

Realism and Melodrama in the Golden Age

Despite melodrama's simplified moral allegories, in the aftermath of the Korean War South Korean filmmakers found ways to use melodrama to represent deeper and more complex social structures, as well as the historical experiences and traumatic memories of their audiences.¹ The social issues that emerged during the end of Syngman Rhee's rule (1948–1960), the April 19 Uprising and Second Republic (1960–61), and the Third Republic of the Park Chung Hee era (1961–1972) affected film melodrama. Urbanization and the formation of the nuclear family and attendant ideas of economic and political modernization influenced ideas of moral authenticity, economic rationality, innocence, and virtue in family dramas. The trauma of the Korean War and its catastrophic military and civil violence produced deeply ambivalent and self-contradictory feelings about state subjectivity, feelings that were worked through in melodramas focused on the war, war veterans, and war widows. Anticommunism expanded from state and military ideology to a broadly influential cultural form, including in cinema. In confronting these social and ideological conditions, cinema often took up melodrama at cross-purposes—to translate the negative affects connected to collective history into individual emotions and sentiments useful for moral allegory and instrumental political ends but simultaneously to provoke pathos and sympathy in order to reveal social injustices, exploitative social structures, and the inadequacy of South Korean state projects in addressing the collective problems of the nation.

In the South Korean golden age, situating the body mode of melodrama between ideology and historical referentiality linked realism directly to the haptic impact and memorability of cinematic image and sound. In order to explicate the complexity of the question of realism, I work through some theories of cinematic realism presented in South Korea leading up to and during the golden age. One early statement by Yi Yŏng-jun, “The Problem of Realism in Cinema” (1947), argued

for haptic realism.² For Yi, the touch of a film produces a sense of actuality that is essential to its claims to refer to real history. However, he describes this touch as also excessive, as an affect not fully contained by narrative and discourse. Haptic realism did not only entail raw affect and was often accompanied by the moral or political coding of affect in the form of narrative or discourse; however, affects and their coding were often in conflict. The melodramatic moods that served as the background of and ontological attunement to the film's diegesis were internally contrapuntal, such that the individual scenes and segments of a film expressed multiple interpretations of the negative affects attached to historical experiences. Therefore, the moral occult of the melodramatic scenario should not be conflated with the totality of historical actuality that a film purports to represent. In film melodrama, the affects of the cinematic image and sound are situated between the haptic and discourses attributing meaning and ownership to those affects. The confluence of the two can direct attention simultaneously to the most abstract or othering of ideological positions, as well as to an explication of complex and underlying social structures.

In order to capture the contrapuntal relation between realism and melodrama, it is useful to focus on those images (or themes or problems) that present both raw affect and sociohistorical reference. One image that lends itself to both heightened sentimentality and social critique is the family. Although film industries and film studies often speak of family drama, never does one use the term family realism. This suggests that family has mostly been an affective and imaginary category, one that draws out the embodied emotions of spectators rather than appealing to a sense of verisimilitude. However, the family can also serve as a microcosm of the social, because cinema can connect the intense affects created by the representation of familial relations to other larger social formations, such as the nation-state. The conflict of scale between the family and the nation-state that it is made to represent was an important problem of realism and melodrama during the golden age. The second such image discussed in this chapter is the image of poverty. The ways that films depicted poverty varied from radical social critique to ideologies of economic development, to nearly exploitative images of poverty (for which the pleasurable feeling of cathartic sympathy was an end in itself). Interpreting these various ways of representing poverty allows one to track the dual impulse in melodramatic films toward morality plays focused on *homo economicus* (or the human as household economic actor) and a realist concern with larger social structures. Finally, the ideology of anticommunism was both a constellation of affects provoked and organized through cinematic sight and sound, as well as a real political and historical phenomenon that touches on tragic and traumatic experiences and events (such as divisions between relatives and friends, the fear of totalitarian state violence, regimes of censorship, and military and police atrocities). Due to ambivalent feelings about anticommunist culture and politics among popular audiences

and the way that cinema is never entirely coded by political intention, the aesthetics and ideology of South Korean anticommunist films were by no means uniform.

VICISSITUDES OF REALISM

In her account of the discourses of realism in early South Korean film criticism, Kim So-yŏn shows that ideas of realism changed greatly between the 1940s and the 1950s. In the colonial period and in the late 1940s, socialist critics, some of whom were later influential for the development of the North Korean film industry (e.g., Im Hwa and Sŏ Kwang-je), argued that proletarian realism should be grounded in dialectical materialism and represent the actuality (*hyŏnsil*) of the lives of workers.³ In late 1940s South Korea, critics in the Korean Film Alliance emphasized the ideological content of films or, when critics such as An Sŏk-chu discussed film form, they advocated Soviet-style montage as an expression of historical actuality. However, with the influx of Italian neorealism in post-Korean War 1950s and the solidification of anticommunist ideology, the dominant idea of realism became “Korean realism,” a nationalist idea of realism resistant to the notion of film as entertainment and serving the political and cultural purpose of enlightening the masses. Yi Yŏng-il would eventually ground this elitist idea of national realism in art cinema. Kim So-yŏn writes,

The realism that emerged “anew” in South Korea in the late 1950s under the strong influence of neorealism was an aesthetic strategy in an era of crisis to prevent films from devolving into a means of entertainment that pacifies the masses, a political strategy in a time of ideological suppression to present actuality as it is, and a discursive strategy to guarantee the legitimacy of Korean cinema since Na Un-gyu’s *Arirang*. Therefore, working with the critical standard called “realism” meant that film would become an art that could enlighten the masses, become a resistant power that could protect democratic values even in the form of right-wing ideas, and continue the tradition of national realism in Korean cinema.⁴

It is important to recognize this transition from proletarian realism to national realism in South Korean film criticism and the concomitant shifts in the dominant idea of actuality. However, there are two continuities between proletarian realism, the Korean adaptation of neorealism, and the eventual development of Korean realism: (1) the centrality of affect for conceptualizing cinema’s representation of actuality and (2) the way that ideas—whether Marxian or Enlightenment—structured the concept of actuality. I argue that the continued emphasis on affect and its capacity to express ideology in various realisms indicates that the power of the melodramatic mode persisted throughout this period, despite the criticism of melodrama as popular entertainment shared by both 1940s leftists and later advocates of a nationalist art cinema. Ideas of actuality may have changed, but there was a continuous and shifting tension between melodramatic affect, with its

capacity to convey moral and political ideas in excess of reality, and the realistic representation of historical conditions.

Although the claims about realism and montage by leftists in the 1940s may seem far afield from melodrama, which we associate with continuity editing and fictional narrative cinema, we have already seen in the North Korean case how montage and melodrama share a dependency on the affection-image. Leftist ideas about the relationship between film and historical actuality—particularly between the affective impact of cinema and its capacity to refer to the audience's historical experiences—established cinematic realism as a problem for South Korean film theory and production. Even if directors concerned with class issues, exploitation, migration, poverty, war memories, and other social issues during the golden age did not and could not profess Marxist positions, the Korean Film Alliance and other leftists of the late 1940s did influence the perception that cinema should engage socially with an ethos of realism. If the film industry was to engage with the real experiences of audiences and potentially have broad social and ideological effects, some kind of relationship between social reality and the dominant mode had to be established. Ideas about montage provided one theoretical articulation of the affective mediation between the two.

Some theories of realism were based at once in the indexical relation between photographic images and objects and the world-building capacity of montage. Yi Chông-gi argued in "Film and Actuality" (1948) that film is the most actual of art forms and is therefore the least artistic; at the same time, it is not a purely photographic medium, because montage (i.e., editing) allows for the realistic expression of abstract ideas and the rendering of photographic actuality into something artistic.⁵ Although editing allows a film artist to construct a distinct world, Yi suggests that film could never be entirely art for art's sake because of its photographic connection to actuality. Combining an indexical notion of photographic realism with an Eisensteinian concern with idea-guided montage, Yi establishes a dialectic between the two, whereby the world-building capacity of montage depends on the actuality of the photographic image to prevent it from becoming completely abstract formalism and, conversely, the photographic image depends on montage to capture the role of ideas and subjectivity in history. In arguing for the ability of montage to build a world and to elevate the photographic actuality of film toward the ideas and forms of an art, Yi was grappling with how cinema can use movement, virtual chronotopes, and multiple perspectives to abstract from things as they are and actualize a truer world than what is merely given in the image. If we take montage in the broad sense of the term, to mean any kind of editing, Yi's argument is highly relevant for melodrama. If melodrama seeks "the true, wrested from the real," then melodrama, too, depends on the establishment of a social reality against which the spiritual values of the moral occult can be asserted.⁶ Film melodrama also depends on the actuality of the photographic image to moor its diegesis in the precinematic experiences of the audience and construct its referential

illusion. Simultaneously, that social reality must also appear as a threshold that has to be overcome through an assertion of hidden values and ideas—subjectivity must be confined realistically by actuality and also capable of transforming it. Although they did not take up Soviet montage, filmmakers of melodrama who were concerned with social realism made films positioned between the indexing of sociohistorical realities and the subjective dimension of world-building.

Yi Yŏng-jun clarified that the mediation between photographic realism and the world-building capacity of cinema was touch, articulating a theory of film experience as haptic realism. In “The Problem of Realism Cinema” (1947), Yi Yŏng-jun contrasts Korean works to Western works in order to imagine how to make the cinematic medium the center of arts and culture: “The works of our country largely include many narrative works such as fiction and scripts; because the works of the West include many three-dimensional expressions, including film, theater, music, and fiction, the emotional effect on the audience is bold and powerful.”²⁷ Yi Yŏng-jun’s distinction between Korean and Western works, however reductive, is part of his attempt to articulate a new mode of realist mimesis for Korean film. According to Yi, Korean works were long steeped in a culture of text, particularly of printed fiction and scripts, and therefore lacked the three-dimensional (*ipchejŏk*) capacity to move an audience that Western film, theater, and music possessed. Considering colonial Korea’s vibrant film culture and the continuation of the culture of the book in Europe and North America, Yi’s binary is not exactly accurate. However, in order to imagine a future cinematic realism for postcolonial Korea, he accentuates the embodiment, expressiveness, and performativity of modern Western works. He opens the essay with a reference to Hegel and tries to synthesize idealism and realism in his theory of cinematic representation. He frames Western works as models for how they affect the audience in an embodied and emotional manner. With the project of nation-building and subject-formation in the background of the essay, he presents these works as an ideal future for Korean works, which remain too tied to the printed word. For Yi, national culture is a social form with an origin in the putative West, and cinema is a powerful technology with the same origin, a technology that has not yet been adequately employed in Korea for the representation of social reality and the production of national subjectivity.

