

At the Margins of Freedom

A Day Off (1968) and Film Censorship

In an interview in April 1968, the director Yi Manhŭi unveiled his new project, *A Day Off* (*Hyuil*), a film about a poor young couple in Seoul. Yi and his team—the writer Paek Kyŏl and the producer Chŏn Oksuk—seemed thrilled about the film’s prospects of success. Chŏn, the only woman studio-runner in the industry, saw “exceptional promise” in the script that convinced her to submit the complete film to prestigious film festivals such as “Venice and Cannes.”¹ In less than three months, her hopes would be dashed when the script failed to win the state censor’s approval. During the interview, however, not knowing what disappointment awaited them, the trio eagerly discussed the film’s plot: one Sunday, Uk and Chiyŏn decide to have an abortion because of their economic precarity. Out of desperation, Uk steals money from a friend in order to take Chiyŏn to the clinic. While she is in surgery, Uk wanders aimlessly around the town. When he returns to the clinic, he learns that Chiyŏn has died. Looking back at his beautiful memories of Chiyŏn, Uk realizes he has been left with nothing to hold onto. Those who had heard about the making of this film were also left with nothing to grasp, wondering how the film had been revised or what the censorship process had been.

Until an original print of *A Day Off* appeared in the storage facility of the Korean Film Archive in 2005, these questions could not be answered. Before this unexpected discovery, the film had existed only in the memories of silver-haired filmmakers and critics and in the pages of old magazines. When the film was unearthed during the year of the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Yi Manhŭi (1931–1975), it increased his fame as an auteur whose creativity as an artist and critical assessment of Korean society were unmatched. Various screenings that celebrated the life of this almost-forty-year-old film widely acclaimed the “belated arrival” of a “masterpiece” that rendered the couple’s despair in an elegant black-and-white aesthetic.² In a fascinating interpretation of the film, the critic

Kim Soyoung describes it as an affectively charged cinematic image of the late 1960s that reflects the climate of a repressive society under the leadership of Park Chung Hee.³ She reads the film's moody depiction of society, with the camera capturing the youngsters' drifting away, as a subtle challenge to the state's aggressive promotion of national unity and developmentalism. If we follow her analysis, it is not surprising that the film raised red flags during the state censors' review process. The published testimony of the writer Paek and other crew members also supports this reading. According to them, the censors recommended a specific and rather abrupt conclusion during revision: Uk was to join the military, making himself useful to the nation to cure his despair.⁴ This proposed ending, at least in the eyes of the censors, would provide the male protagonist with a satisfying escape. As the surviving print shows, the filmmakers accommodated the demand to some extent by revising a final scene in which Uk reminds himself to go to the barbershop to get a crew cut, an action that in the Korean context could allude to joining the military.

The case of *A Day Off* has long been cast as a notorious example of state censorship in analyses that rely on the conventional dynamic of the "oppressed" and the "oppressor" that often operated in the censorship process.⁵ As the Korean Film Archive has expanded access to the collection of Cold War film censorship documents throughout the 2010s, newer discussion has broadened our perspectives on the role of government censors and other important stakeholders in the process. In a departure from previous scholarship that stresses the regulative power of censorship as a tool of the authoritarian state, scholars such as Hye Seung Chung and Cho Junhyoung have revealed the constructive power of censorship that also operated in the negotiations between the censors and the censored.⁶ Attending to *A Day Off*, however, requires a more careful approach given the absence of its official censorship records. Upon receipt of a script from filmmakers, censors typically began a thread of relevant documents on the film. This thread, filed under the film and tagged with its date of birth, includes missives such as a request for script revisions, a confirmation of the approved script, and even a receipt of the film print for review. More important, it shows who was involved in evaluations and what specific decisions were made. In the absence of such a thread on *A Day Off*, one is tempted to speculate that the dossier was "accidentally" lost to avoid a public scandal over censorship.

Such speculation cannot solve one mystery, though, namely, why the film print still exists. Since 1966, the film law had dictated that no movie could be shot without the censorship board's approval of the script, and the surviving print proves, by its sheer existence, that the filmmakers proceeded without the censors' permission.⁷ If we recall the excitement about the film's prospects in the interview that opened this chapter, the filmmakers were unlikely to have deliberately set out to run afoul of the pre-shooting censorship that upset almost every creator in the late 1960s. Even if it was a pure mistake, we cannot deny that when the filmmakers

shot the film without the authorities' consent, they violated the law by disobeying the mandatory censorship protocol. Another act of disobedience followed when the creators of *A Day Off* withdrew the revised film from public release. In the two-tier mechanism of censorship, filmmakers were often left with few or no options beyond making the specified revisions or cuts to get approval for shooting or screening the film in public.⁸ It is unlikely that they, as film-industry veterans, were unaware of the significant cost—economic and, potentially, political—of their decision.⁹ Nonetheless, they chose not to exhibit the film with the revisions demanded by the censors.

