

Mood and Montage in the Total Work of Art

As any revolutionary regime would, the DPRK, the Korean Workers' Party, and President Kim Il Sung cast the North Korean Revolution (1945–50) as the beginning of an entirely new era. Throughout the Cold War, across literature, film, television, art, and journalism, the guerrilla struggle in the 1930s was the first act, and the establishment of the DPRK (1945–48) was the climax of the story of ending Japanese colonial rule. However, transformative historical events never erase the effects of the past completely, and the legacies of Japanese empire continued to haunt the formation of the North Korean nation-state.

Many of the early filmmakers and actors had had careers in the colonial film industry and had worked, along with some early North Korean film theorists, to support the Japanese empire. Against the common notion that the formation of North Korean cinema begins with the influence of the Soviet occupation (1945–1948), it is necessary to trace these connections with the Japanese colonial period.¹ Secondly, *juche* thought, which was the national ideology from the 1960s onward, was traditionally presented as an indigenous Korean form of socialist thought developed by Kim Il Sung; however, *juche* thought also originates in the discourses of the practical subject that arose in the Japanese colonial period. Therefore, both *juche* thought and North Korean realism contain traces of colonial thought and culture. Thirdly, interpreting the melodramatic mode and melodramatic moods of the first North Korean feature film, *My Home Village* (dir. Kang Hong-sik, 1949), reveals that from the outset North Korean film was not nearly as ideologically homogenous as is normally assumed. Film theories expressed different views concerning the proper form of cinematic and political subjectivity that would continue to develop in the 1960s debates on the meaning of *juche* (or the practical subject). Meanwhile, the combination of the stories, moods, and conflicts of melodrama with the verisimilitude of documentary montage in *My Home Village*

did not manifest the ideal of the total work of art sought in film theory; instead, it gives an impression of the undecided nature of cinematic and political subjectivity during the formation of the North Korean state.

My Home Village brought together the technology, editing, and storytelling strategies of Soviet socialist realism with the class conflicts, colonial structures, and cultural references local to Korea. Because of the active revolutionary situation in North Korea under Soviet occupation in the late 1940s, the film captures both the pathos of suffering under Japanese colonial rule and the revolutionary enthusiasm of national liberation. However, it by no means represents a clean break from colonial-period filmmaking. The director Kang Hong-sik had acted in many plays and films during the Japanese colonial period and was immersed in the politics and style of Japan's Korean Film Production Corporation (1939–1945).² Although most of Kang's colonial period films are lost, we can see his appearances in Ch'oe In-gyu's *Homeless Angel* (*Chip ōmnŭn ch'ōnsa*, 1941) and Imai Tadashi's *Love and Vow* (*Ai to chikai*, 1945), including scenes expressing patriotic loyalty to Japan. Once he had access to Soviet films, Kang rapidly incorporated their style, including elements of Soviet montage and documentary and socialist realist narrative. Because of the development of a revolutionary cinema in North Korea that explicitly challenged the aesthetics and politics of Hollywood and Japanese fascist cinema, *My Home Village* exhibits a higher degree of stylistic transformation than the films of South Chosŏn (1945–1948). Yet there are important connections with the late colonial period, particularly in the way the film combines the moods and scenarios of melodrama with depictions of political and historical subjectivity.

Another entanglement between North Korean cinema and the late colonial period is the career of the lead actress of *My Home Village*, Mun Ye-bong (figure 1). She was the most famous Korean film actress of imperial Japan, starring in *Sweet Dream* (*Mimong*, dir. Yang Chu-nam, 1936), *Volunteer* (*Chiwŏnbyŏng*, dir. An Sŏg-yŏng, 1941), *Homeless Angel*, *Korea Strait* (*Chosŏn haehyŏp*, dir. Pak Ki-ch'ae, 1943), and *Love and Vow*. In *Korea Strait*, her character, Kinshuku, voluntarily dedicates her labor to the Japanese war effort by entering a textile factory, which allows her to overcome the moral stain of having a child out of wedlock with an upper-class man. After liberation, Mun Ye-bong spent some time in the South in the Chosŏn Film Alliance (Chosŏn yŏnghwa tongmaeng) and then went to North Korea in response to anticommunist suppression in the South and continued her career there. She starred in *My Home Village* only a few years after *Korea Strait*, this time playing the sister, Oktan, of the main protagonist, the anticolonial partisan Kwanp'il. Along with her family, Oktan suffers under the Japanese colonial system, including working as a tenant farmer for large landowners and eventually being conscripted for labor (likely as a "comfort woman"). The family's suffering ends only through the anti-Japanese revolution and the regaining of Korean sovereignty. Therefore, in the span of a few years, Mun went from playing a fallen woman who redeems herself by volunteering for factory work as a

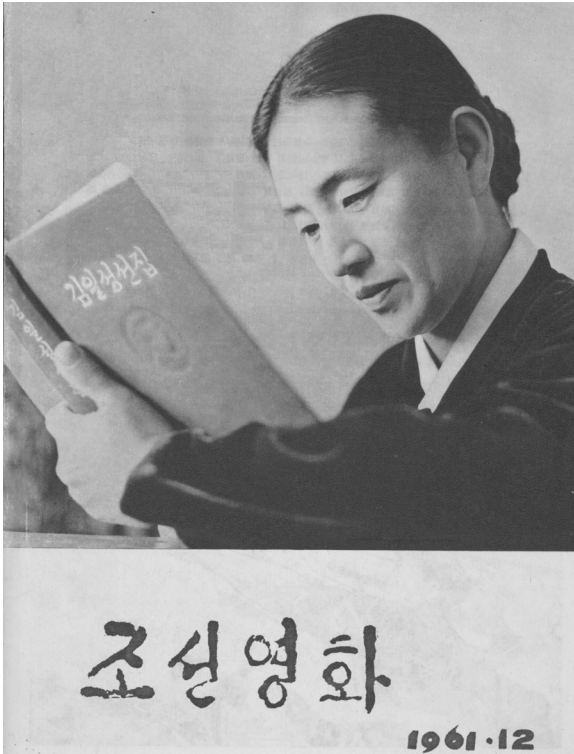


FIGURE 1. Actress Mun Yebong, once a star of pro-Japanese films in the 1940s, appears on the cover of the North Korean film journal *Chosŏn Film* in December 1961, reading *The Selected Works of Kim Il Sung*.

patriotic Japanese national subject to playing an innocent sister who experiences forced labor under Japanese rule and is liberated by the North Korean revolution. Mun's career shows that because of the transformations in political power at the end of the Japanese empire and the onset of the Cold War, the fictional lives of film characters did not align with the politically complicated personal histories of citizens or film artists, despite claims to cinematic realism in late imperial Japan and North Korea.

The temporality of national liberation, as it appeared in early Cold War film in both the North and the South, was one of haunting, not the dialectical overcoming posited by national liberation narratives.³ The haunting of the postcolonial nation-people by the colonial state, which in this case results from continuities in the technological and aesthetic mediation of cinema, is apparent in individual film careers and even more pertinently in early film theory in North Korea (1945–1950). The leftist directors and critics who put forward ideas of cinematic subjectivity that contributed to the project of constructing the North Korean film industry first worked under the Japanese fascist state and engaged with its literary and cultural criticism in the early 1940s. Instead of establishing direct analogies between Japanese and North Korean cinema (for example, through the concept

of totalitarianism and its conflation of fascism and communism), the analysis of North Korean film theory of the 1940s below reveals a translation of ideas about mass culture and the artwork across time and space between the Japanese empire, the Soviet Union, and North Chosŏn (the term used for northern Korea under Soviet occupation, 1945–1948).

