

National Cinema and the Melancholy of Liberation

World War II was followed by a dramatic restructuring of the geopolitical landscape, including the beginning of the Cold War communist-anticommunist conflict, the continued rise of the United States and the Soviet Union as hegemons, the strengthening and successes of Asian and African national liberation movements against European colonial rule, and, in the case of Korea, the end of the Japanese empire and the beginning of national division. Direct US military rule in the form of the US Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) led to the founding of the ROK in 1948, and the DPRK was founded in the same year after the end of the Soviet occupation of North Chosŏn (1945–1948). Both nation-states presented themselves as agents of liberation from Japanese colonial rule. However, in writing cultural and social history, including the history of film cultures, we should not apply too abstractly the chronology of pre- and post-1945. Imagining that everything changed in Korean politics, culture, and cinema in 1945 and imagining that each was liberated from the effects of Japan's political, economic, and cultural imperialism have been important mythemes for the national liberation narratives of both the South Korean and North Korean states, which sought to solidify ethnonationalist identity through the public criticism and purging of pro-Japanese persons and ideas and the ideological mobilization of anti-Japanese sentiment. However, as histories of Korea's mid-twentieth century have shown, many of the events of the Cold War in Korea, including the Korean War, were shaped not only by Cold War politics but also by the previous period of Japanese imperialism and colonialism.¹ As the examination of early North Korean film theory in chapter 1 showed, it was not easy for the emerging states of the ROK and the DPRK to cast aside the effects of imperialism and colonialism, particularly under conditions of occupation by the United States and the Soviet Union.²

The most urgent problem in the flurry of new journals covering arts, culture, literature, politics, and history that emerged in Korea in the late 1940s was postcolonial nation-building. Although the division of the peninsula into North Chosŏn and South Chosŏn affected the ideas of national culture put forward in each territory, there was still a great deal of movement between North and South. For example, as discussed in chapter one, Ch'ü Min, Sŏ Kwang-je, and Mun Ye-bong all belonged to the Chosŏn Film Alliance (Chosŏn yŏnghwa tongmaeng) under USAMGIK and Sŏ published *On Chosŏn Film* before all three went to North Korea and joined the film industry there. Comparative discussions of the two developing national cultures were common during this time, and numerous film journal essays, such as Kim Sŏk-dong's "Impressions of North Chosŏn," discussed in travelogue form, often very positively, Soviet occupation, everyday life, and the emergent cinema culture in the North.³ Sovereignty and ideology divided the national community, but ideas of national cinema in the late 1940s in South Chosŏn, as in North Chosŏn, proposed the inherent historical unity of the Korean people and cinema's role in reflecting and constructing their collective experiences.

In order to accomplish the goal of creating a national cinema that would unite the Korean people, the narratives, style, and aesthetics of Korean film had to change. Immediately after liberation, An Chŏr-yŏng, who produced and directed the remarkable colonial-period melodrama *Fishermen's Fire* (1939) independently without the inclusion of Japanese propaganda, delineated what would be required to create a postcolonial Korean national cinema. In an essay titled "On the Management of Cinemas and Theaters in the Process of Nation-Building," published in the inaugural issue of *People's Art* (*Inmin yesul*) in South Chosŏn he wrote: "For half a century, under the yoke of the Japanese empire, Korean culture and all its sectors struggled greatly in being completely exploited and enslaved through colonialism, and we were unable to see the staging of plays or the screening of films that were cinematic in the genuine sense of the term, or to view advanced foreign films."⁴ Referring to the nightmare of Japanese imperialism, An inveighs against the control of filmmaking by capitalism and imperialism and declares that the pro-Japanese artistic and commercial interests who exploited the Korean people should be completely swept away in order to open theaters that serve the project of nation-building.⁵ Because Korean film artists did not have their own capital and were dependent on investors and the commercial interests of theater managers, they ended up losing their conscience, adhering to the strict system of control over culture, and colluding with the Japanese to produce a uniform set of films. It was unreasonable to expect that Korean cineastes could make artistic and conscientious films under these circumstances. He argues that Chosŏn films of the colonial period tended to stick to melodramatic dilemmas that "skillfully took advantage of the public sentiment of spiritual strife"; otherwise, they could not get their films

made.⁶ He imagines the creation of an artistic and conscientious cinema that would be concerned with more than love and money and would not be subordinated to imperialist economic and political interests.⁷ Reflecting on the combination of the melodramatic mode and political propaganda under the Korean Film Production Corporation of the late colonial period, An thought that Korean national cinema would have to overcome the manipulative aspect of the melodramatic scenarios and their use of sentimentality for imperial mobilization.⁸

An Chŏr-yŏng made his assertions about a liberated Korean cinema in a moment when intellectuals and politicians had founded the Korean People's Republic, an indigenous idea for a unified postcolonial nation-state that still seemed like a viable possibility.⁹ These hopes would soon be dashed as US occupation officials in the military government (USAMGIK) favored anticommunist conservatives to a socialist or left-liberal government while a revolutionary communist state formed in North Chosŏn under Soviet occupation.¹⁰ As in other postcolonial nations during the early Cold War, Korean national cinema in both territories remained haunted in multiple ways by imperialism, especially because foreign occupation did not end with the Japanese empire. Despite An's vision for a cinema critical of imperialism and colonialism—and not reliant on the formulas of Hollywood, Soviet-style socialist realism, or Japanese imperial cinema—this vision was disrupted by Cold War politics and economy. In South Chosŏn, An's vision at the moment of liberation for a total transformation of the economy of Korean film production and exhibition and the end of manipulative melodrama and its replacement with films of conscience and artistry made for the masses proved too ambitious under conditions of US military occupation and anticommunism. Particularly as the United States Information Service (USIS) in Korea became more involved in filmmaking leading up to and during the Korean War—and future famous directors such as Kim Ki-young learned filmmaking by making culture films (*munhwa yŏnghwa*) under its auspices—nation-building through South Korean national cinema became intertwined with the politics and warfare of the US military occupation and the ideology of anticommunism.¹¹ Nor was it possible for Korean national cinema to overcome what An saw as the manipulative sentimentality of melodrama or to do away with the colonial influence of Hollywood and Japanese cinema. Retrospectively, An's own films would be described as melodramas, but he was critical of the use of melodramatic cinema to distract Koreans politically or to mobilize them overtly during the late Japanese empire. The tendency in liberation cinema of both Koreas, however, was not the overcoming of the melodramatic mode through a more elevated and artistic national cinema but a continuation of the mode's dominance, now applied to the creation of national cinema through the production of mass national sentiment. As with all national cinemas, the emergent film industry in South Chosŏn developed out of the translation and adaptation of various foreign models and ideas of filmmaking

and film spectatorship. The result was not the creation of an autonomous national cinema but a national cinema formed through complex processes of translating and adapting the narrative forms, style, and economics of globally dominant cinemas, under the conditions of continued occupation.

