DESIRING BODIES AND ASCETIC REGIMES: POPULAR EROTIC FILM IN SOUTH KOREA FROM 1973 TO 1985

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By

Matthew James Winchell

Thesis Committee:

Park Young-a, Chairperson
Theodore Jun Yoo
Seio Nakajima
Cathryn Clayton
Abstract

In the 1970s and 80s, when South Korea was ruled by the successive military regimes of Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan, a series of erotic melodramas passed government censors, drew record audiences, and dominated the film industry. The incongruence of these erotic films and the ascetic cultural values promulgated by the ruling regimes raises the question: How did erotic films come to dominate the domestic box office of South Korea during a period of heavy censorship and authoritarian military rule?

By looking at the economics and politics of film production at that time and by analyzing the content, style, and reception of two key films, this thesis challenges the prevailing view that these films were instigated by the government and popular due to their prurience and argues instead that their popularity can be explained by trends in the film industry and the innovative style of the films themselves.
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Introduction

South Korea was ruled by two successive military regimes in the 1970s and 1980s; those of Park Chung Hee (1961–1979) and Chun Doo Hwan (1980–1988). Both regimes used the state apparatus and a militaristic culture of violence to curb freedom of expression, persecute dissidents, and maintain draconian cultural policies.

At the same time, the South Korean film industry produced a series of films known first as “Hostess Films” and then later as “Ero Films” that portrayed bar girls, hostesses, and prostitutes engaging in pre-marital sex and extra-marital affairs. Characters which had previously occupied only the background of scenes or acted as foils for male protagonists suddenly took center stage. Furthermore, the sex they engaged in, and the pleasure they found through this sex, had long been foreclosed for the lower classes and women of all classes. The neo-Confucian ideology of the ruling class kept frank depictions of female sexuality off the screen. In the early 1970s this began to change and by the late 1970s and early 1980s these films dominated the box offices of Korea.

From lines of young people waiting in block long lines to see Winter Woman (Kyŏul Yŏja, 1977) to mounted police being called in to disperse crowds waiting outside the sold out theater playing Madame Emma (Aema Puin, 1982)\(^1\), the popularity of these films was unprecedented in Korean film history.

The extreme incongruence of these erotic films and the ascetic cultural values of the authoritarian military regimes raises the question: *How did erotic films come to dominate the domestic box office of South Korea during a period of heavy censorship and authoritarian military rule?*

Several answers have been proposed to this question: Erotic films were part of a deliberate cultural policy that strategically loosened censorship of erotic content while maintaining tight control over political messages and social criticism; the female nudity and

\(^1\)S. Kim, “Pankukjangjuu i siyangijang kwa sŏnginkwan ae dehan nonii [Discussion of Night Theaters and Adult Movie Theaters].”
sex scenes appealed to the prurient interest of male audiences; or simply that erotic films appealed to the curiosity of audiences who were attracted by their novelty.

There are, however, problems with all of these explanations. Even if government policies were behind the erotic films, this doesn’t account for the popularity of the films with audiences. A simple appeal to male desire or the prurience of the films can’t explain the popularity of these films with women, who often composed the majority of audiences. And the appeal to curiosity and novelty can’t explain why the popularity of erotic films lasted for nearly two decades. Clearly something is missing from existing explanations.

In this paper I will look at the Korean film industry and analyze two key films to show that erotic films achieved their unprecedented popularity because of the unique style of the films, which developed due to the context of production and constraints put on filmmakers at that time.

**Approaching Korean Film**

Yi Yŏng-il was the first scholar to undertake a comprehensive history of Korean film. His influential 1969 work *The History of Korean Cinema: Main Currents of Korean Cinema* theorized a dialectical opposition between auteur-driven Realist filmmaking and profit-driven melodramatic filmmaking. He then put this opposition to work as the organizing principle for his history of Korean film. While Yi popularized this interpretive framework of Realism vs Melodrama in the 1960s, it has its origins in the *sinp’a* (Japanese: *shinp’a*) theater of the Colonial period.

*Sinp’a* literally means “new school” and was originally a variation of Kabuki that used contemporary settings, costumes, and stories to distinguish itself from the historical settings and feudal themes of the traditional *kyūha* kabuki plays. These *sinp’a* plays soon spread to the Korean peninsula where Korean language films and plays in the *sinp’a* style gained widespread popularity. Over time these plays and films became known more for their emotional histrionics, tragic endings, and appeal to female audiences than for the contemporary settings and modern themes that had originally defined them, and soon

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²Yi, “Han’guk yŏnghwasa yŏngu ŭi hyŏndankye: shinp’a, mellodŭrama, riŏllijŭm damron ŭl chungshim ŭro [Present Stage of Korean Film Studies: The Discourse on Shinpa, Melodrama, and Realism].”
⁴These aspects were taken over the by the Western-influenced *singŭk* (Japanese: *shingeki*) theater in the 1920s.
male intellectuals in Japan and Korea began to view the theatricality of *sinp’a* as retarding the development of cinema.\(^5\)

In Japan this lead to the establishment of the Pure Film Movement (Japanese: *Jun’eigageki undo*) for whom “the general conception of the pure film was that of a film unencumbered by those very same elements that could be considered essential to shinpa film’s generic identity”\(^6\) and, likewise, for Korean Nationalists, “the exclusion of generic features of *sinp’a* melodrama, especially the component of excessive affection, was constructive of the core definition of the national in the meaning of national cinema.”\(^7\) Thus in both Japan and Korea, the dominant discourses on film have their common origin in the gendering and categorical rejection of *sinp’a* films.

When erotic films became popular in the 1970s and 1980s, Yi and other critics argued that erotic films were in fact a rebirth of *sinp’a* in the full negative sense of the word; commercially-oriented, pre-modern, derivative, sentimental, histrionic tear-jerkers. They saw the popularity of these films as a regrettable deviation from the progressive development of Korean Cinema.\(^8\)

This interpretation grew plausibility and power because its structure mirrored popular political discourse that saw the military regimes of the 1970s and 1980s as regrettable deviations from the progressive development of the Korean Nation. In the case of both film and politics, the view of the 1970s and 1980s as a deviation from the proper course of history was seemingly born out by the later commercial and critical success of Korean films on the one hand and the democratization and continued economic growth of the Korea state on the other.

However, while there is certainly a correlation between the popularity of *sinp’a*-inflected erotic films and totalitarian politics in the 1970s and 1980s, a convincing case has yet to be made for any causation between the two. I will examine arguments put forth by scholars seeking to explain the popularity of erotic films in terms of the military regimes in Chapters Two and Four where I will look in detail at filmmaking under the Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan regimes respectively.

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\(^5\)Yi, “The Genealogy of Shinpa Melodramas in Korean Cinema”.


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By accounting for the popularity of erotic films in terms of their *style* I will be taking two main approaches: The first is a sociological production of culture approach described by Peterson and Anand\(^9\) and the second is a cognitive approach to film style as described by David Bordwell.\(^{10}\)

A production of culture approach looks at institutional, legal, political, economic and technological context of film production and shows how this context produces a “a system of constraints and possibilities”\(^{11}\) which can lead to historically bounded unities in the form and content of films. I will argue that the 1970s and 1980s provided one such context in which certain shared conditions led to stylistic isomorphism in the films themselves as directors and producers adopted similar strategies to solve similar problems.

To pinpoint these similarities in style I will then engage in a “descriptive poetics”\(^{12}\) to look in detail at two key films, paying special attention to film technique and narrative construction to reveal the stylistic unity in these films. Following Yi Young-il’s usage, I call this style the “Revised *Sinp’a* Style:” *Sinp’a* because of the excess of style and emotion and the opposition to Realist filmmaking historically associated with *sinp’a* melodramas, and ‘revised’ because the techniques and narrate strategies used to accomplish the emotional and stylistic excess differ considerably from the *sinp’a* films of previous eras.

Both the Hostess Films of the 1970s and the Ero Films of the 1980s have the Revised *Sinp’a* Style in common and throughout this paper I will offer reasons why this style took the particular form that it did and how it was able to successfully appeal to young audiences of both genders for nearly two decades.

### Outline of the Thesis

Chapter One deals with the culture under the *Yusin* Constitution of Park Chung Hee in the 1970s and the relaxed cultural policies of Chun Doo Hwan and the widespread political activism against his regime in the 1980s. I will then outline the elements of the Revised *Sinp’a* Style and how it included elements from the broader popular culture at the time.

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\(^9\)Peterson and Anand, “The Production of Culture Perspective”.
\(^{10}\)Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*.
\(^{12}\)Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 150.
Chapter Two examines the government’s role in film production in the 1970s, focusing on how the government rewarded films that reflected state ideology and how the government’s film policies returned the film industry to profitability despite declining audiences. This created a situation in which low-budget films could be created with little government interference or concern about commercial performance; a situation that fostered the development of the Revised *Sinp’a* Style.

Chapter Three looks in detail at the development of Hostess Films from a small number of immensely popular films in the early 1970s to a flood of films in the late 1970s. Following this I will analyze the film *Miss O’s Apartment* (*O-yang ap’at’ŭ*, 1978) to look at how the Revised *Sinp’a* Style is put to use in the film and how audiences and critics reacted to this film. I argue that the popularity of the film is largely due to its inclusion of the stylistic elements I outlined in Chapter One.

Chapter Four explores how changes to film policy in the mid-1980s brought an end to the conditions in which the Revised *Sinp’a* Style had developed, leading to the diffusion and spread of eroticism to Historical and Literary Films and ending the stylistic unity which characterized earlier erotic films. Additionally I will look at whether or not changes in the enforcement of censorship under the Chun Doo Hwan regime can be attributed to a cultural policy aimed at using eroticism and sex to distract the population from political matters and whether this can explain the popularity of these films.

Chapter Five looks at the production history and style of the film *Madame Emma*. Since *Madame Emma* became a *succès de scandale* it’s difficult to say that the style alone attracted audiences, but I will show how the style of *Madame Emma* is consistent with the film style developed in the 1970s and therefore how the Revised *Sinp’a* Style defines not just the Hostess Films of the 1970s, but also the Ero Films of the 1980s.

From 1973 until 1987, erotic films experienced unprecedented popularity, especially among young audiences. While many explanations of this popularity are plausible, I argue that it is primarily the *style* of these films that appealed to young audiences of both genders. This style developed in the unique circumstances of the film industry in the 1970s, and once these circumstances changed in the mid-1980s and a new generation of film viewers emerged, this style fell away along with the popularity of erotic films.
Chapter 1

Film Style

In this section I will touch on film-going practices in the 1970s and 1980s and also lay out a general outline of the style of erotic films. This was all made possible by rapid changes in Korean society brought on by an intense period of industrialization and urbanization.

Urbanization

As the Park Chung Hee regime began its strategy of export-oriented economic development in the 1960s, Korean society would undergo profound changes and one of the most dramatic was the massive migration of young people, usually women, from the country to the city. According to a study by Lee Young-gi, “approximately 5.1 million people migrated to cities from rural areas between 1966 and 1975, and another 5.9 million people 1975 and 1984.”1 Furthermore this migration to the city was highly gendered. In 1963 female workers constituted 41 percent of all production workers, by 1976 this reached a peak of 53 percent,2 a peak that perhaps not coincidentally coincided with the beginning of the Hostess Films. Were these young female workers going to see films that resonated with their own stories of personal sacrifice for the family and violence and abuse at the hands of male superiors? Or did these films reflect a societal anxiety about the increasingly large influx of young women from the country?