The well-known conclusion to Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" presents fascism's aestheticizing of politics and communism's politicizing of art as dialectical opposites in political conflict with one another.⁴ The translation of theoretical concepts during the establishment of the North Korean film industry calls for a rereading of this dialectic. In the case of North Korea, the tensions between fascist, communist, and capitalist film aesthetics are better considered a problem of the micropolitics of film form and film affects, of difference through repetition on a microscopic scale, rather than a conflict between bounded ideological positions in negative, dialectical relation with one another. As studies of fascist cinema have shown, such genealogies require seeing the history of fascist film not as an exceptional and isolated case of film propaganda but as one modality and style that borrowed from and influenced other cinemas.⁵

One aesthetic idea that ties film theory and filmmaking in North Chosŏn to the period of Japanese fascism and allows for comparison without conflation is the total work of art (*chonghap yesul*; *sōgō geijutsu*; *Gesamtkunstwerk*). In communist contexts, the total work of art referred to an immersive, multisensory, and multimedia artwork that brought together the various modern arts into a popular, mass aesthetic experience. Boris Groys has explored the problematic conflation of artistic representation with the creation of a people in his study of the Soviet avant-garde and the transformation of its ideals under the aesthetic system of socialist realism.⁶ In the film criticism of North Korea, we find a great deal of self-consciousness about the political power of cinema to not just represent political realities but to create them by way of an immersive spectacle that is not only visual but a fully embodied and multisensory experience of sight, sound, and touch. The question of how to document the historical specificities of the North Korean revolution through such an immersive and multisensory artwork remained a significant theoretical question until the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this span, the melodramatic mode played a role as a way of imitation that could capture historical realities through idealized sentimentality and action. The body mode of melodrama and the immersive and multisensory mass aesthetic experience of the total work of art remained integral to one another in North Korean cinema throughout the Cold War era.

My Home Village attempted to capture the mood of revolution through a combination of melodramatic narrative, montage, and documentary. The ideal artistic form for this project was the total work of art—an immersive, multisensory, and multigenre work that would merge cinematic image and sound with historical

and political subjectivity and action. Eventually the characteristics of the total work of art would be theorized and formalized in the 1960s, when Kim Jong Il, in *On the Art of the Cinema*, compiled the insights of the previous decade of North Korean film theory and criticism and applied them toward the creation of a cinematic state (*yŏnghwa kukka*) through the aesthetic system of *juche* realism.⁷ The North Korean canonization of Kim Il Sung's thought in the 1960s delineated his 1955 speech, "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing *Juche* in Ideological Work" as the origin of *juche* thought.⁸ Western media commonly translates *juche* as "self-reliance," but it is actually derived from the Japanese compound *shutai*, the subject of practice or the embodied, acting subject. According to the memoir of Hwang Chang-yŏp, who defected to South Korea in 1997, there is not a single version of *juche* thought, and the canonized version is actually the result of synthesis and debate. In the 1960s, the debate among North Korean state leaders concerning the true subject of revolutionary practice asserted multiple possible subjects of history: the popular masses, the party, the leader, and humanity as a whole.⁹ This debate reveals that the status of the subject in North Korea, as well as the realist aesthetic that was to represent this subject, were not stable or homogeneous, even if the sovereignty of Kim Il Sung became the hegemonic idea of *juche* beginning in the late 1960s.

From early in North Korean film theory and practice, critics and filmmakers considered the immersive experience of film as total work of art to be the most politically effective way of representing the practical, embodied, and active subject of history. This idea of representing political and historical experience by cinematic experience depended on the conflation of the forms of subjectivity on screen and the lived-body and experience of the spectator. As Vivian Sobchack discusses in her phenomenological study of cinematic experience, the lived-body of the viewer is not a passive vessel for a film's representation of subjectivity:

The lived-body is the "opening" through which the invariant structure of consciousness gains access *to* the world, but it is also what Merleau-Ponty likes to describe as a "fold" *in* the world (a nice insistence that the body is part of the world's materiality). The fold in the world that is the lived-body situates the *access* of consciousness to the world in a world that *exceeds* the lived-body's situation and perspective and that surrounds it as an infinitely rich and variable *horizon* toward which intentionality is concretely directed.¹⁰

The concept of the total work of art is an attempt to close the lived-body's fold in the world and create a closed system of history, identity, politics, and the body (the eventual hegemonic idea of *juche*). However, the lived-body is situated within a world that exceeds it. When a film such as *My Home Village* tries to encapsulate a mass historical experience within a single subjective system—the total work of art as aesthetic embodiment of the emergent postcolonial nation-state—this system is nonetheless mediated through the fold of the lived-bodies of

its various spectators, an opening that connects the film to a world and to affects that exceed the discourse and intentionality of language and consciousness. Although the actual bodily experiences of North Korean viewers in the late 1940s are inaccessible, the narrative structures, art moods, and contrapuntal moments of films carry traces of a world that exceeds the film's linguistic and ideological coding of subjectivity. Particularly through its negotiations with the multiple potential perspectives in its audience, the supposed total work of art *My Home Village* is haunted by colonialism (e.g., the careers of its director and star) and full of alternative possibilities for revolution (e.g., the mood of exuberance of a liberated people that exists beyond the Stalinist framework of leader-centered historical and political subjectivity).

In the first North Korean film, *My Home Village*, and surrounding film theories, multiple possibilities for Korean national cinema were still in play. There were echoes of the previous decade of Japanese imperial cinema, as well as visions of revolutionary possibilities for documenting history cinematically. In the late 1940s, North Korean film and film criticism arguably appear in their most experimental and historically layered forms. Through a reading of early North Korean film theory and the elements of melodrama and montage in *My Home Village*, this chapter explores the constellation of ideas and moods that informed the cinematic representation of subjectivity during the founding of the North Korean nation-state. While theories articulated the role of cinema-as-total-work-of-art in subject formation, they also reveal persistent tensions between the colonial and postcolonial, popular sovereignty and dictatorial sovereignty, and documentary realism and melodrama. These tensions also play out in the popular, ecstatic, and revolutionary mood of *My Home Village*, which the visual form and narrative of the film can only partially contain within the visual and narrative framing of party, state, nation, and leader as the true subjects of history.

FILM THEORY AND THE NORTH KOREAN REVOLUTION

My Home Village exists in the composite tense, depicting the revolutionary and perilous present of an emerging nation-state while pointing uncertainly toward the colonial past and the postcolonial future. To understand the discursive context for the film's multiple visions for national subjectivity, it is revealing to analyze the film theory and film journalism that contributed to the early imagining of the North Korean film industry. The first three volumes of North Korea's first film journal, *Film Art* (*Yŏnghwa yesul*), appeared in 1949. The second volume has a special section dedicated to summarizing and evaluating *My Home Village*. This section includes articles documenting responses on the part of peasants and workers to their viewings the film. The volumes contain many articles published entirely in phonetic Korean script (hangul) without the inclusion of Chinese

characters, which shows the pedagogical function of both film and film journalism in North Korea. They also contain translations of articles by Soviet intellectuals and discussions of many Soviet films that were screened in Pyongyang and would serve as models for the North Korean industry, including late Stalinist productions such as the musical *Ballad of Siberia* (dir. Ivan Pyryev, 1948) and the war films *The Third Blow* (dir. Igor Savchenko, 1948) and *The Young Guard* (dir. Sergei Gerasimov, 1948).

