



Dirt, Noise, and Naughtiness

Cinema and the Working Class During Korea's Silent Film Era

Because mainstream cinema is largely driven by major industries as opposed to individuals, the experience of film has often been tied to Marxist notions of production and hegemony. During the Korean silent film era, a time of rapid modernization, social hierarchies were arguably much more complex than they are today, due in part to rapid industrialization, the growing presence of the Japanese colonizers, and the traditional class distinctions Koreans continued to uphold. As part of an extensive and stringent cultural policy, the Japanese government-general controlled the selection of movies, their content, and the conditions under which they were shown; and yet the majority of the movies showed that Europe and the US comprised modern, “high” cultures worthy of emulation. With reference to the applicability of Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony in the context of the Korean silent film era, it is important, therefore, to consider the various notions of hierarchy and cultural supremacy. Although this study considers the applicability of Gramsci’s concept in this particular context, its primary aim—and as such another step towards a better understanding of the positions of power in Korea under colonial rule—is to understand how the Korean working-class experience of cinema differed from that of other classes.

KEYWORDS: Korea—silent film—working class—Gramsci—power—
cultural hegemony—Japanese cultural policy—public behavior—*pyŏnſa*

BEFORE going to watch a movie at my local cinema, I usually go online to check what is on and at what time. If I then find there is nothing I want to see for what is essentially the equivalent of half the price of a new DVD, I may decide to watch one of the movies I have ripped or downloaded. Because wireless Internet is readily accessible to me, free of charge, I could avoid paying for my entertainment, and limit my expenditure to the hardware I use. I suppose that the freedom with which I am able to select and consume movies might make me appear an empowered consumer as it suggests that I am unbound by what is locally on offer and can choose independently from a wide, international selection. But the freedom here is deceptive. It is ironically the marketing power of mainstream entertainment media companies that affects what audiovisual entertainment one can easily find information on and download from online digital media stores or “exchange” websites. Fiske argues that it is us, the people, who create popular culture and are therefore responsible for its protection (FISKE 1989, 21–22), but from a consumer’s point of view, it still seems that we are merely empowered to freely exchange those products we are led to believe are worth our bandwidth, while few of us have the time or the inclination to explore, even a little, the entire spectrum of what is on offer. What is more, free hosting sites may be under increasing pressure to remove materials that breach copyright law, but the relative ease with which file sharing sites operate beckons the question whether the companies affected are not regarding the downloads as unavoidable appetizers, while reducing the risk this poses to the investment by creating various spin-off products.

The idea that popular culture is ultimately determined by a specific segment of society, or even a corporate structure, is an intriguing thought, and is made no less likely amid today’s widespread illegal, albeit licit, piracy and fast exchange of digitalized entertainment media. Even so, I often question the sustainability of Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony. The concept of a society that is shaped around a base that provides the economic foundation of society, and a governing superstructure of the institutions that support the system’s political construct can still be applied today. However, it was devised to apply to an early industrial state that relies heavily on domestic production and within which all agents (or stakeholders) share the same cultural background (GRAMSCI 1998). Because Gramsci formulated his ideas in the early 1930s, he was unable to address the potential reinforcing or blurring effect of capitalism and globalization on the distinction

between the two structures (CAMERON AND STEIN 2000, 22, 24), and could not have imagined that some eighty years later billionaires and international movie stars, whom one might regard as human icons of the two forces, are more than props at events restricted to the ruling class. The latter are associated with the superstructure first and foremost, but perhaps contrary to what one would expect, they often closely follow developments in mainstream fashion, popular music, and modern technology (STOREY 1998a, 345). In fact, whereas the status of the ruling class may still be explained through the often inherited control of the means of production, it is no longer supported by an exclusive lifestyle or understanding thereof. Global enterprises such as Hollywood's major studios promote ideas on social behavior and lifestyles across national borders to an imagined global community; changes in the composition of the economic base and political superstructure do not affect the theory's core, since those associated with the ruling class can still choose to endorse, adjust, or ban products. Scholars such as Stuart Hall and Louis Althusser (HALL 1986, 39-40; DOCKER 1994, 60-61; see also GRAMSCI 1992, 136-37) have pointed out that because particular ideas and concepts are unlikely to remain the exclusive property of any particular class, it is important for the superstructure to actively maintain control of its hegemony. It remains unclear, however, to what extent a superstructure is truly conscious of how it manipulates cultural production, and, as often in the case of Marxist or postcolonial studies, precisely what constitutes the superstructure and the base in any given socio-economic order (WILLIAMS 1998, 413).

Popular culture largely operates on the basis of availability, affordability, and modernity. Most consumers choose not to explore whatever else is out there, opting instead for what is readily accessible and affordable, while appearing both enjoyable and appropriate. The promotion of those products as novelties constitutes an important factor in this; having the most up-to-date information and being in touch with the latest in terms of culture or technology provides the consumer with a sense of achievement and privilege. This is arguably because privileged knowledge is ultimately empowering, but Foucault would have us consider how privileged this kind of knowledge truly is (FOUCAULT 1980, 98). If we consider the above traits, then popular culture is not likely to yield a sense of real empowerment unless it entails truly exclusive information, or information to which access is notably limited. One could, of course, raise the level of popular culture and create one's own "high" culture, as Hall and Althusser have foreseen, but the chances of those efforts eventually culminating in an overturn of the entire social order are slim. And whether they are true entrepreneurs or wary post-modern intellectuals, those who try to reject common notions of sociocultural values may end up affirming the deceptive process of pseudo-individualism (ADORNO 1998, 203-204).

Cinema is included in the category of what is referred to as "popular culture." Yet most people participate in this particular realm of popular culture as consumers, rather than producers. The dominant influence of the Western movie industry lends some credibility to the possibility of there being an ideological superstructure that through general consent determines or at least is positively distinguished from

the economically productive base (GRAMSCI 1998; WILLIAMS 1998, 408), however many directors we count among our friends, or indie features we may choose to watch. But film industries may not be as dominant as leftist film critics often suggest. Even the one I conveniently generalize here as Hollywood must, in spite of its market size, follow the criteria its audiences have come to accept. Although the superstructure determines what is produced or banned, whether it is a corporate body, a class, or some other form of social construct, movie audiences ultimately decide whether products are successful. The number of movies that Hollywood brings out that still result in serious financial loss shows the limits of its alleged cultural dominance (STOREY 1998b, 112). The primary consumers of popular culture, including the working class, must be followed as much as led, because it is they who ultimately provide the economic foundation critical to the survival of the superstructure itself. While it may be possible to nurture a market for specific products, all too rapid changes constitute a risk, and any backlash is likely to end in losses beyond those invested. Some degree of negotiation therefore occurs, and while Hollywood's marketing companies try to lure audiences into adopting their ideas, a considerable amount of market research is conducted to establish whether the consumers are ready to do so.

Discussing the dynamics of power in the realm of cinema today is thus complex, and may be increasingly so by virtue of the great advancements in technology. If one were to go back to Korea in the early days of cinema, on the other hand, it is likely that the dynamics would shift considerably, primarily in favor of the ruling class. After all, film technology was then in the hands of a much smaller privileged minority of foreign and Japanese entrepreneurs; film viewing only took place in an environment that could be controlled by that minority, and so it was this small group who decided what was shown, to whom, and when. It is within this context that a study on the emergence of a novel entertainment medium during a period that saw the opening up of the national borders to foreign people and products and, subsequently, the first steps towards modernization, may yield important perspectives on the realm of market forces and the viability—or opposition to it—of a cultural hegemony at the time. It will remain difficult nonetheless to determine what exactly constituted the base, and whether the superstructure was either primarily Japanese, or also significantly Western or Korean, or a combination thereof.¹ Studying the hegemony is further complicated by the fact that during the first decades of the twentieth century the working class had virtually no voice. It was not able to express its opinions publicly or prompt those in a position to effect change to take note.²

A definition of the Korean working class around the early twentieth century is not easily reached. Sorensen points out that around the turn of the century, when a number of terms were used to denote the common folk, concepts of class were not based on material wealth, but, rather, on the traditional Confucian concept known as “scholar, farmer, craftsman, and merchant” (*sa-nong-kong-sang* 士農工商) (SORENSEN 1999, 294–95, 304). From the mid 1920s, however, the introduction of Marxist thought led Korean intellectuals to rethink the various notions of class that they held, along either economic or ethnic lines. In the early 1930s, when