When Yi Yŏng-jun contrasted Korean textual traditions to the three-dimensionality of Western artistic forms, including cinema, he was asserting that the Korean arts had to begin anew through cinema and dismissing the Korean national cinema that had taken shape under Japanese colonial rule. Yi’s binary view of “the West and the Rest” should be read critically, with attention to translation and the haunting of the postcolonial nation-people and postcolonial cinema by imperialist and neocolonial forms of culture and politics; however, his focus on dimensionality is suggestive and revealing. The emphasis he and other critics put on dimensionality, photographic realism, and embodied performance in the formation of a shared actuality (*hyŏnsil*) for the national masses through cinema speaks

to the importance of cinematic space in the imagination of a shared national and social space.

Yi Yŏng-jun advocates another version of the total work of art in the context of South Chosŏn, which connects his ideas to the nascent North Korean film industry of the time. He states that it is difficult for film to live up to its promise of becoming a total work of art because it is mass-produced. Although the technologies of mass production are what enable the idea of the film artwork as something aesthetically encompassing, in contrast to the general arts, in which the three processes of artistic creation—planning, scripting, and production—are interconnected within the spiritual action of a single person, film is “extremely difficult because at the same time as it is a total work of art, the three processes of planning, scripting, and production separate and reunify until the very end.”⁸ In other words, the production of a film is a complex venture involving multiple simultaneous processes that can become autonomous from one another, detracting from the unity (and totality) of the work. Under these conditions, Yi turns to realism as the aesthetic means for integrating these processes into a total work, an aesthetic philosophy in keeping with his Hegelian understanding of national cinema. Yet despite his references to Hegel, Yi argues that realism is not obtained through idealistic abstraction or social critique. Neither is realism a matter of verisimilitude. It is rather the expression of the film artist’s worldview accomplished by moving the audience through powerful imagery and juxtapositions. Realism is a matter of affect.

Yi was concerned with how to synthesize idealism with what is real (*riarŭ*) and the power of cinema to achieve both realism and idealism by affecting the sensorium of the audience. He thought of cinema as a mode of mimesis that could use sight and sound in order to activate the sense of touch—a theory of haptic cinema. Because of its negative association with commercialism and conventionality, he did not use the term *melodrama*, but his description of haptic cinema resonates with the body mode of melodrama:

When viewing a cinematic work, in order to understand the filmmaker’s worldview according to their creative spirit and through the passivity and activity of the senses, the depictions of the film must be carried out haptically [*chŏpchŏkchŏk ŭro*]. In a film of Pudovkin, the close-ups of workers with pockmarks, the details of a noble sweating profusely, the sea looming behind a wet corpse like an ominous cloud. . . . When we recall these things, it is sufficient to consider that we hold in our hearts for a long time whatever in the work moved us because it remains with us in the form of touch.

Furthermore, touch requires change, or rather there is beauty in change. When we shut our eyes and see a sculpture belonging to the plastic arts, we would be alarmed by its changeability. In the depictions of a cinematic work as well: after a grainy close-up, a clearly sensed sky like glass; after touching wet blood that gives you goosebumps, soft white clouds like cotton. . . . The contrasts in these kinds of touch are what move us in a determinant way.

The eye that truly grasps actuality is a perspective which has dug deeply into the sense of touch. Isn’t the key to the method of descriptive realism hidden in the way it presents the expression of its images as a form of touch?⁹

Prefiguring discussions of the haptic visuality of cinema, Yi argued that in viewing a close-up of a worker's face or an image of the weather, we are not merely seeing; in hearing the accompanying sound and music, we are not merely hearing.¹⁰ For Yi, a good film touches us, meaning it affects our entire body, or, following Laura U. Marks, our entire skin.¹¹ For Yi, and not metaphorically, the memory of a film stays with someone in their chest or heart (*kasŭm*) rather than primarily in their mind. He argues that the edited juxtaposition of discontinuous images and the haptic impact that they have are particularly powerful and memorable. Therefore, realism is ensured neither by continuity editing and the bourgeois realism of classical Hollywood nor by the ontology of the photographic image but by images edited together in a way that the audience will feel touched and retain a corporeal memory of the film's most poignant scenes; such editing is often more effective when it is discontinuous and creates a moving series of juxtapositions.¹²

Yi Yŏng-jun wrote this article on realism before the establishment of the two Korean states and the Korean War. In 1947, the field of discussion of cinema in South Chosŏn included more Soviet references, and Yi holds up Pudovkin's films as exemplars of realism. However, in turning to the golden age of South Korean film in the 1950s and 1960s, one finds that Yi's idea of realism remains relevant, even if the film culture of that period was ostensibly more cut off from communist and state socialist filmmaking. One connection between this later era and Yi's idea of realism was, of course, melodrama. Melodrama was the dominant mode of the golden age due to its claims to authenticity, realism, and social relevancy. A coherent world, or cosmos, guided a melodramatic film's narrative and its affects, and therefore melodrama as a mode of representation could make the processes of planning, scripting, and production unify and cohere. At the same time, melodrama made the senses and embodied aesthetic experience the central mediation through which to present this cosmos; its authenticity was based in the capacity for sight, sound, and touch to convey the worldview of a moral occult.

What primarily defined the melodramatic mode across genres was its moods, those affective attunements that are the a priori background of narrative and discursive meaning. Mood is another way of thinking about Yi Yŏng-jun's haptic realism. It is an affective attunement to the world and has a purposeful direction and can motivate attachment to a constellation of ideas. That is why the moods of melodrama are so integral to the moral occults of Cold War ideologies. The mood accentuates the conflict between the existing situation of characters and the potential for their more authentic and truthful emotions and ideas to be brought to the surface in order to transform the world from evil toward good. The mood of a melodrama film often represents, in an embodied way, social and historical phenomena and possibilities that have no basis in the extra-cinematic social world. However, another aspect of the melodramatic mode and moods is exposing the limitations placed on subjectivity and exploring the social negativity inherent to a complex and crisis-ridden modernity. The realist impulse, particularly the social realist one prominent during the golden age, is to exploit the verisimilitude of the

photographic image to reveal social, political, and economic structures that lie below the surface of melodramatic moral conflicts. In many golden age films, the melodramatic mood is directed toward the cosmological conflict between good and evil, innocence and guilt, virtue and vice; meanwhile, the realist impulse harnesses that same mood for a countervailing purpose, which is to direct our bodies, attention, and sympathies toward underlying social structures. This attention to underlying social structures produces affects, meanings, and historical references in excess of the moral cosmos of Cold War nationalism (always also present). The realist impulse extends sympathy beyond the bounds of national melodrama, offers alternative meanings of negative affects associated with historical experiences, and indexes everyday events outside the scope of state national history, provoking affective responses uncontained within the ideological framework of Cold War state politics.

As Kim So-yŏn shows, beginning in the late 1950s elitist critics called for the employment of this affective power of cinema for socially relevant narratives and the top-down instilling of democratic values. At the height of the golden age of South Korean cinema, in 1960, the student-led April 19 Revolution deposed President Syngman Rhee and instituted democratic reforms prior to Park Chung Hee's military coup in 1961.¹³ As a cultural as well as political movement, April 19 strongly influenced the sphere of culture, including film theory and criticism. In "The Establishment of Cultural Spirit" (1960), film critic Yi Yŏng-il wrote about the Korean War and April 19 as historical conditions for a cultural transformation that would finally allow Korean artists to bridge concepts and concrete historical realities:

The June 25 War and the April Democratic Revolution have certainly given us belief and a spiritual foundation that are not empty concepts. The June 25 War was a transformation that occurred through external historical conditions and the April Democratic Revolution was a revolution resulting from an internal explosion. These two historical facts drove our situation into a crucible of the harshest misfortune, but it also grew our power to be able to overcome this situation with our internal energy.

There was nothing previously like the vivid experiences of the last ten years to give us such an acute conviction concerning our beliefs. Almost every literary-historical period of Korea passed by fruitlessly due to the distance between ideas and actuality. The actuality that confined the world and actions of the private sphere presented a gap that could never be hurdled. Therefore, writers lived in vain, and literature tended to become idealistic.

However, today we clearly feel a pulsating generation among us. This is not a deformed generation in which thoughts and actuality do not match, like in the past. Our experiences and actions are now supported by definitive ideas of value. This is something exceptional in our cultural history.¹⁴

Yi Yŏng-il's writings in 1960 express optimism about the ongoing political and cultural revolution, which will finally allow Korean literature and film to make

their ideas adequate to actuality. Under conditions of Japanese colonialism and the early Cold War dictatorship of Syngman Rhee, state and market control over culture, including film production, meant that ideas were detached from external social realities and did not have the power to affect history. Although the Korean War and the April 19 Revolution drove South Korea into a “crucible of harshest misfortune,” they also created political and cultural energy, particularly among the youth, to overcome the historical situation through a political movement and a cultural renaissance. A number of classic South Korean films, including *Aimless Bullet* and *The Housemaid* (*Hanyö*, dir. Kim Ki-young, 1960) were made at this time. Yu Hyun-mok’s films in particular represented to Yi Yöng-il the emerging possibilities of a realist arthouse cinema that would contribute to a democratic film culture.¹⁵ Such a cinema would finally overcome the gap between ideas and actuality, a claim that cast the cinematic image as a Hegelian mediation that would bring together idealism and historical referentiality.

