

Melodramatic Moods from Socialist Realism to Juche Realism

As the social transformations celebrated in *My Home Village* were coming into effect, the Korean War (1950–53) devastated the two Koreas. The North Korean state considered the Fatherland Liberation War a continuation of the armed resistance against Japanese colonial rule, this time directed toward the perpetuation of colonial class relations by the United States and its “puppet state,” the Republic of Korea. After three years of war that engulfed the entirety of the peninsula and its population in horrific violence, an armistice agreement established the DMZ as the new border between the two Koreas (only slightly different, territorially speaking, from the thirty-eighth parallel that divided the Soviet and US spheres of occupation). In the aftermath of the destruction of nearly all urban areas in North Korea by US aerial bombardment in the last two years of the war, reconstruction became the central concern of the state.¹ Cinema played a central role in postwar reconstruction in 1950s North Korea and during the Chollima economic development plan of the 1960s.² It provided the stories, images, affects, and ideas that could help to mobilize workers for these tremendous nation-building efforts.

Film genres and film theory distinguished clearly between documentary films (*kirok yŏnghwa*) and art films (*yesul yŏnghwa*, the North Korean term for fictional feature film). At the same time, art films utilized the melodramatic mode to make their claims to represent the realities of revolution and the construction of a utopian socialist society, and montage sequences including documentary footage still occasionally made their way into art films (see the discussion of *A Dangerous Moment* in the section “Socialist Reconstruction and National Identity”). The result of using popular melodramatic cinema as an agent of historical change was a state socialist cinema in which idealized images of socialism were the primary consumer product and object of spectacle. This chapter focuses on the state socialist commodity culture of North Korean art films and how the melodramatic mode

shaped their narratives, moods, and historical referentiality from the era of socialist realism in the 1950s until the emergence of *juche* realism in the late 1960s.

CHOSŎN FILM AND MELODRAMA

Film criticism and film theory influenced the formation of the North Korean film industry in the 1950s and early 1960s, because they introduced movements in world cinema, articulated theoretical positions on representation and technology, and conveyed responses from both critics and audiences. The most important venue for film criticism during this period was the journal *Chosŏn Film* (*Chosŏn yŏnghwa*). Because of the sensational allure of a future dictator publishing a theoretical work on cinema and the fact that the work has been translated into English, Kim Jong Il's *On the Art of the Cinema* (1973) has stood in symbolically for the entirety of North Korean film theory and criticism in most of the limited publications on North Korean film.³ This text was published after the release of a series of films that would become classics of North Korean cinema and the most well-known films outside the country: *Five Guerrilla Brothers* (1968), *Sea of Blood* (1969), and *The Flower Girl* (1972). However, Kim's text and the establishment of *juche* realism (*chuchê sasiljuŭi*) as the dominant system of cinematic representation in the late 1960s were preceded by two decades of critical essays written within the rubric of Marxist-Leninist socialist realism. As Chŏng Yŏng-gwŏn has shown through a reading of two years of *Chosŏn Film* (1965–1966), and specifically Kim Chong-ho's column "Introduction to the History of World Cinema" (1965–66), the elite film culture that preceded the ascendance of *juche* realism in 1967 was more cosmopolitan.⁴ In the late 1950s and early 1960s, in addition to the translation of ideas of Stalinist and post-Stalinist socialist realism in the Soviet Union (including Latvia), articles on world cinema addressed topics such as developments in socialist cinema in China, East Germany, and Romania, as well as numerous articles on important film artists of colonial Korea, especially Na Un-gyu.⁵ Kim Chong-ho's column introduced the French New Wave, as well as the histories of Italian, German, British, Russian, and early Soviet film.⁶ The journal also included reports on foreign screenings of North Korean films, including in Hong Kong.⁷ Finally, the many articles criticizing reactionary movements in world cinema, especially Kyŏng Ryong-il's column "Against Bourgeois, Reactionary Literary Movements," were an important part of the journal's cosmopolitanism, because they required erudite translations, presentations, and interpretations of highly influential movements in world culture (even if the purpose was to denounce them). Such articles addressed Hollywood cinema, of course, but also the philosophical views of existentialism, modernism, pragmatism, and Freudianism and their negative influences on cinema and literature.⁸ The introduction of *juche* thought in 1967 and the subsequent formation of *juche* realism in cinema eventually led to a more isolated and nationalistic film industry, but the film cosmopolitanism of *Chosŏn Film* was a

crucible for later ideas on juche realism. Juche realism was cosmopolitan, and not solely by way of socialist internationalism.

Reading issues of *Chosŏn Film* from the two decades prior to *On the Art of the Cinema* reveals that most of Kim Jong Il's ideas on film were derived from the discourses of various other critics. Even his famous seed theory (*chongja riron*)—which states that the totality of a film should be created organically out of its primary ideological concern—has its obvious precursors. For example, in “The Seed of Action: Its Internal Basis” (1964), Pak Yŏng-hwan states, “The actress Sŏng Hye-rim, who played the role of a young woman in *Paek Il-hong* [dir. Ōm Kil-sŏn, 1963], . . . captures correctly the seeds [*ssiattŭl*] of action that are formed within the living foundation and specific situation of the character.”⁹ Pak uses a different word for “seed” than Kim Jong Il does, but the concept is nearly identical. By situating the seed of action at once in the psychological interiority of the character and in the surrounding living environment, Pak prefigured the organicist and vitalist ideas in Kim's work, where the totality of the film must emerge out of an ideological seed that is drawn from actual life but also guides internally the moral and political actions of the positive protagonist. Pak also emphasizes that it is this internal capacity for moral action that defines the human being, a common assertion within later juche thought.

The turn in 1967 from world cinema and international socialist realism toward juche thought and juche realism was marked by both continuity and change. Kim Sŏn-a shows that in the late 1960s both the political system and the film industry were in transition: “*On the Art of the Cinema* belongs neither to socialist realism nor to juche realism and instead refers only to an era of socialist realism and juche; we can read this as Kim Jong Il's intention to enact the translation and transformation of socialist realism to fit the era of juche, rather than a complete rupture between the two.”¹⁰ This transitional quality of film theory and the different possibilities for the direction of juche realism were reflected in the political and philosophical discussion of juche (or subjectivity) itself. As discussed in chapter 1, Hwang Chang-yŏp described internal party debates in the 1960s about juche concerning the true practical subject (juche) and sovereign of history: the popular masses (*taejung*), the party (*tang*), the leader (*suryŏng*), or the human in general (*in'gan*).¹¹ Although leader-centered sovereignty became the hegemonic idea after 1967, the party, the popular masses, and the human remained essential to the main tenets of juche thought and policy, and the debates related by Hwang show that the status of the subject in North Korea was especially unstable in the previous decade. The shifting identity of the ultimate subject of historical change and action is particularly apparent in 1950s and 1960s film theory and criticism. Despite the retrospective locating of the origins of juche thought in Kim Il Sung's 1955 speech “On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work,” his presence by no means dominates the pages of *Chosŏn Film* during these two decades, and the journal was certainly not an organ for the

cult of personality.¹² Prior to 1967, articles in *Chosŏn Film* are rarely concerned with *juche* and address problems of socialist realist representation, such as how to represent life (*saenghwal*) and actuality (*hyŏnsil*) in a truthful way, particularly through the authentic artistic depiction of the actions of positive protagonists and their political ideology. A rare 1961 article on establishing *juche* in filmmaking by Kwŏn Tu-ŏn bears this out. While it contains ample quotations from Kim Il Sung, for Kwŏn “applying the principles of Marxism-Leninism creatively” is primarily a matter of bringing to life Korea’s revolutionary traditions while articulating a new communist future. His reading of *My Home Village* emphasizes these themes rather than Kim Il Sung.¹³

The concept of melodrama can illuminate some of the historical particularities of North Korean cinematic realism during the era of socialist realism and the transition to *juche* realism. If the melodramatic mode is a matter of wresting the true from the real, it must create contrasts and conflicts between surface conditions and the effort of a truer life, morality, and politics to gain expression. In “Living Actuality and Artistic Authenticity,” a critical interpretation of *Sound the Whistle* (1959), Kim Mun-hwa defines how affirmative pathos can draw these contrasts while ensuring that the conflict resolves in a manner consistent with positive heroism, socialist patriotism, and communist thought:

Through the definitive conflicts in this work, the screenwriter did attempt to show the new human—the positive and typical human of our era growing and developing into a communist human. He chose these conflicts and told the *syuzhet* [*syujet’ü*] in order to complete this task.