Articles by theorists and practitioners such as Sō Kwang-je, Yun Tu-hōn, and Ch'u Min appear toward the front of the volumes and stand out due to their complex critical writing style, their use of Japanese-based technical character compounds, and their inclusion of the intellectual vocabulary of the late Japanese empire. The style of these articles reflects that all three of these intellectuals were educated in the Japanese colonial education system and became filmmakers and cultural critics during the Japanese imperial system and its policy of Japan-Korea unity (*naesōnilchē*). Sō Kwang-je was a critic in KAPF, the Korean Proletarian Arts organization, before directing the now rediscovered *Military Train* in 1938, a film that contains ambivalent messages about the need to be vigilant against liberation movement spies and the importance of Japan-Korea unity. In 1946 while a member of the Chosōn Film Alliance in the anticommunist South, he wrote *On Chosōn Cinema*, which set forward a leftist, proletarian ideal for Korean national cinema that would quickly become impossible to realize there.¹¹ In 1943, Yun Tu-hōn joined the Korean Alliance for National Total War and the Korean Patriotic Organization, where he wrote on the importance of Koreans contributing to the war effort; his articles published in *Film Art* reflect the Pan-Asianist anti-American rhetoric of the Japanese empire.¹² Ch'u Min was also a proletarian arts critic during the colonial period, and like Sō Kwang-je and the actress Mun Ye-bong, after independence he initially joined the leftist Chosōn Film Alliance before going to the North to avoid anticommunist suppression and to participate in the North Korean revolution.¹³

In the first volumes of *Film Art*, these theorists rearticulated concepts about the proper form and social function of film that first became hegemonic in Korea under Japanese fascism in order to construct a popular and autonomous Korean national cinema. This new national cinema would draw from Soviet advancements; it would show Koreans coming into national and class consciousness; and it would be critical of US imperialism. These articles in many ways prefigure the film criticism of the 1950s and 1960s and Kim Jong Il's *On the Art of the Cinema* (1973), particularly in their critiques of capitalist entertainment films and their attention to the formation of national political subjectivity through cinema. However, these critics were writing about the development of Korean national cinema before the formalization of film theory around a North Korean version of Soviet socialist realism. In addition to socialist realism, their writings on film drew more explicitly from the film and cultural theory of late imperial Japan.

The ideas that were translated and repeated from the context of Japanese empire include (1) the conception of sound film as a total work of art: an immersive, multi-sensory, and multimedia artwork that brings together the various modern arts into a popular, mass aesthetic experience; (2) the assertion of Asian resistance against US empire and Western Europe and their debased capitalist cultural forms; (3) the centering of cinema as the primary medium for the subjectification (*chuch'ehwa*) and individualization (*kaesŏnghwa*) of a national community; and (4) the idea that film should contribute to the revolutionary transformation of historical reality through the combination of fictional narrative and documentary realism.

In these articles, “the total work of art” appears multiple times to describe the ideal form of a film. Ch'u Min opens his essay “Ideas for Filmmaking, For Aspiring Filmmakers” with “Of course, the basis of film art is not solely ‘montage’; film art that is a total work of art takes all of the elements of literature, performance, art, music, and photography and makes them work together in order to create a single work.”¹⁴ For Ch'u, constructing a film does not involve solely montage or the editing together of shots and sequences; it should incorporate all the modern art forms into a single, totalizing aesthetic experience. Richard Wagner used the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the mid-nineteenth century to discuss the fusion of theatre, music, and poetry. Many studies of the modernist avant-garde, including the Soviet avant-garde, have associated the bringing together of various genres and media implied by the term *total work of art* with an ideal, organic fusion between art and life or between representation and the poetic construction of a polity.¹⁵ Ch'u's opening statement echoes Eisenstein and other Soviet theorists' ideas about sound film as a total work of art, which were translated into colonial Korea beginning in the late 1920s. This connection is clear in the third volume of *Film Art*, where Ch'u quotes Eisenstein's famous discussion of the counterpoint between montage and sound, as well as his arguments about the autonomy of film, as well as cinematic space and time, from other media.¹⁶ Another submerged reference point for such discussions of the total work of art in *Film Art* is Japanese film critic Imamura Taihei, who in 1938 wrote of the synthetic form of film, which brings together various genres and media.¹⁷

In this respect, the many references to the total work of art in *Film Art* situate the nascent North Korean film industry within the history of the modernist avant-garde, including the socialist realist system that was translated into North Korea through Soviet occupation. However, these invocations of the total work of art also resonate with discussions of Japanese imperial literature and film, particularly if we situate them within the broader historical and political arguments of these early texts of North Korean film theory. For example, Ch'u goes on in the same essay to connect this concept of the total work of art to a critique of the lack of politicality and the lack of consciousness and ideology in the films of capitalist societies. During the height of the project of national literature and imperial film culture in colonial Korea, fascist critics such as Ch'oe Chae-sŏ, in works such as

Korean Literature in a Time of Transition (1943), had launched similar criticisms of culture within profit societies (*eiri shakai*).¹⁸ More important than Ch'oe's and Ch'u's location of the origins of cultural debasement in the capitalist commodity are their moralistic polemics against the cultural symptoms of this debasement—cosmopolitan individuality, divided and fragmented subjectivity, and the purely formal and psychological approach to representation in the experimental avant-garde, art for art's sake, and psychoanalysis. Ch'oe associated all these cultural symptoms of modernity, or the “states of division” in the subject, with the detachment of cosmopolitan society from national community and proposed the formation of a multiethnic Japanese national literature as a solution to the alienation of the modern subject. Ch'u very similarly characterizes the experimental avant-garde, art for art's sake, and psychoanalysis as reflections of a degraded cosmopolitan culture, but he more explicitly connects this bad cosmopolitanism to the project of American imperialism, stating that films that are without ideology or purposive consciousness “become cheap tools of American imperialists who dream of a wicked world system that includes cosmopolitanism.”¹⁹ Criticisms of American consumer culture and cosmopolitanism were prevalent during the Japanese empire. However, the first texts of North Korean film theory repeat these criticisms in the context of the Cold War and explicitly discuss aesthetic modernism as a tool of American imperialism and its debased form of cosmopolitanism. Very early in the Cold War the critics in *Film Art* addressed the “ideology of modernism” (Jameson) and “Cold War modernism” (Barnhisel) in the postwar United States, or how modernism and its modes of subjectivity were canonized as exceptional examples of human freedom and employed in foreign policy against communism and socialist realism.²⁰

For Ch'u, the total work of art had an ethical mission to create a new ethics and a new human subjectivity not bound to the symptoms of cultural degradation and the artistic dishonesty of both formalist and commercial filmmakers (the high culture and the low culture of a singular US-centered cosmopolitanism). However, when Ch'u and the other critics of *Film Art* discussed how film as a total work of art can and should create a new ethics and a new human, they were not only translating ideas about the Soviet new man and socialist morality but also referring back to Japanese imperial theories of literature and film by Ch'oe Chae-sŏ and many others, which in the early 1940s asserted the need to create an organic unity between artists, their artworks, and the national masses, one that could resolve the crisis of modern culture, which was expressed in fragmented and pathological modern subjectivities and the separation of cosmopolitan culture from the national masses. Therefore, while it would be a mistake to conflate the aesthetics of Japanese fascism and Soviet socialist realism, if we hear echoes of the late Japanese empire in the political and film theory of North Korea from this period until Kim Jong Il's *On the Art of the Cinema*, it is because many of the leftist intellectuals in Korea who supported imperial Japan found in North Korea

a state that continued Japan's project of overcoming modernity (not overcoming capitalism).²¹ For Ch'u, in order for cinema to overcome the new Cold War intersection of modernist aesthetics and American foreign policy, it had to contribute to the construction of a new form of democracy based in a better description and transformation of the human. Because cinematic space and cinematic time are both autonomous and specific to the medium, film as total work of art can construct a free historical community out of its spectacles. However, it must avoid turning the camera inward, toward the interiority of the modern individual and its pathologies and situate the human again in a mass historical movement of democratic revolution and state formation. It is reasonable that the Soviet films Ch'u refers to, as well as *My Home Village*, would turn to the melodramatic mode in order to represent the human in historical context rather than delving into the discontinuities of internal time consciousness through formal experimentation. If montage is to serve a political purpose, it has to contribute to a total aesthetic experience, the complete immersion of the spectator in the spectacle, not just visually but also through music and embodied pathos. It is through the immersion of the audience in a collective mood that cinema can contribute to the creation of nation-state subjects.