By late 1961, seven months after Park Chung Hee’s military coup, Yi Chöng-gi and Yi Yöng-il were taking stock of the gains and losses over the previous five years of South Korean cinema in articles appearing in *The Chosun Daily*.¹⁶ The idea that cinema was an important aspect of democratic revolution created an ambivalent relationship to melodrama, which was the primary mode of popular cinematic representation, but also tended to defend conservative values and sentimentality in the face of real politics and history. Echoing Yi Yöng-il’s calls for a cinematic cultural spirit free from bureaucratic and market controls, Yu Tu-yön argued that the withdrawal into ideas was a problem of commercial cinema and melodrama. He contrasted the melodrama of South Korean film to Italian neorealism and the French New Wave:

The backbone to bring about a revival could not be established in the state of consciousness of filmmakers. This is corroborated by the fact that despite suffering the horrors of August 15 [liberation] and June 25 [the Korean War], there was no movement of Italian realism, nor a movement of Nouvelle Vague, and the industry ended up in a deluge of melodrama that aimed only at the safety of recuperating production costs.¹⁷

Yu certainly diagnosed the economic and political factors that had prevented South Korean cinema from fully realizing its artistic and cultural potential. However, even in the midst of the April Revolution, in a commercial film industry in the developing world, in a country defined by anticommunist politics and without the kind of state institutions that supported European arthouse cinema, could the “deluge of melodrama” be held back by a dam of engaged and avant-garde realist artworks? Although both Yi Yöng-il and Yu Tu-yön felt that Korean society had undergone the kind of cataclysmic historical experiences that could energize film artists toward experimentation and a new cinematic realism, the economic and cultural hegemony of melodrama would not disappear overnight. Nor was

their ideal, European arthouse cinema, bereft of its own appreciation for and use of the melodramatic mode. In filmmaking practice, overcoming the gap between ideas and actuality happened through a version of the haptic realism articulated by Yi Yöng-jun, a synthesis of the idealism of the melodramatic moral occult and a realist attention to social structures.

The desire on the part of critics and ambitious filmmakers to create an arthouse, avant-garde, and realist film aesthetic could not simply ignore the power of melodramatic suspension of realistic space and time, particularly in a film market still governed by profit motives and spectacle. Furthermore, even for the original instance of Italian neorealism itself, it is now widely understood that “neorealism overlaps with popular melodramatics throughout this era, challenging assumptions that melodramatic emotion is incompatible with or even betrays (as contemporary criticism put it) realism.”¹⁸ Haptic realism necessarily involves the interweaving of realism and melodrama.

The touch of melodramatic cinema refers to a realm of truer spiritual values at the same time as it indexes the constraints and oppression of the given social reality. The conflict between the real and the true is felt in these films’ moods. In the following analysis of realism and melodrama in the golden age, I focus on how film melodramas depict social phenomena that are particularly replete with socio-historical significance, haptic impact, and affective excessive: war memory, family, poverty, and the communist other. I show how the moods of these films express an ongoing crisis between the symbolic and the psychological, between the melodramatic tendency toward allegorical causality and the realist impulse to use the indexical or duplicative capacity of cinema to engage the audience in reflection on complex social problems.

FAMILY AS MICROCOSM

Films of the 1950s and 1960s often utilized the household and its limits to demarcate public boundaries of gender, class, and national belonging.¹⁹ By 1960, at the macro-political level, class relations, gender roles, and the geographical and political integrity of the nation had been put into crisis through Japanese colonialism, national division, American occupation, and the destruction and impoverishment caused by the Korean War. Many aspects of these social crises were only intensified by the authoritarian government of Syngman Rhee, operating under the aegis of American occupation, and by the nascent industrialization of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The golden age of South Korean cinema was punctuated by ongoing political crisis in the aftermath of the Korean War. In 1960, Syngman Rhee was forced out of office by the April 19 Revolution, which was followed by one year of parliamentary rule with Yun Po-sön acting as president. The following year, General Park Chung Hee’s military coup succeeded, and in 1962 he became president. Changing into civilian clothes, he would serve as president for eleven years, maintaining power through two questionable elections (1963, 1967). Then, with

the Yusin Constitution of 1972, he would dissolve parliament and serve seven more years as a legalized dictator, until his assassination in 1979.

During this period of rapid industrialization and successive dictatorial regimes, some of the most successful directors of the golden age turned to the family household as a manageable milieu in which to depict the experiences of their national audiences. As Martha Kinder and Angelo Restivo have shown in their studies of the emergent Spanish and Italian national cinemas of the same period, the cinematic apparatus, including all the non-filmic media that surround the production and consumption of films, is a particularly powerful technology for the construction of national identity and for enacting the various spatio-temporal reorientations, psychological reconfigurations, and reimagined social relations implied by such a historical process.²⁰ However, the family is not an entirely stable reference point for the sentimental and sympathetic construction of national identity and national cinema. Particularly in the melodramatic mode, the nuclear family functions as a contradictory site of moral authenticity and turpitude, innocence and resentment, reunification and fracture; it often appears as a symptomatic microcosm of the painful and cataclysmic process of Cold War nation-building. The representation of family could play on the sentimentality and sympathies of the audience for the purposes of nation-building, but like any embodied melodramatic mode of mimesis, it also invoked the suffocating limitations, repressiveness, and normativity of family relations and the social negativity these can create. The family as a microcosm of national community functioned within realism as an idea elevated into ideology by way of coded affects of sentiment and sympathy, but it also touched negative social realities that the idea of the family could not itself resolve.

The horrors of historical reality are expressed no more clearly and painfully than in family dramas dealing directly with the traumatic experiences of the Korean War. Shin Sang-ok's *To the Last Day* (1960) confronts the extremes of trauma and loss brought about by the Korean War and is among the most tragic of his melodramatic films. Captain Kim (Kim Chin-gyu) is wounded in battle and paralyzed from the waist down. His wife, Hyegyöng (Ch'oe Ŭn-hŭi), cares for him as he struggles with the loss of his mobility and capacity for sexual intercourse and reproduction, weeping that he would prefer to die. He allegorizes his injury and disability as a symbol of national division: "My body has been hacked in half, just like this country." After he is able to use a wheelchair, Kim, Hyegyöng, and their daughter, Söngyöng (Ch'ön Yöng-sön), flee Seoul to Taegu in order to escape the Chinese invasion (the People's Volunteer Army of China joined the war in October 1950 and pushed the UN and ROK forces south of Seoul). They manage to find a ride in the back of a truck to escape the battlefield, but their newborn baby dies of pneumonia along the way. Hyegyöng pushes and pulls her husband and all their remaining possessions in a cart down the rest of the way to Taegu. The deep space of the sparse landscape surrounding the road and the stream of trucks driving by, already filled with other refugees, highlight the isolation and dire circumstances

of the family. Such images of exhaustion and suffering refer to the extremes of displacement, pain, and struggle that many in the audience would have experienced only years earlier. Although the location filming in the countryside and the use of real military vehicles contribute to the realism of the scene, the scene's referentiality is primarily an effect of its haptic invocation of war memory.

In such working-through of collective trauma by way of the melodramatic mode, the film takes on the quality of ritual mourning, but without the singular moment of catharsis characteristic of tragedy.²¹ The family experiences an unrelenting series of horrific events with only a few momentary suggestions of the possibility of a better future in the postwar, including the ending discussed below. Through the first third of the film, Kim wishes to die but commits to living again after a life-altering event. On the way to Taegu, Kim would rather die than live as a paraplegic and is racked with guilt about slowing down his family's progress. Kim gets out of the cart after Hyegyöng and Söngyöng leave him to get something to eat, intending to commit suicide. He drags himself across the dirt to the train tracks, but Hyegyöng returns carrying Söngyöng on her back and they begin calling for him. He goes under the train bridge as they walk across it above him. When he hears a train coming, he reveals himself in order to warn them; they are just barely able to run off of the bridge and save themselves.

This remarkable scene displays Shin Sang-ok's directing skill. Its sublime outdoor setting is reminiscent of the ending of his *A Flower in Hell* (1958), in which Yöngsik (Kim Hak) chases the sex worker Sonya (Ch'oe Ūn-hŭi) through a foggy mud flat in order to take revenge on her for reporting him to the police and seducing his younger brother Tongsik (Cho Hae-wön). The image of the dying Yöngsik and Sonya lying mud-splattered on the ground became one of Shin's most iconic. Likewise, this scene in *To the Last Day* uses this sublime landscape of the mountains and valleys of central Korea, accentuated by a shot from Kim's point of view, a backdrop that establishes an existential mood and dramatizes his decision to commit suicide. As he drags himself onto the train tracks, they extend infinitely into the background, toward the mountainous horizon. The shot reduces life to a single man struggling with his disability, his death wish, and his physically and mentally traumatic war experiences in a space and mood reduced to sublime natural landscape and the dehumanizing technology of the train. As Hyegyöng and Söngyöng start to call for him, low-angle shots show them running across the bridge, against a clear sky in the background, while high-angle shots capture Kim dragging himself under the bridge. The wooden railroad ties jut into the foreground of shots from both angles, visually highlighting the division that has been created in the family by technology and war. Captain Kim weeps when he discovers that he cannot commit suicide and then yells to his family to get off the bridge. After a harrowing series of shots of Hyegyöng and Söngyöng barely making it off the bridge, the family hugs each other while Hyegyöng pleads with her husband, asking how he could do such a thing. The film then cuts to Taegu, where Hyegyöng

works happily selling goods at a stall to earn money for her family's return to Seoul and befriends another merchant, Mr. Cho (Nam Kung-wŏn).

The scene on the train tracks returns later in a sonic flashback, after Hyegyŏng, Sŏnggyŏng, and Cho have moved into a house together, occupying separate rooms. Hyegyŏng and Cho embrace, and Cho says that her "life is so tragic." As they lie down on his bed, the extradiegetic sound of the oncoming train and Kim's yelling returns, "I'm here! Watch out!" The aural haunting of the family's moment of survival connects the narrative present to a past that must be honored and redeemed, preventing Hyegyŏng from acting on her desire. She is overcome with guilt and leaves Cho's room, visibly resisting her sexual desire. Later films such as *Homebound* (1967) repeated this theme of the effects of paralysis on war veterans and their families, and the problem of the repressed desires of wives of paralyzed veterans, as well as war widows, became something of a motif.²² The conflict comes to a head when Kim goes from the hospital to the house and discovers Hyegyŏng and Cho together; Kim is angered but eventually relents when he realizes how dependent he is on her.

These conflicts are very common to the family drama. Douglas Sirk's *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) centers on the conflict between the widow Cary's desire for Ron and her fidelity to her children and her dead husband. However, the setting and the audience's direct experiences of the Korean War affect the narrative and mood of *To the Last Day* and its engagements with the conventions of the marital and family drama. As Kim's comparison between his disabled body and the division of Korea suggests, one of these effects is the allegorization of the family conflict as a microcosm of national conflict. The weeping and paroxysms of grief in the film express a ritual of mourning that creates sympathy not only for the family unit but of course for the national community that has gone through the cataclysmic collective experience of civil war. These experiences are not primarily referred to through realistic depictions of war, although the real circumstances of refugees and colonial sex workers are highlighted, but through the haptic realism of melodrama. Kim's unbearable pain and death wish through the first part of the film plunges the mood of the film immediately into a deep melancholy that seems intractable. There is little room for Sirkian irony about the foibles and conventions of the middle class because the couple's feelings about death and survival and family loyalty and individual desires are connected to extreme mass violence.