Director Bae Chang-ho writes that “unlike the previous generation, these young people [who migrated to the city] were seeking a better cultural rather than just economic life. They wanted to enjoy city life, watch TV, go to the theater, dance in discotheques, and

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1 Koo, Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation, p. 39.
2 Ibid., pp. 35-36.
drink beer in bars.³ Kim Ch’angnam argues that this hedonistic lack of concern with the political and economic development and led to a commercial-oriented popular culture that is reflected in the Hostess films⁴ while Namhee Lee speculates that rather than reflecting the values of young people these films were instead creating new ones.⁵

In Chu Ch’ang-yun’s study of popular culture in the 1970s, he identifies three dominant tendencies: first a rising youth culture (ch’ungnyŏn munhwa), second the dominant mass culture promoted by the Park Chung Hee regime (Chibe / Dejung Munhwa), and finally a politically dissident counter-culture (Minjung Munhwa). Chu sees the Hostess Films as clearly belonging to the youth culture at the time.⁶

Using Chu’s categories, we can see that the liberalization policies of Chun Doo Hwan in the 1980s pushed the culture in two opposite directions with the dissident Minjung movement heading towards a more ascetic and militant protest culture as popular culture became increasing defined by luxury and conspicuous consumption.

**Movie-Going Practice of the 1970s and 1980s**

J. Park explains in her focus groups with various age women, the presence of young women was one of the dominant modes of movie going in the 1970s and 1980s. It was known as “going sightseeing at the theater” (gukjang gukyŏng kanda) and involved groups of college-aged women getting together, going to see films, and then having dinner and coffee afterwards. For women in these groups the fun to be had in the film going experience didn’t center on the content or appeal of particular films. It was the interaction with the group and the conversation before and after the film that were the primary sources of pleasure.

Groups of friends would often meet regularly, once or twice a month, and meet and go to films. Usually which film to see wasn’t planned in advance and they would typically go to whatever was playing.⁷ As one of the focus group participants recounts:

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⁴C. Kim, “’Yusin munhwa’ ŭi ijungsŏng kwa taehang munhwa [Duplicity of “Yusin culture” and resistance culture]”.
⁷J. Park, “Seeing Stars: Female Film Stars and Female Audiences in Post-Colonial Korea”, p. 158.
It’s not that we didn’t care at all about what movie we were going to see. It’s just that we were definitely going out to see some movies and we did that every month. So it’s not like we decided to meet in order to see a particular movie.\textsuperscript{8}

Further more the focus group reveals there was an illicit thrill from going to see erotic films that were perceived as “naughty” and “unwholesome.” The following shows the appeal of the these movies for young people and also confirms the many accounts in newspapers that high school students were sneaking into these films:

A few of my friends and I, the so-called rebels (bullyang haksaeng) in our school, would sneak in the movie theater to see an R-rated or X-rated movie and then come to school next day and show off about it. So, the fun was [the fact that] we saw what we were not supposed to, and the whole experience of going out together with my friends.\textsuperscript{9}

While this mode of movie-going testifies to the popularity of films with young audiences it doesn’t explain why some films were more popular than others. Why, for example, \textit{Winter Woman} set box office attendance records while films like Im Kwon-Taeks government-supported \textit{Testiment} failed miserably. Since people are drawn to what appeals to them, we can speculate that although the groups of girls didn’t make plans to see specific films, if they were given the choice between two films they will choose the one that most appeals to them. We can also imagine that if the content of the film doesn’t matter, they just want to see any film, that they will opt for the cheapest film. At the time this would have been a domestic film, which were considerably cheaper than foreign films from Liberation until 1985.

\section*{Style}

It is perhaps obvious to consider low-budget filmmaking to be an inferior version of big-budget filmmaking, with the deviations of the low-budget film caused by budget and time constraints on the film’s production. We can say that these films strive towards the same ideal but fall short due to budget and time constraints.

However, consider the case of the Art Film. While Art Films generally have considerably smaller budgets than big-budget Commercial Films, we don’t conclude that therefore the Art Film is an inferior version of a Commercial Film; it is a Commercial Film

\textsuperscript{8}J. Park, “Seeing Stars: Female Film Stars and Female Audiences in Post-Colonial Korea”, p. 158.

\textsuperscript{9}Ibid., p. 158.
which due to budget and time constraints has failed to approach a common ideal. No, we recognize that Art Films and Commercial Films have different aims, different criterion for success, and different ideal models.

While in some cases it may be accurate to characterize low-budget films as inferior versions of big-budget films, as in the case of direct-to-video Disney films and theatrically released Disney films, they both appeal to the same audience, share the same ideals, yet one is limited by the budget and time constraints placed upon it. In the case of erotic films, like Art Films generally, they operate according to principles, with different aims, with different standards. In short they constitute a unique style of filmmaking that is not simply the limited attainment of the same goals as a big-budget film.

Supporting this is two pieces of evidence; one, that the erotic films used a unique set of techniques and narrative strategies that were not shared by other films, and two, that even when their budgets varied the style of erotic films was consistently applied. That is, although the style was developed due to a set of budget and time constraints, it was later applied even in cases where those constraints no longer applied. It was this style, jokingly referred to as the “aesthetics of economy” by film personnel at the time, that proved popular with young audiences.

Yet the fact that producers considered them quota quickies meant precisely that there commercial performance was irrelevant. Producers didn’t care about the content of the films because they were simply producing the films to get import rights to foreign films. Thus these films were emphatically not commercially oriented like larger budget Quality Films or Literary Films that the State and producers took greater interest in.

Certainly these films were made under extreme constraints on time and resources, and both formal and informal censorship prevented certain subjects from being represented in films, yet the narrative construction and visual style of these ‘quota quickies’ was left completely to the director and editor. It was precisely because of these constraints that these films are so interesting to watch, to see the vision of the director and creative personnel realized in unique and creative ways. Directors of the time referred to this style as the “aesthetics of economy” but as I will demonstrate, constraints put on the time and resources available to directors could lead to very different results.

The style accomplished through various techniques and narrative strategies can be said to share certain tendencies and work towards certain goals: 1) a focus on spectacle

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and corresponding de-emphasis on narrative continuity, 2) actions caused by external constraints rather than internal motivation, 3) blurring of past and present, 4) emphasis on the subjective experience of emotions rather than the cognitive construction of a cohesive narrative. This was accomplished through the consistent use of certain techniques including the zoom effect, music, disruptive editing patterns, unusual framing, and narrative strategies like the flashback structure.

**Zoom Lens**

Zoom lenses were originally developed as a way of quickly switching the focal length between shots without having to replace the lenses or reposition the camera. An unintended consequence of this system was that it became possible to change the focal length during a shot rather than between shots, creating the well-known “zoom effect.” Since these lenses were not produced until after the Classical Hollywood period of the 1930s and 1940s, and because they were developed as a time-saving measure mainly for small-format cameras and television, their use was seen as deviating from the “invisible style” of Hollywood Narrative Cinema and evidence of cheapness and low-quality.

In Korea, where top filmmakers and crew were trained in the United States or in Korea by US personnel, the zoom effect was studiously avoided in large-budget, government-sponsored film productions as well as in the auteur-driven realist films. Only in action films and erotic melodramas that needed to be completed on extremely tight time schedules was the zoom effect used widely, constituting a key element of the style of erotic films.

**Music**

One of the largest influences on Korean film, and an obvious connection to the wider popular culture is through music. It is basically possible to divide movies from these times into erotic films and conventional melodramas based entirely on their soundtracks. Hostess films especially featured pop songs, often performed by the singer that popularized them in the film, and the instrumental music in the film employs a pop instrumentation, the most distinct features being the drums and prominent bass guitar. Compare this with

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12 Kingslake, A History of the Photographic Lens, pp. 8–9.
the orchestral music that was used in conventional melodramas and government-sponsored films, which rarely featured vocalists and used symphonic instrumentation.

While the music plays a supportive role in the Classical Hollywood style of announcing themes and characters through the use of motifs and extenuating emotional climaxes, in the erotic films the music frequently takes center stage, taking precedence over the visuals on the screen. This can occur either through performances in the film where performers sing entire songs or through music video-esque montages where the song is accompanied by unconnected visuals that don’t develop the narrative.

Music then is a key component of the erotic film style and like the sex scenes themselves destabilizes the narrative, giving precedence to the enjoyment of the music and relegating the narrative to an inferior status. Remembering that young female movie-goers frequently went to films without concern for the particulars of the film, rather going for the experience of being with their friends, we can see why this element of the style might appeal to them.

**Editing Patterns**

The defining editing pattern of the narrative cinema is the shot/reverse-shot pair that is found in virtually ever film. The paradigm has many advantages including the focus it places on the person speaking, the ability to shoot scenes with only one actor at a time using stand-ins, and the ability to cut out extraneous dialogue or bad takes; the ability to fix it in editing. Short takes mean actors don’t have to remember lines or can even read their lines off strategically placed cards. In short, it is paradigmatic for practical reasons, not because of any inherent “naturalness” in the pattern as some Classical Hollywood theorists argue.

Because of its paradigmatic status and its disposition towards quick filmmaking with minimal setups we can speculate that this the shot/reverse-shot dyad would be frequently used in erotic films where serious time-constraints are evident. And indeed this is the case. But it is also the case that this is true of virtually every film. What is unusual though is that in the editing patterns of erotic films the shot/reverse-shot dyad is disrupted and the spatial-temporal continuity implied by the shot/reverse-shot is undermined.
Formal Experimentation

These films often frequently feature a stylistic play that is difficult to characterize. It consists of placing objects in the foreground obscuring the view of the audience, using unusual camera placement to create highly novel shots, and the frequent use of mirrors and reflections to show the characters looking at themselves, and wide-angle lenses used close to objects to distort their features.

Each of these cases is what I consider an excess of style that is characteristic of the erotic films. It is style that isn’t motivated by the narrative nor by the psychology or emotions of the characters. It is formal experimentation for its own sake, a search for novelty in a low-budget filmmaking environment. The films are in some ways highly generic and predictable and yet in terms of form and style they are constantly pushing for novelty to create excitement.

It is easy to see how novelty and the push for the new excited audiences and attracted young viewers looking for thrills and excitement. Rather than the refinement of realism or the realistic depiction of social problems, they wanted a new consciousness and a new life. Their external world was denied so they lived in fantasy.