In "My Proposal Concerning Film Art," Yun Tu-hŏn connects the total work of art to the subjectification (*chuch'ehwa*) and individualization (*kaesŏnghwa*) of the nation-people (*inmin*).²² The term *subjectification* contains the same term for practical, active subjectivity as *juche* thought, the national ideology of North Korea from the 1960s onward. This is one of the earliest theorizations of *juche* in North Korea, and it is telling that Yun makes it in a discussion of the subjectification process of cinema. Like Ch'u, Yun argues that film is an ideological tool and that it is responsible for creating a new ethics and a new human, particularly by enlivening the consciousness of national subjects, encouraging patriotism, and building a new type of democracy. Furthermore, unlike literature (which was Yun's original field), film has a mass appeal and scale and is therefore the most effective medium for ideological transformation. Ensuring this ideological role for cinema requires the development of new systems for film production, including systems of film theory and film production education, as well as the growth of film as an expressive system that can capture the truth of the historical moment. Yun argues for learning from Soviet film and film theory in order to create these systems, as well as for establishing a national individuality and national subjectivity that does not take the Soviet Union as North Korea's model form but turns to the local historical conditions of Korea.

These issues of *Film Art* were published seven years before President Kim Il Sung's famous *juche* speech (1955), where it was later said he first articulated the principles of *juche* thought.²³ And yet Yun's article refers to the relationship with the Soviet Union, the creation of a democratic people's republic, and the need for film to contribute to subject formation—all through an emphasis on the term

juche. This essay also appeared twenty-five years before Kim Jong Il's *On the Art of the Cinema*, where the president's son (or perhaps his hired writers) connects *juche* explicitly to film production, and yet it articulates how and why film will be the most significant ideological tool for the state. Also, for Yun, the incorporation of music is the most important way that film can bring together media and become a total work of art. He refers to the Soviet musical *The Ballad of Siberia* (1948) as an example of a successful combination of media, because it uses music to create a multisensory and immersive mood for the audience. Yun made this statement twenty-four years before the best-known and classic North Korean film, *The Flower Girl*, incorporated elements of opera in order to represent the North Korean national origin myth with melodramatic pathos, showing through image and song the plight of a peasant family in Manchuria and the rise of the anti-Japanese guerrilla movement in the 1930s.

Therefore, "My Proposal Concerning Film Art" points to many of the future dominant ideas about cinematic subjectivity in North Korea throughout the Cold War, including the incorporation of music (the *melo-* of melodrama) and the importance of embodied suffering and sympathy for conveying political ideology. Yun is more specific than Ch'u about the form that US imperialism is taking after 1945 and criticizes American film and cultural policy by arguing along Soviet lines that the Marshall Plan was suppressing French filmmakers and regulating their content by making commercial motivations the primary driver of film production. Likewise, South Korea and its film industry were one example of the cultural hegemony of US imperialism. Yun states that American films have an anesthetic effect on the working class: "They cause people to lose the ability to think in an idealistic way about the human and thereby enervate the consciousness of struggle within the working class."²⁴ He connects this loss of the capacity to idealize the human being to the pollution of the human spirit under US occupation in Western Europe: "Not only is the US [in France] taking the money and starving the population, they are polluting the human spirit of the population. This is the meaning of American 'entertainment.'"²⁵ Just as Ch'u argued that the European avant-garde was becoming further degraded culturally by the hegemony of US consumer culture and imperialist expropriation, Yun writes that Korean filmmakers should no longer look to the Western European avant-garde, as Yi Yŏng-il and Yu Hyun-mok in the South eventually would. Rather, North Korea should look to a creative translation of Soviet film and film theory. Yun anticipated a great deal of the content of *juche* thought, which emphasizes the creative application of Marxism-Leninism and is an important link between the Japanese empire and North Korean cinema and political philosophy. Therefore, the reconstitution of authentic and wholistic human subjectivity is to happen through melodrama in the original Greek sense, a combination of music and drama reconceived in modern terms as the total work of art. Cinema would produce a new human subjectivity not through a new mode of rationality or transcendental subjectivity

but through the moods of music and drama and their shaping of the subject's practical relation to the world.

In presenting this creation of a new democracy and a new humanism through film in spiritual terms as the overcoming of the pollution of the human and national spirit by the colonial imposition of American consumer culture while critiquing the fragmentation and lack of ethics and humanity in the European avant-garde, Yun was very much working with the terms and discourse of Japan's 1930s and 1940s revolt against the West. This repetition of Pan-Asianist rhetoric could no longer appear fully because of the danger of being outed as explicitly pro-Japanese. Therefore, Yun framed his argument about the pollution of the spirit with the language of global communist criticisms of US imperialism. However, at moments in the essay this repetition of the past does show itself more explicitly, as when he refers to the developments made through the founding of the Korean Film Studio in Pyongyang as a source of pride for the East.²⁶ For someone so immersed in the political organizations and ideologies of the late Japanese empire, this invocation of the East as a collective subject of world history was clearly an echo of the earlier period. It was precisely through the language of redemption from spiritual pollution that many critics of the late Japanese empire articulated the project of Japan and Asia overcoming modernity as an antidote to American commodity culture.²⁷ However, as I discuss in the following chapter, such theories about overcoming capitalist commodity and consumer culture through a North Korean version of socialist realism could not prevent this realism from becoming a consumer culture whose commodity was the socialist and national utopia itself.