The quintessential independence film (*kwangbok yŏnghwa*) of South Chosŏn, *Hurrah! For Freedom* is paradigmatic of the processes of translation involved in the formation of Korean national cinema in the late 1940s, as well as the way that Japanese imperial politics continued to haunt this process. The film hews closely to the style and narrative forms of the classical Hollywood system while also drawing from the aesthetic of late Japanese imperial film in order to represent a mythical underground Korean resistance movement at the very end of the Japanese colonial period. The film is useful for examining how early South Korean films appealed to the postcolonial national audience by narrating a political break from the colonial period but did so by translating and repeating general narrative structures, stylistic qualities, and spatial representations of both Hollywood and Japanese imperial cinema.¹² Despite the canonization of *Hurrah! For Freedom* as a film that inaugurated the South Korean national film history, in the last two decades, with the rediscovery and availability of colonial-period films, film historians have also explored the director Ch'oe In-gyu's controversial colonial-period career and the irony of his production of pro-Japanese films in the early 1940s.¹³ In the years before making this film about underground nationalist revolutionaries, Ch'oe In-gyu directed *Homeless Angel* (1941), *Children of the Sun* (1944), and *Love and Vow* (with Imai Tadashi, 1945), which contain explicit celebrations of the possibilities of Japanese empire and Koreans' place within it. As with Kang Hong-sik's and Mun Ye-bong's careers in the North, analyzing Ch'oe In-gyu's individual motivations, reveal only so much about the political transformations in his career and in the content of his films. More significant than his shifting political perspective is the dissemination and incorporation of narrative forms, film styles, and moods of film melodrama in response to shifting political circumstances.

Because the melodramatic mode is an important continuity between imperial filmmaking (both Japanese and US) and the project of Korean national cinema, accounting for its general characteristics and dynamics contributes to reading South Korean films, particularly of the late 1940s. Working through many critiques of the concept of national cinema, JungBong Choi has argued convincingly against any facile dismissal of the concept on the grounds that it is tied to puritanical and atavistic notions of national culture.¹⁴ Against wholesale dismissals, he argues for national cinemas in the plural and for radical particularism, including seeing each national cinema and national community as heterogeneous, mongrel, contaminated by otherness, and replete with local particularities.¹⁵ He states, "The uniqueness of national cinemas must be searched not from the perceived particularity of styles or themes as such but from the relationships they maintain with

the society and social processes by which they became meaningful in a unique way.”¹⁶ Choi’s discussion of national cinema is helpful in reorienting how we view the relationship between cinema and nation as a social process and not something essential. I read the social process of proposing and trying to actualize Korean national cinema in South Chosŏn in terms of a dynamic engagement with cinema’s conventionality and repetitiveness, as well as its capacity for particular historical and experiential references. For example, in order to read *Hurrah! For Freedom* in all its historical and processual complexity, we have to account for its use of global and colonial conventions of storytelling, style, and ideology as well as its inclusion of historical and experiential references that would be fully meaningful only to the imagined community of Koreans who were the intended audience forming and being formed by an emergent national cinema.

The melodramatic mode and its moods are precisely the virtual space where these two levels converge. On the one hand, cinema tasked with engaging with the local experiences of a society will employ spectacles and narrative forms that provoke affects connected, at least tangentially, to collective experiences. On the other hand, in coding those experiences according to the spiritual ideal of the nation, national cinema simultaneously provides a visual, narrative, spatial, and temporal interpretive framework for reading affects and historical references as matters of national consciousness, history, and sympathies. Following liberation, the moods of film melodrama remained the affective attunement through which to engage the popular masses in the moral project of building a nation through cinema, but these moods also provoked affects, meanings, and historical references outside the framework of nationality, which nonetheless emerged out of the negative spiritual, mental, and somatic strife of colonialism. Melancholic moods register national liberation not as the sublation of colonialism through postcolonial nation-building, but rather as a social process characterized by the mutual haunting of the nation-people and the state. In the melodramatic mode and its haunted, composite temporality, the nation is both a spiritual community responding to the colonial past and a lost object that will never be fully reconstituted. Even in ecstatic revolutionary films such as *My Home Village* and *Hurrah! For Freedom*, the social negativity caused by colonialism lingers in the encompassing melodramatic mood, and colonialism’s power persists in the technological means and the cultural conventions through which liberation is represented.

The affects and mood of melancholy are in excess of the ideological framework of nationality and national liberation, even if they provide a foundation for the articulation of national sympathy. The melodramatic mode occurs in the composite tense, because past failures and late arrivals suggest that the possibilities of the future and the past may already be foreclosed.¹⁷ According to Freud, the difference between mourning and melancholia is that the former is a less pathological way of dealing with loss, because the object remains external to the self; however, in the latter, the lost object is no longer external, but has rather been internalized.¹⁸

The object of loss, as well as of aggression, becomes conflated with the self. Despite melodrama's probing search for the future redemption of innocence, the lost objects of melodrama have typically already been internalized not into an individual psyche but into the film's post-psychoanalytic staging of psychic conflict, as expressed in its images, language, and sound. Therefore, whatever object a melodramatic film frames as lost—whether it is youth, love, the nation, moral innocence, or some combination—exists virtually in the mood of the film. It does not have a real historical or experiential referent but aestheticizes in the virtual the potential of restoring a lost object, through what Svetlana Boym calls restorative nostalgia.¹⁹ As Boym points out, restorative nostalgia both intersects and conflicts with reflective nostalgia, which involves a more persistent and individual sense of loss. Melodrama and its moods occupy a space between reflection and restoration, between individual mourning and collective melancholy.

Film melodrama seems compelled to admit self-consciously that it can only ever be a copy of the feeling of losing something really and authentically historical. It never reflects histories and experiences directly but only proliferates a conflicted nostalgia about a past that never fully existed or a future that will never fully come into being. The psychoanalytic idea of the lost object entails gendered subjectivity and fetishism both for the affects of melancholy themselves and the representation of the national community. In the project of building a Korean national cinema in South Chosŏn, melancholy was often the mood of a masculine melodrama that projected a gendered spatiality and temporality of the national subject. This melancholy connoted both the collective suffering caused by colonialism and the haunting of the project of liberation by an internal otherness and lost object projected onto the feminine other.

The Soviet occupation of North Chosŏn ended in 1948 with the establishment of the DPRK, but the US military occupation of South Korea continues today. One would expect different representations of liberation and independence in these two political contexts—one decolonized and the other colonized—particularly with the importation of the socialist realist film style in the North and the hegemony of Hollywood in the South. I analyze some of the apparent differences in narrative and style between *My Home Village* and *Hurrah! For Freedom* (1946). However, I do not mean to suggest a dichotomy between an exuberant revolutionary cinema in the North and melancholic melodrama in the South. In both North Korea and South Korea, representing national liberation in cinema was a process haunted by continuities with Japanese imperial cinema and Cold War national division. In both cases, this haunting is tangible in the tension and counterpoint between the discursive and narrative construction of the moral occult of the post-colonial national community and the background mood of melancholy and irreparable loss (a trace of the violence of the colonial state and its continuation in the politics and economy of the postcolonial nation-state).

THEORIZING NATIONAL CINEMA

In order to understand the historical dynamic between the powerful idea of national cinema after liberation and the films that were produced in the late 1940s, it is necessary to create a fuller picture of what was at stake in the many calls for national cinema in South Chosŏn. In March 1946, six months after liberation from Japanese colonial rule, the well-known illustrator, screenwriter, and film director An Sŏk-chu reflected on the importance of mass moral and political conscience for the development of national cinema in Korea:

Public sentiment goes from being individual conscience to being national common sense; it becomes the conscience of art and the conscience of politics. Before creating a new cinema, cineastes should first gain a humanistic conscience and build the conscience of cinema. . . .

I think when creating a national cinema, cineastes must have a conscience of the nation and of the era, and national cinema could be built on that.