However, the screenwriter’s task was not successful, because he was lacking the real and burning affirmative pathos and noble party spirit to advocate passionately for the affirmative, the progressive, and the new within actuality and to eliminate the negative, the conservative, and the old—to generalize artistically the victory of the new over the old. Concerning the construction of communist literature today, the problem of creating the party human and communist types presents itself to party writers as the primary problem.¹⁴

Sound the Whistle depicts young people working on railroad construction between P’yŏngsan and Chihari to encourage effort and achievement during the Chollima economic plan. Kim argues that the film has no heroism that would be typical in actuality, but “actuality” (*hyŏnsil*) here refers to the embodied ideas of the referential illusion of melodrama and not to verisimilitude. At the climax of the film, there is a cave-in caused by the protagonist Yŏngp’al’s mistakes and some people are injured. As he is struggling and suffering because of the incident, a commander gives advice during crew meetings and the incident turns into a lesson and warning to the workers. According to Kim Mun-hwa, this is an extremely conservative ending and lacks affirmative pathos, because it depends on the authority of the commander and does not depict the collective struggle and cooperation of actual people in the face of a crisis. Also, the film doesn’t provide other details and

episodes to sharpen the conflict, which ends up appearing as just another incident in a series of difficulties experienced by the young workers.¹⁵

Another example of an early version of seed theory, Kim Mun-hwa's essay proposes that a film scenario should be integrated and unified as one organic body (*yugichè*) around its primary conflict and task. *Sound the Whistle* failed to translate struggle and suffering into the singular affirmative pathos and revolutionary consciousness required in the Chollima era and therefore could not inspire socialist patriotism, communist thought, and the formation of a new human against old and conservative thinking. The idea of affirmative pathos assumes the unilateral translation between affect and emotion that I questioned in the introduction. Following Brian Massumi, I have argued that affect and emotion are better imagined as two poles of a feedback loop. Affirmative pathos in North Korean film theory requires that mistakes, struggle, suffering, pain, tragedy, humiliation, and other signs of social negativity both inspire and are overcome through the actions of the hero and the community, who elevate these affects and experiences into a collective sympathetic emotion. Nonetheless, despite idealist theories of narrative such as Kim Mun-hwa's, filmmakers continued to produce works like *Sound the Whistle* that retain regressive aspects or linger too long in the unredeemed suffering of characters trying to adjust to the demands of the state and the economy. Affirmative pathos remains pathos, and the melodramatic mode's provocation of pity and sadness creates excesses of negativity that cannot be fully recoded by the overarching ideological task.

Of the essays on the practice of film production in the period of *Chosŏn Film*, the greatest number are dedicated to scriptwriting, followed by cinematography and editing, performance, music, and technological development. But film critics' Romantic concern with the organicity of the work of art was not limited to its narrative.¹⁶ Equally important was the mood and atmosphere of the film, composed through a combination of all these facets of filmmaking. The mood establishes film's affective agenda and attunes viewers to its world. In "Cinematography's Description of Mood," Cho Chong-sik wrote,

All the thoughts and actions in a film are given form and develop through the contrast in size between shots, within the tempo and rhythm established by the mutual combinations and connections between these shots' different scales and microcosms. Furthermore, if we want to employ the energetic form and rhythmic image of a shot, then we need the varied and skillful techniques belonging to cinematography. The use of photographic machines of various kinds can dilate or elevate an event and can describe distinctly the living mood [*punwigi*] of the shot.¹⁷

In Cho's discussion, *punwigi* refers to something between a mood and an atmosphere—it is both psychological and a backdrop to the narrative and action. It is different from the setting (*paegyŏng*), which connotes the objective place of the story, because it is a living (*saenghwaljŏk*) aspect of the film. It is living because it is not merely observed by spectators but involves them through their shared vitality

and affects. According to Cho, the proper description of a living mood (e.g., one that will engage spectators vitally and affectively) is not static; it is established through the tempo and rhythm of movement and the contrasts and combinations of different shot scales.

Cho Chong-sik's notion of the rhythmic description of a living mood is as much a matter of editing as cinematography—how shots are put together and sequenced in addition to how they are shot. Essays on editing and montage in *Chosŏn Film*, including translations of Chinese critics, focus on the technical dimensions of editing for narrative.¹⁸ As Jessica Ka Yee Chan has explained in relation to Chinese film theory of the 1950s, by that time montage was treated as synonymous with editing and not limited to the methods of early Soviet montage that had influenced some segments of *My Home Village*.¹⁹ Prefiguring Mao Zedong's call for popularization at the Yan'an forum on literature in 1942, Soviet intellectuals of the Stalin period judged the value of past and present artworks according to their level of progressive popular spirit (*narodnost*).²⁰ They also sought to incarnate, through both historical and fictional biography, the positive heroes of socialism, to render intelligible to the people personalities that were transcendent in their humanity and their ideology. Hence, socialist realism included criticism of too much formalist experimentation and insisted that editing for continuity and narrative would contribute to the necessary popularization of cinema. Popularization (*taejunghwa*) in socialist realist film in North Korean and elsewhere involved borrowing from the editing style of the classical Hollywood system, with its adherence to principles of spatiotemporal continuity, the primacy of narrative, and individual typology. As indicated by articles in *Chosŏn Film* dedicated to the principles of continuity editing, such as Kim Rak-sŏp's explanation of eyeline matches, the 180-degree rule, and shot/reverse-shot in "The Directionality of Shots," these principles became foundational for the editing style of art films in North Korea as well, and the experimentation with montage and combining of melodrama and documentary in films such as *My Home Village* disappeared.²¹ In North Korean film, form is largely subordinated to the "*syuzhet*'s [plot's] presentation of the *fabula* [story]."²²

Continuity editing also concerned mood, affect, and emotion, because its contributions to popularization were meant to facilitate a consistency of emotion between the film and spectators. Hence, in a criticism of the formalism of the film *On a New Hill* (1958), Kang Nŭng-su writes, "The director filled the film with dandyist choices in editing methods, the arrangement of scenes, and film language that do not match the emotions of the people."²³ Despite such criticism of formalism in editing, the alternative was not a naturalist depiction of everyday life but Revolutionary Romanticism, an ethos first articulated by Maxim Gorky in the 1930s.²⁴ In China, socialist realism became "revolutionary Romanticism plus revolutionary realism" during the Sino-Soviet split, and in North Korean cinema critics argued for the incorporation of Revolutionary Romanticism into realism.²⁵ For Kim Rak-sŏp, adding Romanticism to realism (*sasiljuui*) was a matter of imagining a future for the life of humanity and the nation-people:

The human life at the center of all social relations belongs to a historical process in which the past, present, and future worlds are unified. Within this historical process, Romantic artists constantly put effort toward emphasizing harbingers of future things in present actuality and devoting themselves to what has not yet appeared but what they anticipate will appear, aiming to generalize these tendencies through artistic forms that correspond to them. Thus, Romanticism that arises inevitably from reflecting on the future to come is the core of Romanticist artworks.

However, Romanticism in artworks does not belong solely to Romanticism and exists also in realist works that are authentically reviving the strong aims of the people concerning their living emotions and their future.²⁶

Although popularization dictated that the editing of North Korean art films be spatiotemporally continuous, subordinated to narrative, and in line with the mass emotions of the people, critics argued against a realism that merely reproduces what exists. Revolutionary Romanticism demanded recognizing social tendencies in the objective historical process and emphasizing them as signs of future yet to come. As Kim Il Sung's slogan put it, "Like the lead article in the party paper, cinema moves ahead of reality."²⁷ This view toward the future pertains to positive protagonists who have a clear ideological direction expressed through sympathies shared with the audience (or an affirmative pathos). It also pertains to the nationalist, future-oriented nostalgia of landscape imagery, as critics highlighted the effectiveness of sublime shots of the natural environment for conveying Revolutionary Romanticism, including distant horizons over the mountains or crashing waves of the "seas of the Fatherland," which "teem with life."²⁸

The idea that cinema should move ahead of reality changed the status of referentiality and the referential illusion in North Korean realist cinema. According to Roland Barthes, nineteenth-century literary realism circumvented the signified and established an illusion of direct accord between signifier and referent.²⁹ Concepts of cinematic realism that value verisimilitude assume that cinema creates an illusion of such a direct accord. However, the referent of North Korean cinematic realism, as well as socialist realism broadly speaking, is not socialist reality as it is but socialist reality as it should be.³⁰ The referential illusion does not primarily concern the indexing of physical objects or an exposition of the real social structures. Rather, it seeks the affective materialization of ideas and ideology, an embodied way of representing the positive heroes who will bring about an ideal future that is truer to the essence of life.

The moral occult of the melodramatic mode is another term for the ethos of such an idea-centered notion of the historical real. As Istvan Csicsery-Ronay points out, what Samuel Delaney calls "mundane fiction," including nineteenth-century European realism, has always had to grapple with its "its reliance on inherited ethical-mythic structures underlying the concrete details of quotidian existence."³¹ A cinematic realism such as North Korea's can employ the melodramatic mode in order to explore these underlying ethical-mythic structures, without which realism would be reduced to naturalistic depiction and lose any relation to the spiritual,

moral, political, and mythic structures of ideology and history. The vitalism and organicism of North Korean theories of film were in part attempts to close this gap between underlying ethical-mythic structures and the concrete details of quotidian existence. Montage and music could provide a physiological organization to cinematic experience, giving flesh to the film's future-oriented ideology. Through this expression of experience by experience, the emotions of the spectator could be transformed and shaped. The ethical-mythical structures underlying quotidian details could be given an emotional valence. This is the power of the melodramatic mode: to imagine an alternative moral order—the moral occult—through an appeal to and organization of emotions (*kamjŏng*). Throughout the issues of *Chosŏn Film*, articles such as Yun Kyŏng-ju's "The Results Achieved in the Cultivation of the Masses through Film" or Ri Si-yŏng's "The Cultivation of Class and Contrastive Composition" use a term translated from the German Enlightenment, *Bildung* (cultivation, *kyoyang*), to refer to this organization of emotions; critics made aesthetic cultivation and the organization of emotions the foundation of the subjectivity of the working class, the masses, and the nation.³² The first article states that the distribution of films across North Korea is essential to the cultivation of the people under the banner of the party, leader, and Chollima economic plan, while the second analyzes *Return to the Fatherland* to show that the class identity of the working masses can be cultivated only through authentic (melodramatic) contrasts between class heroes and class enemies, which it maps onto this film's representation of North Korea's conflicts with South Korea and Japan.

Therefore, North Korean films use such melodramatic contrasts to give clear ideological content to the patriotic emotions that are foundational to the cultivation of national and class subjectivity, but as discussed in the introduction, films such as *Return to the Fatherland* also deal with complex and real social and historical issues whose attending affects the discourse of the film cannot translate completely into patriotic sentiment, such as family separation, exile, and US colonial racism. Ri Si-yŏng reads this emotional complexity as a virtue of *Return to the Fatherland*, because it makes the contrasts between friend and enemy truer to reality.