Because the family is made to stand in symbolically for a broken national community, in order to end the film with optimism about the national future, the characters' sense of purpose has to be directed beyond individual desires and resentments. This begins to happen after Cho reunites with his sister Yŏngsŏn and discovers that she is a sex worker, the second reference to sex work for American soldiers after Hyegyŏng is disturbed by soldiers and workers in her hotel before moving in with Cho. Cho shames Yŏngsŏn, even though she explains the dire economic circumstances that led to her decision, and she commits suicide. As a



FIGURE 17. In *To the Last Day* (1960), the family experiences a brief moment of joy and hope for the future at the end of the war, after the daughter Sŏngyŏng says, “I will invent something to fix you,” and shows them a drawing of her father standing up from his wheelchair.

melodramatic sacrificial lamb of national feminine propriety, she writes to her family in her suicide note that they should take the money she has earned and contribute it to a good cause. When Hyegyŏng and family decide to return to Seoul, Cho gives her the money and upon their return Hyegyŏng and Captain Kim open a workhouse for war widows. Earlier in the film, when Kim is awarded a medal and promoted to major, Hyegyŏng questions his sacrifice for the ROK state, causing Kim to weep and question her denial of the small joy of his promotion. However, by the end of the film, Hyegyŏng and Kim come together around an idea of postwar national community, not in supporting the state directly but in opening the workhouse and contributing to the national welfare and economic development (figure 17). Even after a final tragedy befalls the family when Sŏngyŏng is killed by a truck while crossing the street, Hyegyŏng still gives an inspiring speech to the widows, telling them, “We have all become family now.” Then a point-of-view shot captures the sunshine opening the clouds before she and Kim deliver their final lines, the original title of the film: “Until the last day of this life!”

Kim overcomes his death wish, and Hyegyŏng is able to see beyond her husband’s disability and her unfulfilled sexual desire by way of a public mission. That the funds of a sex worker would be redirected toward the widow’s workhouse presents a pretty clear moral allegory for national innocence and redemption.

Through this allegory centered on the propriety of women, the meaning of family also transforms from the nuclear family to the extended family of the workhouse and, implicitly, the nation: “We are all family now.” Considering the series of collective and personal tragedies portrayed in the film, it ends on a hopeful note that feels forced. However, the characters’ realization that their family is not a limited and self-sufficient community but a microcosm of a larger national community gives meaning to their sacrifices and ensures that neither community will be undone by selfish desires. Like many post-Korean War films of both Korean film industries, the haptic realism of the melodramatic mode translates familial suffering into national mission. However, the allegory is not entirely closed, due to the contrapuntal quality of the melodramatic mode. The film also refers to state-sanctioned death and immiseration, sexual desires outside the nuclear family, and colonial sex work for American soldiers. The ending attempts to resolve the tension between melodrama’s redemption of national innocence and realism’s exposition of underlying social structures by providing an image of a postwar future and subsuming the problem of individual morality into the national community.

Two other examples of this type of melodrama of postwar possibility are *The Coachman* (dir. Kang Tae-jin, 1961) and *Bloodline* (dir. Kim Su-yong, 1963), both of which star Kim Süng-ho, one of the most famous actors of the era; he was known for playing struggling patriarchs, including in *Romantic Papa* (*Romaensü ppappa*, dir. Shin Sang-ok, 1960) and *Under the Sky of Seoul* (*Seoul chibung mit*, dir. Yi Hyöng-pò, 1961).²³ In *The Coachman*, Kim plays Ha Ch’unsam, a single father who supports his four children by working as a coachman. The film focuses on a family living in poverty and debt, and supported by Ch’unsam’s preindustrial labor, exploring through melodrama the structural economic and social problems of uneven development.²⁴ His younger daughter, Okhüi (Öm Aeng-nan), is ashamed of being poor and tries to find a husband who will support her. In a striking early scene, she rides in the back of an automobile with a man who lies to her about getting her a job at a trading company. A shot peeking over the dash of the passenger seat captures Ch’unsam walking his horse and carriage across the street. The car almost hits him, and Okhüi hides her face in the back seat as the man tells the driver to go ahead. The juxtaposition of old and new technology and the lack of awareness and conscience that accompanies automobile driving foreshadows another remarkable scene. A frustrated driver honks at Ch’unsam from behind, then an automobile speeds around the corner in front of him and we cut in to see that the driver is Ch’unsam’s boss (Chu Sön-t’ae), the carriage owner. The owner hits the horse, which drags the carriage wheel over Ch’unsam’s leg. As he lies on the ground, the owner is concerned only with the damage to the front of his automobile. Ch’unsam is a subaltern worker dependent on an outmoded technology and threatened on the street by industrial modernity. The owner’s dehumanization of Ch’unsam following the accident is a continuation of the inhumanity of the direct expropriation of his labor in the form of rent. This subaltern exploitation

is contrasted to the relative promise of factory labor and ownership. After saving Okhüi from the swindler, the carriage owner's more ethical son, Ch'angsu, heroically helps her get a satisfying job at a confectionary factory and they begin a relationship. Meanwhile, Suwön-daek, the maid of the carriage owner who has a romantic bond with Ch'unsam, purchases the horse from her bosses for their family and joins the family as a stepmother the final scene.

The Ha family is in many respects a microcosm of the economic and social situation of South Koreans in 1961, the majority of whom were living an impoverished subaltern existence while also looking forward toward a future of industrialization and factory labor. Each sibling embodies a particular circumstance that might befall someone in the family's position. The eldest son, Suöp (Sin Yöng-gyun), struggles against class prejudice as he studies for a higher civil service examination and eventually takes up his father's work after his injury. The eldest daughter, Ongnyö (Cho Mi-ryöng), is disabled (mute), and the physical and emotional abuse of her philandering husband drives her to suicide. Okhüi seeks upward mobility through marriage by lying about her family background, before going to work at the confectionary factory. And the youngest son is a thief, as shown in the film's exciting opening chase scene, in which a camera moving on a picture car captures him biking away from and then toward it rapidly through old narrow streets. However, there are also signs of equality, nationality, and mass culture, as when Ch'unsam and Suwön-daek go to the movie theater to watch one of many adaptations of the romantic folktale *Chunhyang*. The movie theater is a levelling experience of mass culture placed self-consciously within the melodrama, but it is also connected to his secret budding romance. The second time they go to the same film, he sees Okhüi, who is on a date with the swindler; he also exchanges an uncomfortable glance with Suöp while at a restaurant with Suwön-daek. In other words, in melodramatic fashion, the family is inside the industrial economy and national mass culture (*Chunhyang*) but also exterior to them, owing to the looming obsolescence of their patriarch's labor and their frequently mentioned social expendability. This contradictory position of the family becomes a part of its internal divisions—Ch'unsam and Okhüi can sit in the same theater, watching a classic Korean folktale, but not as a family due to her lies and his secret. In this way, family lies and secrets, as well as the tragedies of Ongnyö's suicide and Ch'unsam's injury, highlight the structural social inequalities, although within the sympathetic moral framework of melodrama.

The social problems allegorized as family problems are resolved when Ch'angsu gets Okhüi a job in the factory and addresses his family's treatment of them and when Suwön-daek purchases the horse and becomes part of the family. Suöp also passes his examination, despite the class prejudice of other characters against his ambitions. Just as the speech on surrogate family and the point-of-view shot of the opening sky bring an abrupt conclusion to *To the Last Day* and its exploration of the horrors of war memory, the resolution of the family's economic problems and

their reintegration into a new image of national society—the final shot captures them walking down the road, all together for the first time in the film—relies on sentimental identification and acts of generosity between characters of different classes and backgrounds. Class problems are resolved through nation-state development represented at the micropolitical level. However, remnants of the unevenness of the economic and social situation remain. The marriage of Ch'unsam and Suwŏn-daek and the purchasing of the horse are narratively possible primarily because he is a man. In films focusing on women widowers, such as *Mother and a Guest* (*Sarangbang sonnim kwa ōmōni*, dir. Shin Sang-ok, 1961) and *Dongsimcho* (dir. Shin Sang-ok, 1959), the new relationship is almost always left unconsummated through marriage, following a convention established by *All That Heaven Allows*. This gendering of authentic national subjectivity is also reflected in the disturbing violence directed toward the two sisters, not only by men outside their family but by Suŏp and Ch'unsam themselves. Furthermore, factory labor functions as a moral ideal and equalizing social force that allows Okhŭi to overcome her shame, lies, and false hopes, even though in actuality capitalism merely reorganized the exploitation of labor power into a wage system. The social realism of the film is reflected through the prism of a sentimentalized family, giving affective form to social negativity at a microcosmic level. Thereby the unevenness and conflict of the larger society can be subsumed into a sentimental resolution. This vacillation between realism and melodrama is apparent in the visual and musical mood swings between melancholy and hopefulness and in the gradual shift in the narrative causality from a real overdetermined economic and social structure to the allegorical magic of melodrama.

Bloodline tells the story of refugees from the north living in a shantytown on the mountain slopes outside Seoul. It is based on a play by Kim Yŏng-su and director Kim Su-yong uses the setting of a small group of houses to re-create a theatrical feel. Although the film uses family drama to explore issues of poverty, social class, and migration, it expands the focus beyond a single nuclear family. One of many stylistic flourishes appears halfway in, as the camera tracks in on the window of one house and then pans quickly from one window to the next. We cannot see through the windows, but at each window the audio cuts suddenly to the conflict inside each house: (1) A grandmother sings a melancholy prayer. Her two sons fight with one another, her granddaughter is disabled, and her daughter-in-law is dying. (2) A widower father, Tŏksam (Kim Sŭng-ho), has arranged for a much younger bride to come live with him, and he is heard entreating the silent woman to sleep with him and to speak. (3) A strict mother (Hwang Chŏng-sun) sings to her adopted daughter-in-law Poksun (Ōm Aeng-nan), forcing her to train as a *pansori* singer so that she can earn money for the family as a *kisaeng*. The scene then crosscuts between the interior of the three houses. Poksun is disgusted by her *pansori* training, and her mother yells at her husband for being lazy. In the next house, the grandmother reads from a Bible while her son (Sin Yŏng-gyun) wraps

boxes of salvaged cigarette butts with his daughter, and his wife lies dying, unable to afford health care. In the last, Töksam forces his new wife to take off her blouse, while the *pansori* training from next door can be heard in the background.