Because Sŏ Kwang-je directed a film concerned with Japan-Korea unity, *Military Train* (1938), perhaps it is through his essays in *Film Art* where we can see most concretely the kind of aesthetic and formal questions at play between Japanese imperial film culture and early North Korean film and film theory. Sŏ's essay "Survey of Recent Films" argues that Soviet films such as *The Third Blow* (1948) are humanist and heroic, but Hollywood films are not. Sŏ couches his discussion of heroism in many of the same assertions as the other two theorists, focusing in particular on a critique of the detached, ahistorical, and individualistic representation of the human being in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytically informed filmmaking. One of the most significant assertions in the essay is that in order to achieve a properly historical representation of the human being, film as a total work of art will have to combine dramatic film with documentary film in order to create a new vision of history and historical transformation. What Sŏ appreciates most about *The Third Blow* is that it "gets rid of the idea that future documentary films cannot also be dramatic."²⁸ Rather than a film being guided by a single psychological individual, the protagonist of the film, he argues that "events themselves should become the protagonist of the film."²⁹

Considering that Sŏ published his essay in a special issue dedicated to the release of *My Home Village*, his idea that a film as total work of art does not need

a main protagonist is likely in part a reflection on the narrative structure of this film, which deviates considerably from the Hollywood-style films about Korean national liberation produced in the South. The brother and son character in *My Home Village*, Kwanp'il, has no love interest and the plot avoids the double causal structure of classical Hollywood discussed by David Bordwell: public mission and heterosexual romance.³⁰ Kwanp'il's experiences in prison and his formation into an effective partisan make up the first half of the film, and the middle of the film crosscuts between circumstances in his home village and his partisan actions against the factory and trains. As the film nears August 15, 1945, the sister Oktan (played by Mun Ye-bong), the mother, and depictions of exploitation in the village, rather than Kwanp'il and his mission, carry the narrative through to its climax. He is absent during the revolutionary liberation and returns only months later in the final scene. On the one hand, his character and his partisan actions have to make way for the introduction of an even more ideal partisan subject, Kim Il Sung. On the other hand, the film changes genres at the climax, turning to documentary footage of the North Korean revolution rather than the actions of an individual hero. Upon the return of Kim Il Sung to Korea, real documentary footage shows huge masses of people, gathered to listen to the young leader's speech (he appears in one shot).

In addition to *The Third Blow*, such sequences no doubt inspired Sŏ Kwang-je to consider the possibilities for combining dramatic and documentary representations of the ongoing North Korean revolution. He imagined that future North Korean films would continue to find new ways to combine dramatic and documentary genres in order to represent cinematically a democratic political community coming into history. Rather than individual protagonists, such a cinema would, again, present events themselves as protagonists. Sŏ's essay seems completely unconcerned with the role of the cult of personality of leadership in both *The Third Blow* and *My Home Village*. In "The Myth of Stalin in Soviet Cinema," André Bazin discusses how *The Third Blow* uses the power of the cinematic re-creation of history in order to establish Stalin, irrefutably, as a world-historical figure. Stalin is depicted as the subject of history who alone determines the correct military strategy for the taking of Crimea.³¹ The climax of *My Home Village* could be said to accomplish the same for Kim Il Sung, resorting to the insertion of documentary footage of his return to Korea to eliminate the semblance of fiction. Although Sŏ does refer to the leader once in the essay, his argument about the replacement of individual protagonists with the events as protagonists seems to willfully ignore how these films not only show historical events as mass experiences but also recenter their optics away from individual psychological protagonists to heroic leaders who are ultimately the subjects who bring about military victories or national liberation. In the sequence from *My Home Village*, it is notable that in the middle of the documentary footage are spliced a number of manufactured images of what Stephanie Hemelryk Donald calls the "socialist

realist gaze.”³² Fictional characters filmed after the historical event of the revolution are filmed in close-up, looking not only toward the collective future of the democratic republic but also toward the body of the sovereign who has returned to Korea after his heroic revolutionary victories against Japanese imperialism (none of which, by the way, are substantiated by the historical record). Although Sō imagines a kind of seamless combination of fictional dramatic film and documentary, this combination of the two genres ended up producing an uneven cinematic experience.

The problem of how to combine dramatic and documentary film was a significant question in the late Japanese empire. In this regard, Sō did not continue to make films in the Japanese empire after the formation of the Korean Film Production Corporation in 1939 and did not experiment with the kind of combination of newsreel-style depictions of total history and family drama narratives that were the hallmark of late colonial Korean film. As Imamura wrote in 1938, “If newsreels develop, they will no longer be scattered shorts screened as the edge of a dramatic film. They will become valuable records of political and economy society. They will depict poetry and theater that are based on the social realities that run parallel to dramatic films.”³³ Although *Military Train* is ostensibly a propaganda film celebrating the modernity of the Japanese military and train system and promoting the need for vigilance in the face of spies from the Korean national liberation movement, it also contains a great deal of ambiguity in its consideration of the proper way for colonial Koreans to act and to think within the imperial system. Considering these ambiguities, perhaps Sō imagined a different way of combining dramatic film and documentary film during the colonial period, one that would not be tied to the typical narrative of imperial subjectification of Koreans required for films such as *Volunteer* or *Korea Strait*. Although this possibility about his colonial-period career is speculative, Sō seems to ignore purposefully the cult of personality, emphasizing that the unfolding of historical events takes precedence over psychological individuality. One can speculate that Sō’s silence during the era of imperial subjectification in Japan and his silence on the problem of the centering of socialist realism around the figure of the sovereign suggest he resisted the militarist and dictatorial political formations and cinematic cultures of modern Korea and sought alternative possibilities for a popular, revolutionary cinema.

The multiple tensions between these film theories’ ideas of the revolutionary subject—tensions repeated in the later *juche* debates of the 1960s—register in the mood of *My Home Village*, which both expresses the popular, ecstatic enthusiasm for revolutionary change and attempts to contain that affect within the visuality and narrative of party, nation, state, and leader. Reading the mood of the film and its formal construction through montage reveals the political promise and the political limits of the total work of art’s goal of the aesthetic absorption of the mass audience.

MY HOME VILLAGE

The first half of *My Home Village* is concerned with the nation as a lost object; however, the melancholic mood and pathos, rendered spatially and musically, provide a backdrop for the representation of class differences and the exploitation of the impoverished peasantry by the Korean large landowners and the Japanese colonizer. As in many later North Korean films, the focus at first is on a single family and village living as tenant farmers under an exploitative system of rent and taxation and the violence of the Japanese military and the landowners. The climax changes the focus from the individual protagonist Kwanp'il and his family to documentary footage of the North Korean revolution combined with montage sequences depicting a mass revolution. These exultant sequences rely on discontinuity editing and the socialist realist gaze, creating the sense of being immersed through cinema in a world-historical transformation rather than the actions of a single heroic individual.³⁴ The film also has a very different spatial sensibility from the films of imperial Japan and South Chosŏn, using domestic interiors not in order to establish gender difference and a male nationalist interiority but to contrast the sublime and collective landscape of Korea, often filmed through point-of-view shots, with the luxurious domestic spaces of the collaborationist Korean landowners. The North Korean revolution redeems the collective national landscape from the enclosures of the landowners' and colonizers' properties, creating an open space for mass politics. This space is captured through a combination of stock documentary footage and montage. Although the relationship between the melodramatic mode and world-historical transformation is somewhat comparable to Japanese fascist cinema in colonial Korea, there is a notable contrast in mood. Japanese imperial cinema also combined the historical referentiality of newsreels and culture films with fictional melodramatic storylines, but the moods of those films tend toward a melancholic, self-sacrificial embrace of individual injury and death for the sake of the state. The images at the climax of *My Home Village* express a different sort of sublime mood: the collective revolutionary joy of peasants overturning decades, or rather centuries, of economic and political exploitation.

Although the problems of Stalin-era socialist realism and the cult of personality appear at the end of *My Home Village*, much of the film lives up to Sō's idea of events themselves being protagonists and to the goal of creating a revolutionary national cinema. The film forcefully aestheticizes mass politics, giving the sensation of being immersed in the movement for liberation from Japanese colonial rule. It actualizes much of what Sō, Ch'u, and Yun meant by the total work of art. It inaugurated a history of North Korean dramatic film dedicated to reproducing the national myth and legitimating what Wada Haruki called North Korea's partisan state, centering families and village communities to depict oppression

at the hands of pro-Japanese large landowners, peasant partisan struggle leading to the end of colonial rule, and the unification of the Korean nation through the rhetorical, political, and visual hegemony of the Korean Workers' Party and its idolized leader.³⁵ Because filmmaking that showed class revolution and drew from Soviet cinema could not appear within the colonial Korean film industry, it made a more revolutionary break from the past in contrast to the films of South Chosŏn. However, the film also adumbrates the repressive dimension of this liberation and its cinematic representation because the overturning of class relations, liberation from the colonial state, and the freeing of national subjectivity are accompanied by a new visual regime that ultimately codes the collective mass movement as an expression of the will of its party leader.