Conscience of a nation lies in the development of thought that can contribute extensively to the autonomy and independence of the nation and the genuine happiness of humanity, and conscience of the era lies in completely grasping democracy and in the arrival of the fulfillment and victory of democracy in our nation.²⁰

For An Sŏk-chu, a national cinema would not just give expression to existing ideas of individual film viewers but would reconstruct the public sentiments of individuals into a new national common sense about art and politics. For cineastes to be able to create such a mass conscience in the people, they must first cultivate their own humanistic understanding of the public purpose of their films. Japanese imperialism had impeded the development of Korean national cinema, and in the aftermath of liberation he advocates using the technological power of cinematic images and storytelling to overcome that negation and create a national population with shared emotions and a shared common sense. In invoking conscience, An was speaking to the confluence of moral principles and emotions (or affects given ownership and language). A proper mediation between affect and morality, or the realm of conscience, had been unable to develop under Japanese colonial rule. The project of building a national cinema had to be based in national conscience but would also produce it *en masse* through new mediations between affects and moral sentiments.

An Sŏk-chu sees national cinema as serving a pedagogical and subject-producing role that colonial-period intellectuals had often assigned to national literature.²¹ Although An argues for the development of thought that contributes to the autonomy and independence of the nation, he also connects the cinematic apparatus to more universalist and humanist ideas of moral cultivation that were prevalent during the previous decades of Japanese colonial rule. He grafts these ideas of moral cultivation onto the primary ideological term of US occupation: democracy (*minjujuui*). As the hybridity of An's discussion of national cinema suggests, rather than articulating a plan for autonomous and independent national cinema, he was

involved in a complex translation. An indigenous call for Korean national independence, the ideals of American democracy, the moral and political philosophies of the Japanese empire, and reflections on the technology of cinema all intersected in his formulation of the relation between politics and film art. In filmmaking practices of the time, the melodramatic mode provided just such a mediation between universalist humanism and national community and between affects and morality.

We should not imagine that film criticism in the South was commercial and Hollywood in orientation, while critics in the North concerned themselves solely with Soviet models of revolutionary cinema. Particularly before the establishment of the communist DPRK and anticommunist ROK states in 1948, ideas about cinema were not strictly codified in such Cold War political terms, and the primary concern on both sides of the thirty-eighth parallel was the national particularity of Korean cinema in the aftermath of Japanese colonialism. Critics were concerned with how to transition from foreign domination to the sovereignty of the Korean people and how to create a national culture no longer threatened by foreign hegemony. The film critic Yi Sŏ-hyang put it this way in early 1948, on the eve of the founding of the ROK: "The great ethical responsibility in building a national cinema [*minjokchŏk yŏnghwa*] is to construct a cinema culture that serves the people [*inmin*] on the people's soil."²² Yi posits a strong connection between cinema and politics, because political and economic independence are required in order to realize the "ethical responsibility" to construct a cinema produced domestically and in the interest and taste of the Korean people.²³

The understanding of cinema as mass culture moved critics to see it as the medium most conducive to bringing together various social classes by way of aesthetic experiences. In "The Mass Character of Film Art," Yi Chŏng-u connected the idea of national cinema to social class, arguing that in the wake of liberation from imperialism, an autonomous Korean cinema would be best realized when film artists are immersed in the life of the national masses (*minjung*).²⁴ According to Yi, cinema is not merely entertainment that might as well be produced outside of Korea and imported. It has an essential pedagogical and social function: to affect the spirit and feelings of the audience, helping to cultivate their artistic sensibilities. Because film is a total work of art, it is capable of penetrating and representing the everyday lives of ordinary people, simultaneously transforming their feelings about culture. Yi argues that cinema as mass media not only should emerge out of the masses but is also essential to their very creation:

In thinking that cinema exists in no other place than among the masses, the path from cineastes to the audience is again restored to normalcy. Contemporary cineastes appear to exist in a time when even if they are only one person, they must command much of the popular masses [*taejung*] and contribute to the formation of a new national mass.

A new people [*inmin*]! Only they can be the ground that forms a new culture, and we call them the last "place" that guarantees the superiority of culture over politics.

True art film in the hands of the people!²⁵

In North Chosŏn at the time, critics were theorizing the total work of art of film in explicitly political terms, but Yi's essay also reflects an old colonial-period debate about the social function of art. While Yi Sŏ-hyang stated the purpose of national cinema in moral terms, Yi Chŏng-u argues that the masses are themselves a modern work of art, and one that can come into subjectivity and develop a culture through the medium of cinema. At work in this conception of national cinema is a notion of popular sovereignty that is democratic in principle but also tied to nationalist ideas of the aesthetic and cultural formation of a people. The national community that forms and is formed by cinema exists both outside and within the state, a subject and object of representation that requires a state but also supersedes it.

These statements about a liberated national cinema were made within a situation of divided sovereignty and continued foreign occupation by the United States and the Soviet Union. In the case of constructing a national cinema during the liberation period, the melodramatic mode allowed for the cinematic expression of suffering, sorrow, sympathy, and unfulfilled desire and therefore enabled its refraction of the negative and traumatic historical experiences of the audience, including colonialism, capitalist crisis, fascism, and national division. However, this construction of national cinema by way of the melodramatic mode involved multiple translations. The appropriation of *sinp'a* and other existing indigenous theater traditions was only one translation among many to consider, including translations of the techniques, forms, and moods of the late Japanese imperial films, of Hollywood narrative and visual conventions, and of historical, cultural, and psychic events that for the audience preexist the intervention of cinematic representation. The various processes of translation involved in films that aspire to become national cinema are connected to the limits of the representational capacity of the postcolonial state or its continued haunting by imperial and neocolonial sovereignties. Melancholy is the mood through which these translations and hauntings of melodrama become visible in the cinema of the postcolony. In South Korean films of the 1940s, we find an ambivalent process of translating conventions, the gendering of national subjectivity along colonial lines, and melancholic moods surrounding the uncertainty about whether or not the lost object of the nation will ever be retrieved and reconstituted.

GENDERING TIME AND SPACE THROUGH POSTCOLONIAL TRANSLATION

Hurrah! For Freedom (1946) and its history include all these problems of post-coloniality, the Cold War, and the melodramatic mode. As Chŏe In-gyu went from making Japanese propaganda films to depicting a mythical underground national liberation movement in the span of one year, and he set out to contribute to the formation of a Korean national cinema, his filmmaking practice came to involve translations of the melodramatic mode of Japanese imperial cinema and Hollywood narrative cinema (which Japanese imperial cinema had already

appropriated in its own way). A comparison on *Hurrah! For Freedom* with the North Korean independence film *My Home Village* reveals some apparent differences in mood and style.

At the climax of *My Home Village*, the attention shifts from the exploited family and the individual protagonists to the revolutionary masses and their leader Kim Il Sung, which entails a transition from the formal qualities of narrative cinema to montage sequences that splice together fictional images and documentary footage. The mood of the end of the film is one of revolutionary ecstasy, collective joy, and redemption of innocence, produced by triumphal music, a series of close-ups showing faces unified by the idea of the liberated nation-state, and point-of-view shots panning across the romantic and reappropriated Korean landscape. *Hurrah! For Freedom* also depicts the period right before the end of the Japanese empire (two weeks before liberation) and includes many action scenes that relish in the pleasure of cinematic suspense and spectacle. Plot elements of the film are consistent with the overall mood of melancholy. Although other activists state that liberation from Japanese rule by external factors is likely and continued resistance only endangers them, the protagonist Hanjung (Chŏn Ch'ang-gŭn, also the screenwriter) insists that armed direct action is still necessary. His heroism and authenticity are defined not by political ends but by his individual psychological commitment to national martyrdom. The film script suggests that the lost end of the film shows the masses celebrating liberation but focuses on Hanjung's search for the tomb of one of the two women protagonists, Mihyang (Yu Kye-sŏn), who was killed by Japanese police and her collaborationist lover Nambu. Therefore, the gendered lost objects of the love interest and the nation appear to persist beyond the moment of liberation.