The title refers to kinship and genealogy, and the story is concerned with the relationships between generations. Poksun's father remarks to the village barber, Kapdük, "The old people don't have what it takes to start a new life, but you have your whole life ahead of you." However, in describing multiple connections between three different families, the circuits of sentiment and sympathy are not clearly contained within the nuclear family and its genealogy. The inclusion of three families allows the film to refer to multiple layers of colonial history. All the characters have migrated as refugees from the north. Poksun's mother is displaced from Hamhüng province, and she is trying to teach her the singing style of that region. Töksam has worked as a miner in Hokkaido, part of the massive labor migration from Korea to Japan proper in the last decade of the Japanese empire. His wife presumably died during the Korean War, "twelve years ago." The cigarette salesman's younger brother, Wönc'h'il (Ch'oe Mu-ryong), has been studying in Japan, funded by his sister-in-law's factory labor prior to her fatal illness. A landowner comes to the village demanding payment for property rights, which he likely gained through cooperation with Japanese or US colonialism.

Wönc'h'il also has a love interest (Kim Chi-mi) who is a sex worker for the US military. When she and Wönc'h'il go out together near the US military base, Kim Su-yong captures the alienation of US occupation in a signature montage. The couple drinks at a club while a singer and jazz band play a melancholic song. The scene cuts from couple to couple, US soldiers smiling at Korean women with solemn faces, and then back to the band. The anonymity of the faces and the eeriness of the song creates a surreal mood of depressed delirium. Kim presents the problem of US colonialism and the sex work of Korean women but does not give the conflict the typical melodramatic treatment (e.g., weeping over the loss of the sister's innocence, as in *To the Last Day* and *Aimless Bullet*). Kim uses the atmosphere and music of the club to create a discomforting aesthetic distance and experimental feel. Although Wönc'h'il breaks with her in the subsequent scene, by momentarily contravening the melodramatic and allegorical conventions of representations of sex work, Kim is able to critique politically the alienation of the social context rather than merely denouncing morally the iniquity of the woman worker.

Despite the film's social realist attention to the layers of colonialism, migration, and economic exploitation, the ending is as optimistic about the future as the above films. Töksam's son Köbuk is in love with Poksun and after the scene that cuts between the three houses, they run away together and begin working at a textile factory. He writes a letter to their families and their two fathers go to visit them at the factory. A scene of the factory floor shows them happy to be doing industrial labor. They reunite with their fathers and the family lineage as the two fathers arrange their marriage, and Töksam says, "She is from a good family.



FIGURE 18. *Bloodline* (1963) begins in a shantytown where three families struggle to get by and ends with a young couple entering a factory, where industrialization and the nuclear family promise a better life for some.

She belongs to the Yangju Cho family clan.” Reminiscent of the final shot of *The Coachman*, the fathers and children walk toward the factory (figure 18). The wide walkway, the landscaping and pond, and the factory walls and smokestack in the distance—everything about the space of the final shot, including its symmetry and clear point-of-view perspective, differs from the multiple disorienting angles and ramshackle mise-en-scène of the scenes of the shantytown. This image, combined with the triumphant music, presents a sublime aesthetic of modernity. Because of its absolute visual contrast with the rest of the film, the image makes an abstract break from all the story’s complex and saddening social conditions. Realism and melodrama do not align with modernity and tradition. The final image is formally melodramatic, an emblem of the victory of familial sentiment, industrial labor, and national development over uneven structural conditions. The image is also one of the film’s most realist, if the criterium for realism is point perspective. The three families and their layered histories are occluded by an image of the future: family lineage, industrial modernization, and postwar national development. The

dialectic of realism and melodrama resolves into a singular image and story of recovery and reconstruction.

Aimless Bullet stands out as a family drama that refuses to end with such an image of family and nation-state. It is relentless in its dark view of South Korea in the aftermath of the Korean War. Based on the 1958 short story by Yi Pöm-sön and like *Bloodline* after it, *Aimless Bullet* depicts refugees from the north. Eldest brother Chörho (a secretary), his wife and daughter, younger brother Yöngho (an unemployed war veteran), and the family's grandmother live in Liberation Village, a neighborhood known for North Korean migrants. There are a number of scenes that explicitly draw attention to the problem of melodrama in relation to realism, which is not surprising, considering the director Yu Hyun-mok's critiques of melodrama and his adoration of arthouse realism.²⁵ Chapter 6 deals in detail with some of the more obviously self-reflexive moments in the film, in which Yu uses the setting of a film studio, as well as offscreen space, to problematize the limits of melodramatic and cinematic representation in relation to real historical events and traumas. In terms of family drama's use of the family as a microcosm for society or the nation-state, a few qualities distinguish *Aimless Bullet*. The grandmother repeats the phrase "Kaja!" ("Let's go!") in a sort of delirium. This line is taken from the short story, where it expresses her desire to cross the thirty-eighth parallel to return to their home village in the north. The famous final scene of the film depicts Chörho, who has had two rotten teeth removed, collapsed in the back of a taxi. His brother has been arrested for robbing a bank, his sister has become a sex worker, and his wife has died in childbirth. He tells the driver different destinations—Liberation Village, University Hospital, and the police station—unsure if he should go home, see his newborn child, or visit his brother. When the taxi arrives at the police station, Chörho does not get out and tells the drivers to "just go." They say he must be drunk or an "aimless bullet," which inspires Chörho's monologue: "An aimless bullet. . . . I have to be a son, a husband, a father, a brother, and a secretary. . . . So many things I have to be. Maybe you're right. I might be an aimless bullet made by the Creator. I don't know where I should go, but I should be going somewhere now." He lies down in the back seat and when asked again by the drivers where they should go, he responds, "Kaja!" and collapses back in the seat.

In contrast with the majority of family dramas of the golden age, *Aimless Bullet* ends with a paralysis about the future and one's role within the family and society. Rather than using the microcosm of the family as a symbol for the overcoming of historical suffering and social divisions, the scene shows Chörho questioning familial roles as a matter of subject position. Every relationship through which his familial and work identity could make sense as part of the larger whole of society or the nation-state has been shattered. As the above films show, this refusal to encapsulate possibility and optimism in a familial image was an overt resistance to the pressure to express melodramatically and idealistically the ethos of postwar reconstruction. Earlier, Yu intentionally inserts into Yöngho's bank robbery chase

scene images of the April 19 Revolution labor protests, as well as a horrific image of a mother who has hung herself with a baby on her back. These insertions work very explicitly against the sensationalism, suspense, and action of the melodramatic chase scene, referring through juxtaposition to an extra-cinematic world of continued suffering and social crisis—not even the spectacle of the chase, as necessary as it might be for a popular film, can momentarily hide the real social conditions of the postwar that the film has exposed through negative affects and moods. Likewise, in the final scene, there is no image of a future direction, no opening of the sky, or no sentimental reunion of the family that can redeem suffering and translate social negativity into a well-formed affect of hope. *Aimless Bullet* became a classic in part because of this refusal to allow the melodramatic mode and mood to serve an integrative social function, even as Yu uses it to explore the real suffering, traumas, and injustices of a social system that has not yet moved beyond war. This kind of self-conscious melodramatic filmmaking does not attempt to resolve the tension between realism and melodrama. Rather, it uses popular melodramatic spectacle to attract a mass audience, self-conscious de-realization as a reminder that it is only a movie, and strategic insertions of realist references to history to disrupt haptic immersion in a moral occult.

IMAGES OF POVERTY

In numerous films of this era, a common scene shows a relatively minor character reminding one of the protagonists of a debt that is owed to him. In *The Coachman*, a neighborhood man who is also interested in Suwön-daek, Kim Sö-gi (Kim Hüi-gap), pesters Ch'unsam to repay a debt, before later on spying on the couple in jealousy. In *Bloodline*, the barber Kapdük, who asks Okhüi's father for her hand in marriage, reminds Kōbuk that he owes him money, before later seeing the couple at the train station and telling her adopted mother that she has run away with Kōbuk. Both scenes of attempted debt collection occur in the first fifteen minutes and set the stage for a conflict between the lender and debtor over a romantic interest. These conventions for representing indebtedness connect the economic problem of debt to an allegorical social world. Played by the same “bad guy” actor, Chu Sön-t'ae, the carriage owner and landowner character in each film, respectively, wield their power directly and coercively. However, the acquaintance lenders belong to what Elsaesser calls the counterpoint of melodramatic narrative. They operate as foils to the protagonist and compete with him in love, but they are also equal to him. The debt works to create sympathy for the protagonist at the same time as it establishes the protagonist's moral dilemma. These acquaintances are not evil, and their repayment is not directly connected to exploitation; therefore, the debt becomes an ethical problem for the individual protagonist. The problem of debt expresses a larger ambivalence concerning poverty and capitalism in *sömingük*, or common-people's drama.²⁶ As Mauricio Lazzarato explains, debt is

not simply a mode of oppression but also a technique of governmentality, because indebted subjects is key to keeping them ideologically and practically dependent on the capitalist labor market.²⁷ The indebtedness of the common person can be transformed into a moral allegory of the whole economy through which structural problem of poverty can be displaced into issues of governmentality, particularly the practices of individual *homo economicus*.