Soviet directives swayed many into adopting the notion of class being universal, another novel political ideology, fascism, brought others to hold onto the importance of ethnicity (LEE Jin-kyung 2006, 92–93). The various debates will have certainly been fueled by the rapidly-changing social conditions in Korea. Throughout the 1920s, the market-based success of Koreans changed the traditional formula of class distinctions. Some of the larger store managers, wholesale traders, administrators, and entrepreneurs that now generally made up the middle class were able to compete with small- and medium-size Japanese businesses and have a lifestyle that, akin to the large Korean landowners, involved sending their children overseas for study and owning more than one house. They—along with the landowners—formed an upper-middle class, as opposed to a lower-middle class, who in some cases would have still struggled to make a living. The industrialization of Korea was certainly in full swing by this time, but the majority of the population remained active as farmers, even in the 1930s. Soon-Won Park refers to two official surveys from 1928 and 1930, according to which at least 87.6 percent of the population was still engaged in farming. Urban workers numbered some 1.16 million, more than 40 percent of whom were free day laborers. A little over a quarter of the urban workers, some 319,000, were employed as housemaids and houseboys, while the remainder, some 63,000, worked in factories and mines (PARK 1999, 133). Others making a living as low-level workers in and around the cities would have included those running bistros or shops that offered repairs or a limited range of basic necessities, and craftsmen, although it is likely that there were many farmers among this group.

Distinguishing classes is, of course, always a crude endeavor, especially since even among those engaged in a particular field of production there can be such vast differences in wealth and social position (PARK 1999, 134). It is safer to assume that whereas in Korea all but a few saw a movie at some point during the silent film era, while only those employed in and around the cities saw movies regularly. City life increasingly required a basic degree of literacy, which implies that at least in theory those considered to belong to the urban working class were better placed to participate in and judge the culture of the superstructure than, say, low-level farmers. However trivial it may seem, it is important to distinguish between those who would regularly buy premium tickets, and those who were unlikely to pay for the extra luxury and status, even if their income occasionally allowed for it. For the working class the notion of being participants in this realm of popular culture would have been contentious, because in spite of their increasing but limited literacy, they were unable to influence the cinematic entertainment available to them, and their experience of cinema was principally a passive one. From a Gramscian point of view, their role in entertainment thus allows easy application of the notion of a cultural hegemony. Yet few materials document working class experiences, so it is difficult to understand how the majority of the urban population was affected by the phenomenon of cinema and how their experiences differed from that of the ruling class. However, based on what evidence there is, some conclusions can be drawn on what characterized the working class experience of Korea's silent film era,

which began around 1900 and ended in the mid 1930s. The medium of cinema itself sometimes reveals ideas and practices that aid our understanding of the impact it may have had, but because the Japanese government-general exercised strict censorship, and because only a handful of movies from the colonial period have survived, this analysis will rely primarily on secondary data such as newspaper reports and columns, ticket prices, and police records.

After they “annexed” Korea in 1910, for thirty-five years the Japanese government-general exercised strict control over most aspects of public life there, and in particular where its new subjects could disseminate Korean patriotic ideas and sentiments to a larger audience. The administration’s cultural policy was extensive, and it strictly monitored the conditions and activities of theaters and cinemas. In spite of the restrictions, however, Korean intellectuals published many critical commentaries on new cultural products and ideological concepts in newspapers and magazines. They reveal that all kinds of novelties were revolutionizing people’s lives through foreign—mostly Western—ideas and concepts they drew on, despite the fact that traditional social morals and standards continued to remain firmly in place for the majority of the population. Since it was in the interest of the administration to support the growing number of Japanese enterprises in Korea’s fast-growing consumer economy, it was imperative to pay attention to public demand. Contrary to today, when sales of media for personal use or other spin-off products can make up for disappointing ticket sales in Korea, during the silent film era few such products existed and revenue was derived almost entirely from ticket sales.³ In spite of the unquestionable hegemony, therefore, audiences in those days had the ability *a priori* to influence the success of theaters and films more directly. Yet if one went back to the early beginnings of cinema, one would find that moving pictures were not yet shown to sell cinema tickets, but that the experience was, in fact, free of charge.

A NEW PHENOMENON

Around the turn of the twentieth century, when moving picture technology first appeared in Korea, Seoul was a far cry from the global metropolis it is today. It was a fairly rural, small walled-in city with a population of approximately two hundred thousand Koreans and a few thousand foreigners (KIM Yong-Woong 1999, 37). Public facilities were basic, and there was only a simple network of roads and drainage systems. The ruling elite had left the structure of the city relatively unchanged for centuries in the hope of maintaining “a structure of space that preserved their cultural pre-eminence in the city” (GELÉZEAU 1997, 74), but in 1886 King Kojong (1863–1907) broke with tradition and ordered a series of projects to increase the number of public roads and improve the infrastructure. Two years later the American entrepreneurs Henry Collbran and Harry Rice Bostwick were invited to join the royal household in a venture enterprise called the Hansŏng Electric Company (Hansŏng

chŏn'gi hoesa). It was commissioned to set up, among other things, a structure of power lines, water pipes, and tramlines (Yi T'aejin 2004, 97, 103–104, 111).⁴

Japan had set its mind on expanding its influence in the region, and after 1876, when it forced Korea to sign the Kanhwa Treaty, an increasing number of Japanese migrated to the peninsula. Around the turn of the century those settling in Seoul accounted for some 20 percent of the total number of Japanese immigrants.⁵ At the end of 1904 that number stood at approximately 5,000, but following Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), it began to grow rapidly, to 46,067 (18.73 percent of the city's population) in 1910, and 65,617 (26.22 percent) in 1920 (Yŏ 1999, 12, 14).⁶ When the Japanese finally annexed Korea in 1910, they renamed Seoul the “Capital City” (Jp. Keijō; Kn. Kyŏngsŏng). They removed its outer walls and built new roads for various administrative and military purposes (GELÉZEAU 1997, 74). Most of the Japanese expatriates settled just north of Namsan, close to the central railway station they arrived at, as well as in the neighboring areas of Myŏngch'ijŏng (today's Myŏngdong) and Ponjŏng (today's Ch'ungmuro). Since these areas comprised the southern part of the original walled-in city, they were known as the “southern town” (*namch'on*), whereas the shopping and nightlife areas in the more northern parts of Seoul that catered primarily to Koreans, including Chongno and the southern part of Insadong, were nicknamed the “northern town” (*pukch'on*).

It is not certain exactly when the first moving picture was shown in Korea,⁷ but there is a consensus that it was some time between 1897 and 1900 (CHO Hŭimun 1992, 16–17; CH'ŎE Kyujin 2008, 199). On 1 January 1929, the author and director Shim Hun wrote in the *Chosŏn ilbo* (Korea Daily) that the first moving images had already come to Korea in 1897. Ichikawa Sai (ICHIKAWA 1941, 99–100) later noted that in 1897 movies had been shown at a small pinewood shed called Ponjŏngjwa (*chwa/jwa* [site]) in the southern part of Ponjŏng called Nihyŏn 泥岷. Sai's claim was confirmed by the former public relations manager of the Tansŏngsa theater, Yi Kuyŏng, who is reported as saying that he heard Japanese people discuss watching movies at Ponjŏngjwa that year (KIM Mihyŏn 2006, 24; YI Chinwŏn 2007, 19). According to Kim Chŏngghyŏk, it was also in 1897 that an American by the name of Esterhaus⁸ showed a single film from the French Pathé Company inside a Chinese warehouse in Namdaemun borrowed for the occasion, but most scholars believe that this took place later, in 1898 (KIM Chŏngghyŏk 1990, 421; CHO Hŭimun 1992, 18–19, 211; YI Yŏnggil 2004, 39; YI Chinwŏn 2007, 19).