Even more significant than these plot points maintaining the nation and love interests as lost objects, the mood of the film conveys gendered modes of resentment and melancholic identity struggle reminiscent of late imperial Japanese films about the mobilization of Koreans for the Japanese state. Much of the gendering of national subjectivity, as well as the melancholic mood surrounding it, are articulated through particular spatial and temporal configurations. Like the music (*melo-*) of melodrama, its moods are both temporal and spatial. The troubled history of the film itself, including various layers of censorship by the US occupation government and the Park Chung Hee dictatorship (1961–1979), further surround the film text with a mood of lost opportunity, presenting difficulties at the level of affect in archiving it as the first film of postcolonial Korean national cinema.

Despite its national allegory of epic political conflict, the aestheticization of liberation in *Hurrah! For Freedom* adheres to the everyday gendered spaces of melodrama. The house and hideout of the nationalist revolutionaries is coded as entirely masculine. Besides Mihyang's dangerous appearance there, only men inhabit it. It is also filmed with low-key lighting and appears darker and more clandestine; it is always under the direct threat of political adversaries. The national revolutionaries

guard the inside of this building with guns and secret codes, in scenes more at home in a crime drama or film noir. The space of the women's houses, on the other hand, marks the feminine sphere as separated from political conflict by its association with the private travails of love and the apolitical sentimentality of feminine emotion.

The particularly affected scene that ends with Mihyang's murder expresses the entanglement of the film's mood with the gendering of national subjectivity and melancholic identity struggle. The collaborationist Nambu (Tok Ŭn-gi) is the evil counterpart to the nationalist Hanjung, as well as his alter ego and his competitor in love (for reasons described below, Nambu's scenes are largely excised from the extant version). In the scene ending in her death, Mihyang crosses the threshold between two important interiors: her domestic space, which has been visited by both Nambu and the fugitive Hanjung, and the underground hideout of the national liberation movement. Mihyang steals information from Nambu and goes to the hideout; however, at the same time she unwittingly leads the Japanese colonial police to the revolutionaries. When she first arrives, she admits her past evilness to Hanjung. In the shot/reverse-shot capturing this final conversation with Mihyang, Hanjung maintains his authenticity and his stoicism by looking away from her toward an invisible horizon and declaring his willingness to die. In contrast, Mihyang weeps uncontrollably and collapses on the table, close-ups capturing the bodily expression of her guilt and regret for previously supporting the Japanese empire through her love for Nambu (figure 14).

Liberation in the film is not a macropolitical movement, but rather a matter of purifying ethnic identity, psychologically and morally, within a limited group of characters. The purification of national identity is haunted by doubles and foils: Nambu and Hanjung; Mihyang and Hyeja (an innocent and loyal nurse who also loves Hanjung and frees him from the hospital after his capture). The mood of melancholy—of national identity as a lost object—is articulated through gendered representation of interior spaces and Hanjung's male resentment toward Mihyang's sentimentality, foolishness, and boundary crossing. Close-ups form the mood of the scene of Mihyang's unwitting betrayal. As Doane argues, in classical Hollywood and derivative film forms, close-ups provide "proximity, intimacy, knowledge of interiority," in contrast to idea-oriented close-ups of Soviet-style montage.²⁶ As an "affection-image," the characters' faces express reflection on an interior psychological state. Mihyang's weeping gives visual expression to her guilt and regret for her late arrival to Korean nationalism.²⁷ Because they are overflowing and irrational, her emotions contrast with Hanjung's close-up, which conveys single-mindedness and impassive determination.

As Deleuze argues, "Affects are not individuated like people and things, but nevertheless they do not blend into the indifference of the world. They have singularities which enter into virtual conjunction and each time constitute a complex entity."²⁸ The affection-image has a virtual quality; it has the power to abstract itself



FIGURE 14. In *Hurrah! for Freedom* (1946), Mihyang cries out of regret for her relationship with the collaborationist Nambu and subverting the anticolonial movement, while Hanjung looks stoically toward the horizon and declares his patriotism.

from space and time and thereby bring singularities into relation with the whole. The facial close-up is an affective moment that “suspends individuation” and concentrates a complex of action, narrative, and political ideology.²⁹ However, not all close-ups work the same way. The affection-images of *My Home Village* suspend individuation to figure a singular democratic collectivity with a relatively open future, but in this scene, “proximity, intimacy, knowledge of interiority” transform affect into emotion, making the pathos of Mihyang’s regret an owned, personalized affect that coexists with Hanjung’s stoicism. Collectively, the scene represents a masculine national subjectivity that tries to contain its negative affect by pathologizing Mihyang and her dangerous crossing of the threshold between domestic life and politics. However, Mihyang’s weeping gives expression to a deep sorrow and regret about the fate of the Korean nation under colonialism, and the virtual conjunction, or mood, of her close-ups overflows their gendered narrative and visual coding. The affection-image of her sorrow both suspends individuation and personalizes affect. As much as the film tries to articulate a pure national community out of the melodramatic contrasts between its four main characters, such scenes express a mood of melancholy and frame national identity as an irretrievable object. That Hanjung eventually searches for Mihyang’s tomb and dies at the

moment of liberation points further to this negative confluence of past, present, and future in this version of national identity.

The history and fate of the film in Cold War South Korea provides another layer to its problematic position as an origin point for postcolonial Korean national cinema. The existing film was both damaged and edited severely at various points: the time of its production, during the Korean War, and when it was “restored” in 1975.³⁰ Kim Su-nam’s research into the film documents, through comparison with the original screenplay, which scenes were left unmade at the time of the film’s production, which were likely destroyed during the Korean War, and which were deleted for the 1975 version. The existing film is twenty-four scenes shorter than the original screenplay.³¹ Nearly forty minutes of the film were lost or deleted; the largest portion disappeared from the end of the film, including the heroic death scene of the protagonist Hanjung.³² In Kim Ryō-sil’s evaluation, the original film was much more ambiguous in its politics and presented the possibility for a postcolonial unification of right and left nationalists; however, the 1975 version transformed the film into a national narrative suitable to the anticommunist nationalist perspective of the Yusin-era Park Chung Hee regime.³³ The fact that all the scenes in which the actor Tok Ŭn-gi appears as Nambu were deleted and his name taken out of the opening credits bears out Kim Ryō-sil’s assertion, as these scenes were removed simply because Tok went to North Korea after the release of the film. As Adam Hartzell points out, these deletions detract from the quality of the film and its main dramatization of resistance and collaboration.³⁴

The extant version of *Hurrah! For Freedom* opens with a subtitle stating the date when the story begins: August 1, 1945. This subtitle loses some of its historical reference in comparison to the original screenplay, because the original scenario contains scenes of the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.³⁵ In examining how the film narrates national history and liberation, this omission is significant, because such images would have asked the audience to consider the violence through which the United States contributed to the liberation of East Asia from Japanese colonial rule. The precise reasons for the omission of these scenes are unknown; they could have included a lack of available stock images or the technical capacity to reproduce them. Kim Ryō-sil speculates that the United States of America Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) may have demanded the deletion of these scenes in 1946. Other significant scenes that were left out at the time of filming *Hurrah! For Freedom* include many that would have served to deepen the love-triangle story involving the protagonist Hanjung, the nurse Hyeja, and Mihyang.³⁶ These scenes include a dream sequence in which Hyeja (Hwang Ryō-hŭi) imagines marrying Hanjung, as well as further scenes of her nursing him back to health. Further action scenes of Hanjung’s escape from prison and chase scenes that were to be filmed at night were also left out due to technical and financial limitations. The various versions of *Hurrah! For Freedom*—from the original screenplay to the heavily censored 1975 version—tell one

complex story of the cinematic representation of South Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule. Many of the omissions and deletions affect only the visual pleasure of the film and are not explicitly political. However, other erasures explicitly contribute to reducing the narrative of the colonial conflict to one between those who remained loyal to the nation and those who betrayed it. In other words, censorship and revision have eliminated most of the elements of melodramatic counterpoint, despite the political complexity of the film artists' own past work during the colonial period.