Narrative Structure

Beyond the visual style of the film there are several other stylistic features that unify these films. The majority of these films have their origins in popular stories that were serialized in newspapers and were later turned into bestselling novels. This generic transformation, from newspaper serial to novel to film, were also characteristic of the sinp’a films of the Colonial period.13

This source in serialized novels tends to make the films very episodic with little emphasis placed on the goal-oriented actions of characters that we typically see in Hollywood films. This further decentralizes the narrative and puts the emphasis of the films on the emotions of the characters and the excessive style that conveys these emotions. However, the oneiric quality of the episodic structure tends to be even more pronounced in the films than in the serial novels the episodes are frequently put out of order through the extensive use of flashbacks to organize the narrative. This elliptical style of structuring the narrative

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13Bernardi, Writing in Light: The Silent Scenario and the Japanese Pure Film Movement, p. 46.
around episodes connected by flashbacks is one more characteristic element of the Revised Sinp’u Style.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have laid out unique traits of the erotic film style. Certainly some of these traits were shared with other films and styles of filmmaking, but they are arranged in a unique way in the erotic films. I have also given the background of the young men and women who were the primary movie-goers in the 1970s and 1980s and explained why the style of erotic films would be more attractive to them than other types of Korean cinema or foreign cinema. In the following chapters I will provide concrete examples of how the elements discussed above were put to use in various films and how the condition of the film industry in the 1970s and 1980s pushed filmmakers to adopt this style.
Films always contain the circumstances of the times as a “plus something.” A film can be considered good only when it contains that.

Kim Ki-young

This chapter will examine the government’s role in film production in the 1970s, focusing on how the government rewarded films that reflected state ideology and how the government’s film policies returned the film industry to profitability despite declining audiences. This created a situation in which low-budget films could be created with little government interference or concern about commercial performance; a situation that fostered the development of the Revised Sinp’a Style.

Park Chung Hee was a three star general in the Korean Army when he took power in a coup-de-tat in 1961. While he held regular elections throughout the 1960s, his strength remained in his connections to the military and the newly formed KCIA, and his strongly anti-communist stance which endeared him to the US military. Responding to the withdrawal of US troops from Indochina, the possibility of a significant reduction of US troops stationed in Korea,¹ the strong showing of opposition party leader Kim Dae Jung in the 1971 presidential election, and the gains made by the opposition party in the

¹Cumings, Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History.
National Assembly,\textsuperscript{2} Park Chung Hee put the country under martial law and passed the Yushin constitution on November 21st, 1972.

Based on and sharing the same Chinese ideographs as the Japanese Meiji restoration, the Yushin constitution was aimed at consolidating Park’s power, pushing forward with his export-oriented development strategy, and working towards the reunification of the Korean peninsula. In practice though the new constitution would “increase executive power by permitting broad use of presidential emergency measures,…undercut the power of the National Assembly and…restrict many civil rights,”\textsuperscript{3} essentially giving Park “an indefinite term as president with almost unchallengeable power.”\textsuperscript{4} The Yushin Constitution lasted until Park assassination in 1979.

\textbf{2.1 Causes of 1970s Production Trends}

Television is credited as the single most important factor in the rapid decline of the film industry during the 1970s. The introduction of television led to a major drop in theater attendance as households with television could now watch for free what they had previously paid for. Government control of television programming and a lack of large studios meant that it was impossible for film production companies to transition into television production the way they had in the United States and Japan. Consequently they were forced to compete directly with television for viewers with no chance of gaining additional revenue streams.

Additionally there was a migration of talented writers and performers from the film industry to television where steady advertising royalties and the serial format of television programming led to high wages delivered at regular intervals over long periods of time, a situation conspicuously absent in the film industry. To lure performers back to film required paying increasingly high fees compete with television’s high salaries, though film producers frequently consented because a top performer’s weekly exposure in dramas served as free advertising for the film.

While film viewers were down dramatically in the 1970s, the most attended films in Korean history all came in the 1970s, starting with \textit{Hometown of Stars (Pyŏldŭl ŭi gohyang, 1973)}, which was later surpassed by the block buster \textit{Winter Woman} in 1977.

\textsuperscript{2}Im, “The Origins of the Yushin Regime: Machiavelli Unveiled”, p. 246.
\textsuperscript{3}Savada and Shaw, \textit{South Korea: A Country Study}.
\textsuperscript{4}Han, “South Korea: The Political Economy of Dependency”, p. 43.
Additionally, despite the decreasing attendance in the 1970s the film industry actually became more profitable for a variety of reasons; chiefly that there were fewer films made and there were fewer companies. This reduction of the industry made the companies and producers that remained more profitable as they were more likely of producing hit movies. Whereas profitability in the 1960s was built on produced as many films as possible to sell them at fixed rates to regional distributors, the massive hits in the 1970s caused producers to try and imitate hit movies in the hopes of creating a profitable series. The 1980s then carried out this logic of imitation and series films while losing much of the profitability of the approach.

The only foreign film that surpassed the success of Winter Woman in the 1970s was the massive success of Yuen Woo-ping’s Drunken Master (Ch’wikwôn, Yuen Woo-ping, 1978) playing in the Gukdo Theater (which had also hosted Hometown of Stars in 1973) for an unprecedented 181 days and attracting 898,561 moviegoers, an average of 4,964 viewers per screening. Although Jackie Chan had lived in Korea for about 8 years working as a stuntman on Korea-Hong Kong co-productions, Drunken Master was Korean audience’s first glimpse of Jackie Chan in a starring role and his pathbreaking blend of action and comedy, and the massive success of both Drunken Master and Snake in Eagle’s Shadow (Sahyŏngdosu, dir. Yuen Woo-ping, 1980)\textsuperscript{5}, inspired a series of popular martial arts films in the 1980s targeting mostly children and young adults.

Revision of the Film Law and the Censorship of Film

In 1973 the Park Chung Hee regime passed the Fourth revision of the Motion Picture law which brought stricter censorship and more comprehensive oversight of film production by government as well as the clause “every film should have the concept to perform the ideology of the Revitalizing Government.”\textsuperscript{6} A set of criteria were developed\textsuperscript{7} to identify and reward films that strongly reflected the Yusin Ideology.\textsuperscript{8}

While tighter control of the content of films was a priority of the revisions, they were also intended to bring the film industry back to profitability. Understanding the

\textsuperscript{5}Snake in Eagle’s Shadow was produced earlier than Drunken Master but wasn’t imported and released in South Korea until after the success of Drunken Master. While it didn’t reach the popularity of Drunken Master, Snake in Eagle’s Shadow still attracted a massive 500,074 spectators at the Gukjae Theater in Seoul.


\textsuperscript{7}See Appendix A for the complete selection criteria.

\textsuperscript{8}C. Kim, “‘Yusin munhwa’ ŭi ijungsŏng kwa taehang munhwa [Duplicity of “Yusin culture” and resistance culture].”
tenuous position of the film industry which had experienced the first year of negative growth after ten years of growth, the Park regime applied many of the same policies they had used earlier to turn around the heavy industries of Korea to the film industry including creating a centralized body for handling decision makings and giving special government favors to encourage development of strategic products.

The fourth revision of the Film Law enacted many of these same policies, disbanded the Motion Picture Promotion Union and establishing the Motion Picture Production Company, limiting the number of companies to avoid competition, giving favors that produced films that the government wanted produced, and ensuring that companies had sufficient credit prior to undertaking filming to ensure invested capital would at least result in a product, if not turn a profit. While these moves are often presented simply as the Park regime strengthening its control over the film industry, there was an economic strategy that underlied this consolidation and the film industry was returned to profitability as revenues increased during the 1970s.

Despite the fact that viewership significantly dropped from a peak of 173,043,272 people in 1969 to 65,700,738 people in 1976, this had little impact on the film production companies due to the way the film distribution system was arranged.

![Figure 2.1. Nationwide Revenue, 1970-1979. Adjusted for inflation (2005 equals 100)](image)

The price of film tickets was also a major source of additional revenue, though the massive increase in ticket is somewhat misleading due to the high inflation rate through much of the 1970s, the average ticket price at a first run theater went from 200 won for a Korean film and 250 won for a foreign film in 1970 to 1,500 won and 2,000 respectively.
By 1980 the average ticket would be 4,000 and there was no longer any separation between Korean and foreign films.

Certainly the 1970s were a time of political repression, government corruption, rule by force, extra-judicial imprisonment and torture, and constrained freedom of expression. This shouldn’t be forgotten or over-looked, but it is also important to remember that this was a time of profitability and unprecedented commercial success for the film industry. While the viewership had dwindled, the revenues had increased greatly, largely due to the Fourth Revision of the Film Law and the artificially limited competition that allowed film producers and importers to make more money per company and make more money on the money they invested on each film.

The Motion Picture Promotion Union had been a trade union composed of the Motion Picture Producers Association of Korea, Inc., Film Exporters and Importers Association of Korea, Inc., Federation of Theater Owners of Korea, the Motion Pictures Association of Korea, and others. This Union, composed of industry participants, had been in charge of following and regulating government policies concerning the production, import, export, distribution, and exhibition of motion pictures. However, the Fourth Revision dissolved this Union and replaced it with the the Motion Picture Promotion Corporation, allowing the government more direct control over the film industry.

The MPPC then took over the government Grand Bell Awards, originally under the purview of the Arts Bureau of the Ministry of Culture & Information. The Grand Bell Awards hadn’t been held since 1969 but with the reorganization they began to be held again, this time more explicitly giving the award to films that espoused the ideology of Yusin and largely ignoring the popular trends in the film industry. This was the main venue for the government to award film producers for making ideological content in support of the government as a prize at the Grand Bell Awards meant subsidies for the next production and extra licenses to import films.

While the attendance figures in Figure 2.1 show that, with the exception of The Land, War Films, Anti-communist Films, and Enlightenment Films (films that supported official ideology) weren’t popular at the box office, but because of government policy they could be extremely profitable. When a film won the Grad Bell prize the production company won the right to import a foreign film as well as have a film subsidized in the following year. Producing films that won could be extremely profitable if the film won a Grad Bell award.

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9Lent, The Asian Film Industry, p. 128.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Attendance in Seoul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Patriotic Martyr An Chung-gŭn</td>
<td>Chu Dong-jin</td>
<td>30,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>The General in Red</td>
<td>Lee Doo-yong</td>
<td>8,636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>The Land</td>
<td>Kim Su-yong</td>
<td>120,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Flame</td>
<td>Yu Hyun-mok</td>
<td>20,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Im Wŏn-sik</td>
<td>16,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Diary of the Korea and Japanese War</td>
<td>Chan Il-ho</td>
<td>35,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Police Story</td>
<td>Lee Doo-yong</td>
<td>10,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>The Hidden Hero</td>
<td>Im Kwon-Taek</td>
<td>3,628</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1. Grand Bell Winners under the *Yusin* Constitution

Because of this these films had larger budgets and tried hard to incorporate as much *Yusin* propaganda as possible.

You can also notice that out of the films that won the Grand Bell award about half are by strongly established directors like Yu Hyun-mok and Kim Su-yong and about half are by directors who would establish themselves in the 1980s, like Lee Doo-yong and Im Kwon-Taek. This can be explained by the directors only wanting to work on big budget films and this type of film being the only way they could put together a big budget film.

The government did little to prevent the production of the Hostess Films in the late 1970s, but questioned the motives of the filmmakers and producers.\(^\text{10}\)

One very direct effect that the revision of the Film Law had on the film industry was the limiting of movie companies to 14. These 14 companies had a monopoly on both production and importing foreign films.\(^\text{11}\) This limited entry into the film industry and allowed the government to keep strict control of film production and was essentially a monopoly license system that ensured steady profits for those with licenses but discouraged experimentation and competition. By essentially eliminating competition and limited the product to a small number that didn’t vary with demand Korean film producers lucky enough to have film companies were in a position to make lots of money.