Ch'oe Kyujin argues that the first person to see moving pictures in Korea said that it was the work of ghosts (CH'ŎE Kyujin 2008, 199),⁹ but those early trepidations will have soon subsided. As the title of a 1901 article in the *Hwangsŏng shinmun* (“Capital Daily”; 14 September 1901, 2) suggests—“Recorded life better than real action” (寫活勝於生人活動)—the predominant emotion elicited by the new medium will have been excitement rather than fear. Seeing movies around this time was a very exclusive affair, and the privileged few cannot have all been seriously concerned with the medium representing an unwelcome gateway to the spirit world, although some outside the privileged circle will have undoubtedly imagined it, per-

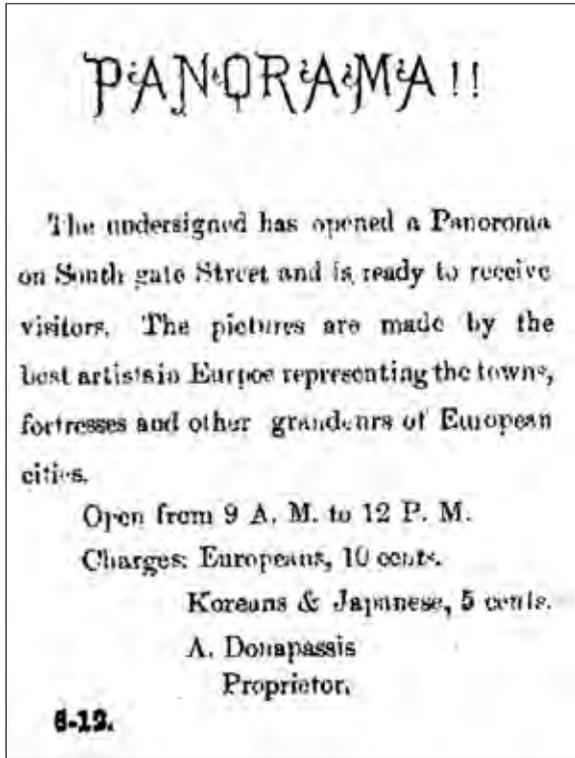


FIGURE 1. Advertisement for “Panorama.” *The Independent*, 13 May 1897, 7.

haps fondly. It is likely, as Hyangjin Lee suggests (LEE 2000, 18), that an important reason for foreign diplomats, missionaries, and companies to organize showings of moving pictures was to demonstrate their prosperity. The audience would have usually been made up of people closely associated to the owner of the medium, and would likely have excluded the working class. The short length of the moving pictures and the fallibility of the technology meant that most of those early showings took place in a controlled environment, such as hotel lounges or warehouses.

The technology needed was expensive and not easily obtainable. Until film showings became common, for some time other forms of entertainment appeared that entailed forms of virtual tourism. One example is the “Panorama” exhibition, which was held alongside the main Namdaemun Road from at least 13 May to 15 June 1897 (*The Independent* 13 May 1897, 4; 15 June 1897, 4). It comprised a series of panorama-like photographs of European cities arranged on the inside of a cylindrical wall surrounding the spectator. The entrance fee being as little as five “cents” (*chŏn*), it is likely that it attracted people of all backgrounds.

Narrated presentations of slides were a similar but more common form of entertainment. Between December 1899 and October 1901 a few ads for public slide shows appeared in the *Hwangŏng shinmun* (22 December 1899, 2; 5 December 1900, 2; 25 October 1901, 2). The advantage of the medium was that it enabled

presenters to provide hours of entertainment with relatively few slides and that it was a relatively affordable technology, unlike film.¹⁰

From around 1900, the showing of moving pictures became a fairly common phenomenon (*Hwangŏng shinmun* 14 September 1901, 2; CHO Hŏimun 1992, 37). The first permanent, public venue for moving picture viewing was the warehouse of the Hansŏng Electric Company next to the Eastern Gate (Tongdaemun), which from around 1905 became known as the Tongdaemun Moving Pictures Venue (Tongdaemun hwaldong sajinso) (KIM T'aesu 2005, 157; KIM Mihyŏn 2006, 35).¹¹ According to a report in the *Hwangŏng shinmun* (10 July 1903, 2) it was there, in June 1903, on a screen made of calico, that movies were shown to the general public for the first time (CHO Hŏimun 1992, 40). It is said that the directors of the railroad company had—in true cultural hegemonic fashion—initially arranged film showings to encourage their workers (KIM Mihyŏn 2006, 20), but that when they began to attract an increasing number of people, they decided to charge entrance fees and allow people to exchange their tram tickets for movie tickets at no extra charge. They also signed an agreement with businesses such as the Yŏngmi Tobacco Company (Yŏngmi Yŏnch'o Hoesa), which allowed the latter to run a similar promotion scheme and advertise: in exchange for an empty pack of its cigarette brand, one could enter the venue free of charge (*Maeil shinbo* [Daily Report] 20 November 1913, 2).¹²

The popularity of the film showings was enormous, apparently drawing audiences of over one thousand daily (LEE 2000, 18). According to an ad in the *Hwangŏng shinmun* of 23 June 1903 (3), the Hansŏng Electricity Company showed movies daily, from 8 PM to 10 PM, except for Sundays and days of heavy rain. Tickets cost ten *chŏn* and twenty *chŏn* for ordinary and premium seats respectively, and every week new Korean and foreign movies were shown (KIM T'aesu 2005, 155). There were, of course, few laborers who would readily forsake, let alone more than once, the equivalent of approximately one-fifth of a sack of rice for a movie ticket,¹³ but an anonymous report in *The Korean Review* (1903, vol. 3, 268) claimed the ticket price was set low enough to allow Koreans of all trades to enter:

[...] the admissions fee has been set at the modest sum of ten cents Korean (about three cents in US currency), so that all, even the poorest, might enjoy the show.¹⁴

In continuing with an anecdote on the competition between the Hansŏng Electricity Company and the Seoul Electric Company, the account indeed suggests that rather than movie tickets, selling tram tickets was the primary objective (1903, vol. 3, 268). Even if the cost of a basic ticket was within reason, it is still notable that the early theaters attracted what was equal to half a percent of the city population for a selection of shorts that each lasted no more than two minutes (KIM T'aesu 2005, 156).

Other venues for moving-picture viewing included the Japanese-run Moving Pictures House (Hwaldong sajinok 活動寫真屋), which was established in Sadong, in what would today be the southern part of Insadong at Chongno 2-ga, around

1904 (CHO Hūmun 1992, 68). Another was a makeshift theater in the area just north of today's Ŭljiro ipku, where from around December 1904 films were shown by the then newly-established Japanese Moving Picture Society (Ilbon hwaldong sajinhoe) (Yi Yongnam 2001, 52). In 1907 and 1908 at least two other temporary theaters were opened, the Yōnhūngsa 演興社 and Changansa 長安社 respectively (Yi Yongnam 2001, 54). The former was set up inside a building called Changyunjik in Sadong, the current location of the Chongno District Office, while the Changansa was established on the main shopping street of what was then known as Changdae-jangdong, which today forms part of the area of Tonūidong in Chongno district (Yi Yongnam 2001, 64, 66).¹⁵ It is reported that the latter began to show movies from around 1912 and that Koreans would occupy the ground floor, and Japanese the first floor (CHO Hūmun 1992, 103; Yi Yōnggil 2004, 49).¹⁶ Temporary screenings included those by the Patriotic Wives Society (Aeguk puin hoe) in June 1908 at the Ministry of Domestic Affairs to show the members' great admiration for the Korean Crown Prince during his study in Japan (*Hwangšōng shinmun*, 24 June 1908, 2), and those by the Japanese Patriotic Wives Society (Ilbon aeguk puin hoe) in praise of Itō Hirobumi at the Kyōngsōng (Capital) Hotel on 14 December 1909 (*Hwangšōng shinmun*, 16 December 1909, 2). Whereas these events were intended to provide emotional support, another organized by members of the British church in downtown Chōngdong was intended to add to the attractiveness of the church's Easter celebrations (see *Taehan minbo*, 15 March 1910, 2; CHO Hūmun 1992, 79). With the exception of those run by churches, few of these special screenings will have been open to the working class, even at the cost of a ticket.

Seeing as temporary screenings were becoming increasingly common, we may assume that projectors were becoming more readily available for purchase or hire. Killick points out that the increase in commerce spawned the emergence of private theaters (KILLICK 1998, 57), and it is likely that this underpinned the hiring of projection equipment for private use. Because the sound and image quality offered at the major theaters were superior, this will, however, have begun curbing the popularity of temporary screenings several years after they became a possibility. Despite the failure of some businesses, the cinema industry continued to grow fast. In 1922 the cinemas in Seoul showed a total of 2,566 movies to 961,532 spectators. Considering that at this time the population of Seoul was around 260,000, the figure implies that on average people saw approximately four movies per year (YOO 2003, 364), including, I suspect, commoners, despite their limited disposable income. The number of cinemas grew fast and by 1926 there would be ten cinemas in Kyōnggi province, and fifty in the entire country.¹⁷ As a result, competition between theaters increased (PAE 2005, 283–84; KIM DONG HOON 2009, 18–19), but only really in Seoul. The capital was by far the largest and most densely populated city; audiences elsewhere tended to be considerably smaller. In 1927, for example, when the ten cinemas in Seoul and Inch'ōn were able to sell approximately half a million tickets over a period of six months, the six cinemas in South Ch'ungch'ōng together were only able to sell some 17,500 tickets over the same period, while Kangwōn province by this time still had no cinemas at all (CHO

Hüimun 1992, 117). The number of cinemas in Seoul and the rest of the country continued to grow until the mid 1930s, during which time ten cinemas were built in Pusan and seven in South Hamgyöng province (Yi Yongnam 2001, 99).