In relation to the delicate balancing act in politicized melodrama between provoking often ineffable or excessive affects while also providing a moral code, critics turned to montage and its structuring of space and time to explain how films could organize emotions while maintaining an authentic connection to the actual lives of the people. Similar to Cho Chong-sik's discussion of the creation of a living mood through cinematography, Chŏn Sang-in wrote about using montage to create a filmic flow organized physiologically, temporally, and rhythmically in a way that corresponds to "our living emotion":

Looking at filmic flow (tempo and rhythm), we can say that film is an art of process and time. We can say, on that point, that it has a physiological organization similar to music. When a shot is good, but the flow (tempo and rhythm) has been destroyed,

not only is it unable to create any kind of emotion for spectators, but it produces the opposite phenomenon of creating displeasure. In this way, the problem of filmic flow (tempo and rhythm) becomes an urgent issue of montage. Moreover, today films must have the filmic flow (tempo and rhythm) belonging to the kind of montage that corresponds to our actual development and living emotions. If they do, then today's problems of historical particularity and modern aesthetic sensibility will also be resolved.³³

Rather than disrupting the illusion of experience through formal experimentation, filmic flow should provide a physiological organization that both provokes emotions and organizes the emotions of spectators. At stake was nothing less than all the problems (or even crises) of modern aesthetic sensibility, and the editing techniques of socialist realism were tasked with resolving them. Because *melodrama* means "drama accompanied by music," Chŏn Sang-in's comparison of montage and music is apt, and the countless articles on film music and the inclusion of song scores in the film journal *Chosŏn Film* confirm how significant music and sound were to the creation of film moods and to the cultivation of class and national subjectivity. Music became even more essential to the aesthetic and physiological organization of emotion as revolutionary operas emerged in the late 1960s and enacted a return to the total work of art combining film, music, and theater.

Evgeny Dobrenko provides insights into the status of reality in the immersive spectacle of Soviet socialist realism, many of which pertain to the North Korean context.³⁴ The assertions in Dobrenko's argument that are pertinent to North Korean cinema are that the Stalinist political and cultural project was fundamentally representational, that the transition to socialism was accomplished, to a large extent, discursively, and that the realization of socialism through the aestheticization of society entailed a de-realization of everyday life.³⁵ In the era of socialist realism, socialism itself existed only in representation, through its cinematic, literary, and discursive construction. Drawing from Jean Baudrillard, Dobrenko states that through the socialist realist system of representation, socialism became hyperreal—that is, more real than the de-realized everyday life—and, quoting Guy Debord, it became a spectacle, "not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images."³⁶ The aestheticization of socialism in Stalinist culture glorified production, the ethic of labor, and political loyalty to the party's economic projects. However, these representations did not reflect the reality of productive relations in society, but themselves became society's primary product and commodity. Socialist realism boldly moved the political and economic basis of revolutionary socialism into the aesthetic, transforming socialism into an image and a story consumed by the popular masses. A political economy of the sign similar to the one Dobrenko describes has been an important aspect of the realism of North Korean cinema.³⁷

The excesses of affect in the melodramatic mode of North Korean films are also in excess of these films' own professed ideologies and the state socialist commodity

culture for which socialist reality was itself the product. The consumption of idealized images of suffering, revolution, and redemption and the personalization and collectivization of affect into emotion and sympathy also leave behind traces of social negativity, registered in the surrounding mood, that cannot be fully subsumed into the Manichaeian world of the film (the people versus the enemy). As in capitalist films, these film moods contain contrapuntal traces of social antagonism, perceptible despite the aestheticization of politics and the de-realization of everyday life through cinematic spectacle. The antagonisms in the background of realist films pertain to the debates about subjectivity and sovereignty outlined in the previous chapter through the work of Hwang Chang-yŏp. They are the affective and cinematic analog to the uncertainty and disunity of the debates on subjectivity concerning the people, the party, the masses, and the leader.

Between the Korean War and the late 1960s, when the North Korean film industry and culture engaged deeply with world cinema on both sides of the Cold War, the technologies and techniques of cinematography, editing, and sound were mastered; genres began to take shape; film stars emerged; stylistic conventions were established; the melodramatic mode became dominant; national narratives and myths solidified; and audiences were trained to read the codes of a melodramatic socialist realist cinema. In tracing the formation of the North Korean realist film aesthetic from the period of socialist realism in the 1950s and 1960s to the height of revolutionary opera and *juche* realism in the early 1970s, I argue that the construction of North Korea's state socialist film culture involved much more than refining cinema's propaganda messaging. It was an ongoing process of engaging with the everyday lives, affects, and memories of the cinema audience and directing these toward personalized affects (i.e., emotions). Like any consumer culture, however, the affects of melodramatic North Korean cinema were not fully contained within this alienating function of the commodity form. Even with the establishment of *juche* realism, with its focus on the Japanese colonial period and its clear lines between friend and enemy, the melodramatic mode's provocation of affects remained an unstable foundation for political discourse. The living moods of melodrama retain traces of social negativity that resist direct translation into dominant narratives and sympathies.

SOCIALIST RECONSTRUCTION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

North Korean cinema's connections to global cinema in the 1950s included both the predominance of the melodramatic mode and the translation of multiple genres and genre elements and their attendant moods. Two significant genres that employed the melodramatic mode were the family drama and the counterespionage film. Similar to contemporaneous films of South Korea, many North Korean films of the mid-1950s present families as microcosms of the larger society to dramatize

problems of economic development, modernization, and gender in the aftermath of the Korean War.³⁸ In a family drama, the mood of the film tends to emerge out of a conflict between family members, which contrasts significantly with the conflict between a sympathetic family and the colonial system that we find in the epic narratives of *My Home Village* and later juche realist films on the Japanese colonial period. The melancholic mood and pathos of a family drama tends to originate from the inability to establish the family as a space of love and innocence. In national independence films set during the colonial period, the fallenness of the family and the mournful mood are caused entirely by Japanese colonialism, and national liberation brings about the redemption of the family as a space of innocence. However, in 1950s family dramas concerned with national reconstruction, conflicts internal to the family related to labor, gender roles, and lack of affection between couples are just as significant. Elevation of the characters' sympathy, morals, and political perspective allows them to resolve these issues internal to the family, and the family then becomes an allegorical microcosm for national reconstruction and socialist development. However, as in South Korean family dramas of the era, such narratives about the education and development of subjects' emotions and ideas provoke and leave behind remainders of affective and social negativity that do not fit into the ideal integration of family, nation, and state.

The director Yun Yong-gyu made the most artistic melodrama of late 1940s South Korea, *A Hometown in the Heart*, an adaptation that eschewed many of its literary source text's overt nationalism. After emigrating to North Korea during the Korean War, he made *Boy Partisan* (*Sonyŏn Ppaljjisan*, dir. Yun Yong-gyu, 1951), another film that tempers nationalist themes by again focusing on the relationship between a boy and his mother.³⁹ He then made an early classic of North Korean socialist realism, *The Newlyweds* (*Sinhon pubu*, dir. Yun Yong-gyu, 1955). Many later juche realist films continued in the tradition of epic national history developed in *My Home Village*, but in *The Newlyweds*, Yun introduced an important aspect of South Korean melodrama to the North: the effective use of small-scale, melodramatic short stories for the purpose of conveying larger themes and ideas. Compared to contemporaneous South Korean melodramas dealing with gender roles between the domestic and public spheres of labor, such as *Madame Freedom* (*Chayu puin*, dir. Han Hyung-mo, 1956), *The Newlyweds* has an overall more progressive view of women entering the workplace, even if its representations of family and feminine desire are more unambiguously heteronormative and celebratory of the nuclear family. In *Madame Freedom*, Madame Cho's work at a boutique exposes her to black-market corruption and her husband punishes her with expulsion from the home when he finds out about her extramarital affair; however, as a matter of counterpoint, many scenes do celebrate, visually and sonically, consumer culture, jazz, extramarital desire, and homoeroticism between women.⁴⁰ Within the parameters of socialist morality, *The Newlyweds* does not explore the prospect of extramarital affairs or other topics of capitalist consumer



FIGURE 5. “The capital Pyongyang teems with construction”: a photo spread of construction projects appears in the May 1960 *Chosŏn Film*, connecting cinema to national reconstruction.

culture, but it does deal with the problem of women entering the workplace during an era of industrialization and economic development with a greater sense of gender equality created through labor and the family.

