely taken for granted. The famous protest against Japanese occupation on March 1, 1919, at Pagoda Park, Seoul, is a significant event in the history of Korean anti-Japanese resistance. Many of the thousands of peaceful protesters gathered at Pagoda Park were shot and killed by Japanese forces. In the film, the slide depicting this protest tells us that many other demonstrations against Japan were also quashed. The sequence ends with a well-known portrait photo of Lee Dong-Guk, the contemporary South Korean soccer player described earlier in this chapter.

As soon as the historical time-line sequence ends, a cityscape of present-day Seoul (2009) appears. It looks exactly like a city in Japan, with neon signs and billboards all in Japanese, which effectively stirs the audience's national sentiments. But this city is identified as Keijo (Seoul's Japanese name), which in 2009 is the third-largest city of the Great Japan Empire (after Tokyo and Osaka). In "real history," Seoul is where South Korea hosted the 1988 Summer Olympic Games and co-hosted the World Cup soccer tournament in 2002 with Japan. Both of these international events provided opportunities for Koreans to be proud of their nation and are therefore critical to the country's sense of national dignity. However, the film audaciously re-writes and replaces these monumental events of Korea's past.

The city sequence ends with another shot that reverses another major Korean icon: a statue of Toyotomi Hideyoshi standing in the downtown area of Gwanghwamoon Plaza, where, in the "real" world, the statue of Admiral Yi Sun-Shin stands today. The filmmakers understood quite well how Korean audiences would react to the sight of

Admiral Yi—the most prominent Korean naval commander of the Joseon Dynasty, the hero who saved the country from the Japanese attack in the sixteenth century—replaced by his Japanese counterpart, Toyotomi, a *Daimyo* [feudal nobleman] most notorious in Korea for his two invasions of Joseon. *2009 Lost Memories* deliberately incites its Korean viewers with this conflation of national monuments; these powerful images are presented over somber background music in a disturbing, inflammatory manner.

After setting up its historical background of diegesis, the film moves on to an attack by Fureisenjins¹⁷² on the Inoue Cultural Center. These supposed terrorists are unsuccessfully searching for a particular relic, known as the Lunar Soul, exhibited in the center. This relic is essential to the plot, because it turns out to hold the key to the Time Gate, the device that permits the protagonists to travel back in time. By going through the gate, Sakamoto is eventually able to “correct” the film’s skewed version of history.

An elite Japanese police unit soon arrives to handle the hostage situation that has resulted from the botched raid. A sleek-looking car pulls up and the film’s two main characters, Sakamoto and Saigo, emerge. The scene clearly illustrates these characters’ centrality and introduces their importance to the audience. In a medium shot, the camera captures a car approaching with suspenseful background music. The two men, in their flawless suits, are presented in a highly dramatic manner, with their serious expressions in close-up. The first half of the film focuses on the relationship between Sakamoto and Saigo; they are best friends as well as partners. Eventually, however, they will follow opposite paths; mise-en-scènes are tailored to accommodate these changes.

¹⁷² *Fureisenjin* is the term used by the film’s characters to refer to Koreans who resist Japanese occupation. Early in the film, Sakamoto calls them criminals; Saigo says that they are antiquated and out of touch with the majority of the Korean population.

In one early scene, Sakamoto visits Saigo's home to have dinner with Saigo, his wife (Yuriko), and his daughter (Keiko). After dinner, while the adults are drinking tea and chatting, it is revealed that Sakamoto once acted on his friend's behalf when Saigo and Yuriko's relationship was about to fall apart by writing a letter to Yuriko that not only explained how much Saigo loved her but also asked her to reconcile with him. Thus, in addition to being Sakamoto's best friend, Saigo somewhat owes the happiness of his family to Sakamoto.

After tea, as the two men look out onto the garden at Saigo's house, the audience sees them stand next to one another. Each man occupies one half of the frame, creating equilibrium in the *mise-en-scène*. It is a tranquil night and the two are at peace. There is, as yet, no conflict or clash; the frame is well balanced, as is their relationship. Later, as they are heading in opposite directions, the same shot is shown again. But this time we only see Saigo's back, standing on the right side of the frame. Without Sakamoto, the shot is empty and unbalanced.

Although their courses of action in the film's narrative diverge drastically, the visual representations of the two men do not differ much. They are both flat archetypes of action heroes straight out of the 1980s John Woo Hong Kong buddy movies, exemplified by *A Better Tomorrow* (1986) and *The Killer* (1989).¹⁷³ They reify supreme, faultless masculinity that is never questioned: they dress in immaculate suits, never disheveled; are always serious, never smiling; and are competent at whatever they do.¹⁷⁴ While perfectly

¹⁷³ The significance of Hong Kong films' influence over South Korean cinema is well recognized by Korean film scholars. For further research, refer to Jinsoo An's "*The Killer: Cult Film and Transcultural (Mis)Reading*" in *At Full Speed: Hong Kong Cinema in a Borderless World*. Esther C.M. Yau, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. Print.).

¹⁷⁴ This summary of ultramasculinity owes much to discussions on <<http://www.koreanfilm.org>>, especially <<http://www.koreanfilm.org/kfilm06.html>>.

drawn, these characters and their relationships nonetheless fail to illustrate the shifting nature and complexity of Korea-Japan relations as they result to the simple binary of black-and-white portrayals.

Both Sakamoto and Saigo stand in for the Korean and the Japanese youth, respectively, and represent unquestionably secure masculinities that set out to protect the weak—women and children—and complete their national fates. The tension and conflict between them are familiar from many older Korean films featuring Japanese characters. The characterizations of Sakamoto and Saigo are mixtures of several familiar archetypes although Saigo does seem to digress a bit by being torn between his various duties as elite Japanese investigator, family man, and friend. While their friendship could have incorporated and suggested an intricate and contradictory relationship between Korea and Japan, Sakamoto and Saigo continue to be recurring stereotypes of conventional rivalry, protagonist and antagonist, hero and anti-hero.

Other figures, such as Hye-ryun and Yuriko, Minjae and Keiko, also vary little from their archetypes. Hye-ryun and Minjae form a convenient parallel with Yuriko and Keiko as Koreans versus Japanese, yet all of them do not escape from the roles of passive women and children who need protection from male protagonists. For instance, in Sakamoto's dream sequences, which are highlighted several times from early in the film, a young woman standing in hazy, blurry lighting wears a unique necklace, although at first she is not clearly identifiable to the audience. During Sakamoto's first visit to Kayaran (a Korean bar located in the Korean district of Keijo/Seoul), while he is investigating the Inoue Foundation attack, Hye-ryun is briefly introduced as a waitress; the audience can then recognize her as the woman who has been appearing in his

dreams.¹⁷⁵ The bar, which is set up as a Fureisenjin hangout, is visited once by Saigo and Sakamoto together and once by Sakamoto alone. A special, prior connection is implied between Sakamoto and Hye-ryun, but it is never fully developed and remains unexplained until the end. It is enough for the audience to know that Hye-ryun consistently appears in Sakamoto's dream and is a remote love interest for him. She is a member of the Fureisenjin gang and takes care of Sakamoto after he is shot. As befits her role as a fighter for Korean independence, she mainly wears a paramilitary uniform and carries a gun, whereas the film's other female character, Yuriko, appears in a traditional kimono to serve her family and guests. Hye-ryun is an assertive, active rebel, in contrast to the quiet, subservient homemaker Yuriko. However, neither of these women demonstrates complex dimensions or plays a significant role in the film. In addition to resorting to an expedient binary between Korea and Japan, *2009 Lost Memories* employs a deeply rooted gender dichotomy of active men and passive women.

Minjae, whom Sakamoto befriends while he stays at Kayaran, also highlights the drastically different fates of Koreans and Japanese. After barely managing to escape from JBI headquarters, Sakamoto is severely injured and is a wanted criminal. He flees to the bar, collapses, and awakens in Hye-ryun's room, under her care. During his recuperation he realizes that Minjae's father was one of the people he killed during the Inoue attack. Indeed, Sakamoto executed him point-blank. Until this moment he has felt no guilt over the killing, because Minjae's father was the leader of the attack, but now the internal conflict he is experiencing about his ethnic identity causes him to regret the shooting.

¹⁷⁵ The name of the restaurant, Kayaran, is taken from Kaya (also Gaya), an ancient kingdom in Korean history. Kaya supposedly lasted from B.C. 42 until 562 A.D., when it was overrun by Shilla.

(Minjae is also doomed to be killed, as his living quarters double as the Fureisenjins' lair.)

In its final, climactic sequence, the film shows Koreans, including Sakamoto and Minjae, being gruesomely hunted down and shot underground, while Japanese above ground, including the Saigos, are enjoying a festival and street fair. The abundance of slow motion emphasizes the stark contrast between the lives of the two nationalities. This sequence is obviously designed to anger Korean viewers. The unwarranted sentimentalism, however, unintentionally induces the audience to keep a distance from Sakamoto and calls attention to the arbitrariness and implausibility of the situation in the intended zenith of the film.¹⁷⁶ Many Korean historical films have used this type of elongated slow motion to evoke emotional responses from audiences that it has become a generic convention. Instead of questioning the history behind the plots and investigating the political implications of the events it depicts, *2009 Lost Memories* expends cinematic devices in the service of a supposedly guaranteed emotional response from the audience.

The problem with the ways that slow motion and gloomy, non-diegetic music are used in *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* is that the films try too hard to impose their monumentalization of events on their audiences.¹⁷⁷ The histories they reenact are already deeply significant and emotionally laden, to domestic audiences. By using the obvious cinematic cues of slow motion and melancholic music, *2009 Lost Memories* and

¹⁷⁶ Many reviewers as well as critics have commented that while the concept of the film and its opening scenes are intriguing, the ensuing parts of the film do not satisfy the high expectations set up by the early drama: <http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?s=rate&id=5646>.

¹⁷⁷ I am using monumentalization in the Nietzschean sense, and have borrowed both from his essay on history (originally published in 1873) and from Landy's interpretation (1997). See Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History* (New York: Cosimo, 2005. Print.) and Landy, *Cinematic Uses of the Past*.

Hanbando literally point to whom to identify with and what kinds of reactions are appropriate for the audience. They leave no room for different interpretations.

I believe historical films should endeavor to do more than treat their audiences as rote spectators by stimulating requisite emotions via simple dichotomies. In his critique of so-called standard historical film, Robert Rosenstone asserts that this kind of historical film emotionalizes the past and suppresses a useful re-consideration of the history by focusing on individual journeys. *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* nicely fit into his category of mainstream standard historical film. By personalizing the past, they ignore the layered sociopolitical contexts of the very past represented and waste an opportunity for the audience to reconsider the histories.¹⁷⁸ A thorough self-examination is what Chungmoo Choi demands and it should prevail over the colonization of consciousness. Historical films promoting self-reflection would be what Choi would appreciate, but *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* retreat to employing a convenient enemy, Japan, yet again.

2009 Lost Memories also uses several sets of dual oppositions to convey the disparity between Sakamoto and Saigo. Early in the film, Saigo remarks to Sakamoto that he has never thought of Sakamoto as Korean, yet he makes several careless, insensitive comments that not only contradict this statement but also indicate that he might be, in fact, extremely sensitive to Sakamoto's Korean origins. For example, Saigo asks Sakamoto to translate the conversation with Minjae's father, the Fureisenjin leader, that takes place just before Sakamoto shoots the rebel. The camera shows Sakamoto's stern face as he listens to his friend's request; he does not reply. But in the following shot, Sakamoto exchanges silent glances with Chief Takahashi, who is both a father figure to Sakamoto

¹⁷⁸ Robert Rosenstone proposes the postmodern history film as an alternative to the standard historical film in his book, *Visions of the Past* (11). He praises the ability of the postmodern film to generate multiple meanings.

and another police officer of Korean descent. Here, impassive facial expression is used to convey both rejection and understanding.

In another scene, as Saigo and Sakamoto drive to Keijo's Korean district in search of clues about the Fureisenjin attack, Saigo looks at Sakamoto and complains that he knew Sakamoto would take him someday to this "shady" area. (Sakamoto's face in close-up shows no emotion, nor does he respond.) Also, even before their official fallout, it is difficult to figure out whether Saigo's frequent remarks about Koreans are intentional. Therefore, when he tells Sakamoto that he has never thought of Sakamoto as Korean, it is hard to accept that so much insensitivity and carelessness have not been deliberate.

The friendship between the two starts to unravel when Sakamoto is removed from the investigation of the Fureisenjin and the Inoue Foundation, because he has become too deeply involved, and Saigo takes over. They continue with their usual Kendo practice, however. After one of these routines Sakamoto is lying on his back on the gym floor, casually resting, while Saigo keeps the Kendo rule and follows the appropriate, formal step to end the match. As Saigo leaves the gym he tells Sakamoto that he is off the case because he is "Josenjin" (a derisive Japanese term well-known from colonial times that means "Joseon's People," i.e., a powerless, inferior person). This is the first time Saigo applies this epithet to Sakamoto. From then on, their relationship can never be the same: the term's historical legacy is too painful for Koreans. It is significant that Saigo calls Sakamoto "Josenjin" at this critical point in their friendship as well as in the film's narrative.

Not long after the Kendo match, Chief Takahashi is murdered and Sakamoto is accused of it. He has been set up, of course—Takahashi was the closest thing to family Sakamoto ever had—but must endure questioning by his fellow officers. When Saigo

volunteers to interrogate Sakamoto, his former friend greets him with relief that quickly changes to shock when Saigo treats him like a regular suspect, just as the other officers have done. The camera shows Sakamoto's relieved face at the sight of Saigo's changing to an appalled expression. Although Saigo does help Sakamoto escape the JBI building in this sequence, he makes it clear to Sakamoto that the next time they see each other they will be enemies. Their fates clearly diverge as Sakamoto struggles over his long-suppressed identity as a Korean. Sakamoto can no longer be content with his previous self as an elite Japanese agent.

The success of *2009 Lost Memories* is a mixed bag. Because the film's enormous production costs (including star salaries for big-name actors like Jang Dong-gun and Nakamura Toru) swallowed up by its moderate profit, the overall box office result was not satisfactory. Money, however, was well spent on the computer-generated images that create the effect of time travel, on which the film does a fairly decent job. It was ranked seventh among the most popular domestic films of 2002.¹⁷⁹

Arguably, *2009 Lost Memories* can be considered a surprise hit because it broke the tradition of Korean films set in the future crashing at the box office. It was also a daring venture to deal directly with the sensitive subject of Japanese colonialism, especially for a blockbuster film. *2009 Lost Memories* recalls Korea's colonial experiences (history) and repackages them with the flashy technology of Time Gate (science-fiction). As the title suggests, memories of Japanese occupation are lost in the present (2009) because of the Japanese conspiracy. *2009 Lost Memories* sets out to remind the Korean audience of their painful past.

¹⁷⁹ <<http://www.koreanfilm.org/kfilm02.html>>.

2009 Lost Memories provides an important opportunity for Koreans to begin and sustain open discussions about vulnerable memories of national history and national identity. However, the film instead brazenly imposes “appropriate and correct” nationalistic sentiments through its use of cinematic strategies that are designed to arouse sentimentalism. For instance, the elaborate and elongated sequences of the assassinations of empress and Ahn are used to stir up viewers’ emotions, so that when Sakamoto kills Saigo at the end, it becomes a justifiable act to defend the rightful history of Korea. Instead of provoking thoughtful analysis of the past, *2009 Lost Memories* yet again comes back to demonizing Japan as the ultimate enemy.¹⁸⁰

Scholarly debates around inducing “correct and proper” audience responses are not new, especially in films that represent the history and memory of the Holocaust. In comparing *Schindler’s List* to Primo Levi’s writings, Bryan Cheyette observes the inherent danger of the overriding theatricality of *Schindler’s List* and argues that “the uncertain certainties of [the film’s] documentary naturalism are displaced onto a Manichaeian aesthetic.”¹⁸¹ Many have been wary about representing the Holocaust, for reasons which have been raised most notably by Elie Wiesel. Wiesel condemned a television mini-series, *Holocaust*, for trivializing the unspeakable tragedy into a sentimental melodrama.¹⁸² Yet, we live at a time when influence of media representations

¹⁸⁰ Cindy Patton, *Cinematic Identity: Anatomy of a Problem Film*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007: 36. Print. Using examples like *Pinky* (Dir. Elia Kazan, 1949.), Patton points out the problem of imposing the proper emotional responses upon the audience rather than trying to encourage political debates or direct experience of social problems.

¹⁸¹ Cheyette 230. Cheyette asserts that the film fails to contain the uncertainties and complexities of the Holocaust and resorts to crass sentimentalism and Manichaeian oppositions.

¹⁸² *Holocaust*. Dir. Marvin J. Chomsky, April 16-19, 1978, NBC, 475 min. Elie Wiesel, “Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction,” *The New York Times*, 16 April 1978.

is ever more potent, even regarding this experience of the Holocaust, which is generally considered unrepresentable.

The power of cinema over the general public, in this case its power to re-articulate stories of the Holocaust, is well documented and well represented—especially in terms of the impact that a film like *Schindler's List* has had on people throughout the world.¹⁸³ Because of its status as a Hollywood blockbuster, Spielberg's film has reached a larger audience than any other Holocaust film. As Thomas Elsaesser appositely states, the opening night of such a film is a public event occurring in the public sphere.¹⁸⁴ However, Spielberg's stylistic choice of documentary naturalism reduces the complexity and uncertainties of the event down to a simple binary of good and evil. Using Schindler as the avatar of good, redeemed and deified, and the completely deranged Amon Goeth as evil incarnate, *Schindler's List* tries too hard to elicit emotional responses from viewers and quickly “descends headlong into an irredeemable sentimentalism.”¹⁸⁵

Whether the matter at hand is Japanese colonial history or the Holocaust, presenting the excesses of good and evil these catastrophic events embody is never a matter of constructing easy, binary oppositions. At least, Sakamoto and Saigo of 2009 *Lost Memories* exhibit some level of inner conflicts and agonies over their ethnic identities, while there is no three-dimensional Japanese character in *Hanbando* at all. Yet both films still heavily depend on the Japanese as the most convenient enemy for Korean audiences. Historical films should strive for containing the uncertainties and complexities

¹⁸³ Yosefa Loshitzky, “Introduction” in Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust*. This book is only one of the numerous academic debates surrounding this extremely popular and successful Holocaust film. Loshitzky discusses the worldwide power and impact of the film and how it revived public awareness of the Holocaust.

¹⁸⁴ I discussed this in the Introduction. See Elsaesser, “Subject Positions, Speaking Positions” in *The Persistence of History*: 149-50.

¹⁸⁵ Cheyette 237.

of their historical contexts instead of staying bound by filmmakers' didactic pretensions. Nonetheless, all three films do not seem to have escaped the easy trap of a simple dichotomy.

Using Robert Rosenstone's terms, *Schindler's List*, *2009 Lost Memories*, and *Hanbando* are "the standard historical films" that portray the past "in a highly developed, polished form" and "suppress rather than raise questions." By relying on showing personalized and emotionalized pasts, these standard historical films merely "illustrate the familiar."¹⁸⁶ Korea's colonial past under Japanese occupation is a critical part of its national history and identity. However, simplistic approaches cannot reflect the complex contextual elements of Korea and Japan's relationship.

Like *2009 Lost Memories*, *Hanbando* uses easy dualism and emotional manipulation, but its rationale for these elements is even more difficult to understand. *Hanbando* starts with a fictional event, the reconnection of a critical railroad between North and South Korea. In the opening ceremony, Japan claims its right over the railway, which infuriates the South Korean President. Japan's re-claiming of its right to Korea's infrastructure is based on an illegal treaty signed over 100 years ago under Japan's forceful imposition. A historian, Choi, is determined to prove that the Seal used in the treaty was inauthentic, and argues that emperor hid the real one somewhere else. While the tension between Korea and Japan heightens throughout the film, *Hanbando* conveniently ends with the finding of the real, authentic seal of the emperor, and thus annuls the legitimacy of the treaty and Japan's claim.

¹⁸⁶ Robert Rosenstone. *Visions of the Past*: 11. Rosenstone uses *Glory* (Dir. Edward Zwick. 1989.), *Reds* (Dir. Warren Beatty. 1981.), and *The Last Emperor* (Dir. Bernardo Bertolucci. 1987.) among others as examples of standard historical films.

Unlike characters in *Hanbando* who do not display any doubt about their actions and behaviors, Saigo in *2009 Lost Memories* exhibits struggles and confusion about his job as an elite Japanese investigator, especially when he has to hunt down Sakamoto, previously his best friend, as a criminal who fights for Korean freedom. Saigo is torn between his duty as a family man and a friend. Whether or not his transformation is believable, the film makes sure to emphasize Saigo's distress. *Hanbando*, however, is full of characters who are too politically deep-seated and stubborn even to re-evaluate their positions; they never question their beliefs. One character, Lee Sang-hyun, does change his viewpoint, but the shift is too extreme to take seriously, even though his conversion is a necessary and expected plot element.

Except for Lee, most characters in *Hanbando* are one-dimensional, intransigent believers in their political ideologies who never vacillate or show any confusion under life-threatening crises. Most notable is the main protagonist, Choi Minjae, who never even doubts his beliefs. Unlike Sakamoto, there is no identity crisis for Choi. At the end, Choi's character remains exactly the same as it was at the beginning of the film, except that his unorthodox argument about the emperor's seal is proven to be correct.

Choi, an ousted historian who has been arguing for the existence of the authentic seal of the Emperor Gojong, is the character (presented in conjunction with the character of the nationalist president) with whom the audience is supposed to identify, as the majority of *Hanbando*'s narrative privileges his perspective. His actions, however, are often unjustified and even inexplicable. First of all, this elite historian and graduate of Seoul University, one of the best universities in South Korea, if not the best, has been

thrown out of academia over one unconventional assertion.¹⁸⁷ Then he loses a much less desirable job (as a day-lecturer to housewives at community cultural centers) because he yells at his students. The audience first sees Choi when he is becoming visibly upset at these older female students because they are ignorant of crucial events in colonial history, about which he is passionate.¹⁸⁸ Although some facts about Choi's character and life history are revealed to the audience in a speech made by another character, no other description of Choi's personal life is offered.¹⁸⁹ Choi is a very implausible, unlikely character whose sole purpose in the narrative is to illustrate the determination required to seek the emperor's seal.¹⁹⁰

A series of *Hanbando*'s provocative presuppositions is all too outlandish. First, the film is based on the exceptionally radical assumption that Japan might attempt to retrieve its rights to Korea's infrastructure, which were annulled in 1945. Gyeong Eui Seon, the rail connector between Seoul and Euiju that has been closed since the Korean War in 1950, is not only a part of that infrastructure, but its re-opening also symbolizes the imminent unification of North and South Korea. By reclaiming the rail line, Japan would be denying Korea's rights to Gyeong Eui Seon, and thus poses a considerable threat to unification attempts by the two Koreas. To make matters worse, all of Korea's

¹⁸⁷ I would argue that Seoul University is Korea's equivalent to Harvard. Certainly it is the most prestigious university in South Korea.

¹⁸⁸ In Korea, appropriate respect must be given to elders, even if they are only six months or a year older. However, this scene also conveys a strong misogyny toward upper and middle-class homemakers, which contradicts the role of age in Korean social demeanor and etiquette but is nonetheless pervasive and acceptable in contemporary South Korean society.

¹⁸⁹ Choi is introduced to President by the chief of staff. With all three men present, the chief of staff gives a brief presentation of Choi's life to the president. Through this summary, the audience learns about Choi's career as an ousted historian who has been asserting his claims about an authentic seal even though no one in academia agrees with him.

¹⁹⁰ An article in *Cine 21* also points to the implausibility of the character, Choi in *Hanbando*. < http://www.cine21.com/Article/article_view.php?mm=002001001&article_id=39921 >.

traditional allies—the U.S., China, and Russia—decide to endorse the Japanese assertion. This hypothesis, although unbelievable, taps into the paranoia of the many Koreans who believe that these alliances would vanish in a real crisis.¹⁹¹ Second, in spite of the (inter)national chaos and catastrophes strewn throughout the narrative, the film resorts to verification of the authentic seal of Emperor Gojong as a convenient solution, using the flimsy rationale that this very seal “legalized” the treaty between Korea and Japan more than 100 years ago that paved the way for Japanese colonization. Third, *Hanbando* assumes that Gojong knew in advance that Japan would use his seal to sanction the treaty and subjugate Korea, and therefore that he created a counterfeit seal to authorize all treaties that would be disadvantageous for Korea. This assumption highlights another fallacy: that proving certain treaties were signed with a forged seal would retroactively invalidate them.¹⁹²

Choi handily explains that Gojong created the replica to look both authentic enough to replace the real seal temporarily, and recognizable enough for future generations to tell the difference. Choi’s discovery of the authentic seal solves the improbable difficulty posed in the beginning of *Hanbando*. From the audience perspective, if one accepts that Japan’s “rights” can be restored based on a document more than a century old that has been superseded by treaties currently in force, one also must believe that Choi’s discovery of the authentic seal will resolve everything. The

¹⁹¹ The position of the U.S. is extremely interesting in terms of its close ties to both Korea and Japan. The role of the US in both countries is critical in many ways, and will be further discussed in following chapters in the context of the Korean War and the Gwangju Uprising.

¹⁹² In 1905, 1907, and 1910, treaties were signed between Korea and Japan, and the official documents were all sealed with emperor’s seal. *Hanbando*’s premise is that, since Japan re-claimed its rights over Korea based on these documents, proving the seal inauthentic would annihilate their legitimacies. For further information, refer to Duss, *The Abacus and the Sword*.

whole thing, from the perfectly crafted protagonist to the ridiculously simple solution, is just too unbelievable.¹⁹³

The president, on the other hand, can be more readily identified with because he appears to be a little more convincing.¹⁹⁴ While as nationalistic as Choi, if not more so, the president is more rational and calm. Therefore his actions seem more justifiable; after all, he is head of a government and a nation. In contrast to Choi's emotional outbursts, the president's manner is much more subdued, yet his speeches adamantly convey his frustration. As president, his motivation to prove Japan wrong is more understandable than Choi's scholarly obsession. However, when the president suddenly falls into a coma, the film's use of parallel editing to place him alongside Emperor Gojong at the end of the nineteenth century is arbitrary and far-fetched.¹⁹⁵

Through crosscutting, the camera shows a glass of water delivered to President and a bowl of herb medicine served to Gojong. After drinking the water, President becomes unconscious, while Gojong spews blood out of his mouth. Gojong is being poisoned and killed which implies President is also being drugged. The parallel editing convinces the viewers that, even though there is a gap of over a hundred years between the two scenes, President and Gojong face similar situations. While it is widely believed to have been a Japanese conspiracy, Gojong's murder has never been officially proved. Also, the film never explains why and how President falls into a coma.

¹⁹³ <http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?s=rate&id=17071>. The fake seal found by Choi early in his search is quickly destroyed by Lee Sang-hyun. The film does not provide any account of who made this fake seal or its purpose.

¹⁹⁴ It is also noteworthy that the actor who plays the president, Ahn Sung-gi, is one of the most respected actors in South Korea today and has played a similar role many times. His appearance in this film adds credibility and authority to the character.

¹⁹⁵ Many reviewers have commented on this implausibility.

In a variety of ways, including crosscutting Emperor Gojong's poisoning by the Japanese with the current president's being drugged by his personal physician,¹⁹⁶ *Hanbando* puts forth the idea that present-day Korea is not much different from the Joseon Dynasty of the early 1900s.¹⁹⁷ These scenes drive home the point that the contemporary situation of Korea is analogous to its circumstances in the late nineteenth century, and that the president is in a quandary just as Gojong was. However, it is hard to see a convincing resemblance between these two historical moments. It could be argued that the actual time period in which Gojong was truly in charge of the country was very short; only a few years elapsed before he was caught between foreign powers and became a puppet of Japanese domination.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, Gojong was not in charge of a self-governing sovereign state like today's South Korea, and his ruling power was the result of royal birth, not a democratic election. Although the film's parallel between the president and Gojong is cleverly drawn, the comparison is unconvincing. The president in *Hanbando* has both choice and some agency; Gojong had neither.

Nation includes and excludes its people; it accepts them and negates them. Simultaneously, it harnesses a collective sense of identity built around a communal past

¹⁹⁶ Gojong's death was both untimely and suspicious because of his relatively young age, sixty-six, and his good health. The possibility of murder by poison was widely circulated and believed, but no extant written data supports this claim. In the film, the president requests a glass of cool water, into which his doctor dumps a white powder, but this powder is not explained until the end of the film.

¹⁹⁷ The film is set some time in the near future, not too far from the present day.

¹⁹⁸ Gojong was on the throne for forty-three years (1863–1907) until he was forced to abdicate at the end of the nineteenth-century Joseon Dynasty. When he became a king at the age of 11, the country was ruled by a regent (his father, Heungseon Daewongun). When Gojong turned 21, old enough to rule, his strong-willed wife, Empress Myeongseong, gained considerable control over various policies. After she was murdered in 1895, Gojong became a pawn of his own government, which was already controlled by Japan. He died in 1919.

and utilizes a common enemy to underline solidarity within itself.¹⁹⁹ Citizens of South Korea share similar notions of history and, by extension, identity, both of which are acquired by undergoing various social structures and educational institutions. The national history, the ways the past is narrativized and remembered, endows people with a collective national identity and the belief that they belong together in one nation.²⁰⁰

The official systems of South Korea—educational, social, and cultural—still encourage citizens to memorize the colonial past, what our ancestors’ lives were like under Japanese occupation, and how much they suffered. However, Korea’s contemporary landscapes do not present a unified picture to Korean youth. Unlike the 1950s, when independence was new, today it is acceptable to enjoy Japanese fashion, music, TV shows, films, and Japanese culture overall. The sense of communal unity that was once a universal byproduct of Koreans’ shared antipathy toward Japan is no longer formed the way it used to be.

Korean hatred of Japan used to be unquestioned and unquestionable. Because all Koreans share the painful memory of Japanese colonial imperialism, Japan was always the ultimate and eternal enemy. Today, it is unclear whether one can depend on this antipathy to establish a sense of shared national identity among Koreans. In today’s radically shifting sociopolitical contexts, being Korean has become much more complicated and diversified. In some ways, *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* are desperate attempts to hold on to the binary of loving Korea and hating Japan.

¹⁹⁹ Kathleen McHugh (“South Korean Film Melodrama”), and Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar (*China on Screen*) have also discussed this function of nation.

²⁰⁰ Depending on which discourses of nation formation one subscribes to, various explanations of national history and identity may seem accurate. All of them agree, however, on the critical importance of a shared sense of communal experience, memory, and history. Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, and A.D. Smith, among others, are leading scholars of debates on nationalism.

The entire narrative of *Hanbando* focuses on whether or not Choi has rightly guessed that there are both authentic and false Seals of Gojong, but many other questionable narrative devices push the story forward as well. The narrative heavily relies on the easy binary oppositions between President and Prime Minister, Choi Minjae and Lee Sang-hyun, patriots and traitors, and Korea and Japan.

The president's counterpart, the character of Prime Minister Gwon, is first presented as balanced and diplomatic. When the Japanese make an absurd claim over the railroad, it is Gwon whom they contact first. Gwon wants to react to the situation in a realistic and practical manner, unlike the initial anger exhibited by the president. However, Gwon loses his balanced, rational judgment in conversation with his right-hand man, Choi's former rival Lee Sang-hyun, when Gwon brings up and dismisses one of the most disgraceful historical events under Japanese occupation. Choi and Lee were both educated in the Department of Korean History at Seoul University, but Lee became a governmental official, a close assistant to the prime minister, while Choi remained a history scholar mired in an unpopular, unconventional assertion.

Gwon tells Lee that, in some aspects, it might not be such a bad thing that Korea is under Japanese domination; at least Koreans can benefit from the advantages of Japanese power and wealth. While possibly anti-Korean, Gwon's argument at least sounds pragmatic. However, when Gwon goes on to question whether surnames matter—Lee or Park or Nakamura or Kurosawa—he is invoking one of the most shameful, distressing facets of Korea's colonial history: the times when Koreans were forced to speak only Japanese and Korean children were punished for speaking Korean at school.