SEOUL'S MAJOR CINEMAS

Andrei LANKOV claims that the first permanent theaters for film viewing did not emerge until late in the second decade of the twentieth century (2007, 172), but it seems increasingly likely that they were by then already in full swing, the first having been established in the early twentieth century. One of the early Western-style cinemas is said to have been set up and run by the Frenchman J. Martin (Korean name: Majön 馬田) in Shinmun, today's Södaemun district, in April 1906 (CHO Hüimun 1992, 95; YÖ 1999, 7). According to an advertisement in the *Hwangšöng shinmun* of 19 April 1906, tickets cost between fifteen and thirty *chön*.¹⁸ Screenings ran every night from 8 PM to 9 PM, and were followed by *p'ansori* (sung epic dramas), dance, and child acrobatics (CHO Hüimun 1992, 96). The very first permanent theater—that also showed movies from 1903¹⁹—was the Hyömnyulsa 協律社. Built in 1902 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of King Kojong's accession to the throne (1863), it was located in Yajuhyön, the present location of the Saemunan church on Shinmunno in Södaemun district (Yi Yongnam 2001, 47).²⁰ It was a round, two-story brick building, reportedly modeled on Rome's Colosseum (KILLICK 1998, 56), with windows all around and a conical-shaped top. It was fairly large, with the number of seats ranging somewhere between five and six hundred.²¹ There were three separate seating floors, which are likely to have corresponded with three different ticket prices (CHO Hüimun 1992, 89). On 16 July 1903, the Hyömnyulsa briefly closed down following an electric explosion, but it appears to have reopened several months later (*The Korean Review* 1903, vol. 3, 360). The lack of safety measures did not, however, constitute its biggest threat. Conservatives complained that it was improper for high officials to be seen at a public venue like this in the company of young women entertainers (*kisaeng*) and they argued that the venue had a bad influence on the youth. Following a successful petition to the king on 17 April 1906 the palace ordered the theater to discontinue its operations (Yi Kwangguk 1981, 105; KILLICK 1998, 57, 106; SÖ and Yi 2000, 30–31; and Yi Yongnam 2001, 50). The management of the theater was subsequently taken over by Yi Injik, Pak Chöngdong, and Kim Sangch'ön, who renovated the building and on 26 July 1908 reopened it under a new name, Wön'gaksa 圓覺社 (CHO Hüimun 1992, 98; Yi Yongnam 2001, 33).

On 28 May 1907, three entrepreneurs, Yi Sangp'il, Kwak Hansöng, and Kwak Hanyöng, took over management of the Tongdaemun Moving Pictures Venue and renamed it Kwangmudae (光武臺; *dae* means "stage") to commemorate the founding of the Kwangmu Empire by King Kojong in 1897. Since it was a plain, single-story stone shed with plated roofing (PAE 2005, 298), it appears to have used an existing building (PAE 2005, 302–13). In September 1908, however, the new directors passed on the management to Pak Süngp'il 朴承弼, who ran the the-



FIGURE 2. A picture of the Taejōnggwan appeared in the *Maeil shinbo* on 8 November 1912, 4.

ater for two decades until 1928, when it was taken over by Cho Pyōnghwan (PAE 2005, 313).²² Under Pak’s management the theater’s primary repertoire came to consist of moving pictures as well as traditional music and drama, such as folksongs, *p’ansori*, and *kayagŭm sanjo* (solo pieces on the Korean twelve-stringed zither; Yi Yongnam 2001, 42, 54–55; PAE 2005, 297). During the first few years movies seem to have been the main attraction since they made up the entire evening program (Sŏ and Yi 2000, 31), but after several years, when the screenings became less popular, the theater increased its offer of traditional drama (KIM Mihyŏn 2006, 25). An illustration on the cover of a booklet with refined traditional folksongs (*chapka*) from 1915, *Mussang shin’gu chapka* (Supreme old and new songs), represents the inside of the theater. Shown is a large open stage with two loge-like balustrades on the left side. On the second floor one can see gentlemen in Western costumes accompanied by professional entertainment girls, presumably occupying first-class seats, and on the ground floor gentlemen are seated on benches, which presumably were second-class seats, with the working class holding third-class tickets standing behind them (PAE 2005, 302).

The Taejōnggwan 大正館 was one of the first cinemas to focus entirely on movies. It was set up in 1910 in Aengjōngjōng 櫻井町 by the Japanese entrepreneur

Mitta Kōichi 新田耕市 (OKA 1989–1990, 478). The two-storey building had a total surface of around 670m² and boasted a capacity of twelve hundred seats. Some fifty staff members helped to run the many sections of the large complex, which included a tearoom, restaurant, shop, smoking room, and bathrooms (OKA 1989–1990, 478–79; Yŏ 1999, 10). As it focused on Japanese audiences it featured mainly movies by Japanese film companies such as the Nikkatsu Film Company 日活映画社 (LEE 2000, 21; Yi Yongnam 2001, 87). Whereas one picture of the Hyŏmnyulsa from around 1902 had proudly revealed a large Korean flag on the inside (PAE 2005, 281), a picture of the Taejŏnggwan from 1915 showed it had come to look like a bastion of Japanese imperialism, with many Japanese flags on top of the gate, and one particularly large flag on top of the building (OKA 1989–1990, 479).

The Seoul Supreme Entertainment Theater (Kyŏngsŏng kodŭng yŏnyegwan 京城高等演藝館) was another cinema that focused entirely on showing movies and was the first to have its own regular film narrators, *pyŏnna*, to introduce movies and provide live commentary (OKA 1989–1990, 508; CHO Hŭimun 1997, 192). The fact that it was aimed at Korean audiences despite being run by a Japanese is evidence of the growing Japanese interest in the Korean market (CHO Hŭimun 1992, 108). New movies were imported weekly from the French Pathé company, with the entire program changing every other week (CHO Hŭimun 1992, 104, 106; Yi Chinwŏn 2007, 20). The Western-style two-storey wooden building was built in Hwanggŭmjŏng ipku, today's Ŭljiro ipku,²³ in 1910 and accommodated up to six hundred people.²⁴ It is said to have been beautifully decorated and to have had modern facilities, with wooden benches on the ground floor, and tatami (straw flooring) mats on the second floor (CHO Hŭimun 1992, 106; Yi Yongnam 2001, 72–73; KIM Mihyŏn 2006, 27). The decor and facilities came at a premium, but even though it was expensive, with ticket prices set at one, three, or five *wŏn* (CHO Hŭimun 1992, 105), the theater became very popular. The success of the cinema even led to King Kojong inviting the staff to screen a movie at his palace (Yi Yongnam 2001, 73). When the theater was partly destroyed during road extension works in July 1912, the occasion was used to redo the entire building. It was reopened some time at the end of 1913 and renamed Taejŏnggwan 2.²⁵ Although it is claimed that its focus shifted to Japanese audiences from then on (Yŏ 1999, 17, note 51), a surviving program leaflet of the cinema, which I assume is from 1915, is written entirely in Korean, which suggests that at least for some time Koreans continued to visit the theater (SEOUL MUSEUM OF HISTORY 2003, 44).²⁶

Umigwan 優美館 was set up at 89 Kwanch'öldong, along Chongno 2-ga in Chongno district in December 1912. It was a very large, two-storey brick building with seats for up to one thousand people. Like the Seoul Supreme Entertainment Theater, it focused on Korean customers even though it was set up by a Japanese businessman, Hayashida Kinjiro 林田金次郎 (CHO Hŭimun 1992, 108; Yi Yongnam 2001, 84). The theater was very popular and there was often a line of people in front of the ticket office hours before the start of the program (CHO Hŭimun 1997, 196, note 21).²⁷ Koreans were rather critical of the limited repertoire of movies shown here, but they continued to come anyway because it employed popu-

lar movie narrators such as Sŏ Sangho, Kim Tŏkkyŏng, and Yi Pyŏngjo (CHO Hŭimun 1992, 110). These particular narrators also worked for another cinema, Tansŏngsa 團成社, which is among the most noted of Seoul's old cinemas, in part because it is still operating in Chongno district's Suŏndong today. According to Killick, Tansŏngsa's exterior was based on Western models and its interior on Japanese models, with tatami mats covering the floor of the more expensive seating areas (KILLICK 1998, 92).²⁸ The theater specialized in traditional plays and charity shows, and began showing movies from 1907 (CHŎNG 1989, 19). It catered to both Korean and Japanese audiences and always tried to show the most popular movies, including Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* in 1913 and Francis Ford's *The Broken Coin* in 1915 (KIM Mihyŏn 2006, 26–27).