Yun Yong-gyu scaled down the melodramatic mode to the everyday. *The Newlyweds* begins with conflicts in the domestic sphere about the gendered division of labor and ends with a macropolitical, socialist realist vision for the resolution of everyday domestic antagonisms.⁴¹ The melodramatic aspects of the film extend beyond the focus on domestic conflict: a symphonic soundtrack and diegetic musical performance, the manifestation and soft-pedaling of moral dilemmas, the use of close-ups to accentuate sorrow and pensiveness, and the fallacious spectacle of an ultimate resolution. The many films dealing with the quotidian dimension of socialist reality and economic development tend not to tell the epic sweep of national history but focus more locally on the worker’s role in the construction of socialism (figure 5). Although it has many scenes set in the train system and train-parts factory, *The Newlyweds* emphasizes conflict within domestic space more than most films on the theme of the socialist reality.⁴²

At the outset, *The Newlyweds* takes a conventional approach to gendered national imagery. In an early scene, Ŭnsil (Kim Hyŏn-suk), who has left her job at

the train-parts factory in order to become a housewife, smiles as she picks flowers on a hillside, wearing a traditional Korean *hanbok*. Adumbrating the image of ideal femininity that would solidify in the character (and state cultural franchise) of Kkotpun (Hong Yŏng-hŭi) in *The Flower Girl*, landscape, tradition, and femininity fuse in one iconic shot. The bright, harp-centered musical theme creates a mood of natural and humble joy. Ŭnsil's husband, Yŏngchŏl (Yu Wŏn-jun), works hard to become the fastest and most productive train engineer. She sees him returning home from work and they embrace and then break into song as they walk home, adding fond sentiments of conjugal love and a gendered image of the uniformed husband and traditionally clothed wife. Of course, there can be no melodrama without a dilemma, and the earlier scenes of Ŭnsil being visited by her old work-mates and Yŏngchŏl feeling pressured by his comrades to become a labor hero foreshadow the main conflict: Ŭnsil desires to return to the factory to support the postwar effort to rebuild after the horrific US aerial bombings during the last two years of the Korean War; Yŏngchŏl wants Ŭnsil to stay at home and raise a family so that he can pursue his goal of becoming a labor hero of the first three-year economic plan (1954–1956).⁴³ By the end of the walk, Ŭnsil already looks pensive, and her shame over not contributing to factory labor and economic development grows in the course of the film. Later on, looking into a vanity mirror, she rejects her conservative, bourgeois position as housewife by throwing foundation powder at her reflection, and the scene dissolves to a flashback in which she is dressed in her worker's uniform and operating a machine in the factory with assistance of her friend (Mun Ye-bong). This friend is shown during her earlier visit to Ŭnsil's house to have a baby, yet still she maintains her job in the factory.

Although produced in a state socialist country, *The Newlyweds* dramatizes a core issue in colonial and postcolonial forms of capitalism, which is the gendered division of labor between unwaged household work and waged industrial manufacturing.⁴⁴ Toward the end of the film, Ŭnsil puts her worker's uniform back on and begins working in the factory secretly, while also remaining in *hanbok* in the home and dutifully performing her domestic work. Yŏngchŏl eventually finds out but supports her after realizing how important her work is for supporting his own engineering job and the economic plan. In this respect, the film seems to provide a socialist critique of patriarchy and a resolution to the problem of housewifization, because Yŏngchŏl overcomes his traditional ideas about gender and family, and Ŭnsil achieves ostensible equality through labor. She is liberated through her work. Because industrial and agricultural labor were valued as a means of liberation for women (*yŏsŏng*) and contrasted to the bourgeois idea of the supposedly non-laboring wife (*puin*), the fact of Ŭnsil's re-entrance into the factory stands as a sign of women's liberation.⁴⁵ The film also captures how this liberation was often in conflict with the DPRK's reliance on the social formation and images of the nuclear family for its projection of community. Indeed, just prior to Yŏngchŏl discovering that Ŭnsil has returned to the factory, she, back in *hanbok*, serves him and his fellow workers drinks in their home, impressing them with the performance of her

housework, including her affective labor of supporting the men in their moment of leisure. The film unambivalently values women's industrial work outside the home in contrast to the melodramatic mix of questioning and defensiveness concerning patriarchal control over the household that we find in South Korean films. However, similar to South Korean melodramas, Ŭnsil's labor is split between the demands of tradition and the promises of modernity, and her body and its accoutrements hold the allegorical weight of the film's social antagonisms and contradictions concerning family, state, economy, and reproduction.

The Newlyweds is an example of how socialist realist films do not depend on verisimilitude in order to establish their sense of historical actuality, but rather take up a set of abstract ideas and then give them realistic form through the creation of affectively impactful melodramatic scenarios. Dobrenko's analysis of the aestheticization of socialism in socialist realist art and consumer culture pertains to how the film is able to ignore the fact that its fundamental social problem is not actually resolved. Despite the couple's sentimental dialogue and return to conjugal love upon his discovery of her return to work—importantly, witnessed in the public space of the factory by many of their comrades—the story perpetuates the fallacy that only quantified industrial labor contributing directly to national economic growth counts as labor in the proper sense. The story does not address whether the gendered division of labor within the household will have to change as the couple commit to becoming heroes of the socialist economy. Using the melodramatic mode to present the primary social conflict—the necessity of both quantified abstract labor and unquantified household labor for social reproduction—allows the film to aestheticize this conflict and transfigure it into a gendered allegory of women's liberation through work.

Yun aestheticizes socialism and figures national and party objectives as the singular resolution of the symptomatic conflicts within the everyday melodrama narrative. The result is not propaganda in the strict sense but a somatically impactful political fiction. South Korean films of the period, such as *The Coachman* and *Bloodline*, end happily with the children characters entering the factory, aestheticizing technological advancement and industrial labor as means of overcoming class exploitation and discrimination in the former, and subaltern status as Northern refugees in the latter. In focusing on the train system and an industrial factory, *The Newlyweds* also prefigures the future for a largely rural society; in Kim Il Sung's later formulation, film moves ahead of reality.⁴⁶ The opening scene pans across a train station from a high angle, highlighting the steam and the sublime size of the train. It takes on the point of view of the factory manager as he goes to the next room to see the women at work, cuts to close-ups of the machines, and then shows him filling in the numbers on a chalk graph tracking the production and repair schedule.

The beginning of the film fetishizes quantifiable labor in a way that allows subsequent scenes to contrast it to the alienation and unproductive life of domestic space. The most transformative moment for Ŭnsil takes place after her flower-picking on the hillside and singing with Yŏngchŏl, when they take a sightseeing



FIGURE 6. In *The Newlyweds* (1955), Yŏngchŏl, in his train engineer's uniform, and Ŭnsil, in traditional *hanbok*, observe the rebuilding of Pyongyang in the aftermath of the Korean War, the former with elation and the latter with disappointment and frustration that she can no longer contribute her labor outside the home.

trip to Pyongyang. There they briefly enjoy feminized consumer culture, purchasing the powder that she will soon be throwing at her own reflection. They also visit monumental architecture, filmed with the same sublime scale as the industrial technology. The turning point occurs, however, when they visit a construction site where women are hard at work contributing to rebuilding the capital. Ŭnsil speaks with an inspiring young worker and then gazes upon the construction site with consternation and shame. In a relay of gazes that expresses a contrapuntal mood of inspired patriotism for Yŏngchŏl and shameful alienation for Ŭnsil, we see her watching the spectacle of socialist reconstruction without belonging to it. In this way, the film aestheticizes the socialist totality through melodramatic visual contrasts and frames the eventual return of the alienated individual to the aestheticized social totality at the climax as an overcoming of alienation. This reliance on the moods, visibility, and embodiment of melodrama protects some patriarchal structures from critique; the character Ŭnsil is liberated to work only as a hero who contains and sublates her divided subjectivity. She becomes an impossible, dualistic, and nationalist sign for both the modern factory girl and the traditional, dutiful wife. The consummation, preservation, and social recognition of the couple's relationship and the promise of future children become the foundation for socialist reconstruction and development (figure 6).

Ŭnsil's duality is technically resolved in the narrative, but not affectively. By way of music and images of the body, the mood of the film expresses negative

affects connected to the formation of the nuclear family that cannot be resolved through the socialist morality that celebrates factory labor. The coldness, violence, and aggression expressed in the segment during which the couple fights comprise the dominant mood of the second half. Ŭnsil tells Yŏngchŏl that she would like to return to the factory. In the subsequent heated conversation about love, he argues that their love is enough, while she looks toward the horizon and states that by itself their love is not enough. In the middle of the scene, as he tells her that their life together is fulfilling without her working outside the home, she pinches her fingers together tightly. The spat ends with him pushing her aggressively twice and her weeping with her back turned toward him. His selfishness and aggression carry over into his work, as he drives his train too hard and causes damage to it, eventually having to participate in a self-criticism session. In fact, he reconsiders the value of her factory work only when it helps to protect him from further reproach at the session. What should we make of this mood of coldness between the couple conveyed through subtle and overt moments of aggressive and internalized violence? In the second half of the film, this mood is broken by a scene of his joyful workmates singing, to which he turns his back and complains, crosscut with her dutiful maintenance of the household despite reentering the factory. When he accepts her work, the negative affects of the domestic space are supposedly transformed into an overcoming of selfishness and a reinvigorated dedication to the cooperative socialist economy. However, these negative affects and the mood of coldness and violence linger in excess of the narrative's closure, and the ending of the story does not overturn the patriarchy of the household economy that causes them.

Family drama was not the only genre appropriated and reworked for the purposes of socialist realism. In the early days of the counterespionage genre, films such as *A Dangerous Moment* (*Wihŏm han sun'gan*, dir. Cho Kye-ok, 1958) employed the moods and storytelling of noir crime film—including high contrast between light and dark, expressions of urban alienation and delirium, and a struggle against shadowy enemies—to dramatize an identity struggle between North Korean socialism and the depraved colonial capitalist system of South Korea. The emergent counterespionage genre's suspenseful action and noir aesthetic creates a mood of suspense and fear, a kind of embodied intensification of melodramatic melancholy into an atmosphere of danger and menace. The genre also uses the melodramatic mode to direct this suspense and fear toward a spiritual struggle against South Korean spies and the temptations of capitalism. However, the translation of suspense and fear into the spiritual values of the nation-state's moral occult is accompanied by scenes of subjective fragmentation symptomatic of a cinematic and everyday conflict between socialist humanism and urban alienation and moral seductions. The quality of the affects and moods of a counterespionage film may differ from a family drama; however, the defining feature of the melodramatic mode remains—its provocation of affect in the service of spiritual values and the excess of that affect in relation to those values.