Koreans were also coerced to change their names to Japanese ones.²⁰¹ Gwon could have been regarded as pragmatic before this conversation, even if he sounded like an anti-nationalist politician. Here, by indicating approval of Japanese suppression of the Korean language, Gwon becomes simply a traitor.

Eventually Choi persuades Lee to help him find the seal instead of killing him as Gwon has ordered.²⁰² Although Lee's conversion is a plot necessity, *Hanbando* does not explain why Lee is suddenly won over by Choi and chooses to help him. In the beginning, Lee, like Gwon, is obstinate in his belief that finding the real seal is going to cause a bigger problem than the one his nation already faces. Yet, Lee changes his mind about what he and Gwon have committed to do, which is to accept Japan's demands and try not to offend them for Korea's sake. Lee may be easily convinced by Choi, but many among the film's audience were not.²⁰³ Characters who could have been interesting and complex are revealed to be simple-minded and one-dimensional after all. Choi represents one extreme and Gwon another. Lee could have been a character who presents a believable transformation, yet the film does not fully develop his inner conflicts.²⁰⁴ In a way, Lee stands in for the Korean youth who will soon realize how dangerous it is to consider Japan as a useful ally. At the end, Lee rightfully converts and supports Choi.

²⁰¹ Toward the end of the Japanese occupation of Korea, the official school system stopped teaching Korean in favor of Japanese as the national language. Some Japanese scholars have described the prohibition against using the native tongue as cultural genocide.
<http://www.cgs.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/workshops_e/w_2004_02_23_e.html>.

²⁰² Gwon seems to be convinced that killing Choi, and thus annulling the president's attempt to find the authentic seal, will be advantageous for the country. The notion that Gwon would sanction the killing of Choi and order Lee to kill Choi is unpersuasive, however.

²⁰³ Several postings by viewers mention how Lee's transformation into an avid nationalist is unconvincing.

²⁰⁴ <http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?s=rate&id=17071>.

Unlike the depictions in *Hanbando*, matters such as what is best for Korea and whether one is a patriot are never simple. What Choi and the president represent might easily be a way of upholding national pride and autonomy, but this possibility is negated by the actions of the prime minister, who is also acting in the best interest of South Korea and its government, as he perceives it. When he gives a little speech to Lee that he is doing what is the best for the country—which he believes is to comply with Japan’s request—Gwon is compelling and believable, regardless of the initial astonishment created by this assertion. Gwon maintains that a concord among the U.S., Japan, Russia, and China is a prerequisite to unification between North and South Korea. Although Gwon’s claims might not sound too proud, compared to self-righteous Choi, Gwon is initially depicted as level-headed and sensible. Yet, the portrayals of Gwon and Lee become more implausible and unidentifiable as the film progresses.

The last shot of *Hanbando* is a freeze frame of the president and the prime minister, just after the prime minister has submitted his letter of resignation; they are caught at the end of their final argument. Neither one has succeeded in changing the other’s mind. Gwon has walked out of the room, and although he is called back by the president, Gwon keeps walking, turning his back on him. The two are clearly apart in *mise-en-scène* as well as in their political viewpoints. The shot freezes and the ending credits roll in the gap between the two officials. This cinematic strategy might be a useful gesture to validate Gwon’s perspective and an attempt to give some weight to his political agenda, but the entire film is so one-sided that it is almost impossible, at this point, to start reconsidering the binary message of the narrative.

The final scenes of *Hanbando* as well as *2009 Lost Memories* present mixed messages in complicated situations. They are clearly not predictable happy endings. In

2009 Lost Memories, the last scene shows a group of Korean children, including Minjae,²⁰⁵ whom the audience previously saw being killed in a wronged present/future by Japan, visiting a memorial site for Korean independence fighters. The camera pays extra attention to Minjae, and he is clearly identifiable within the group. While the group passes by the photographs hanging on the wall, Minjae stops before one of them and stares at it for a while, until he is called by his friend. The camera then moves into the picture Minjae was closely looking at, and it is a photo of a group of independence fighters. Among them are Sakamoto and Hye-ryun, smiling.

Although the two have died, they willingly fought and sacrificed for their country, which probably resulted in Minjae's survival. *2009 Lost Memories* does not go on to explicate what is going on in this present/future in which Minjae and other children are visiting the memorial site, but the wronged past created by Japan that we saw in the beginning of the film is clearly corrected by Sakamoto. In *Hanbando*, internal fissures within Korea are evidently illustrated by the frozen frame between President and Prime Minister. Japan apologizes and withdraws its absurd claim, yet the implacable disagreements among Koreans continue.

Unlike *2009 Lost Memories*, *Hanbando* does not feature any significant Japanese characters. Instead, Japanese politicians are merely tools that jeopardize Korean national security and the film's real conflict occurs among Koreans who have different political perspectives. *Hanbando* seems to be more concerned about Koreans who, like Gwon, do not follow "the righteous path" exemplified by the president and Choi, instead of depicting believable and identifiable Japanese characters like Saigo in *2009 Lost*

²⁰⁵ Sakamoto befriends Minjae when he was shot and cared for by Hyeryun in the hideout of the Fureisenjins. Later, Sakamoto learns that Minjae's father was a leader of the Inoue Foundation attack and he had killed him. Sakamoto feels bad about the killing as he becomes fond of Minjae.

Memories. Although Prime Minister Gwon becomes a more noticeably identifiable antagonist as the narrative develops, I believe that his characterization reveals a certain amount of ambivalence.²⁰⁶ He might be a mere traitor to some, but he acts in ways that he believes are most beneficial to his country. People's opinions about which are the most patriotic acts will always vary. Gwon's role as the antagonist in *Hanbando* is equivalent to Saigo's function in *2009 Lost Memories*, although the latter film portrays the conflict between Saigo's obligations as a Japanese police officer and his friendship with Sakamoto in more depth than *Hanbando* allots to Gwon's internal conflicts. In fact, *Hanbando*'s Japanese characters are all unswerving nationalists who clearly know what is best for Japan.

As some reviewers have remarked, *Hanbando* is a film that only Gang Woo-Seok, the director, could have made. Gang is considered one of the most influential directors/producers in the South Korean film industry. Using a scenario based on implausible and absurd hypotheses, Gang managed to produce one of the most expensive films of the year. Some web postings argue that Gang was given too much power and money to waste on such a poorly constructed narrative, while others praise the director's effort to convey a nationalistic message.²⁰⁷ Gang's directing career includes several commercially successful films, and the production company he founded has made many financially successful films. Because he is one of the most influential producers and directors in the Korean film industry, Gang's position as a powerful household name

²⁰⁶ However, I might be the only one who sees this ambivalence in Gwon's character. None of the postings I have looked at mention the possibility of different interpretations of Gwon.

²⁰⁷ <http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?s=rate&id=17071>.

needs to be considered in discussions of *Hanbando*.²⁰⁸ Most of the actors in *Hanbando* are well-established, too; their names always arouse anticipation about their films. They include Ahn Sung-Gi (the President), Moon Sung-Geun (the Prime Minister), Cho Jae-Hyun (Choi Minjae), and Cha In-Pyo (Lee Sang-hyun), among others.

IV. Conclusion

In Korea, the connection between national history and the politics of nationalism has complicated struggles over how to depict the past, and for what purpose. According to Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson, who have studied colonial modernity in Korea, “History is precisely the site of contention and conflict over the meaning and significance of the past.”²⁰⁹ This conflict is rooted in the system of philosophical/artistic binaries that expresses itself in simplistic dichotomies such as “failed tradition in the face of modernity, backwardness overcome by progress, righteous national pride obscured by evil external domination, collaboration of the rich (Korean and Japanese/ Western monopoly capitalists) over the pure, impoverished (Korean) masses, Japan–Korea, Asia–the West, and so forth.”²¹⁰ Shin and Robinson consider colonialism, modernity, and

²⁰⁸ *Cine 21* has chosen Gang as the most influential chief executive in the Korean film industry for several years. Some reviewers have condemned *Hanbando* on the grounds that it was only made because of Gang’s solipsism and conceit, while others praise its depiction of patriotism and sympathize with Gang’s vision of nationalism.

²⁰⁹ Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson. “Introduction: Rethinking Colonial Korea” in Shin and Robinson, eds. *Colonial Modernity in Korea*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999: 1. Print.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.* 3.

nationalism as “three interlocking and mutually influencing ideas”²¹¹ in the colonial formation of Korean modernity.

This critique of the binary logic that underlies the discourse of Japanese colonialism in Korea is deeply relevant to understanding *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando*. Even though both films exhibit slight modifications of the binary by portraying their Japanese antagonists a bit more sympathetically and reasonably than South Korean films of the 1960s did, both *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* end up resorting to the same old dichotomy of heroic Koreans and evil Japanese. In the end, in spite of the changing relations between Korea and Japan, depictions of Japanese in South Korean films of the 2000s have not changed much from those produced during the 1950s and 1960s.

Shared memory of historically traumatic events has bound Koreans together and provided them with a sense of collective identity. Some historical events, such as the Japanese colonial occupation, are traumatic even today. In the year 2011 Japan is a crucial partner of Korea in its politics, economics, and culture, yet the entangled historical relationship between the two countries continues to complicate their present and future relations. In the history of Korean film, the tropes of Japanese characters and Japan have consistently been employed as the ultimate enemy and the Other, a backdrop against which to develop and articulate Korean national identity. The Japanese have always been, and remain, the most frequently and conveniently identifiable enemy. This tradition becomes complicated, however, when one considers the fact that Korea’s present owes much to Japan—politically, economically, and culturally.

²¹¹ Ibid. 5.

In this chapter, I have discussed two films that depict Korea's relationship with Japan both literally and metaphorically. These films utilize historical dramatizations to invoke memories of colonial Korea that are still raw for their viewers. Through the specific use of melodramatic strategies, namely slow motion and somber background music, *2009 Lost Memories* endeavors to push sentimental patriotism on its audience, while *Hanbando* simply uses its implausible hypotheses to lecture Koreans on why they need to be wary of Japan. I argue that, although these films successfully raise the question of how Korean national identity has developed in light of the history of Japanese colonialism, and also force the audience to reconsider Japan's role in the formation of Korean identity, *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* ultimately fail to incorporate complex current contextual relations between Korea and Japan.

Japan is a necessary ally of South Korea in many ways. Geographically, it is one of the closest neighboring countries; politically, its support is a crucial aspect of South Korea's relationships with both North Korea and the U.S.; economically, it is an intimate trade partner; and historically its relations with Korea as a colonizer have provided a fundamental aspect of Korean national identity. Also, the global image of the two nations is similar: they share an East Asian regional location and both compete with the fierce hegemony of the West in terms of politics, economy, culture, and more.

Robert J. C. Young uses the postcolonial as "a dialectical concept" that comes "after colonialism and imperialism, in their original meaning of direct-rule domination, but still positioned within imperialism in its later sense of the global system of hegemonic economic power." Young's postcolonialism is the postcolonial critique that signifies "an active concept of interventions" and "combines the epistemological cultural innovations of the postcolonial moment with a political critique of the conditions of

postcoloniality.”²¹² Acknowledging the contention around the term “postcolonialism,” Young proposes the use of “tricontinentalism” instead. According to Young, the postcolonial critique possesses the potential for political intervention that can allow former colonial subjects to recognize and surmount the everlasting impact of colonialism in their material status and intellectual presence.

Korea’s postcolonial relationship with Japan will enable it to launch a more constructive future together with its former colonizer; it is time for Koreans to move on and progress, and it is time to *overcome* Japan. Nonetheless, it is still appropriate to treat the fashionable speech of postcolonialism and decolonization with caution. Chungmoo Choi rightly reminds us that “the discourse of decolonization cannot safely rely on the self/other formula of the anti-colonial discourse,”²¹³ yet *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* fall back on the same binary opposition of Korea and Japan, Us and Them, good and evil, that Korean films have used for decades.

Japan’s international position has been much stronger and more powerful than Korea’s. Therefore, for its own national benefit, Korea must learn to resolve its deep-rooted antagonism toward Japan. Conversely, Japan needs to align itself with Korea more closely than ever, especially against China’s rapidly growing regional dominance and world power. However, to neutralize and objectify their shared colonial history from the Korean perspective remains difficult, even if these tasks will aid both countries’ futures. Korean resentment of Japan is so ingrained and institutionalized that it will be extremely challenging to reverse. The popularity of Japanese pop culture among South Korean

²¹² Young 57.

²¹³ Choi 350.

youth today may, however, indicate that a more friendly and pleasant nexus with Japan is in sight.

2009 Lost Memories and *Hanbando* express the anxieties inherent in these changes between Korea and Japan but also exploit traditional enmity against Japan, and attempt to instill it, based on the belief that Koreans *should* remember their colonial experience under Japanese occupation. These two films adhere strongly to the notion that it is necessary for Koreans to antagonize Japan and that Japan is crucial to Korean identity, largely without acknowledging factors that make such a simplistic opposition impossible to sustain. Although these films generated a good deal of controversy and have stimulated many interesting discussions, both *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* are ultimately unsuccessful at reflecting today's complex contexts. Examination of the Japanese in Korean cinema soon reveals that these cinematic portrayals have not changed much over time. Perhaps it is safer for Koreans to exploit Japan and the Japanese in order to legitimize and establish a Korean national identity rather than to examine themselves.²¹⁴

In part, *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* are interesting because of the sociopolitical contexts of South Korea in 2002 and 2006, the years the films were released. In these years, the presidents of South Korea were Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun, respectively, the first two leftist liberal presidents to lead the country since its establishment. The state of struggle and high tension between South Korea and Japan has been constant; however, the diplomatic landscape between the two is changing. On the

²¹⁴ Consideration of Korean national identity against the backdrop of the Korean War and the Gwangju Uprising becomes more complicated because of the ambiguous binaries of Self and Other. This statement will be further discussed in subsequent chapters.

popular front, the Korean Wave and the ever-growing consumption of Japanese cultural products in Korea attest to these changes.

At this juncture, these two unashamedly anti-Japanese films foreground some significant issues in the public debate. *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* are expensive films with big-name stars and wide distributions. They reignited the controversial topic of anti-Japanese sentiments and sparked many heated debates. Whether or not one enjoys the films and appreciates their messages, *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* do lead audiences to question publicly what it is to be Korean. Clearly, Korean identity is still defined against Japan, the Japanese, and especially the Korean experience of Japanese colonial imperialism.

It is meaningful that both *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* are set in the near future. As with historical films, science fiction films are not solely about the future; they are more about the present that we live in.²¹⁵ The fictionalized dystopian futures²¹⁶ of *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* caution of a danger faced by today's domestic audiences: if Koreans are not careful, they might end up repeating their colonial past under Japan. Both films function as caveats for Koreans and try very hard to establish the legitimacy of their alternative histories by employing documentary-like slides that justify their narrative goals. There is, however, too much incongruity in these two films and their contextual backgrounds for viewers to adopt blindly their anti-Japanese sentiments. The alternative futures/presents visualized in these films hang on to particular national

²¹⁵ Many (e.g., Pierre Nora and Pierre Sorlin) have made this point. Similarly, one can claim that science fiction films comment more about the present than the future.

²¹⁶ Some classic examples of dystopian future are *Blade Runner* (1982, Ridley Scott. 1982.), *The Terminator* series (Dir. James Cameron. 1984., Dir. James Cameron. 1991., Dir. Jonathan Mostow. 2003., and Dir. McG. 2009.), and *Gattaca* (Dir. Andrew Niccol. 1997.). Recently, even a light-hearted animated feature, *WALL-E* (Dir. Andrew Stanton. 2008.), acceptably protests excessive consumption and warns of the environmental dangers courted by today's society. See Geoff King and Tanya Krzywinska, *Science Fiction Cinema: From Outerspace to Cyberspace* (London: Wallflower, 2000. Print.).

narratives that do not account for the actuality of complicated contextual factors between Korea and Japan.

Of the two films, *2009 Lost Memories* deserves a little more credit because Saigo is one of the most complex Japanese characters that Korean films have ever featured. Perhaps Saigo is part of the reason why *2009 Lost Memories* was more successful both financially and critically than *Hanbando*. Neither film, however, refrains from using mostly archetypal characters, improbable events and causalities, and inconsistent narratives. *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* were produced within the milieu of deeply rooted hatred of Japan, although Japanese popular culture is now omnipresent in the daily life of Koreans.

It is impossible to fathom Korean identity without grasping the position Japan occupies in Korea's national history. Some Koreans think that Japan is likely to become a threat in the future, as in *Hanbando*, whereas in *2009 Lost Memories* it is Japan's conspiracy that has kept Korea a Japanese colony in a fictionalized past and present. Others may consider Japan a possible future partner that will help Korea survive in a highly competitive global economy dominated by Euro-American neoliberal capitalism. Being Korean today requires not only an understanding of past Japanese colonialism but also an acceptance of Korea's possible future with Japan.

I have argued that *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* fail to reflect the complexities of the sociopolitical shifts of contemporary South Korean society. Based on numerous reactions to the films and Internet postings about them, however, it seems that audiences manage to find pleasure in watching the films by (re)negotiating the meaning

of national identity that *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* attempt to impose.²¹⁷

Although the two films do not completely capture the intricacies between Korea and Japan, they modify traditional depictions of antagonists with characters like Saigo, Gwon, and Lee. If one were to make a successful film that “more accurately” represents Korean national identity vis-à-vis Japan, it would have to incorporate the uncertainty of contemporary South Korean audiences and the unpredictability of their reception.

As a mediator, cinema attempts to interfere with both official history/memory and popular history/memory. As a powerful and influential form of media, cinema is neither official history nor popular memory, but encompasses both simultaneously. If South Korean youth today function as a barometer of Korea’s changing perceptions of Japan, it would not take too much time to realize the difficulty of assessing the reception of anti-Japanese films within an inconsistent, explosive set of contexts as I have done. To capture successfully the sentiments of current South Korean society, cinema has to demonstrate ambivalence toward Japan in its filmic representations of Japan as the ultimate Other.

Present is inseparable from past and future. Korea’s past, present, and future are inconceivable without Japan, and the national narrative of Korea is unfeasible without remembering Japanese colonialism. *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* reflect the critical position that Japan occupies in their filmic narratives. By providing alternative histories, Koreans’ present and future fates are under Japanese control in *2009 Lost Memories*. The alternative future of Korea portrayed in *Hanbando* is also deeply affected

²¹⁷ While antithetical responses to these films exist, almost every reviewer acknowledges their attempts to reframe historical legacy and revisit the issue of national identity. Whether positive or negative, the majority of comments address the issue of national identity in and of itself, without explicitly agreeing or disagreeing with the films’ perspectives.

<http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?s=rate&id=5646>,

<http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?s=rate&id=17071>.

by Japanese control, and Japan becomes an emerging threat in Korea's future, as it was in Korea's past. After all, the title of *2009 Lost Memories* gives away its content: the memories of Japanese colonialism are lost in 2009, but these memories should be remembered over and over again in order for Koreans not to repeat their colonial past.

While Saigo, the Japanese antagonist in *2009 Lost Memories*, appears more tormented and conflicted than any of the Japanese characters in *Hanbando*, neither film recognizes the convoluted discrepancies of the contexts experienced by the contemporary South Korean youth to which they were marketed. The political, social, and cultural contexts of the filmic reproduction of historical events are the main concern of this dissertation and will be further investigated through the lens of different historical events in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3
THE KOREAN WAR RE-VISITED IN
TAEGUKGI: THE BROTHERHOOD OF WAR AND WELCOME TO
DONGMAKGOL

I. Introduction

Of the several memorable scenes in the 2005 South Korean blockbuster film, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, the “popcorn snow” scene is particularly impressive. It is the middle of the Korean War, but the residents of Dongmakgol, a small village deep in the mountains, are not even aware of it, since their geographical location is so isolated from the rest of the world. They have never even seen a gun or grenade. By chance, North Korean and South Korean soldiers encounter each other in this village. Tensions run high as the soldiers point guns at each other, yet the residents carry on their daily lives as if nothing else is happening. By mistake, a grenade explodes in a small silo full of corn. A slow motion close-up shows each corn kernel blowing high up on the air, popping, and falling onto people’s heads and shoulders. It is a beautiful, edible snow in early fall.

The fantastical space of Dongmakgol contains no ideological conflict, military hostility, or killing. In this town, inhabited by childlike villagers, even North Korean and South Korean soldiers, enemies in battle, become friends. The name of the town even

means “to live and play like children,” as one of the inhabitants explains early in the film. Although people in this fictional community are free from the guilt, crime, and sins of the outside world, eventually the war catches up to them. Even then, soldiers from both sides risk their own lives to protect the village. The depictions of the village and the villagers are highly implausible, in reality, and they symbolize everything people desire but cannot have, especially during the war: kindheartedness, compassion, and humanity.

Dongmakgol is the utopia that we never had and never will have.²¹⁸

Welcome to Dongmakgol employs fantastical aesthetics and constructs a utopia-like village to re-visit the civil war, one of the most painful memories of contemporary Korean history. At times, the film appears to be almost a fantasy like the *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter* series. The Korean War, as depicted in *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, is different in several aspects from its presentation in innumerable previous Korean War films. Many local viewers use the words “fantasy” and “utopia” to describe their reception of the film,²¹⁹ and the treatment of these terms is grounded upon the communal and cultural understanding of the war, rather than the psychoanalytic practice of fantasy in film studies. Therefore, the way that the viewers use the term “fantasy” to describe *Welcome to Dongmakgol* is different from the Lacanian fantasy of desire. I will expand on how the film employs fantastical elements later in this chapter.

²¹⁸ Some of the audience postings on the web mention the utopian nature of Dongmakgol. Refer to Appendix for actual postings.

²¹⁹ On cine21.com, a viewer (wing05) describes *Welcome to Dongmakgol* as “a fantasy in the midst of war” (5/25/2006), while redsunny comments that “utopia still exists” (3/29/2006). For more postings, refer to Appendix.

Although the residents of Dongmakgol manage to remain immune, the Korean War—most commonly referred to in South Korea as *Youg-ee-oh* [6-2-5]²²⁰—involved all Koreans. It was against communist North Korea that South Koreans established their identities as citizens of a democratic nation, and North Korea temporarily replaced Japan as the ultimate enemy. Although the war is mainly considered a civil war, it indeed involved many other parties, most notably the United States, the former Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China. Today, the Korean War remains a crucial part of contemporary Korean national narrative and national identity, even for the generations who have no direct memories of the war. Films, TV shows, and literature are still being produced about the conflict, which lasted from June 1950 until the armistice was signed on July 27, 1953.²²¹

The Korean War resulted in about two million deaths, including those of non-Koreans (more than one million were South Korean, of whom 85 percent were civilians). Remembered as a national tragedy, the Korean War still haunts North and South Korea alike. Not only did many people die, sustain wounds, or go missing, families on both sides were separated and have never seen each other since. The war is still commemorated in both North and South Korea as an undeniable tragedy, both publicly and privately. Following immediately after Japanese colonialism, it emphasized the sense of victimhood that underlies Korean national identity, and extended the emotional continuity grounded in Korea's long history of helplessness, lack of agency, and sense of being doomed to its own fate.

²²⁰ June 25 (6-25) was the date in 1950 that North Korea invaded South Korea. In Korean, year comes before month and month comes before day; for example, 1950.6.25.

²²¹ *71: Into the Fire* [*Pohwasogeuro*] (Dir. Lee Jae-han. 2010.), another blockbuster set during the Korean War, was released on June 16, 2010 in South Korea. The film has also been very successful financially.

In this chapter I examine two recent blockbuster films set during the Korean War: *Taegukgi Huenalimyu*²²² and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*. *Taegukgi* is the story of two brothers, Jintae and Jinseok, and their family tragedy. At its conclusion, an imperfect equilibrium is restored by reunion between Jinseok and his mother; his elder brother, Jintae, and his fiancée, Youngshin, are missing. *Welcome to Dongmakgol* follows four different groups of people who all meet and reside in Dongmakgol: North Korean refugees, South Korean deserters, an American pilot, and the people of the village. While the film is full of comic episodes supplied by the childlike naivety of the villagers, at its conclusion even *Dongmakgol* cannot dodge the tragedy of war.

In these two films, the War is depicted as more problematic and senseless than in previous films set in the same time period,²²³ and the divisions between South and North, good and evil, self and other are more blurry and vague. Female characters, however, continue to be simplistic as voiceless and powerless victims, although both *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* present more developed and complex male characters. *Taegukgi* follows familiar conventions of Hollywood war films more closely than *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, which reveals a more ambiguous attitude toward the division of friends and enemies by presenting sympathetic, likeable North Koreans and cruel, sadistic South Korean and American soldiers. The way that the U.S. is portrayed is particularly interesting in *Welcome to Dongmakgol* in that the film depicts the negligent

²²² The original Korean title is *Taegukgi Huenalimyu* and its meaning is “Waving *Taegukgi*” (the Korean national flag). In this chapter the film is hereafter referred to as *Taegukgi*.

²²³ The Korean War has been depicted onscreen on numerous occasions since the 1950s. Korean War films became most popular during the 1960s and films like *Five Marines* (Dir. Kim Ki-Duk. 1961.), *The Marine Who Never Returned* (Dir. Lee Man-Hee. 1963.), *The Red Muffler* (Dir. Shin Sang-Ok. 1964.), and *South and North* (Dir. Kim Ki-Duk. 1965.) were hugely successful. In these films, there is no confusion in identifying the good guys and the bad guys, and the South Korean war heroes either succeed in dangerous missions and get the girl or fail and bravely sacrifice their lives while fighting against evil communists.

and inconsiderate decisions made by the U.S., and brutal actions carried out by American soldiers, though these depictions are rare.²²⁴

Although it is not obvious at first glance, the scrupulous self-examination of Koreans themselves is present in *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*. The Korean War turned ordinary citizens of the nation into killers; however, the portrayals of the war in each film diverge. The War in *Taegukgi* seems inevitable, and thus justified for the nation, while it causes the deaths of all the main characters in *Welcome to Dongmakgol*. *Taegukgi* might appear to recede from making a direct comment on the war itself, yet it clearly portrays its pure violence and condemns the South Korean authorities as well as the U.S. for not trying harder to reduce the civilian casualties. *Welcome to Dongmakgol* does not shy away from plainly depicting their hasty decision to bomb residential areas. The re-visioning of the Korean War on the screen here is more critical and complex.

Taegukgi and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* also demonstrate a particular national film industry's survival strategy against Hollywood hegemony; as such, they demonstrate a successful balance between Hollywood aesthetics and local subject matter.²²⁵ The two films masterfully utilize familiar generic conventions of war cinema to tell the story of a civil war, the nation-specific content. Both the stylistic conventions of American war films and the historical events that these films depict (in this case, the Korean War) are widely identifiable in contemporary South Korea. While the formal elements of the films

²²⁴ Cinematic representations of the U.S. and American characters in South Korean films have been increasingly negative and critical as today's youth in South Korea develop contradictory and mixed feelings toward the U.S. The role of the U.S. as a savior and protector of South Korea has been questioned among the liberal media in recent years. For my further research, I would like to analyze American characters in recent South Korean films.

²²⁵ Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen*, and Christina Klein, "Why American Studies Needs to Think about Korean Cinema," have noted the ambivalent relations between Hollywood and the national cinema industry. I discuss this topic further in this chapter.

could be universal, the subject matter, the history, is specifically bound to the indigenous and national context.

Familiar generic conventions of Hollywood war cinema abound in both films: the “melting-pot platoon,” “the girl back home” (Youngshin in *Taegukgi* and Yeoil in *Welcome to Dongmakgol*), “destructive masculinity” (Jintae in *Taegukgi*), and “boy becoming a man” (Jinseok in *Taegukgi*). Visual spectacle is also generously employed to capture the carnage in both films’ battle scenes.²²⁶ *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, however, strays from the genre by being fantastical and funny at times. It caters to local audiences by providing an unlikely utopia like Dongmakgol, which is apolitical, serene, and joyful.

Both *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* star well-known actors²²⁷ and are filled with sophisticated special effects; they were expensively produced, widely exhibited, broadly popular, and financially successful. They also both resort to a conflict-free utopia where no political reflection is present. *Welcome to Dongmakgol* employs narratively, visually, and ideologically fantastical elements to represent space and time. Pre-war Seoul in *Taegukgi* is also beautified as a nostalgic utopia without any clashes.²²⁸

In order to understand *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* better, it is necessary to review the historical aspects of the Korean War and situate them within their

²²⁶ I have paraphrased and borrowed these terms from J. David Slocum’s discussion on Hollywood war cinema and its generic conventions, discussion of which will be further developed later in this chapter. J. David Slocum. “General Introduction: Seeing through American War Cinema,” Slocum ed. *Hollywood and War, The Film Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

²²⁷ *Taegukgi* features Jang Dong-Gun (Jintae), Won Bin (Jinseok), and Lee Eun-Joo (Youngshin), among others, and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* stars Shin Ha-Gyun (Pyo Hyun-Cheol), Jung Jae-Young (Lee Soo-Hwa), Kang Hye-Jung (Yeoil), and others. Jang and Won are extremely popular in contemporary Korean culture, and Shin and Jung are also widely recognized for their work.

²²⁸ Early in *Taegukgi*, Youngshin, the fiancée of the main protagonist, Jintae, wishes that every day would be like the day that she just had. In the scene, she is talking to her future mother-in-law, Jintae’s mother, who nods her head to agree with Youngshin. Everyone is content and happy. Soon after the scene, the war breaks out.

cultural contexts. This chapter first provides an overview of the Korean War and explores the social, political, and historical background of the event, especially what kind of role the war played in the project of nation-building and national identity. I shall examine the two films closely in terms of their contradictory attitudes toward the war and their unusual character portrayals (sympathetic North Koreans, horrible South Koreans, and ever-passive women). Afterward, I shall discuss how *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* re-visit and re-vision the Korean War by adopting recognizable traits of Hollywood war films as well as fantastical elements that are culturally specific. *Welcome to Dongmakgol* not only employs a unique device of utopian fantasy, but also features rare depictions of American characters and their involvement in the War. At the end of the chapter, I shall further analyze the particular usage of fantastical moments in the film.

II. Context: History and Politics of the Past and the Present

The Korean War (1950-1953) began only five years after Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial occupation (1910-1945). The liberation of Korea was achieved through the defeat of Japan by the Allies at the end of World War II; at the time, no direct acknowledgement of the many, ceaseless attempts by Koreans to secure independence was made. Still, Koreans rejoiced over their freedom and the happiness of regaining the rights of their nation. Many exiled patriots and anti-Japan fighters returned from abroad as new foreign powers (i.e., the United States and the Soviet Union) began to fill up Japan's old positions. Much of the resistance had fled to China, especially between 1937 and 1945, when Japanese political oppression and regulation of every aspect of daily life in Korea became most severe.

These former independence fighters gathered in Seoul but found that they all had different ideas about how to re-build their country. Some who had not gone into exile disagreed with the visions of the returnees. Disagreement and resentment even flared up among those who had remained and endured Japan's harshest oppression together. Moreover, the poverty and inequality that had been rampant under the occupation did not change. In his in-depth analysis of the origins of the Korean War, Bruce Cummings describes how Korea was ready for a revolution during the volatile years of 1945-1950. Even before civil war began, Koreans demanded "thoroughgoing political, economic, and social change" and more than a hundred thousand lives were lost in "peasant rebellion, labor strife, guerilla warfare, and open fighting along the 38th parallel." According to Cummings, "the opening of conventional battles in June 1950 only continued this war by other means."²²⁹

Immediately after Japan's surrender in August 1945, Korea was divided into South and North Korea along the 38th parallel; the two halves were occupied by the Soviet Union (north) and the United States (south).²³⁰ Needless to say, these two postwar superpowers would play significant roles in the fate of the newly liberated, fragile Korea. Koreans needed to determine where their new loyalties would run: to Moscow, Washington, or Beijing. At the same time, various internal forces vied for domestic hegemony.

The Soviet Union and the United States became Korea's new political, economic, and cultural authorities. With their support, provisional governments were quickly

²²⁹ Bruce Cummings. *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes 1945-1947*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981: xx-xxi. Print.