The last decade of imperial Japanese film in Korea was marked by the hybridization of the historical referentiality of newsreels, documentaries, and culture films with melodramatic fiction film. Their difference from *My Home Village* lies in how their moods connect to the arc of the political narrative. The colonial-period fascist film *Korea Strait* begins with a melodramatic scenario that includes various familial problems: an illegitimate child, class differences between protagonists Kinshuku and Seiki, and Seiki's failure to live up to the ghost of his dead brother. Likewise, the mood is melancholic and constructed through individuating close-ups emphasizing pain and loss. However, after Seiki volunteers for the Japanese military, the film begins to celebrate the protagonists' self-sacrificial embrace of individual injury and death for the sake of the state and as a means of redeeming their lost innocence. The melodramatic scenario at the beginning of *My Home Village* is presented through a similar attunement through melancholy, but this negative affective background directs our attention to collective suffering caused by colonial class relations. The lost innocence that needs to be redeemed is the dignity and equality of the Korean peasantry. The film uses sentimental familial relations not as a moral standard to which the fallen woman and fallen man must return through self-sacrifice for the state but as a way to create a more focused sympathy for the suffering masses. Its romantic visual rhetoric of pictorial landscape combined with melodramatic realist depictions of suffering bodies links sympathy for the oppressed characters with the struggle of partisans and their party. The climax provokes a sublime mood of victory and redemption; however, rather than the sublime pointing toward the solidification of the holy trinity of fascism—the individual, the family, and the totality of the nation-state—for the colonized minority, the montage sequences and point-of-view shots of the Korean landscape present a romantic image of national community realized through anticolonial revolution. When the sister and brother Oktan and Kwanp'il look out over the landscape at the end of the film, they express intense joy at having become part of a new nation-people, in contrast to the injury, illness, and exhaustion of Kinshuku and Seiki at the end of *Korea Strait*, which surrounds the protagonists' heroic acts of becoming Japanese with a mood of ambivalence.

Despite the mythical portrayal of Kim Il Sung's successes as an anticolonial guerrilla revolutionary, which would remain significant throughout the history of North Korean film and literature, *My Home Village* provides historical and social context for revolution and liberation. It represents Japanese imperialism as an issue of national identity and collaboration and resistance but also as a system that perpetuates exploitative class relations. It employs the binaries of melodrama in its depiction of the noble, impoverished peasants and the evil, rapacious large landowners, but this is done to refer to a number of specific economic problems: the exploitative taxation of tenant farmers by landowners, the propping up of these landowners by the Japanese colonial state, the brutality of the Kwantung Army and colonial police, the partisan activities of revolutionary peasants (including the sabotage of factories and railroads), and the forced conscription of Koreans into labor camps or the military. Rather than stripping away as much of the historical context and class politics as possible in order to individualize and psychologize the national identity conflict, it focuses on the macropolitics of history.

The film takes up two important narrative aspects of later Soviet socialist realism: an emphasis on maintaining narrative continuity (for the sake of popularization) and the figuration of the party leader as the primary source of narrative and visual causality (particularly at the climax). However, the narrative's differences from the double causal structure are apparent in that the male protagonist, Kwanp'il, has no love interest. His experiences in prison and his formation into an effective partisan make up the first half of the film, and the second half cross-cuts between circumstances in his home village and his partisan actions against the factory and trains of the Japanese empire. He is absent during the liberation and returns only months later in the final scene; at the climax primacy is given to mass revolution rather than to the individual hero. Documentary footage of huge masses of people, gathered to listen to Kim Il Sung's speech, are insinuated where a classical narrative would position the individual protagonist's achievement of his public mission.

The cinematic space and the mood of the *mise-en-scène* also convey a different political sensibility. Kang Hong-sik was a theater and film actor during the Japanese colonial period. Not surprisingly, considering Kang's background, the first scene of the mother pleading with the landowner appears very theatrical in its *mise-en-scène* and blocking, with the landowner seated inside with his tax books and the mother looking in through a square window, her lower body invisible, as though she were kept neatly outside the interior of the house through the capture of a picture frame. This scene establishes relations of domestic interior and exterior landscape that continue throughout the entirety of the film. However, the distinction between interior and exterior is not a matter of gender, as the spatial dichotomies of the South Korean film *Hurrah! For Freedom* are, but rather a matter of social class. The landowners' home is the site of wealth, entertainment, and

connivance, and as in all North Korean films set in the 1930s or 1940s, the tenant farmers cannot enter the house until the revolutionary climax. The homes of the farming families are dark and marked by suffering; they are also gradually emptied as Kwanp'il goes to prison and then flees to the mountains. It is then that the Japanese military conscripts the majority of the village into forced labor. Therefore, the mood of alienation and loss directs our attention not to gendered spaces and the threat that feminine desire poses to the colonized national community, but rather to the enclosure of national space by collaborationist landlords and accumulation of wealth and luxury at the expense of the farmers. The very division of domestic interior and sublime exterior spaces is an ideological one that facilitates class exploitation. During Kwanp'il's process of becoming a partisan, most of the significant domestic scenes, including a remarkable flashback to his childhood when he recounts his thwarted desire to attend school, occur outside around a campfire at night, surrounded by both male and female cadres. Therefore, the film centers on a family, but a family whose domestic space is broken and who is dispersed into the natural and industrial landscapes, returning home eventually only by means of the revolution. All the interior spaces of the film—the landowner's home, the inside of the train, the inside of the factory or prison—are coded as spaces of ownership and power, whereas the rural partisan is able to gain a romantic connection to both community and to land through his displacement, finding in the nationalized natural landscape inspiration for the struggle. Rather than the mood of national loss getting filtered through the prism of masculinist national identity and the gendered fetishism of interior and exterior, this melancholy can be resolved only by expelling the colonial agents of enclosure and spatial division, through the ecstatic mood of revolution presented by way of montage.