Made in the aftermath of threats to Kim Il Sung's sovereignty during the era of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union, *A Dangerous Moment* addresses the problem of South Korean spies working in North Korea in order to subvert its national effort at reconstruction. Although it does not contain a love story, it is comparable to the South Korean anticommunist counterespionage film *The Hand of Destiny* in its depiction of spies through the generic conventions of crime films, representing the Cold War enemy as a criminal organization internally threatening the nation's sovereignty. It also contains scenes of normative spectatorship and healthy bodies; a long circus scene presents a wholesome form of traditional entertainment contrasted to American and South Korean immorality and inauthenticity: jazz music, alcohol, counterfeit money, and sexual promiscuity.⁴⁷

The proletarian film theorist Ch'u Min wrote the script for *A Dangerous Moment* in collaboration with Han Sang-un. The story reflects many of Ch'u's theoretical concerns, particularly his critiques of consumer culture and liberal cosmopolitanism and his advocacy of North Korean national culture as a mass aesthetic experience (or total work of art). The story focuses on an elderly bus driver, Kim U-sil (Chŏn Un-bong), who inadvertently assists a South Korean spy ring whose mission is to destroy an important factory under construction, but then he heroically fights and helps to capture the ringleader. This story about industrial espionage and postwar reconstruction under the banner of "increased production, saving output" (*chŭngsan chŏryak*) begins by referring to a real incident of US and South Korean economic warfare during the Korean War, which was the production and dissemination of counterfeit North Korean hundred-wŏn notes in an attempt to devalue the currency.⁴⁸ Usil's young adult niece Insun (Chang Yŏng-jin) works collecting fees on the bus and gives a political speech to the passengers about the DPRK's postwar reconstruction efforts in Pyongyang, liberation from Japanese colonial rule, solidarity with African countries, and resistance to US imperialism. When Insun turns in the day's earnings, the money counter notices that one of the hundred-wŏn bills is counterfeit; Insun is alarmed, but Usil is not concerned and says they should just spend the money. When Insun's young brother and Usil's nephew In'gil (Min Pyŏng-il) hands another counterfeit bill to her, she reports it to the chief of the Home Office. In'gil's story to the chief is visualized with a blurred circular frame overlaid with non-diegetic music. He was sledding and found a wallet dropped by a man later revealed to be Cho Pyŏng-hwan (Kim Tong-gyu), a spy for South Korea. When he returned the wallet, the man was appreciative and gave In'gil some money. He followed In'gil to the art supply store, where the boy tried to purchase some drawing paper; however, the salesperson noticed the counterfeit bill. The man left and In'gil eventually handed the bill to Insun. The montage of the boy's story captures well the child's perspective, with low-angle point-of-view shots of the man's face and a somewhat limited perspective on the mysterious and menacing incident.

The film quickly establishes its moral occult through melodramatic contrasts. Usil is not concerned about the counterfeit bills. He is also prone to excessive

drinking and tells war stories to a friend at a bar as Cho Pyŏng-hwan eats nearby and listens secretly to their conversation. Usil also refuses the invitation of his women coworkers to go to the circus theater (*kogye kŭkchang*) and is therefore not a participant in the valorized form of mass spectatorship. Until his heroic act at the end, he is a veteran caught between good national subjectivity and his foolhardiness and bad habits. Meanwhile, the leader of the espionage plot, Yi Kyŏngch'il (Pak Sŏp), is introduced as he is boarding the family's bus, right after Insun has made her speech and received the approving gazes of the passengers. Before paying Insun with what we find out is a counterfeit bill, he steals a seat while a young man is offering it to an elderly woman and rudely absorbs himself in his newspaper. Despite the good North Koreans laughing at Yi's lack of concern, he does not notice and the friend of the young man is forced to give up her seat for the elderly woman. Socialist humanism and morality are contrasted to the everyday selfishness and inhumanity of someone we soon find out is a South Korean agent. The film also creates melodramatic dichotomies between edifying aesthetic education, such as children learning to draw the gates of Pyongyang castle, and the subjective fragmentation caused by US imperialism and capitalist consumer cultures of jazz music and bars.

In adapting the ideological concerns of Ch'u Min and Han Sang-un's scenario into cinematic form, Chu Kye-ok employed a number of stylistically remarkable camera movements and editing choices to create a living mood embodying multiple layers of history, memory, and political signs. One melodramatic technique used frequently in North Korean film of the time is superimposition not only for typical dissolve transitions but for longer periods within a scene in order to express these layered moments. Images of past events in personal or national history are superimposed upon a close-up shot of the character experiencing the memory; such scenes show the character's internal consciousness as well as affective facial responses to the memories. This technique creates a variety of moods depending on the images and the character's responses: melancholy, nostalgia, fear, revolutionary enthusiasm. No matter the specific quality of the mood, its affective form is self-reflexivity. According to James Chandler, shot/reverse-shot creates self-reflexivity by showing a perspective on an object or character followed by a response to that object or character.⁴⁹ Flashbacks create self-reflexivity by cutting back to an image of the character experiencing the memory in the narrative present. Superimposition in the North Korean style condenses the self-reflexivity of shot/reverse-shot and flashback into a series containing both the objects and the character's subjective responses presented simultaneously.

There are two such scenes in *A Dangerous Moment*. Usil's nephew Inho (Ch'u Sŏk-bong) is leading the construction of additions to a factory, and during a drunken night out Cho Pyŏng-hwan asks Usil to convince his nephew to get him a job there, which he does. Working covertly at the factory, Cho sneaks into Inho's office and makes an impression of the keys that unlock the cabinet holding

the plans for the factory. During his next meeting with Yi in their dark hideout, Yi makes a further demand, which is that Cho set fire to the factory and steal the plans before they can change the lock. After Cho refuses, Yi loads his gun and asks him if he has already forgotten his meeting in Seoul. The first superimposed shot follows: a close-up of a smiling Cho is overlaid with point-of-view shots of a US officer offering him piles of money, a sex worker dancing and laughing, empty bottles of alcohol on the table, and finally the officer threatening him with a gun (as Cho's face turns from joy to fear). Although most of the soundtrack of the film includes orchestral themes and traditional Korean instrumentation during the circus scene, swing jazz plays during the superimposition. Combined with the erotic delirium and claustrophobia of the point-of-view shots and the final threat of violence by the US officer, the scene aestheticizes an idea that Ch'u Min had articulated early on in North Korean film theory: US cultural imperialism and military imperialism go hand in hand and proper national subjectivity requires the rejection of US cultural forms, consumer society, and sexual imperialism in addition to direct military occupation and violence. As a character questioning whether to continue with the plot, Cho is shown to be under the threat of violence but also immoral in his choice to give in to vice, money, and personal gain.

A second, contrasting scene of superimposed shots occurs after In'gil recognizes Cho at a restaurant as the man with the counterfeit hundred-wŏn bills, through a low-angle, blurry point-of-view shot. Yi sees In'gil recognize Cho, follows him out of the restaurant, and then comes back in and lies to Usil that a boy in a fur hat has been hit by a car. While In'gil and Insun report Cho to the police and they arrest him, Usil gets in a car to go to find In'gil. However, Yi gets in the backseat and pulls his gun, ordering Usil to drive. Usil sweats profusely in an extreme close-up, while a shot from the front of the speeding car captures the dirt road in front of them. As the music crescendoes and the scene cuts back to Usil's face, superimposed images appear again, but this time the superimposition dissolves to a montage sequence depicting the National Liberation Day of Korea. With a soundtrack of triumphant patriotic music, a combination of fiction and stock documentary footage reminiscent of *My Home Village* shows the center of Pyongyang as a mass of people releases balloons and birds, young women march in file, the crowd shouts "Manse," In'gil rides on Usil's shoulder, and Kim Il Sung tips his hat to the crowd. Rather than the sense of delirious interiority and juxtaposed moments in the superimposed shots of Cho and Seoul in the earlier scene, the complete dissolve into the hybrid montage places Usil fully within his memory and the spectacle of mass patriotism. Cutting back to the present, Usil becomes resolute, purposefully crashes the car, and then struggles with Yi in the dirt until the police arrive to arrest him. Usil redeems himself from his drunkenness, pride, and gullibility by remembering the glory of the North Korean revolution and his previous integration into the spectacle of socialism (figure 7).



FIGURE 7. In *A Dangerous Moment* (1958), as the South Korean spy handler Yi holds a gun to Kim U-sil's head, images of his memories of North Korean liberation are superimposed over his close-up; these memories inspire him to act courageously and patriotically to crash the car and subdue Yi.

These superimposed shots and accompanying soundtrack give melodramatic expression to ideology by linking subjective interiority to the social exterior (in other words, by connecting memory and national history). The analogies and differences between Cho and Usil epitomize melodramatic counterpoint because they suggest that heroes and villains live with similar temptations and confront similar moments of moral decision. In addition to these melodramatic moral struggles, exciting shots of the Pyongyang cityscape from moving vehicles, sublime images of the factory's architecture and industrial technology, the spectacle of the circus and its acrobats, and a high-contrast *mise-en-scène* combine to give lively expression to the urban experience of North Korean socialist modernity. Like most North Korean films, *A Dangerous Moment* is realist only in a restricted sense based in the melodramatic worldview. Its reality is constituted through a combination of the monumental materiality of a capital city and an ideological and spiritual struggle over authentic Korean national identity. At the same time, the aesthetic and mood of the film are premised on the division of Korean subjectivity across national, spiritual, and social differences, layered in space and time like superimposed cinematic images, never fully integrated into a single national body. The power of the melodramatic mode lies in this ability to capture subjective fragmentation and alienation as much as in its emotional and sentimental pleas to national unity, patriotism, and socialist reconstruction.