“Filmmakers were compelled to reveal the bright side of social reality and highlight cultural traditions to school the public in the virtues of their ancestors. The authorities

\(^{10}\) *Donga Ilbo*, May 26th, 1979.

\(^{11}\)*H.-s. Kim, *Sŏk’ninppakk ŭi han’guk yŏnghwasa: paran ŭl kkumkkumun yŏngwŏnhan ch’ŏngnyŏn ŭi iyagi [Korean film history off the screen]*.
tried to teach the audience traditional morality—especially that which involved obedience and respect to authority.”

2.2 Independent Filmmaking

While there were many restrictions on the film industry, this didn’t prevent filmmakers in making films outside of the commercial film system. As many filmmakers were pushed out the film industry by the revision of the Film Law and it was more difficult to make movies within the system, both alternative production practices and alternative viewing spaces emerged to meet the demands of society. While both of these groups, a group of filmmakers and critics known as the Visual Age Group would lay much of the foundation for the larger scale activities of activist filmmakers in the 1980s. Unlike the later activists, independent filmmaking in the 1970s was not overtly political and was instead largely influenced by European films and European film theory, focusing on artistic innovations and theory rather using film as a tool for political change.

The most notable filmmaker involved in the Visual Age Group was Lee Jang-ho. Lee Jang-ho’s debut film was *Hometown of Stars*, the film that paved the way for the later Hostess Films. He was regarded as the most talented directors of the his generation but ran into political trouble due to a charge of marijuana possession that prevented him from making films. Unable to make commercial films, Lee Jang-ho involved himself in the Visual Age Group and made one short film for them.

After the assassination of Park Chung Hee in 1979 he was able to return to filmmaking and his comeback film in 1980, *A Good, Windy Day* is regarded as one of the best films of the 1980s. He again turned to female protagonists in his 1980s, this time working in the Folk Erotic and Ero Film genres in films like *Ŏudong* and *Between the Knees*. Even filmmakers who were explicitly barred from filmmaking by the government could still create films and participate in film culture and criticism despite the authoritarian governments powers. The Visual Age Group offered one such venue.

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2.3 Women in the Film Industry

While women continued to play an extremely marginal role in the film industry in the 1970s, there were some interesting contributions. Like the Hollywood studio system, the Korean film industry gave gendered roles. Because editing was seen as similar to sewing, with the similar postures and manual skills required, in both classical Hollywood and in Korean film editors were primarily women. In the Korean case this is even more interesting as there were very few editing facilities and so experienced editors were in high demand and worked constantly. While directors like Im Kwon-Taek are celebrating for directing over 100 films, editors like Kim Hŭi-su worked on over 700 films in her thirty five year career and Lee Kyŏng-ja edited 350 films in her forty two year career. In the year Kim Hŭi-su edited Madame Emma she also edited eighteen other films, completing a film every three weeks.

In terms of directing most women got their chance after working in the film industry in other capacities. Hwang Hye-mi (1932-present) was made her directorial debut in 1970 with the film First Experience. She had previously worked as a producer on Kim Su-yong’s Mist. She both wrote, directed, and produced First Experience as well as writing and directing When Flowers Sadly Fade Away in 1971 and The Relationship in 1972. All of her films were melodramas and all of them portray “the paradoxes of monogamy” and “explore issues of sexuality” especially “modern man’s lack of interest in sex and insecurity.” While she was only able to direct three films and while she didn’t work in the sinp’a mode, preferring a more Modernist style, it is interesting to note that she dealt with issues that would anticipate the development in melodramas.

In the mid 1970s, Han Ok-hee, Kim Jeom-sun, Lee Jeong-hee and Han Soon-ae of the women-only Khaidu Club made and presented experimental films. Like the Fine Art movements of the 1970s, the Khaidu Club’s experimental films focused on formal experimentation and expanding the possibilities of the film medium. It would not be until the 1980s that these experimental films began to take on overtly political messages.

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14 He has released 101 films as of this writing.
16 C.-s. Chu, Films of Women Directors in Korea, p. 163.
17 Her exceptional cultural and educational background, studying at Seoul National University and then at the Sorbonne in Paris in the late-1950s, no doubt influenced her taste in movies.
18 Nam, “Korean Women Directors”, p. 163.
2.4 Conclusion

The film industry in the 1970s was facing a crisis. The Film Law revision in 1973 helped stabilize the industry, but also prevented it from growing or trying different strategies. However, because of the focus on the film imports which guaranteed their profits, filmmakers were given free reign with low-budget films provided they delivered completed films on time and stayed away from politics.

While many established directors continue to make big budget films, this was primarily done to win the Grand Bell award or get the film classified as a quality film. But in the case of the bigger budget films it was necessary to include Yusin ideology and make numerous compromises. Low-budget filmmaking was an environment free of these ideological constraints and it’s difficult to see how Kim Ki-young’s Insect Woman, Pak Nosik’s Crazy Bitch, or Winter Woman, or Hometown of Stars have anything to do with the Yusin ideology.

Chapter Two examines the government’s role in film production in the 1970s, focusing on how the government rewarded films that reflected state ideology and how the government’s film policies returned the film industry to profitability despite declining audiences. This created a situation in which low-budget films could be created with little government interference or concern about commercial performance; a situation that fostered the development of the Revised Sinp’a Style.
Chapter 3

Miss O’s Apartment and Hostess Films

The hostess film cycle of the late 1970s is definitely a shameful episode in Korean film history.

An Chae-sŏk

In this chapter I will look in detail at the Hostess Films and in particular the Hostess Film Miss O’s Apartment. In my analysis of this film I pay close attention to how the Revised Sinp’a Style is put to use in the film and how audiences and critics reacted to this film. I argue that the popularity of the film is largely due to its inclusion of these stylistic elements.

In the case of both the Hostess Films of the 1970s and the Ero Films of the 1980s there is a general perception that they dominated the film industry. In the case of Hostess Films that they were widespread through the 1970s. As Ahn Hae-sŏk argues, it wasn’t until the commercial and critical success of Miss O’s Apartment in 1978 that the Hostess Films really took off. However, there are several precursors which clearly point the way towards the Hostess Film. Of these the most important are Hometown of Stars, Yŏngja’s Heyday, and Winter Woman.

Although it started as a serious portrayal on the dark side of society like Homecoming of the Stars...social realism films in the 1970s gradually gave way to a series of so-called;“hostess films,” that exploited the lives of barmaids and prostitutes in the narratives.1
Table 3.1. Most Attended Films, 1970 to 1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Admission</th>
<th>Theatrical Run</th>
<th>Director</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Winter Woman</td>
<td>585,775</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Kim Ho-sŏn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hometown of Stars</td>
<td>464,308</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Lee Jang-ho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Woman I Left</td>
<td>375,913</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Chung So-yŏng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yŏngja’s Heyday</td>
<td>361,213</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Kim Ho-sŏn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Hometown of Stars Sequel</td>
<td>298,125</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Ha Kil-jong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Miss O’s Apartment</td>
<td>281,726</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Pyŏn Chang-ho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Man I Left</td>
<td>239,718</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Chun So-yŏng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The Testimony</td>
<td>232,762</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Im Kwon-Taek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Do You Know Kkotsuni?</td>
<td>216,628</td>
<td>1978</td>
<td>Chun In-yŏp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Toward That High Place</td>
<td>201,418</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Im Won-shik</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 3.1 we can see that out of the top ten most attended films of the 1970s, eight of them can be considered ‘hostess films’ and of those eight, five of them were released in either 1978 or 1979, and that two of these remaining five films were sequels.

It was initially rather difficult for movies about bar girls, hostesses, and prostitutes to get made. Director Kim Ho-sŏn recalls that he carried the screenplay for *Yŏngja’s Heyday* around for more than seven months, meeting with producers and investors, without any interest. “Most of all, they seemed to have an indescribable resistance against a prostitute protagonist and treated it as if it were an old-fashioned story.”2 After the success of *Yŏngja’s Heyday* and *Winter Woman* investors realized there was a market for these films and Hostess Films filled theaters from 1978-1979, led by *Miss O’s Apartment*, which sold over 200,000 in its first month of release and won Kim Cha-ok the best actress prize at the Australian Film Festival.

However, by 1979 Korean filmmakers and producers believed these films had run their course and began to publicly criticize the continuing production of these films. Director Yu Hyun-mok, said that “It’s natural for young people to have curiosity about these films since bar girls and prostitutes are sexually open. But now I think audiences have started to get tired of them. It’s time to take time and energy for our movie industry to find a new subject.”3 Here is a clear articulation of the curiosity hypothesis, which attributed the popularity of the films to audience curiosity about their erotic content.

2 “Encounter with the Outstanding Auteur Director Kim Ho-sun,” Yonghwaha magazine, June 1976

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In the same article, Film critic Pyŏn In-sik, founder of the Visual Age Group, demands “I want them to stop making movies about hostesses and prostitutes now. ...[Film-makers] are just competing for the same audience with these similar forms and stories. It’s time to stop this.” But while critics continued to bash these films as failing to represent the Korean Nation (a critique that wouldn’t have been out of place coming from Park Chung Hee), the films were extremely popular and influential among young people.

**Miss O’s Apartment.**

*Miss O’s Apartment* is based on a best-selling serialized novel by O Min-yŏng about her real life experiences as a hostess. After an intense bidding war, Yŏnbang Films won the rights to produce the movie and brought in Kim Chi-hyŏn to write the script and Pyŏn Chang-ho to direct. Writer Kim Chi-hyŏn had worked in the film industry since the late 1950s and worked with all of the top directors of the Golden Age including Yu Hyon-mok, Shin Sang-ok, Kim Ki-young, Kim Su-young and Lee Man-hee. Director Pyŏn Chang-ho had previously made the film *Tears of a Wedding Dress* which was a modest success when it was released in 1973. Along with *Hometown of Stars* it was an early film in the Revised *Sinp’a* Style, and this style would become much more prevalent in Pyŏn’s later films like *Miss O’s Apartment*.

Once the writer and director were selected, actress Kim Cha-ok was selected to play the lead character of Miss O. Kim Cha-ok had previously worked with director Pyŏn Chang-ho twice, in her debut film *Ordinary Woman* (1976) and in the 1978 film *Yŏng-a’s Confession*, filmed and released earlier than *Miss O’s Apartment*. Cha-ok parlayed her critical and commercial success with *Miss O’s Apartment* into a starring role in the popular drama *Spring Rain* (January to May 1979) and notably starred in two Kim Ki-yŏng films; *The Woman Who Chased Killer Butterflies* (1978) and *Water Women* (1979). By the 1980s Kim left film for television dramas where she continues to appear frequently as of this writing.

*Miss O’s Apartment* was an immediate success. The *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun* reported that the film was seen by 200,000 people in the first 36 days of its release, averaging over

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5 *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, December 8th, 1976.
Figure 3.1. An illustration that accompanied a serialized Hostess novel in the *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, May 11th, 1979.