Leading up to the revolutionary climax, the fictional narrative of the first half, with its focus on the microcosm of the single family and village, eventually gives way to a more documentary approach to the revolution and the beginning of North Korean national history. However, the techniques of documentary—including documentary footage and titles explaining historical events—function to expand the established melodramatic conflict to the macropolitical dimension of the nation-state, both as a form of historical exposition and as a way to distill the terms of the Manichaean struggle of the melodrama narrative. Regarding the film's claim to document real history, its realism is as questionable as that of late Stalinist films imported to North Korea during the Soviet occupation. Superimposed titles and intertitles give the film an air of pedagogical and documentary authority, but one prominent intertitle that appears at the film's climax evidences how mythic North Korean cinematic realism was from the outset. A title shows the date August 15, 1945, some bombs drop on the village from an anonymous source, and the explosion disrupts the party of the evil large landowners. The intertitle that follows states, "The unrivaled patriot General Kim Il Sung, at the end of a fifteen-year armed struggle against the Japanese, overthrew Japanese imperialism and liberated



FIGURE 2. What appears to be stock footage of the North Korean Revolution is edited with performed scenes of Kwanp'il and other characters cheering for Kim Il Sung upon his return to Korea from the Soviet Union.

the Motherland.” The bombing that ends World War II and liberates Korea is not attributed directly to any agent. The Soviet Union never officially declared war on Japan, although the threat of that declaration contributed to Japan’s decision to surrender. The seemingly aerial bombardment perhaps visually alludes to the United States’ atomic bombings of Japan, but the liberation itself is attributed to Kim Il Sung, who as a partisan in Manchuria in the 1930s and 1940s had no access to aerial weapons or artillery. Later, when the film shows, through a mix of live action and documentary footage (figure 2), Kim Il Sung’s return to Korea from the Soviet Union on October 14, 1945, it is not explained how he was able to use guerrilla tactics to topple the Japanese empire while in exile in the Soviet Union. Therefore, from the beginning, the North Korean film industry inherited many of the conventions of late Stalin-era Soviet films (1945–1953), which tended to depict every historical event, including the end of World War II, as an effect of Stalin’s will and military acumen.³⁶

The insertion of documentary footage into a romantic revolutionary melodrama dramatically changes the purpose of the footage from fact-based exposition to a means of punctuating the mood of the melodrama narrative and giving an ideological direction to its pathos. Some of the titles do point to significant historical facts that were in danger of getting lost as East Asia transitioned to the Cold War order, such as Japan’s subjection of Koreans (including comfort women) to forced labor. In this case, the title adds to the fictional portrayal of villagers being rounded up by the Japanese military and Oktan’s capture by a local soldier, providing a broader factual context for the events experienced by the family and the village. However, the purpose of the title is not mere propaganda, because it informs the audience about the shared historical circumstances of lower-class Koreans under Japanese colonial rule rather than trying to impel particular thoughts or actions from them. The tragic and dramatic soundtrack in combination with the title connects the fate of the conscripts to the injustices of Japanese colonial rule

and Koreans' struggle against these injustices. However, in the case of the vague or inaccurate intertitles discussed above, the use of documentary information to punctuate the resentment and desire for redemption within a mood of loss gives way to the hyperreality of myth. The fact that Kim Il Sung liberates Korea through his guerrilla movement in one scene and then returns from the Soviet Union in the next scene is a narrative inconsistency that the film seems to try to cover up with an intensive series of images of revolution and the leader's return presented through discontinuous montage editing. The technique creates a hyperreal version of the revolution that gains its historical and political legitimacy as narrative through the affective power of the series of images and the ideas and political personality at their center.

It is telling that the film turns to montage precisely at the moments when it emphasizes the shared national identity of Koreans or when it captures the sublime mood of revolution—since Eisenstein and Vertov, montage has lent itself well to the expression of abstract ideas and the moods of social transformation. Although the first half of the film is concerned primarily with class relations, the revolution of the second half is guided as much by the idea of national sovereignty and the personality of the leader as it is by the overturning of class relations. Montage performs a central role in the translation of class oppression at the level of the family and the village—the primary content of the melodramatic narrative and its mood of pathos and negative affects—into the positive struggle of a national community guided by a political party.

There are two main styles of montage to consider: landscapes and mass politics. To use a term from Carl Schmitt's reading of partisanship, the *telluric* quality of the partisan struggle is emphasized through the film's montages of images of the Korean landscape, particularly in the very symmetrical first and final scenes.³⁷ As Kim Sŏn-a points out, the film begins and ends with two fairly long montages of pictorial landscape images—shots panning across the river that runs through the village or the deep space of the agricultural valley, shots capturing the still beauty of nearby lakes and mountains and trees blowing in the wind, and also some pastoral glimpses of farmers and farming equipment.³⁸ In camera movements that are allegorical and epitomize the melodramatic narrative of loss and redemption, shots in the opening landscape montage pan to the right and those at the end of the film pan to the left. The first sequence transitions to the scene of the mother pleading with the landowner, signaling the loss of the land through its commodification, and the last personifies the gazes of Kwan'ŭl and Oktan as they scan the Korean landscape, toward the future of Korean sovereignty and the people's republic. As a film that both turns to the recent past and points to the future of the DPRK nation-state, these montages are utopian in a dual sense. The first montage imagines a collective origin that has been broken by colonialism and class differences. The montage at the end of the film contains similar shots panning in the opposite direction, suggesting that this origin has been returned



FIGURE 3. Sister and brother, Oktan and Kwanp'il, are reunited and the camera begins to pan left across the liberated landscape of the Korean nation.

to its proper state through the revolution and the home village has reintegrated into its natural landscape. Through these pictorial landscape montages, the North Korean aesthetics of liberation create a sense of national interiority distinct from the gendering of private and public space in many Hollywood and South Korean melodramas. They are not merely sublime shots of nature. The melodramatic narrative and mood of lost origins delimits a nation-people and a national subject, an oppressed and then liberated political community defined by their historical experience of colonialism and their shared aesthetic experience of emerging from and returning to the same landscape. The final montage begins with a shot of brother and sister embracing after Kwanp'il's heroic return but then pans to the left (figure 3), following the line of his gaze, attributing to the images a perspective that is lost at the beginning of the film, is mourned throughout, and then finally regained through national liberation.

An earlier scene of train passengers arriving home from the distant locales of their forced labor presents the same idea through more social realist and less romantic and metaphysical images of reunion; it belongs to the second type of montage in the film. This type represents mass politics, using dramatic close-ups of faces and long shots of masses of people that certainly echo Eisenstein and early Soviet film. A montage that occurs at the moment of liberation conveys this latter

sense of human community through a series of close-ups of the faces of humble villagers smiling and shouting “Manse!” Although the montage begins with images of characters, including the mother, the subsequent series of faces borrows from Soviet practices of typage; they do not appear to be hired actors, but rather regular citizens. This montage begins a sequence of images of massive crowds and is followed by the villagers tying up and punishing the landowners and collaborators, creating analogies between the liberation of the home village and the liberation of the nation. Because the series of close-ups occurs as the villagers are beginning to use their popular power to overturn the class structure and because it includes non-actors, it is one of the more powerful and referential scenes in the film. It is also the scene that most directly calls upon the viewer to identify with the characters and their actions.

VIRTUAL REVOLUTION

The mood in the last third of *My Home Village* is a virtual space filled with visual and sonic affects, the translation of these affects into ideological emotions, and excesses of revolutionary desire. The close-ups at the end of *My Home Village* are perhaps the most important aspect of the revolutionary mood and one indebted to Soviet montage. In an analysis of the close-up that spans many theories, Mary Ann Doane encapsulates the different use of the close-up that Eisenstein assigned within Soviet cinema. Although she warns against blanket descriptions of Hollywood aesthetics, her reading of Eisenstein is useful for the present comparison:

As opposed to the American cinema's use of the close-up to suggest proximity, intimacy, knowledge of interiority, Eisenstein argues for a disproportion that transforms the image into a sign, an epistemological tool, undermining identification and hence empowering the spectator as analyst of, rather than vessel for, meaning.³⁹

In comparing this series of close-ups in *My Home Village* with those in a South Korean independence film such as *Hurrah! For Freedom* (discussed in chapter 4), a few telling differences can be identified. In *Hurrah! For Freedom*, Ch'oe In-gyu's close-ups are comparable to D. W. Griffith's (in Deleuze's contrast between Griffith and Eisenstein), because he gives preeminence to the “reflexive face” rather than to the “intensive face” that was Eisenstein's preference for the transformation of image into sign.⁴⁰

The most effective close-ups in *My Home Village* show that Kang Hong-sik's Soviet-influenced film tends toward the virtuality of intensive faces that draw together the singularities of the narrative and themes in a manner similar to Eisenstein's:

Eisenstein's innovation was not to have invented the intensive face, nor even to have constituted the intensive series with several faces, several close-ups; it was to have produced compact and continuous intensive series, which go beyond all binary structures and exceed the duality of the collective and the individual.⁴¹



FIGURE 4. In *My Home Village* (1949), the mother of the family yells “Manse!” upon the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule.