Of course, not all early North Korean socialist realist films concerned with reconstruction and national identity were set in the city and dealt with urban industrialization. The melodramatic mode was equally powerful in depicting internal social conflicts between classes in the ongoing process of agricultural collectivization. *The People of Sujönggol* (dir. Kim Chi-hak, 1960) is one of many that focuses on postwar problems in the countryside. It begins with tragic scenes of the protagonist Hyöngch'an (Ch'a Kye-ryong) returning to his small village, Sujönggol, and seeing the graves of dead villagers and the rural landscape and infrastructure



FIGURE 8. On the left are stills from various documentary films and on the right an advertisement for *The People of Sujonggol* (1960), from the August 1960 issue of *Chosŏn Film*.

that had been destroyed by US aerial bombardment. The main social issue addressed is the reluctance on the part of landowners, their managers, and their allies in the party to join the farmers' union, collectivize their property for agricultural production, and apply modern science and industrial mechanization to their farming tools and practices. While urban films on reconstruction graft the style and narratives of Hollywood genre films onto the worldview of socialist realism, films on agricultural collectivization and modernization have their foundations in Soviet and Chinese socialist realism, aestheticizing the transition from colonial-feudal land relations and technologies, as well as village-level political affiliations, to modern industrial agriculture led by the party and enacted by the nation-state.

Despite the film's emphasis on ideology and historical progress, it uses the moods of melodrama to express the uneven temporality of the nation-state and the lateness of many of the characters to the historical moment of national reconstruction and agricultural modernization. Unlike many contemporaneous back-to-the-land and development films in South Korea, such as *Evergreen Tree* (dir. Shin Sang-ok, 1961) or *Soil* (dir. Kwŏn Yŏng-sun, 1960), the story of *The People of Sujonggol* is not based on the nationalist, colonial-period back-to-the-land novels concerning rural enlightenment projects undertaken by urban college graduates. Its ideas of development and the modernization of agriculture are socialist and specific to land reform, collectivization, and reconstruction (figure 8). Nonetheless, as in the South Korean films, the melodramatic mode and mood validate apprehension about the social displacement and loss of personal identity

during periods of rapid urbanization and industrialization. The film ends with the landowner and his party ally—who spend nights drunk together—getting caught trying to burn down the new houses of the farmers' union, even after Hyŏngch'an has invited the union to help plant his rice fields with their scientific methods and new technology. With the landowner and his allies out of the way, the union uses tractors and plows provided by the state to cultivate his land; the last scene shows the farmers working the fields together and celebrating their new working conditions in typical socialist realist fashion.

Much of the film focuses on characters caught between the villainous landowner and the heroic revolutionaries, such as Yŏnggwan, who raises cows and manages the landowner's property, and his daughter Tongsuk, who returns to the ravaged Sujŏnggol along with Hyŏngch'an at the beginning of the film. Although not a bad person according to the sympathetic Hyŏngch'an, Yŏnggwan fears an end to his livelihood and his traditional ways of farming and initially refuses to join the union. Only when the landowner's ally injures Tongsuk as she tries to stop him from burning the farmers' new homes does Yŏnggwan beat and apprehend the landowner and fully commit himself to the union. In the final scene, he remarks how much collectivization and mechanized agriculture has improved his life. The stuff of melodrama—a society torn between two temporalities, contrapuntal moods and characters, the defense of an innocent daughter—allows socialist realism to recognize the anxieties of rural audiences while also conveying a didactic message about the ultimate benefits of collectivization and industrialization. Just as *A Dangerous Moment* represented watching the circus as a wholesome practice in contrast to alcohol consumption, *Sujŏnggol* attempts to train the cinema audience in its viewing practice diegetically. *The People of Sujŏnggol* includes a scene of the villagers enjoying a singing performance by Tongsuk, now dressed in *hanbok* rather than her cadre uniform. A later film, *Story of a Nurse* (*Han kanhowŏn e taehan iyagi*, dir. O Pyŏng-chŏ, 1971), similarly depicts a screening of a traveling documentary film, including images of the audience's patriotic responses. By showing cinema viewers how rural people should react to sanctioned spectacles, the film frames national culture and spectatorship as integral aspects of economic modernity, postwar reconstruction, and anti-feudal land reform. In family dramas, espionage films, and rural socialist realism, the melodramatic mode splits identification between conflicting temporalities and positionalities but also situates the reintegration of subjectivity in the political and cultural project of national reconstruction.

Later in the 1960s, films on the socialist reality focused more on the Chollima work-team movement and the speed campaigns. Defector and former party elite Hwang Chang-yŏp called this period the golden age of *juche* thought, when the North Korean economy was growing at a good pace and the work-teams represented an effective indigenous communism.⁵⁰ In the quintessential Chollima work-team film *When We Pick Apples* (*Sagwa ttal ttae*, dir. Kim Yŏng-ho, 1971) the ideological seed is that agricultural workers should remain dedicated to increasing

apple production. The leader of the work-team thinks that fallen apples need not be harvested because of the abundance produced by the socialist economy, and a bride concentrates more on her upcoming wedding than on her work at the cooperative farm. The hero, a young woman named Chŏngok, intervenes to inspire the workers and the children of the village to respect food production, overcome their individualism, and maintain their ideological commitments to Chollima despite the country's economic successes.⁵¹ A comparison between *The People of Sujŏnggol* and *When We Pick Apples* shows how dramatically the North Korean economy, particularly the rural economy, transformed in the 1960s. It also reveals the flexibility of the melodramatic mode within the political economy of socialist realism. The former depicts with sensitivity the hesitancy on the part of farmers to unionize and collectivize their agricultural labor, as well as the evil acts committed by landowners to prevent them. The latter presents an image of an established agricultural utopia in the form of the village work-team, which is threatened by a regression to individuality and indolence. This contrast shows how important the melodramatic mode was to both projecting better futures and maintaining the idea of a present utopia.

FATHERLAND LIBERATION WAR MEMORIES

The aesthetic and narrative construction of North Korean identity in 1960s films about the Fatherland Liberation War and the ongoing civil conflict with South Korea often emphasizes internal struggle and ideological crisis, rather than drawing absolute political lines about intra-Korean class conflict (peasant versus large landowner), as in films set during the colonial period. This internal ideological and identity struggle includes the appearance of moods of pathos and fractured subjective states that refer to the traumatic historical experiences of national division and civil war, while the narrative attempts to elevate affect into ideology through a psychological variation of the melodramatic mode.

Return to the Fatherland, described in the introduction, gives deserved symbolic weight to the setting of Kaesŏng. Kaesŏng is a culturally and politically important city that was Korea's capital between AD 919–1392, during the Koryŏ Period. The thirty-eighth parallel that divided the territories of Soviet and US military governments (1945–1948) runs just north of the city, which initially belonged to the Republic of Korea after its establishment in 1948. However, it was captured, recaptured, and captured again, and after the armistice agreement of 1953, it became the only major city to change control from South Korea to North Korea as a result of the war. Like the protagonist architect Wŏnil himself, Kaesŏng was caught in between two nation-states but was finally returned to the fatherland of North Korea. As a Kaesŏng citizen who would have never lived under Soviet occupation or witnessed the North Korean revolution, it is realistic that Wŏnil is susceptible to his classmate's anticommunist image of North Korea, even though he tragically gets separated from his family. He loses his eldest son and cannot parent his

other two children due to this poor decision; however, he nonetheless redeems himself as a father on the larger scale of the nation-state by refusing to cede his plans to South Korea and designing and building an iconic postwar monument in Kaesŏng, the Children's Palace (historically completed two years prior to the film's release, in 1961).

The realistic separation experienced by a Kaesŏng family and the reference to the historical completion of the Children's Palace give *Return to the Fatherland* a sense of verisimilitude. The miraculous reuniting of the family and Wŏnil's contributions to architecture and reconstruction occur in a magical allegorical causality connected to state and party ideology. However, in between realism and melodrama is the mediation of individual subjectivity and the representation of psychological responses to trauma. Like most North Korean productions dealing with South Korea, the film attempts to use melodramatic mimesis to contain the subjective experience of trauma and the negative mood within a national political frame. The point-of-view pan across the Children's Palace in the opening scene presents an architectural sublime, an aesthetic experience of monumental grandeur through which Wŏnil and his family sublimate the struggles of the previous ten years. Wŏnil tells his personal tragic story within that very public and state-sanctioned space. Nonetheless, in representing his experiences of displacement and separation, various visual flourishes produce a mood of pathos bordering on surrealism (figure 9).

In a tiny, shadowy apartment in Seoul, a compatriot who sympathizes with North Korea plays a melancholic tune on the violin for his wife and Wŏnil, close-ups of his face pressed against the instrument and images of his shadow on the wall accentuating their longing and melancholy in the South. The next day, he works as a day laborer building a US military installation and witnesses the violent expulsion of impoverished families from their homes, showing his helplessness in confronting the realities of US neocolonialism. The scene dissolves to a remarkably composed deep space, low-level shot of a rubble landscape emptied of houses; only two military jeeps and a compressed horizon appear in the distance. Both these scenes are followed by close-ups of Wŏnil walking pensively toward the camera, deep in thought. Wŏnil's classmate and his US handler also meet in a dark, shadowy office. When Wŏnil, covered with rain, beats the priest to avenge the death of In'gil, the interior of the church is high contrast—almost gothic—and the priest shows the hypocrisy of Christianity when he attempts to fend off Wŏnil by wielding the cross on the wall as a weapon. When Wŏnil escapes to the eastern coast and is about to cross over to Japan, rear projection presents a backdrop of crashing waves and sunlight piercing a clouded sky and reflecting on the ocean surface. He and a helpful fisherman are framed in a mythical landscape and their conversation marks the beginning of Wŏnil's return journey to North Korea. These scenes are exemplary of the "living mood" discussed by Cho Chŏng-sik, creating vital images of suffering and alienation and establishing the need for an eventual redemption of innocence.