Today we have two versions of the script and a film print, none of which was officially approved by the censors at the Ministry of Culture and Public Information, the primary content-approving authority.¹⁰ Analyzing the three available texts of *A Day Off* helps us understand how Cold War film censorship invited not only the authorities' oversight but also a process of bargaining and negotiation between the authorities and filmmakers. I begin by mapping out the ongoing reform of the censorship system in the mid-1960s, which formalized a two-tier system of review that yielded more dialogues between censors and the censored. While tracking the constructive effect of this change across the three texts of *A Day Off*, I consider how the revision process permitted both filmmakers and their advocates in the film industry to imagine freedom apart from the government's definition. On one level, it prompted a reckoning among critics and filmmakers about the right to express themselves freely in cinema, which they saw as contingent upon the political regime that often overrode citizens' constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression. On another level, the creators of *A Day Off* chose not to capitulate to the censors and withdrew the film from public release, and in so doing, they ultimately refused to accommodate the government's definition of what could and could not be shown in public. Both the discourse and the action involved in *A Day Off* manifested celluloid democracy. I show that they emerged as nonconfrontational yet critical expressions of resistance against the condition of censorship that hollowed out the meaning of freedom. In a moment when modes of direct confrontation could elicit violence, they tested and undermined the boundaries set on cinema, opening up other ways to practice freedom at the margins of the system.

COLD WAR STATE CENSORSHIP

From the outset, South Korean film censorship had been established with the intention of regulating all motion pictures and their place in public. But its protocols and rules had changed via multiple reforms that increasingly tied cinema to the state's priorities and perspectives. During the early postwar era under the leadership of Syngman Rhee, cinema's popularity had intrigued political authorities at the same time that it raised concern about the medium's influence in society. Still, this was a period of relative freedom for Korean filmmakers. While the

state cracked down on representations of sexuality and depictions of Japan, as well as allegedly anti-nationalistic ideas, its regulations targeted primarily foreign features. Restrictions on cinema dictated by the law remained incomprehensible and irregular until Park Chung Hee, a rising military leader, instituted a series of regulatory measures. Soon after the coup under the banner of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction in May 1961, he proposed a new registration to industrialize film production, ultimately ratified through the 1963 Film Act. From this point onward, the law put film production in the hands of those who met the state's requirements for registration, demanding that they produce a certain number of films per year in order to expand the capacity of the domestic film industry. Over the next few years, this policy worked to turn small production companies and individual producers into an industrialized studio system, which Steven Chung calls "a highly productive but creatively constricted factory."¹¹ As for censorship, Park immediately called a halt to the first non-state film censorship board, a young institution charged with overseeing the state's regulation of cinema that had emerged during the April Revolution in 1960. The next step placed a strict prior restraint on public release; any film that was to be screened in public had to receive approval from the Ministry of Public Information (expanded as the Ministry of Culture and Public Information in 1968). The Film Act explicitly prohibited the making or distribution of any movie that "celebrated the communists, violated public propriety, or spread fake news."¹² What the state censors aimed to forbid was straightforward enough, but the way they went about it turned out to be remarkably obscure.

Consider the case of *Seven Female POWs* (*Ch'irinüi Yöp'oro*), arguably the most excessive instance of the control of cinema that made the headlines in the so-called golden age era. It began on December 19, 1964, when the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office filed charges against the director Yi Manhüi and the producer Yi Chongsun for *Seven Female POWs*, a feature about the Korean War. Pinpointing the film's humanistic portrayal of North Korean soldiers and critical depiction of the war, the prosecutors sought an arrest warrant for the two on the grounds of their "violation of the Anti-communist Act."¹³ In the next few hours, even as the arrest warrant was lifted, a new warrant for the search and confiscation of the film was issued by the Seoul Criminal District Court.¹⁴ Against that court's decision, the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) stepped in, accusing Yi Manhüi of being pro-communist.¹⁵ Yi was arrested on February 5, 1965, and imprisoned for forty days before being released on bail.¹⁶ Over the next few months, Yi refilmed almost every scene as demanded and eventually released the film with the new title *A Returned Female Soldier* (*Toraon Yögun*). The film earned neither critical acclaim nor box office success. However, this was not the end of the affair. The Seoul Central District Prosecutor sentenced Yi to a year in prison and a suspension of his qualification. Even after the Criminal Court dismissed the prosecutors' appeal in December 1965, the prosecutors never dropped

the case. In the second appeal against Yi and *Seven Female POWs* in March 1969, the Criminal Court justices finally put the prosecutors on a leash, denying that they had the right to arrest the moviemaker for the allegation of being pro-communist. While the judges did not declare the state's censorship unconstitutional, they reversed the burden of proof. Previously, the burden had been on the filmmakers to prove that their film was not "antisocial" or "immoral." With the Yi decision, the Criminal Court for the first time placed the burden on prosecutors and censors: if they did not want the movie shown as it was, or if they wanted Yi to stop making films, they had to prove to a judge that the film or Yi was undeniably detrimental to society.¹⁷

As the *Seven Female POWs* incident discloses, two other powerful state apparatuses secured footholds in the regulation of cinema in the mid-1960s: the Prosecutors' Office and the KCIA. The former, as in typical civil law jurisdictions, was not part of the judiciary. Instead, it was part of the government bureaucracy. The latter, as an institution under the president's directive, oversaw virtually all aspects of governmental bureaucracy. It was these state organs, not the presumed censorship authority, that charged Yi with violating the Anti-communist Law and appealed the Criminal Court's decision about Yi's probation. They insisted that Yi had violated Article 4 of the Anti-communist Law, one of the provisions most frequently cited by these state organs to punish "an individual who benefited an anti-state organization by praising, encouraging, or supporting it or benefited by other means the activities of an anti-state organization." The law was designed specifically to block the activities of communist organizations in the name of national security. But because of its broad and vague terminology, it was "prone to abuse" by the Prosecutors' Office and the KCIA.¹⁸ Whereas these institutions rationalized Yi's arrest as a means of protecting society from the threat of communism, this rationalization in itself reveals how they could wield their power to limit freedom of expression and ultimately criminalize any citizen.