²³⁰ U.S. colonels Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel selected this dividing line in July 1945. Both the U.S. and the Soviet Union honored it until the Korean War broke out.

established in both the northern and southern regions, with Kim Il-Sung leading the north and Rhee Syngman leading the south. Although not without tensions and arguments, the two were trying to find a way to establish one government; for its part, the country was still chaotic but also full of anticipation and optimism. This frenzied, unorganized, yet hopeful period quickly ended with the war. Moreover, the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union became more intense as the civil war progressed. In fact, some consider the Korean War to have been their proxy military conflict.²³¹

Most Korean peasants in the north joined the Communist Party, which in turn supervised the imprisonment and killings of landlords, property owners, and moneylenders. In the south, however, where the Party held no sway, such actions were met with revenge from family and friends of the victims, who murdered the killers and even the killers' family members. This vicious cycle was repeated each time local regimes switched from communism to democracy and back again. People who did not leave their homes to seek refuge, but remained, suffered severely at these times. The North accused them of helping and co-operating with the U.S., while the South indicted them for helping "the Commies" and selling out their Motherland. Sometimes, while the men of a household went to fight the war, the women who remained were accused and killed.²³²

²³¹ After the end of World War II in 1945, the political and ideological differences between the United States and the Soviet Union became increasingly intensified. Some argue that this rising tension broke out and manifested itself in Korea (the 1950s) and Vietnam (the 1960-70s), which appeared to be civil wars. Many external forces and world powers were involved in these wars, however; thus, the task of examining these wars closely is much more complicated than it looks at first.

²³² In *Taegukgi*, Youngshin is shot to death by South Korean officials while her fiancé, Jintae, is trying to protect his family by fighting against North Koreans. This type of tragic irony, which was common during the war, resulted in the number of civilian victims exceeding the number of combat casualties.

After more than two million lives were lost, the cease-fire treaty was signed in July 1953 and the leaders of the northern and southern regimes, Kim Il-Sung and Rhee Syngman, successfully established their two separate political territories. The war benefited Kim and Rhee by making it possible for them to exercise strong control over their governments and people. Since 1953, Korea has been divided into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK).

Fresh from the excruciating hurts inflicted by ideologically motivated killings amongst themselves, Koreans hated those on the other side of the border and the hatred was overwhelmingly prevalent after the war. While the surviving families of Communist ideologists went over to the North and were forbidden any contact with the South, Christians and liberalists came to the South where their children learned anti-communism in school-books, cartoons, and stories from their parents' and grandparents' generations. Some of the cartoons even portrayed North Korean communists as greedy, obese pigs in contrast to the normal human beings of South Korea.

The South Korean government has always had a very strong anti-communist agenda, mainly because of Rhee Syngman's policies and U.S. influence.²³³ The military dictators who followed Rhee also used anti-communist rhetoric to control the public effectively. Kim Young-Sam (1993-1998), South Korea's first civilian president since Rhee, is considered as a transitional figure because of compromises he made with the

²³³ It is noteworthy that Rhee, a conservative, right-wing politician, had a very strong anti-communist agenda of his own even before the war. When Korea was liberated, the Communist Party was much stronger than the Democratic Party throughout the country. Rhee's personal distaste for communism was a good fit for the American military authority and its interest in removing Communist influence from Korea. Rhee also spent years in the U.S., during which he obtained several degrees, including a Ph.D. from Princeton University, and married a Caucasian woman, Francesca Donner. When he returned to Korea, he conducted a campaign to "remove Communism" that was actually a veiled attempt to eliminate all potential opposition. In addition, Rhee opposed many of the nationalist movements that attempted a unification of North and South.

former military power. Kim Dae-Jung (1998-2003) and Roh Moo-Hyun (2003-2008) were South Korea's first truly liberal presidents. The policies of leniency and relaxed censorship instituted by the government during the ten-year period of their presidencies enabled filmic portrayals of North Koreans during the Korean War to be sympathetic. Free of governmental control and accusations of being communist sympathizers, South Korean filmmakers were finally able to represent the war in a critical light, including self-examination of their own war crimes and sympathetic portrayals of those readily identifiable enemies.²³⁴

Under the Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun regimes, the South Korean government launched an official project to uncover long-buried truths about the Korean War. As a result, battle and execution sites have been excavated, just as in the beginning of *Taegukgi*. The bodies of many MIAs and also civilians missing since the war have been found in these locations. A large number of the dead, wrongfully accused of being communists and North Korean supporters during the war, were executed without any proper procedure. Because these murders were often carried out by South Korean soldiers and Americans, who were supposedly the "good guys," the bodies were buried in secret sites and discussion of the entire matter was suppressed after the war. Other burial sites include former residential areas bombed by U.S. planes.²³⁵ Although it was better to let

²³⁴ I discussed the changes in official censorship and industrial background of this period further in my Introduction. Refer to the discussion of the South Korean film industry in the Introduction. Under the military regime of Park Chung-Hee and Chun Doo-Hwan, it was not uncommon for filmmakers to be arrested and accused of making films that were supportive and friendly toward communism, especially if the films contained any sympathetic portrayals of North Koreans. Their films had to undergo severe cuts and were banned at times. During the liberal presidencies of Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun, the official law of censorship was considerably loosened.

²³⁵ One of the most notorious incidents is "the Bridge of Nogunri." Although they were unsure if there were northern spies among the fleeing villagers, American forces opened fire and ended up killing several hundred men, women, and children. A film dealing with this tragedy directly, *A Little Pond* (Dir. Lee Sang-woo), was released in April 2010.

these facts remain unspoken under oppressive authoritarian regimes, under democratic governments they have finally been revealed. It is important to examine *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* within this historical background as well as recent contextual changes.²³⁶

III. Two Films in Focus: Taegukgi and Welcome to Dongmakgol

Taegukgi was directed by Kang Je-Gyu, one of the prominent blockbuster filmmakers in South Korea. Although Kang has not been a prolific filmmaker, his previous films have all garnered significant box office results. His first film, *Gingko Bed* [*Eunhang Namoo Chimdae*] (1996) was only a moderate success, but by opening the door for other commercially viable big-budget domestic films, it initiated the revival of Korean cinema—a real accomplishment at a time when domestic film consumption was minute, compared to the success of movies imported from the ever-hegemonic Hollywood. Kang's next film, *Shiri* [*Swiri*] (1999), was considered the very first Korean blockbuster. *Taegukgi* lived up to its hype and became hugely successful, both financially and critically. The film also had limited distribution in the U.S., where it received some recognition.²³⁷

Welcome to Dongmakgol was originally a hit play in the Seoul theater district. Its producer, Jang Jin, who is recognized for his mastery of the comedic genre, turned it into

²³⁶ South Korea returned to a conservative regime under President Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013), who has already cut funding for these projects. Refer to the Introduction for additional details.

²³⁷ A review by Dave Kehr calls Kang, the Steven Spielberg of East Asia who builds “compelling genre stories around questions of national identity, a formula that has long been a winner for Mr. Spielberg.” http://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/03/movies/03TAEG.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=brotherhood%20of%20war%20taegukgi&st=cse.

a film with another director, Park Kwang-Hyun. Utilizing his typical witty and clever dialogues, Jang effectively combines his comic talents with Park's beautiful cinematography.

The representations of the Korean War in *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* are complex and even contradictory at times. While the enemy is obviously present in both films, the films do not hinge on the simple dichotomies of good and evil, self and other as previous war films have. In the films dealing with Korea's colonial past examined in Chapter 1, *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando*, the Japanese remained a convenient and easily identifiable enemy with a slight improvement in their characterizations. Conversely, in *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, the South Korean "good guys" are portrayed as bad, while the North Korean "bad guys" are shown as good, which makes it difficult for the audience to decide whom to identify with and who are the real good guys. The clear-cut dichotomy, however, continues with victimization of passive and helpless women. Unlike more multifaceted characterizations of men who struggle in difficult situations, female characters in both films remain simplistic.²³⁸

On the one hand, the war seems justified as self-defense and as being essential for nation-building, especially in *Taegukgi*, while on the other hand, the films also make sure to depict the sheer violence and senselessness of the war. The representations of war's atrocities proliferate in both films, such as ruthless killings of unarmed men, swift executions of the accused, and excessive beatings of civilians. The war turns innocent

²³⁸ Youngshin (Jintae's fiancée) and the mother of Jintae and Jinseok in *Taegukgi* and Yeoil in *Welcome to Dongmakgol* do not exhibit any changes in their character arcs. Female characters in *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* (discussed in Chapter 1) are also one-dimensional and thus, unconvincing.

people into killers, and physical and psychological trauma of its aftermath are bequeathed even to today's generation (*Taegukgi*).

Taegukgi starts with the excavation of bodies and bones from the Korean War at a site of a major battleground. In the very first scene, a dark black screen is cleared up little by little with a brush, as if someone is brushing dirt out of the frame. In the next shot, we see someone actually brushing a skull. The camera is positioned as if we are inside the skeleton, looking out through the eyes, being dug up. As the frame clears off, the story of these skeletons, especially the story of two brothers unravels.

In the next sequence, an older man receives a phone call from one of the workers at the site, who says that the remains have been identified as those of Lee Jinseok; the caller wants to make sure that he is talking to Lee Jinseok himself. The older man, who indeed is Lee Jinseok, asks if the name might be Lee Jintae, but the caller says no. The older man hangs up, ruminates for a bit, and then prepares to visit the site himself; he thinks that the remains might be those of Lee Jintae, his older brother. The film then goes back to 1950 to tell the story of both brothers and their family before, during, and after the war. Toward the end, *Taegukgi* returns to the present Jinseok, now in his seventies, who weeps before Jintae's casket.

When Jinseok sobs before the coffin of his dead brother, the camera shows younger generations—volunteer workers for the excavation committee and Jinseok's own granddaughter—standing beside him solemnly and respectfully. *Taegukgi* shows present-day South Korea technologically, economically, and politically flourishing, and seems to suggest that the nation stands strong because of sacrifices like those made by the Jintaes

and the Jinseoks.²³⁹ *Taegukgi* values its survivors and defers to their efforts. Like the youth in the scene above, the film asks its audience to pay respect to the Jintaes and the Jinseoks.

Taegukgi does not spend much time depicting North Koreans, but they do speak throughout the film and participate in its narrative, just like the South Korean heroes. Although *Taegukgi* does not feature any major North Korean characters, North Korean characters in *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* are given voices, backgrounds, and space for the audience to identify and sympathize with. In the latter film, three North Korean stragglers—Lee, Jang, and Seo—are the main protagonists, along with two South Korean deserters, Pyo and Moon. The two highest ranking officers from each side, Lee Soo-Hwa of the North (played by Jung Jae-Young) and Pyo Hyun-Cheol of the South (played by Shin Ha-Gyun), are played by the most well-known actors among the casts. The three North Koreans are just like the South Koreans, who have been dragged into the national turmoil regardless of their will; and as such, the North and South Koreans become friends as the film progresses. Unlike the depiction of enemies as ruthless killers and coldblooded monsters in Hollywood war films, North Korean foes in these two films are ordinary people, just like the South Korean characters.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Slocum is quoting Robert Burgoyne here: “One of the most significant and obvious forms of national mythology [are] the war stories of the nation-state. In the twentieth-century United States, the narrative forms that have molded national identity most profoundly are arguably the western and the war film, genres that articulate an image of nation that, in the words of Anthony D. Smith, has been ‘beaten into national shape by the hammer of incessant wars’ (Burgoyne 1997: 7-8; see also Anderson 1991; and Smith 1981)” (10). Robert Burgoyne. *Film Nation: Hollywood Looks at U.S. History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Print., Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*., and Anthony D. Smith. *The Ethnic Revival*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1981. Print. In the case of South Korea, it is the Korean War film that “articulates an image of nation” and the youth in *Taegukgi* are exhibiting an appropriate level of respect to those who perished during the War. Still today, the Korean War is one of the most popular historical subjects in the South Korean film industry.

²⁴⁰ Portraying some of the enemies in Hollywood war films, such as the Japanese, Vietnamese, and Iraqis, also involves issues of race and racist portrayals of the Other, in contrast to the white masculinity of the

Welcome to Dongmakgol starts with a intertitle offering general information about time and location (September 1950, in the thick of the Korean War right after Incheon Landing, the Korean peninsula). When the intertitle disappears, the face of happy, smiling Yeoil, a critical female character of *Dongmakgol*, fills the screen. She is looking up at a clear blue sky when Smith's plane crashes into the ground. The next sequence introduces a group of defeated North Korean soldiers looking exhausted and drained. Several are injured and have to depend on the rest of their battle-weary comrades in order to walk.

One of the North Korean officers approaches Commander Lee and questions why he has not carried out the order that the audience later learns was to execute the injured and female soldiers who are slowing their retreat. Sensing what might happen, one of the injured, a young male soldier, begs Lee not to kill or abandon him. He attempts to stand up out of a stretcher even though he has been shot in the leg and cannot walk.

Commander Lee does not appear to want to follow the order to kill his own soldiers. The officer who initially approached Lee pulls out his gun and points it at Lee, his superior. He is about to overpower Lee, when he is shot by the South Koreans who are firing upon the North Korean unit, causing the North Koreans to sustain high

United States. In Korean War films, race is obviously not a decisive factor, but ideological difference is. This ideological difference is very slippery and ambiguous in determining who is with us or against us. Representations of North Koreans in *Taegukgi* are very different from the depictions of enemies in *Saving Private Ryan* (Dir. Steven Spielberg. 1998.) and other famous war films such as *The Deer Hunter* (Dir. Michael Cimino. 1978.), *Full Metal Jacket* (Dir. Stanley Kubrick. 1987.), and *The Thin Red Line* (Dir. Terrence Malick. 1998.). *Saving Private Ryan* unambiguously offers a clearly identifiable enemy: Nazis. Similarly, both *The Deer Hunter* and *Full Metal Jacket* simply portray the Vietnamese either as insane killers obsessed with Russian roulette (*The Deer Hunter*), or as ideological fanatics, such as the teenaged sniper in *Full Metal Jacket* who does not utter a single understandable word before her death. Japanese soldiers in *The Thin Red Line* are not much different from the Viet Cong in *The Deer Hunter* and *Full Metal Jacket*; they are merely a group of unintelligible foreign enemies who have to be eliminated. Portrayals of Iraqis in recent Iraq war films seem to mimic these examples. For instance, the portrayals of Iraqis are minor and insignificant while the narrative still centers around American characters in the U.S., as in *In the Valley of Elah* (Dir. Paul Haggis. 2007.) and *Stop-Loss* (Dir. Kimberly Peirce. 2008.), among others.

casualties. Lee is able to save a few of his men and they escape to safety. Next, a South Korean platoon moves in. The young North Korean soldier who begged not to be killed earlier is still alive, not knowing what to do. Unarmed and scared, he looks up at the South Koreans. Unexpectedly, he is shot and killed. Although he was injured and unarmed, the North Korean soldier is executed by the South Koreans. The next sequence introduces the South Korean main characters.

The South Korean Lieutenant Pyo, a military deserter, is first seen attempting to commit suicide.²⁴¹ Moon, the other South Korean deserter, stops Pyo from succeeding by taking his rifle.²⁴² Pyo suffers from psychological trauma caused by a military operation that he led. The secret of his torment is not revealed until later, and when the audience finally learns the reason for his anguish, the irresponsible frivolity of the South Korean authorities is even more strongly underlined.

Shown through Pyo's flashback, the scene depicts Pyo on the phone, being pressured by his superior, who orders him to blow up a bridge, even though doing so will kill numerous civilian refugees. During the war, the South Korean government regularly conducted these kinds of military operations that resulted in many civilian casualties. These state-led missions were carried out while ignoring the inevitable sacrifices of noncombatants. By obeying the order, Pyo has engaged in the dishonorable murder of innocents and is left with guilt for the rest of his life.²⁴³ This is the reason he tries to kill himself when he is first introduced in the film. The war made him a killer of countless

²⁴¹ It is difficult to determine Pyo's actual military rank. Each individual refers to him with different rankings throughout the film.

²⁴² Although Moon saves his life, Pyo does not seem appreciative.

²⁴³ In some ways, Pyo is very much like Kim Young-Ho in *Peppermint Candy*, in that both of them commit a crime against their will and become, at the same time, the perpetrators and victims of an authoritarian society. Were we to empathize with Pyo's experience, *Welcome to Dongmakgol* would be a "psychological trauma film," a phrase used by J. David Slocum in his study of Hollywood war films. See Slocum 6.

civilians, and Pyo is scarred with unforgettable guilt and incurable trauma. After losing his belief in the war, he becomes a deserter. Pyo's recollections clearly illustrate the absurdity and corruption of the military authority, including that of the President himself.²⁴⁴

The character of North Korean Commander Lee is unusual, in that he is reluctant to follow a merciless order from his superior to desert his own troops. He is sympathetic and humane, unlike the lower-ranking officer who attempts to subvert him. In numerous fictionalized media representations of the Korean War, ruthless North Korean characters are seldom hard to identify. In two widely popular and influential Korean War films of the 1960s, *The Marines Who Never Returned* (1963, Lee Man-Hee) and *Red Muffler* (1964, Shin Sang-Ok), North Korean soldiers are simply cruel killers. Characters like the lower-ranking officer in the scene described above are plentiful and familiar. In *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, however, Lee is compassionate and caring. He does not want to commit senseless killings. On the contrary, it is a South Korean platoon that comes in and kills a young enemy soldier who is defenseless and wounded. In opposition to the thoughtful Lee, South Korean soldiers, the conventional heroes, do not seem concerned about committing brutal murders. It is shocking to see them cruelly executing a vulnerable combatant. This is not the familiar portrayal of the war that previous Korean War films have frequently presented.

In *Taegukgi*, South Korean G.I.'s who conscript and punish the brothers do not exhibit any sympathy for the predicament their family faces; they beat Jintae badly when

²⁴⁴ Through a radio broadcast, President Rhee Syngman requested that the citizens of Seoul, during the first hours of the North's attack, stay put and defend Seoul, while he himself had already left the city and headed to the southern part of the country. Rhee also commanded the military to cut the bridges connecting Seoul to the south in order to slow down the North, risking the lives of many innocent civilians. As in the film, the bridges were exploded and cut, and many civilian casualties occurred.

he tries to rescue Jinseok. Later in the film, Jintae and his unit even force North Korean prisoners, including Yongshik, to beat up one another in order to receive food although Jinseok forcefully opposes it.²⁴⁵

As the narrative progresses in *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, North Korean and South Korean soldiers who met in Dongmakgol gradually overcome their hostilities to one another. At one point, South Korean Pyo asks North Korean Lee why Lee did not kill his enemies, two South Koreans, when he had a chance. Lee does not reply, but clearly, he could have harmed the opponents and chose not to. The other two North Korean characters, Jang (a middle-aged private who is funny and wise) and Seo (an adolescent soldier who is entrenched in communist ideology) are also likeable and easy to identify with. Jang establishes a special bond of friendship with a younger South Korean soldier, Moon, and Seo becomes fond of Yeoil, a village girl. The convention of a hodgepodge platoon is confirmed in this mixture of five Korean soldiers.

I argue that *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* rewrite the history of the Korean War by re-presenting the war under a more ambiguous and indecisive light. Enemies are depicted as considerate and kindhearted, while the supposed good guys are insensitive and callous killers. The War is re-visited from more complicated and multifaceted perspectives, and thus the divisions between self and other, South and North are more complex and less simplistic. Re-examinations of historical events often occur during shifting sociopolitical circumstances (in this case, under rare liberal presidencies) and result in changes of the focus of historical analyses. *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to*

²⁴⁵ Yongshik, who worked with Jintae before the war in a shoeshine business, confesses when he is captured that he was forced to join the North Korean army. Except for Jinseok, the entire unit, including Jintae, does not show much empathy to the North Korean hostages, Yongshik included.

Dongmakgol provide different interpretations of a historical event that enable re-visioning and re-inventing of the past.

Unlike multi-dimensional filmic depictions of Korean men, the portrayals of women in *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* continue to adhere to the simple presentation of women as helpless victims. Many scholars have argued that female figures in films symbolize a nation itself, its fate and its ultimate fall.²⁴⁶ Especially when films are set in wartime, many women on the screen seem unable to escape their predestined deaths. Unfortunately, strong female characters in Korean historical films are rare, and none are found in these two recent Korean War films.

Historically, in Hollywood war films, women are either completely absent or remain domesticized as “the girl back home,” far from the battlefields.²⁴⁷ According to J. David Slocum, women are “feminizing influences, figures of vulnerability,” and they undermine “the masculine nature of the institution of war.”²⁴⁸ Both Yeoil from *Welcome to Dogmakgol* and Youngshin in *Taegukgi* do represent figures of vulnerability and they cannot escape; therefore, they are fatally exposed to the violence of the war, unlike the figure of “the girl back home.” No one escapes from the Korean War, evidently, but women seem especially doomed to fall victim to violent national tragedy.

In *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, the life of Yeoil, who is presented as the perfect outsider and observer, is claimed by the war and the audience is left to mourn the loss of

²⁴⁶ Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar’s discussion of Gong Li’s characters in the context of Chinese national cinema is most relevant here. For the further discussion of the fate of women as an allegory for a nation’s fate, refer to Berry and Farquhar’s *China on Screen*. I discuss female representations in *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* only in opposition to the complex portrayals of male characters. Women in these films remain simply passive victims. Examining the characterizations of women in recent Korean films is a topic I hope to pursue in future research.

²⁴⁷ For instance, *Full Metal Jacket* does not feature any female characters other than one enemy sniper, while *The Deer Hunter* and *The Thin Red Line* both feature girls back home.

²⁴⁸ Slocum 9.

innocence and joy as they mourn for her. Along with the villagers of Dongmakgol, the viewers are forced to confront the harsh reality of the Korean War. As a developmentally challenged person, Yeoil is depicted as someone completely oblivious of her surroundings, especially the war. She is an orphan without any apparent family members around, but she is well cared for by the villagers. Mostly, she is happy and content running around the fields and climbing mountains freely and blissfully.

Yeoil stands in for all villagers in their incorruptibility and naiveté. She reifies all the virtues and values of the villagers, especially innocence and ignorance. An adolescent girl with flowers in her hair,²⁴⁹ she is presented in drastic contrast to the soldiers from the outside world. Her killing at the hands of Captain Smith's rescue team is an accident, yet she dies and with her dies the innocence of the villagers. The wholesomeness and purity of the village have been ruined. The era of innocence has ended.

In *Taegukgi*, Youngshin, Jintae's fiancée, can be considered Yeoil's counterpart in *Taegukgi*, as a main female character. Although she has a full intellectual capacity, unlike Yeoil, Youngshin is uneducated and unintelligent, and thus lacks agency to determine her own fate. Youngshin also does not have knowledge about the sociopolitical atmosphere of her time. She lives and dies without the grand narrative traditions of boy-to-man or battlefield heroics to ennoble her story.²⁵⁰ Although both Yeoil and Youngshin are orphans, Youngshin has extra responsibilities of supporting her three younger siblings and struggles to manage daily life. She is engaged to and in love with Jintae, unlike Yeoil, who does not appear to have come to the age of puberty.

²⁴⁹ Putting flowers in one's hair, especially behind the ear, is the most commonly identifiable indicator of being crazy in Korean cultural tropes. Yeoil epitomizes the stereotype of the crazy girl and the film makes a self-conscious comment about her insanity throughout the film.

²⁵⁰ The grand narrative tradition of war genre—"boy-becoming-man" or destructive masculinity—is expanded later in this chapter.

Another main female character of *Taegukgi*, Jinseok and Jintae's mother, keeps the family together and is hard-working, but a near-fatal illness has left mute; she is literally voiceless and silent. Youngshin, also the breadwinner of her own family, gets into trouble because of her various money-making activities amid a series of shifting occupations in Seoul. She labors for both the North and the South because she needs to feed her siblings, but because of that labor she is accused of being "a commie supporter" and is eventually killed by fellow South Koreans. While a diligent and loving woman, Youngshin cannot break away from her fate as a powerless victim.

Both Mother and Youngshin fit war films' gender stereotype of "the woman who needs to be protected." Guy Westwell labels such gender constructions in current-day films nostalgic and regressive, as in 1940s war movies. His analysis of the female characters in *Pearl Harbor*²⁵¹ is especially germane to the characterizations of Mother and Youngshin in *Taegukgi*. According to Westwell, the women in *Pearl Harbor* are portrayed as traditional and stereotypical "through their work as nurses, their willing subservience to men, and in their lack of any notable ambition."²⁵² Although Youngshin does not seem to differ much from these female characters or those of other 1960s Korean War films at first, she does not stay intact and safe; on the contrary, she gets killed.

One of the most successful and popular Korean war films in South Korean film history, *South and North* (1965, Kim Ki-Duk), features a love triangle between a North Korean officer, a South Korean Lieutenant, and the woman who is married to both of them. North Korean defects to the South in hopes of reuniting with his missing wife, but she has already remarried and become the wife of his rival. Although she is the center of

²⁵¹ *Pearl Harbor* (Dir. Michael Bay. 2001.).

²⁵² Guy Westwell. *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Front Line*. London: Wallflower, 2006: 101. Print.

the narrative tension, the figure of the wife remains secondary to the story and obedient to her husbands.

In *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, men are the protagonists who push the narrative forward, whereas women are helpless. The contrast between the portrayals of male and female characters is disturbing because both films seem to assume that history only happens to men, and men are the only ones making historical changes. Not only are women active participants in history, they often drive the critical events that move history forward. However, like many other war films, both *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* do not feature strong female characters who affect the course of events either within or beyond the immediate narrative.

Unlike the simplistic depictions of women in *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, portrayals of male characters in these films are complex: their characterizations are often incoherent and contradictory. Most conspicuously, the men develop clear character arcs as the narrative progresses. The male characters can also be examined in relation to the traditions of Hollywood war films. Jintae and Jinseok, for example, the brothers in *Taegukgi*, appear as familiar archetypes.

Taegukgi utilizes many generic conventions of Hollywood war films, including “the hodge-podge platoon,” “destructive masculinity” (Jintae), and “rite of passage” (Jinseok), in addition to “the girl back home” (Youngshin).²⁵³ Jintae and Jinseok’s unit is an assortment of various war-film stereotypes, such as the family man who is soon to be killed (he foreshadows his own death by showing off his family photo to his squad), a vengeful tough whose entire family has been killed by the enemy, a funny and wise older

²⁵³ Slocum 13-14.

man, a young rookie who is soon to be killed, and rugged, worn-out superiors.²⁵⁴ Through the experiences of the war, Jintae turns into a monstrous warmonger and Jinseok turns from an adolescent boy into a man.²⁵⁵

In his study of Hollywood war films, J. David Slocum discusses that individual motivations or goals are a driving force of filmic narratives, while the experiences of war often lead to the complete transformation of characters. Jintae's desire to send Jinseok home safely is the central concern of *Taegukgi*. Slocum also asserts that Hollywood war films present contradictory attitudes toward the war and condemn military leadership, as witnessed in both *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*.²⁵⁶

Taegukgi presents the war as an obstacle that gets in the way of two brothers' lives. At first the film sets up a meager but cheerful, peaceful family life. It shows two happy brothers, the older one working hard to support the family and the younger one a smart, conscientious high-school student. Although their father is absent and their mother is frail, the older brother has a fiancée and, with her three younger siblings, the family is content. The war shatters this delicate stability: the growing businesses (a noodle shop), the plans for marriage and school, and any other thoughts of a rosy future come to a halt indefinitely. Moreover, the two brothers are forcefully conscripted and sent to the front. Jintae, the elder, is full of concern for his younger brother, now a soldier, and their invalid mother at home. As the war progresses, this dutiful, thoughtful brother and son turns into a violent aggressor without sympathy or compassion.

²⁵⁴ In Hollywood war films, this "melting pot platoon" is one of the familiar tropes of the genre (ibid. 9).

²⁵⁵ I have based this discussion of the genre of the war film on Slocum (ibid.) and Robert Eberwein's introduction in his anthology, *The War Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005. Print.).

²⁵⁶ Slocum, "General Introduction," uses Chris Hedges for his discussion of character transformation through the experiences of war. For the representation of "the profound indictment of military leadership" (5), Slocum analyzes Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957). South Korean Lieutenant Pyo in *Welcome to Dongmakgol* undergoes an experience similar to Jintae's in *Taegukgi*.

The progression of Jintae's character is familiar to anyone who has ever watched a war film: an ordinary guy—he can be even nice—turns into a sadistic killer. Although his original goal was to receive a medal and use his war-hero status to send his brother home safely, Jintae instead reifies the character who has fallen victim to the “seductive, ‘potent and lethal addiction’” of “carnage and destruction in the ‘rush of battle.’” When he runs into the North Korean hostage Yongshik, Jintae shows no sympathy for him even though they used to work together before the war. Yongshik pleads with Jintae and Jinseok, saying that he was drafted by North Koreans against his will, very much like Jintae and Jinseok. While Jinseok tries to care for Yongshik, Jintae demonstrates no compassion toward his former co-worker. Jintae's intense combat experiences permanently altered him.

Jintae has gradually become an atrocious destroyer (along with the rest of his unit), but when he mistakenly thinks Jinseok has been killed he is depicted as literally insane. When the two meet upon the battlefield, Jintae sports a large scar on his left cheek, has a crazy, blank look in his eyes, and cannot even recognize his beloved brother. War has transcended from an unwelcome obstruction in the characters' lives into a killing spree from which no one can escape.

Jinseok—a high-school senior who has just turned eighteen—is the more intellectual of the two brothers, while Jintae is given a thoroughly blue-collar portrayal. Jintae does not attend school and it is assumed that he quit his schooling to support the family when his father passed away. Jintae enjoys his job shining and repairing shoes, and has no ambition other than to become a good shoemaker someday. He cannot even help Yongshik, a younger co-worker, with a simple question about Korean spelling and grammar.

When he does not know the answer to Yongshik's question, the camera shows Jintae's hesitancy and uncomfortable expression in a full shot, yet he quickly retorts that he already told Yongshik not to ask him about anything related to school. Interestingly, Jintae seems happy rather than embarrassed about his limited education, because he gave it up to help support his family, especially for his little brother, Jinseok. *Taegukgi* underscores that Jintae is so proud of Jinseok that he would gladly give up anything for him, including his own life. Even in the middle of fierce battle scenes, Jintae tries harder to protect Jinseok's life than his own. Although *Taegukgi* favors Jinseok's perspective, Jintae's struggles to send Jinseok home safely are the ultimate driving force behind the entire narrative.

During Jintae's period of insane grief over Jinseok's supposed death, he kills the high-ranking South Korean officer who was in charge of Jinseok's execution; then he joins the North Korean army. The film's indictment of South Korean military leadership is a clear subtext of every encounter between the two brothers and their superiors. Jintae's visceral, primitive killing of the officer is shown in horrific detail (he picks up a rock from the road and repeatedly smashes the officer's head in a scene that powerfully conveys his rage, anger, and grief). For Jintae, switching sides from South to North is about neither politics nor ideology, but is rather a matter of personal vengeance and familial loss, just like many other Koreans experienced at that time. When he finally does recognize Jinseok on the battlefield, Jintae tells his brother to go home; he will follow soon. He then turns on the North Koreans and starts shooting at them to cover for Jinseok. When Jintae is killed it is unclear if he was shot by North Koreans or South Koreans; moreover, it is difficult to say whether Jintae was with the North or South at the time of his death. Neither seems to mean much to him, as long as he can get Jinseok home safely.

Taegukgi chooses personal motivations of survival, familial duty, and vengeance over sociopolitical issues. According to Slocum, this tendency of war cinema originates from Hollywood norms that seek “emotional or psychological explanations for social and economic problems.”²⁵⁷ This film, however, does not hesitate to depict wrongdoings committed by South Koreans, although its portrayals of North Koreans are typically limited.²⁵⁸ Overall, *Taegukgi* revisits history via ambiguous and complex depictions of self, in the form of protagonists who are supposedly good guys, and its portrayal of the war is multifaceted. Jintae’s sadistic transformation is evident and his violent behaviors are often excessive. The war completely destroys the family’s pre-war happiness, although the war itself appears to be legitimate and justified at the same time.