On 1 January 1913 (*Maeil shinbo* 1 January 1913, 16) another cinema aimed primarily at Koreans²⁹ opened on the grounds of the Hwanggŭm Recreation Park 黃金遊園 complex just north of Taejŏnggwan, along the main road of Hwanggŭmjŏng 4-chŏngmok, today's Ŭljiro 4-ga. Much like an outside shopping mall, there were a number of shops and restaurants on the premises, with a large theater called Hwanggŭm yŏnyegwan 黃金演藝館 situated left of the main entrance (OKA 1989–1990, 474). The Hwanggŭmgwan, as the theater soon became known, was a large, two-storey concrete building with a very large stage and up to one thousand seats. It was used to premiere movies by the Japanese Nikkatsu Film Company and along with Umigwan and Tansŏngsa was among the first to have regular movie narrators (OKA 1989–1990, 474). Located a few hundred meters north from here was the Korea Theater (Chosŏn kŭkchang, 朝鮮劇場), which in 1922 was opened on the left side of the main road leading into Insadong.³⁰ It was equal to the Hwanggŭmgwan in capacity and offered bench seats on the ground floor for thirty *chŏn*, or fauteuil seats on the second floor for one *wŏn* (KIM Mihyŏn 2006, 27; KIM T'aesu 2005, 168). According to a report in the *Maeil shinbo* of 2 October 1922, 3,³¹

[...it is] a three-storey building with an elevator on the top floor that takes you up and down, and there is a restaurant and an entertainment room and one can enjoy having a look inside as much as one wants without entering. There is also a very large stage that even has electric spotlights and as far as the chairs are concerned, they have armrests, and because there are balustrades on the left and right one can always walk down even when there is no attendant. Although there is no division between men and women, they have apparently made it very comfortable.

Even though ads in the *Maeil shinbo* in the early part of the second decade of the twentieth century were aimed at both Koreans and Japanese, most theaters catered to either a Japanese or Korean audience (YŎ 1999, 13–14). When in August 1913 Umigwan listed the names of movie narrators on its advertisements, it effectively differentiated the intended audiences (YŎ 1999, 18). Kim Dong Hoon suggests that the segregation through film narration was permanent (KIM DONG HOON 2009, 21, note 5), but by the late 1920s the distinction began to blur when middle-class Koreans began to visit cinemas aimed primarily at Japanese audiences. Since

the number of Japanese films grew, many preferred viewing Japanese films with Japanese narration and some even ridiculed the viewing of Japanese movies with Korean narration. But a number of theaters actively discouraged Koreans from entering by giving them bad seats or none at all (YŎ 1999, 19–20; KIM T'aesu 2005, 169–70). In a 1936 Japanese tourist guide a comparison of various cinemas can be found, including Tansŏngsa, which it describes as a modern theater specializing in foreign films “with high-class visitors from all corners of Korea” and Korean narration (YANO 1989–1990, 185). Few Japanese would have visited cinemas aimed at Koreans other than the major ones, as apart from not providing Japanese commentary they would have had a lower standard of comfort and hygiene. Similarly, albeit for different reasons, the Korean working class would never have visited a theater catering primarily to a Japanese audience.

Although cinema had become a significant industry by the middle of the second decade of the twentieth century, commoners could only express their likes and dislikes by way of their decision whether or not to purchase a ticket. Since the size of the urban working class was growing fast, the impact it could potentially have on commercial success was growing, but there was no likelihood of it actively wielding its consumer power over the programming. Some middle-class Koreans writing for the printed media on issues regarding cinema may have taken it upon themselves to voice the workers' concerns, but for most commoners cinema remained a form of passive entertainment and a source of information, as well as, to some extent, a way of learning about the new notions of culture and sophistication that the middle classes were trying to emulate.

Despite the fast-growing interest in cinema among Koreans in general, printed media reports and commentaries on moving pictures remained fairly scarce for some time. The strict prepublication censorship that the Japanese installed shortly after the annexation meant the discontinuation of all but a few Korean periodicals. Those that were sustained were privately run and usually associated with a religion. Few periodicals reported on developments in popular culture unless they questioned the religious order or threatened public morality. But newspaper advertisements continued to grow in number. Soon after they appeared around 1910 they began to permanently occupy the bottom section of the front page. The *Maeil shinbo* placed the first such advertisement on 30 August 1910, and between then and December 1923 it carried ads for approximately 2,570 foreign movies (KIM Mihyŏn 2006, 20). When, following the massive Korean uprising against Japanese rule on 1 March 1919, the Japanese authorities relaxed their policy regarding the Korean media, two newspapers, the *Tonga ilbo* and *Chosŏn ilbo*, and six magazines were granted permission to report on current affairs (ROBINSON 1988, 51). Together with the *Maeil shinbo* these periodicals had tens of thousands of mostly middle-class subscribers, and constituted the main sources of daily news and avenues for Korean print advertising. Movie and music-related commentaries subsequently became very popular. They maintained their popularity until the late 1930s, when they again disappeared under pressure from increased censorship and propaganda.

THE REPERTOIRE

When the first moving pictures arrived in Korea, they captivated people simply by virtue of the technology. Audiences marveled at the “real” images, the foreign faces, and previously unseen sights. Around 1897 and 1898, the most popular material shown in Korea comprised “real-life” shorts or *actualités* produced by the Pathé and Gaumont companies (KIM Mihyön 2006, 19), which constituted mostly scenes of Westerners experimenting with the technology and exploring the wonder of recording movement, so there was little narrative and little to be interpreted. In many ways, the images showed that their creators were as captivated by the technology as their audiences. Because until the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century these films lasted less than a minute, they did not have much narrative, and the additional information provided was basic at best (CHO Hūimun 1992, 97).³² Soon, however, it appears that Koreans grew tired of the lack of a setting and narrative; like the Japanese, they did not enjoy much the freedom to interpret these silent movies “blindly,” but instead preferred to be guided, even if it was sometimes in a different direction from that intended by the director.³³

The first moving images of Korea were shot by Elias Burton Holmes, a travel writer and lecturer, who delighted the Korean royal family by introducing the new medium to them in 1899 (CHO Hūimun 1992, 25; HOLMES 1901, 106–109). It is not known whether Holmes’s films were also shown at any of the public theaters later, but since the first public showings took place around this time and included scenes and views of theaters from Europe and America as well as Korea (CHO Hūimun 1992, 118), those by Burton Holmes may have been among them.³⁴ Even when one movie in particular was being advertised, most screenings constituted a selection of shorts (CHO Hūimun 1992, 121). A program leaflet for the Seoul Supreme Entertainment Theater from around 1910 tells us that a single program comprised as many as fourteen shorts of various lengths (in feet), some of which were rendered in color, some in sepia (*yömsaek*) (SEOUL MUSEUM OF HISTORY 2003, 44). They usually entailed simple real-action scenes from America or Europe, including war footage, ceremonies, or people on carriages or trains, carrying titles such as *The Russo-Japanese War*, *The Sino-Japanese War*, and *Western Customs* (CHO Hūimun 1992, 50, 59, 62, 118). From the early part of the second decade of the twentieth century, however, the fascination with cultural voyeurism began to wane as Koreans developed a preference for fiction over nonfiction. After the last successful nonfiction movie, *The Port of Marseilles*, was shown in 1912, all box office successes were fictional, including *Hyölbashisan*, a 1913 movie about the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, and Francis Ford’s 1915 *The Broken Coin* (KIM Mihyön 2006, 20).³⁵