Money is one classic portrayal of debt and gambling in a village setting. The film surrounds the image of poverty with an ambivalent mood of both sympathy and frustration with the main character Pongsu's tragic flaws in relation to household finances (Kim Sūngho again plays the foolish father). As the title of the film suggests, although it does represent labor and the struggles of farmers within the rural economy, its primary focus is on money. As Marx showed in his analysis of money, money is itself a commodity and emerges out of commodity exchange.²⁸ Just as a commodity alienates and hides the value of the congealed labor in the commodity, money operates as an equalizing and symbolic abstraction. It facilitates the circulation of commodities, particularly in relation to the temporal and spatial gaps between sites of production, exchange, and consumption. As a commodity with pure purchasing power for any other commodity (its use value), it becomes an object of accumulation and hoarding, as well as a quantitative symbol of wealth and power. However, also as a commodity, it hides the value that labor has added to it in the production process—not only in the production of the material of the money itself but of all the commodities through whose exchange and circulation a quantity of money was accumulated. In a melodramatic film focused on poverty, these symbolic, metaphorical, abstract, and occlusive qualities of money can transform it into a master-signifier that stands in place of the totality of complex social relations involved in impoverishment and accumulation. In the case of *Money*, this symbolism transforms the social realist concern with agricultural labor, the urban and rural divide, and the debts of farmers into an allegorical reflection on the moral problems of money as commodity: gambling, graft, theft, and murder. This shift of emphasis from labor and debt to the proper and improper circulation of money as the binding social symbol melodramatizes poverty into a problem of governmentality. The social realist representation of political economy gives way to an allegory concerning the proper practices of *homo economicus* and their necessity for sustaining modern subjectivity and a modern family.

Pongsu is very naïve about managing money. He is in debt to Mr. Ch'oe, who asks him to sell his calf in order to at least pay the interest on the loan. Again, Ch'oe is not the primary enemy and the two reconcile later in the film. However, even though Ch'oe is not evil, the debt to Ch'oe causes Pongsu to put off his daughter Suni's wedding and precipitates all his mistakes in managing the family's money. The real villain of the film is Ōkcho (Ch'oe Nam-hyōn), who makes money usuriously lending to impoverished farmers and getting them to gamble on the card game *hwat'u*. Ōkcho's wife (Hwang Chōng-sun) owns a bar that employs Okkyōng

(Ch'oe Ŭn-hŭi), who is the love interest of Pongsu's son, Yŏngho (Kim Chin-gyu). It is not the fact of Ch'oe's debt that sets in motion the tragic sequence of events that makes up the melodramatic narrative. Rather, Pongsu is talked into playing *hwat'u* with two other farmers during a drunken night at Őkcho's house. He wins enough of their money to pay his debt, but Yŏngho insists that he return it. However, when he meets Őkcho to return the money, the usurer tells him that he would be a fool to return the money, that the others will not thank him, and that "people will even sell their souls for money." He then coaxes him into playing *hwat'u* again, cheating in order to win all the money Pongsu had previously acquired from his fellow farmers, as well as what he has earned by selling rice. These losses put Pongsu at the mercy of Őkcho, who connects him with another debtor businessman in Seoul. Pongsu earns money selling the family's cow in Seoul but is swindled out of the funds. When Őkcho tries to rape Okkyŏng, she fights him off and he drops his money. Pongsu finds the money and gets in a fight with Őkcho over it; Őkcho pulls a knife and Pongsu accidentally kills him with it during the struggle. When Okkyŏng finds the money on the ground, she mistakes it for good fortune and shares it with Yŏngho as they plan their move away from the village. However, the police arrest them for theft and murder and take them by train to police headquarters. The film ends with a shot from the back of the departing train, which captures Pongsu on his knees, weeping and yelling, "Yŏngho! it was neither you nor me, it was money that killed Őkcho!"

Money concerns a village economy in the aftermath of rural reforms. However, as Jinsoo An argues, the localism of *Money* does not simply emphasize the rural and regional color of the village setting; the vernacular nationalist discourse of 1950s cinema entails using the conventions of Hollywood-style narrative and continuity editing to allegorize the national through the rural, local, and regional.²⁹ Although the realism of the film draws attention to the material conditions of poverty in the countryside, the melodramatic narrative and mood use the rural as a backdrop to dramatize the individual morality at the foundations of the national economy. The film surrounds the symbolic function of money with a melodramatic mood that emphasizes the tragedy of Pongsu's lack of financial understanding. Han Sang-gi's melancholic orchestral theme plays only during the opening credits and in the final scene; it stands out during Pongsu's final condemnation of money as the true murderer. As a comparatively quiet melodrama, the film's mood otherwise depends on lighting, cinematography, and acting. In the fateful scene in which Pongsu loses his money gambling, the focus is on his pensive face as Őkcho manipulates him into playing more and more hands. Key lighting from the left side illuminates Pongsu's facial expressions: fear, anger, and anguish. The ignorance that allows him to be conned by Őkcho and then swindled during his trip to Seoul inspires empathy but also moral frustration, particularly because his family suffers greatly from his actions. As the referentiality of the film gradually shifts from the realist representation of the economic injustices besieging farmers

to a haptic melodramatic mood of lateness and tragedy centered on the morally symbolic circulations of money, poverty itself is allegorized and the demise of Pongsu's family takes on a fated causality connected to his improprieties and lack of economic rationality. The apportioning of guilt is threefold: structural injustices, the actions of evil characters, and Pongsu's foolishness all lead to the tragic circumstances. The virtual space of the film—one way that it translates political economy into melodramatic allegory—reorients realism away from the exposition of structure toward psychological individuality. Therefore, despite its condemnations of rural poverty, the film also depicts debt as an effect of lacking economic rationality by symbolically isolating the moral circulation of money from productive economic relations.

The original Korean title of *A Dream of Fortune* (dir. Han Hyung-mo, 1961) is *A Dream of Pig*, referring to the superstition that if you dream of a pig, you will gain a fortune. In this case, it is also a word play, because the plot centers on a family that is persuaded to raise a pig in order to help lift themselves out of poverty. The reference to magical causality in the title points to the allegorical and melodramatic aspects of the film.³⁰ It uses the intimacy of the family and refers to traditional superstitions about wealth in order to transform political economy and the image of poverty into matters of familial sympathy and morality. Similar to *Money*, it gradually transforms the object of economic analysis and discourse from underlying macrosocial structures to the *homo economicus* of psychological individuals.

A Dream of Fortune has both melodramatic and comedic flare, including two aspects of Han's signature style: bright music and spectacular images of urban consumer culture. The opening credits appear over two funny cartoon images of a pig, one in which the pig is being filmed while a scriptwriter is sitting on it and a second in which a man is being kicked by a bucking pig. However, the mood then shifts from comedic imagery and music to a scene of social realism in the form of a state documentary. A vast landscape shot of Seoul cuts to a series of busy street scenes at the center of the city: cars, pedestrians, trains, bicyclists, and buildings. A female voice-over addresses the audience as the scene shifts to residential areas on the outskirts of Seoul, from mansions gradually to a shantytown:

Hello everyone! Home to two million people, this is Seoul. Look at the flood of cars and people. What do all these people eat and where do they live? Of course, they can't carry their homes on their backs like snails. They have to build their homes. If I may speak for the Department of Social and Health Services, there are currently 400,000 families in Seoul, but only 180,000 homes. That leaves about 200,000 families without a home. That means that there are more people without a home than with a home. Those with money live in luxurious homes, but those without live in poverty on top of mountains or build shacks beside streams. According to a survey, birds can still build in Seoul, but there isn't enough land for people to build homes. That is why each year the government builds 3,000 homes on the outskirts of the city, saying they will give it to the homeless, but of course it's not free. The protagonist of this movie lives in one of these homes built by the government.

Using the language and imagery of documentary realism and citing government statistics in order to explain the housing problem, the voice-over is authoritative and expository. The opening sequence grounds the film narrative in sociological and economic facts, framing the story of a family living in government housing with the authority of social realism.

However, the film quickly leaves behind its documentary and social realist framing, relying on comedy and melodrama in the representation of poverty. The son of the family, Yŏngjun (An Sŏng-gi), limps around on his worn-out shoes. When his mother (Mun Chŏng-suk) explains that his father, Son Chang-su (Kim Sŭngho), does not make enough money as a schoolteacher to afford new basketball shoes, Yŏngjun banters with her humorously. The mother has been doing the household expenses by placing labels on piles of money on a desk and the son moves the label “shoes” over one of the piles. Changsu sleeps in a closet on his day off, but his wife finds him and riles him out of bed. He is too chubby to fit through the door of the house, refuses to return to an office job, and has pretensions to writing a movie script. These early moments of slapstick and situational comedy gradually push the narrative away from a realist exposition of poverty and social structures toward an emphasis on physical movement and sharp-tongued verbal conflict. Changsu dreams that he brings a large pig into the house, which becomes a reality when a neighbor convinces his wife to begin raising a pig. However, the real financial “dream,” as well as the melodramatic plotline, begins when she convinces Changsu to involve himself with a Korean American from Hawaii, Charlie Hong (Hŏ Chang-gang), and his smuggling business. The family goes further into debt in order to loan Charlie some money, only to find out that he is a con artist and that the suitcase of goods he has left the family is full of rocks and grass. When the con is discovered, the wife weeps uncontrollably and Changsu slaps her violently. While Changsu drinks and his wife goes off to her sister’s house, Yŏngjun runs out of the house to try to find Charlie, whereupon the film repeats the convention of a car accident killing the family’s child.

The gradual shift in mood from sober-minded documentary to physical and situational comedy and then to tragic melodrama mirrors a movement from the center of Seoul to its impoverished periphery, where the government helps to house lower-middle-class families who nonetheless remain threatened by economic exclusion and foreign US swindlers. The melodramatic last half of the film emphasizes the tragic consequences of Changsu’s drinking, his wife’s greed, and their collective poor management of the household finances. The family and its patriarch are again both sympathetic and woeful and become too immoral to actualize the fortune promised them in Changsu’s dream of the pig. The suggestion is that if the couple had focused on the real economic possibilities of pig raising or office work rather than chasing easy money, they could have lifted themselves out of poverty. Instead, they are swindled out of money, left in debt, and their son dies. However, in turning to the tired convention of a car hitting and killing a child, which also appears in *Sweet Dream* and *To the Last Day*, the film

displays an exhaustion of some melodramatic tropes by the early 1960s. Melodrama experiences an exhaustion of its conventions, leading some filmmakers, such as Yu Hyun-mok, to break from the magical causality and sentimentality of melodramatic allegory and linger more persistently on social realism's exploration of underlying socioeconomic structures and ideology, as well as introducing self-consciousness about cinematic representation's capacity to capture the actuality of history. Others, such as Kim Ki-young, parodied melodrama and intensified its embodied moods into uncanny horror.