Whereas Jintae turns into a hideous killing machine, the innocent Jinseok becomes a man who can stand up for himself after having to kill to survive. While Jintae loses his sanity, and eventually his life, in the madness of war, Jinseok keeps his life and his senses by remaining calm and keeping a distance in battle. The character arc of Jinseok marks *Taegukgi* as a generic variation of the “adolescent-boy-becoming-a-man story.”²⁵⁹ Having to face life and death in combat, Jinseok becomes a man.

No matter how protective Jintae is of his younger brother, at some point Jinseok will be left alone to take care of himself. It is thus expected that Jinseok will face a situation in which he must kill in order to survive. In this pivotal scene, set in the middle

²⁵⁷ Ibid. 9.

²⁵⁸ The film clearly depicts South Korean transgressions, such as South Korean soldiers’ forceful enlistment of Jintae and Jinseok against their will and the execution of Youngshin. When the brothers attempt to rescue her, South Korean officials even accuse them of being Communist supporters. None of the North Korean characters have any real influence on the film’s narrative.

²⁵⁹ Slocum 8.

of a gruesome battle, Jinseok is engaged in hand-to-hand combat with a young North Korean soldier.

The camera shows Jinseok wrestling with his opponent, in a close-up. His heavy breathing is audible, a reminder to viewers that they are experiencing something of what Jinseok is going through. This sequence gives the audience a chance to feel Jinseok's struggle intimately. Just as he is about to subdue his opponent, however, Jinseok hesitates in response to his young enemy's plea that he is only seventeen and has been dragged into the war. This moment of pause nearly proves fatal, as it gives the North Korean the opportunity to overpower Jinseok.

Now the situation is reversed: with absolute hatred and psychosis in his eyes, the young soldier yells at Jinseok to die. As Jinseok is being strangled, however, he manages to grab a knife and stab his assailant. Turning teenaged boys into killers is the function of the war machine; it is what war does to men. By having to kill, Jinseok has to grow up. He cannot stay young and innocent; he has to become a "man." Through his eyes, the audience experiences a simultaneous loss of innocence and disenchantment with war's horrors.

Near its end, the film returns the audience to the present day. When they met for the last time on the battle ground, Jintae promised his younger brother that he would come back home alive. And Jintae does at last come back, but in a casket. Grey-haired Jinseok weeps and shouts at his dead brother, "You promised to come back home! You promised!" For its very last scene, *Taegukgi* returns to the past.

Life, even though it may be imperfect, must continue. The cease-fire agreement is signed, and young Jinseok comes back home to his mother. She is still working at the noodle shop, as she did before the war, and taking care of Youngshin's three younger

siblings. The mother and children welcome Jinseok; they are back again at the market, just like before. Jintae and Youngshin, however, are absent. Equilibrium has been restored, but it is incomplete. Nor is Jinseok the same. Once an innocent high-school student, he is now a veteran soldier who has faced death. The things he has seen and done during the war have changed him forever: he was an adolescent boy and now he is a man.

In addition to the passive victim Youngshin and the brothers' silent, frail mother, Jintae and Jinseok's characters are familiar tropes of the war genre—an ordinary guy turning into a monstrous killer, and an adolescent boy becoming a man.²⁶⁰ Also, the beautification of nostalgic time and space the film presents—pre-war Seoul in 1950—is familiar, yet it never existed in reality. The film's attempt to apoliticize the war and personalize it as an individual tragedy is regressive because of its attempt to sanitize the sociopolitical context of the war. *Taegukgi* avoids useful and necessary reflections on the war's its conditions, causes, and consequences.

Paradoxically, *Taegukgi*'s obvious political agenda seems to apoliticize and personalize the Korean War. In service of this goal, the war is depicted in a manner similar to that of a natural disaster, and the film characterizes Jintae and Jinseok as innocent, somewhat ignorant young men, unaware of the sociopolitical upheavals of their times. Their life before the war is shown in a series of innocent, slow-motion flashbacks, such as the boys chasing after one another on a busy street, sharing an ice pop, and helping their mother with chores. Although the fatherless family struggles to make ends meet, they are happy and content regardless of the political commotion surrounding them.

²⁶⁰ Since *The Birth of a Nation* (Dir. D. W. Griffith. 1915.), the story of brothers or close friends whose fates radically differ in the midst of war has been the basis of a classic war film narrative.

The brothers are literally swept into the turmoil of war and take part in its violence inadvertently. During the war they are both profoundly transformed.

Taegukgi and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* plainly blame the war and the nation for causing the conversions of innocent civilians into killing machines. Slocum argues that many Hollywood war films focus more on the trials and tribulations that individuals must endure in order to survive during war, instead of the actual causes and consequences of the war.²⁶¹ The political issues are pushed aside in favor of the portrayals of war heroes, yet *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* openly accuse the nation of its horrible war crimes as well.

In this case, society is to blame, not individuals. The horrific acts carried out by citizens occurred because the nation forced them to do so. These films use the nation to condone and excuse individuals who committed horrendous actions. But the question remains: Should individuals (the Jintaes, Jinseoks, Lees, and Pyos) be forgiven for their deeds because of the conditions forced upon them by society? *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* seem to suggest that they should be exonerated because they, as ordinary citizens, were coerced into becoming soldiers. They became killers, not because they chose to but because of the circumstances. A similar situation occurs with the Gwangju Uprising and the character of Kim Young-ho in *Peppermint Candy*, discussed in Chapter 3, again brings up equivalent issues.

Although these films do not evade indicting the nation, it is questionable whether or not that move of blaming the nation is less problematic and more progressive than depicting the war as just a personal tragedy. *Welcome to Dongmakgol* is consistent in its criticism of the war. It is the nation that has ruined the peace and happiness of

²⁶¹ Slocum 9.

Dongmakgol and turned Lee and Pyo into killers. The ways *Taegukgi* approaches the war, however, are conflicting. The war claims the lives of Jintae and Youngshin, yet it also seems to be an inevitable and justifiable step for the formation of the nation. In the prosperous and progressive present, the descendants of the Jintaes and Jinseoks pay tribute to their predecessors who perished during the war. *Taegukgi*'s war is both futile and necessary at the same time.

Although both *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* deplore the horrific nature of war and present condemnable acts performed by South Korean authorities, only *Welcome to Dongmakgol* presents American characters and also critiques the U.S. command, features absent from *Taegukgi*. *Welcome to Dongmakgol* does not simply denounce the American superior, but it is apparent that the U.S., without further investigation, went ahead with an operation that it knew could cause the deaths of countless civilians. The film clearly depicts the brutal deeds executed by Americans.

In the film, a series of coincidental crashes of U.S. aircrafts in the area near Dongmakgol causes the U.S. Air Force headquarters to consider the town a hot zone, and it plans to air bomb the area. One South Korean officer questions the justification of the order and suggests that more evidence needs to be collected before the operation, since it may cause the losses of many innocent lives. His American superior, however, asserts that they do not have enough time to do more research, and that the area is in a geographically critical location; thus, the bombing is inevitable. Reluctantly, the South Korean officer shuts up.

When a rescue team for Captain Smith, the American navy pilot stranded in Dongmakgol, arrives in the town, the leading American officer of the team beats up and yells at villagers to give up supposed North Korean spies. To pressure them further, one

of the South Korean soldiers begins to strike the village chief, an elderly man with grey hair and a grey beard, and threatens to kill him. The violent acts committed by these soldiers, who are traditional heroes, appear irrational and condemnable. The re-writing of history, that is, the re-presentation of the War in *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, embraces negative portrayals of U.S. and South Korean soldiers. The film forces the audience to re-consider who these supposedly good guys are, and to re-examine what they actually did during the war.

The depiction of South Koreans in an unfavorable light is unprecedented in the Korean War films. There used to be no confusion in recognizing who was on South Korea's side and who were the enemies.²⁶² However, *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* feature compassionate North Koreans and detestable South Koreans. Portrayals of Americans in the Korean War films are relatively rare, as the war is mainly depicted as a matter of a domestic struggle between North and South. Therefore, the character of U.S. navy pilot Smith in *Welcome to Dongmakgol* is particularly important to consider.

Smith's character largely functions to provide comic relief in the main narrative of North and South Korean soldiers throughout the film. He cannot communicate with anyone in most of the film because no one in the village speaks English, including the five soldiers who encounter him there. And thus, Smith's first days in the village are understandably very frustrating for him. Eventually, however, he learns to converse with the villagers without the help of language, but merely through exchanges of glances, gestures, and smiles. Ironically, Smith is portrayed as being happier and more satisfied

²⁶² Previous war films like *Red Muffler* and *The Marine Who Never Returned* do not contain any unlikeable South Korean characters or sympathetic North Koreans.

when he is around people with whom he cannot communicate normally, rather than around people who speak English. *Welcome to Dongmakgol* suggests that interactions based on warmth and caring make it possible even for enemy soldiers to overcome their linguistic and cultural differences.

Even though Smith speaks no Korean, he establishes a connection with Dong-goo, a little boy in the village, and an old lady whose son is the village chief.²⁶³ Dong-goo follows Smith around and talks to him constantly, even though his new friend cannot understand his words. The mother of the village chief takes a special interest in Smith that she shows in numerous ways, including caring for him when he is sick, feeding him roasted potatoes, and putting fermented soybean paste on his face.²⁶⁴ In turn, Smith takes good care of the old lady when he has recovered enough to take care of himself. These ties are so strong that they influence other characters: when one of the South Korean soldiers, Moon, refuses to participate in the decoy operation because it is too risky, Smith's readiness to join in changes his mind.

Although Smith's loyalty to the villagers is evident, he remains an outsider and stranger. In every frame he is in, the *mise-en-scène* underlines his unique features in contrast to the Koreans around him. After all, he is the only Caucasian man in the midst of an entire village of Asians. He is too tall and his physical features visibly distinguish him from others. When the women in the village give all the soldiers—three North Koreans, two South Koreans, and Smith—Korean civilian outfits to wear, only Smith

²⁶³ The village chief is an elderly man in his seventies, so his mother is presumably at least in her nineties. She is mentioned to be the oldest person in the village.

²⁶⁴ Smith gets a lot of bee stings while hanging out with Dong-goo. A popular remedy in Korea is to put fermented soybean paste on the bee-stung areas. Although effective, the treatment can be unbearable because of the pungent and rotten smell of the bean paste.

looks awkward in his new clothing, mainly because the lengths of the arms and legs are too short for his body, while the same clothing fits others well.

Smith befriends Dong-goo, gives a piggy back ride to the older woman, and plays American football with the villagers, although his background story is not fully explained. At the end, Smith is the only survivor among six soldiers stranded in Dongmakgol. Five Korean soldiers send Smith back to the American base to report that the area of Dongmakgol is not enemy territory but a civilian residence. He is on his way when he realizes that the others have probably died carrying out the dangerous mission of a decoy bombing. He sheds tears.

Welcome to Dongmakgol presents numerous American characters: a general who orders a hasty bombing of a suspicious area (which the audience knows is Dongmakgol), a captain of the rescue team who is rude and cruel to the villagers, and Smith. Through its various portrayals of American soldiers, the film incorporates the elaborate involvement of the U.S. in the war as well as in contemporary South Korean politics. The most likeable among the American characters, Smith, is a true ally of the Koreans, yet he is still relegated to the position of a distant observer. At the end, he is the sole survivor, while his fellow soldiers stranded in Dongmakgol have perished in the mission to save the village.

When the five Korean soldiers plan a mission to protect Dongmakgol by creating a decoy bomb attack, Smith is eager to participate in the action, despite its risk. Moon, one of the South Korean deserters, does not want to be part of it because he realizes the danger of the task. Moon is a medic but he does not seem to possess any particular medical knowledge. Later, when he develops a bond with Jang, the older and wiser North Korean soldier, Moon tells Jang that he wanted to become a singer in a famous

entertainment district in Seoul. While frolicsome and flippant, Moon is not a bad person, although he refuses to take part in the perilous operation to protect Dongmakgol. After witnessing Smith's willingness to take part in the mission, Moon hesitantly agrees to participate as well.

Unlike Pyo and Moon, whom the audience gets to know more about, the overall communities of South Korean and U.S. soldiers are not portrayed in a favorable light in *Welcome to Dongmakgol*. As is shown in the beginning of the film, a South Korean platoon attacks defeated North Korean troops and kills an unarmed, injured, and helpless adolescent enemy. They also beat up an old man and threaten innocent villagers. It is not a flattering depiction of South Koreans.

New findings, perspectives, and resulting discussions have encouraged re-examination of the Korean War in a more critical light.²⁶⁵ In the past, views of the war tended to fall into a blindly clear-cut division between good and evil, friend and enemy, self and other, South and North. In today's South Korea, however, cinematic representations of the Korean War endeavor to do away with these simple binaries.²⁶⁶

The War in *Taegukgi* is depicted in a conflicting manner, while the portrayal of the war in *Welcome to Dongmakgol* is consistently negative and even overtly critical. While *Taegukgi* utilizes familiar war-genre formulae, *Welcome to Dongmakgol* brings an innovative approach of employing fantasy, unlike Hollywood war films.

²⁶⁵ In recent years, the long-suppressed and silenced facts about the misconduct and offenses committed by South Korean and American soldiers during the Korean War have been unearthed.

²⁶⁶ The complex portrayal of the War can be found in literature as well. For instance, *The Guest*, a recent work by Hwang Seok-young, one of the most prominent novelists in South Korea, is set during the Korean War. This groundbreaking work, tells the stories of two brothers, who are supposedly "good guys" because they supported the South Korean government. In the present day, the older brother, who committed many horrendous wartime killings in the name of democracy and Christianity, reflects on his past while facing his own death. Hwang Seok-Young. *The Guest* (Seoul: Changbi Pub., 2001. Print.).

The usage of fantastical elements needs to be clearly articulated in this context. Commonly, fantasy is employed to define the particular strand of literature or film that involves supernatural beings or magic (most famously, works like J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*). Fantastical aesthetics in *Welcome to Dongmakgol* is a cinematic strategy used to re-vision the stark historical reality of the civil war and re-present a hope that things could have been different if there had been a village like Dongmakgol. The existence of the town itself is a narrative fantasy because every Korean who is familiar with the historical facts of the war would acknowledge it as something impossible. Yet, both the filmmakers and the film's audience are complicit in producing and believing in this improbable and unlikely fantasy. The fantastical moments, both narratively and visually, often provide solutions at critical junctures in the film.²⁶⁷

In addition to the improbable innocence and incorruptibility of the villagers, the otherworldly quality of Dongmakgol is demonstrated through the film's visual aesthetics. Although the fantastical elements of *Welcome to Dongmakgol* are crucial to its narrative, by and large the film is faithful to the conventions of classical Hollywood cinema, including shot-reverse shots, eye-line match, point-of-view shots, flashback sequences, crosscutting, and invisible editing.²⁶⁸ As specific cinematic devices, slow motion and dreamy music accentuate the wondrous attributes of the village and its life, and they invite willing participation from the audience.

²⁶⁷ Leonkimm comments that Dongmakgol is like a utopia, while kh16304 asserts that *Welcome to Dongmakgol* is a fantasy about the tragedy of the Korean War. For the actual postings, refer to Appendix.

²⁶⁸ In their historical studies of classical Hollywood cinema, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson have discovered that most films produced in the Hollywood system before 1960 share similar narrative elements and cinematic styles. Stylistic choices, like shot-reverse shot, eye-line matches, point-of-view shots, and crosscutting, are among the common stylistic elements. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985. Print.

The “popcorn snow” scene, beautifully shot, evokes a Christmas-like atmosphere in the middle of a hot fall day; it is like a scene from a children’s fairy tale, in that the villagers are simply happy as they enjoy the lovely, edible snow. At the same time, enemies who were just pointing guns at each other begin to become friends. Slow motion and close-up shots of popping corn, accompanied by soft music, cue the audience about how and when to immerse themselves in the fantasy world of *Dongmakgol*. Even though it is set in the midst of civil war, *Welcome to Dongmakgol* depicts these idyllic moments for the audience so that they, like the innocent villagers, may escape violence and death.

The butterfly is another of the film’s significant visual signs. The opening credits start with a small, fluttery creature flying around the mountain; soon after, when Captain Smith is about to crash land, he notices a yellow butterfly right outside the window of his plane. When Dong-goo takes Smith to the remains of another fallen plane, a whole flock of butterflies flies out of it. Another group of butterflies even “attacks” the paratroopers who have been sent to rescue Smith. In this scene, it is as if the butterflies are acting as defenders of the village and villagers. The butterflies are shown for the last time in the snow (which is, of course, implausible, as they cannot survive in cold temperatures), flying through the vestige of the previous night’s hard-fought battle.

The fantastical elements of *Welcome to Dongmakgol* operate on three different levels—narratively, visually, and ideologically. Visually fantastical sequences (edible popcorn snow, butterflies, and the slaying of a wild boar,²⁶⁹ for example), mark the very existence of *Dongmakgol* as a narrative fantasy. This fantasy also works ideologically

²⁶⁹ It is established earlier that a wild boar has been damaging the crops in *Dongmakgol*. In one scene, Smith and Dong-goo, a little boy whom Smith befriends, are attacked by the boar, and South and North Korean soldiers unite to protect them. They eventually kill the boar and succeed in saving Smith and Dong-goo. The whole sequence is shot in a very dream-like manner, in slow motion and with fantastical music.

when North Koreans, South Koreans, and an American join forces and even risk their lives for one cause. Dongmakgol is a fantastical space that makes all these unlikely things probable, and reifies the filmmaker's conscious desire to create a film that both highlights and protests the destructive reality of war.

Dongmakgol does not exist in reality and did not, of course, exist during the Korean War. By presenting an ideal utopia like Dongmakgol, the film endeavors to appeal to the communal desire of local audiences to imagine a time and space that is like in a children's story: no one is evil and nothing bad ever happens in this fantastical place. Under the current cultural and educational apparatuses in South Korean society, South Koreans are incessantly reminded of the devastating effects of the Korean War on the nation. By creating this fantastical place, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, set during the War, allows the viewers to smile and take pleasure in the narrative as if a place like Dongmakgol could have been possible.²⁷⁰

Both *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* rely on the creation of a non-existent time and space based on apolitical illusions. In *Taegukgi*, pre-war Seoul is idealized to the point of being almost like a lost paradise. The film uses the Lee family to illustrate this peaceful, idealized existence. One of the early scenes shows an early summer night, in the middle of June, just after the family has finished dinner. They all go out to a small stream near the house to enjoy the night. Brothers Jintae and Jinseok, their mother, Youngshin, and her three younger siblings all play in the water, splashing one another and having a good time, in slow motion over soft background music. This is clearly the

²⁷⁰ *Welcome to Dongmakgol* was the most successful film of the year 2005. It is reported to have had an admission of 2,435,088. See Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance*. Appendix 1. Many local audience members have commented that they are well aware that the existence of a village like Dongmakgol would have been impossible during the war, but they want to believe the children's story-like fantasy the film offers. For actual postings, refer to Appendix.

happiest time for this family, as the audience already knows that what happens next will tear apart both their lives and the nation. The nostalgic perfection of this scene is, however, an apolitical illusion, which *Taegukgi* employs to emphasize the catastrophic impact that the war will have on the life of the Lee family and, by extension, the nation of families that make up Korea.

Dongmakgol represents a fantastical space that never did, never does, and never will exist.²⁷¹ Unlike a psychoanalytic usage of fantasy, which often implies automated spectatorial response and unconscious, prohibited sexual desires, the fantasy of *Welcome to Dongmakgol*—the very existence of a village like Dongmakgol and people like the villagers of Dongmakgol—relies heavily on both the filmmaker’s efforts and the cooperation of audiences, who readily acknowledge the implausibility of the film’s fantasy yet enjoy going along with it.²⁷²

Dongmakgol epitomizes both the past and present of what Koreans long for, lost, and cannot regain. It is a utopia completely isolated from the world outside, the war, the foreign powers, and ultimately from reality. For this film to be successful, Dongmakgol and what it represents should be protected and upheld at any cost for the fantasy of the audience. Even in its Korean War setting, which is accurately presented as full of extreme hatred, Dongmakgol has the power to unite people and resolve tension.²⁷³

²⁷¹ The use of fantastical aesthetics in film dates back to George Méliès’s *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), arguably the very first science-fiction film, yet *Welcome to Dongmakgol* is not a science-fiction film. Also, the film still functions under the rules of the Hollywood realist text, which I will explain later in this chapter.

²⁷² Many online reviews and comments have used the word “fantasy” to describe Dongmakgol; one reviewer states that he already knew this fantasy of utopia would be destroyed, but still smiled. Terms such as “utopia” and “innocence” are also frequently used in many viewers’ reactions to the film. For actual postings, refer to the Appendix.

²⁷³ One viewer comments that *Welcome to Dongmakgol* is the best movie he has ever seen, and another calls it “innocent and beautiful.” Among 403 reviewers, most are positive and state that they liked the film

The irony is that the film is set in 1950 Korea when war was tearing the entire nation apart. By presenting a village and villagers that are implausible yet believable, *Welcome to Dongmakgol* has managed to provide an opportunity for domestic viewers to escape, via manufactured memories from the cruel reality of the nation's real memories of the Korean War.

Taegukgi, by contrast, masterfully employs many familiar tropes of war films while telling the story of two brothers in a civil war, wrapped in sleek cinematography. The film defends and indicts the war simultaneously by clearly demonstrating the respect the younger generation owes to the nation's Jintae and Jinseoks, as well as the destruction caused by the war causes the Lee family. These films do not rest on the simple binary of good and evil, like previous war films have done. They suggest that the war should be re-examined in a critical and complex light.

IV. Conclusion

Taegukgi and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, two blockbuster films set during the Korean War, re-visit and re-tell the story of the war from a different perspective.²⁷⁴ While North Koreans are depicted in a favorable light, the violence and atrocities committed by South Korean and American soldiers are also depicted. Although female characters in

very much, mainly complimenting the film's ability to visualize the "implausible fantasy" of *Dongmakgol* and the villagers. For actual postings, refer to Appendix.

²⁷⁴ Jinhee Choi notes that although the term "Korean blockbuster" is common in South Korea, the way that the Korean blockbuster is conceived should be distinguished from perceptions of Hollywood blockbusters. Employing Steve Neale's criteria of "specialness" and "spectacle," Choi asserts that, while both categories can be utilized to understand the Korean blockbuster, the use of these strategies by national cinema is best understood "in a relative sense" and "inevitably involves a scaling down, or 'de-Westernizing' process" (Choi 33. Choi is borrowing Chris Berry's argument here as well. Chris Berry, "What's Big about the Big Film? De-Westernizing the blockbuster in Korea and China" in *Movie Blockbusters: 217-229*). *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. Julian Stringer (New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.).

both films do not escape from the archetypal role of passive victim, *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* re-present the story of the Korean War with the mastery of Hollywood generic conventions as well as elements of culturally specific fantasy.

The Korean War completely transforms the lives of the characters in these two films. In *Taegukgi*, a dutiful, thoughtful, diligent man (Jintae)—who is a son, a brother, a fiancé, and a friend—turns into a monstrous killing machine and eventually dies, whereas an innocent adolescent boy (Jinseok) becomes a jaded war veteran. The characters in *Welcome to Dongmakgol* do not differ much. North Korean Commander Lee was a farmer before the war, and South Korean Lieutenant Pyo suffers from the guilt of killing refugee civilians while he was following an order. At the end, they all die.

Rather than the conventional war heroes, the protagonists of *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* are ordinary people caught in the middle of a national tragedy. Although the films tend to ignore the reality of the historical context in order to personalize the war, they do not avoid telling the inconvenient truth about the war and the nation that forced these people to become killers. The portrayals of the war in these films still remain romantic and less than factual, to some degree (for instance, the familial love and friendship among people who cannot even communicate with one another triumph at the end; the sociopolitical background of Korea in 1950 is never explained; and the final denouements rely on individual actions rather than national resolution), yet the change of focus in depicting the war is evident in its cataclysmal impact on the lives of the protagonists and the avoidance of simple dichotomies of good and evil. In the end, no one is innocent in the midst of war.

Cinematic history is a mediator between official history and popular memory. Historical films are often more powerful than official history learned from a textbook,

which means that mainstream media have tremendous influence over the popular memory of a particular historical event. However, the history presented by cinema often overlaps with official history and manipulates popular conceptions of that history as well. When cinematic history breaks away from official versions of history, especially when official versions are based on censorship and oppression, the past becomes attractive in a new way and therefore draws public attention. The presentations of the Korean War in these films strive to avoid the simple dichotomies of official history. Not only was the war much more complicated than we have been told, the people who were alive during the war were much more complex than the characters presented to us in earlier films.

As it has tried to carve out its own niche, Korean cinema has been in an ongoing state of tension with Hollywood. *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, while utilizing many of Hollywood's war-genre conventions, describe distinctively Korean situations. At a time when no one can prove the existence of "authentic" national cinema, the directors of these films have been free to appropriate Hollywood's aesthetics as well as its narrative and commercial conventions. As Korean cinema attempts to resolve its state of "complex textual engagement and negotiation with Hollywood,"²⁷⁵ it utilizes Hollywood's glossy visuals and proverbial narrative structures to satisfy its domestic audiences with specifically "Korean" stories. Understanding Korean cinema's "ambivalent" attitude toward Hollywood, its love/hate relationship, is useful in order to grasp fully these Korean historical films and their reworking of Hollywood.

David Bordwell and others note that Hollywood is characterized as excessively obvious cinema.²⁷⁶ Hollywood films, however, have also long sought "to make invisible

²⁷⁵ Klein 895.

²⁷⁶ Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson. *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*.

[their] formal conventions and especially, the political, cultural, and ideological preoccupations they reinforce.”²⁷⁷ In adopting obvious cinematic structures from Hollywood, *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* endeavor to re-tell and re-image the story of the Korean War. Attempts to take “neutral” and “apolitical” positions toward the Korean War are troubling, however, because although these films effectively implement Hollywood’s structural inclinations they cannot afford to be either neutral or apolitical about this war. The Korean War is one of the most crucial, central narratives of national history and identity for Koreans; as such, it is still a source of much grief and sorrow.

Although most Korean viewers are at least somewhat familiar with historical facts about the Korean War, and have seen at least a few Korean War films, both *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* simultaneously meet and resist local viewers’ expectations. Even as these films correspond to the conventions of Korean War films, they also defy them by presenting the crimes of South Koreans and Americans and showing the effects of injustice on their protagonists (e.g., Jintae’s transformation and Pyo’s suicide attempt). While these two films might not supply answers about how the Korean War began, whether or not it had a sane rationale, how its sacrifices and killings of innocent civilians could be justified, and so forth, *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* re-vision the War and certainly present some fresh perspectives.²⁷⁸

The Korean War was inarguably a major turning point in the history of one nation, Korea, that remains divided into North and South halves today. To North Koreans, the war was a necessary attempt to liberate fellow Koreans from the foreign imperial power

²⁷⁷ Slocum 17.

²⁷⁸ A possible parallel can be drawn to a recent film about the American Civil War, *Cold Mountain* (Dir. Anthony Minghella. 2003.), in terms of its revisionist view of the war. There are vast amounts of literature on historical revisionist films.

of the U.S.; to South Koreans, it was a criminal invasion by the North that caused the deaths of tens of thousands of innocent people. How Koreans understand the Korean War is crucial to their understanding of national history and national identity. North Koreans ostensibly believe that they still need to liberate South Koreans from U.S. rule, and that the two Koreas must unite by any means necessary. South Koreans also believe in unification—but by nonviolent means. In practical terms, South Koreans are aware that unification would also be an enormous financial burden on them, as was the case with East and West Germany. It is widely believed that the majority of South Korean youth are skeptical about reunification for this very reason; even for this cherished national dream, they are unwilling to risk a grim economic future. North Korea is said to be one of the most destitute countries in the world, in which many people are supposedly dying of hunger.

Owing to its significant place in Korea's national history and national identity, the Korean War has been represented many times in film, TV, and literature, as well as other genres. I argue that the two recent blockbuster films discussed here are different from previous productions because they reflect sociopolitical changes in South Korean society that have allowed the war to be re-examined in a more complex light. The reality of war is that nothing is clearly set in simple dichotomy; the ways these films depict this particular war reflect war's complications and ambiguities.

It is certainly progress to witness the more sophisticated portrayals of self and others offered in these two war films. Neither is shy about depicting atrocities executed by South Koreans (self), alongside and humane and sympathetic North Korean soldiers (other). Yet it is clear that some problems remain when *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* present the utopias of family and community. In *Taegukgi* the idealized

setting is pre-war Seoul, where everyone is having a good time; the family is together and they are joyful. In *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, utopia is found in the form of a mountain town free of any outsider's intrusion. In both cases, it is the war that destroys peace and happiness. If not for the war, everyone could have remained content. But in reality, *Taegukgi* conveniently omits the societal confusion and turmoil that plagued Seoul before the war, and the town of Dongmakgol could never have existed.

In Chapter 1, the division between self (Korea) and other (Japan) was more than clear. The Korean War makes the binary more complicated, as the dichotomy must exist within the Korean community itself. However, the War provides the ideological barrier needed to separate North from South, and there are still other exterior forces involved as well. The partition becomes even more problematic in the case of representing the massacre of the Gwangju Democratization Movement, as the killings occurred among fellow South Koreans.

Historical representation is always difficult because of the limitations of signification, documentation, and discourse.²⁷⁹ Today, governmental interference or oppressive censorship no longer forbids South Koreans from looking back upon the past. They are given a chance to examine their past without being compelled to irresponsibly idealize and simply divide good and evil. The opportunity to ruminate on history without any political bias is a privilege today's South Koreans have that their predecessors did not.

²⁷⁹ Joshua Hirsch. *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004: 5. Print.

CHAPTER 4

THE GWANGJU DEMOCRATIZATION MOVEMENT IN FILMS: PEOPLE'S HISTORY IN *PEPPERMINT CANDY* AND *SPLENDID VACATION*

I. Introduction

Splendid Vacation, a domestic blockbuster hit in South Korea in summer 2007, begins with a low-angle medium shot of a sunny blue sky with pleasant, peaceful music. The protagonist, Minwoo, is driving his taxi along a paved path between tall trees in a rural area. No other cars are on the road. Feeling the spring breeze through the open window, he enjoys the beautiful day. Over a long shot of the taxi as it travels down the road, the words *Hwaryuhan Hyugha* [*Splendid Vacation*], the title of the film, appear on the screen.

The next sequence, set to urgent background music, is a military base at night, where the soldiers of an elite combat unit are getting ready to climb into the planes that will transport them to the site of their mission. They do not know where they are heading or what their task is (later, both soldiers and audience will find out that they are being sent off to a small city called Gwangju, to suppress the anti-government demonstrations taking place there). These two sequences—one with a lone man in a peaceful countryside and the other with soldiers on high alert—emphasize the drastic difference between two groups of people and their mindsets.

In May 1980, many citizens of Gwangju, South Korea, were killed as they resisted an illegal military coup.²⁸⁰ Although the exact number of casualties remains in dispute, it is widely acknowledged that a large number of unarmed civilians died. Although the immediate victims mainly consisted of the people of Gwangju, the Uprising affected everyone in South Korea and became a symbol of its hard-fought democracy. *Splendid Vacation* reenacts this incident from the perspectives of Gwangju's people. Sadly, survivors of the Massacre have confirmed the veracity of the film, especially the details of the cruel, violent acts committed by soldiers against their own people.

The Gwangju Democratic Uprising lasted less than two weeks. However, it is regarded as one of the most critical events in the democratization of South Korea, the formation of contemporary South Korean identity, and the nation's self-definition as a democratic country. The event and its aftermath permanently altered the lives of South Koreans, both inside and outside of these films. To some, the events that took place in Gwangju in 1980 were literally matters of life and death.

Examining the Gwangju Uprising in films is more complicated than the two previous events I have discussed (Japanese colonialism and the Korean War) because the distinction between self and other becomes more difficult to draw. Japanese and North Koreans have been and remain the most predictable, definitive antagonists, whereas in representing Gwangju it is extremely hard to determine who is *not* culpable. In the matter of Gwangju 1980, no one can claim innocence and no one is free of guilt: not the soldiers, not their superior officers, not the government, not the general public who stood by as the

²⁸⁰ Gwangju is the sixth largest city in South Korea. Its name is also interchangeably written as "Kwangju" in English.

killings happened. In consequence of this national shame, South Korean suppressed the memory of Gwangju.