Even before the *Seven Female POWs* episode, members of the film industry had a troubled relationship to censorship. Filmmakers and producers not only had to endure the inherent delays involved in submitting a film for review, but they also had to pay the fee for its review. If scenes were ordered to be removed or a film was disapproved, it was the studio owners and distributors who had invested in the production that bore the financial loss. Many film workers also questioned the qualifications of the state censors at the ministry, who seemed to have no specialized knowledge of movies or public morals. As civil servants, the censors had been appointed by their superiors and worked without clear guidelines to explain what the statutory language meant. Terminology that today seems utterly vague and imprecise was accepted by the minister and other stakeholders. Worse yet, the flexibility of the imprecision may have been the point: the censors could be easily asked to apply a word like "immoral," "antisocial," or "pro-communist" without a statutory definition or a regulatory clarification.¹⁹

The government's destructive regulation of Yi Manhŭi led other artists and writers to ponder what it might mean for them and their society. In a roundtable organized immediately after Yi's arrest, the critic Yi Yŏngil, the writers Sŏnu Hwi and O Yŏngjin, and the former justice Kwŏn Sunyŏng shared their concerns about the coerciveness of the state's regulation.²⁰ Yi and Kwŏn, in particular, pointed to an inherent contradiction in the constitution that guaranteed citizens' right to artistic and intellectual freedom (Article 19) while subjecting all films to censorship in the name of "public propriety" and "moral order" (Article 18). The contradiction between these two consecutive lines left them highly suspicious about their country's constitutional foundation. In a different space, the state censor Hong Chŏn acknowledged such contradictions and yet defended the necessity of regulating cinematic expression to "purify society."²¹ Amid the ongoing debate over censorship, the renowned filmmaker Yu Hyŏnmok came out as the first of his fellow directors to support Yi Manhŭi; in a public lecture, he warned of the "death" of cinema if there was to be no freedom in artistic expression and communication with the audience.²² According to Brian Yecies and Ae-Gyung Shim, Yu's public advocacy of freedom of expression almost immediately generated a targeted investigation of his 1965 film *An Empty Dream* (*Ch'unmong*), based on the allegation it violated obscenity laws, a charge made with no tangible evidence.²³

Facing this broad criticism, the government revised the film law in 1966, making two controversial changes. First, it normalized a pre-filming censorship of the script as a formal procedure. This action was justified as a way to avoid costly reshoots of scenes to which the censors took exception, or even more costly outright bans on entire films. In any case, film companies were now required to submit a script to the board of censorship to get approval for shooting. Censors could approve it, require certain revisions or cuts to be made before approval for filming, or ban it entirely. A completed draft film—based on the script that survived the first round—was subjected to another round of evaluation for screening. Second, the revised law effectively replaced more community-based protocols of gate-keeping with more centralized procedures, empowering the Ministry of Public Information. Previously, a network of script reviewers had worked as a public mechanism to provide relatively collegial feedback to moviemakers before the ministry's formal review. With the revision that authorized the government to be the sole content-determining agent of censorship on paper, the members of this network lost most of their power to the Ministry of Public Information.²⁴

Filmmakers suspected that these changes could yield a form of "invisible" censorship in which films were effectively banned before they could be made.²⁵ Technically, the 1966 Film Act did a better job of specifying what the censors were looking for than had the earlier version: films deemed unconstitutional or likely to harm national prestige; films seen as likely to be immoral or obscene; films considered likely to harm international relations; and films that would be likely to diminish the national spirit.²⁶ Yet filmmakers worried that, as in the earlier practice, the

review criteria were flexible enough to block any film deemed to be contrary to the state's vision of national security and prosperity. The last article of the film law frightened moviemakers even more, as it dictated that any other detailed criteria of censorship could be determined by the highest authority: the president. The exercise of state power on cinema had already rattled filmmakers making features, particularly those about the Korean War or that included North Korean characters. Kim Su-yong, one of the popular directors of the era, even admitted that since the implementation of the revised law, he had been racked with concern about how to avoid "cuts" during every second of shooting.²⁷ Clearly, he was not alone. The fact that very few films were alleged to be pro-communist after Yi Manhŭi's arrest indicates that producers and directors became cognizant of the new limitations set on the realm of representation.²⁸

The testimony of the filmmakers as evidence of oppressive state censorship, however, should be taken with a grain of salt. Their self-positioning as victims of oppression has long shaped scholars' view of censorship as a mere tool of the authoritarian state, impeding other ways of understanding its complex operations. Of course, this is not to invalidate the vulnerability of the film creators, whose cinematic expression became more strictly subjected to the state's regulation than ever before—at least based on the 1966 revision. Yet because both scripts and film prints had to be reviewed, the dual process of censorship generated more back-and-forth conversations between censors and filmmakers. Even in this allegedly more draconian process, censors and filmmakers participated in dialogues that inescapably shaped and reshaped the destiny of film. Annette Kuhn, in her important study of film censorship, remarks: "Censorship is not reducible to a circumscribed and predefined set of institutions and institutional activities, but is produced within an array of constantly shifting discourses, practices and apparatuses. It cannot, therefore, be regarded as either fixed or monolithic. [It . . .] is an ongoing process embodying complex and often contradictory relations of power."²⁹ Crucial to this perspective on censorship is that *both* censors and filmmakers are subject to changing protocols and practices.