FIGURE 9. In *Return to the Fatherland* (1963), Pang Wŏn-il narrates the story of his experience of the Korean War in South Korea as images of his memories are superimposed over his close-up.

These gloomy spaces are accompanied by depictions of poverty, especially In'gil's plight from being a student talented in drawing to becoming homeless and joining a group of street children who work for meager meals, to his murder by the priest's dog. The high contrast images of sinister urban life and the realist depiction of poverty contrast melodramatically with the bright, stable, medium close-up shots of Wŏnil's family in North Korea. While social conflict exists in the film's postwar Kaesŏng, particularly in the younger son's psychological adjustment to family separation, it is gradually resolved through socialist education and the inclusion of women in the project of industrialization. Social negativity never manifests aesthetically in the subjective form of the cinematography and editing of the North Korean scenes. Nonetheless, by including extensive scenes set in South Korea and exploring the protagonist's subjective traumas and struggles with national division, the film introduces excesses of mood and affect that would have remain uncontained within the state master narrative for North Korean audience members who actually experienced national division and war and may have had relatives on the other side of the Cold War divide. The allegorical and magical narrative causality and aesthetics of familial reunification and national heroism would contrast deeply with many audience members' real experiences of the war, including, in the case of Kaesŏng specifically, the initial North Korean attack of South Korea. Therefore, in referring to negative war memories

within a mood of pathos and sentimentality, the melodramatic mode cannot fully guarantee that the affects associated with these memories can all be translated and recoded at the personal, subjective level into North Korean national pride and anticolonial enmity toward the United States and the South Korean puppet state.

What Elsaesser calls the “soft-pedaling” aspect of melodrama is related to the tendency to reserve political enmity for the South Korean government and US military occupation, rather than directing it toward South Koreans themselves.⁵² *The Ch'oe Hak-sin Family* (*Ch'oe Hak-sin ŭi ilga*, O Pyŏng-jo, 1966) is a telling example of how civilian memories of national division and the war are topics that tend to introduce affective ambivalence into the narrative and visual forms of North Korean cinema; such ambivalence is directed toward not only everyday people who affiliate with South Korea but even dominant North Korean state narratives. In her reading, Suk-Young Kim translates statements by the director O Pyŏng-jo to show that the portrayal of a character such as Ch'oe Hak-sin is delicate, even if civilian characters who defect are a powerful means of conveying the power and truth of an ideology.⁵³ During the course of the film, Ch'oe transforms from a pro-American Christian minister to a supporter of North Korea, but O states that he could not make Ch'oe a neutral character; he had to describe his transformation as a complete reversal.⁵⁴ Ch'oe, as well as his eldest son and ROK soldier Sŏnggŭn, do not embrace North Korea until the very end. Their ideological changes are both very gradual, so while they are not “neutral” characters, like Wŏnil in *Return to the Fatherland*, they undergo a wrenching transformation as characters caught between their idealist beliefs about religion, Korean nationalism, and US imperialism and the oppression and violence they witness during the South Korean and US attack and occupation. Ch'oe's complete reversal is not instantaneous.

The film's critique of Christianity is typical of North Korean literature and cinema that memorializes the Fatherland Liberation War. According to these narratives, American Christians are colonizers who conspire with the US military to oppress and kill Koreans in contradiction to their expressed faith; Korean Christians are colonized and misguided and should learn to believe in the Korean people and the North Korean revolution rather than God and Christ. The insight that the universalist missionary discourses of the United States are a way of masking the racial and national exceptionalism of its imperialist projects appears in the opening thesis of the film, presented through a voice-over and titles scrolling over flames, smoke, and a bombed-out landscape: “American imperialism, which is the main ringleader of world reaction on earth, continues to exist, and there remain people who harbor illusions about the myths that it spreads concerning ‘freedom,’ ‘philanthropy,’ and ‘aid.’ This tragedy about one family is not just a story that concerns the past.” Made fourteen years after the armistice agreement, the film reminds North Koreans of the dangers of believing the mythic Christian and democratic ideals disseminated by US imperialism, because as inspiring as the ideas of freedom, philanthropy, and aid may be, they mask the global reactionary violence of US imperialism and anticommunism.

However, through counterpoint the film analogizes Christian belief in God and nationalist belief in the people and the state. At the beginning and end, two important discussions concerning belief occur between Ch'oe Hak-sin and S'okche, an elder very close to the family. In the first discussion, Ch'oe defends Christianity and says that even modern scientific people need a higher power, God, especially during a time of war, while S'okche explains that the younger generation criticizes Christianity as superstition. The second discussion occurs while S'okche is dying in Ch'oe's arms after being shot by American troops and the apocalyptic US aerial bombardments have commenced. The two elders agree in this final scene that the higher power is the Korean people and the North Korean state in their struggles against the evils of US imperialism. In this way, the primary melodramatic conflict is not between religious belief and scientific reason but what the true objects of belief should be. Although the film contrasts the ideologies of Christianity and anticolonial nationalism, its messaging also depends heavily on a general notion of belief (*midŭm*) and the analogous vocabulary, affects, and practices between religion and nationalism. Despite the aim of avoiding neutrality, the process of ideological transformation nonetheless occurs within an existential and a priori mood that frames both nationalist and Christian belief as responses—albeit one correct and the other incorrect—to the same affective landscape. The melodramatic mode allows for any Korean to come to the correct ideological conclusion within this shared affective landscape not by discovering a materialist science of history but by redirecting the passionate idealism of Christianity toward different political objects.

Of course, it is through a social realist attention to historical violence and suffering that the film can give authenticity to the realizations of Ch'oe and his eldest son, S'onggŭn. The family is at odds internally, as the youngest daughter, S'ongmi, is a revolutionary and along with her mother helps the Korean People's Army soldier Y'ongsu recover in a back room of the family home. Even before discovering Y'ongsu and feeling unable to kill him, the ROK soldier S'onggŭn struggles with criticism from his mother and S'ongmi for helping to imprison and interrogate locals close to the family, particularly S'okche, who we discover, through another superimposed flashback, is a surrogate uncle who helped to raise him. An American officer conspires with a minister—Ch'oe Hak-sin's religious hero—to use Ch'oe to help control the locals through Christianity. He eventually discovers that the officer has killed his other sister, S'ongok, after she rejected his advances, which is the final straw. When the officer orders S'onggŭn to execute S'okche, S'onggŭn refuses and shoots and kills the officer and commits suicide instead. Then the US attack ensues. By depicting the sympathy that S'ongmi and her mother feel for the wounded Y'ongsu, the violent arrests and interrogations in which S'onggŭn becomes complicit, and the disrespect toward the family by South Korean soldiers searching for Y'ongsu, the Christian ideals of the Americans and South Koreans contrast with the colonial violence of US anticommunism and imperialism. The officer's spying, sexual advances, and murder of the married and innocent S'ongok are certainly the worst immorality

committed against the family, but the officer's immoral actions are contextualized within the macropolitical conspiracy between US imperialism and Christianity, including the various forms of subjection represented through social realism.

Ch'oe and Sönggün are the most complex characters in the melodrama because they experience the most anguish over the loss of their ideals and also undergo the most dramatic psychological and ideological transformations. Despite the caricatured Manichaean conflict at its foundation (including Korean actors made-up to look like evil, hook-nosed, white Americans), the film is powerful and engrossing mainly because of the aesthetically effective way that it captures the turmoil these two characters go through as they lose faith in Christianity and America in the face of the colonial violence directed at their closest relations.

Two scenes capture well the way that melodramatic counterpoint presented through a sorrowful space and mood prevent the film from devolving into characterless propaganda. The first scene occurs upon Sönggün's return to the family home, when he and Söngok sing a patriotic song together while he plays the piano. The sound of the music reverberates to the back of the house where, unbeknownst to Sönggün, Söngmi is caring for Yöngsu. Although separated by the walls of the house, which stand in for the national division that has come between the two soldiers, each character hears and is touched by the siblings' duet. The space of the scene is replete with melodramatic tension as it cuts between the two rooms—the house, like the Korean nation, are united through the song but still divided by politics.

The second scene is more formally experimental. When Sönggün stands before Sökche and has been ordered to execute him, struggling to keep his eyes open as the church bells begin to ring and he begins to drift into a delirium, the scene cuts to a point-of-view shot from his perspective and Sökche's image goes in and out of focus as Sönggün struggles to aim. Then a relatively long, two-minute montage ensues, superimposed upon the image of the church bells swaying with only the sound of their ringing. This time, the montage superimposes three images at a time—the church bells are constant and Sönggün's agonized face fades in and out as other images from the plot of the film overlap: Sökche playing with Sönggün as a child and pleading with him in the present, the menacing faces of the American officer and minister, the officer harassing Söngok, their mother lying by Söngok's corpse, Söngok's husband castigating him for wanting to execute Yöngsu, and the officer shooting their mother. After this montage, Sönggün cannot bring himself to follow the order and fires at the tree above Sökche's head and then, after being scolded, kills the officer and commits suicide as the American troops march in. Of course, this dramatic turn to internal consciousness and the layers of Sönggün's memory at the height of the melodramatic conflict and action emphasizes ideological transformation. However, it also renders the struggle of the South Korean soldier with sensitivity to both his colonial position vis-à-vis powerful Americans and his unbearable regret.