This chapter closely examines *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation*.²⁸¹ Since the Uprising, six films have been produced on the subject of the Gwangju Democratization Movement. The first two, *A Song of Resurrection* (1990, Lee Jung-Gook) and *A Petal* (1996, Jang Sun-Woo),²⁸² produced during the regimes of Roh Tae-Woo and Kim Young-Sam, respectively were heavily censored, whereas the other four, *Peppermint Candy* (1999), *The Old Garden* (2007), *Scout* (2007), and *Splendid Vacation* (2007), did not suffer from any official censorship.²⁸³ Under the successive liberal presidencies of Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun, the film industry was largely free of governmental pressure and interference, and thus, the production of these four films was possible.²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ The Korean title of this film is something like *Splendid/beautiful/fabulous/fantastic Vacation*, which was the original military operations term for soldiers deployed in Gwangju in May 1980. The studio somehow translated the Korean title into English as *May 18*, but I use *Splendid Vacation* instead to underline the cruel irony of the very term.

²⁸² While *A Song of Resurrection* follows multiple characters and their trials and tribulations through the 1980s, especially after the Uprising, *A Petal* follows a nameless girl who is severely traumatized from the experience of the Gwangju Massacre. She witnessed the death of her mother and of hundreds of other civilians. She cannot process the trauma and literally goes crazy. The girl in *A Petal* represents the suffering and pain of Koreans, especially civilians of Gwangju in the aftermath of the massacre.

²⁸³ Four films were produced between 1998 and 2008 on the subject of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising. In order of production and theatrical release in South Korea, they are: *Baak Haa Saa Taang* [*Peppermint Candy*] (Dir. Lee Chang-Dong. 1999.), *Ohraedoen Jungwon* [*The Old Garden*] (Dir. Im Sang-Soo. 2007.), *Hwaryeohan Hyugha* [*Splendid Vacation*] (Dir. Kim Ji-Hoon. 2007.) and *S Cah Woo T* [*Scout*] (Dir. Kim Hyun-Seok. 2007.). *Peppermint Candy* was the first to be released, on New Year's Day 2000. *The Old Garden*, *Splendid Vacation*, and *Scout* were released in the order mentioned above.

²⁸⁴ I discussed the detailed background of the Korean film industry and censorship in the Introduction. Kim Dae-Jung (1998-2003) was the first civilian president officially recognized as democratically elected. His predecessor, Kim Young-Sam (1993-1998), was also a civilian president, but his regime is considered to have been more of a transitional period than a radical break from previous military regimes because of his compromises and cooptation with prior governments. Kim Dae-Jung was a significant figure in the Gwangju Uprising, although he was under house-arrest during that time. He was from Jeolla Province, where Gwangju is located, and one of the demands of the citizens of Gwangju was to set Kim free of his home confinement. Kim was subsequently sentenced to death by the Chun Doo-Hwan (1980-1988) regime,

From among the four films depicting the Uprising produced between 1998 and 2008, I have selected two, *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation*, as the focus of this study because of their box office success. While the local box office outcomes of *The Old Garden* and *Scout* were meager, *Peppermint Candy* was the ninth best-selling domestic film of the year 2000, and *Splendid Vacation*, the second best-selling domestic film of the year 2007.²⁸⁵ The popularity of films and their influence over the general public are critical in this study, which aims to explore the way that cinematic portrayals of historically crucial events reinforce, alter, or challenge the hegemonic historiography of South Korean national narrative and affect the sense of national identity.

In this chapter, I analyze the representations of the 1980 Gwangju Democratization Movement in *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation*. *Splendid Vacation* depicts the event chronologically from the points of view of Gwangju's citizens, its most obvious victims. As a result of the massacre, Minwoo, the protagonist of *Splendid Vacation*, loses his family, his friends, his love interest, and his own life. *Peppermint Candy*'s narrative is presented in reverse chronological order, and it is difficult to decide whether or not its protagonist, Kim Young-Ho, is a perpetrator, a victim, or both.

Unlike with the Japanese (Chapter 1) and North Koreans (Chapter 2) in the films previously discussed, it becomes more difficult to identify the enemy in *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation*. *Peppermint Candy* presents the young Korean soldier, Kim Young-Ho, as both a perpetrator and victim simultaneously, while faceless and

but later, as president, he granted Chun clemency and reduced his sentencing—a historical irony in South Korean politics. Roh Moo-Hyun was in office between 2003 and 2008.

²⁸⁵ In 2009, 59 domestic films were released nationwide, while the number went up to 112 in 2007. For further details, refer to Appendix.

nameless soldiers in *Splendid Vacation* are undoubtedly murderers. However, the clear, binary opposition of good/evil becomes problematic as those soldiers are also fellow South Koreans under the same conditions of economic destitution and stifling authoritarianism.

Peppermint Candy is not an official history; it is a history told from the point of view of a victim/loser/anti-hero, more specifically an unusual one. Conversely, the protagonists of *Splendid Vacation* can be described as “straightforward” victims who were happy and content, carrying on with their daily lives until an unwarranted, unforeseen, and unstoppable tragedy intervened and literally took their lives away. One of the virtues of *Splendid Vacation* is to have given voices to the ordinary people of Gwangju, not conventional heroes who were born, raised, and died uniquely and specially but regular people who were satisfied with small pleasures and joys in life. Even though it was not their goal to be caught in the sociopolitical unrest, these ordinary citizens of Gwangju fought bravely and died like heroes. *Splendid Vacation* provides an interpretation of the past that allows people’s individual participation to be incorporated.

In *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation*, the Uprising is remembered from civilians’ perspectives, not the official ones. In these films, history finally endeavors to incorporate the forgotten, silenced, and ignored narrative of the nation. It is people’s history, not the official history, that *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation* strive to represent.²⁸⁶ Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar argue that cinema has long been utilized to promote the supposed unity and homogeneity of national history and the nation-state.

²⁸⁶ The record of congressional hearings regarding the uprising states that the massacre was an unfortunate mishap caused by a group of communist sympathizers, and only resulted in a small number of casualties. The official history of the Gwangju Democratization Movement was a blatant lie for many years, especially under the military leaderships of Chun Doo-Hwan and Roh Tae-Woo. It is only recently that survivors’ testimonies have been heard, acknowledged, and incorporated into History.

Berry and Farquhar's close examination of *City of Sadness* is very much relevant to the discussion of *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation*. *City of Sadness* represents the other side of history that challenges the official version of progressive history, according to Berry and Farquhar. Its characters are ordinary people, "those to whom national history happens rather than those who make themselves its agents."²⁸⁷

The protagonists of *City of Sadness* (1989), directed by Hou Hsiao-Hsien, an influential contemporary director in the Taiwanese film industry, are not heroic people who reify the progress of the nation-state but ordinary people who get swept up into the national crises. *City of Sadness* follows the steps of the four Lin brothers and their fates during "'the February 28 Incident,' a topic politically taboo in Taiwan from its occurrence in 1947 to the lifting of martial law in 1987."²⁸⁸ The film challenges the harmonious narrative of nation-building and development and conveys "the bitterness of the islanders' memories."²⁸⁹ Berry and Farquhar assert that *City of Sadness* strives to represent "the experiences of the nameless ordinary people whose lives are not recorded in preserved documents."²⁹⁰ *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation* aim to convey people's history in much the same way as *City of Sadness* traces the trials and tribulations of the Lin family.

Peppermint Candy was released on New Year's Day 2000 under Kim Dae-Jung's presidency. The film attracted critical acclaim and had a modest, unforeseen box office success—somewhat surprising, since the film does not feature any famous actors.

²⁸⁷ Berry and Farquhar 36.

²⁸⁸ Ibid. 35.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. 32.

Although they became well-respected and well-acknowledged after *Peppermint Candy*, Sul Kyung-Gu (who plays Kim Young-Ho, the protagonist) and Moon Sori (who plays Sunim, Young-Ho's love interest) were relatively unknown and certainly new to the South Korean film industry. The popularity of *Peppermint Candy* among the general public is unexpected, especially considering the gravity and severity of the subject matter.

As an expensively produced summer blockbuster, *Splendid Vacation* features many recognized actors, including Ahn Sung-Gi (who plays Park Heung-Soo), Kim Sang-Kyung (Kang Minwoo), Lee Yo-Won (Park Shinae), and Lee Jun-Gi (Kang Jinwoo). While the success of *Splendid Vacation* was more predictable, the success of *Peppermint Candy* was a welcome surprise for many Korean film critics. *Peppermint Candy* also met with some appreciation abroad, including a few awards at international film festivals.²⁹¹ Scholars of Korean cinema have published several articles on *Peppermint Candy* in English, which is rare for a Korean film.²⁹²

The narrations of *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation* take different approaches. *Peppermint Candy* is presented in reverse chronological order, while *Splendid Vacation* follows the conventional order, beginning to end. *Peppermint Candy*'s protagonist is a killer/victim, while there is no confusion between the killers and the victims in *Splendid Vacation*. As Berry and Farquhar have described in their discussion of *City of Sadness*, it is the experiences of nameless ordinary people that *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation* attempt to convey. The Gwangju Democratization

²⁹¹ *Peppermint Candy* participated in many international film festivals in Montreal, Vancouver, and Karlovy Vary, where it was awarded the Special Grand Prize, the Netpac Award, and the FICC Award respectively. See Gateward 136.

²⁹² Kyung-Hyun Kim's and David Martin-Jones's books are mentioned further in this chapter. Other discussions of *Peppermint Candy* can be found in: Shin and Stringer, *New Korean Cinema* and Gateward, *Seoul Searching*.

Movement is the most critical event in both of their narratives, and it is told from the perspectives of regular people, not conventional heroes.²⁹³ It is necessary, therefore, to examine the historical background of the Gwangju Uprising.

II. A Brief History of the Gwangju Democratization Movement and Its Cinematic Representations

The Gwangju Democratization Movement, during which the military killed many of Gwangju's unarmed citizens, is one of the most traumatic events in contemporary South Korean history. Subsequent erasure of the massacre, its memory, and all public discourse about it was pervasive for many years, and the Uprising remains a politically sensitive subject. The memory of Gwangju still divides the nation and this division makes it difficult to engage in public discussions about what really happened there and why. This sense of containment, and of restraint, strongly resonates within the nation's public consciousness as collective guilt, which it must be dealt with in order to overcome the pain and heal the wounds caused by the event.

Commonly referred to today as *Oh-il-pal* [5.18] (May 18), the Gwangju Democratization Movement, also called the Gwangju Democratic Uprising, lasted from 18 to 27 May 1980. What began as a peaceful political demonstration against an illegal military coup ended with the bloody slaughter of thousands of Gwangju citizens. Even today, no one claims responsibility for the killings. Although former presidents Chun

²⁹³ Matthew A. Killmeier and Gloria Kwok assert that the story of the Vietnam War depicted in *Heaven and Earth* (Dir. Oliver Stone. 1993.) is based on ordinary Vietnamese people's experiences, and term the film a people's history. The film is from the perspective of Le Ly, a young Vietnamese woman, who is the omniscient narrator of the film. See Matthew A. Killmeier and Gloria Kwok. "A People's History of Empire, or the Imperial Recuperation of Vietnam? Countermyths and Myths in *Heaven and Earth*" in *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 29.3 (July 2005): 256-272. Print.

Doo-Hwan and Roh Tae-Woo are commonly assumed to be the ones in charge at the time, they still deny any involvement.

Incidents that resulted in the massacre began on 26 October 1979, when President Park Chung-Hee, a former military general, was assassinated by Kim Jae-Kyu, the director of the KCIA (Korean Central Intelligence Agency), after eighteen years of sole dictatorship. After his death, it quickly became obvious that the interim government was unprepared and could exert little control over the nation.

Next, prominent Army Major General Chun Doo-Hwan took control in the coup d'état of December 12 (commonly referred to as *Shibi shibi* [12.12], meaning December Twelfth) and quickly ended any hopes for democratization by imposing martial law nationwide. Universities and colleges were closed and key advocates of democracy, including future presidents Kim Young-Sam and Kim Dae-Jung, were arrested. The citizens of Gwangju, however, did not surrender, but instead demanded both abolition of martial law and governmental democratization.

On the morning of 18 May, a large student demonstration began in Gwangju, at the gate of Jeonnam National University, to protest its closing; soldiers responded with billy clubs. Not only participants but bystanders as well were beaten, some fatally. Enraged, citizens attacked the local arsenal and took up arms to defend themselves. Although the city remained under citizens' control for a few days, their resistance was soon brutally crushed by a special army unit.²⁹⁴

During the presidency of Chun Doo-Hwan (1980-1987), the massacre was officially defined as a rebellion fomented by a conspiracy between communist

²⁹⁴ Still today, reports of the exact number of casualties vary drastically, depending on the sources.

sympathizers and North Korean spies in Gwangju.²⁹⁵ No one questioned this version, at least publicly, as doing so could endanger one's well-being and even one's life. When Kim Young-Sam took over the government in 1993, former presidents Chun and Roh were indicted and imprisoned, but they were soon released. During Kim Young-Sam's term, the incident was acknowledged as an attempt to promote democracy under military rule. A national cemetery for the victims of Gwangju was also established, and an annual memorial service is held here on May 18.

One of the most problematic aspects of the Gwangju Uprising is the severity of the violence executed by soldiers upon the citizens of Gwangju²⁹⁶ and the fact that no one has ever been held responsible. This national betrayal and lack of culpability mean that there are hundreds of thousands of victims, survivors, and witnesses, but no killers, no perpetrators, and most importantly—no guilty parties. Without justice, the Gwangju Massacre remains an open, incurable wound.

The impact of the Gwangju Democratization Movement on South Korean politics and history endures. Not only was the legitimacy of Chun's regime severely damaged, but both Chun and Roh were branded in public opinion as responsible for the massacre, despite their denials. Also, it is widely believed that the United States knew

²⁹⁵ *The Kwangju Uprising: Shadows over the Regime in South Korea* includes an official report on the Kwangju Incident to the National Assembly National Defense Committee, June 7, 1985 by Yoon Sung-min, then Minister of Defense. In this report, Yoon states that North Korean spies were among the "rebels." Since the report was made under Chun's regime, it justifies the military actions and minimizes civilian casualties. *The Kwangju Uprising: Shadows over the Regime in South Korea*. Donald N. Clark, ed. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988: 87. Print.

²⁹⁶ This intense brutality by the soldiers against civilians of Gwangju is well demonstrated in *Splendid Vacation*.

about the dispatch of special troops to Gwangju but did nothing to stop the killings.²⁹⁷

The U.S. supported both Chun and Roh throughout their reigns. It is irrefutable that the Gwangju Democratization Movement paved the way for South Korea to become a democratic country. The event became the ultimate symbol of South Koreans' struggle against authoritarianism.

III. Two Films in Focus: People's History in Peppermint Candy and Splendid

Vacation

Peppermint Candy is about a man's life from age twenty to forty, shown in reverse chronological order. It begins with the male protagonist, forty-year-old Kim Young-Ho, standing in front of an oncoming train. Just before he is hit, Young-Ho shouts "I want to go back!" He cannot go back, of course, but the film obligingly takes the audience to Young-Ho's past—a few days before, a few years before, and finally twenty years before. Young-Ho's life is profoundly altered when he begins his mandatory army service and is deployed to a small city, Gwangju, where he accidentally shoots and kills a schoolgirl. After this tragic incident Young-Ho becomes a torture-expert cop, a corrupt businessman, and an abusive husband, and finally goes bankrupt when the economic crisis hits South Korea in 1997. In the final scene, twenty-year-old Young-Ho is at the exact same place where the film began. He looks up at a beautiful sky and sheds a tear, as

²⁹⁷ In one scene in *Splendid Vacation*, one of the protestors in Gwangju brings *The New York Times* to the group that reports the event. He asserts that the world knows about what is going on in their city and hopes that there will be some diplomatic pressures from the U.S., but others quickly dismiss the possibility of U.S. involvement. At the end, no external help comes to rescue them.

if experiencing a premonition or déjà vu.²⁹⁸ With Young-Ho's face in close-up, the film ends.

Young-Ho's life is turned completely upside down in Gwangju. The girl he unintentionally kills is someone he briefly mistakes as his first love interest, Sunim, whom he has forced to leave him so that she can be with a man "better" than he is.²⁹⁹ This mistake is critical, as Sunim represents the innocence, the beauty, and the hope of life that Young-Ho has destroyed along with the killing of the girl. In the wake of these tragedies Young-Ho becomes a self-loathing man, a familiar trope of recent South Korean cinema. Under social, political, and economic conditions that they cannot control, these self-loathing men become emasculated and impotent, often literally. In addition to becoming self-destructive, these men often intentionally harm others, especially ones close to them, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Kyung Hyun Kim asserts that the trope of self-loathing men recurs in many recent Korean films.

Kim maintains that many of the male protagonists of early Park Kwang-Su and Jang Sun-Woo films exhibit entrenched self-disgust and abomination toward people around them, usually stemming from their painful childhood memories. Not being able to manage the traumatic experiences well, they often result in committing violent crimes or suicide, and severely hurt those who love them. Young-Ho can be understood as an extension of these previous characters of self-loathing men.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁸ Premonition and déjà vu mean almost the opposite, but for this moment in *Peppermint Candy*, it is appropriate to surmise that Young-Ho might be experiencing both simultaneously.

²⁹⁹ "First love" is a widely recognized phrase and expression in Korean that designates the most innocent and purest form of love. Most likely, one does not consummate his or her first love, and thus, it becomes even dearer and more endearing throughout a person's life.

³⁰⁰ For further discussion of self-loathing men in recent South Korean cinema, refer to Kyung-Hyun Kim's *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*. Kim argues that a self-loathing man is a commonly employed trope in New Korean Cinema, such as early Park Kwang-Su films like *Chilsu and Mansu* (1988) and *Black*

Young-Ho's actions and the life choices that follow are rooted in his conviction that his life is ruined. Young-Ho forces Sunim to leave him because he believes he does not deserve to be with her. In his mind, Young-Ho already killed Sunim when he killed the Gwangju schoolgirl; things cannot be repaired. Sunim represents the life he has dreamed of—everything he once desired but could not attain. Gwangju is an unforgettable site of trauma and haunting for Young-Ho.

In *Peppermint Candy*, Young-Ho's trials and tribulations are closely intertwined with the course of the nation's fortunes. South Korea was one of the most destitute countries in the world through the 1970s; then the Gwangju Massacre occurred in 1980. The 1980s in South Korea was "a contradictory era of political unrest, social turmoil, and economic prosperity."³⁰¹ According to Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient, the Gwangju tragedy is "a repressed trauma for both the individual and the nation."³⁰²

Successive military regimes pushed forward swift, growth-centered development, led by government plans that mostly benefited big corporations rather than individual workers. During this unprecedentedly rapid economic growth, called the "Miracle of the Han River," the wealth created by hasty economic expansion was based on the sacrifices of blue-collar laborers who worked long hours for low wages.³⁰³ Attempts to organize labor unions were futile and many of the organizers were arrested, tortured, and

Republic (1990) and Jang Sun-Woo's *To You, from Me* (1994). Because of their intense self-hatred, male characters in these films end up killing themselves or deeply hurting their loved ones.

³⁰¹ Chung and Diffrient 123.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ The majority of factory workers were young women during the 1960-1980s in South Korea and *Gongsuni* is a derogatory term to describe these women. The average wage of these blue-collar workers was even lower than the minimum cost of living until 1987, even though they worked 54.7 hours a week (1986), the highest level in the world. (Kim Yuk-Hoon. *Living Textbook of Contemporary Korean History*. Seoul, Korea: Humanist Pub. 2007: 290. Print.).

imprisoned.³⁰⁴ Today, the labor movement is one of the strongest traditions of social activism in South Korea; many young men and women devote their lives to improve working conditions. The Labor Party is one of South Korea's major political parties, for which support and appreciation continue to spread.

The national financial crisis, which peaked in 1997, also plays a crucial role in *Peppermint Candy*.³⁰⁵ The stock-market crash of that year demolishes Young-Ho's life as a successful businessman. By 1999 he is a middle-aged man who has lost his business, house, car, and family; the film then traces his fall in reverse, through the time he owned a small but thriving furniture store. In the late 1980s, he was a torture-expert cop who arrested many political activists. In 1980 he was a young man serving his mandatory service in the army,³⁰⁶ and finally in 1979, at the end of the film, he is a factory worker who makes low wages working long hours. Young-Ho was hard-working yet underprivileged when he was an honest and innocent young man in 1980. When he becomes a killer, torturer, and exploiter, his life flourishes, at least financially, during the 1980s and 1990s. In 1999, he loses everything, including his own life. Young-Ho's occupations change throughout the film and his life is intimately connected to Korea's sociopolitical shifts.

Kim Young-Ho, the protagonist of *Peppermint Candy* is unusually unlikeable and hard to identify with. Two days before he commits suicide, he buys a contraband gun in the port city of Incheon, about two hours from Seoul. After making this purchase, he

³⁰⁴ When he first joined the police force, Young-Ho in *Peppermint Candy* is questioned and taunted by his colleague who accuses him of being involved in the labor union movement. Out of a desperate attempt to fit in to the brutal culture of the police and clear his involvement with the union, Young-Ho executes his very first torture as a policeman.

³⁰⁵ This financial crisis in 1997 is known as "the IMF (International Monetary Fund) crisis" in South Korea.

³⁰⁶ In South Korea, every young man has to serve his mandatory duty in the military with few strict exemptions.

wanders around and approaches a female vendor in the back of a truck, who sells him a cup of instant coffee for 1,000 won.³⁰⁷ Sipping the coffee, Young-Ho makes small talk and flirts with her. He then looks into his wallet and tells the seller that he forgot to go to an ATM and thus does not have any cash on him. He “returns” the cup of coffee since he cannot pay for it; the vendor is at a loss for words.

The camera captures a few moments of extremely awkward silence between the two in a medium shot without any cuts. The woman is clearly upset and does not know what to do next while Young-Ho is leering at her. She eventually decides to let him keep the coffee, as he has already taken several sips. For his part, Young-Ho is very pleased with himself. He skips back to his car through drizzling rain, still sipping the coffee, sneering and smirking. Once seated inside the car, Young-Ho takes the gun out of its brown paper bag. In a medium shot, the camera shows him grabbing the gun, pointing it at his head, and then putting it in his mouth. In a medium close-up we see him holding the end of the nozzle inside his mouth. Tears are coming out of his eyes. He finally fires, but there is no bullet.

All these shots, shown from outside of the car window, are blurry and foggy because of the mist and rain on the car window. Similarly, it is unclear why Young-Ho is acting the way he is at this point in the film. At last, flushed and teary-eyed, Young-Ho takes the gun out of his mouth. Here is a man obviously so tormented and conflicted that he is ready to blow his own head off with a gun, a weapon that is extremely hard to obtain in South Korea, yet he is delighted with himself because he just swindled a dollar from the female coffee vendor, a hard-working yet economically underprivileged and unfortunate person. At this point in the film, Young-Ho seems like nothing but a plain

³⁰⁷ A thousand won roughly equals \$1 U.S.

crook who lies his way through life. Until the penultimate chapter when the film finally explains what made Young-Ho who he is at age forty, Young-Ho is an impossible character to understand, let alone identify with. As it reveals the story of this unusually unlikeable protagonist, *Peppermint Candy* begins with him committing suicide, next demonstrates how despicable he is, and does not reveal the somewhat understandable reasons for why he is the way he is until the film is almost over.

Murray Smith's theory of character engagement is useful in trying to comprehend how the audience feels about a protagonist like Young-Ho. Smith lists three levels at which spectators engage with characters: recognition, alignment, and allegiance. The spectator constructs characters at the level of *recognition*. She has access to their actions, thoughts, and feelings at *alignment*. And in *allegiance* the film attempts to marshal audience reactions to the characters, whether they are positive or negative. The process of forming allegiance most closely resembles the common usage of the term "character identification," according to Smith.³⁰⁸

The audience watching *Peppermint Candy* can certainly recognize and align with Young-Ho; the construction of his character and the motivations for his actions, thoughts, and feelings are clear, at least on the surface. Yet it remains exceptionally challenging to feel allegiance to Young-Ho because he carries out various detestable actions, such as cheating a street vendor, torturing suspects, beating up his wife although he is having an affair, and kicking his own dog, among others. When the film discloses the truth about him in Gwangju, 1980, then it somehow makes sense that Young-Ho decided to live a life of a villain, a simply despicable human being, after the accidental murder he committed in Gwangju. But when the audience finally understands his rationale, it is

³⁰⁸ Smith, *Engaging Characters*.

almost too late to feel compassion for him. Ironically, this belated sympathy might possibly cause a more powerful engagement with Young-Ho than the audience would have felt, had the narrative been presented in chronological order.³⁰⁹ This narrative strategy of employing an unlikeable protagonist and hiding the truth about him by reverse chronological narration creates a potent character engagement with Young-Ho.

The critical sequence of *Peppermint Candy*, the penultimate chapter of the film, shows the youthful Young-Ho serving in the army. It is May 1980. Sunim, his girlfriend, visits him at his post but cannot see him because his unit has been dispatched to Gwangju. While being hurried out of his barrack, Young-Ho drops his canteen on the floor; it is full of peppermint candies. This is significant because Sunim has previously told Young-Ho that she is working in a peppermint candy factory, where she wraps a thousand candies every day. Each of her letters contains one of these candies, which he has saved in his canteen. Now the precious candies are being smashed under the boots of the troops who are about to be deployed to quell the civilian demonstrations in Gwangju. The destruction of the candies is not only heart-wrenching but also foreshadows the fate of Young-Ho. Like the peppermint candies, his innocence and pure love for Sunim have been demolished.

At the gate of Young-Ho's army base, Sunim is forced to turn back without getting to see him. Young-Ho does manage to catch a glimpse of her in a fleeting moment from the back of the crowded truck as it passes her on the way to Gwangju. With his fellow soldiers whistling at Sunim, he sees her for a brief moment, but she does not

³⁰⁹ Some of the web postings about *Peppermint Candy* mention how and why it is agonizing to see Young-Ho's despicable actions and behavior. Many viewers have mentioned how difficult it was to watch the film because they can sympathize with Young-Ho painfully well. For actual postings, refer to Appendix.

see him. It is sad to see them missing one another, which foretells the future of their relationship.

As soon as the truck arrives in Gwangju, late that night, one of Young-Ho's fellow soldiers accidentally shoots him in the foot. The shooter is never identified. Young-Ho's fresh, painful wound renders him unable to run or even walk quickly, so he is left behind when the platoon moves out to begin its mission. He sits alone on the railroad tracks, sobbing in fear and pain. It is then that he encounters a high-school girl trying to cross the tracks. For a moment, he thinks that the girl is Sunim, but soon realizes his mistake.

Young-Ho hears a sound and learns that there is another person on the railroad track besides him. He orders the girl to come closer and she slowly moves toward him. In the process, she walks into the shadow of a train. Here, the film intentionally confuses her with Sunim. It was Sunim who walked into the shadow but it is the girl, who comes out. The girl begs Young-Ho not to kill her but simply to send her home. Young-Ho intends to let her go, but then he hears his fellow soldiers returning. He tells the girl to run home quickly and shoots in her direction, so that she will run faster, but the bullet accidentally hits her. In disbelief that he has just shot and killed an innocent girl, Young-Ho weeps with her corpse in his arms.

In medium close-up, the camera shows his crying face, lit in the wavering glare of his returning comrades' flashlights. He keeps telling the dead girl that she needs to go home, urging her to get up and go home, but obviously she is unable to respond. The camera lingers on his weeping face. No doubt Young-Ho is a killer, yet it is extremely difficult not to feel sorry for him because of the way the film presents his story. The scene captures his teary face long enough for the audience to reconsider how unlikeable

Young-Ho has been and how justified they have felt in despising him. However, because of what happened to Young-Ho in Gwangju, his life needs to be re-examined with this new revelation about his past. *Peppermint Candy* clearly presents Young-Ho, a killer, as a fellow citizen of South Korea, who is also a victim of totalitarian regimes. At least in this sequence of Gwangju 1980, Young-Ho did not kill the girl deliberately. It was an accident. However, as he grows older, he purposely commits many atrocious actions to hurt others. He turns into a monster.

In early scenes, *Peppermint Candy* depicts Young-Ho as crude, inconsiderate, violent, and abusive, but also tormented and distressed. Yet, it leaves unexplained what could have happened to him that would have resulted in such vileness. The sequence of the accidental shooting in Gwangju 1980 finally shows that Young-Ho deprived a girl of her life when he himself was still an innocent youth. Through Young-Ho's experience, *Peppermint Candy* seems to argue that this is not just what Gwangju 1980 did to Young-Ho, but how the massacre affected *all* South Koreans. For South Korean audience members, it feels almost mandated to sympathize with Young-Ho, because any one of them could have been Young-Ho.

Kim Soyoung, a Korean feminist film scholar, does not see Young-Ho as a compassionate character. Kim claims that the film dangerously attempts to blur the distinction between the killer and the killed. She adamantly rejects the idea that no one can blame Young-Ho, since everyone is guilty, even though the film encourages its audience to understand and forgive Young-Ho by presenting him as a fellow victim of authoritarianism, a pawn of the military dictatorship. *Peppermint Candy* addresses its audiences as if they are part of the indistinct and inclusive "we/us," according to Kim, and she refuses to be part of this "us." The film's logic is that "we" cannot hate or even

judge Young-Ho because “we” are also perpetrators who either killed in Gwangju or sat back and did nothing during the killings. If Young-Ho is guilty, then so are “we.” Kim, in opposition to this rationale, observes that *Peppermint Candy* does not account for women’s experiences of survival in the exact same times and places as South Korean men. Therefore, not only does she refuse to be included in the film’s “us,” she insists that, as a woman, she is not truly allowed to be included.³¹⁰ Kim’s argument is convincing, especially considering that *Peppermint Candy* represents women as subsidiary in both Young-Ho’s life and in the fate of the nation.

Kim argues that *Peppermint Candy*’s depiction of national trauma (survival during authoritarian regimes) is counterproductively gendered, focusing solely on masculine experiences of trauma at the expense of female victims. Women are barred from national history and are visible only when they are objectified, victimized, and sacrificed. Although women lived through the same eras and experienced the same traumas as men, all of these films present exclusively male versions of the traumas and restrict the female experience to victimization.³¹¹ Kim further maintains that, because gendered representation of trauma disguises itself as the experience of the entire country, it actually prohibits imagining or visualizing female trauma.

While ignoring the difference between perpetrators and victims, as well as that between men and women, these totalitarian ways of thinking and feeling put all of them in the chain of the metonymy of “we” and include them as part of the “we,” thereby making them complicit. ... The historical sites and scenes *Peppermint Candy* reconstructs are not alternative or resistant ones, but were

³¹⁰ The title of Kim’s article is “Do Not Include Me in Your ‘Us.’”

³¹¹ Here, Kim specifically discusses *Peppermint Candy* and *Memories of Murder* (Dir. Bong Joon-Ho, 2003.) as seemingly progressive texts with regressive messages.

created through a consistent logic of collectively mobilizing “us,” while subliminally reenacting a totalitarian state ideology.³¹²

Female characters in *Peppermint Candy* include Sunim (Young-Ho’s first love), Hongja (his wife), Lee (his mistress), Kyung-Ah (his one-night stand), and the murdered high-school girl whom the film does not name. A scene with Kyung-Ah is particularly worthy of a close analysis.

A fantastical moment occurs during the single night Young-Ho and Kyung-Ah spend together. While staking out a fugitive in Goonsan (a small city south of Seoul), Young-Ho meets Kyung-Ah while she is tending a bar alone. He tells her that he has come to Goonsan to find his first love, the woman whom he can never forget (Sunim), and adds that Goonsan is Sunim’s hometown. It is never clear whether or not Young-Ho is telling the truth. A few scenes later, we see Young-Ho and Kyung-Ah in her small room, obviously post-coital, lying naked next to each other in the dark. Kyung-Ah tells Young-Ho to think of her as Sunim.