Indeed, determining what is expected on both ends requires verbal and written dialogues that are not always tethered to a set of prescribed notions about what should be seen or not. With the 1966 codes, Korean censors were expected to follow more specific guidelines that demanded the revision or elimination of scenes deemed "anti-constitutional," "immoral," or "harmful to international relations and to the national spirit." Although these terms were applied without much justification, insofar as the state guidelines were subject to an individual censor's interpretation, there was room for the moviemakers to interpret both the guidelines and the censor's language. In other words, filmmakers could read what they were supposed to do differently from the written or spoken codes and represent their position to censors through communication during the censorship process. As we will see in the case of *A Day Off*, it was, in the end, the filmmakers who

decoded the censor's unsolicited suggestions and decided how to apply them with minimal damage to their work.

INTERTWINED PRODUCTION AND CENSORSHIP

The production of *A Day Off* began in spring 1968 and ended in the fall of the same year. This was a long production time for a single feature, especially when the logic of the local film market encouraged quicker turnaround times.³⁰ Typically, regional distributors and theater owners invested eighty to ninety percent of the costs of production with a demand for a swift return on their investment so they could finance other productions. Because studio owners rushed producers and filmmakers to shoot as efficiently as possible to meet investors' demands, filmmakers often directed multiple features per year. In 1968 alone, Yi Manhŭi made four films, an arguably modest number when two others in the same generation of directors, Kim Su-yong and Yu Hyŏnmok, shot nine and seven, respectively. Given this climate, when the film crew embarked on *A Day Off*, no one anticipated such a delay in production. The film's script, however, kept being returned without a seal of approval. The earliest script came back with a hopelessly discouraging and ambiguous comment from the censors that targeted the lack of both "artistic merit" and "consciousness." The revised version also failed to pass, this time with an even more ambivalent note on the "continuous lack of subjectivity." The filmmakers were finally told, in response to an informal inquiry that seems to have left no official record, "A film like this had better not be made."³¹

Far from singular or complete, the back-and-force process of censorship demands a close reading of the three available texts—two scripts and a film print—of *A Day Off*. This task is not meant to highlight the "polarities between repressed and authentic versions of an author's work," an approach that often views censorship as an external silencing of a resistant subject's speech or expression.³² Working under the assumption that an intervention occurs *after* the act of expression, this view of censorship as a mere regulative force fails to consider the many different ways this expression can be conditioned.³³ In the case of *A Day Off*, the changes made to the extant texts indicate an intertwined mechanism of censorship and filmmaking that shaped the entire revision. What is particularly interesting about this process is, as I demonstrate below, the consistent engagement of the censors, and not merely the filmmakers, in the production of the citizenship model backed by the Cold War state, and the filmmakers' identification of and reactions to this dynamic. Beyond the direct legal control of expression, each revision proves the relatively covert use of state power to privilege a particular model of citizenship that embodied dutifulness, cheerfulness, and wholesomeness. This production worked within the discourse of the film law that explicitly stated what could be seen (and what could not be seen) on screen to a certain extent. But even if the rule about what could be seen began to appear as the "natural" way of the world, it was

not always internalized by censors and filmmakers in the same way. By analyzing the three available texts of *A Day Off*, we can see how the filmmakers, while decoding the ambivalent comments, also made decisions to obstruct the control of the textual meaning and the promotion of the citizenship model that the censors and their regime were attempting to enforce.

The first round of revision, which took place prior to shooting, influenced the film text structurally. Upon receipt of comments from the censors, the filmmakers removed a prologue and an epilogue in which Uk, the male protagonist, commits suicide after the death of his lover. In the earlier version of the script, the film begins with a ferryman's retrieval of Uk's dead body. Detectives arrive and start to investigate the cause of death:

Detective: When exactly did this happen?

Ferryman: Sunday evening. *They* usually pick Sunday.

Detective: Why is it that *they* chose Sunday?

Ferryman: I have no clue.

Detective: Who is the dead?

Ferryman: *They* like to leave nothing.

Detective: What is your occupation?

Ferryman: I used to fish . . .

Detective: And these days you catch the dead . . .

Ferryman: In the past it used to be those in their 30s or 40s . . . but nowadays it is all in their 20s. Why do you think this happens?

Detective: . . .

Ferryman: Why is it that *they* dived into the river?

Detective: I need to ponder that.

Ferryman: *They* were crazy, you know? *They* were just crazy.³⁴

At first glance, the conversation includes little information about why Uk has been found dead. But when considering why many young people—not a singular *he* but the plural *they*—have killed themselves, the ferryman and detective acknowledge but do not utter aloud what they are thinking. In the ending, the script circles back to the investigation scene in which Uk's friends fail to identify the dead man. The detective then wraps up the case by confirming: "John Doe, unknown cause of death, about 25 years old." The camera zooms out to show the scenery of the riverfront, as if nothing has happened.