6,000 people per day and out performing the Hollywood films being shown at nearby Seoul theaters.⁷

**The Text of the Film**

One of the defining elements of the Revised *Sinp’a* Style is the temporal ambiguity of the scenes in relation to each other, the episodic nature of the narrative, and the privileging of emotion and stylistic excess over narrative development. In keeping with this style *Miss O’s Apartment* presents several separate stories that remain unconnected and in various states of development. I present them below in the order of their first appearance in the film.

Miyŏng (the titular Miss O played by Kim Cha-ok) and her first boyfriend Chinsu (Han Chinhee) fall in love as students, but when her father becomes ill she decides to become a hostess to pay for his medicine. Chinsu is understanding but Miyŏng breaks off the relationship, feeling she isn’t being true to Chinsu while working as a hostess. Later, Miyŏng and Chinsu meet by chance at an orphanage where Chinsu works and decide to

restart their relationship. However, after spending the night together Miyŏng again leaves Chinsu, saying she doesn’t want to ruin his reputation and social standing with her past as a hostess.

Miyŏng’s friend and fellow hostess at the club is from a rich family and chooses to be a hostess to meet a husband, unlike Miyŏng who is forced to be there by external circumstances. Miyŏng’s friend’s father strongly objects to her working as a hostess but Miyŏng helps him to understand that many good girls are hostesses. Soon Miyŏng’s friend falls in love with one of her customers, who promises to marry her, despite the fact that he was dating one of the other girls that works at the club. She is later married to the customer with the blessing of her father.

Miyŏng’s falls in love with her first client, Daegŭn, who takes her with him to Busan where they spend the night together at a motel. In the morning he drives off alone in a jeep and when she inquires where he is going at the front desk she is told that he has checked out and has left money for her. She feels used and taken advantage of. However, later in the film she finds out he is in prison and goes to visit him in prison, telling him that she has come to pay back the money he gave her and that she didn’t go with him to Busan because of money. He is thankful, saying he regrets his actions, and asks her to visit the orphanage he volunteered at and give the money to them. She agrees and while there she meets Chinsu.

When Miyŏng first comes to work at the club he takes offense at her attitude towards him and pours beer on her head. He then waits for her to leave work and when she leaves he pulls her into his car and drives her to his apartment where they have sex. He then gives her money to rent an apartment (the apartment in the title of the film). Things seem to be going well when one of Miyŏng’s classmates from school visits her extremely upset. She reveals that the man paying for Miyŏng’s apartment is her husband and she is furious at Miyŏng for carrying on an affair with a married man.

Finally, Miyŏng meets one of her customers outside the club by chance. This older business manager recognizes her on the street and takes her out to lunch. His intentions are benign and he offers her assistance if she ever has problems. He then drops her off at her house where her father has come to visit her and is waiting outside.

*Miss O’s Apartment* wastes no time delivering on the expectations of the audience. In the first ten minutes of the film we have in miniature the basic structure of the film, and of the Hostess genre more generally. A female character works as a bar maid, a prostitute,
or a hostess, she is displayed for the audience, than we see the hardships she is facing in her line of work, and then we flashback to show the conditions that pushed her to become a hostess.

In the opening scene of *Miss O’s Apartment* we see Miyŏng, the main character, playing tennis outside her apartment. She rushes up the stairs and the lecherous guard, licking his lips, rushes after her. She goes into her bedroom and takes off her clothes, wraps herself in a towel and takes a shower. The lecherous guard tries to look into her apartment door through the peep hole, what he hopes to see is unclear, but the audience is allowed access to the guard is denied and we watch Yŏngmi finish her shower and then we see her apply make up in a series of lengthy closeups of her lips, then her eyes. These shots are very drawn out and no part of the action of applying makeup is omitted.

The next scene is at the club where she works. The hostesses line up in a row and receive instructions from the bar manager, who instructs them to do anything to their patrons while singling out girls and berating their appearance, questioning their ability to attract customers. While this verbal abuse is carried out on the girls, the camera zooms into a close up on Miyŏng and then racks out of focus. There is a cut to Miyŏng and and her mother sitting on the floor talking as Miyŏng’s father lies sleeping on a bed in the background. Miyŏng’s emotionally explains to her mother that she will take a job as a hostess in the city in order to pay for the medicine her father needs to live. She then rushes off as her mother and father call after her.

This pattern of display, hardship, and motivation will repeat throughout the film to various characters, but the central situation is laid out very clearly at the beginning of the film. What is unique in this film is the rapidity of the flashback sequences. These quick flashbacks though will eventually give way to a free floating narrative in which the pattern of flashbacks continue but it becomes increasingly unclear which actions are taking place in the present and which are taking place in the past until the last half hour of the film. This style is not intended to provide the character motivation and background information necessary to understand film’s narrative, but rather to express the emotions and subjective experiences of the characters.

**Music**

In a sequence towards the middle of the film Miyŏng sings a song in the club while her friend and other hostesses watch her with customers. The song is slow, lugubrious ballad
with a strong beat by a rock rhythm section accompanied by an orchestra and saxophone, an arrangement common in popular music in 1970s South Korea. As she sings the song there are a series of flashbacks of her and her first love Chinsu playing on a beach, riding rides at an amusement park, feeding goats at a zoo, and frolicking on the grass. These happy scenes of young love intercut with her plaintive song of loneliness and despair give a bittersweet, nostalgic tone to the flashbacks. By cutting from close ups of her to the scenes we are cued that the scenes are her flashbacks, the way she remembers things.

The scene is repeating information we have already gathered elsewhere, and making it very clear what the narrative is. The emphasis is not on presenting information, but on conveying the feeling of Miyŏng’s emotional state with the audience, inducing in them the same bittersweet remembrance that the character feels. As the film develops though, this repetition of information and impressionistic use of flashbacks gives way to a wider range of devices as it becomes clear that other people can also talk in voice overs and have flashbacks of their own. While everything is initially clearly identified as belonging to certain characters, by the end of the film this begins to break down and it is not clear what is being remembered by whom.

The transition between these scenes isn’t signaled by zooms or racking focus or close ups of characters as it is in the earlier flashback sequences. The scenes that take place in the past are also much longer than the earlier flashbacks, which tended to just show a single shot or a brief series of shots. Here whole scenes are rearranged in time without any cue to the viewer except through the dialogue and their understanding of the situation. While there was heavy repetition to ensure clarity of the impressionistic flashbacks, the longer flashbacks are not cued in anyway and it’s often not clear their relationship to the other scenes until it arises in dialogue. We can say that there is high ambiguity regarding the narrative but relative clarity regarding the emotions of the characters.

Conclusions

We can perhaps argue that this style developed precisely because of the conditions of production under which these films were made. Because there was little time for pre-production or story planning, common story elements were recycled in different patterns, icons and a common visual language was used to quickly cue the audience onto the characters psychology and motivation, and, crucially, the narrative development was downplayed to
favor instead episodic scenarios making the clear understanding of the narrative possible at any point in the film.

Because these films fail on both of these terms they have slipped through the cracks and are seen as an anomaly in Korean film. Discussed only in relation to the corruption of the film industry and its complicity with the Authoritarian regimes of the time or discussed in terms of statistics which consistently downplay the importance of this time period.

In this chapter I looked at the Hostess Films and Miss O’s Apartment. I have shown how the elements of the Revised Sinp’a Style I outlined in Chapter Two are combined in Miss O’s Apartment to an aesthetic effect emphasizing the expression of emotions and stylistic excess over the development of a narrative. This aesthetic, common to the Hostess film, targeted and appealed to young audiences at the time and the popularity of the style continued into the 1980s with the Ero Films.
Chapter 4

Filmmaking Under the 5th Republic, 1980–1988

I cannot remember the contents of the erotic films that I saw at the time at all. However, I clearly remember the sleazy film titles that were in vogue at the time, and the images of actresses gasping for breath in expressions of total fulfillment.

Yu Chi-hyŏng

Chapter Four explores how changes to film policy in the mid-1980s brought an end to the conditions in which the Revised Sinp’’a Style had developed, leading to the diffusion and spread of eroticism to Historical and Literary Films and ending the stylistic unity which characterized earlier erotic films. Additionally I will look at whether or not changes in the enforcement of censorship under the Chun Doo Hwan regime can be attributed to a cultural policy aimed at using eroticism and sex to distract the population from political matters.

The 1980s were a decade of rapid change in which South Korea’s export oriented economy was no longer willingly supported by the US and Japan and a consumer oriented domestic market began to be developed in order to continue the economic growth that was necessary to legitimate the government. This change was became symbolized by the new presidency of general Chun Doo Hwan, who took control of South Korea after Park Chung
Hee’s assassination in 1979 who had dominated South Korean politics in the 1960s and 1970s.

Chun differed from his predecessor, Park, at least on one account by recognizing the importance of leisure and consumer spending as the crucial engine of capitalism and the comfort pill for the masses to temporarily forget the dispossessions of their voting rights. Complementing the time of radical change, a new consumerist culture was made available through special rates for loans on cars, electronic goods, and furniture and in new retail stores, credit cards, and homes, which were in previous decades denied to the middle class. An attempt to curtail and condemn public excesses and foreign imports also appeared.¹

These policies were complimented by the government’s strategy for dealing with cultural and political liberalization, which was to give symbolic concessions while maintaining political control over other aspects of society. This became popularly known as the 3S policy, the Ss standing for Sex, Screen, and Sports. This referred to the loosening of censorship of sex in film, the start of color broadcasting and the subsidy of televisions to promote adoption, and the founding of professional baseball and football leagues and the hosting of the 1986 Asian Games and then the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

Each of these liberalization policies was meant to appease a growing middle class desire for material rewards and growing demands to decrease the militarization of society and to begin the process of democratization. By strategically giving symbolic concessions the government sought to maintain its authoritarian control over the population while symbolically satisfying the needs of the populace.

Fifth and Sixth Revision of the Film Law

Like Park Chung Hee, Chun Doo Hwan attempted a revision of the Motion Picture Law soon after he took the presidency in 1982. While Park had been able to push through his revision, though Chun’s cabinet approved a draft the National Assembly rejected the revision² and it was not until 1985 that the revision was passed. This was the Fifth Revision of the Film Law and it ended the system of constraints that made the erotic film style possible. The number of film companies was no longer limited and there was no more requirement to produce films in order to import them. Companies could import foreign films without having to produce any domestic films.

²Kay, Korea Annual 1983, p. 216.
One unintended consequences of this Revision was that while foreign films had been guaranteed moneymakers through the 1970s and early 1980s, after 1985 the market was flooded with foreign films as Korean companies were formed to import these films. Losing their novelty, foreign films began losing money as frequently as domestic films and Korean Companies competed with each other to get the importation rights to the highest-grossing Hollywood films driving up the prices to acquire foreign films.

Sensing the potential of a profitable new market, the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA) with the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR)\(^3\) and in order to table the complaint the Korean government passed the Sixth Revision of the Film Law, allowing foreign companies to directly distribute films in Korea without going through a Korean intermediary.

![Graph showing the number of imported films and Korean films from 1980 to 1990](image)

**Figure 4.1. Films Released in Korea, 1979–1991**

In Figure 4.1 we can clearly see the effect these two revisions of the Film Law had on the film industry. While the number of domestic films hovered around 90 throughout the decade, the number of foreign films imported increased drastically following the two film revisions. The Fifth Revision took effect in July of 1985 and the number of imports rose rapidly from 30 films in 1985 to 85 films in 1987. The Sixth Revision took place in 1987

\(^3\)Moon, *Korea Annual 1986*, p. 220.
and led to a dramatic increase from 85 films in 1987 to 264 films in 1989; an increase of 310 percent in just two years. These two revisions led to a drastic changes in the structure of the film industry and brought the production and popularity of erotic films to an end.