Censorship was only an aid to the simplification of the film's narrative of Korean liberation. In both the original screenplay and the extant version, several narrative conventions are employed that suggest important continuities with colonial period filmmaking (including Ch'oe In-gyu's own work). One can speculate that Ch'oe In-gyu's own career as a propagandist for Japan affected his realization of Ch'ŏn Ch'ang-gŭn's script and that the cinematography of the conservative Han Hyung-mo (Han Hyung-mo) influenced its version of masculinist national identity. In order to explore the translatability of cinematic conventions as they pertain to the politics of liberation, one can compare *Hurrah! For Freedom* to late colonial-period films, with reference to classical Hollywood film form. The comparison with classical Hollywood may seem ahistorical, considering that Hollywood films were banned in the Japanese empire between 1938 and 1945. However, in the late Japanese empire, narrative and formal techniques of Hollywood were explicitly appropriated, transformed, and employed in film melodramas supporting the Japanese empire. *Hurrah! For Freedom* does not adhere precisely to all the narrational principles that David Bordwell puts forward concerning classical Hollywood cinema, but three aspects certainly pertain: individual psychology, linear causality, and the double causal structure of public mission and heterosexual romance.³⁷ Many colonial-period films, such as *Korea Strait*, were written and edited according to these two lines of action. *Korea Strait* (dir. Pak Ki-ch'ae, 1943) shows the public mission of the male protagonist Seiki's joining the Japanese military and the female protagonist Kinshuku's joining the textile factory as a resolution to their class differences, their family conflicts, and their illegitimate child. Like *Hurrah! For Freedom*, such late-colonial-period films are also marked by an excess of melancholic mood and suffering beyond the bounds of what could be redeemed by the glory of the state.

In her reading of the late-colonial-period film *Volunteer* (dir. An Sŏg-yŏng, 1941), Yi Yŏng-jae argues that the protagonist Ch'unho's depression exists prior to the beginning of the story and is not simply a matter of his disappointment about not being able to become a volunteer in the Japanese military.³⁸ Yi discusses Freud's concept of melancholy, in which the lost object is internalized and its identity obscured, as a pervasive mood in late-colonial-period films because of the lasting disappointment and shock of not being able to found a Korean state. These melancholic moods might also be attributed to the reticence on the part of Korean filmmakers to represent the process of becoming Japanese as an easy proposition

emotionally and politically. Why does an independence film such as *Hurrah! For Freedom* carry a similar melancholic mood into the postcolonial historical context? Certainly, Cold War division and continued occupation by the United States and the Soviet Union are factors, but equally important are the conventions of gendered narrative, subjectivity, and space that Ch'oe In-gyu, for example, continued to employ in his film style. Moods of melancholy in cinema of course can adumbrate an eventual recovery of the lost object that has been internalized as loss, inspiring patriotism. However, the continuation of the melancholic mood in cinema of the liberation period suggests that the affect of loss still precedes the beginning of the cinematic narrative for both character and audience and is the film's structuring mood. The moral occult of postcolonial nation-building through cinema defines the object that must be retrieved (the nation) through the repetition of gendered conventions and representational spaces that also appear in Japanese imperial cinema. The varied affects of loss and anxiety in both art moods and human moods are not directly attached to specific lost objects such as the nation, and the project of coding of affect into national consciousness is always an incomplete one, regardless of the surface messaging of cinematic narratives and discourses.

Hurrah! For Freedom is a post-liberation film working through the meaning of the prior period, but it does so by borrowing its cinematic conventions. Hanjung's story of heroism is also told through the double causal structure, and its mood also remains ambivalent about the possibility of reconciling the public mission with heterosexual romance in the formation of a national community. Although the goal of national liberation is clearly his most urgent motivation, the heterosexual romantic triangle between Hanjung, Hyeja, and Mihyang is an important second plot line. The intertwining of these two plot lines ends up being crucial to the film's narrative causality and the most important source of political and social meaning. Although the male characters Hanjung and Nambu are pitted against one another in the fashion of melodrama—the naturally loyal Korean versus the evil collaborator—the female character Mihyang, with her overly sentimental and confused sense of love and politics, brings the two men together in conflict and unwittingly causes injury to the hero despite her better intentions. In this way, the first half of the film articulates its political stance—that liberation is primarily a matter of distinguishing resistant Korean masculinity from collaborationist Japanese masculinity—by displacing the uncertainty about the political situation onto Mihyang and her vacillating female desire. Even as the good woman, Hyeja, passes messages and helps Hanjung to escape from the hospital toward the end of the film, her primary motivation is not nationalism but her love and respect for the hero Hanjung. In other words, the double causal structure is accompanied by gender norms that allow for displacements between the public and private conflicts and a gendering of ideal national subjectivity as masculine.

In keeping with the double causal structure of its narrative, *Hurrah! For Freedom* uses the interior of buildings in order to articulate a mood that emphasizes

both the division between and the dangerous interpenetration of public and private life. While Mihyang's apartment might still be dangerous despite that scene's slapstick comedy, the home of the younger Hyeja is presented as a completely safe haven from the political conflict. One of the more formally interesting scenes is Hanjung's visit to her home. It begins with a two-shot in which Hyeja states her sympathy for another arrested revolutionary and a close-up of her expressing fear that Hanjung sees her only as a little girl. This is followed by shots of Hanjung studying and Hyeja lying down and writing in her journal before bed, with the presence of her sister providing a buffer. The page reads, "He isn't my brother or my teacher. Then what is he? He's so brusque and he didn't even see the flowers I brought him. His awareness..." At that moment Hanjung notices the flowers and interrupts her to thank her for them; she crosses out the thoughts on the page and rips up the paper. The camera lingers on her bowed head and although she does not speak, she lifts her head and expresses a mix of love and pain, a mute desire and repression common to melodrama. The presence of her mother in the house and their intimate conversations highlight her innocence and her morality, in contrast to Mihyang's life as a single woman with conflicted desires. This scene establishes Hyeja's family house as an apolitical space where moral goodness and feminine affection protect the hero from the dangers of his public mission.

The articulation of the Korean nation-people was tied to the general cinematic conventions of melodrama, as well as the colonial past, particularly through the narrative and spatial representation of gender difference. *Hurrah! For Freedom* began to establish in film the binary of resistance and collaboration, which would remain one primary way to solidify Korean ethnic national identity in South Korea through the representation of the colonial period and the stoking of anti-Japanese sentiment. It takes up the tendency of late colonial period films to incorporate techniques and conventions of classical Hollywood to depict conflict, suspense, action, and counterpoint. It does so in order to dramatize the psychological and political conflict between resisters and collaborators, which is at once an internal psychological conflict projected onto the female characters and an external political conflict between good and evil. In terms of film form, liberation can be understood first as a narrative form tied to the temporality and mood of melodrama. In order to represent national liberation, one must first represent oppression, the negation of national identity, and the conflict between the imperial and colonial nations. Then the national people appear, overcoming this state of oppression through the exercise of their political will. However, in *Hurrah! For Freedom*, there is a perceptible ambivalence about this narrative of overcoming, because the film's production and consumption remain haunted by the external circumstances that brought about liberation, including the violence of US warfare and neocolonialism. They are also haunted by the specter of collaboration, which the film displaces by strategically representing gender difference and constructing masculinity.