The writer Paek Kyöl feared that a script that included the death of the male protagonist would not be approved.³⁵ In the late 1960s, the suicide of a young male had very rarely been shown as a film's key plot point in his country. Unless the main character's death was justified as inevitable for the safety of the nation (as in the case of soldiers depicted as war heroes), it was rare to see suicide as a response to a crisis experienced by a character in a film. Perhaps the only

exception is a 1968 film titled *General's Mustache* (*Changgunŭi suyŏm*, dir. Yi Sŏng-gu), which begins and ends with the male protagonist being alleged to have died by suicide. This time its creators received an easier pass. At least partly because the film was an adaptation of an already highly popular novella of the same title by Yi Oryŏng, it could safely be categorized as a literary art film (“munye yŏnghwa”), a state-promoted film genre. Even in the films in this preferred genre, however, a youth suicide would have been seen as damaging to the government’s diffusion of developmental ideology. When *A Day Off* was in the making, all media were expected to disseminate ideology in line with the second Five-year Economic Development Plan, the state-led modernization push.³⁶ *A Day Off* was also written at the height of the Vietnam War, in which South Korea had already sent about two hundred thousand troops to aid US-backed South Vietnam; using an extensive network of various channels, the government aggressively mobilized working-class, able-bodied men as military labor in Vietnam in the service of economic growth and consolidation of the anti-communist front, “Free Asia.”³⁷

In this climate, Paek’s specific concerns about the representation of Uk’s suicide seemed warranted, as the censors indeed viewed with suspicion the lack of “consciousness” in a young, able-bodied male subject and refused to allow his unjustified death to enter the realm of representation. But then the revised version—with the opening and ending sequences removed—was also returned quickly. In this version, the film begins with Uk and Chiyŏn’s meeting on Sunday morning. In the end, Uk does not commit suicide in the agony of loss, and the film instead focuses on his recollection of Chiyŏn in a series of flashbacks. The last sequence begins with the empty streetcar at night, followed by his monologue: “Seoul, Mt. Nam, the barkeeper, the landlady, Sunday, and everything. I love them all. There is nothing I do not love. From now on, I do not need to wait for Sunday, I do not need to have money for coffee, goodbye . . . goodbye.”³⁸ The scene magnifies Uk’s devastation at the absence of Chiyŏn, whom he could not afford to take to a café every Sunday. Soon a streetcar operator comes to gently remind Uk that they have reached the last stop:

Operator: Sir, shall we meet again tomorrow?

Uk: Where are we now?

Operator: What is your destination?

Uk: . . . I just hopped in.

Operator: This is our final stop.

Uk: Then I should leave.

Operator: . . .

Uk: Farewell!

The last sequence draws to a close when Uk, having hopped off, hopelessly stares at the streetcar heading back to the garage. The revised version subtly

points to his despair without concluding with his suicide. The filmmakers accommodated the censor's comment without tweaking the narrative to the extent of changing the overall tone and meaning; the revised version, they thought, would pass review. But against their expectations, it was returned again with puzzling feedback denouncing its "lack of subjectivity."

In response, the producer Chŏn Oksuk, a worldly-wise networker in the cultural industry, approached the censors for feedback about how to move *A Day Off* forward, and they apparently responded that they were not looking for "a kind of film that portrays the dark side of society."³⁹ In this conversation, the filmmakers were also encouraged to change the male protagonist's destiny to what the censors regarded as a fulfilling one: volunteer enlistment in the military service. At least to the censors, this would let the audience assume that Uk found temporary relief from his pain by committing to serving the nation as a wholesome male subject.

Based on the available film, the filmmakers seem to have followed the unwelcome recommendation. The surviving print includes the addition of a few lines to Uk's monologue, which now comes at the very end of the final sequence. In voice-over, he narrates: "Seoul, Mt. Nam, the barkeeper, the landlady, Sunday, and everything. I love them all. There is nothing I do not love. From now on, I do not need to wait for Sunday, I don't need to have money for coffee. (pause) *It is going to be morning soon. Dawn will come. Shall I go out to the street? Shall I go meet people or drink coffee? No, I will go to the barber's first. I will cut my hair first.*"

In the newly added lines (in italics), Uk has moved to hold onto tomorrow, a time that in his despair he had hitherto neither imagined nor embraced. Even in the previous versions, his sense of temporality was disrupted by Chiyŏn's death, shifting only between the past (in his remembrance of their time together) and the present (in his processing of her absence). He has now decided to get a haircut the next day. His subdued tone of voice sounds much more determined when he reiterates to himself: *I will cut my hair first.*

In her study of South Korean citizenship under authoritarian rule, Seungsook Moon compellingly argues that the South Korean state-led modernization project actively deployed gendered strategies for militarizing citizens. It aimed to transform the men to be productive on the front lines of the industrialization of the nation, and the women be useful both at home and at work.⁴⁰ When we use this social imagery of gendered citizenship as a lens through which to review *A Day Off*, it becomes more evident what censors meant by the "lack of consciousness." During most of the film, Uk is far from an ideal male subject. In scenes in which he waits for Chiyŏn's surgery to be done, he feels empty and drifts away. Following his aimless steps through streets, parks, and bars, the camera captures Uk in choked desolation; his emptiness is magnified when the camera zooms out to put him in the perspective of the urban landscape, as if he, the dispossessed youth, belongs nowhere. Uk's friends



FIGURE 5. Uk staring back at the streetcar while reminding himself in voice-over to get a haircut. *A Day Off* (1968). Credit: Korean Film Archive.

are also melancholic and defeatist. For instance, a drunken friend laments: “I am college-educated but have failed to get a job in this society. And that is not my fault.” Another friend, feeling “too bored,” numbs himself by taking six baths at home on Sunday. *A Day Off*’s young male characters hardly fit with the state’s promotion of images of diligent citizens or images of the efficacy of its policies for national development.