While the Sixth Revision was just the beginning of Hollywood’s quest to tap into the Korean market, it was the end of an era for the Korean film industry. Although erotic films occasionally found large audiences through the late-1980s, the system of constraints in which the style developed no longer existed, the rise of the Adult Video industry took erotic films in a more explicitly pornographic direction aimed at much smaller audiences, and the new post-authoritarian generation of film-goers had their own tastes and preferences quite different from the youth of the 1970s and 1980s.

Censorship in the Fifth Republic

Formal Censorship

In 1982 Chun replaced the Government censorship board with the Performance Ethics Committee, a civilian board appointed by the Minister of Culture and Information charged with ensuring the films exhibited in Korea met standards of acceptable representation. While purportedly free of interference from the government, it was in fact closely supervised by the Ministry of Culture and Information who appointed its own members to key positions on the board and drew from the film industry for the remaining positions.

The film industry at the time was looking for ways to differentiate itself from television and regain audiences, and dealing with eroticism was seen as a good solution. Representatives film industry had been lobbying the Ministry of Culture of Information to loosen censorship on sexual content to help the film industry and with the creation of the Performance Ethics Committee they finally got their wish. Once censorship was loosened the erotic films that appeared were reviewed favorably by critics who emphasized the interesting style of the films.

However, after the success of Madame Emma film producers began to produce little besides erotic films and the government began to express concern to film producers.

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4 For the US perspective on the opening of the Korean market see Ford, Struggle for Korean Movie Screens an Epic Story — With a Happy Ending.
5 Maeil Kyōngjae, January 22nd, 1982
6 Kyōnghyang Sinmun, February 23rd, 1982
7 Kyōnghyang Sinmun April 9th, 1982
Uneasy with the amount of erotic films being produced and feeling like the film industry was taking advantage of the loosening of censorship, the government intervened and replaced all the members of the Performance Ethics Committee except for one. The replacement members were more in line with the Ministry of Culture and Information and censorship of erotic material briefly returned to its previous levels.

This episode casts some doubt on the claims that the changes in film censorship was part of a larger cultural policy by the Chun Doo Hwan regime, or even that the Chun Doo Hwan regime had very much to do with it. Replacing the members of the Performance Ethics Committee for allowing too many erotic films to be produced seems instead to have been largely prompted by the film industry who were looking for to compete with television.

While it is undeniable that due to the “complaints of people in the film industry about the censorship of domestic films” the Performance Ethics Committee “permitted rather liberated expressions of overt sexual content, without loosening its control on the expression of socially conscious material,” and perhaps even that the resulting “erotic films...were in tune with Chun Doo Hwan’s policy of liberalization,” there doesn’t appear to have been any direct approval of these films. They seem to have stemmed from industry pressure and the government appears to have been at best ambivalent, if not opposed to, the production of these films.

Beyond this, the loosening of censorship only accounts for why these films were allowed, not why they were popular, and it was certainly their popularity that drove their continued production through the 1980s. To explain why they are popular we need to look at who was going to watch these films as well as the films themselves. I hope to show that these films were mostly seen by young audiences and that they enjoyed these films primarily because of their style and not for their prurient appeal.

**Informal Censorship**

In addition to this, films were occasionally targeted by social groups for negative portrayals of characters. The 1981 film *The Girl Who Went to the City* tells the story of a girl who comes to the city to find work in order to support her family in the country. She works in a variety of jobs before eventually settling down as a bus conductor. But she soon

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8 *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, April 15th, 1982  
9 *Donga Ilbo*, April 16th, 1982  
11 Sin, “*<Aemabuin> ŭi abŏji* [The Father of Madame Emma]”.  

finds it difficult to adjust to city life and the various demands placed on her by her job and her male supervisor and she unsuccessfully tries to return to the country. (Bae 1988, 10)

The film’s negative depiction of the conditions of bus conductors led the female bus conductors union to picket the film causing the film’s producers to pull the film from distribution. In this case, even though the film was cleared by the censors, a union was able to successfully stop the distribution of the film because they film it slandered their occupation.

Another example of this type of social pressure happened in 1984 to director Im Kwon-taek. Im began production on the film Female Monk, which was to be the second in his “Buddhist trilogy” with Mandala and Upward, Upward, Come Upward (1987). However, the Chogne Order objected to the film on the grounds of its sexual objectification of female monks. They not only picketed the production of the film, making it difficult for producers to find shooting locations, but also took legal action which eventually resulted in the shutting down of production and Im abandoning the project.

As Im Kwon-Taek said in an interview, “I’ve had more problem with pressure-groups blocking a number of my projects than I ever had with the government’s Ethics Committee.”

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how changes to film policy in the mid-1980s brought an end to the conditions in which the Revised Sinp’a Style had developed, leading to the diffusion and spread of eroticism to Historical and Literary Films and ending the stylistic unity which characterized earlier erotic films. Additionally I looked at the various ways censorship functioned in the 1980s as well as the rise of independant filmmaking.

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Chapter 5

Madame Emma and the Ero Film

The special difficulty with eroticism is that if you do it well it’s art, but if you do it poorly it’s pornography.

Kim Yang-sam

Madame Emma is considered an Ero Film and not a Hostess Film for the simple reason that Emma, the protagonist, isn’t a bargirl, hostess, or prostitute; she is a married woman who looks for sexual satisfaction outside of marriage. Despite this change in subject from hostess to adulteress, the Ero Films continued to be made in the Revised Sinp’a Style. In this chapter I will look at the production history and style of the film Madame Emma. Since Madame Emma became a succès de scandale it’s difficult to say that the style alone attracted audiences, but the style is consistent with earlier Hostess Films and continued to attract young audiences of both genders in large numbers.

Like Miss O’s Apartment and many of the other Hostess Films, Madame Emma is based on a bestselling novel, however, unlike most of the novels that began as newspaper serials, Madame Emma originally appeared as a novel. Despite this it retained the episodic narrative structure that helped define the Revised Sinp’a Style.

In an interview with South Korean film magazine Cine21 Chŏng In-yŏp, the director of Madame Emma and two of its 14 (and counting) sequels, talked about the origins of the film in a trip he took to the United States as part of a training program. During his stay in New York City he often went to movies in the Times Square area which, in the late 1970s through 1980s was infamous for its grindhouse theaters that played non-stop pornography, kung fu films, mondo films, horror films, and various other sub-genres of exploitation and
sexploitation films. The film that left the largest impression of him was *Caligula* (dir. Tinto Brass, 1979), in particular the implied sexual relationship between Caligula and his horse. Immediately thinking of the book *Madame Emma*, at the time a best-seller, he met with novelist Cho Su-bi as soon as he arrived back in Seoul and asked her for permission to make a movie based on her book. *Madame Emma’s* roots in the counter-culture of early 1980’s New York City may have given it a transgressive appeal that helped boost its popularity among young people.

![Image of Deuce theaters showing Caligula in the late 1970s.](image)

**Figure 5.1.** The Deuce theaters showing *Caligula* in the late 1970s.

While he was able to get permission from Cho Su-bi, director Chŏng In-yŏp was turned down by a series of producers and financiers who argued that, despite the promise of large profits if it was successful, the film would be unable to get past the censors. Eventually Chŏng convinced Yŏnbang Films to take a chance on the film, but throughout filming producer Yang Pong-sŏk was concerned about possible censorship and insisted on the actress wearing clothes throughout the movie and removing the word “sex” from all dialogue in the

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1. Landis and Clifford, *Slezoid Express: a Mind-Twisting Tour through the Grindhouse Cinema of Times Square*.
2. In the title of the novel the Chinese ideographs for Emma (愛馬) literally mean “horse lover,” however, for the film this was changed by the Performance Ethics Committee to less lurid, phonetically equivalent Chinese ideographs (愛麻).
film. Chŏng got around the first request by having actress An So-yŏng wear a see-through negligee for the love scenes so that they could claim the movie did not have any nudity, yet still leave less to the audience’s imagination. The second request he complied with completely.3

With the constant worry about censorship during the shooting of the film, everyone involved with the production was surprised when the censors passed the film without a single cut. The only change requested was to print the release prints dark so that the see-through quality of the negligee was minimized. In the previous chapter I described how the Chun Doo Hwan regime gave control of censorship to the nominally civilian Performance Ethics Committee and how they initially loosened censorship on sexual matters. There appears to have been little communication between the government, the Performance Ethics Committee, and those working in the film industry, but the timing of Madame Emma couldn’t have been better and it appeared before the newly formed Committee at precisely the moment they were looking to help the film industry by loosening censorship. This was their first stroke of good luck.

Madame Emma was passed by the Performance Ethics Committee on January 27th and opened in theaters on February 6th, 1982. The film was initially a moderate success, but was helped by another stroke of luck. After 37 years of a nightly curfew that prevented citizens from being outside of their homes at night, Chun Doo Hwan unexpectedly put the curfew to an end. Seeing a potential opportunity to expand their business, some movie theaters applied to the government for permits to hold midnight screenings. Sŏul Theater manager Yi Hwang-nip recounts that “at first [film producers] applied to the government with this idea without knowing whether or not the government would agree or not. When they applied they thought their chances were around fifty percent. But surprisingly, they got permission easily.”4

In the 1960s the downtown area of Jogno 3-ga was known as a center for inexpensive prostitution until Seoul Mayor Kim Hyon-ok led a campaign to clean up the area. By late 1968 the area was free of prostitution and became known more for its cluster of first run movie theaters than for its prostitution.5 Sŏul Theater was a newer theater built in 1979 and it’s location in the heart of downtown, Jogno 3-ga, put it right at the heart of what

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3Sin, “<Aemabuin> ŭi abŏji [The Father of Madame Emma]”.
4S. Kim, “Pankukjangjuŭi ŭi simyagŭkjang kwa sŏnginkwan ae dehan nonŭi [Discussion of Night Theaters and Adult Movie Theaters]”.
would emerge as the center of night life in Seoul in the 1980s. Helping the growth of the area was the opening of Line 2 of the Seoul Metropolitan Subway system in 1980 and connected many of the University’s to the central downtown area, allowing affordable and fast transportation and focusing attention on the areas immediately surrounding subway stations. While buses had served this function before they were more distributed and didn’t have the effect of concentrating people in one area. Jogno 3-ga was one of the original stops on Line 2 and its exit directly in front of the newly opened Sŏul Theater helped make it a popular attraction.

One could imagine the excitement of young people at the time when laws governing the length of hair and skirts were repealed, police were ordered off campuses, protests were again tolerated and the government began organizing professional sports leagues and the night curfew was lifted. And all of this energy and desire was focused on the first midnight screening of Madame Emma which focused the energies and desires of those out at night.

The excitement of the March 27th opening was palpable. It inaugurated not just midnight screenings but also Seoul nightlife in general, which became open and public for the first time. While the film was the centerpiece of this new nightlife, it was the newfound freedom associated with the lifting of the curfew that was celebrated as the stars of the film and their supporters "held an improvised soju party to celebrate the successful opening of the film."