At its climax, *My Home Village* becomes a long, complex, and continuous intensive series. The initial rapturous joy of the villagers is followed by documentary footage of Kim Il Sung’s return and the final landscape shots. The close-ups of mostly anonymous people shouting “Manse!” begins this long series (figure 4). If the spectator can identify with this intensive series, it is not through the melodramatic invoking of sympathy with the pained or controlled body but rather in the way the sequence transforms the image into a sign, particularly the sign (or idea) of the nation-state. The egalitarian expression of patriotism is certainly emotional, but this emotion is not presented as psychological interiority, and the close-ups do not make one feel more intimate with the characters. Instead, the intensive series abstracts the external object of the faces’ affection (the nation-state) from space and time, transforming it into a virtual possibility.

The different uses of the close-up in *Hurrah! For Freedom* and *My Home Village* speak to the two Cold War political systems that were already beginning to develop in North and South Korea in the immediate aftermath of World War II. On the one hand is a film steeped in the liberal humanism of psychological individuals and their struggles against clear obstacles. On the other hand is a film that gradually deemphasizes the role of the everyday individual in history and imagines the nation-state as an organic whole held together by an idea.

The intensive series at the climax of *My Home Village* elevates the community of faces from an imagistic object to a sign. Each face is connected to the next

not through personal psychology or spatiotemporal contiguity in the manner of objects; one can no longer speak of a binary of individual and collective. As the history of North Korean film develops, this empty offscreen space will be filled more and more transparently by the figure of the sovereign leader, but in 1949 such a scene could still empower analysis, or perhaps a popular will to imagine a postcolonial future whose form was yet to be decided. In other words, the mood of revolutionary fervor was not contained by a socialist realist gaze directed toward the body of the sovereign. The virtual openness of the revolutionary mood and the series of gazes correlates with emergent ideas about subjectivity in film theory at the time. Just as the identity of the practical subject (*juche*) of historical transformation was up for debate, in *My Home Village* there is space for multiple notions of subjectivity. The melodramatic family scenario, the staged montage sequences, and the landscape point-of-view shots live up to Sŏ's notion that events themselves should be the protagonist of the film. Although Kwan'pil is a hero, the implied meaning of the aesthetic is that the national popular masses, and not a single individual, bring about historical transformation. On the other hand, the documentary montage sequences and the intertitles establish Kim Il Sung as the ocular and ideological center of national history. The historical direction of both the total work of art and the North Korean revolution had yet to be determined.

Despite its relative openness to multiple ideas of subjectivity and revolution, the degree to which *My Home Village* prefigures later North Korean cinema and theater is remarkable. The most canonized and well-known melodramatic and operatic films of the late 1960s and early 1970s, such as *Sea of Blood* (1969) and *The Flower Girl* (1971) are certainly indebted to it. The story relies on a primary contrast between a large landowning family and an impoverished tenant farming family. It depicts the landowning family eating large feasts, enjoying the luxury of fine clothes, playing Go, dancing, and plotting with Japanese authorities. This family also relies on the colonial police to suppress peasant rebellions. The film contrasts these landowners to the tenant farming family, which suffers physically and spiritually because of the landlord's taxation, the Japanese state's appropriation of rice, its forced conscription of laborers, and the sexual harassment of Oktan by a soldier. As in the later films, the landowning family also degrades and insults the farming family, in this case when the young son spits at her feet when she comes to discuss the food shortages and, later on, when she is beaten. The spitting incident sets off the main events of the plot, because Kwan'pil retaliates and is imprisoned and then escapes to the mountains with a partisan leader to join the guerrilla revolutionaries. All these narrative elements appear in later films, in only slightly modified form (e.g., in *The Flower Girl*, the landowner's wife blinds the youngest daughter, and the mother dies of overwork).

My Home Village and the surrounding film theories prefigured *juche* thought's concerns with subjectivity, which entailed various ideas of the subject that policy and cinema both tried to unify visually and narratively. For example, the end of

the film declares the end of trauma and a radical history fissure beyond memory, because in scanning the Korean landscape in the aftermath of revolution, Kwanp'il and Oktan have moved beyond the Japanese colonial period and their experiences of imprisonment, forced labor, and state-sanctioned sexual violence. Although this dialectical overturning is inspiring as a story of liberation, the real-life tumultuous careers of Kang Hong-sik and Mun Ye-bong, Yun Tu-hŏn, and so on suggest that this pure political position of redeemed innocence is entirely cinematic and virtual.

There is no realistic version of the North Korean revolution in which postcolonial cultural and cinematic subjectivity would not remain split in some way by the politics and experiences of the colonial past. There are traces of the violence of that translation of real everyday experience into the sovereignty of party leadership in the way that the film is compelled to present documentary elements that construct an unbelievable version of events, occluding basic factual information. The reunion of the family and the redemption of their innocence within a Korean landscape of reconstituted natural origins also symbolically conflate the social registers of family, village, nation, and state, giving them the image of an organic whole somehow no longer haunted by the contamination of colonial class and gender relations. This elevation of myth and occlusion of everyday experiences and structures of history are common aspects of melodramatic cinema, which Evgeny Dobrenko argues serves to mask the violence of the state in socialist realism.⁴² However, the mood of suffering and pathos at the beginning of the film contrasts so strongly with the revolutionary exuberance at the end that the melodramatic extremes also threaten to overflow the film's claims to a semblance of reality. The narrative fallacies and melodramatic moods in *My Home Village* would remain perceivable in later films in the contrasts between individual traumas and the master narratives of the revolution.

As Suzy Kim's analysis of everyday life during the North Korean revolution shows, the gendering of the national subject reinscribed conservative ideas about motherhood and domesticity into the rhetoric of revolution, equality, and freedom.⁴³ *My Home Village* avoids the misogyny of some scenes in *Hurrah! For Freedom* and represents women partisan fighters in addition to innocent mothers and sisters. However, beginning with this first film, melodramatic cinema in North Korea often used gender difference in an allegorical manner, as a way to accentuate the need for good motherhood in the revolution, to present symbols of lost innocence in wounded sisters, and to proliferate ideal victims who need to be defended and redeemed by male protagonists.⁴⁴ The character of Oktan would become paradigmatic and conventional, particularly in films dealing with the colonial period. On the other hand, women heroes did gradually gain more agency, and between *The Flower Girl* (1972) and *Traces of Life* (1989), the need for a masculine lead gradually diminished. What these kinds of transformations in conventions over time show is that despite the monolithic aesthetic sought in

North Korean film theory, a monolithic film, a total work of art with a singular aesthetic effect on subjectivity, is an impossibility. That is why differences in mood and affects across genders, classes, and relative position within the party and the state remained present in films throughout the history of Cold War North Korean film. In *My Home Village*, we can already sense this impossibility, because as a total work of art meant to give life to the organic whole of the nation-people, its theorization, its production, its form, its narrative, and its moods all remain open to multiple and conflicted meanings and subjective relations to history.