MODE AND MOOD ACROSS GENRES

One aspect of building a national cinema through the melodramatic mode that was not emphasized as frequently in film theories of the time but was clearly a concern in film production was the development of multiple genres through which the melodramatic mode could give expression to national history and identity. Genres such as *sagük* (period drama)—for example, *Chunhyang* (dir. Yi Myöng-u, 1935)—and the Western—for example, *Suicide Squad at the Watchtower* (dir. Imai Tadashi and Chöe In-gyu, 1943)—already developed during the colonial period. During the construction of a South Korean film industry after liberation, and particularly during the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s, genres diversified further with the emergence, as well as the mixing, of the musical, the war film, the horror film, the comedy, and the family drama. Based on the idea that Korean national cinema had to reach wide and diverse audiences through a democratic cinema culture, the establishment of genres opened up multiple worlds, narratives, chronotopes, and media through which moviegoers could experience the shared sentiments of national consciousness. For many genre films, it was the trans-genre melodramatic mode that connected the genre to the larger ideological project of national cinema, as well as the ambivalent and melancholic mood of postcolonial translation. These emergent industrial genres showcased the modernity of Korean national cinema, but the incorporation of the melodramatic mode allowed for the expression of anxiety and melancholy toward the postcolonial state's embrace of the modern development of industrial and communications technologies (e.g., sound recording, aviation, and cinema itself).³⁹

Two partially extant films of the late 1940s, the musical *Blue Hill* (dir. Yu Tong-il, 1948) and the biopic *Pilot An Ch'angnam* (dir. No P'il, 1949) show the trans-genre and modal quality of melodramatic moods within the process of constructing a Korean national cinema. *Blue Hill* is a musical that represents the music industry, and therefore is self-reflexive about music production and the genre of the musical itself. The story follows a young man from the countryside, Hyönin, who achieves great success as a singer in Seoul after winning a singing competition. From the thirty-five minutes of the film that still exist, it seems all the musical sequences of the film occur in theaters; however, these musical sequences are integrated into the diegesis because of the story's focus on musicians and the music industry. One remarkable scene moves from Hyönin's live performance to documentary-style shots of the factory where they are mass-producing the vinyl recording of the song. The continuation of the sound of the live performance over the images of the mass production of the recording brings the process of sound production into the diegesis of the film, emphasizing the multiple technologies involved in the emerging South Korean cultural industry's intermediality. Representing sound recording across cinema and musical production within the genre of the musical creates the type of synergy between sight and sound and their technological

mediation that theorists of the total work of art imagined necessary in the cinematic creation of a national cinema in both South and North Korea.

Having many of the typical qualities of the musical, including music and dance spectacles that break up the linear plot, the mode of *Blue Hill* remains melodrama. The degree to which the national in cinema was tied to and expressed through the melodramatic mode and its melancholic mood is apparent in that it was not only the dominant mode of liberation films that directly represented anticolonial movements but also such genre films concerned with the development of national culture through the technologies of mass media. The story takes up a conventional plot line of melodrama: a protagonist moves from the countryside to the city and enters a love triangle with a conniving urban modern girl and a humble, traditional, and virtuous young woman from his hometown. As in later films such as *Madame Freedom* (dir. Han Hyung-mo, 1956) and *A Flower in Hell* (*Chiokhwa*, dir. Shin Sang-ok, 1958), female figures as objects of desire are split between the modern and traditional through costuming, their association with urban or rural landscapes, and their behaviors. The nation-form as an idea of community is inherently caught between modern mass culture, one of its conditions of possibility, and the invented traditions that appear threatened by that very modernity and are essential to a notion of shared origins (or, in Balibar's term, "fictive ethnicity").⁴⁰ The melodramatic mode dramatizes this internal contradiction within the idea of the nation (and national cinema) by introducing a play of surface and depth that is a matter of both gender ("woman" as fetish object shifting back and forth between the twin objects of androcentric nationalist desire, modernity and tradition) and melancholic mood (a way of attunement that expresses that time and space may remain forever fissured, that community and individuality will continue indefinitely to arrive late to their destinations). Hyönin gets engaged to his rural love interest and gives up on both the glory and the potential for moral corruption in urban modernity, but the bittersweet mood of loss and nostalgia is not entirely assuaged.

The modern girl goes so far as to pay to have Hyönin kidnapped to prevent him from performing and leaving her for the other woman. The negative melancholy of the love story is expressed both in the action of the modern girl's revenge and in the way the countryside and home village serve as objects of loss and nostalgia. The mood is expressed in the various musical numbers. It is also directed self-reflexively toward the very genre of the musical as a translated cultural form and to the uneasy incorporation of this genre into national cinema. The clearest point of melodramatic tension is between the visual and sonic celebration of the modern technology that enables amplification, radio broadcasting, and recording in the music industry—not to mention cinema—and the negative and dehumanizing effects that the social relations of modernity have on Hyönin. He frequently contemplates an image of Beethoven on his wall when he is remembering his original innocent desire to become a musician, but industrial capitalism and the

modern culture industry threaten that innocence. In an experimental scene of a picnic, Hyōnin gets drunk with the modern girl, and they meet an indigent man. Through a remarkable sequence of dissolves between a close-up of the man's face from Hyōnin's point of view and images of the man's memories, Hyōnin sees the man's life story—he was a famous singer but became addicted to opium and ended up poor and homeless. The scene uses the visualization of memory and its visual superimposition with the present in order to create a melancholic mood of lost innocence and lost opportunity. Like the film's narrative arc of hopeful urban migration followed by a return to tradition through marriage, the future-oriented cultural development enabled by visual and sonic technologies and the mourning of lost cultural and social signifiers are interwoven.

This melancholic and melodramatic take on the musical genre emphasizes self-reflexively that the genre belongs to the institutions of the culture industry and its commercial orientation. Like *Hurrah! for Freedom*, it genders the time and space of the diegesis and creates a mood of lost innocence in order to pose the problem of whether translated technologies, forms, and genres can give shape to an autonomous postcolonial national cinema. The melodramatic mode and its moods allow for the localization of the musical because they emphasize the tension between the genre and the local national context; they also broaden the scope of national cinema beyond explicit liberation films, diversifying the generic signifiers through which to stage problems of modernity and tradition relevant to the contradictory trajectories of national culture—one toward the future and the other toward the past. The colonial-period film *Spring of the Korean Peninsula* (*Pando ūi pom*, dir. Yi Pyōng-il, 1941) concerns the efforts of artists to produce a film version of the folktale Chunhyang under conditions of colonialism and touches on recording and stardom in the music industry, also dealing self-reflexively with the problem of the reproducibility of tradition. In that film, the formation of the Peninsula Film Production Corporation (a reference to the historical Chosŏn Film Production Corporation) allows the directors and music producers to complete their projects; however, the protagonist falls ill notably and does not appear in the propagandistic scene of the founding of the company. As Kyung Hyun Kim points out, through the film-within-a-film device, it introduces complex questions about nationality and film capital, and it uses scenes of illness to critique the image of the healthy male body as the dominant symbol for imperial subjectivity.⁴¹ Although made after liberation from Japanese colonial rule, *Blue Hill* does not depict a culture industry liberated from political, economic, and moral turmoil; rather, it expresses a similar ambivalence toward industrial cultures and genres through self-reflexivity about the musical genre and a focus on the moral problem of the commodification of music culture and music stars.