A survey of films shown between 1913 and 1923 by the *Tonga ilbo* of 1 January 1925 shows that American-made films were by far the most dominant (695), with the remaining movies coming from Italy (78), Korea (44), Japan (14), France (26), Britain (16), Denmark (6), Germany (8), and the Netherlands (2) (CHO Kyöngghan 1999, 44). Even in the 1930s, when the Japanese and Korean film

industries recorded their first major successes, American-made movies continued to make up two-thirds of the market (YOO 2001, 429), even though the import of those with popular actors or directors cost approximately twice that of those produced in Europe (KIM DONG HOON 2009, 18). To ensure it had full control of all content circulating the Korean peninsula, on 26 April 1933 the Japanese Government-General promulgated Korean Government-General Law No. 40 which stipulated that all foreign films distributed in Korea were to be imported into Japan first (YECIES and SHIM 2003, 83). Although some of them were very popular with Korean audiences, the supply was limited overall, and some of those coming from Japan were so worn-out that the facial expressions of the actors were blurred (YOO 2001, 429). Narrators could nevertheless make even worn-out movies interesting and make up for a cinema's poor offer (CHO Hŭimun 1992, 110). In order to remedy the limited supply, cinemas often cut a movie into two or more pieces, forcing audiences to return several times to see a movie in its entirety (KIM T'aesu 2005, 159-160).³⁶

Korean film critics began to assess not just the theater conditions and the program, but also the content of movies. They argued that the majority of the movies imported were below standard, and that some constituted cultural imperialism (YOO 2001, 429). The obvious solution was, of course, to boost domestic production, but even if they were able to hire the necessary equipment, Koreans could not secure the financial backing necessary to achieve a production standard that matched that of the features made by Western or Japanese studios, especially after the advent of sound film technology. Some of the Korean-made movies that came out in the mid 1920s therefore relied heavily on sentimentalism, including *Changhwa hongnyōjiŏn* (1924), *Changhanmong* (1926), and *Nakhwa yusu* (1927). According to Yi Yŏngil, they copied the style of the very melodramatic Japanese *shinpa* 新派 plays and were embarrassing in their self-righteousness and lack of creativity (Yi Yŏngil 2006, 27).

Moving images were, however, no uniform mode of entertainment that simply developed progressively in terms of technology, length, and theme. Because the films were very short at first, in Japan around the early part of the second decade of the twentieth century a number of people began using them as the backdrop to live theater in a new form called *rensageki* 連鎖), which constituted a play with actors performing on the proscenium with specific scenes or sequences projected on the screen behind them. This new form, which Koreans referred to as *yŏnswaegŭk*³⁷ or *k'ino* (*Kino*, German: cinema) *dŭrama* (drama), became popular in Korea several years later.³⁸ To avoid censorship most of these productions dealt with individual emotions and problems, such as love, heroism, greed, or cunning, as opposed to general social or overtly political issues.

The first movies with sound were those made using the so-called Phonofilm technology created by Lee De Forest. The first reels with diegetic sound and music were introduced to Korea in February 1925 at Umigwan, and included a violin performance and a political demonstration on Washington Square (YECIES 2008, 166; *Tonga ilbo* of 8 October 27, 3). Silent movies nevertheless continued to be made.

Yecies is right in pointing out that academics have adopted too easily the year 1935 as the year in which talkies “emerged out of the ethereal” (YECIES 2008, 166; see also KIM T’aesu 2005, 164), but in the late 1920s, when more and more sound films began to emerge, they began to slowly transform the experience of cinema. Despite numerous technological problems, they eventually turned movies into an experience that would allow Korean audiences to independently interpret the movements on screen, as opposed to one where the interpretation was provided. It did not, however, imply an immediate change from a non-diegetically narrated story to a diegetically spoken one. Because very few Koreans understood spoken or written English, let alone the garbled voices of some of the earlier recordings (CHO Hümun 1992, 133; MACGOWAN 1956, 289), it was logical that narrators continued to be employed at least for some time.

AUDIENCES

The first public entertainment venues constituted little more than roofed open spaces. There were no bins or toilets, and even though hundreds of people would be sitting together, there was no ventilation. To make matters worse, the acetylene projectors that were set up close to the audience released pungent fumes (DYM 2003, 51). The ground was full of dust, spit, and cigarette butts, and sometimes dead leaves would be blown in (YOO 203, 368). In Japan, the conditions appear to have been similar. Jeffrey Dym describes how, depending on the season, the often smoke-filled venues could be very cold or hot and humid. Until air conditioning was introduced in the summer of 1932, many *benshi* (narrators of Japanese silent films) therefore complained about having to perform drenched in sweat, and so in order to stay cool and for dramatic or comic effect some of them took to the stage in bathing suits or loincloths. Winters, Dym argues, tended to be better because the dense crowds generated heat, and because charcoal braziers could be brought in (DYM 2003, 51). In Korea, those braziers were used as well, but on one occasion at the Yönhüngsa theater in late November 1909, the crowd demanded its money back because of the extreme cold inside (Yi Yongnam 2001, 65).

Hygiene was often poor. Whereas the toilets at the Korea Theater were located in the hallway, those at Umigwan and Tansöngsa are said to have been located on either side of the seats, and it is likely that in hot summers the adjacent seats were not popular. At Changansa urine flowed from the toilets besides the ticket booth across the floor where people were walking (KIM T’aesu 2005, 166–67). At cinemas aimed at Japanese customers, on the other hand, the conditions were very different: an ad in the *Maeil shinbo* announcing the opening of the Taejönggwan discussed the facilities in detail. It revealed that there was a tearoom, a shop, a smoking room, a bathroom, and a gym, and that it had heating and fans (KIM T’aesu 2005, 168). It boasted that the hygiene facilities were of an international standard, and praised the “magnificent architecture,” “perfection of the interior,” and “elegant decorations” (8 November 1912, 4). The audiences were, of course,



FIGURE 3. Today the name Umigwan is still used for the building that occupies the theater's original location; it looks like its clientele may not have changed much. Photo: Roald Maliangkay.

partly responsible for the conditions at theaters, and they differed between venues. Former narrator Sŏng Tongho, for example, found the audience to be a little better at Tansŏngsa than at Umigwan (SŎNG, YI, and CH'ŎE 2006, 26). Smaller, local theaters will have attracted more laborers and are more likely to have had to deal with issues of noise and hygiene. Although in the early years theaters expected people entering to take off their shoes, for example, many workers did not wear shoes or wore open shoes and so in order to prevent them from bringing in dirt, they had to be asked sometimes to wash their feet at a well outside (YŎ 1999, 9; KIM T'aesu 2005, 167).

Hyangjin Lee claims that film had fallen under governmental censorship since 1903 (LEE 2000, 16), but it appears that in fact the first laws restricting social or cultural activities were not promulgated until the second decade of the twentieth century. Even so, Killick gives examples of reports of the tightening of police control of drama performances in 1909, a year before the annexation of Korea. He points out that Japanese claims of theaters not meeting Japanese standards of public morality were not unfounded, as they also reflected Korean experiences, as exemplified by the closing down of the Hyömnyulsa in 1906 (KILLICK 1998, 84–86). The unruly conduct of people at many theaters in 1911 led to new police directives for the curbing of disturbances of social order at cinemas, and the monitoring of fire safety and hygiene. Police officers subsequently began to inspect theaters to ensure their managers were keeping a close eye on the conduct of their audiences, as well as on their venue's overall cleanliness (YOO 2003, 366–68). Because theaters were also ordered to disallow vulgar plays and only screen movies to audiences larger than forty people, the number of days they were open for business decreased, which led to the closure of some theaters, including Yönhungsa (Yi Yongnam 2001, 65).

Despite these and later regulations, the behavior of crowds was not that easily controlled. Many men smoked during movies, and many people made noises.³⁹ Although most theaters had different seating arrangements for those willing to pay more, audiences were generally mixed. A report in the *Hwangsöng shinmun* of November 1907 said that theater audiences included upper-class and working-class citizens, pickpockets, lowly women, and students (YÖ 1999, 9). An article in the *Maeil shinbo* of 3 May 1913 complained that the Umigwan was a meeting place for vagrants, that there were lewd women in the audience performing obscenities, and that “men and women were engaging in bestial vulgarities in the toilets on the second floor” (YOO 2003, 368). Korean intellectuals often made theaters the object of moral critique (YOO 2003, 364; CHU 2005, 63)⁴⁰ and they probably had good reason to do so. According to a letter printed on the 15 March 1914 entitled, “They’re All Insane” (모다멋친놈들이다), people, presumably laborers, had begun to fight during a performance at the Changansa three days earlier (*Maeil shinbo* 15 March 1914, 3).