The Dong-a Ilbo quotes a Choe Yŏng-su, a 24 year old who came to see the film with his girlfriend, as saying that “I’m very glad to have a place for young people to appreciate movies together and share opinions.”

On March 27th, Madame Emma became the first movie to hold midnight screenings and it quickly began breaking box office records. On the first night 5,000 people showed up at the 1,500 seat theater. Over 500 additional people were allowed to stand in the aisles but the majority of the crowd was left waiting outside where they became disgruntled and began smashing the box office windows of the theater. Mounted police had to be called in to restore order. Again, the midnight screenings gave the film a transgressive appeal and it’s not surprising that the majority of those that attended these early screenings of Madame Emma were in their 20’s.

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6Dong-a Ilbo
7S. Kim, “Pankukjangjuūi ti simyagŭkjang kwa sŏnginkwan ae dehan noni [Discussion of Night Theaters and Adult Movie Theaters]”; Lankov, Dictating Sex.
8Donga Ilbo, March 29th, 1982
Figure 5.2. A poster for Madame Emma.
The advertising that accompanied Madame Emma, seen in Figure 5.2, highlighted the eroticism of the film. The yellow text at the top announces “Magnificent fanfare for the era of adult films” asking rhetorically below in white text “Do you know Madame Emma?” To the left there is light yellow text that reads ”The carnal girl who gestures with her eyes and speaks with her body.”9 Finally, the vertical red text at the far right of the poster implores the viewer to “Help Emma put her clothes on,” implying that at some point in the film she must take them off. The promise of bared flesh and eroticism are up front and undisguised.

Above actress An So-yŏng’s left breast there is a semi-transparent rectangle that darkens the image. As mentioned earlier, this was a concession to the Performance Ethics Committee to reduce the translucence of her negligee to avoid revealing too much. Above the large red title of the film10 we see a silhouette of a girl, presumably Emma, riding a horse. Without this image of the horse the poster becomes quite generic and it’s the horse, and the association of riding a horse with sex, that became the marketing hook for the film and is well remembered in South Korea, even by those too young to have seen the film.

Another influence on the film was the French film Emmanuelle (dir. Just Jaeckin, 1974), which was picked up by Columbia Pictures for US distribution in 1974 and was the last of the major US studio’s attempts to release “classy” X-rated movies through mainstream distribution channels. The film is based on the novel Emmanuelle: The Joys of a Woman published under the nom-de-plume Emmanuelle Arsan in France in 1967 and follows the extra-marital affairs of the wife of a diplomat stationed in Thailand.

The film was a worldwide hit and generated numerous sequels, both official and unofficial. Although it was never theatrically released in South Korea, the troubles with censors in various European countries were frequently covered in South Korean newspapers, as seen in Figure 5.3, where the film was referred to as Aemanyuael Puin.11 So while the film itself would have been difficult to see in South Korea, the scandal surrounding the film and its censorship issues were well covered in newspapers of the time. Considering director Chŏng’s travel experience and interest in erotic movies it is possible that he saw the film. In any case, Emmanuelle clearly inspired the title of both the book and the movie Madame

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9 This line perhaps reminded audiences of the 1980 erotic film The Parrot who Laughed with its Body.
10 As mentioned before, the hanja used for the title of the film is the phonetic ‘馬’ rather than the original ‘馬’, meaning horse. Despite the changing of the hanja the connection between eros and horses is still quite clear.
11 Note the similarity between Aema Puin (Madame Emma) and Aemanyuael Puin (Emmanuelle). One is clearly a shortened form of the other.
Figure 5.3. An article on the history of banned films uses the censorship of *Emanuelle* as an excuse to print a topless photo actress Sylvia Kristel. *[Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, April 16th, 1975]

*Emma (Aema Puin)* as well as the general premise of the story of a woman looking for sexual satisfaction outside of her marriage through a series of lovers.

Another thing *Madame Emma* and *Emmanuelle* had in common was their appeal to female viewers. Jon Lewis recounts in his book *Hollywood V. Hardcore* how Columbia president David Begelman “was first attracted to *Emmanuelle* when he noticed that the lines outside theaters showing the film in Paris were comprised of 75–80% women.” For the US studios the appeal to women was crucial to keep their legitimacy as mainstream film distributors and to differentiate themselves from the proliferation of small format pornographic films at the time.

For South Korean producers, the appeal to women was crucial because women had traditionally been the largest viewers of films but the recent introduction of color television meant that more women were watching dramas at home and less were going to the theaters. The production of erotic films with strong melodramatic elements was seen as a way of offering something to women which color television could not. A conscious strategy on the part of film producers was to attract female audiences with the melodrama and male audiences with the sex.

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Interestingly, the initial midnight screenings were dominated by two groups that are typically not associated with these films: young adults and women. The *Donga Ilbo* reports that the first midnight screening on March 27th was completely sold out and 80–90 percent of the audience were in their 20s\(^{13}\) with the *Kyunghyun Sinmun* adding that most of the young adults were couples and that those not there as couples were mostly single women.\(^{14}\)

While the unique circumstances surrounding *Madame Emma* make it difficult to claim that it was the style that contributed to the film’s popularity, the style is worth examining because *Madame Emma* is seen as a model for later Ero Films and, as we shall see, the film contains the elements of the Revised Sinp’\(a\) Style. The difference between the Hostess Films and the Ero Films is the subjects they portray, because the films exhibit strong stylistic continuity.

In a way the cultural significance of *Madame Emma* overshadows the film itself. While not everyone has seen the film everyone knows the iconic images of An So-yŏng riding a horse and is aware that the film is an erotic film. It’s perhaps significant in this regard that the only reference to ero films in general at the Korean Film Archives is a statue replica of Emma riding a horse. The icon looms larger than the film itself. But as interesting as the events surrounding the film are, the film itself is just as interesting as it pushed the boundaries of acceptable behavior on screen and provided a vehicle for audiences to think about themselves and their desires in new ways.

**The Text of the Film**

*Madame Emma* tells the story of Emma, a housewife who lives with her husband and daughter in a large, well furnished house. Her husband is unable to fulfill her sexually and leaves her alone at home for long periods of time while he is having affairs under the pretense of work. When she walks in on him and another woman at a motel they get into an argument and she threatens to have an affair to get revenge. He becomes furious, goes out drinking, gets into a bar fight and kills the man he is fighting, ending up in prison.

Emma’s daughter is taken away by the grandparents of her husband and when she visits him in prison he urges her to forget him and to find another man. Emma is hesitant to break her monogamous relationship with her husband but her friend Erica encourages

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\(^{13}\) *Donga Ilbo*, March 29th, 1982

\(^{14}\) *Kyŏnghyang Sinmun*, March 30th, 1982
her to think of own satisfaction herself first and initiates her into an extramarital sexual relationship.

While living at a friend’s apartment, Emma runs into a former lover who is now married and happens to live in the apartment above where Emma is staying. Seeing Emma is now single he attempts to rekindle their relationship and, failing that, breaks into her apartment and rapes her. Distraught and disillusioned, Emma goes to live in the countryside and takes a job as a farmhand where she meets a young student artist whose mentor (sŏnbae) is in the same prison as her husband. She is attracted to his gentleness and honesty and they begin a love affair. In the end, Emma’s husband is released from prison early due to good behavior and Emma must choose between the student artist, who has invited her to come with him to Paris, and her husband, who would allow her to reunite with her daughter.

Just as important to the film as the visuals, and until recently overlooked in film studies, the sound design of the film in Madame Emma plays a crucial role in building the desires of the audiences. As the visuals in the film were strictly censored, both by the producers of the film through self-censorship and through the Performance Ethics Committee and their command to darken the release prints of the film, the sound design took on an important role and was clearly an important element of the overall design of the film from its conception.

The most famous scene in the film is of Emma masterbating in her bed while she fantasizes about riding horses, an act that is explicitly linked with her earlier lesbian encounter with her friend Erica. In this scene she is blindfolded, the images that play on the screen in a dissolve on the screen are presumably those in her mind. As we see her riding a horse on one side of the screen and her blinded folded face, lips parting in pleasure on the other side, it is the soundtrack that provides the eroticism and fulfills the desires of the audience.

I have already described the opening shot of the film, but the narrative proper starts with Emma riding a train alone. She looks out the window at the passing scenery in a common visual trope of Korean Films in general, especially during this period. There is a young man across the aisle from her who is looking at her gaze out of the window. Suddenly a gun enters the frame from the foreground pointed at Emma, the camera positioned where the person holding the gun would be. The pattern of editing implies that it is the man who is pointing the gun at her. Instead, a cut reveals a young boy in a cowboy suit with a fake gun telling her to put her hands up. Emma smiles and complies. The boy continues around
Figure 5.4. Emma masterbates blindfolded while an image of her riding a horse appears in a split screen shot.

the train telling everyone to put up their hands and shooting them with water when they refuse. After seeing the boy Emma looks out the window lost in thought.

The film cuts without transition to Emma and her daughter lying on the floor together and reading a book out loud. It’s not clearly established but we assume that this young boy on the train has reminded Emma of a memory of her daughter.

After her daughter goes to bed her husband is brought home extremely drunk and laid down on the bed. Quick cuts pass by, reminiscent of the opening shot, of Emma’s face against a black background a single light source lights one side of her face (unlike the opening shot which had a standard three point lighting setup) already drawing us into Emma’s subjective space as we literally can’t place her face in relation to another objects. She opens her mouth and moans. We then cut back to a high camera position looking down at Emma sitting on the edge of the bed next to her husband. A single overhead light now highlights the husband lying on a white and yellow bed while Emma is still backed by darkness. In one of the most famous shots of the film she brings his hand to her breast but pulls his hand away and rolls over. Cut to a medium close up of Emma, now evenly lit with a soft backlight, as she reflects on her unfulfilled desire. Fade to black.

The next shot is Emma looking outside a window as rain pours against the window distorting her image in waves of water. A widescreen lens further distorts the straight lines of the window. Cut to inside the house now and Emma goes and shuts off the radio which
she has been listening to. She sits down in a chair and suddenly we cut to a handheld camera walking down a hallway. The camera goes to the room 316 and continues towards the numbers until the camera loses focus. Then three quick cuts. One showing Emma entering the room and gasping and the next showing her husband in bed with another woman and then back to Emma leaving the room again. We then cut to a clock on the wall showing midnight. Emma’s husband is smoking a cigarette in the living room of the house with only a single lamp on leaving most of the room in darkness.

Already the film shows many of the characteristics of the Revised Sinp’a Style. The constant flashbacks and jumps in time leave the viewer disoriented as to how the scenes are related to each other. It is still unclear how all of these flashbacks fit together. Furthermore, the flashbacks aren’t signaled through typical devices as in Miss O’s Apartment of dissolves, racks out of focus, and closeup of characters. Whereas Miss O’s Apartment began with more conventional signaling of flashbacks and jumps in time to later abandon them as the film develops, Madame Emma abandons these from the beginning giving the whole film a mysterious, dream-like feeling in which the relationship between scenes is often initially unclear and can be somewhat disorienting. This is further reinforced by the lighting design which puts key scenes, especially the erotic scenes, in heavy shadow and darkness removing spatial referents in those scenes and giving them a dreamlike quality that supports the central aim of the sinp’a mode which is to emphasize the emotional qualities of the scene at the expense of narrative cohesion.