Meanwhile, Chiyŏn, who dies during an abortion in all versions of the film, confronts the model of the female citizen once she agrees to end a pregnancy and thus refuses to birth a future citizen. She justifies her decision because neither she nor Uk—the breadwinner in the conventional sense—can afford a family, saying, “We are hardly capable of managing our own lives, so how can we be responsible for another human life?” Her concern appears reasonable in the film’s context, but the goal of her action challenges the gendered nationalist ideals that she does not perform as a female protagonist.

With almost all the film’s characters failing to embody the state’s ideal citizens, the censor’s comment—“A film like this had better not be made”—was not a joke: in the eyes of the state apparatus, neither the useless citizens in *A Day Off* nor the film was meant to be born. Uk’s seemingly abrupt determination to get a crew cut has to be understood in this context; originally represented as anything but a productive and forward-looking male subject, he had to be turned into a useful citizen in order to continue to be seen until the end of the film.

Just as the writer Paek supposed the censors would likely control the meaning of the male protagonist’s death, filmmakers could internalize certain forms of perception and expression that were mandated by censorship. Yet their process of decoding these forms did not guarantee any prescribed outcome. In fact, filmmakers could only assume and assess what censors wanted (not) to see in the



FIGURE 6. Uk's unemployed friend complaining about his miserable life in a tavern named "malse" in Korean, meaning doomsday. *A Day Off* (1968). Credit: Korean Film Archive.



FIGURE 7. Chiyŏn determined to have an abortion. *A Day Off* (1968). Credit: Korean Film Archive.

face of the broad and vague comments they received along the way. Even though the 1966 Film Act specified a rubric of certain demands, nowhere did it dictate exactly how characters on screen should perform to be perceived as productive and useful—and thus representable—citizens. As we can see in the last scene, in which Uk reminds himself to get a haircut, the censor's suggestion indeed guided the filmmakers' revision, but not necessarily in a way that sacrificed the character's development or the tone of the film. Despite an inherent power dynamic that presumably granted the censors the controlling hand, the multiple revisions of *A Day Off* reveal that the relation between the subjects of censorship involved more than an overt and unilateral regulation. State censors and filmmakers constantly pushed and pulled the boundaries of what could be shown—or who deserved to be seen—on screen, yielding a process in which film censorship and production became intricately intertwined.

BEYOND THE STATE'S FREEDOM

A Day Off's multiple rejections fueled the rapidly growing concern among members of the film industry about the state's suppression of artistic freedom. The critic Yi Yŏngil stood at the forefront of criticism of the state's "overexercise" of its power over cinema. Once the revised scripts were returned, he wrote: "What a pity that competent filmmakers have lost their creative power in this dreadful process of pre-filming censorship."⁴¹ A publisher of a major journal of the 1960s, *Film Art* (*Yŏnghwayesul*, renamed *Film, TV, Art* in 1968), he used this platform to support filmmakers and advocate for freedom of expression. In a commentary on censorship at the end of 1968, he once again pointed to the "extremely rigid and unreasonable regulation of film in contradiction to the constitution that protected the right of free artistic expression."⁴² Despite his measured tone, Yi, perhaps due to fear of retaliation, could not help but ponder what democracy might mean for citizens when the state possessed unlimited power. The case of *A Day Off* showed, at least in his view, that the state was abusing its power by violating the right of its citizens to free expression, and that alone proved the hypocrisy of Korean democracy.

While Park Chung Hee remained a civilian leader for most of the 1960s, his notion of democracy appeared remarkably contradictory. For instance, he justified various forms of state violence as a way to protect the nation-state from the threats of communism and economic devastation. Park claimed that because South Korea lacked "the subjective condition"—vaguely meaning his principle of self-determination and national development—its democracy could not be adopted in its "ideal" form. Until his country advanced to the degree of the developed countries, he believed that Korea's democracy should be "properly modified and suited" for its current (i.e., "less developed") situation.⁴³ His modifications yielded ambiguous terms such as "Koreanized democracy" and "bureaucratic democracy," concepts that were used to validate his rule and its incremental erosion of the democratic process during most of the 1960s. With the launch of the Second Economic Plan in January 1968, his rhetoric of democracy notably came to emphasize the traditional values of self-reliance, cooperation, and frugality. He imbued his self-proclaimed Koreanization of democracy with these values to legitimate his regime.

In the eyes of journalists and writers, however, Park's notion of democracy looked suspicious and even conflicted with what citizens experienced, raising the question of whether he considered citizens' basic rights to be subordinate to economic development. Frustrated with the Park regime's authorization of itself to violate artistic and intellectual freedom, Yi sharply captured its operation *above* the constitution as a sign of crisis of both democracy and cinema in South Korea.⁴⁴ To him, the undemocratic limitations set on filmmakers' freedom became most evident when they made movies that included what was deemed a critical commentary on society. Only when a film approached the boundaries of what could be seen did the censorious intervention make itself visible. Put differently, once someone created a work, the limit of freedom announced



FIGURE 8. Yi Yŏngil dedicated two pages of the July 1968 issue of *Film, TV, Art* to *A Day Off*; he published the blurb and still images of the film on the right side of the page, and his editorial on the left. Credit: Korean Film Archive.

itself. And this announcement occurred at the expense of filmmakers' artistic and personal integrity.⁴⁵