Pilot An Chàngnam uses the biopic genre to accomplish a similar broadening of national cinema through the melodramatic mode, presenting the violence of Japanese colonial rule and a mixed mood of anxiety and the sublime concerning



FIGURE 15. Pilot An Ch'angnam, played by Myŏng Yu-jŏng, in the cockpit (1949).

the technologies of colonial modernity. Based on the life story of the first aviator in Korean history, An Ch'ang-nam (Myŏng Yu-jŏng), the film creates Korean national sentiment by depicting An's experiences of ethnic discrimination and harassment at the Okuri Aviation School in Japan. Like later biopics of North Korea (e.g., *An Jung Gun Shoots Ito Hirobumi*, 1979) and South Korea (e.g., *The Life of Na Un-gyu*, *Na Un-gyu ilsaeng*, dir. Mu-ryong Choi, 1966), *Pilot An Ch'angnam* represents the struggles and triumphs of a national hero of the Japanese colonial period. An is beaten and suspended from the aviation school for a semester when he is falsely accused of injuring a Japanese student during a drill. After returning to work as a milk deliveryman with his humble wooden cart, he returns and becomes Korea's first licensed pilot in 1920 (figure 15). Based on An's real-life biography, the lost second half of the film likely goes on to show his return to Korea and his participation in the Korean independence movement in China.

A biopic need not be nationalist, but the genre does lend itself to celebrating or working through the events of national history through the life of a historical personality. The result is a simplification of history. As Belén Vidal states, in the biopic, "Personality and point of view become the conduit of history in stories that often boil down complex social processes to gestures of individual agency."⁴² As with the fictional protagonists of *Hurrah! For Freedom*, there is a refraction of politics and history through individual psychology and identity, but because the stories are based on a real historical personality, the genre of the biopic carries

a stronger aura of verisimilitude and truth. The melodramatic representation of emotional and bodily pain caused by colonial discrimination and physical violence, as well as An's overcoming that discrimination in order to best his Japanese classmates and eventually dedicate himself to the anti-colonial struggle, creates powerful allegorical and sentimental connections between the experiences of one historical personality and the experiences of the national community as a whole.

Pilot An Ch'angnam has many long takes of airplanes flying above, including trainings and An's aerial demonstrations. Although the airplanes are not contemporary to the late 1940s, these shots of modern technology against a blank clear sky present a version of the technological sublime and celebrate An's skill as the first Korean pilot.⁴³ These shots—along with images of bodily training, technological education, and An's development of superior engineering skills—show industrial modernity and science as essential aspects of nation-building. Although Japan is the conduit for the transfer of technology, modernity, and education, An's Japanese classmates bully him mentally and physically and also get him suspended. Later, during a nationalist event for Korean students, the police intervene and stop a musical performance. An is arrested after he leads the crowd in pushing out the police and chanting "Manse!" and a collaborationist Korean investigator who previously offered to help him with his suspension tells him that "shouting Manse must put you in an exhilarating mood, but it's useless." Therefore, the film shows the contradictions of colonial modernity, which offers the means of technological and scientific development but also assimilates collaborators and subjects the colonized to ethnic discrimination and violence.

The melodramatic mode and the mood of melancholy are important for conveying these contradictions, which also pertain to the relationship between South Korean nation-building and the US occupation at the time of production. After his suspension, An is forced to return to humble subsistence work. A close-up tracking shot of the wheels of An's wooden milk cart highlights the gap in technology between the means of a colonial Korean migrant student and the airplanes that he came to Japan to master. An bemoans his unfair treatment to two Korean friends, an elderly benefactor and his daughter, making explicit the conflict between Japan's control over technology and its colonial discrimination. The melodramatic representation of this problem of colonial modernity manifests the haunting of the nation by the prosthetic technologies of the colonial state, which are necessary for its modernization, and the haunting of the colonial state by its violence toward its colonies. In this respect, the themes and moods of the film also belong to the *late* 1940s, when a new occupying power (the United States) and its neo-colonial nation-state (the Republic of Korea) were making technologized violence an endemic part of their postcolonial, anticommunist state formation. The biopic genre provided a way to bring the colonial past into the historical present through allegory, distilling the broad social, political, and economic processes of colonialism and imperialism into a melodramatic story of a heroic individual's

encountering modernity and surmounting of discrimination. *Blue Hill* and *Pilot An Chàngnam* show that the formation of genres was another example of the role of the translation of convention in the formation of national cinema, and such translation entailed an alienation from origins and identity that found expression through melodrama.

REIMAGINING ORIGINS

The problem of translation in modernity is a matter of signification, sentiment, and origins. Translation theory is concerned in some fashion with how arbitrary signs come to refer to culturally specific objects and affects through a slippery binary between the domestic and the foreign. Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida showed how modern ideas about language and translation are inherently involved in the problem of origins.⁴⁴ How can human communities be understood to have a shared origin if the signification of shared origins always involves translation, a process of mimicry and repetition? Foucault approaches the problem of origins in modern thought through a genealogy that shows how and at what time this seemingly transhistorical concern actually emerged. Derrida discusses the logic of supplementarity, in which a master-signifier comes to occupy the absence at the ground of signification, providing an illusion of systematicity to the human and its origin. I have been arguing that in the formation of a national cinema, cinema represents the dynamic process of mimicry and repetition—translation—as a transfer of meaning between two coherent signifying systems. In the language of national cinema in South Korea in the late 1940s, a liberation film cannot be fruitfully compared to an imperial Japanese film because they are presumed to belong to two different systems of signification. And yet, when we see the postcolonial film as repeating formal and affective aspects of the late Japanese film industry rather than superseding it dialectically, then it becomes clear that the notion of a shared origin of the signifying system—Korean national cinema—is itself self-differentiating in the process of translation through which it is constituted. This is the case as much for national cinema as it is for national language.

Hurrah! For Freedom shows how the problem of national origins in early South Korean cinema is caught up in gendered and spatialized metaphors of authentic national subjectivity and its struggle against moral and political corruption, a conflict played out within a general mood of melancholy. The articulation of gender difference in the service of establishing an image of origins in nationalism and national cinema is extensive, from the foundational American white supremacist myth of needing to defend innocent white women against black male violence in *The Birth of a Nation* (dir. D. W. Griffith, 1915) to the depiction of humble and moral Hindu motherhood as the center of national consciousness in *Mother India* (dir. Mehboob Khan, 1957).

In contrast to national melodramas that represent women as the bearers of tradition, *A Hometown in the Heart* stands out as a remarkable artistic meditation on

origins, community, and motherhood at a time when the gender conventions used to produce South Korean national cinema through the melodramatic mode were still nascent. The film is set in a mountain temple where a boy, Tosöng (Yu Min), was abandoned by his mother at the age of three, visiting him only once, when he was seven. He is now twelve years old and will train to be a monk. Although the film utilizes the more typical orchestral music of melodrama in some scenes, it begins with meditative silence as the camera pans across the mountain landscape and then the beautiful temple. It is morning and a monk walks through the corridors striking a drum. Tosöng rings the massive temple bell, which reverberates loudly through the forest. After a couple more empty shots of the temple, the scene cuts-in to the monks chanting and striking a temple block in front of a statue of the Buddha. The meditative atmosphere of the opening of the film, with the natural and direct sounds of the temple, creates a subdued mood that contrasts with the opening chase scene of *Hurrah! For Freedom* or the opening depiction of familial conflict in *Sweet Dream* or *Madame Freedom*. After establishing its meditative mood, a temple worker discovers Tosöng measuring his height against a tree, and they discuss the main conflict. Tosöng tells a temple worker that the worker lied to him because he has grown bigger but his mother has not returned for him as the worker said she would.