The camera shows Young-Ho with his back turned toward Kyung-Ah in a medium shot. He tearfully calls her “Sunim” and she, also in a voice choked with emotion, tells Young-Ho that everything is all right, as if she is Sunim. Their earlier, flirtatious banter about Young-Ho’s first love has been transformed into this strangely sincere, genuine moment in which two perfect strangers share a deep emotional connection. Just for that moment, for the audience as well as the characters, it is as if Kyung-Ah is really Sunim and is consoling Young-Ho. Like Kyung-Ah, the audience knows very little about Young-Ho and his tormented past at this point in the film, yet

³¹² Kim Soyoung 82. Trying to explicate why Young-Ho becomes such a drastically different person from youth to middle age, David Martin-Jones attributes the institutionalization of the population of South Korea as the cause. David Martin-Jones. *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity*.

there is something deeply moving about the way *Peppermint Candy* presents this oddly earnest tableau.

In addition to character engagement, how the narrative unfolds is critical to a close analysis of *Peppermint Candy*. The film begins on a beautiful spring day in 1999, with a group of middle-aged men and women having a little picnic by a stream. They are eating, drinking, singing, and dancing, when a man approaches them. This scene is from the man's perspective. Through the sound of heavy breathing and the impression of a staggering walk created by wobbly camera movement, the audience is introduced to Kim Young-Ho, the film's protagonist. We soon learn that the revelers consist of the same people who picnicked at the same location twenty years before, and that Young-Ho was one of them. The film ends with the same people, much younger, picnicking at the same location.

But this time, Young-Ho breaks up the party with out-of-tune singing and by trying to drag women onto their feet to dance with him. By the time everyone—partygoers and audience—has begun to feel really awkward about his presence, Young-Ho jumps into the shallow stream and splashes through it. He then climbs up a railroad bridge nearby and yells some indistinguishable sentences. When a train comes along, he faces it and shouts, "I want to go back!" At this moment his tearful face is frozen in an extreme close-up. Although what happens next is not shown, he is probably hit by the oncoming train because the screen goes dark.

Over melancholic music, the shot of the railroad appears on-screen again. It is as if the scene is shot from a camera in a moving train. It is not apparent at first, but as the same scene reappears in between every chapter, it becomes evident that this train is moving backward, to symbolize the reverse chronology of the narrative. Objects and

people next to the train also go backward—cars, petals, and a man riding a bicycle. This interlude is repeated throughout the film; whenever a sequence depicting a certain period of Young-Ho's life ends, the film shows the shot of the railroad from a train moving backward.

As if *Peppermint Candy* is trying to carry out Young-Ho's unfulfilled wish to "go back," its next scene shows Young-Ho, very much alive, two days before he disrupts his former friends' picnic. He spends his last penny on a contraband handgun. When Young-Ho arrives home, to a shack in Seoul, he finds Sunim's husband, Kwang-Nam, waiting outside for him. At first, Young-Ho believes that Kwang-Nam has been sent by one of his many creditors. He invites Kwang-Nam in, where he has trouble even finding a place to sit. In front of Kwang-Nam, Young-Ho points the gun he just purchased in Incheon at his own head. He threatens that he will kill himself, or possibly kill Kwang-Nam as well. With the gun to his own head, Young-Ho enumerates a list of people whom he wants to kill so that they can accompany him on his way to death.

After a big sigh, Kwang-Nam identifies himself as Sunim's husband and tells Young-Ho that Sunim, his first and only true love, is on her deathbed, and that her dying wish is to see Young-Ho one last time. On their way to the hospital, Kwang-Nam gives Young-Ho brand-new clothing, including a suit and underwear. In his new outfit, Young-Ho brings a jar of peppermint candies for Sunim, but she has slipped into a coma. Holding the candy jar, Young-Ho weeps as he talks to the unconscious Sunim. The camera shows his grief-stricken face in a close-up. His eyes and nose are dripping; he is crying hard. He tells Sunim that these are the peppermint candies she sent him twenty years before, when he was a soldier and she worked in the candy factory. He continues to weep while telling the story, and tears drop from the unconscious Sunim's eyes as well.

As Young-Ho leaves the hospital, Kwang-Nam gives him a camera that Sunim said belonged to him. Taking the camera with him, Young-Ho goes on his way but begins to limp severely.

Young-Ho's limp, which we later find out is the result of being shot in the foot by his comrade in Gwangju, is the return of the repressed in the Freudian sense. Although the physical wound is completely healed, Young-Ho hobbles every time he is reminded of his innocent youth and the irreparable damage Gwangju brought to his life. Still limping, he goes to a camera shop and sells the camera. As he leaves, the shop owner tosses him a roll of film that was inside the camera. Young-Ho exposes the film under the sun, so we never find out what pictures were on it. Alone next to a train track, as a train passes, Young-Ho again weeps, holding the ruined film.

Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient maintain that the railroad in *Peppermint Candy* is “a fitting metaphor for modern Korean history, its tracks unfurled against a landscape of personal pain and publicly inscribed trauma.”³¹³ Every time the film regresses, that is, at every crucial moment in Young-Ho's life, a train and train tracks appear. As Chung and Diffrient note, the train signifies an observer, a witness to Young-Ho's life as well as to the nation's fate. It is also noteworthy that the camera often keeps a distance from Young-Ho in the most intensely emotional scenes, such as when he cries over the dead girl, points a gun to his own head, and cries before the unconscious Sunim. These scenes are shot in a medium close-up, not the extreme close-up one might expect. *Peppermint Candy* positions the audience as an observer, a witness as well, like the train.

Another shot of a backward-moving train transports the audience to the summer 1994. Young-Ho is now a successful business owner but his family is in shambles. His

³¹³ Chung and Diffrient 128.

wife, Hongja, is having a tryst with her driving instructor and Young-Ho himself is having an affair with Lee, a clerk at his store. While having dinner at a restaurant with his mistress, Young-Ho encounters one of his former torture victims, Myung-Shik. When they run into each other again in the bathroom, Young-Ho remarks that “Life is beautiful.” It is unclear if he is saying this to Myung-Shik or to himself; it is spoken as if Young-Ho is talking to himself, but he raises his voice enough for Myung-Shik to hear. As Young-Ho speaks, the camera shows Myung-Shik’s agonized face in a medium shot and Young-Ho standing behind him at a urinal. Myung-Shik leaves the bathroom without saying a word.

The audience does not find out the full significance of these words until later in the film—that is, earlier in the life of Young-Ho. It is a phrase Myung-Shik wrote in his journal before he was arrested by Young-Ho, who confiscated Myung-Shik’s personal belongings and sorted through his journal to discover the hiding place of Won-Shik, Myung-Shik’s colleague. In a sickening example of his brutality, Young-Ho uses this phrase to taunt Myung-Shik during torture.

In the late 1980s, police brutality under Chun Doo-Hwan’s authoritarian regime was at its height. In this era of his life, Young-Ho works as a policeman who specializes in torturing suspects. His actions are representative of the kind of violence that actually occurred in South Korea during this time, when, for example, a number of college demonstrators were tortured, and some even killed in custody, for no apparent reason. The murder of one such student, Park Jong-Chul (1964-1987), sparked a series of huge civilian demonstrations that demanded both an explanation of Park’s death and appropriate punishment for those who were responsible. The autopsy found water in Park’s lungs that resulted from the water torture committed by the police, very much like

what Myung-Shik goes through in the film. The length and intensity of the public outcry over Park's death led to Chun's decision to conduct a democratic presidential election at the end of his term, and hand over power peacefully to the winner.³¹⁴ Although the entire process of struggle and resistance against Chun's dictatorship is understood to be a victory for democracy, routine torture by police marks a shameful period in South Korean history.³¹⁵ Myung-Shik is a familiar trope of the politically active college student demonstrator who is arrested and tortured, and finally gives in.

In the film's next chapter, set in the fall of 1984, the twenty-five-year-old Young-Ho has just joined the police force. At this time he is reluctant to torture his first victim, a labor union worker. During the torture session, the arrestee defecates on Young-Ho's hands. As Young-Ho viciously washes his hands, the same senior officer who ordered him to torture the prisoner informs him that Sunim has arrived at the police station. Acting on his newly intensified self-loathing, Young-Ho intentionally pushes her away while they are sitting inside of a small restaurant, run by Hongja and her mother, near the police station. (From previous scenes, the audience is aware that Hong ja likes Young-Ho although Young-Ho is not interested in her.) When Sunim tells Young-Ho that she has always liked his sweet hands, Young-Ho deliberately touches Hongja's legs, to her dismay, and gropes her body in front of Sunim. Appalled, Sunim sheds tears. Young-Ho then accompanies Sunim to the train station, where they bid farewell, and Sunim

³¹⁴ This announcement is commemorated as "*Youk-Yi-Goo Seonun* (meaning 6-2-9, i.e., June 29 Declaration)" in 1987.

³¹⁵ Park Jong-Chul was a college student who was arrested and tortured while in police custody. He died during the police water torture and the police lied about the cause of his death. The autopsy found water in Park's lungs that resulted from the police repeatedly submerging Park's head in a bathtub full of water. Myung-Shik in *Peppermint Candy* is tortured just like Park and it is widely known that many student activists were tortured this way after they were arrested. Water torture in Korea was like an extreme measure of water boarding. Park's death became the cause of huge civilian demonstrations against the military dictatorship during Chun's final days in office in 1987.

gives Young-Ho a camera as a gift. She tells him that she has had to save up for a long time to buy this camera, and reminds Young-Ho that he used to dream about becoming a photographer. But Young-Ho refuses to accept Sunim's gift. That night, after humiliating Sunim and sending her away, Young-Ho gets drunk and becomes violent toward his fellow cops, who send him to be taken care of by Hongja. During their first night together, Hongja recites the Lord's Prayer. While she prays, Young-Ho stares at the ceiling.³¹⁶ The sequence ends, and the train appears and disappears again.

Then it is May 1980. As a young man fulfilling his mandatory enlistment, Young-Ho is deployed to Gwangju. Peppermint candies are destroyed. He gets shot. He kills a young girl and his own innocence dies too. The train emerges and vanishes for the last time.

Young-Ho is a youth in the film's final sequence. It is fall 1979. Young-Ho, Sunim, and their friends have a picnic at exactly the same place as the opening sequence. Young-Ho experiences déjà vu, telling Sunim that he feels like he has been here before.³¹⁷ He also says that he wants to be a photographer some day, taking pictures of small wildflowers. He frames Sunim with his fingers as if they are a camera. Sunim shyly smiles at him.³¹⁸ While their friends are singing, he walks away and lies down under the railroad bridge, alone, a few feet beneath the spot where he will commit suicide twenty

³¹⁶ Hongja is depicted as a devout Christian in the film; however, she does not seem to abide by any Christian conduct or behavior. She lies to her husband and is unfaithful to him. Lee Chang-Dong, the director of *Peppermint Candy*, delves into the issue of forgiveness in Christianity in his other controversial film, *Secret Sunshine* (2007).

³¹⁷ Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient write, "Does he *remember* his future?" (122).

³¹⁸ As a former factory worker, Young-Ho must be familiar with the extremely poor working conditions of most laborers. Chun Tae-Il is a legendary figure in the South Korean labor movement. Refer to the earlier footnote.

years in the future. His face is shown in a close-up as he looks up at the sky and sheds a tear. The screen freezes on this shot of Young-Ho's face.

The character of Kim Young-Ho is initially presented as irrational, disturbed, and impossible to sympathize with. His severe emotional distress remains unexplained until the penultimate chapter. As the film progresses, the audience gains more understanding of Kim Young-Ho's life as well as the turbulent social contexts of South Korea from 1979 to 1999. Some audience members are able to understand, forgive, and accept Young-Ho at the end of the film, but others (such as Kim Soyoung) disagree.³¹⁹

The narrative of *Peppermint Candy* is not easy to follow; it takes time to understand what is going on and what the film is trying to accomplish with its reversed temporality. It is also unclear at first that the railroad shots, seemingly from the perspective of a moving train, are moving backward instead of forward, and what these shots signify. Figuring out what makes Kim Young-Ho the way he is in 1999, by paying attention to the various events in his life between 1979 and 1999, requires effort from the audience. Surviving through the authoritarian regimes in South Korea, as Young-Ho does, also requires effort, although Young-Ho eventually gives in at the end. One thing is certain, however: shattering moments in his life are closely linked to South Korea's national traumas during the same two decades.

While locating the film in the trajectory of New Korean Cinema, David Martin-Jones maintains that *Peppermint Candy* offers various moments "when national identity could have developed in a very different direction" by employing reverse narrative.

Martin-Jones writes:

³¹⁹ Most reviews of *Peppermint Candy* are sympathetic toward the character of Young-Ho. For actual postings, refer to Appendix.

Each episode shows a moment of potential change in both an individual's and a nation's narrative, and then shows its reterritorialisation. The reverse structure continually pauses to play out events that occurred at a fork in the labyrinth of time, only to demonstrate how all possible deterritorialisations were curtailed by the police state at these potential moments of national transformation.³²⁰

Borrowing from Slavoj Žižek, Martin-Jones argues that *Peppermint Candy* reveals “the possibility of contingency,” which is “the result of a fork appearing in the narrative of national identity.”³²¹ According to him, the actual present is introduced side-by-side with the very past that caused it, which in turn shows the absolutely contingent relationship between deterritorializing the present and reterritorializing the past. Although this argument for contingency is promising, it does not take into account the sense of helpless fatalism and doomed vulnerability that most Koreans felt and shared during the 1980s, which was real.³²² Nothing could have been done differently. It was a widely accepted belief that South Koreans were destined to failure and powerlessness under the smothering oppression of authoritarian regimes. Maybe Young-Ho was forced to be the way he was, and the oppressive society in which he lived should be blamed; if so, his story is a tragedy of fate, not character.

Kim Soyoung refuses to sympathize with Young-Ho and asserts that *Peppermint Candy* insinuates a sinister excuse for perpetrators. Yet, it is difficult to label Young-Ho as simply a killer without feeling sorry for him at all.³²³ The ways that Young-Ho's distress and despair are depicted in *Peppermint Candy* make it hard to deny that he had little control over the situations he was put into, which makes him a victim in his own

³²⁰ Martin-Jones 213-214.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Some of the reviewers on the website share the similar concern of doomed fate in South Korea, especially during the 1980s. For actual postings, refer to Appendix.

³²³ Again, Murray Smith's discussion can be useful here. The audience could recognize and align with Young-Ho, yet refuse to form an allegiance with him.

right. In the fateful murder scene, it is painfully clear that Young-Ho is unable to admit either the reality of his powerlessness or the fact that he has just killed an innocent girl. In spite of the political danger of blurring the distinction between victim and victimizer, I acknowledge Young-Ho *is* both victim and perpetrator at the same time, at least when he is in Gwangju. Although it is admirable that Kim Soyoung is able to declare she is not part of “us,” I am unsure whom to include in and exclude from the category of those responsible, directly or indirectly, for the Gwangju Massacre. In any case, *Peppermint Candy* successfully taps into the national sense of collective guilt that haunts South Korea regarding the massacre.

Another reason for not being able to despise Kim Young-Ho is that his life is so closely linked with difficulties that South Korean society as a whole has had to undergo, even without considering Gwangju. At age twenty, working in a factory, he could have thought about organizing a labor union, or joining one, while being afraid of actually becoming involved. *Peppermint Candy* does not choose one motivation or another, although Young-Ho is clearly one of the overworked laborers earning extremely low pay. Some hints are provided, however, during the scene of the picnic when the group of friends, including Young-Ho and Sunim, sings a song that is considered the theme song of labor unions (its lyrics praise the glory of morning dew after a long, dark night). Also, one of Young-Ho’s fellow cops teases him about possible involvement in labor unions. It is reasonable to suppose that Young-Ho could have been a union sympathizer at one time; in the rapidly growing *chaebol*³²⁴ economy of South Korea in the 1970s he would have been at the bottom of the heap, a laborer in a dead-end job who knows what it is to

³²⁴ *Chaebol* is a Korean term for a huge corporation.

have to live with the minimum in life. After his deployment in Gwangju, however, Young-Ho gradually becomes a self-loathing and self-destructive man whom the audience cannot hate, a familiar trope of New Korean Cinema.

As *Peppermint Candy* clearly presents, going back and remembering the past is excruciating for South Korean domestic viewers. But it is important for Koreans to revisit their past, even though Young-Ho, a representative of that past, ends up resorting to suicide. In order not to create a monster (perpetrator/victim) like Young-Ho, *Peppermint Candy* asserts that we need to go back and remember the past.³²⁵ The film reminds the local audiences of their past and their predecessors, and creates a sense of who they are as survivors of extremely difficult times.

Even though South Koreans should be proud of enduring so many adversities, the memory of Gwangju still needs to be resolved. The problem remains because no killers have been identified, while those killed have been commemorated. Despite South Koreans' new-found freedom in being able to represent and discuss the massacre, the heinous violence against their own citizens cannot be forgiven because there is no one who claims responsibility. Crimes are committed and there are victims, but there is no accountability. *Peppermint Candy* presents a killer, yet he is also a victim.

Unlike the confusing figure of Young-Ho, who is detestable and sympathetic simultaneously, all the main characters of *Splendid Vacation* are likeable and easy to identify with. In many ways, *Splendid Vacation* is different from other films depicting the uprising. First, it was the biggest box office success with the highest production cost, widest distribution, and most famous cast. More than seven million people nationwide

³²⁵ Aaron Han Joon Magnan-Park argues that *Peppermint Candy* reifies the will to remember, not to forget in his article, "Peppermint Candy: The Will Not To Forget" in *New Korean Cinema*.

viewed *Splendid Vacation* in theaters in 2007; it was the second most-watched domestic film that year, after *D-War* with 8 million viewers.³²⁶ Second, it portrays the Gwangju Democratic Uprising most directly from the perspectives of the citizens of Gwangju. The film is set in May 1980, in Gwangju. Third, unlike other films dealing with the uprising that utilized mixed chronology, *Splendid Vacation* takes the most conventional approach of straightforward narrative in chronological order. The film starts several days before the massacre and ends with the deaths of all the characters fewer than ten days later. And fourth, *Splendid Vacation* illustrates the most clear-cut division between good and evil.

While *Peppermint Candy* blurs and overlaps the boundaries between victims and

³²⁶ For actual statistics, refer to Appendix. *Splendid Vacation* was one of South Korean cinema's major financial successes in 2007. It is also, to date, the most financially successful film portraying the Gwangju Democratization Movement. The power of a blockbuster film, and its influence on the film industry and general public, are hard to deny. The most financially successful blockbuster film among my selection for this dissertation is *Taegukgi*, which had 1,227 reviews as of June 2010. Although *Peppermint Candy* attained the highest rating for its artistic achievement (8.48 out of 10), there are only 79 postings for *Peppermint Candy*. *Taegukgi*'s rating is 8.35. For an indigenous film to achieve the status of blockbuster in South Korea requires the triumph of nationalistic pride and patriotism over pervasive Hollywood domination. Even the notion of film as an exportable commodity has become prevalent since President Kim Young-Sam's discourse of globalization and his famous example of exporting Hyun Dai cars worldwide. In his famous speech, President Kim compared the yearly profit made by Hyun Dai cars and the gross profit of *Titanic* worldwide. To most Koreans, the exporting of Hyun Dai is a source of national pride because it exhibits Korea's economic power and technological advancement. While underlining the unprecedented financial success of *Titanic*, Kim proposed that the Korean culture industry should market itself toward world export, and Korean films should strive for becoming lucrative commodities. In South Korea today, a film's power and influence are judged by the number of people who watch it, and a film's quality is recognized by the awards it receives at prestigious international film festivals, such as at Cannes, Venice, and Berlin. The biggest box office success of all time in South Korea, *The Host* (2006, Bong Jun-Ho), drew a domestic audience of more than 13 million in a country of 49 million people. This means that approximately 27 per cent of the total population saw this film in a theater—an incredible success of a domestic film against the typical Hollywood blockbuster (Jinhee Choi has a similar discussion in her book. *The South Korean Film Renaissance*). When *D-War* (2007, Shim Hyung-Rae), known as the most expensive South Korean film of all time, was promoted as an attempt for a Korean blockbuster to break into the global market, the debates around it focused singularly on issues of nationalism and patriotism that no one could actually criticize. No matter how valid a critique was, anyone who had anything negative to say was instantly labeled as anti-Korean. For instance, Jin Joong-Gwon, a cultural critic, criticized *D-War* for its incoherent plot structure by indicating obvious narrative flaws. Jin's personal blog was bombarded with severe panning and accusations of his being anti-patriotic, even though some people who posted acknowledged Jin's critique as being legitimate. In addition, there was a movement on the internet against illegal downloading of *D-War* in favor of watching it in a theater and/ or buying the official DVD. It is an extremely common practice to download a pirated copy of movies through the internet in South Korea, a country full of technology-savvy people. But Korean netizens (net + citizens: another newly coined but very common term in Korea) decided amongst themselves not to download a pirated version of *D-War* so that the film would avoid losing profit through this practice. Both *The Host* and *D-War* provoked vibrant public debates around issues raised both in and outside of the films.

victimizers, the soldiers who murder the innocents of Gwangju in *Splendid Vacation* are purely evil, although there is no explanation as to who these soldiers are and why the level of violence against their own people is so excessive.

Splendid Vacation presents the massacre from the perspectives of its victims, the people of Gwangju, a stark contrast to the shots and scenes from the perspective of Kim Young-Ho, the protagonist of *Peppermint Candy*, who is a perpetrator and victim at the same time. The protagonist of *Splendid Vacation* is Gang Minwoo (a cab driver). The narrative concerns his brother, Jinwoo (a high school student); his love interest, Park Shinae (a nurse); and Shinae's father, Park Heung-Soo (a retired army officer, and the owner of the taxi company for which Minwoo works). Park Heung-Soo leads the citizens of Gwangju against the military forces sent to quash their peaceful demonstrations. The film captures everyday life, trivial yet beautiful, before the massacre and contrasts these moments with the violence and cruelty of the event. At the end, Shinae is the sole survivor from the main characters.

In the final scene, a black-and-white wedding ceremony that is either a fantasy or a dream, Shinae marries Minwoo. Everyone, including those who have been killed, is present, as if they are all still alive. While the dead smile, Shinae, in truth the only survivor, stands with a grim, stern face. This is her unfulfilled dream; the fantasy can never be realized. Instead she will carry this sorrow for the rest of her life.

Splendid Vacation provides what E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang describe as “a comforting cure.” Kaplan and Wang propose four positions cinema takes to represent traumatic experiences. First are films that grant a comforting “cure”; second are films whose audience is “being vicariously traumatized”; third are films that place their audiences in the position of “being a voyeur”; and fourth are films that place their

audiences in the position of “being a witness.” Kaplan and Wang argue that the last position is the most politically useful.³²⁷ The approach taken by *Splendid Vacation* is to offer a comforting cure, understandable for its industrial status as a summer blockbuster.³²⁸ In contrast, *Peppermint Candy* seems to have managed to position its viewers as witnesses, no matter how gendered its perspective is. While successfully depicting the beautiful, innocent, and nostalgic past of Gwangju in 1980, *Splendid Vacation* fails to re-probe the traumatic past and promote politically useful reflections.

Splendid Vacation attracted more than seven million people to theaters nationwide and, in an equally astonishing effect, brought long-repressed memories of the Gwangju Massacre back into public discourse. Despite its popularity, however, *Splendid Vacation* is a regressive text that attempts to negate the complexity of and struggle over representing Gwangju. The film portrays the event as a mere tragedy and focuses on

³²⁷ E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang, eds. *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004: 9-10. Print.

³²⁸ Because its main objective was to make as much profit as possible, which generally results in a straightforward narrative that is easy to follow, *Splendid Vacation* takes the approach of chronological narrative in the classic Hollywood tradition instead of using mixed chronology. In fact, *Splendid Vacation* is the only film constructed along a linear narrative among all six films that have been made about Gwangju. David Martin-Jones argues that, in times of national crisis, national cinema gives up the dominant form of movement-image cinema and instead employs jumbled and perplexing narrative that is chronologically disordered because the movement-images cannot provide a unified, coherent version of national identity any longer. Martin-Jones uses *Peppermint Candy* as one of the examples to support his claim, and it seems perfectly rational to agree with his argument. But it is also interesting to realize that the year 2007 witnessed the releases of three films about the uprising (*The Old Garden*, *Splendid Vacation*, and *Scout* in order): *Splendid Vacation* follows a linear progression, while the other two do not, even though they portray the same time frame. *Splendid Vacation*, however, is the only film among them that was produced and marketed as a summer blockbuster film. Martin-Jones’s argument was summarized earlier in this paper, with the discussion of *Peppermint Candy*. As a blockbuster film, *Splendid Vacation* presents a narrative in which story and plot coincide in a way that minimizes narrative ambiguity or confusion. Geoff King (“Spectacle, Narrative, and the Spectacular Hollywood Blockbuster” in Stringer, *Movie Blockbusters*) argues that while the spectacle is the main attraction for Hollywood summer blockbusters, they still do attempt to appeal to the audience through coherent and convincing narratives: “They [Hollywood blockbusters] tell carefully organized, more or less linear cause/ effect stories organized around central characters” (120). *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991, James Cameron), for example, “has a primarily linear, forward-moving structure, across the different narrative threads, based on cause-and-effect relationships between one event and another” (122). Geoff King. “Spectacle, Narrative, and the Spectacular Hollywood Blockbuster” in *Movie Blockbusters*, 120.

having a good cry over it, rather than addressing the real political concerns. *Splendid Vacation* presents the story of victims, those who are killed, yet it asks no questions about the killers and the perpetrators. They remain faceless and nameless and the film offers no explanation as to who they are and why they did what they did. In a way, the killings and violence the characters of *Splendid Vacation* had to face are depicted as if they encountered some sort of natural disaster. The truth is, however, that it was a horrendous crime committed by the military against its own people, and that the perpetrators should be brought to justice.

Although *Splendid Vacation* successfully re-awakened public memories and discussions of Gwangju, the film also evokes unresolved issues and questionable facets about the event.³²⁹ First, its filmic portrayal of Gwangju in May 1980, before the uprising, shows a situation that never existed. In the beginning of *Splendid Vacation* there are no grave problems: family members care for one another, people work hard to support their families, men court women, friends have fun together, everyone is nice, and life is simple. It is a world that functions, albeit pleasurably, in a political and economic vacuum. This idealized past is beautified and sanitized. It also sharply contrasts with the calamity created by the troops sent by General Chun (who is referred to but not depicted in the film). The tragedy, which scarcely needs enhancement, seems even more devastating when such a perfect world is lost. As in the beginning of the film, with its two very different sequences, the contrast of the nostalgic past and the violent present is effectively conveyed—yet it is simply untrue. Gwangju was experiencing political unrest and dire

³²⁹ *Splendid Vacation* has 339 postings and its rating is 7.63 out of 10 as of June 2010. For actual postings, refer to Appendix.

poverty long before the uprising, just like the rest of the country, even though the film conveniently skips that background.

Splendid Vacation offers the attacking military force as an easily recognizable enemy, unlike the confusing figure of Kim Young-Ho in *Peppermint Candy*. There is no room for identifying with the soldiers; the division between them and the civilians they massacre is unambiguously simple. The troops are a mass of faceless killers to whom the audience is never allowed to assign motivation or personal characteristics. They are merely following orders—orders to beat, attack, and kill. The film supplies one exception, a man named Kim who used to be a subordinate of retired officer Park Heung-Soo and who visits Park at his home. Kim is the only sympathetic character among the soldiers, the only one whom the audience gets to know a little, but he is powerless under the cruel general. The group of nameless soldiers which he belongs is the ultimate Other, like the Japanese in *Hanbando*. Eventually Kim, who is invested with some compassion even though he is a soldier, witnesses Park's death; he cannot even save his true friend. The rest of the soldiers in *Splendid Vacation*, regardless of rank, are all power-hungry warmongers who eagerly murder innocent civilians. It is easy to blame them quickly and label them as the enemy, but by making things so easy for the audience, *Splendid Vacation* abandons its responsibility at least to question whether the identity of these people, and what caused them all to become ruthless killers, are matters worthy of examination. Other than beautifying the traumatic past, *Splendid Vacation* neither provides any political account of Gwangju nor explains who is responsible for the tragedy and what enabled it.

Splendid Vacation elevates conventionally insignificant characters by incorporating their stories into the main narrative. Although the actions of Minwoo and

Shinae remain the focus, other minor characters, all citizens of Gwangju, are given the opportunity to show their stories in the film. For example, In-Bong, the closest friend of Minwoo, who drives for the same taxi company, is a bit older than Minwoo, and has a wife and baby. The day before the raid, In-Bong's wife, carrying the baby on her back, comes to find him at the Provincial Office where the protesters have gathered. Knowing the imminent danger, In-Bong weeps when he looks at the baby, who he knows will grow up fatherless. In-Bong's friends, including Minwoo, tell him to go home with his wife rather than stay and face certain death. Hesitantly, he leaves. However, later that night he returns to the Provincial Office and rejoins his friends. He dies honorably with them doing what he believes is right.

Splendid Vacation includes other characters as well with whom the audience can sympathize and identify, including a bothersome passenger in In-Bong's cab who later becomes a good friend, a high-school friend of Jinwoo's, a teacher who sacrifices his own life to save his student, a priest who participates in the uprising with a gun in his hands, and a doctor who is killed while rescuing people during the raid. Although these people are not at the center of the narrative, their characterizations are vivid and effective. It is people's history *Splendid Vacation* that represents, and the film vividly depicts the actions of these minor characters dying for what they believe is right. One of the virtues of *Splendid Vacation* is that it has captured the participation of these ordinary people in History.

Civilians of Gwangju in *Splendid Vacation* are not conventional heroes but people we know: our friends, neighbors, and family, whom the film gives the opportunity of carrying out the last days of their lives on-screen. Gwangju is not a story of a few heroes but a story of ordinary people. In conveying this message, the film asks the

audience to remember these ordinary people, their experiences, and their deaths in Gwangju in May 1980, even though it fails to contemplate any political causes and consequences of the uprising. During brief respites from the battles, Shinae rides in a jeep and requests over a loudspeaker, “Please remember us. Please do not forget us.” Significantly, she does not ask anyone to join her group to fight but just to remember the ones who fought, not to forget them. The film’s implied aftermath is that both the audience and Shinae, the survivors, will always remember the people of Gwangju, because *Splendid Vacation* urges the local audience to remember the people who died and urges that South Koreans do need to remember them. The film does not, however, interrogate who the killers were in Gwangju, an omission that should also be remembered.

The way *Splendid Vacation* asks the audience to “remember” Gwangju, or rather the way the film remembers it for the audience, is troubling. As a means of defying the official, authorized history of Gwangju, all films made about it to date have employed flashbacks in order to privilege individual experiences, respect personal stories, and simply acknowledge that there can be more than one point of view about a single event. Unlike the versions of history that military dictatorships imposed upon South Koreans for many years, the nature of people’s history is centered upon the ways people remember the past and share their memories with others. Even though these films are based on survivors’ testimonies, the narrative of Gwangju 1980 remains partial and imperfect; memory can never offer more than an incomplete, biased, subjective account of the past. All films about Gwangju are very well aware of this limitation, except *Splendid Vacation*.

The fundamental difference between *Splendid Vacation* and other films about Gwangju is how the experience of Gwangju is narrated. Through their tendency to use flashbacks or other non-linear narrative structures, films about Gwangju ruminate upon

the incompleteness and fallibility of history.³³⁰ *Splendid Vacation*, however, narrates the experience of citizens of Gwangju in a linear, chronological fashion and thereby assumes the status of official history, as if the film is presenting a definitive version of events that cannot be challenged. Instead of selecting the necessarily subjective position of first person, the third-person perspective taken by *Splendid Vacation* presumes the dependable authority of its narrative as an objective, and therefore claims accuracy for its account of Gwangju. Unlike other films that feature protagonists “remembering” the massacre, *Splendid Vacation* remembers it *for* the audience and shows them “what really happened.”³³¹ In the wake of totalitarian government, South Koreans can challenge and question “History” for the first time, yet the omniscient narration tacitly implied in *Splendid Vacation* simply replaces official history by re-creating popular history for the audience, rather than recognizing the imperfect nature of memory, in particular, memories of Gwangju. Although its attempt to present people’s history is commendable, *Splendid Vacation* assumes another authorial position on History, and thus ultimately fails to provide a reflexive rumination and thorough re-examination of the past.