This recognition is powerful, yet it leaves me wondering why Yi paid so much less attention to the decisions made by the filmmakers than to those made by the state authorities. Yi's emphasis on the state's acting as the oppressor—of cinema and democracy—is reasonable enough. As a writer, he had repeatedly struggled with the state's censorship. But this struggle hardly relegated him to a compliant silence throughout his entire career.⁴⁶ While constantly exposed to the state's control of the pen, he did not lose all his power to write or his agency in the process of writing. The same was true for the filmmakers of *A Day Off*. Of this agency of the subject in a position of presumably little power, Judith Butler writes:

To become a civic and political subject, a citizen-subject, one must be able to make use of power, and this ability to make use of power is, as it were, the measure of the subject. To make use of power is linked to the ability to speak insofar as the citizen is defined as one with the ability to do what one says, to translate word into deed. . . . One can live in a polity without the ability to translate the words into deeds, and this is a relatively (though not absolutely) powerless way to live: it is to live on the margins of the subject, or rather, as its margin.⁴⁷

With *A Day Off*, it was not only those with more power—the censors—who exercised its agency, or in Butler’s words, the “ability to speak,” but also those in a position of relatively little power—the filmmakers. The filmmakers, like the censors, navigated the dynamic with their agency, however limited, while expressing their “deed” by making certain choices. If we are willing to see their “ability to speak,” any forms of their expression can point toward an emergence of a different relation of power that was not solely dictated by the state. Such interventions in asymmetric power relations can generate a new horizon for considering cinema and democracy beyond the state’s instrumentalization. This state, with its myopic view, assumed that it could repress any expressions by citizens and ultimately control all the realms of representation. But even under the repression of state censorship, as we have seen, filmmakers demonstrated how it was possible for citizens to exercise their agency: by following the state’s directives and yet making changes that were not really changes to the film’s tone and themes.

The filmmakers’ choice to shoot the film before the state’s approval of the script is another expression of their agency. Technically, this action broke the film law, which required official registration and approval of the script in order to shoot. Anyone who failed to follow suit could not only be forced to cease production but also be charged a penalty of up to 200,000 won (equivalent to 5,500 US dollars today).⁴⁸ It is difficult to say whether the filmmakers’ decision to film before receiving official approval to do so had the ulterior motive of dismantling a prior constraint. Once again, none of the film crew expected another rejection of the script after they changed the opening and the ending; the excisions were done under the assumption that the changes would allow the film to pass the pre-filming censorship process within a reasonable period of time.⁴⁹ It was, nonetheless, their decision to shoot without approval, an act that would undo the mandate of the state regulation and create a film text that was technically unapproved before its birth. In a sense, the effect, not the intention, of their act enabled *A Day Off* to live a life in celluloid over the decades, possibly moving from one house to another until it was caught in—and therefore, however unintentionally, preserved within—a dark storage room of the Korean Film Archive.

Even more critically, the filmmakers asserted their right not to carry over the project and exhibit it in its revised form. Although the filmmakers accommodated most of the revision requests of the state censors so that they could eventually screen the film in public, they were determined to silence *A Day Off* as revised. With the term “silence,” I am building upon Wendy Brown’s insightful interpretation of silence in censorship. The conventional way we talk about silencing cinema presumes a particular power imbalance between the two parties—the one who silences cinema and the other whose cinema is silenced.⁵⁰ While this kind of power dynamic played out in the process of censoring *A Day Off* to an important extent, what is equally important to me is that the filmmakers used their power to withdraw the film from further revision and from public release. Here, according

to Brown, is where we can see a resistant ground in the practice of “refusing to speak.”⁵¹ This refusal did not necessarily involve a direct confrontation with the state authorities, because, as she points out, subtle resistance can work in many cases as “a defense in the context of domination” or “a strategy for negotiating domination.”⁵² Still, silence can speak to and reject complicity in a regulative relation. Despite the cost of the action, silencing the film was a nuanced act of withdrawal from the censorship process, and possibly the only way the filmmakers could choose not to speak as they were directed from above. Rather than being silenced by the authorities, their silencing was “deployed from below,” a deliberate action that withheld their consent to the ways *A Day Off* was revised and was supposed to be seen in public.⁵³

The filmmakers expressed themselves through noncompliance with the state’s demand, and their voices might have gone unheard at the time of speaking. It has nonetheless arrived at this moment of acknowledgment. By acknowledging their voice here, I am not simply concluding that in retrospect they fought against the state and its interdiction of freedom. Instead, I want to dwell on the other qualities of their enunciation of “would rather not.” In the writer Paek Kyöl’s words, he, Yi Manhüi, and Chŏn Oksuk felt that they “would rather not” let the revised film be shown in public.⁵⁴ They may have (or may have not) wanted to compromise further with the state’s mandate; they may have just wanted to move on to other projects in the interest of time. In any case, the effect of silencing is a claim of their own, one that manifests the refusal to be forced to speak.

In his rereading of Herman Melville’s story “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street,” Slavoj Žižek finds a radically political response to the mandate in the protagonist.⁵⁵ At first, Bartleby is a dutiful and productive employee, but he soon begins to respond to all the requests of his boss with “I would prefer not to.” Bartleby’s basic disposition of refusal expressed in his “I would prefer not to” throws the workplace into total disarray. Bartleby does nothing, but this sort of doing nothing is far more effective than “doing something.” What Žižek sees in this action is a profound critique of the Foucauldian notion of power and resistance. Michel Foucault famously wrote, “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.”⁵⁶ Power and resistance thus form a kind of antagonistic enclosure, and therein lies the problem. This means that acts of resistance are ultimately affirmations of the very power the subject resists. Insofar as one is invested in specific types of resistance, one is unconsciously invested in the power that makes them possible. For Žižek, Bartleby escapes the circuit of power and resistance; he occupies the “position of exteriority” at which resistance is incapable of arriving.