This scene creates a mood of intense sympathy and melancholy and sets up all the conditions for the unfolding of a more typical reunification narrative in which an abandoned child struggles to return to his mother, a story line to which multiple layers of allegorical meaning could be applied. However, this film is concerned not with such a symbolic return but with meditating on the meaning of the sign of mother in a context of detachment. Detachment is not only a matter of the secluded setting and the representations of Buddhist meditation but also the rendering of hometown (*kohyang*) as an internal state or desire rather than a substantial space or fixed object of nostalgia. When a widow (Chöe Ŭn-hŭi) comes from Seoul to the temple with her mother, Tosöng begins associating her with his mother, who has yet to return for him. We find out that the tragedy of the death of the widow's husband has been compounded by the death of her young son from measles. Tosöng's desire for the widow to become his mother puts into tension Buddhist practices of detachment from desire and the abandoned Tosöng's irrepressible need for maternal love. As he sits with the monks chanting from a book of sutras, a point of view shot from his perspective shows the widow appearing on the pages of his book, encircled by an iris. This use of the widow's superimposed image creates a contrapuntal idea and mood common to melodrama: detachment coexisting with desire. The contrast between the moral occult and the excess of affect in this shot has an intellectual resonance. The image presents a melodramatic tension between detachment and desire, between the moral demand that the priest places on Tosöng to overcome his bad karma through meditation and prayer, and Tosöng's heartbreaking desire to be nurtured. The moral problem of bad karma is emphasized by the neighboring children getting in trouble with the



FIGURE 16. In *A Hometown in the Heart* (1949), Tosong dreams of reuniting with his mother, here represented by the surrogate widow who wishes to adopt him.

head priest and temple workers for shooting birds on the temple grounds, and Tosong gets embroiled in that conflict when he gets caught by the head priest after shooting a turtledove in order to make a feathered fan for the widow, one that would match his biological mother's.

The iris returns later when Tosong dreams that the widow is his mother and returns to the temple to take him back. The dream ends badly when he slips on the rocks and the widow walks ahead; the iris goes blurry, and he wakes from the dream. The use of the iris creates a feeling of concentrated claustrophobia and conveys Tosong's fixation on the widow as a surrogate mother (figure 16). It presents the perspective of a child—limited, framed, and encircled, unable to see the broader picture that might allow him to understand how his mother came to abandon him or why the widow cannot adopt him immediately and take him to Seoul. When his biological mother does return to the temple for Buddhist rites of departure, she explains to the widow that she came from poverty, lost her parents early on, and ran away with a hunter, abandoning Tosong at the temple. Meanwhile, the widow tells her mother and then the head priest about wanting to adopt Tosong, but her mother tells her she needs to forget about the death of her son and not try to replace him. And the head priest thinks that the boy needs to overcome the bad karma of his mother before returning to the wider world. The conflict between the child's and the widow's innocent desires for the ideal of motherhood and the Buddhist worldview of karma and detachment is a melodramatic dilemma. As Juhn Ahn shows, the film's source text, Ham Se-dök's play composed in 1939 and published as *Young Monk* in 1947, imagines the boy's struggle to reunite with his

mother as an allegory for universal class struggle; on the other hand, the director Yun Yong-gyu reinterpreted the allegory as a struggle for national sovereignty.⁴⁵ Considering their politics, it is not surprising that both artists went to North Korea, where Yun Yong-gyu made *The Newlyweds*, discussed in chapter 2.

The allegorical dimension of the film exhibits what Linda Williams describes, in her reading of *Stella Dallas* (dir. King Vidor, 1937), as “the device of devaluing and debasing the actual figure of the mother while sanctifying the institution of motherhood,” which she states is typical of the “woman’s film” of this period.⁴⁶ After other guests at an upper-class resort mock Stella for her working-class and garish version of high style, she debases herself in an act of self-sacrifice. Despite loving her daughter Laurel more than anyone, she acts dismissively toward Laurel and pretends to marry the boorish and indigent Mr. Munn. She does this to ensure that Laurel will go to live with her father and the wealthy widow Mrs. Morrison; the film ends with her watching Laurel’s wedding through the window, proud that she has improved her daughter’s economic situation. Both *A Hometown in the Heart* and *Stella Dallas* “sanctify motherhood” while “devaluing and debasing” mother figures, who abandon their children and show themselves unfit. At the same time, the patriarchs (Mr. Dallas and the head monk) misunderstand Stella and the widow as an immoral biological mother and an unworthy surrogate, respectively. Melodramatic counterpointing between the surface social readings of their actions and their true and pure intentions establishes the moral occult of the films on a foundation of misrecognition. Motherhood can be valorized only by simultaneously questioning a society that can only partially recognize its ideal form in actual mother figures. Both films are aware of this moral conundrum, despite their conservative values, and *A Hometown in the Heart* in particular ends up questioning the way that the allegories of patriarchal nationalism transform motherhood into an allegory for national development and reproduction.

Therefore, despite the melodramatic allegories of class struggle or national liberation told through a celebration of motherhood and a debasing of mothers in *A Hometown in the Heart*, these conventions are attenuated by other aspects. Its setting and its Buddhist themes prevent these allegories from finding closure through the gendering of space common to other films of the period.⁴⁷ The doubling of the figures of motherhood beyond the constraints of the biological nuclear family and the displacement of the hometown away from a substantial rural storehouse of nostalgia and memory to a more conflicted temple environment and eventually to the very psyche or heart (*maŭm*) of Tosöng counterpoint the concern with returning to an authentic maternal origin with meditations on detachment and surrogacy. There is certainly an appeal to motherhood at the center of the film’s gendered allegory of origins, care, and sympathy. However, neither the widow nor the biological mother ends up taking in Tosöng and reestablishing a stable image of motherhood or family. The two mothers meet and decide that the widow should take him; however, after the head priest finds out that Tosöng has

shot the turtledove, he will not let him go. After finding out that his biological mother had already returned once, Tosŏng decides to travel to Seoul himself. As he walks down the mountain path, he turns briefly when he hears the chime of the temple bell, but then continues down the path. In contrast to earlier point-of-view shots using the iris, which visualize the limited and fixated fantasies and dreams of a child, the film ends with a point-of-view shot of the valley below. Tosŏng has come of age and become the subject of his own landscape, moving beyond the space of the temple and no longer in immediate need of a mother's nurturing.

If any existing film of late 1940s South Chosŏn lives up to An Chŏr-yŏng's call for conscientious and artistic films that move past the colonial-period manipulation of the public sentiment of sorrow through the use of melodramatic dilemmas, it would be *A Hometown in the Heart*. Both visually and narratively, the film does not merely translate the conventions of the gendered fictions of late-colonial-period films, transforming the imagery and storytelling strategies used to convey to Koreans the possibilities of Japanese imperial subjectivity into the independence film. It begins with an allegorical reflection on the fundamental problem of the gendered desire to return to an origin and the possibility or impossibility of detaching oneself, particularly as a child, from that worldly and eventually ideological dilemma. Therefore, even though it is set in the deep mountains, the film presents a mood in which to meditate on the crisis of modernity and to see that melodrama, as well as national cinema, need not always insist on the possibility of a redemption of innocence, revenge and punishment against evil, or any of the other ways that fictions close themselves off from complex social realities.