In the film, Shinae asks the citizens of Gwangju to remember those who fight and will be killed. Her portrayal is complex and contradictory, as the film itself is simultaneously regressive and liberating. At first Shinae appears to reify the traditional value of the beautiful, fragile, obedient, and passive love interest of the male protagonist. She is a familiar archetype: physically weak, emotionally unreliable, and needing to be

³³⁰ Joshua Hirsch makes a similar claim about cinematic representations of the Holocaust. See Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage*.

³³¹ Arguably, *Peppermint Candy* takes the approach of the omniscient narrator, just like *Splendid Vacation* does. However, *Peppermint Candy* never assumes a position of authority in the narrative of Gwangju, like *Splendid Vacation*, nor does it tell the story of a representative model of likeable characters as in *Splendid Vacation*.

protected. However, she is brave enough to volunteer for the dangerous mission of going to the battleground to save the injured, although the mission is initiated by a male doctor who asks for aid. Upon encountering the soldiers, the doctor is killed and Shinae faces danger alone, at least until her lover, Minwoo, rescues her. *Splendid Vacation* ends with a dreamlike wedding ceremony between Shinae and Minwoo, from her perspective; in reality, everyone she loves has been killed.

Through the wedding sequence, the audience reflects upon the lives of those Shinae has lost. It is Shinae's wedding, not Minwoo's, because it is she who has survived to tell us and show us the dead. It is Shinae who remembers the victims, as the film makes clear through her expressions: at the wedding, she is the only one with a grief-stricken face, while everyone else looks blissful, as if they do not know what has happened or will happen to them. Shinae cannot experience the joy of the fantasy, her fulfilled wish. She is left with the moral responsibility and ethical duty of remembering the tragedy of Gwangju for and along with the South Korean audience. At the end, she is literally the eyes and ears of the audience. Her future might be sorrowful and lonely, but at least Koreans can remember Gwangju with Shinae and all can honor it as a community.

Shinae does not drive the narrative forward, she is not the character most easily identified with in *Splendid Vacation*, and she does not distinguish herself as the bravest. She is, however, the one who survives, and thus she is the one who is able to remember. The story of Gwangju is told by survivors like Shinae and it is through their perspectives, experiences, and struggles that Koreans remember the uprising. The legacy of Gwangju and the history of South Korea will be preserved and carried on by society's Shinaes.

IV. Conclusion

While *Splendid Vacation* can easily be situated with the other four films in this project, *2009 Lost Memories*, *Hanbando*, *Taegukgi*, and *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, in that they were all expensively produced and expected to do well at the box office, *Peppermint Candy* is different from the others. In terms of its industrial aspect, *Peppermint Candy* was the most unexpected box office success of the year 2000. Narratively, Kim Young-Ho is an anti-hero who executes many horrific actions, unlike the protagonists in any of the other films. With *Peppermint Candy* excepted, the rest of the films under examination fit well the category of mainstream standard historical films, as defined by Robert Rosenstone.

Rosenstone maintains that historical films can be categorized into two groups: standard historical films and postmodern history films. Standard historical films “deliver the past in a highly developed, polished form that serves to suppress rather than raise questions,” while postmodern history films “revision, even reinvent History” by being self-conscious about their constructive nature and allowing multiple meanings.³³² At first glance, *Splendid Vacation* seems to typify a standard historical film in its “personalizing, and emotionalizing the past, and delivering it to a new audience,” while *Peppermint Candy* is open to various interpretations and is self-reflexive in regard to its artificial timeline.³³³ It is, however, a remarkable feat that *Splendid Vacation* transmitted its representation of the long-ignored and repressed past to a large group of new viewers,

³³² Robert Rosenstone. *Visions of the Past*: 11-12. Rosenstone modifies his categories into mainstream drama and innovative drama in his later work, *History on Film/ Film on History*.

³³³ Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*: 11-12.

despite its limitations. *Peppermint Candy* failed to account for women's experiences by concentrating only on male perspectives of survival.

The Gwangju Democratization Movement figures differently in the narratives of *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation*. However, once the uprising touches the characters, their lives are fundamentally altered in both films. Although the Gwangju Massacre occurred more recently than the Japanese occupation and the Korean War (chapters 1 and 2), it is the most disturbing and traumatic in that it was a killing of civilians perpetrated by soldiers on their own people. The task of drawing an unambiguous division between self and other in *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation* is much more complicated than presenting the Japanese or North Koreans as the clearly identifiable enemy. For many years, authorities have misrepresented the Uprising and have suppressed people's memories of it, while most bystanders feel guilty about not have been able to do anything about it. So far, the South Korean film industry has produced six films about the event, and one of them was an expensively produced and promoted film. Even Gwangju has become profitable subject matter for blockbuster films.

Employing an unlikeable protagonist who is both a killer and a victim, *Peppermint Candy* questions whether or not the audience can accuse, blame, or dislike Kim Young-Ho without also feeling sorry for him. *Splendid Vacation* brought masses of people into theaters and enabled public discussion not only about the facts of Gwangju but also about the event's political implications. Although the film does impose a linear narrative of Gwangju and assumes another omniscient version of the past, *Splendid Vacation* highlights the importance of individual citizens by presenting numerous minor characters to whom the audience can easily relate.

It is the ordinary people of Gwangju and their stories *Splendid Vacation* endeavors to convey. It is people's history that *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation* represent, not the official version of events. In their discussion of *City of Sadness* (1989, Hou Hsiao-Hsien), Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar assert that the film tells the stories of ordinary people "those to whom national history happens rather than those who make themselves its agents."³³⁴ *City of Sadness* aims to convey "the experiences of the nameless ordinary people whose lives are not recorded in preserved documents,"³³⁵ according to Berry and Farquhar. It is this kind of history that *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation* strived to present.

The portrayal of Kim Young-Ho as victim/victimizer in *Peppermint Candy* is certainly troublesome, because the film seems to imply that the audience should grant an excuse for a perpetrator like Young-Ho, who exploited and abused people less privileged, less powerful, and less fortunate than him, like his wife, his mistress, the political activists he tortured, and a female street vendor, among others. Kim Soyoung is right to refuse to be included in the inclusive and tacit "Us" that *Peppermint Candy* forces upon the audience. Nonetheless, as the killing of the school girl portrays, unlike the soldiers in *Splendid Vacation*, Young-Ho did not willingly take part in the massacre. At least in Gwangju, 1980, it is the society and the nation that turned Young-Ho into a killer, not his own will; he is also a victim of authoritarianism.

The division between killer and killed is never unclear in *Splendid Vacation*, however. This apparently binary division does not make the film a more thoughtful or better film about the past, as it reduces any useful reflection on that past to a simple

³³⁴ Berry and Farquhar 36.

³³⁵ Ibid. 32.

dichotomy of black and white. While the victims, the civilians of Gwangju, are clearly identifiable, *Splendid Vacation* offers no explanation as to who the killers are. In a way, the film reflects reality more daringly than it might have intended, as no one is held accountable for the massacre, even today. Although *Splendid Vacation* tells the stories of ordinary civilians and clearly values a people's history of the Uprising, the film also assumes the position of authority to re-tell the nation's past *for* people. While it is successful in giving voices to the people, *Splendid Vacation* does not provide alternative versions of history but another version of "this is what really happened then."

In a film set during the time of Japanese colonialism, identifying the enemy is never a confusing task. Even today, the Japanese are the ultimate Other that Koreans can easily recognize. The contextual shifts and relational changes between Korea and Japan, however, complicate this traditional division of good and evil. Therefore, *2009 Lost Memories* can present a character like Saigo, who is torn between friendship and patriotism; he is not purely one-dimensional like all the Japanese characters in *Hanbando*. This new approach might have been, at least partially, one of the reasons for the film's box office success.

Representations of the Korean War make it more complex to identify the enemy, in comparison to films that portray the Japanese. The bad guys in *Taegugki* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* are North Koreans but, at the same time, they are fellow Koreans who live on the same peninsula as the members of the film's intended audience. In addition, South Koreans and Americans in these two films, the supposed good guys, commit unheroic acts, including the killing of the innocent. From the 1950s into the 1990s, discussions of the Korean War required an unmistakable separation between "Us" and "Them." At least on the South Korean screen, the former Soviet Union, China, and North

Korea were the war criminals responsible for the division of Korea into two countries. However, shifting global politics and improved regional diplomacy have complicated matters to the point that the enemy is no longer so clearly evident. *Taegugki* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* reflect this complexity by portraying North Korean soldiers as humans; just like South Korean soldiers, they are lost, confused, and forced into situations over which they have no control.

Cinematic representations of Japanese occupation and the Korean War have been repeatedly used as governmentally sanctioned history to promote unity within the nation against a common enemy. In portraying the Gwangju Uprising, the killers and the killed are all South Koreans without any distinct demarcation to separate the two. It is the military uniform that divides the killer from the killed, yet without the uniform, the killers are the same fellow South Koreans, just like the ones who are killed. *Splendid Vacation*, however, reveals no further information regarding the killers, and never identifies them, just as in the reality itself.

To decide whether Kim Young-Ho of *Peppermint Candy* is a victim or/and a victimizer simultaneously is still a contentious point, while the characters of *Splendid Vacation* should undoubtedly be honored. Whether it favors personal experiences or imposes another presumably objective narrative, *Splendid Vacation* clearly pays tribute to those who died as well as those who survived in Gwangju in 1980.

Because of this ambiguity and these unresolved tensions, cinematic representations of Gwangju have been more controversial than other topics in South Korean history because there has been no trustworthy, official history of the event; moreover, to date, no one has been punished for the massacre. How to understand the Gwangju Democratization Movement remains a challenge for South Koreans, and

Peppermint Candy and *Splendid Vacation* have brought this challenge into the public forum, where it belongs. At last, South Koreans have finally been able to go to a nearby multiplex and watch a film about Gwangju, one of the most sensitive political subjects of their country's recent history, and freely discuss their experience afterward. This sense of relative political stability and freedom of speech is fairly recent for South Koreans, and is an entirely new development, after decades of living under various dictatorships.³³⁶

³³⁶ Refer to the history section in the Introduction.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Peppermint Candy opens with its protagonist, Kim Young-Ho, standing in front of an oncoming train. Right before he is hit by the train, Young-Ho yells, “I want to go back!” In slow-motion, the camera closes in on Young-Ho’s lean, tense body. He opens his arms wide and the camera eventually freezes on a close-up of his tormented face, flushed and teary, as if from the point of view of the train.

The extreme close-up of Young-Ho’s face in pain—not necessarily physical—has become an iconic image of the recent South Korean history that *Peppermint Candy* well illustrates. Young-Ho cannot return, but the film can and does take the audience into Young-Ho’s past, as well as into the nation’s past. The journey shows how Young-Ho’s life is intimately interwoven with South Korea’s recent sociopolitical turmoil.

May 2010 marked the thirtieth anniversary of the 1980 Gwangju Democratization Movement and the government-sanctioned massacre of its members. In May and June, the musical version of the 2007 blockbuster *Splendid Vacation*, using the same title, was performed in the cities of Gwangju and Seoul. Remembering the Gwangju Uprising is no longer prohibited in South Korea. An official memorial site has been established in Gwangju, and each May, the current president visits to honor the victims. Even the conservative current president, Lee Myung-Bak, has paid a visit to the site. The democracy of South Korea today allows its government to officially recognize the

importance of the Gwangju, and Koreans have finally been given not only the chance to reflect upon one of the most traumatic events in their history but also to mourn for those who perished.

This dissertation has closely analyzed six films, *2009 Lost Memories*, *Hanbando*, *Taegukgi*, *Welcome to Dongmakgol*, *Peppermint Candy*, and *Splendid Vacation*, all financially successful South Korean historical films produced between 1998 and 2008, during the decade under two liberal presidents, Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun. A few recurrent events play critical roles in South Korea's onscreen narration of national history. Three of these events were the Japanese colonialization (Chapter 1), the Korean War (Chapter 2), and the Gwangju Democratization Movement (Chapter 3). In examining these historical films, I have focused on how each narrates critical moments of the national past within its respective socio-historical context.

The practices of film historiography are the subjects of this project. I have argued that the historical films under examination reflect a more complex rumination on the past and present, and a more mature point of view toward the traumatic past, than is typically evident in Korean cinema, in that they struggle to overcome the simple dichotomy of good and evil. The analysis also reveals that these films do not neatly fall under one single ideological orientation. Unlike during the authoritarianisms, Korean history can finally be less simplistic and more ambiguous. As in reality, historical films in discussion no longer necessarily present a clear-cut, black and white picture. At least, they do not have to and are no longer forced to.

Cinema is a complex social construct rather than an imitation of reality. Film can be a work of art, an economic commodity, and a mindless entertainment all at the same time. I agree with Marc Ferro's idea that society is not passively reflected on film but "an active agency creating its image on film."³³⁷ In discussing *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation*, especially, two films portraying the Gwangju Uprising, Ferro's gratitude toward the historian-filmmaker is particularly pertinent: "thanks to popular memory and oral traditions, the historian-filmmaker can give back to society a history it has been deprived of by the institution of History."³³⁸

I have striven for a truly historical analysis of text. Under the tradition of Russian formalists, truly historical poetics are always already social and historical. Bakhtin and Medvedev's discussion on literary scholarship can easily be applied to film analysis. Cinema cannot be understood outside the context of the culture of a given epoch; it is inseparable from socio-cultural life and ideological horizons.³³⁹

I strongly believe that cinematic representations of crucial historical events still directly speak to the people of a nation, although the popularity of transnational/international co-productions makes determining the nationality of a particular film more challenging these days. Even though adhering to the outdated conceptualization of national cinema is severely problematic, I have argued that studying the links between cinema, history, and national identity is more necessary than ever, especially in contemporary South Korean contexts. Through the close examinations of

³³⁷ Ferro 19.

³³⁸ Ibid. 20.

³³⁹ I am referring to Robert Stam and his understanding of Bakhtin and Medvedev. Stam applies their discussion on literature to film. Robert Stam. *Film Theory*: 195, 199.

South Korean films presented herein, I hope I have convincingly demonstrated a possible direction for the future of national cinema studies.

As I have discussed, the South Korean film industry operated under the least amount of governmental control and received the most financial support from the Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-Hyun regimes. Previously forbidden subjects like the Gwangju Democratization Movement and civilian massacres perpetrated by the South Korean and U.S. armies during the Korean War were shown onscreen for the first time during this period.³⁴⁰ Not limited by the strict control over the film industry that occurred during the nation's military dictatorships, contemporary South Korean filmmakers operate under minimal government interference and with maximal freedom of expression. The production of expensive historical films, as I have discussed in this study, is definitely an outcome of this change.³⁴¹ South Korean cinema can now look back and contemplate the painful history of the nation. Rather than one-dimensional portrayals resulting in binary, either/or oppositions, representations of the past have become sophisticated and multifaceted. Even Japanese characters, the most convenient enemy of all, are allowed to exhibit inner struggle and conflict; likewise, North Koreans in contemporary South Korean films are also portrayed as understanding and sympathetic at times.

By presenting exaggerated and elongated reenactments of some of the most critical moments of the Japanese colonial period, *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* try

³⁴⁰ On 15 April 2010 a film dealing with a civilian massacre committed by the U.S. army during the Korean War, Lee Sang-Woo's *A Little Pond* [*Jahgeun Yeonmot*] was theatrically released in South Korea. *A Song of Resurrection* (Dir. Lee Jung-Gook. 1992.) was the very first film to portray the killings perpetrated by the Korean army in 1980 in Gwangju, but was subjected to severe censorship. *Peppermint Candy* (1999) is the very first film to portray Gwangju without any externally mandated cuts. To date, a total of six films depicting the Gwangju Democratization Movement have been made; I examined two of them in detail in Chapter 3. Another Korean War film, *71: Into the Fire* [*Pohwa Sokeuro*] (2010), was one of the biggest box office successes of the year.

³⁴¹ Darcy Paquet discusses details of the shifts in film industry and governmental involvement. Paquet. *New Korean Cinema*: 47-51, 75-77.

hard to force their local audiences to experience a vicarious sense of trauma. The general intention behind these elaborate, embellished dramatizations is to enrage domestic viewers. It is debatable whether or not *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando* were effective in achieving this goal,³⁴² but *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* more clearly position their viewers as witnesses to famous historical events. By employing spectacular visuals in their battle scenes and boldly depicting graphic violence, these films manage to recreate the civil war for post-war generations. Consequently, as the youth in *Taegukgi* do, audiences appreciate and pay respect to those who sacrificed their lives for the nation.³⁴³

Peppermint Candy and *Splendid Vacation* represent the same event, the Gwangju Uprising, in radically different ways. Through following the story of one protagonist, shot in reverse chronological order, *Peppermint Candy* places the audience in the position of witness.³⁴⁴ Even when it becomes possible to feel sympathy for the protagonist (at the end of the film/beginning of his troubles), the camera shows him with a level of detachment that discourages over-identification by almost never employing extreme close-ups. *Splendid Vacation*, by contrast, takes the conventional approach of portraying likeable characters for whom the audience can easily feel compassion. *Splendid Vacation*, however, does not evoke useful political contemplation from the public as *Peppermint Candy* does.

³⁴² Refer to the diverse postings and responses from *Cine 21* website. For actual postings, refer to Appendix.

³⁴³ The reviews of *Taegukgi* and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* are mostly positive and respectful unlike *2009 Lost Memories* and *Hanbando*. Refer to the Appendix for actual postings.

³⁴⁴ E. Ann Kaplan and Ben Wang propose four positions for the viewers of trauma films. As the most politically useful position, being a witness is one of them. I discussed their arguments in Chapter 3 and I will refer to them later in this conclusion.

At first, the films in discussion—all five, with the exception of *Peppermint Candy*—appear to reconfirm hegemonic historiography, reinforce the dominant ideology, and suppress alternative versions of and questions about Korean history. However, films never simply represent one political point of view; fissures and gaps occur during the films that defy the neat classification of regressive texts. Even *Peppermint Candy*, a subversive film that challenges the conventional historiography of progress-driven national narrative, reverts to a simple gender dichotomy.

The nation that produced all these films, South Korea was ruled by authoritarian regimes for almost four decades (1950s through 1990s). During this period, official history was the only acceptable version; challenging government-issued historical narratives was forbidden. Even if one did not believe what one had been told, it was not possible to discover the truth. Media representations, which were also under government control, were powerful means of disseminating these unified, singular versions. Now, with the nation under democratic rule, representing numerous alternative versions of national narratives is possible in South Korea. Stories that have been silenced, ignored, and suppressed for generations are being told and listened to. Cinema has welcomed these changes; recent South Korean historical films portray either the same history from different perspectives or histories that have never been told.

In order to understand Korea's historical events, it is critical to recognize the pervasive aspects of contemporary Korean society that produced these historical films. As Michael Robinson and Darcy Paquet have aptly noted, modern Korean history cannot be understood without acknowledging various obsessions that Koreans have endured for

decades.³⁴⁵ While virulent anti-communism, entrenched resentment toward Japanese colonial imperialism, and relentless determination to overcome post-war destitution are straightforward and widely accepted sentiments, Koreans have developed contradictory attitudes toward the presence of the U.S. and the continuing influence of Japan on their daily lives.³⁴⁶

The feeling of doomed helplessness also became very familiar to Koreans, whose national fate from the late nineteenth century until less than sixty years ago was decided not by their own will but by foreign powers. Modern South Korea still entertains numerous political, economic, and cultural obsessions, yet even its seemingly permanent antipathies toward North Korea and Japan have begun to oscillate, judging by political changes on both domestic and regional levels. Financially, from the early 1960s to the late 1990s South Korea achieved one of the world's fastest-growing economies; as of 2010, its economy was the twelfth largest in the world.³⁴⁷ These obsessions, a feeling of hopeless fate, and a sense of pride all co-exist in Korea today, clashing with and cancelling out each other as the nation's contemporary political and cultural ideologies overflow with contradictions and inconsistencies.

Understanding recent South Korean society demands the realization of these provisions. Historical events discussed in this dissertation need to be situated within the complex map of these factors. Accordingly, as I have argued, South Korean films have

³⁴⁵ Paquet quotes Michael Robinson in his introduction. Paquet, *New Korean Cinema*: 2.

³⁴⁶ South Koreans who remember the Korean War are grateful to the U.S., while younger Koreans are skeptical of the presence of the U.S. Army and want political, economic, and particularly military independence from the U.S. for Korea. Feelings toward Japan are also contradictory. Antipathy and antagonism toward Japan remain ubiquitous in Korea, but Japanese pop culture continues to be fashionable among the youth. For future research, I would like to incorporate ethnographic data to support this widely pervasive and dominant assumption.

³⁴⁷ <<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2800.htm>>,
<<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ks.html>>.

begun to reflect the senses of obsession, trauma, and vulnerability that developed while the society struggled through rapid changes and numerous hardships. Among the many historical periods that have been depicted on film, I have examined cinematic representations of oppression and subjugation under the Japanese, the heart-wrenching division of the peninsula that began after the Korean War, and the long-suppressed memory of Gwangju—a trauma inflicted upon South Koreans by their own countrymen.

In discussing the link between trauma and cinema, E. Ann Kaplan and Ben Wang suggest that cinema takes four positions to represent trauma, utilizing different cinematic strategies.³⁴⁸ First, films provide a comforting cure; second, the audience experiences trauma vicariously; third, the camera becomes a voyeur; and fourth, the audience becomes a witness. Kaplan and Wang identify the fourth position as the most politically useful, because it “may open up a space for transformation of the viewer through empathic identification without vicarious traumatization.”³⁴⁹ Through this identification, spectators can enter into a character’s experience. Maya Deren’s *Meshes of an Afternoon* (1943), Alain Renais’s *Nuit et Brouillard* [*Night and Fog*, 1955], Marguerite Duras and Alain Resnais’s *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959), and Tracey Moffatt’s *Night Cries* (1989) are examples of films that position their audiences as witnesses, according to Kaplan and Wang. Among the films considered here, *Peppermint Candy* best exemplifies this fourth position because its viewers are emotionally and powerfully moved, yet also “keep a cognitive distance and awareness denied to the victim—in this case, *Young-Ho*—by the traumatic process.”³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ Kaplan and Wang 9-10.

³⁴⁹ Ibid. 10.

³⁵⁰ Ibid. Italics and hyphens are mine.

Peppermint Candy examines the Gwangju Uprising from an uncertain perspective. Through its portrayal of a seemingly detestable protagonist, the film offers an interesting case study of how audiences engage with characters.³⁵¹ Because the life of Young-Ho, the film's central character, is intricately intertwined with Korea's social upheavals, the progression of his demise is very familiar to domestic audiences. He is despicable, undoubtedly; however, it is impossible to simply accuse him of and blame him for his horrendous crimes: any Korean man could have been Kim Young-Ho.³⁵² Although the film tries hard to position the viewers as witnesses, it is difficult to decide how to engage with Young-Ho, i.e. to keep a distance from him without feeling sorry for him.

Even *Peppermint Candy* with unknown casts achieved an unexpected box office success in spite of its grave subject matter. I have chosen to focus on financially successful films because of their attractiveness to and influence over the general public; marketability renders historical epic one of the genres most frequently selected for South Korean blockbusters. As a nation with one of the most successful film industries outside the U.S., South Korea has been skillfully adapting Hollywood's generic conventions and has managed to draw Korean audiences with subjects tailored exclusively to their national sensibilities. Utilizing historically specific themes and events has proven to be one of the most effective ways of making Korean blockbusters commercially viable while

³⁵¹ Many reviewers have commented how tiring and challenging it is to watch Lee Chang-Dong's films, especially with a protagonist like Kim Young-Ho. For actual postings, refer to Appendix.

³⁵² Kim Soyoung disagrees with this argument; I discussed her claim further in Chapter 3.

also resisting Hollywood's universal narratives.³⁵³ One of my particular interests in analyzing historical blockbuster films in Korea is the ways a national film industry adapts to and competes with Hollywood. For future research, I intend to explore the adaptations of various generic formulae of Hollywood to Korean films. I am also interested in examining cinematic representations of trauma that employ the conventions of melodrama, in addition to representations of racial minorities in Hollywood blockbuster films. Representations of North Korean, American, and female characters in recent Korean films is also worthy of serious analysis.

I have examined cinematic representations of historical traumas in recent Korean filmography. Historiography on the recent Korean screen is the focus of my work, and it is one of only a handful of such studies written in English. To my knowledge, my examinations of some of the films discussed in this dissertation are some of the first serious analyses in English of recent Korean films. These films are mostly popular, but some display artistic mastery and have received critical acclaim. This dissertation has also focused specifically on popular historical films produced during the decade under two liberal presidents.

I would welcome additional research that incorporates further analyses of audience reception, because I am interested in how Korean viewers connect with their national identities through these films that revisit critical historical events. For the purpose of this study, I have only looked at Internet postings of a particular website, <http://www.cine21.co.kr>, but further audience discussion about these films needs to be undertaken. Including extra reviews and postings would enhance an in-depth study of the

³⁵³ Jinhee Choi claims that South Korean blockbusters employ historical subjects to distinguish themselves from the Hollywood ones by appealing to the domestic audience with culturally specific narratives. Historical events have become one of the most popular themes of blockbuster films. Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance*.

reception, and would reveal the sense of national identity shared or unshared by a wider sampling of audience members.

My personal wish for the future of the South Korean film industry is that it produce smarter blockbuster films that satisfy and entertain domestic and international audiences alike. By “smarter” blockbusters I mean films that effectively incorporate familiar Hollywood conventions and specifically Korean elements, as *The Host* did. *The Host*, the most successful film in South Korean film history, exemplifies a balanced combination of Hollywood framework and Korean narrative.³⁵⁴ I would also like to see more complex, multifaceted portrayals of antagonists rather than simple dualism and archetypal representations of good and evil. If current trends continue, it will be quite interesting to examine representations of the Japanese and North Koreans in South Korean historical films made since the 1990s. As a fervent advocate of the argument that there is an inevitable link between cinema and its social context (i.e., the society that produces it), I want to see even more changes in South Korean cinema and society, with more multi-dimensional characters and more sensitive, thoughtful, contextual reflections.

In the very last scene of *Peppermint Candy*, Young-Ho, a twenty-year-old man, stands at exactly the same spot as he was/will be in the beginning of the film when he is forty—next to a railroad bridge that spans a little stream. He lies down under the bridge and looks up to the sky; his eyes become teary. The sounds of a train passing over his head are heard. With Young-Ho’s face in close-up, the screen freezes. The film ends.

According to director Lee Chang-Dong, *Peppermint Candy*’s final sequence, “A Picnic, Fall 1979,” paradoxically presents hope to the audience. Through the way Young-

³⁵⁴ While masterfully utilizing several generic conventions of Hollywood (comedy, monster film, blockbuster, action, and family drama, to name a few), *The Host* employs specifically Korean elements that speak well to the domestic audience. For instance, the family dynamics and humor are based on Korean culture, and the U.S. army base in Seoul is ultimately responsible for the creation of the monster.

Ho stares at the sky, Lee says he wanted to convey to young audience members that they can restart, as Young-Ho wishes he could: “The reverse time is thus re-circulated by the audience, and although the time travel in the film is over, the audience can start their individual time-travel journey.”³⁵⁵ By examining cinematic time-travel journeys to some of the most traumatic, pivotal events in modern South Korean history, I hope I have been able to present a glimpse of the complex nexus between cinema, history, and identity.

³⁵⁵ <http://www.peppermintcandy.co.kr/news_20000200_kpaf_a.htm>. My translation.

Appendix

THE PRESIDENTS OF SOUTH KOREA SINCE ITS INCEPTION

Rhee Syngman (1919-1925), (1948-1960): resigned on April 26, 1960
Yun Bo-Sun (1960-1962) and Prime Minister Chang Myon
Park Chung-Hee (1963-1979): 16 May 1961: coup, 26 October 1979: assassinated by Kim Jae-Kyu
Choi Kyu-Hah (1979-1980)
Chun Doo-Hwan (1980-1988): 12 December 1979: coup
Roh Tae-Woo (1988-1993)
Kim Young-Sam (1993-1998)
Kim Dae-Jung (1998-2003)
Roh Moo-Hyun (2003-2008)
Lee Myung-Bak (2008-2013): Incumbent

THE FILMS PORTRAYING THE GWANGJU UPRISING

The very first film that clearly portrayed the Gwangju Uprising was *The Song of Resurrection* (1990), a heavily censored film that was withdrawn from public circulation shortly after its theatrical release. The next film about this subject, *A Petal* (1996) did not come out until 1996. From 1998 through 2008, four films depicting the Gwangju Uprising were made: *Peppermint Candy* (1999), *The Old Garden* (2006), *Splendid Vacation* (2007), and *Scout* (2007). *Splendid Vacation* is the single blockbuster film among these four. The liberal presidencies of Kim and Roh are credited with enabling the production of multiple films about Gwangju. Chapter 3 examines *Peppermint Candy* and *Splendid Vacation* further as they were produced between 1998 and 2008 and among the top ten most successful domestic films of the year.

SOME EXEMPLAR REVIEWS OF THE FOLLOWING FILMS FROM CINE21.CO.KR

2009 Lost Memories

<http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?s=rate&id=5646>.

“A good subject, but using the time machine was like MSG...” ID pajumi 5/30/2004; “A disgusting concept of trying to make money off anti-Japanese sentiment” ID yojungbb 1/3/2005; “This is the distortion of history” ID kimad1981 7/9/2005; “This is why Korean blockbuster doesn’t work. What a waste” ID best0701 9/27/2005; “Shouldn’t have touched a piece of very sensitive history...” ID ssaguryu 12/5/2005; “The last photo was almost comical” ID magicdice 2/4/2006; “Everything is loose and incoherent,

especially the fantasy sequence at the end” ID dandyboy05 2/8/2006; “No progress” ID koru8526 9/15/2008; “It is difficult to keep it cool between Korea and Japan” ID cosmobora 11/6/2008; “Dissonance between history and fantasy. A big sigh” ID wisdompaul 12/13/2008; “This is why Korean blockbusters never make it...Disappointing...” ID kcw0318 4/3/2009; “It is difficult to keep it cool between Korea and Japan” ID cosmobora 11/6/2008; “An encounter between history and fantasy! A well-made Korean blockbuster!” ID cystickallive 2/15/2005; “The best of commercial movie” ID carolinejeana 6/21/2005; “Fun imagination” ID cico92 3/1/2007.

Hanbando

<http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?s=rate&id=17071>.

“Passionate, but silly and doesn’t make much sense” ID gari1 7/7/2006; “It’s about time to change thinking. Updated macho-ism and illusion of nationalism” ID juven10 7/8/2006; “This is just too much” ID tyzg07 7/11/2006; “Saw it today... ‘Director Kang, maybe it’s time to retire’” ID samjabc 7/13/2006; “So disappointed at banal dialogue, music, and cinematography” ID idred 7/13/2006; “This movie is just not fun!” ID djarixo 7/13/2006; “Movie’s ridiculous concept and preposterous storytelling. The worst” ID dandyboy05 7/14/2006; “Isn’t it just too much patriotism? Just too much...” ID amlita 7/14/2006; “The blatant and forced patriotism makes me throw up” ID carlyle 7/14/2006; “The size of Kang Woo-Seok’s nationalism is about that of Hanbando” ID pputtygirl 7/14/2006; “Exaggerated acting, loose structure, childish dialogue...? Fell asleep” ID enoch777 7/15/2006; “Too didactic” ID zimmamin 10/25/2006; “Nationalism” ID skytreee 11/23/2006; “Sometimes we do need a movie like this” ID nalpali2 9/18/2007; “A well-made movie, *Hanbando*” ID cellys 10/15/2008; “If you are Korean!” ID psp01 1/4/2009; “A piquant movie” ID jtw0905 1/29/2009; “A movie with emphasis on patriotism!! Great narrative great acting” ID junnl6 9/25/2006; “Full of patriotism” ID best0701 9/26/2006; “This movie is a success because it contains 2 seconds of Kang Soo-Yeon’s tears” ID optcnerve 12/2/2006 (Kang is the actress who plays Empress Myeongseong in the film); “The movie made me reconsider recent Korean history” ID dotol87 2/21/2007; “If you are Korean, this movie will boil your blood” ID dngusal79 9/4/2007; “The movie made me become patriotic” ID jung790 7/30/2006; “The movie made me move” ID smp7117 7/31/2006; “The movie made me reconsider the reality. Excellent narrative” ID soq012 8/22/2006; “A movie well presenting the positions of both Korea and Japan” ID march6th 7/17/2006; “Moving” ID pudingsajo 7/18/2006; “Worth watching just because of Kang Soo-Yeon’s tears” ID hyn21 7/21/2006; “If you are Korean, you will be moved!!” ID mihee73 7/29/2006; “Viva Korea!” ID skycell 7/29/2006; “We need a movie like this right now” ID bclee68 7/14/2006; “Screw you, critics. The scene with Empress Myeongseong is enough; it is the best” ID s1918t 7/14/2006; “Korea should bring Japan to an international tribunal” ID jorocome 7/15/2006.