THE ANTICOMMUNIST FILM

Another Han Hyung-mo film, *The Hand of Destiny* (1954), stands as the most symbolic visual expression of anticommunist ideology. The main protagonist, Margaret (Yun In-ja), is a North Korean spy who begins a relationship with a South Korean counterintelligence agent, Yöngchöl (Yi Hyang). The most striking visual element of the film is that Margaret's North Korean boss and other intelligence officers are filmed from a low level of framing and their faces are invisible until the last ten minutes of the film (figure 19). The film's melodramatic mimesis creates a bodily experience of paranoia and fear that is an expression of the idea of anticommunism; the constellation depends on the obverse of the facelessness and mechanism of communist thought, which is the romantic relationship and its associated affects. The close-ups of the faceless North Korean enemy subtract one element from the scene and through this subtraction create an illusion of coherence and completeness for the film's Manichaeian moral and political world. In contrast, when the camera shows Margaret and Yöngchöl sharing an embrace, the camera is intimate with their intimacy, and their love is presented in all its untainted purity. The film includes the first onscreen kiss in Korean cinema history, and this transformative event of mass culture epitomizes, in the narrative, the humanistic bond between the two characters. As Hyun Seon Park argues, these bodily images are part of a biopolitical representation that contrasts the healthy and whole body of the South Koreans with the fragmented and incomplete bodies of the North Korean communists.³¹ According to Park, a Hollywood montage of Yöngchöl and Margaret going to sporting events, including boxing and cycling, and then playing golf further highlights the healthy nationalized bodies of South Korean athletes, spectators, and consumers.³² Such montages are an early Cold War example of what Mark Fisher calls the "atmosphere" of capitalist realism, or what I call its mood.³³ Mimicking the position of the audience in the cinema, such sequences of images of healthy bodies immersed in spectacle and consumption, in contrast to the faceless North Koreans, creates an illusion of a closed and defined body politic defined by its capitalist values.

Such images of joyful consumption are accompanied by other noir sequences that highlight the intractable gloom of postwar urban existence, while using a



FIGURE 19. For most of *The Hand of Destiny* (1954), the faces of Margaret's North Korean handlers do not appear on screen, but a close-up frames her fully visible face as she delivers a speech about tiring of communist schemes and wanting to regain her humanity.

politicized melodrama to project the cause of this negativity onto the communist other. The camera transforms characters into objects in a melancholic and allegorical play taking place in a political world with demarcations between good and evil, purity and corruption, human and inhuman, emotional and mechanical, and so on. The subtraction of a single element makes the invisible perceptible as an absence in order to instill a sense of fear and paranoia; the film attempts to make the limit of embodied perception into a fearful inhuman enemy in order to create an illusion of somatic transparency, identity, and wholeness in the audience. It gives an image to the totalitarian body of the anticommunist nation.

Yi Kang-chŏn's *Piagol* (1955) stands as one of the more politically and ethically complex of the early anticommunist films produced in South Korea, and its concern with both cinematographic and narrative realism contrasts with *The Hand of Destiny*. According to Yi Sun-jin's archival research, both of these films responded to real documented events: Kim Su-im, like Margaret, was uncovered as a female spy, and Yi Hyŏn-sang, like the troop leader Agari in *Piagol*, led a troop of partisans in the south into the rural areas around Mt. Chiri during the Korean War.³⁴ Despite these shared foundations in historical incidents, which lends a certain realism to each film, *Piagol* does not represent communists in a purely melodramatic fashion as evildoers who lack human emotion and threaten to infiltrate South Korea and undermine the emergent possibilities for freedom of thought, humanity, and romantic love. Although *Piagol* certainly does contain some melodramatic aspects, Yi Kang-chŏn aspired to a more realist portrayal of the characteristics, actions, and milieu of communists by focusing almost solely on one troop of communist cadres and depicting them as complex individuals with attitudes and sensibilities that transform over the course of the narrative. The film's communists are not simply foils for South Korean national subjectivity or the opposing forces in a Manichaeian moral and political struggle; they are psychologically complex internal others stranded in South Korea after the Inchon landing. In addition, Yi's use of on-location shooting near Mt. Chiri, which contrasts

with the predominance of urban settings in *The Hand of Destiny*, further highlights the real historical situation of most partisans of the Korean Workers' Party, who were largely rural partisans who maintained a telluric connection to the Korean landscape in both ideology and practice.³⁵

One of the most unique aspects of *Piagol* is that it genuinely attempts both to understand and to represent realistically the communist other, which most of its contemporaries, as well as later anticommunist productions, were unable to do. The fact that the South Korean government banned screening the film because it was thought to defy anticommunist laws shows the degree to which its status as an anticommunist film was controversial, even though most viewers are likely to identify it as anticommunist. The ambiguity of the film's anticommunism is an effect of its aspiration to realism, and film critics have often celebrated it as one of the most important Korean War films because of its realist approach to representing the communist partisan.³⁶

Despite its divergence from the most excessively paranoid and fundamentalist versions of anticommunist aesthetics and narrative, the film's realism is still overlaid with Cold War and post-Korean War melodrama. The film's allegorical depictions of gendered sexual violence and innocence lost are typical of anticommunist narratives that highlight the immorality of the communist worldview. The film also suggests that in isolation communist guerrillas are prone to turning against one another and exposing their moral and political corruption. In terms of its visual style and its dramaturgy, the film attempts to provoke sentimental identification with victims of communist partisanship, as well as the romantic love of defectors, through the depiction of embodied emotions that are excessive of the film's realism. Nonetheless, these melodramatic aspects of the narrative and visual style are fused with and tempered by that impulse toward realism.

The narrative, visual style and form of *Piagol* are hybridized in unprecedented and unexpected ways, including with North Korean productions, which in part explains critics' continued interest in the film's unique aesthetic and its unique perspective on the Korean War. In contrast to many Hollywood films and Korean films about the Korean War and as a document of world cinema more generally, *Piagol* provides an example of the sheer complexity of the intersections between cinema and geopolitics, civil war, national cinema, communist and anticommunist ideologies, and the politics of representation in the context of the global Cold War and a fascinating period of realism and melodrama in both Korean film industries.

Piagol is the name of the real valley where *Piagol* is set, currently located in Mt. Chiri National Park in the Southern Chölla Province, South Korea. The story begins right after the Korean War armistice (1953). A troop of communist partisans are stranded in South Korea and chased by ROK and UN troops. The troop is unable to go north of the Demilitarized Zone and get to North Korea, their supply lines are cut, and they cannot depend upon the Chinese troops to ensure liberation. Under their ruthless captain, Agari (Yi Ye-chö'n), the partisans are forced to

maintain their loyalty to the troop and to communist ideology. As internal strife and the threat of external attack by the South Korean government break the troop apart, its political identity begins to dissolve, even as many of the members remain faithful to the lost cause of revolution in the southern part of the peninsula. The two main characters who openly question the ideology and practices of the troop are Chölsu (Kim Chin-gyu) and Aeran (No Kyöng-hüi). Chölsu is skeptical from the beginning of the film, and Aeran transforms from a cold-hearted partisan to a critical detractor through her love for Chölsu. After Agari kills Chölsu, Aeran escapes death by defecting, an event suggested by the superimposition of the ROK flag over her image as she struggles down the mountain. The censors demanded that Lee include this image as a condition for the film's rerelease in 1955, following the film's banning and Lee's appeal.

A number of other plot events convey the film's basic anticommunist message, despite the concern of censors that it portrayed some of the communists too favorably or at least as having too many human qualities. Many of these events highlight the ruthlessness of the hardened captain Agari and the homicidal and misogynist violence of a particularly immoral member, Mansu. Firstly, when the troop reconvenes after fleeing, Agari is more concerned about a lost carbine rifle than two fatalities and one injury and shoots the member who had lost the carbine after being shot in the arm. Mansu then finishes off the man with a large rock. Secondly, a long sequence depicts the troop's attack of nearby Namsanli village, where they seek to gather supplies and to take revenge on the villagers whom they believe informed the government about their mobilization. Importantly, this is the home village of the youngest man in the troop, Iltong. The troop burns down much of the village and ransacks it for supplies, claiming that it is full of reactionaries. One of the main partisans, Talsök, kills Iltong's mother, and he cries and hugs her dying body. The headman and two other villagers are also taken hostage, after which Aeran forces the two villagers to execute the headman by spear and to become informants for the partisans. The climax of this rather stunning sequence, which also includes many impactful and expressionistic close-ups, occurs when Agari finds out that the headman was Iltong's maternal uncle. Calling him a "hereditary reactionary," he kills Iltong by chasing him off a cliff with a large rock, despite Iltong's pleas that he cared for his uncle only because he had paid his tuition and that he had now disowned him. The ransacking of the village, the coerced execution of the headman, and the murder of the young cadre portray communist revolution as brutal, manipulative, politically irrational, senselessly violent, and destructive of traditional family relations.

However, whereas the sequence employs the melodramatic mode to represent the partisans as morally evil, it also contextualizes their violence realistically within the struggle between the revolution and village leaders who often were at the center of anticommunist resistance during the Korean War, particularly in the face of North Korea's large-scale land reforms during its occupation of the South

and the often-horrific reprisals of organized peasants against landowners. The inclusion of the character Ilton, a young man living in between his mobilized communist subjectivity and his prewar familial past, provides a complex image of the partisan, who might be unbending and ruthless in the execution of his or her political ideology or otherwise be torn between different affiliations during a time of extreme crisis, social upheaval, and civil war. The film aspires to make a realistic reference to history through the ambivalent position of Ilton, a position closer to that of the majority of Koreans whose families and villages were caught up in the horrific violence of the war, even when individuals were compelled to choose a political side. Ilton remains a partisan even in his innocent victimization, meaning that the sympathy provoked for him is not dependent upon seeing him as either a political enemy or a political friend of the South Korean state.

The most central series of events that helps to articulate the film's anticommunist message utilizes a more conventional melodrama narrative. Soju is a young agent who, after being relocated to the main camp, stumbles into Mansu with an injured shoulder and informs him that the enemy has attacked the main camp, that they have killed the chief captain, and that Piagol will soon be destroyed. Upon hearing this apocalyptic message, Mansu does not respond heroically; he rapes and kills Soju and then kills his comrade Talsök and blames him for the crimes. Just as Ilton is an innocent victim of his familial relations, Soju is a sympathetic character whose relocation to the other camp provides some drama to an early scene of the chief captain giving orders to the Piagol troop. Mansu commits the rape and murder at the moment when the political mission of revolution in the South is coming to an end, suggesting that communist morality is not based in an individual sense of right and wrong and therefore easily allows for selfish criminality, even against one's own people, when the political mission no longer provides an ethical framework and justification for murderous violence. However, the depiction of Soju as an innocent victim is again rendered more complex by the film's intent focus on partisan characters; although she is a victim of Mansu, she is also a victim of the government's counterinsurgency and a loyal agent of the party. Therefore, even in its allegorical and melodramatic representation of rape and stolen innocence, *Piagol* is ambiguous in its anticommunism and its gendering of politics, because the distinction between the victim and the perpetrator of sexualized violence does not match neatly with the distinction between the communist enemy and good South Koreans.