Most theaters had customarily separated men and women. At Tansöngsa, for example, the men and women would sit separately on the second and first floors respectively, whereas at P’yogwan theater in Inch’ön the men were seated on the left and the women on the right (Yi Yongnam 2001, 71).⁴¹ The press tended to be conservative, and made an issue of it when, for example, a woman heaved a sigh after a kissing scene. Presumably as a way of ensuring their standards of morality were upheld at all theaters, in 1915 the Japanese turned separate seating according to gender into a legal requirement. Following the decree, police officers would sometimes come in to keep a watchful eye on the audience, either seated among them or standing on the side. They kept an eye on pickpockets too, and when in 1919 a gold watch was stolen at Umigwan, detectives saw to it that nearly all of the entire crowd of hundreds of spectators were arrested and inspected (KIM T’aesu 2005, 169).

On 1 August 1918 national film regulations created a rating system for movies that prohibited the showing of foreign movies that sensationalized violence or adultery, and distinguished movies between those for under fifteen and those for adults (YECIES and SHIM 2003, 78–79; Yi Yöngil 2004, 54). An anonymous report in the *Pyölgön'gon* (Another World) of March 1927, roughly a decade later, said that audiences had quieted down, and that the number of children in the audiences was decreasing. This may have been because of rising ticket prices, or because the increasing standard of movies made them harder to follow. Although the decreasing number of children might suggest that women were going to the movies less frequently, audiences had, in fact, come to consist mostly of women, in particular older ladies, *kisaeng*, and female students (KIM Chinsong 1999, 187–88).⁴² Perhaps mostly due to the fairly large number of students in the audience, from the late 1920s, editorials in the journal *Chogwang* (Daybreak) and the *Chosön ilbo* had begun to discuss the impact of movies on the younger generations (CHU 2005, 32). A notice in the March 1929 issue of *Haksaeng* (Student) warned students not to emulate the low moral standards of foreign movies (CH'OE Kyujin 2008, 201):

Under no circumstances must one get excited when actors kiss; actors will always brush their teeth after kissing.

Do not become totally infatuated with male or female actors; they have daughters and sons, and even grandchildren, and they are said to be covered with freckles.

Of course warnings such as these were in vain. Although traditional concepts of morality did not change overnight, cinema, among other things, ultimately had an enormous impact on Koreans' notions of societal values. Movies made them part of the modernized world, and they provided near indelible markers of cultural achievement. They were like “textbooks of modernity” that served to distinguish those able to read them from those who could not (YOO 2001, 430).

CONCLUSION

The moving images shown during the silent film period constituted a novel and exciting form of entertainment. They opened a window to far-away cultures and made audiences feel connected with people elsewhere. To some extent, cinema served to level the differences between classes across cultures. At the same time, however, at least in Korea the degree of one's active involvement in the medium was also a marker of one's social achievement, and as such a way to distinguish oneself socially. Those who showed movies first did so in part to show their prosperity and sophistication. It is likely that cinema enthusiasts and critics hoped to associate themselves with the rich middle class—as opposed to the working class—abroad. The middle classes in Korea were fortunate enough to be able to emulate in daily life some of the standards of behavior and fashion the movies introduced. To them, cinema was a source of both information and inspiration, factors that commerce eagerly made use of in advertising. For the working

class, the experience of cinema was more passive. Whereas they were inevitably part of a system that, by hinting at opportunity and social mobility, negotiated hierarchy (BENNETT 1998, 220–21), in reality few low-level workers could move up in society. The images of laborers and the middle class elsewhere will have comforted, informed, entertained, and certainly also inspired them, but unlike those more fortunate, the working class were unable to emulate any of the modern concepts regarding style and social behavior that were shown on screen.

Cinemas either catered exclusively to audiences of different cultural and class backgrounds, or by way of different seating arrangements and services inside. The working class could not afford a seat on a tatami mat and had to stand in the back or sit on a bench, sometimes amid the putrid smell of people or toilets. Venues that were more affordable to them will have had poorer sound and image quality, less frequent program changes, and more basic seating (or standing) arrangements. However significant the compromises made, commoners were not in a position to express their dislikes other than through direct verbal protests and the threat of not returning. Although riotous behavior could lead to the police shutting down a theater temporarily, it seems unlikely that the working class would ever plan a more permanent outcome of their criticism. Although their major peeves were undoubtedly heard and on occasion taken on by those writing commentaries for newspapers and journals, it was Korea's literate middle- and upper-middle-class residents who could to some extent manipulate cinematic entertainment and engage in its promotion and production. Meanwhile, for the Japanese, the strong Korean interest in cinema provided important political and economic opportunities. Apart from introducing propaganda movies, it allowed the Japanese to manipulate the Korean consumer market into adopting capitalism as a seemingly fair way of acquiring opportunities and, *a priori*, a degree of equality, though of course no one, even among the upper-middle class, would be able to ignore the unfair conditions in which those "opportunities" were set.

Movie narrators could play the important role of negotiator, both of the images on screen and the modern markers of social distinction embedded in them. The system of censorship established by the Government-General ensured that Japanese standards of decency were upheld, and it prevented movies that could solicit a subversive or patriotic reaction from the crowd from being shown. Even so, narrators sometimes took "artistic" liberty to add strong social criticism or patriotic messages to seemingly harmless films, so even a movie initially allowed by the Japanese, such as Na Un'gyu's *Arirang* (1926), could be turned into a pamphlet of Korean nationalism. The working class would have been unable to afford the gramophone records of such movies' theme songs or narration, but they will certainly have supported the popularity of those narrators by purchasing tickets at those cinemas where they worked. The realm of cinema may not, therefore, have offered workers a reprieve from the reality of a highly stratified society and colonial rule, but it did provide an escape from the toil of everyday life, and even, in some rare instances, opportunities to embrace their heritage and perhaps find solace through the shared enjoyment—or criticism—of a narrator's interpretations.

The materials available to me during writing revealed relatively little about the cinematic experiences of the Korean working class firsthand. Based on the various anecdotes and reports I have found, however, it is possible to conclude that the working class was unable to enjoy the best cinema facilities, and that the conduct of the people around them was more likely to disturb them than those seated in second- or first-class seats. And yet that does not imply that they would have wanted to move seats. They will have been very aware of the social hierarchy, and the vast difference in opportunities it entailed, but partly because of the considerable lack of social mobility among the workers, they will have felt an affinity towards those in a similar position. The lack of significant social mobility and the fact that they were unable to express their opinions about sociocultural affairs to those outside their social group will have underpinned a strong sense of community, which in turn will have led them to voice their opinions within their group more strongly and more fondly.

I do not contest the claim that all social classes were “segregated along ethnicity” (KIM DONG HOON 2009, 20), but many aspects of the hierarchy remain under-researched. It is unclear, for example, how the Japanese migrant workers were treated by the local working class and, more importantly, by the Korean middle class. Since sources reflecting the opinions of the workers are scant, it is even more difficult to gain an understanding of the opinions they shared regarding the social hierarchy. I assume that they were easily swayed by the seductive power of the images of Western culture as much as the middle class. The Japanese colonizers strictly monitored all forms of social gatherings, including those where sociopolitical ideas could be raised or discussed, but they allowed all kinds of Western movies to be shown. The images and the production quality of the movies themselves will have highlighted the preeminence of Western culture, but since the movies were imported and controlled by the Japanese, they also served to underpin the notion of the Japanese empire as standing at least on an equal footing. It is therefore possible to apply the concept of cultural hegemony to Korea’s silent film era. The manufacturing, producing base does not need a clear idea of what it is that constitutes the superstructure, as long as they recognize its values. And values were exactly what the moving images and the conditions under which they were viewed were all about.

NOTES

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1. Kim Dong Hoon notes that many Koreans were involved in the operation of Japanese cinema businesses on the peninsula (KIM DONG HOON 2009, 9).

2. For more on the growing concerns of the plight of the working class, see SORENSEN 1999.

3. Records tied to movies began to appear from some time in the 1920s; see MALIANGKAY 2007, 57.

4. The tramlines would run between Sōdaemun and Ch'ōngnyangni (via Chongno), and Inch'ōn and Noryangjin (PAE 2005, 294; KIM Mihyōn 2006, 23).

5. According to a census conducted in 1906, when the number of Koreans living in the capital would have been close to 245,000, 11,491 of the 60,000 Japanese expatriates lived in Seoul (*The Korean Review* May 1906, #6, 196; KIM Yong-Woong 1999, 37).

6. According to a survey by the Japanese colonial government, the total population of Japanese was 171,543 in 1910, 347,850 in 1920, and 501,867 in 1930 (GOVERNMENT-GENERAL OF CHOSEN 1935, 6).