The film continues with Emma’s daughter waking up and going to her husband. We find out that Emma hasn’t come home yet so the daughter can’t sleep. The daughter goes back to bed and Emma’s friend Erica calls the house asking for Emma. The husband says that he sent her to her parent’s house in the country. We then cut to Erica talking on the phone with Emma sitting next to her. Erica thanks Emma’s husband and hangs up the phone. They both laugh at the husband’s lie. Emma says that after she found her husband cheating on her she just went to a movie theater and then came to Erica’s house. She wants to go home to take care of her daughter but Erica encourages her to stay out longer to make her husband suffer.

She goes home the next day and her husband is still waiting for her. They have an argument and the stakes of the film are laid out very clearly. He accuses her of having an affair while she was out that night. She says that he’s been out every three or four nights. He says it’s for work. She says that he refuses to have sex with her but then has affairs
with other women and feels humiliated. She warns him that she will really do what he is accusing her of and she slaps him and leaves the house and goes out drinking.

Interestingly here the film switches from being more or less confined to Emma’s point of view, with some exceptions, to now being focused on the husband’s point of view. While the husband is out drinking some men at the next table talk about how they met a girl at a nightclub who was married. They laugh at how pathetic his husband must be. They get in a fight that effectively uses slow-motion photography and he kills the other man and is sentenced to life in prison.

The next scene the husband’s parents take her daughter away from her and she asks Erica for advice. We then see her traveling across country in a bus. She gets off the bus and goes to visit the prison. Seeing the man from the first scene of the movie on the train. The initial flashback is then over and the syuzhet has finally arrived back at the ‘present’ moment in which the film began. It is here, with the backstory revealed, that the narrative proper begins of Emma’s extra-marital sexual encounters.

The entire structure of the film is similarly fractured and free-floating in time, with the connections between scenes not becoming obvious until later in the film. This quite clearly emphasizes the emotions of Emma over an attempt to present a linear narrative and quite often the style and emotion of the movie overpower the narrative completely, as in the erotic scenes or the climatic final scene where Emma drives her car to meet one of the men; but we aren’t sure who until the very end of the film. This scene becomes built up emotionally through the heavy use of pop music, cuts between the present men waiting for her, Emma driving in her car, and her past with each of the men, and the use of zoom shots into closeups of the waiting men, building anticipation and heightening the emotional poignancy of the scene. In this way Madame Emma makes extensive use of the elements of the Revised Sinp’a style.

Conclusion

While the unique circumstances surrounding the release of Madame Emma certainly account for most of the popularity, the transgressive appeal of the film to young audiences was accomplished not just through the midnight screenings and sexual content, but also the style of the film which lent itself perfectly to a total film experience rather than simply the realistic recounting of a story.
Conclusion

By the end of the 1980s South Korea had their first democratic elections. Though the results ended up putting Roh Tae-woo in power, opposition candidates Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung had run without the political restrictions that had hampered their previous campaigns (Kim Dae Jung had previously run for President in 1970s). While the newly revised constitution would become the 6th Republic, it was said by many people to be the 5.5 Republic in that many of the Ministers and Policies were carried over from the Chun Doo Hwan regime. However, it was now clear that it would be impossible to rule Korea in the same autocratic manner that previous military regimes had.

As restrictions on expression and consumer spending were relaxed, a growing discourse criticizing kwasobi, or excessive consumption, emerged. In line with the Nationalist ideology of sacrifice for the nation, this discourse criticized those citizens who fulfilled their own desires instead of suppressing their desires for the good of the nation. In Laura Nelson’s book *Measured Excess* she explores the development of this concept. By the late-1980s, the discourse had taken on increasingly moral tones and this sort of excessive consumption had become associated with women, particularly housewives, who neglected their duties as mothers in order to fulfill personal desires by shopping and spending money. Thus the discourse on kwasobi was highly gendered. Additionally groups like the Seoul YMCA began to connect the excessive consumption with the excesses of the pleasure industry, which included massage parlors, hostess bars, room salons, and other coded forms of the sex industry.

It’s not surprising then that we begin to see coverage of Ero Films also taking a moralistic approach in newspaper articles and editorials in the late 1980s, frequently connecting the films with the larger pleasure industry and by extension with the kwasobi which was seen as a negative effect of capitalism and Westernization.

In the 1988 articles erotic films are presented as just one of many problems which include hostess bars, strip clubs, sex shows, prostitution, and pornographic magazines. The
erotic melodramas were presented as part of this ‘pleasure industry’. The Kyŏnhyang Sinmun in particular took a strong editorial stand on this issue. In a 2nd page editorial titled “Lewd Flood Needs to be Stopped”, an entertainment section article titled “Lewd Peak Point...Too Many Sex Movies and Nude Shows” and a lengthy editorial by social critic Ji Young-woo titled “Decadent Culture: Do We Have to Keep This?”, the newspaper blasted not only the erotic films but the larger sex culture that they were seen as being a part of.

In Ji Young-woo’s piece in particular he clearly states that it isn’t the film makers or film producers or the students who are to blame, it is the 3S policy of the Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan administrations. 3S stands for Sports, Screen and Sex and became a shorthand for critics of Chun Doo-hwan to refer to hi cultural policies. These involved the establishment of professional baseball and soccer leagues and the hosting of the 1986 Asian Games and the 1988 Seoul Olympics, the promotion of color televisions and color broadcasting which had been previously been illegal under the austerity measures of the Park Chung-hee regime, and the proliferation of erotic melodramas and the ‘pleasure industry’. While the existence of the ‘sex’ component of the 3S policy has been called into question and there appears to have been no explicit policy to produce erotic melodramas or encourage prostitution as there were with the other S’s, the phrase ’3S policy’ became widely used in the late 1980s by critics of the Chun Doo-hwan regime.

In line with this trend the editorial goes on to state that the 3S policy has deliberately brought about the decadent culture and is a disease on society. He calls on newly elected president Roh Tae-woo, who replaced Chun Doo-hwan in 1987 making a campaign promise to reverse the policies of the former administration, to clean up society and restore it to its proper state. This three way connection between erotic films, the surrounding ‘pleasure industry’, and the politics of the former administration is not only completely absent from the 1982 articles, but also inexpressible under the censorship laws at that time. It is only with the relaxing of political censorship in 1987 that editorials like this one by Ji Young-woo became possible to print. So it’s no surprise then that the articles from 1988 deal increasingly on larger social and political issues and the corruption of the previous regimes.

This shift in tone and focus of the news coverage of commercial films and the simultaneous emergence of the ‘Korean New Wave’ directors who began making films dealing with social issues in a serious, has until recently prevented an appreciation of the popular
films from the 1970s and 1980s, chief among them the Ero Films. The criticism of Ero Films as complacent with the authoritarian government and espousing patriarchal militaristic values has become widespread since the late 1980s and these films continue to be seen as at best an embarrassing chapter in Korean film history.

In this paper I have looked at the erotic films of the 1970s and 1980s and tried to show that these films have merit as interesting film texts and that they do not simply reflect the ideology of the authoritarian military governments of the time. I have argued that the massive popularity of the films can be best explained by looking at the style of these films and how this style appealed to audiences. In doing this I hope to offer a new way of viewing these films which can move the conversation beyond the moralizing discourse that began in the late 1980s by opposition politicians. In this sense I hope that this paper provides both demonstrates the continuing importance and significance of these films as key components of the popular culture at the time as well providing a more balanced view of the films of the time and the audiences that enjoyed them.
Appendix A

Selection Standards for “Quality Films”, 1973–1979

1. Content that embodies the “October Yusin.”

2. Content that establishes the Korean nation’s independence and encourages and boosts the national character of devotion to our country and our people.

3. Content that builds up an adventurous national spirit full of desire and loyalty.

4. Content that makes people participate in the New Village Movement (semaül undong)

5. Content that emphasizes cooperation and solidarity among Human Evergreens (ingan sangroksu) who are sensible and strong-willed.

6. Content that gives farmers and fishermen dreams and faith to contribute to the development of rural culture.

7. Content that describes characters who are faithful, diligent and frugal.

8. Content about Industrial Warriors (sanŏp chŏnsa) who devote themselves and do their best for the modernization of the Fatherland.

9. Content about historical figures who overcame national crisis through foreknowledge and brave decisions.

10. Content that shows the way to overcome national crises through the unity of the masses.
11. Content that encourages people’s awakening on the model of national ordeals.

12. Content about the enhancement of export and which encourages the whole nation’s scientification.

13. Content about government officers who devote themselves to the nation and its people.

14. Content that contributes to beautiful and fine traditions and the purification of national sentiments.

15. Content that contributes to the clearness of people’s lives through the development and popularization of healthy national past times.

16. Content that cultivates a spirit to preserve national properties.

17. Content that contributes to the transmission and development of cultural traditions and the enhancement of Korean people’s art.

18. Content of great artistic value as creative, pure, literary fare.
Appendix B

Selected Filmography

What follows is a selected chronological filmography of Hostess Films and Ero Films that contain elements of the Revised Sinp’a Style. I have left out the Folk Erotic films and Literary Films which, as I discuss in the thesis, are stylistically quite different from the Hostess and Ero Films and are also quantitatively fewer in number: the titles of virtually all of these films can be found in the text of the thesis. I have also included only the first three films of long-running series like Madame Emma, Red Cherry, and others.

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<tr>
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<th>Release Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wedding Dress in Tears / 눈물의 웨딩드레스</td>
<td>Byŏn Chang-ho</td>
<td>July 21, 1973</td>
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<td>Promise of the Flesh / 肉體의 約束</td>
<td>Kim Ki-yŏng</td>
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<td>Winter Woman / 겨울 여자</td>
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<td>Iŏ Island / 異魚島</td>
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<td>Oct 4, 1977</td>
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<td>A Splendid Outing / 화려한 외출</td>
<td>Kim Su-yong</td>
<td>Mar 10, 1978</td>
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<td>Miss O’s Apartment Sequel / O양의 아파트(속)</td>
<td>Byŏn Jang-ho</td>
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<td>Miss Yang’s Adventure / 미스양의 모험</td>
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<td>I’m Lady Number 77 / 나는 77번 아가씨</td>
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<td>Woman After a Killer Butterfly / 살인나비를 쫓는 여자</td>
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<td>Do you know Kkotsuni? / 꽃순이를 아시나요</td>
<td>Chŏng In-yŏp</td>
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<td>The Outsiders / 외인들</td>
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<td>A College Girl’s Confession / 어느 여대생의 고백</td>
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<td>The Hut / 피막</td>
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<td>Mandala / 만다라</td>
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<td>The Parrot Cries with its Body / 앵무새 몸으로 울었다</td>
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<td>A Night’s Heaven / 밤의 천국</td>
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<td>A Woman’s Trap / 여자의 함정</td>
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<td>Temptation / 유혹</td>
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<td>Lee Chang-ho</td>
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<td>Daughter of Darkness / 어둠의 딸</td>
<td>Chŏn T'ae-sik</td>
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