Bartleby’s imagination of exteriority resonates with the filmmakers’ withdrawal—“would rather not”—of *A Day Off* in that their decision was not dictated by the authorities, who were preoccupied with approving or disapproving the screening. In making this decision, they chose to negate the unspoken rule of

censorship that the ruled should subscribe to the ruler's prescription, not the other way around.

This negation did not emerge out of a state of impotent passivity. Instead, it activated another kind of freedom when the filmmakers unleashed themselves from the authorities' protocols and expectations in the process of censorship. It was through this freedom that they chose not to fully concede the authorities' right to determine what could be seen or to push themselves further to comply. True, filmmakers' freedom of expression was undeniably constrained without reasonable justification at the time; the writer's removal of the opening and the ending alone tells us that the code of censorship could overrule the choices made in the realm of representation. Through another kind of freedom, however, filmmakers refused to let the state power alone determine the destiny of *A Day Off*. Only through this refusal can we see the boundary that the state set on freedom or, more glaringly, the condition of unfreedom.

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As they moved forward, the creators of *A Day Off* continued to struggle to survive within the confines of the system. The film careers of Yi Manhŭi, Paek Kyŏl and Chŏn Oksuk started to dwindle in the early 1970s, as did the careers of other popular filmmakers from the previous decade. The new decade took off with a series of regulations aimed at the ratification of a new constitution that granted Park Chung Hee nearly absolute control of society. Before promulgating this new constitution in October 1972, he had already arrogated to himself the power to control wages and prices, restrict strikes, ban demonstrations, and censor the press. He legitimated his move by naming the external threats—a relaxation of tension growing out of US President Richard Nixon's visit to China and negotiations with North Korea to reunite divided families—that would weaken what he claimed to be "national unity." Another justification for his grip on society came down in the shift of the direction of economic development to favor heavy industry and the production of capital goods, accompanied by more restrictive policies on direct foreign investment. In alignment with its developmental strategy, the state's new regulator, the Motion Picture Promotion Corporation (now the Korean Film Council), was created to promote the production of notorious national policy ("kukch'aek") films. Once again, the revised film law enforced a stricter policing of scripts, and under increased political control, film workers noticed that their opportunities for creative dissent were increasingly curtailed. Of course, as Steven Chung notes, the state's control was "not total" and had "uneven effects on political and cultural expressions" in the 1970s; directors like Shin Sang-ok pushed through and even circumvented the newer challenges within the system.⁵⁷ Yet the confines in artistic expression and the saturation of national policy films at the theaters turned audiences to the rapidly expanding television network, leading to a sharp decline in box office numbers, from 170 million viewers in 1969 to 98 million in 1979. The number of films produced also fell from its peak of 229 in

1969 to 100 in 1979.⁵⁸ In this sense, Chŏn Oksuk and Paek Kyŏl made a sensible choice. Chŏn, based on her network in Japan, imported Japanese TV series to South Korea, and Paek wrote scripts for TV series until he returned to the film industry toward the end of the decade. Meanwhile, Yi Manhŭi faced another major censorship fight with *The Wildflowers in the Battlefield* (*Tŭlguk'wanŭn p'önnünde*, 1974), a “national policy” film on the Korean War produced by the Motion Picture Promotion Corporation. Amid an escalating conflict between Yi and the producer—this time the state institution—he succeeded neither in bargaining nor in playing with the system, and he was ultimately forced to leave the editing room. It seems that he never fully recovered from this experience. When he died a few months later at age forty-four, he was in the middle of adding the final touches to *A Road to Sampo* (*Samp'oganŭn kil*, 1975), a movie based on a popular novel by Hwang Sok-yong.

Knowing this unfortunate ending should not prevent us from asking what other expressions of resistance film workers developed in order to create and defend a space of another freedom, a space the censors were unable to block. In her reading of freedom encapsulated in the practices of art and writing in trying times, Svetlana Boym notes that adventures of thinking can open up “border zones, thresholds, bridges and doors.” These spaces are not given but must be generated by artists and writers who become aware of “fences and passages and boundaries” in their imagination; it is in these spaces that they learn the importance of envisioning alternative frames, norms, and tools.⁵⁹ Despite the tragic loss of Yi, what still remains salient is that, in the acts that created an alternative future for *A Day Off*, filmmakers carved out a space of freedom at the margins of film production and censorship. It was a space where they could liberate themselves, albeit temporarily, from the older ways of doing things and turn obstacles into adventures in Boym's sense of the word. Put another way, it was in this freedom, not the state's unfreedom, that filmmakers were able to breathe in the possibility of existing outside the norms of film business and censorship. Certainly, dwelling on such freedom is not a liberationist politics, as it did not ultimately destroy or even fight the conditions of oppression, but it nevertheless opened up a clear form of resistance *within* the system that even today offers insight into other ways to work around the rules. Without the filmmakers' specific choice to carve out such a space, our understanding of censorship would have landed on a much more black-and-white authoritarian world of the oppressed and the oppressor. *A Day Off's* existence—across the available scripts and film print—permits us to feel the space of another freedom, inviting us to view what might seem to be capitulation as fertile ground for a subversive aesthetics and politics.