7. After the introduction of the term *yōnghwa* (movie) around 1921, the term *hwaldong sajin* (moving image) continued to be used for some time (KIM Mihyōn 2006, 34).

8. In Korean, the name has been transcribed as *Asūt'ū hausŭ*.

9. Yi Pohyōng has argued that those listening to a record for the first time had the same reaction (see YI Pohyōng 1992, 430; MALIANGKAY 2007, 55).

10. Film projectors were costly and I surmise that in the early years they were rented as often as bought. There may have been some price competition between August and Louis Lumière's Cinématographe and Thomas Edison's Vitascope, but if one considers that in the first decade of the twentieth century a machine as relatively simple as a record player still cost the equivalent of a laborer's annual salary, then only a few people or businesses will have been in a position to purchase a projector.

11. Although Kim T'aesu does not substantiate his claim here, Pae points out that two reports in the *Mansebo* (Independence News Eternal Report, 21 May 1907 and 30 May 1907) refer to the place as the *Hwaldong sajinsŏ* (PAE 2005, 296) and it is unlikely that these are the first occasions.

12. Later, in 1929, the Japanese fragrant powder brand Club ("Kurabu") organized a number of special movie nights for its loyal customers across the country, obviously in an attempt to associate on-screen beauty with the product. The first movie segment shown was from *Mi-nŭn kwanghwi*, which translates as "the glory of beauty." See *Chungoe ilbo*, 28 September 1929, 6.

13. The average price of a sack of rice had more than doubled from 31.5 *chōn* in 1900 to 66.9 *chōn* in 1903 (YI Yōnghun 2008, 80).

14. An Chonghwa has described how in 1905 a man standing in front of the warehouse of the Yōngmi Tobacco Company would try to lure people in. Since An gives the unusually low entrance fee of two *chōn*, it raises questions regarding the accuracy of the account (cited in HO 2000, 18).

15. Yi Yōngil says the theater was located at Hanyang-gol, in today's Nagwōndong, south-east of Tonūidong (YI Yōngil 2004, 48). Killick notes that there is some uncertainty about the year in which Changansa opened (KILLICK 1998, 58).

16. On 11 July 1908 the *Hwangšōng shinmun* reported that movies were shown at Changansa to raise money for an orphanage (CHO Hūimun 1992, 102).

17. In January 1925 it was reported that the number of regulars in Seoul had grown to over three thousand daily (*Tonga ilbo* [(East Asia Daily) 1 January 1925, 3).

18. Cho Hūimun transcribes an ad he says is from the *Hwangšōng shinmun* of 19 April 1906 (CHO Hūimun 1992, 96), but I was unable to find the ad in that particular issue.

19. According to an account by Ch'oe Namsōn, the theater had a screen and backstage area (PAE 2005, 278).

20. In November 1903 the last character in the name of the theater was changed from 司 to 社 (PAE 2005, 275, note 7).

21. Killick argues that reports saying that the theater had as many as two thousand seats must have been exaggerated (KILLICK 1998, 56, note 8).

22. According to Sō Yōnho and Yi Sangu, Pak's management was taken over by Im Sōkchin (SŌ and YI 2000, 32), but Pae cites a report in the *Chosŏn ilbo* of 4 October 1928 that specifically deals with the handover (PAE 2005, 313). Han Sangŏn also believes it was Pak who assumed management, but in 1909 as opposed to 1908 (HAN 2010, 35).

23. Yō Sōnjōng says it was located at Ŭljiro 2-ga (YŎ 1999, 12).

24. Oka says that the building's floor space was approximately one hundred and fifty *p'yōng* (some 500m²) after its reopening in 1915 (OKA 1989–1990, 480).

25. In 1915, Mitta changed the name again to Segyegwan (世界館), but it is unclear why. Cho Hūimun claims that Mitta made an agreement to do so with the management of another theater, Umigwan (CHO Hūimun 1992, 107).

26. In 1946 the theater was renamed Kukto Kūkchang (National Theater) (YI Yongnam 2001, 86–87). Accounts of the emergence and management of theaters in the colonial period often disagree on details. Yi Yōngil claims, for example, that the Seoul Supreme Entertainment Theater was established in 1912 and renamed Umigwan in 1916 (YI Yōngil 2004, 48).

27. In early 1913 Ch'oe Kyōngun 崔景, an entrepreneur from the southern part of the city of Taegu, who had earlier employed a gramophone to sell medicine, began handing out free Umigwan tickets to those customers spending twenty *chōn* on Lion tooth powder (*Maeil shinbo* 23 April 1913, 3). According to Cho Hūimun, it was an adaptation of the marketing scheme first employed by the Tongdaemun Moving Pictures Venue involving the Yōngmi Tobacco Company that was later taken on by other companies, including, in 1912 and 1914 respectively, by the Japanese-run tobacco companies Tongsō yōnch'osang 東西煙草商 and Kwanggang 廣江商會 (CHO Hūimun 1992, 81–85).

28. According to Kim T'aesu, stools were the standard seats at the theater (KIM T'aesu 2005, 168).

29. Why Yi Yōngil argues that the theater was rather late in focusing on Koreans (YI Yōngil 2004, 48) is unclear to me, considering it was—besides Umigwan and Tansōngsa—only the third cinema to do so (CHO Hūimun 1992, 113–14).

30. The cinema is included in two Seoul street maps, the 1923 *Kyōngsōng shiga do* 京城市街圖 and the 1924 *Kyōngsōng shiga chido* 京城市街地圖, both of which were compiled by the Japanese colonial government. A memorial stone marks its original location, now a small public garden.

31. See also Sōng Tongho's account in SŎNG, YI, and CH'ŌE 2006, 26.

32. Cho Hūimun argues that in 1897 in Japan the first movies shown by way of a Cinématographe lasted only two to three minutes, including the scenes *Train Arriving at a Station*, *King Nicholas of Russia*, and *A Boat Outing on the River Thames* (CHO Hūimun 1992, 13). The assumption is that the first movies shown in Korea will also have lasted that long, and that programs comprising ten or more shorts would therefore have taken up around thirty or forty minutes (YOO 2003, 371; KIM T'aesu 2005, 157), but an index of Western moving images from the late 1890s until 1900 reveals that most movies lasted no more than a minute and that only from around 1902 did longer movies begin to appear that ran well over half an hour (KLEPPER 2005, 8–19, 22–40). In the early part of the second decade of the twentieth century even longer movies came to Korea, including Enrico Guazzoni's two-hour-long *Quo Vadis* (1912) (CHO Hūimun 1992, 121).

33. Narrators such as Shin Ch'ul and Sō Sangp'il sometimes expressed patriotism in their interpretation of movies (see MALIANGKAY 2005).

34. Because programs commonly comprised films from different countries, in 1912 a billboard inside the Wōn'gaksa theater boasted, "You'll travel the world without leaving your hometown" (YŎ 1999, 8).

35. Later box office successes include D. W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (1922), and Abel Gance's *J'accuse!* (1922) (KIM Mihyön 2006, 20).

36. An ad for the Tansöngsa in the *Maeil shinbo* of 1 December 1928 (3) has numbers underneath titles indicating what part of a movie would be shown.

37. *Yönswaegük* is a literal translation of *rensageki* and is thus written with the same Chinese characters.

38. For more on the new forms of theater emerging in the early part of the second decade of the twentieth century and their relationship to *kino* dramas, see CHO Hüimün 1992, 142; KILLICK 1998, 56; Yi Yöngil 2004, 66–72; KIM Mihyön 2006, 20.

39. Kim T'aesu notes that later, when a phone call would sometimes come in for a member of the audience, his name would be called out loudly (KIM T'aesu 2005, 168). Rick Altman notes that around 1900 Western audiences often expressed their likes and dislikes by making all kinds of sounds during the movie (ALTMAN 2004, 53).

40. In *The Korean Review* of December 1906 (HULBERT, VI, 471) one finds the following report: "One of the elements of value in the daily press of Seoul is the fact that its ridicule of the disgraceful 'theater' in Seoul has shamed the public out of attending it and the concern is losing money. It is to be hoped that it will be definitely closed."

41. An ad for Lion tooth powder shows a mixed audience at Tansöngsa (undated, see KIM T'aesu 2005, 155).

42. Some Koreans criticized the fact that Korean-only schools allowed students to watch movies while Japanese-only schools prohibited them (YOO 2001, 430).

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