

Korea's Occupied Cinema, 1893–1948: The Untold History of the Film Industry. Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung, Shim. New York: Routledge, 2011 (Routledge Advances in Film Studies). ISBN: 9780415740487

While Korean cinema has gained a great deal of attention around the world, not much scholarly work has been done on the early years of Korean cinema. Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim's ambitious study, *Korea's Occupied Cinema*, traces the history of Korean cinema from 1893 – when missionaries introduced the earliest magic lantern shows – to 1948, when the United States ended the military occupation of South Korea. Before Koreans contributed to the making of their own cinema, foreigners and foreign cinema culture were said to have occupied cinema in the peninsula. However, despite the “occupation” of Korean cinema, Yecies and Shim show that Koreans and foreign agents exerted continuous influence on one another, creating a history of interaction that was bidirectional rather than monodirectional. Through the study, the authors show how various internal agents actively nurtured and shaped the nascent film industry in Korea in myriad ways, thereby countering Japanese and American influences.

The study is divided into six chapters organized chronologically, underscoring both the evolution of Korea's film industry and the interactions between domestic and foreign agents. The first chapter (1893–1905) explains early film technology and policies while tracing the evolution from magic lantern shows to the first motion pictures and silent films. The second chapter (1905–1916) examines the implications of the arrival of American, European, and Japanese entertainment films and newsreels; the development of venues for screening moving pictures; and the rise of new audiences for the Korean film industry. In the third chapter (1916–1936), the authors demonstrate how official policies shaped Korea's film industry, with particular emphasis

on Governor-General Saitō's new cultural policy of relaxing administrative control over Korean cultural expression. The fourth chapter explores the introduction of sound to Korean cinema during this same period, highlighting the role Korean filmmakers and live narrators (pyōnsa or byeonsa) played in exerting greater agency over the cinematic product. This chapter also shows how the film industry became more vibrant in the 1920s and 1930s, with rise of radio broadcasting, foreign film exhibitions, and the new generation of Korean filmmakers who received education abroad. The fifth chapter (1937–1945) examines the impact of wartime mobilization wherein the colonial state apparatus started discouraged Western themes in favor of pro-Japanese propaganda films. Finally, the sixth chapter (1945–1948) introduces the new film culture that emerged out of the importation of American ideals and values during the U.S.'s occupation of South Korea.

While the book offers an impressive amount of historical detail, the approach is neither surprising nor innovative. The authors constantly emphasize the complex flows and interpretations of foreign influence, methods, culture, and ideals within the Korean film industry. In other words, they argue that the reality of Korean cinema was far more complicated than simply being “occupied.” This argument sounds rather generic to a postmodern audience. Power and agency have complex dimensions, as the authors claim; yet, a deeper analysis beyond arguing for an acknowledgement of the “complexity” of the relationship would have been beneficial. In addition, I wonder why the authors chose the title “Korea's Occupied Cinemas,” when the point of the study is to challenge the notion of the “occupied” in Korea's film industry.

The value of the study is also somewhat undermined by basic historical inaccuracies. For instance, the assassination of Queen Min, wife of King Kojong (aka Gojong), was in 1895, not 1907 (p. 42). The beginning year of *Tonga ilbo* (*Donga Ilbo*) was also 1920 (same with *Chosŏn*

ilbo (*Chosun Ilbo*)) not 1921 (p. 71), and so on. Beyond these errors in the timeline, the presentation of the historical narrative includes some uncomfortable assumptions and generalizations. For example, while neo-Confucianism became more influential in the late Chosŏn era, it is an exaggeration to say that Confucianism always provided the fundamental traditions for the majority of Koreans. Contrary to the authors' depiction, the idea of a strict physical separation between noblemen and commoners, and men and women, simply does not hold up to scrutiny (p. 44; p. 59). Popular entertainments such as *p'ansori* and *sadangp'ae*, predated the introduction of indoor theaters in the early 20th century and almost always blurred the physical separations between gender and status. Another point of contestation comes from the authors' assertions regarding Japanese colonial censorship. The authors conclude in Chapter 3 that it "is clear that the censorship apparatus was chiefly directed at collecting a mass of application fees rather than preventing films from being screened" based solely on the number of censorship applications, though the authors do admit that more research is necessary (p.93-94). However, it must be remembered that the existence of censorship invites self-censorship, which would not be reflected in the number of censorship applications. While the author's use of abundant primary and secondary materials is admirable, the study as a whole would benefit from a more careful and critical consideration of the existing body of literature on the history of cinema and that of Korea.

Despite these shortcomings, this study can be especially useful in the classroom as a textbook for the history of Korean cinema at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Given the dearth of scholarship in English on Korean cinema during this period, it also represents an important addition to the historiography. In particular, it offers detailed descriptions and fascinating examples from the early years of Korean cinema. This work will undoubtedly serve

as an important reference and textbook for scholars and students of Korean film and history. This book will be helpful for those who study Korean cinema, culture, and history as well as those in the field of East Asian cinema and culture.

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