Tae Guk Gi: the Brotherhood of War

<http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?s=rate&id=6298>.

“I witnessed a pinnacle of Korean war film” ID ktkdoo 4/30/2004; “The reason why *Taegukgi* meets *Saving Private Ryan* eye to eye” ID wookpsn 5/4/2004; “A really moving film” ID wktjsnghk 9/11/2004; “The best movie I have ever seen!” ID jlchju69 10/13/2004; “The best war blockbuster movie ever in Korean film history” ID gshock79 2/4/2004; “The best movie in the country” ID navy1807 2/4/2004; “Now Korea can make a movie like this!!!” ID nanobus 2/4/2004; “The best Korean movie” ID kinoj 2/5/2004; “A war movie with Korean sentiment, thus greater than Hollywood war movie” ID cdhunter 2/5/2004; “A Korean war movie full of fraternal love and tension between two brothers along with well-made battle scenes” ID h2hja 2/5/2004; “Could have been better, but definitely an improvement for Korean movie” ID hanaro21 2/5/2004; “The highest quality battle scenes in Korean war films” ID hesperides 2/5/2004; “Five stars. Big scale Korean movie just like big scale Hollywood movie” ID siyounge 2/6/2004; “A true Korean blockbuster with historical veracity” ID kid389 2/6/2004; “Emergence of Korean blockbuster” ID ekfrxpa 2/6/2004; “Best spectacle and action” ID witt99 2/6/2004; “Better than *Saving Private Ryan* and *Pearl Harbor*!” ID uniquejuya 2/7/2004; “Real well-made battle scenes!” ID prettygo 2/9/2004; “Much better than *Saving Private Ryan*. I am proud of this Korean movie” ID teppei 2/9/2004

Welcome to Dongmakgol

<http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?id=7912>.

“An innocent film” ID: shaniabin 1/11/2006; “‘popcorn snow,’ butterfly, a fighter-bomber, ..., and utopia” ID leonkimm 2/1/2006; “I love you, Dongmakgol” ID hinaki35 3/24/2006; “Utopia still exists” ID redsunny 3/29, 2006; “A fantasy in the midst of war” ID wing05 5/25/2006; “A village that spreads a positive epidemic” ID zimmani 7/20/2006; “*Welcome to Dongmakgol*—a fantasy about the tragedy of the Korean War which we could not learn” ID kh16304 7/28/2006; “Pleasant encounter between modern history and cinema” ID pj0241 8/15/2006; “A fantasy is a dream of reality” ID berserk75, 9/20/2006; “Popcorn snow falling in the village of innocence” ID hyades98 10/9/2006; “A story of war that revives people” ID jingrace 10/9/2006; “A real good movie” ID gorn1004 11/6/2006; “Welcome to Humanism” ID ccoogi 11/20/2006; “A romantic tale of happy people who can silence the insanity of stupid war” ID hurray 8/4/2005; “Let’s peel off the dirt of our hearts at Dongmakgol bath house!” ID paranpul 8/4/2005; “I want to see it again even if I get hit by a wild boar” ID alladia 8/5/2005; “I laughed and cried while eating popcorn. The best movie ever in my life” ID jeioh 8/5/2005; “No need for ideology nor theory. A movie makes you laugh and cry at the same time” ID softhoi 8/7/2005; “Innocence and beauty” ID soft9602 8/7/2005; “Unrealistic setup brings out enjoyment” ID no1law 8/8/2005; “Dongmakgol’s peace is ruined by the army” ID mindlle99 8/9/2005; “Nice pretty good movie!! Like popcorn snow...” ID hoonschoi 8/9/2005; “An innocent movie as I expected” ID mooy09 8/12/2005; “A heartwarming story with fantastic elements and beautiful music” ID rainysun2892 8/14/2005; “Actors gooooo—the film is like an animated film, but I like it” ID xiwang 8/26/2005; “A fantasy of utopia. I already knew it will be destroyed, but I still smiled” ID 21cbach 9/29/2005; “A power of fantasy that breaks through the tragedy of division!” ID acehhs 12/7/2005; “A utopia we want is a world of innocence and

purity” ID dayak5 12/7/2005; “Dongmakgol’s innocence that buried war and ideological conflicts” ID chihiro84 12/8/2005

Peppermint Candy

<http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?s=rate&id=2090>.

“Is history always this painful?” ID easirhee 2/1/2005; “A sad stare at distorted and heart-wrenching modern Korean history” ID cycstillalive 2/2/2005; “Cruel contemporary Korean history hidden under broken peppermint candies” ID kom1029 5/15/2005; “Contemporary Korean history through a life of one man” ID ninetwob 7/15/2005; “A memory of innocence buried under current repulsiveness” ID drnam 12/8/2005; “As I get older, it resonates stronger: ‘I want to go back!’” ID etkdduf 12/22/2005; “I do not want to go back, too.” ID magicdice 2/4/2006; “A life of individual intertwined with the society” ID viewing 4/29/2006; “A well-done portrayal of a human being transforming as the society changes” ID ppoyang 5/9/2006; “A reason why we are sad as Korean” ID roonya 10/26/2006; “A requiem for the 1980s!” ID perfume616 1/16/2007; “An uncomfortable reality” ID papalagi83 4/4/2007; “Through a man who is riding a train moving backward, we encounter the shadow of modern Korean history” ID kimpd1010 4/14/2007; “A tragedy of time turns into an individual tragedy” ID home000 8/5/2007; “Recent Korean history via personal history” ID crystal9029 9/30/2007; “*Peppermint Candy* made me realize how happy I am in this beautiful world” ID jazzlist 10/5/2008; “Who is victim and who is victimizer?” ID ddd40 12/23/2008; “Ah! Bitter aroma of peppermint” ID inclip 6/1/2009; “Watching Lee Chang-Dong’s film is very exhausting as if I performed some strenuous physical labor, yet I still watch it.” ID hapha 12/29/2004; “An uncomfortable reality” ID papalagi83 4/4/2007; “The film makes me feel very constrained...” ID yarhi 1/28/2005

Splendid Vacation

<http://www.cine21.com/Movies/Mov_Movie/movie_detail.php?s=rate&id=19824>.

“Our inerasable past” ID pjw321 6/27/2007; “You must watch it at least once!” IDskyksy1017 7/14/2007; “A popular movie that re-evoked May 18 in the world. That itself is meaningful.” ID zzni 7/27/2007; “Made me cry and remember the history” ID tinylily 7/27/2007; “A movie that you have to watch if you were Korean” ID i007843 7/28/2007; “You should watch it. You will remember that cruel May” ID sgjahng 7/28/2007; “Wish this kind of tragedy will never happen again...” ID babe731 7/30/2007; “One blockbuster film” ID musik05 7/30/2007; “Our painful past...” ID dazzle4me 7/30/2007; “A movie that you should watch if you were Korean!!” ID esnoi 7/31/2007; “Remember, that is the resistance” ID zimmani 9/7/2007; “‘Splendid Vacation’ has not yet ended” ID cleank 9/9/2007; “A tragic and heart-wrenching history that should not be repeated” ID ky21anh 9/12/2007; “‘1980 Gwangju’, not beautiful yet must-be-remembered pain for our generation” ID stiltaeye 9/13/2007; “Splendid Vacation? Horrible Vacation!!” ID ekfrl66 9/27/2007; “REMEMBER 5.18” ID kukgod 9/30/2007; “The resonance of buried truth overcomes the banality” ID caiens 10/4/2007; “A painful movie” ID ismin12 3/2/2008; “It is at the end, people’s history” ID zombie 3/19/2008;

“A half-done movie that refuses political interpretations” ID mansoledam 3/21/2008;
 “Hurray for Korean Movies!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” ID lovelikecute 8/3/2008; “The saddest movie I
 have ever seen” ID newface444 9/14/2008; “We do not know that pain” ID kwonin79
 11/23/2008; “Different approaches to the memory of torture and being tortured” ID ala1st
 12/28/2008; “The bloody truth about cruel and brutal history” ID mirim96 2/14/2009

THE BOX OFFICE RESULT OF DOMESTIC FILMS (1998-2008)

The Best Selling Films of 1998

	Korean Films	Seoul Admissions	Release Date
1	A Promise	704,600*	Nov 14
2	Whispering Corridors	621,032	May 30
3	Christmas in August	422,930	Jan 24
4	The Soul Guardians	419,210	Aug 15
5	Art Museum by the Zoo	412,472*	Dec 19
6	The Quiet Family	343,946	Apr 25
7	An Affair	304,666	Oct 3
8	Girls' Night Out	290,502	Oct 3
9	Jjim	168,813	May 16
10	Scent of a Man	148,781	Sep 12

	All Films	Seoul Admissions	Release Date
1	Titanic (US)	1,971,780	Feb 20
2	Armageddon (US)	1,170,252	Jul 3
3	Mulan (US)	771,194	Jul 17
4	A Promise (Korea)	704,600*	Nov 14
5	Deep Impact (US)	637,387	May 16
6	Whispering Corridors (Korea)	621,032	May 30
7	Prince of Egypt (US)	613,973*	Dec 19
8	Saving Private Ryan (US)	593,681	Sep 12
9	Alien 4 (US)	571,751	Jan 10
10	007 Never Die (US)	479,621	Aug 1

* Includes tickets sold in 1999.

Market share: Korean 25.1%, Imports 74.9% (nationwide)

Films released: Korean 43, Imported 290

Total attendance: 50.2m admissions

Number of screens: 507 (nationwide)
 Exchange rate (1998): 1333 won/US dollar
 Average ticket price: 5,150 won (=US\$3.86)
 Exports to other countries: US\$3,073,750
 Average budget: 1.2bn won + 0.3bn p&a costs

Source: Korean Film Council (KOFIC).

The Best Selling Films of 1999

	Korean Films	Seoul Admissions	Release Date	Weeks
1	Shiri	2,448,399**	Feb 13	17
2	Attack the Gas Station	960,000	Oct 2	11
3	Tell Me Something	730,000	Nov 13	6
4	Nowhere to Hide	687,000	Jul 31	9
5	Happy End	557,294	Dec 11	6
6	Yonggary	500,000	Jul 17	6
7	Ghost in Love	420,000	Aug 14	5
8	Phantom the Submarine	365,000	Jul 31	7
9	The Ring Virus	332,354	Jun 12	7
10	City of the Rising Sun	329,778	Jan 1	5

	All Films	Seoul Admissions	Release Date	Weeks
1	Shiri (Korea)	2,448,399**	Feb 13	17
2	The Mummy (US)	1,260,000	Jul 10	8
3	Attack the Gas Station (Korea)	960,000	Oct 2	11
4	The Matrix (US)	910,000	May 15	9
5	Sixth Sense (US)	879,000	Sep 18	9
6	Tarzan (US)	820,000	Jul 17	7
7	Star Wars: Episode One (US)	811,000	Jun 26	7
8	Tell Me Something (Korea)	730,000	Nov 13	6
9	Nowhere to Hide (Korea)	687,000	Jul 31	9
10	Love Letter (Japan)	645,615	Nov 20	8

* Includes tickets sold in 2000.

** *Shiri* drew an estimated 6.2 million admissions nationwide.

Market share: Korean 39.7%, Imports 60.3% (nationwide)

Films released: Korean 49, Imported 297

Total attendance: 54.7m admissions

Number of screens: 588 (nationwide)

Exchange rate (1999): 1176 won/US dollar

Average ticket price: 5,230 won (=US\$4.45)

Exports to other countries: US\$5,969,219

Average budget: 1.4bn won + 0.5bn p&a costs

Source: Korean Film Council (KOFIC).

The Best Selling Films of 2000

	Korean Films	Seoul Admissions	Release Date	Weeks
1	Joint Security Area	2,499,400**	Sep 9	20*
2	The Foul King	817,000	Feb 4	12
3	Bichunmoo	730,300	Jul 1	7
4	The Legend of Gingko	637,000	Nov 11	6
5	Libera Me	546,300	Nov 11	6
6	A Nightmare	332,000	Jul 29	5
7	Ditto	326,000	May 27	10
8	Lies	314,500	Jan 8	5
9	<i>Peppermint Candy</i>	311,000	Jan 1	11
10	Jakarta	282,200	Dec 30	5*

	All Films	Seoul Admissions	Release Date	Weeks
1	Joint Security Area (Korea)	2,499,400**	Sep 9	20*
2	Mission: Impossible 2 (US)	1,130,000	Jun 17	8
3	Gladiator (US)	1,127,000	Jun 3	13
4	The Foul King (Korea)	817,000	Feb 4	12
5	Bichunmoo (Korea)	730,300	Jul 1	7
6	The Legend of Gingko (Korea)	637,000	Nov 11	6
7	Dinosaur (US)	619,000	July 15	6
8	The Perfect Storm (US)	572,000	Jul 29	5
9	Libera Me (Korea)	546,300	Nov 11	6
10	Charlie's Angels (US)	487,000	Nov 25	5

* Includes tickets sold in 2001.

** *Joint Security Area* drew an estimated 5.8 million admissions nationwide.

Market share: Korean 35.1%, Imports 64.9% (nationwide)

Films released: Korean 59, Imported 342

Total attendance: 64.6m admissions

Number of screens: 720 (nationwide)

Exchange rate (2000): 1139 won/US dollar

Average ticket price: 5,355 won (=US\$4.70)

Exports to other countries: US\$7,053,745

Average budget: 1.5bn won + 0.65bn p&a costs

Source: Korean Film Council (KOFIC).

The Best Selling Films of 2001

	Korean Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release Date	Weeks
1	Friend	8,134,500	2,579,950	Mar 31	15
2	My Sassy Girl	4,852,845	1,765,100	Jul 27	10
3	Kick the Moon	4,353,800	1,605,200	Jun 23	10
4	My Wife is a Gangster	5,180,900	1,466,400	Sep 28	8
5	Hi, Dharma	3,746,000	1,304,200	Nov 7	8
6	My Boss, My Hero	3,302,000	1,229,100	Dec 8*	9
7	Guns & Talks	2,227,000	896,500	Oct 12	7
8	Musa	2,067,100	873,600	Sep 7	6
9	Volcano High	1,687,800	593,200	Dec 8*	5
10	Bungee Jumping Of Their Own	947,000	507,400	Feb 3	11

	All Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release Date	Weeks
1	Friend (Korea)	8,134,500	2,579,950	Mar 31	15
2	My Sassy Girl (Korea)	4,852,845	1,765,100	Jul 27	10
3	Harry Potter...	4,030,000	1,672,000	Dec 14*	8

	(U.S.)				
4	Kick the Moon (Korea)	4,353,800	1,605,200	Jun 23	10
5	My Wife is a Gangster (Korea)	5,180,900	1,466,400	Sep 28	8
6	Hi, Dharma (Korea)	3,746,000	1,304,200	Nov 7	8
7	My Boss, My Hero (Korea)	3,302,000	1,229,100	Dec 8*	9
8	Shrek (U.S.)	2,344,700	1,123,200	Jul 06	6
9	Pearl Harbor (U.S.)	2,261,100	1,081,627	Jun 2	7
10	The Mummy Returns (U.S.)	2,341,800	954,700	Jun 16	7

* Includes tickets sold in 2002.

Market share: Korean 50.1%, Imports 49.9% (nationwide)

Films released: Korean 65, Imported 306

Total attendance: 89m admissions

Number of screens: 818 (nationwide)

Exchange rate (2001): 1276 won/US dollar

Average ticket price: 5,860 won (=US\$4.59)

Exports to other countries: US\$11,249,573

Average budget: 1.62bn won + 0.93bn p&a costs

Source: Korean Film Council (KOFIC).

The Best Selling Films of 2002

	Korean Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release Date	Weeks
1	Marrying the Mafia	5,021,001	1,604,219	Sep 13	10
2	The Way Home	4,091,000	1,596,521	Apr 5	11
3	Sex is Zero	4,089,900	1,313,570	Dec 13*	9
4	Jail Breakers	3,073,919	922,467	Nov 21*	7
5	Public Enemy	2,987,900	1,161,500	Jan 25	8
6	Wet Dreams	2,432,950	760,698	Nov 6	7
7	<i>2009 Lost Memories</i>	2,263,800	882,400	Feb 1	6
8	Phone	2,182,915	765,000	Jul 26	6
9	Champion	1,770,000	567,000	Jun 28	5

10	Conduct Zero	1,683,533	701,624	Dec 27*	6
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	All Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release Date	Weeks
1	LOTR: The Two Towers (NZ/US)	5,145,193	1,771,966	Dec 19*	8
2	Marrying the Mafia (Kor)	5,021,001	1,604,219	Sep 13	10
3	...Chamber of Secrets (UK/US)	4,340,487	1,522,988	Dec 13*	7
4	The Way Home (Kor)	4,091,000	1,596,521	Apr 5	11
5	Sex is Zero (Kor)	4,089,900	1,313,570	Dec 13*	9
6	LOTR: Fellowship... (NZ/US)	3,873,300	1,361,855	Jan 1	11
7	Minority Report (US)	3,379,000	1,400,200	Jul 26	10
8	Jail Breakers (Kor)	3,073,919	922,467	Nov 21*	7
9	Public Enemy (Kor)	2,987,900	1,161,500	Jan 25	8
10	Spider-Man (US)	2,901,821	1,107,600	May 4	8

* Includes tickets sold in 2003. Source: Korean Film Council (KOFIC).

Seoul population: 10.32 million
Nationwide population: 47.9 million

Market share: Korean 48.3%, Imports 51.7% (nationwide)
Films released: Korean 78, Imported 266
Total attendance: 105.1m admissions
Number of screens: 977 (nationwide)
Exchange rate (2002): 1214 won/US dollar
Average ticket price: 6,035 won (=US\$4.97)
Exports to other countries: US\$14,952,089 (Japan: 44%)
Average budget: 2.45bn won + 1.27bn p&a costs

The Best Selling Films of 2003

	Korean Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release Date	Weeks
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1	Silmido	11,074,000	3,262,000	Dec 24*	15
2	Memories of Murder	5,101,645	1,912,369	Apr 25	12
3	My Tutor Friend	4,809,871	1,622,064	Feb 7	10
4	Untold Scandal	3,345,268	1,293,642	Oct 2	7
5	Old Boy	3,260,000	1,170,000	Nov 21*	9
6	Oh! Brothers	3,125,256	948,604	Sep 5	6
7	A Tale of Two Sisters	3,110,000	1,000,471	Jun 13	5
8	Once Upon a Time in a Battlefield	2,835,000	923,000	Oct 17	6
9	My Teacher, Mr. Kim	2,470,000	857,000	Mar 28	8
10	Crazy First Love	2,340,000	742,000	Jun 27	5

	All Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release Date	Weeks
1	Silmido (Korea)	11,074,000	3,262,000	Dec 24*	15
2	Return of the King (NZ/US)	5,960,000	1,978,409	Dec 17*	8
3	Memories of Murder (Korea)	5,101,645	1,912,369	Apr 25	12
4	My Tutor Friend (Korea)	4,809,871	1,622,064	Feb 7	10
5	The Matrix Reloaded (US)	3,600,000	1,500,000	May 23	7
6	Untold Scandal (Korea)	3,345,268	1,293,642	Oct 2	7
7	Old Boy (Korea)	3,260,000	1,170,000	Nov 21*	9
8	Oh! Brothers (Korea)	3,125,256	948,604	Sep 5	6
9	A Tale of Two Sisters (Korea)	3,110,000	1,000,471	Jun 13	5
10	Once Upon a Time in a Battlefield (Korea)	2,835,000	923,000	Oct 17	6

* Includes tickets sold in 2004. Source: Korean Film Council (KOFIC).

Seoul population: 10.32 million
Nationwide population: 48.4 million

Market share: Korean 53.5%, Imports 46.5% (nationwide)
 Films released: Korean 65, Imported 175
 Total admissions: 119.5 million (=\$601 million)
 Number of screens: 1,132 (end of 2003)
 Exchange rate (2003): 1194 won/US dollar
 Average ticket price: 6,002 won (=US\$5.03)
 Exports to other countries: US\$30,979,000 (Japan: 45%)
 Average budget: 4.2bn won including 1.3bn p&a spend

The Best Selling Films of 2004

	Korean Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release Date	Weeks
1	<i>Taegukgi</i>	11,746,135	3,509,563	Feb 5	13
2	My Little Bride	3,149,500	876,600	Apr 2	8
3	Once Upon a Time in High School	3,115,767	1,023,601	Jan 16	6
4	Ghost House	2,890,000	751,340	Sep 17	6
5	A Moment to Remember	2,565,078	797,593	Nov 5	4
6	My Brother	2,479,585	699,725	Oct 8	5
7	Fighter in the Wind	2,346,446	634,897	Aug 12	5
8	Windstruck	2,199,359	659,380	Jun 3	4
9	Romance of Their Own	2,189,453	574,511	Jul 23	4
10	The Big Swindle	2,129,358	776,898	Apr 15	7

	All Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release Date	Weeks
1	Taegukgi (Korea)	11,746,135	3,509,563	Feb 5	13
2	Troy (US)	3,851,000	1,513,408	May 21	8
3	Shrek 2 (US)	3,300,533	1,285,594	Jun 18	5
4	My Little Bride (Korea)	3,149,500	876,600	Apr 2	8
5	Once Upon a Time in High School (Korea)	3,115,767	1,023,601	Jan 16	6
6	Howl's Moving Castle (Japan)	3,014,800	979,800	Dec 24*	8
7	The Day After Tomorrow (US)	3,006,400	959,010	Jun 3	6
8	Ghost House	2,890,000	751,340	Sep 17	6

	(Korea)				
9	A Moment to Remember (Korea)	2,565,078	797,593	Nov 5	4
10	Harry Potter and the Prisoner... (US)	2,532,000	892,900	Jul 16	5

* Includes tickets sold in 2005. Source: Korean Film Council (KOFIC).

Seoul population: 10.32 million
Nationwide population: 48.6 million

Market share: Korean 59.3%, Imports 40.7% (nationwide)
Films released: Korean 74, Imported 194
Total admissions: 135.2 million (= \$738 million)
Number of screens: 1,567 (end of 2004)
Exchange rate (2004): 1151 won/US dollar
Average ticket price: 6287 won (=US\$5.46)
Exports to other countries: US\$58,284,600 (Japan: 69%)
Average budget: 4.2bn won including 1.4bn p&a spend

The Best Selling Films of 2005

	Korean Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release	Weeks
1	King and the Clown	12,302,831*	3,667,849*	Dec 29	7
2	<i>Welcome to Dongmakgol</i>	8,008,622	2,435,088	Aug 4	11
3	Marrying the Mafia 2	5,635,266	1,451,468	Sep 8	7
4	Marathon	5,148,022	1,552,548	Jan 27	9
5	Typhoon	4,094,395*	1,229,971*	Dec 14	6
6	Another Public Enemy	3,911,356	1,167,828	Jan 27	6
7	Sympathy for Lady Vengeance	3,648,808	1,375,194	Jul 29	5
8	Mapado	3,090,467	922,647	Mar 10	8
9	You Are My Sunshine	3,051,134	1,063,480	Sep 23	6
10	All For Love	2,533,103	902,189	Oct 7	5

	All Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release	Weeks
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1	King and the Clown (Korea)	12,302,831*	3,667,849*	Dec 29	7
2	Welcome to Dongmakgol (Korea)	8,008,622	2,435,088	Aug 4	11
3	Marrying the Mafia 2 (Korea)	5,635,266	1,451,468	Sep 8	7
4	Marathon (Korea)	5,148,022	1,552,548	Jan 27	9
5	King Kong (US- NZ)	4,232,430*	1,352,121*	Dec 15	7
6	Typhoon (Korea)	4,094,395*	1,229,971*	Dec 14	6
7	Another Public Enemy (Korea)	3,911,356	1,167,828	Jan 27	6
8	Sympathy for Lady Vengeance (Korea)	3,648,808	1,375,194	Jul 29	5
9	Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (US)	3,615,300*	1,239,817*	Dec 1	6
10	Mr. and Mrs. Smith (US)	3,546,900	1,206,120	Jun 16	7

* Includes tickets sold in 2006. Source: nKino, Korean Film Council (KOFIC).

Seoul population: 10.32 million
Nationwide population: 48.8 million

Market share: Korean 58.7%, Imports 41.3% (nationwide)

Films released: Korean 83, Imported 213

Total admissions: 145.5 million (= \$873 million)

Number of screens: 1,648 (end of 2005)

Exchange rate (2005): 1028 won/US dollar

Average ticket price: 6172 won (=US\$6.00)

Exports to other countries: US\$75,994,580 (Japan: 79%)

Average budget: 4.0bn won including 1.3bn p&a spend

The Best Selling Films of 2006

	Korean Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release	Weeks
1	The Host	13,019,740	3,571,254	Jul 27	9
2	Tazza: The High Rollers	6,847,777	2,091,058	Sep 27	9
3	200 Pound Beauty	6,619,498*	1,934,910*	Dec 14	10

4	My Boss, My Teacher	6,105,431	1,502,821	Jan 19	5
5	<i>Hanbando</i>	3,880,808	1,077,033	Jul 14	5
6	Marrying the Mafia 3	3,464,516	779,445	Sep 21	5
7	Maundy Thursday	3,132,320	980,772	Sep 14	6
8	Forbidden Quest	2,576,022	868,692	Feb 23	5
9	Barefoot, Gibong	2,347,311	524,357	Apr 26	5
10	My Scary Girl	2,286,745	766,007	Apr 6	7

	All Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release	Weeks
1	The Host (Korea)	13,019,740	3,571,254	Jul 27	9
2	Tazza: The High Rollers (Korea)	6,847,777	2,091,058	Sep 27	9
3	200 Pound Beauty (Korea)	6,619,498*	1,934,910*	Dec 14	10
4	My Boss, My Teacher (Korea)	6,105,431	1,502,821	Jan 19	5
5	Mission: Impossible 3 (US)	5,740,789	1,584,202	May 3	7
6	Pirates of the Caribbean 2 (US)	4,628,903	1,525,853	Jul 6	6
7	Night in the Museum (US)	4,612,831*	1,226,404*	Dec 21	6
8	Hanbando (Korea)	3,880,808	1,077,033	Jul 14	5
9	Marrying the Mafia 3 (Korea)	3,464,516	779,445	Sep 21	5
10	The Da Vinci Code (US)	3,339,082	1,144,795	May 18	6

* Includes tickets sold in 2007. Source: Korean Film Council.

(Note that *King and the Clown* was released on December 29, so it is listed on the 2005 page)

Seoul population: 10.35 million
Nationwide population: 49.0 million

Market share: Korean 63.8%, Imports 36.2% (nationwide)
Films released: Korean 108, Imported 237
Total admissions: 153.4 million (= \$954 million)
Number of screens: 1,880 (end of 2006)

Exchange rate (2006): 970 won/US dollar
Average ticket price: 6034 won (=US\$6.22)
Exports to other countries: US\$24,514,728 (Japan: 42%)
Average budget: 4.0bn won including 1.4bn p&a spend

The Best Selling Films of 2007

	Korean Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release	Weeks
1	D-War	8,426,973	2,098,438	Aug 1	8
2	<i>May 18</i>	7,307,993	2,009,666	Jul 25	8
3	Voice of a Murderer	3,143,247	826,287	Feb 1	4
4	Le Grand Chef	3,037,690	913,989	Nov 1	7
5	Miracle on 1st Street	2,750,457	697,439	Feb 14	5
6	Paradise Murdered	2,259,511	647,717	Apr 12	6
7	Going by the Book	2,190,250	672,381	Oct 18	6
8	Love	2,123,815	547,926	Sep 19	4
9	Seven Days	2,096,137	703,325	Nov 14	6
10	Sex is Zero 2	1,925,504*	n/a	Dec 13	4

	All Films	Nationwide	Seoul	Release	Weeks
1	D-War (Korea)	8,426,973	2,098,438	Aug 1	8
2	Transformers (US)	7,440,531	2,300,866	Jun 28	4
3	May 18 (Korea)	7,307,993	2,009,666	Jul 25	8
4	Pirates of the Caribbean 3 (US)	4,966,571	1,481,077	May 23	7
5	Spider-Man 3 (US)	4,935,660	1,444,270	May 1	6
6	Harry Potter 5 (US-UK)	3,475,000	1,134,747	Jul 11	4
7	Die Hard 4 (US)	3,380,800	990,440	Jul 17	4
8	Voice of a Murderer (Korea)	3,143,247	826,287	Feb 1	4
9	Le Grand Chef (Korea)	3,037,690	913,989	Nov 1	7
10	300 (US)	2,929,400	1,076,005	Mar 14	6

* Includes tickets sold in 2008. Source: Korean Film Council.

Seoul population: 10.42 million
Nationwide population: 49.1 million

Market share: Korean 50.8%, Imports 49.2% (nationwide)
Films released: Korean 112, Imported 280

Total admissions: 158.8 million
 Number of screens: 2,058 (end of 2007)
 Exchange rate (2007): 935 won/US dollar
 Average ticket price: 6247won
 Exports to other countries: US\$12,283,339 (Japan: 27%)
 Average budget: 3.7bn won including 1.2bn p&a spend

The Best Selling Films of 2008

	Korean Films	Nationwide	Release	Revenue
1	Scandal Makers	8,280,308*	Dec 3	53.80bn
2	The Good, The Bad, The Weird	6,719,000	Jul 14	43.77bn
3	The Chaser	5,071,619	Feb 14	33.99bn
4	Public Enemy Returns	4,337,983	Jun 19	28.64bn
5	Forever the Moment	4,039,220	Jan 10	26.11bn
6	Frozen Flower	3,772,976*	Dec 30	25.41bn
7	The Divine Weapon	3,751,588	Sep 4	24.32bn
8	Portrait of a Beauty	2,364,482	Nov 13	15.66bn
9	Eye for an Eye	2,074,638	July 31	13.41bn
10	My Wife got Married	1,818,497	Oct 23	12.06bn

	All Films	Nationwide	Release	Revenue
1	Scandal Makers (Korea)	8,280,308*	Dec 3	53.80bn
2	The Good, The Bad, The Weird (Korea)	6,719,000	Jul 14	43.77bn
3	The Chaser (Korea)	5,071,619	Feb 14	33.99bn
4	Kung Fu Panda (US)	4,675,712	Jun 5	30.00bn
5	Mamma Mia (US)	4,556,416	Sep 4	29.36bn
6	Public Enemy Returns (Korea)	4,337,983	Jun 19	28.64bn
7	Iron Man (US)	4,315,573	Apr 30	27.80bn
8	Indiana Jones 4 (US)	4,135,807	May 22	26.69bn
9	The Mummy 3 (US)	4,112,188	Jul 31	26.22bn
10	Forever the Moment (Korea)	4,039,220	Jan 10	26.11bn

* Includes tickets sold in 2009. Source: Korean Film Council.

Seoul population: 10.42 million
 Nationwide population: 49.1 million

Market share: Korean 42.1%, Imports 57.9% (nationwide)

Films released: Korean 108, Imported 271
Total admissions: 150.8 million
Number of screens: 2,081 (end of 2008)
Exchange rate (2008): 1103 won/US dollar
Average ticket price: 6494won
Exports to other countries: US\$20,541,212 (Japan: 43%)
Average budget: 3.1bn won including 0.9bn p&a spend

The source: www.koreanfilm.org

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