The final series of events is interspersed between these first three and provides the main arc of the narrative. Throughout the film, Aeran has a romantic interest in the taciturn Chölsu and tries to engage him in conversation and flirtation. Chölsu is silently critical of both Captain Agari and the revolution, whereas Aeran dutifully carries out her role as a hardened revolutionary until the end of the film. Although the actor Kim Chin-gyu skillfully expresses Chölsu's doubts throughout the film, he does not verbally express his critical thoughts until the moment when

he and Aeran decide to renounce their communist politics and escape the mountain before it is too late. Meanwhile, Agari strictly censures any romantic relationships within the troop but nonetheless desires Aeran, which is one motivation for his killing Chölsu when he overhears their plan.

Although the love story between Chölsu and Aeran provides a narrative arc to the film, its causality is largely independent from the established norms of the melodrama mode of the time. Aeran is not punished for her independence, her strong-willed and masculine violence as a partisan, or her direct expressions of romantic interest in Chölsu. She is a ruthless revolutionary for most of the film, particularly during the execution in Namsanli, and does transform through romantic love. However, rather than undergoing a sudden conversion, she gradually and reasonably decides that they must try to escape the mountain and Agari. Most importantly, she is not punished for her past acts as a partisan or for being desirous; she survives her male counterparts rather than being reduced to an allegorized symptom of their conflicts of psychology or identity. The film's aspiration to realism, while not entirely fulfilled in the allegorical representation of defection, does allow for a more flexible moral universe than most melodrama films and certainly most anticommunist melodrama films, of the 1950s.

In addition to the more complex and focused characterizations of communist partisans and the unexpected ways that the narrative allows them ethical ambiguity and even redemption, it is likely that the visceral and cognitive experience of the visual style and sound of *Piagol* gave the censors pause in the mid-1950s. Perhaps because the film depicts communist partisans almost exclusively, its mise-en-scène, cinematography, and editing create a visual style that often resembles a North Korean production, even though the film's anticommunist messaging is apparent. In other words, the realism of the film is in part an effect of its mimicry of the North Korean realist style, which, like its South Korean counterparts, employs the melodramatic mode of conveying moral and political truths in addition to on-location shooting and an attempt to represent real social structures and possible historical events. At the same time, there are multiple scenes in *Piagol* that draw from the conventions of North Korean films but also contain a visual or sonic twist that rearticulates the scene's political perspective or subjectivity. Although one might conjecture that this type of direct engagement with and transformation of North Korean conventions might actually make for a more effective anticommunist film for an audience caught between two parties in a civil war, they probably instead contributed to the censors' concerns about the political position of the director.

One example of such a scene occurs after Agari has killed the youngest partisan, Iltong, by chasing him off of the cliff with a rock. Agari begins interrogating Iltong's confidante and criticizing him for not bringing up Iltong's ideological impurity during the attack on the village. Although Agari is clearly not the type of righteous and benevolent hero that we find in North Korean partisan films,

the scene does mimic formally how important ideological content is conveyed in North Korean cinema. The dialogue between the powerful pedagogue and the accused troop member, captured by shot/reverse-shot, highlights the importance of learning to overcome individual weakness for the sake of the larger political mission. More importantly, this dialogue is followed by a breaking of the 180-degree rule by cutting to a medium-long shot that depicts the partisan leader (Agari) turning around and giving a powerful speech to the surrounding troops about the need to remain dedicated to the party and the state regardless of the armistice agreement and the dire circumstances of their isolation in the South. The filming of the spatial relation between individual speaker and the crowd of troops, which includes a track-in that gradually enlarges the speaker, is a very common convention of Cold War North Korean films.

While it draws from ideological and formal conventions of the melodramatic representation of political speeches in North Korean films, the scene in *Piagol* contains two obviously awkward elements that speak to both its anticommunist didacticism and its delightful hybridity. As Agari interrogates the partisan, the camera breaks from the shot/reverse-shot convention and pans slightly to the right, bringing Chölsu and his ethically and politically skeptical gaze uncomfortably into the frame. Through an intensely consternated scowl, the actor Kim Chin-gyu conveys his character Chölsu's questioning of Agari's murder of the young partisan and, by extension, the whole rhetoric of the hereditary reactionary, which serves as a justification for violence against family members and villages caught within the civil conflict. This silent, contrapuntal perspective on the rhetoric of the partisan leader is further expressed as the camera tracks in on Agari's speech. The tracking is slow, with no dramatic punctuation of the speech. More significantly, halfway through the tracking, when the camera has again framed only Agari and Chölsu, it suddenly veers to the left, occluding the speaking Agari and arriving at a close-up of the silent and pensive Chölsu.

In this way, *Piagol* incorporates elements of the North Korean film style, which relies heavily on such melodramatic scenes of interrogation and political speech, while also self-consciously introducing twists into the formal conventions. However, because the focus of the film remains the internal struggles of the partisan hero rather than the South Korean counterinsurgency, the aggregate effect of such twists is not so much a transparent and positive rendering of anticommunist ideas as a more complex formal expression of a partisan subjectivity split between the political ideas of revolution (and the violence necessary to carry them out) and an exhaustion of the power of those ideas for the isolated Southern partisan questioning the foolhardy continuation of the revolution after the truce. Again, by straddling the line between melodrama's effective use of emotive discourse and visuality to convey the power of a moral system and realism's confrontation with the material and psychological limits to that system, *Piagol* presents narratively and visually an anticommunism for which communists are not dangerous

automatons but complex subjects who are transformed by both circumstances and their own reason.

Another type of scene from North Korean film whose visuality *Piagol* appropriates self-consciously is that of the partisan gazing out over the Korean landscape, which in North Korean partisan films is presented as the object of his or her political affection and dedication. As I showed in chapter 3, the convention of using dramatic landscape shots, often filmed in point of view, to capture the political ethos of the partisan was established early on, in *My Home Village*. In *Piagol*, immediately following the fade out of the scene of Agari's speech and Chölsu's consternation, we fade into another shot of Chölsu looking pensively into the distance. The camera tracks around to his side and then the scene cuts to a point-of-view shot, which directly mimics those of *My Home Village* in the way it pans across the mountains from the perspective of the partisan. However, the music is not the triumphant patriotic music of a North Korean production but sorrowful and melancholic strings that capture in melodramatic fashion the internal mood of the despondent and silent Chölsu. The subversion of the North Korean partisan film's use of landscape is apparent in this scene of a defeated and anguished communist's contemplation of the Korean landscape and, by extension, his reconsideration of the rightful heirs of the anticolonial struggle in the aftermath of civil war. This is anticommunism in its most aesthetically complex form because it inhabits visually the perspective of the partisan as it was developed in North Korean film, even as it utilizes sonic dissonance and close-ups of Chölsu to show the agony of a revolution that has lost its way and lost its object.

Later scenes of Chölsu and Aeran also emphasize this contemplation of the landscape but more explicitly supplant the platonic and purely political affection between male and female partisans in North Korean films with suggestions of a budding romance that might outlive the dissolution of the troop. *The Hand of Destiny* also frames romantic relationships as the means toward a humanizing ideological reorientation of the North Korean spy Margaret, but in *Piagol* the South Korean male is not present, and the relationship between Chölsu and Aeran does not contain the kind of missionary conversion of the female communist that we find in the earlier film. Aeran remains a strong and willful character, even as she comes to question communism through her conversations and romance with Chölsu. If the melodrama of heterosexual romance gradually replaces that of partisan subjectivity, the film nonetheless remains ambivalently attached to a realist concern with context, circumstances, and contradiction and never suggests, like many other anticommunist melodramas, that love will, or at least should, conquer all.

Much of *Piagol* provides what we might expect from an anticommunist film: Agari is a ruthless and secretly self-interested commander, Mansu steals Soju's innocence at her most vulnerable moment, and partisans cannot but turn against one another when the structure of the state and the party disappear and they are



FIGURE 20. In *Piagol* (1955), the communist troop leader Agari enters a Buddhist temple during the troop's attack of the village Namsanli. His face expresses fear and guilt during a series of shot/reverse-shots with two statues of the guardians of the Buddha.

left to their own devices. On the other hand, *Piagol* constantly conveys a tension between melodrama and realism and between the demands of anticommunism and an honest attempt to portray the psychology of the communist partisan in the aftermath of revolutionary struggle.

This tension between melodrama and realism reaches a peak in one scene whose mood and pathos stand out in terms of both aesthetic impact and experimentation with the representational possibilities of the melodramatic mode (more on that in the following chapter). The scene stands out not because of its engagement with North Korean conventions of realism but because of its unexpected expressionism and mood of regret and sympathy toward the staunch communist Agari. As the troop is attacking Namsanli, Agari enters a Buddhist temple. He has his eyes closed in reflection in what is the only scene where he seems to express remorse or uncertainty. The lighting is very dark and the shot tracks in very slowly toward his anguished face as swirling orchestral music builds. At the climax of the sequence of music, a series of shot/reverse-shots show Agari opening his eyes and looking up at statues of Narayōn Kūmgang and Miljök Kūmgag, two powerful and imposing guardians of the Buddha (figure 20). The music provides the only sound, and again the character does not profess ideological uncertainty openly but only through his facial expressions. The scene is filmed in a highly expressionistic manner and its insertion in the middle of the Namsanli sequence would seem out of place if *Piagol* did not contain other such narrative and visual flourishes that mark it as much more than an anticommunist propaganda picture. Although Agari never shows weakness or uncertainty toward the other partisans, here, alone in the temple, he experiences guilt and apprehension when he confronts the religious icons. The inclusion of such an expressionistic scene speaks to Yi Kang-chōn's ambitious vision for the film and to the more experimental possibilities of the melodramatic mode.