The scene of patriotic music uniting Koreans across national division, as well as the extended and delirious montage showing the internal consciousness of a South Korean soldier, contrast with the later hesitancy in North Korean film to portray South Korean soldiers or their memories in films about the war. Perhaps the most well-known North Korean film on the war, *Wolmi Island* (*Wolmido*, dir. Cho Kyŏng-sun, 1982), tells the story of a small group of soldiers and civilians who for three days defend Wolmi Island against the United States' Inchon invasion. It is a melodramatic story about victimization, redemption of innocence, and duty toward the state, party, and leader in the face of death. South Korean soldiers do not appear; they are lumped together with the UN forces and referred to vaguely as the enemy. The only flashback scene occurs at a night gathering when a young woman radio operator, who is later killed, sings a patriotic and leader-centered song accompanied by the cook and his accordion ("dead or alive, we are in your embrace"). Tracking in one-by-one on the faces of the singer and two men listening to the song, the scene focus-fades to each character's nostalgic memory of their home village: a soldier happily farms land gained through revolution, the radio operator walks through a field and reads with her sister, and the commander of the troop meets his lost love in a grove. Memories of revolution and war are idealized to the point that every personal memory refers directly to the message of the song: all losses and all innocent moments of the past are redeemed in the consummation of one's duty to the state and the leader, which is in death. By 1982, war memories had achieved a stable format and gone were many of the fascinating moments of mutual haunting between the nation-people and the state that we find in 1960s cinema.⁵⁵ Concomitantly, there was a reining in of the formal and aesthetic experimentation that went into representing the intense ideological struggles, fragmentations of identity, and inclusions of South Korean perspectives that we find in a film such as *The Chŏe Hak-sin Family*. Later films on the war, at least from the fascinating and complex *The Fate of Kum Hui and Un Hui* (*Kŭmhŭi wa Ŭnhŭi ŭi unmyŏng*, dir. Pak Hak, 1974) onward, tended to render more transparent and homogeneous the subjectivity of cinema and politics and limited extended reflection on the origins of psychological and somatic trauma in national division.

REVOLUTIONARY OPERA AND THE RETURN TO THE TOTAL WORK OF ART

The production of the North Korean films most well-known outside of North Korea corresponded to the turn from socialist realism to juche realism in *Chosŏn Film* in 1967. These include two of the celebrated classics based on theatrical operas: *Sea of Blood* and *The Flower Girl*. While the films discussed thus far in this chapter deal with ideological, psychological, and political problems internal to the North Korean state and its civil and anticolonial conflicts with South Korea and the United States, these two films return to the Japanese colonial period and

use the melodramatic mode, combined with operatic elements, to re-mythologize the North Korean state and its origins. Both films depict a family's extreme suffering under Japanese colonial rule and the Korean landlord class that it historically propped up. Imprisonment, blinding, and death are followed by the eventual coming-into-consciousness of the remaining family members through the intervention of national consciousness and the party. These films on the revolutionary traditions narrate the individual's emergence out of unconscious victimization into conscious activity, forging various analogies between this movement and the unfolding of national history. The climax redeems oppression by way of naturalized connections between the individual hero, the family, the nation, and the party.⁵⁶ They utilize a larger-than-life aesthetic; in the words of Kim Jong Il, they "aim high," representing individual lives as bound to the collective mission to liberate the nation from colonial incursion.⁵⁷ It is a shared experience of oppression and sympathy with others' suffering that gives rise to group identification and partisan struggle. Subjects gain political agency and correct political ideas by recognizing, more through shared emotion than political savvy, that their personal and familial suffering is enmeshed with the macropolitical conflicts of the colonized nation and the emergent nation-state. In contrast to the genre films on socialist reconstruction and films that were working through the recent memories of the Korean War in an ideological fashion, these revolutionary opera films return to many of the cinematic conventions established during the North Korean revolution itself.

However, there are significant differences between these films and *My Home Village*, particularly in relation to montage, mood, and music. My reading of *My Home Village* emphasizes how the montages at the film's climax express revolutionary enthusiasm and have an ontological relationship with the history of the North Korean revolution due to the inclusion of documentary stock footage. Although there are certainly scenes of revolutionary enthusiasm and ecstasy in *juche* realist films of the 1960s and 1970s, the exclusion of stock footage, the intensification of pathos and suffering, and the adaptation of operatic elements in films such as *Sea of Blood* and *The Flower Girl* entail a new version of the total work of art (figure 10), one reminiscent of Wagner's intermedial conception. *My Home Village* incorporates explicative subtitles and intertitles to provide narrative and historical information: the character Kwang'il joined the partisan resistance; Japan subjected Koreans to forced labor; Kim Il Sung defeated the Japanese empire and eventually returned from the Soviet Union. These titles establish connections between the film's fictional narrative and its historical referentiality. These nods to documentary realism do not appear in the revolutionary opera films, which depend even more on the music (Gr. *melo*-) and expressivity of the melodramatic mode for their referential illusion. Although the characters do not sing diegetically, *Sea of Blood* and *The Flower Girl* are based on two of the five great revolutionary operas, and the melancholic themes and lyrics of their music accentuate the embodied suffering and heightened sentimentality. The sublime beauty of the film's combination



FIGURE 10. In *The Flower Girl* (1972), Kkotpun and her younger sister Sunhüi mourn the death of their mother as the operatic soundtrack plays. The integration of image, music, and political ideology mark the return to cinema as a total work of art.

of sight, sound, and language conveys the film's ideological perspective on history. This further aestheticization of politics and history changes the terms by which we might understand the historical referentiality of *Sea of Blood* and *The Flower Girl*. In *My Home Village*, accuracies and inaccuracies about history are obvious, and they can be discerned by comparing and contrasting the documentary historical claims with the historical record. The aestheticization of the revolution in revolutionary operas, detached from the concerns of realism and conveyed primarily through the structuring expressive mood of operatic melodrama, attempts to occlude the historical gap between the organic events of the revolution and the reinvigoration of the national mythology of anticolonial guerrilla resistance beginning in the late 1960s.

These cinematic portrayals of colonial oppression and guerrilla revolution are not realist in the sense that they reflect the complex historical reality of Japanese colonialism (1910–1945). However, as quasi-mythical texts, they shape the hyper-reality of North Korean national history during an era when the anti-Japanese partisan revolution of Kim Il Sung and party leadership again rose to the forefront of cultural production.⁵⁸ Toward the end of *The Flower Girl*, set in the 1930s, Chölyong escapes from a Japanese prison and leads peasant rebellions, in part to save his sisters (the captured flower girl, Kkotpun, and the younger Sunhüi, who was blinded by collaborationist landlords). At the height of the narrative arc, when he argues that a larger revolt is necessary, a medium close-up shows Chölyong embracing his sisters and crying as he explains the colonial class structure and the historical reasons for the plight of the Korean nation. He conveys the ideological seed of the film—that a stateless nation cannot survive—in the most direct terms at the height of the bittersweet emotion of the family reunion. This discursive unveiling of the seed at the climax of the film is similar to the second discussion between Chöe Haksin and Sökche in *The Chöe Hak-sin Family*. However, by setting the story in

the colonial period, the problem of the mutual haunting of nation-people and state can be sublated somewhat because of the lack of competing Korean nation-states. Because US neocolonialism operates through the granting and manipulation of national self-determination among the anticommunist states that it occupies, North Korean cinematic rhetoric about sovereignty in the post-Korean War era could not depend on the same colonial binary of exploited stateless nation and self-governing nation-state that appears in *The Flower Girl*. One reason that the films considered to be quintessentially *juche* realist are set during the Japanese colonial period is that this setting allows for a clearer articulation of the lack of Korean subjectivity under colonialism and its recuperation through revolution. The only characters who live between colonizer and colonized are the large land-owners, and they are invariably represented as purely evil collaborators. The complex divided subjects of early films on the Korean War do not appear and there is little experimentation in cinematic form dedicated to capturing these characters' interiorities. Therefore, rather than seeing a persistent emphasis on the Japanese colonial period from the late 1940s onward, these classics should rather be understood as belonging to an era when the debates on the meaning of *juche* gave way to a master narrative of national origins and national leadership dependent on the aestheticization of a period that was gradually becoming the distant past. At the same time, because *The Flower Girl* unfolds in the composite tense, it is far from ideologically seamless. Even the most direct expression of the ideological seed of the film, Chŏllyong's speech, implicitly asks the audience to consider whether or not the contemporary North Korean state, thirty years later in 1972, has brought about the redemption of the Korean people from the suffering of colonialism.

Not all films on colonial-period partisanship are operas. This form of heroism was attributed to a non-communist nationalist of the colonial period in the biopic *An Chunggŭn Shoots Itō Hirobumi* (*An Chunggŭn Idŭngbangmun ūl ssoda*, dir. Ŏm Kil-sŏn, 1979), which celebrates the historical person who resisted Japanese colonialism by shooting the Japanese resident-general in Harbin, China, in 1909. It is rendered most sublimely in the three parts of *Five Guerrilla Brothers* (dir. Chŏe Ik-kyu, 1968), set during the Japanese colonial period, in which dramatic long shots of the mountainous Korean landscape present a sublime object for contemplation and for political commitment to what Carl Schmitt called the telluric struggle of the partisan in the colonial war.⁵⁹ The turn to the Japanese colonial period is more about developing the icon of the anticolonial partisan as the foundational hero of national history. However, the intermedial connections with opera are emblematic of the aestheticization of history and the attempt to create an immersive total work of art devoid of any instigation to make comparisons with documented history. In the fully aestheticization of politics and history through opera and the melodramatic mode, counterpoint in excess of ideology becomes less explicitly perceptible in narrative conflict or the interiority of characters and becomes an aspect of the affective excess itself (or its fallacy). For such immersive films, the

points of overidentification, misidentification, or disidentification on the part of the audience are no doubt present, although impossible to quantify or measure. The excess of pathos and musical expressivity in a spectacle of history can lead to all these responses because there is no entirely unconscious immersion of the consumer of socialism or the national people in the aesthetic experience of the film and therefore no entirely unconscious inculcation of the version of history that is aestheticized.