

## Film and the *Waesaek* (“Japanese Color”) Controversies of the 1960s

The 1965 bilateral treaty that brought together South Korea and Japan as regional Cold War partners meant both new opportunities and new hindrances for the local film business and filmmaking in South Korea. Film policy, censorship practices, publicity campaigns, cultural discourses, and film production were newly focused on film exchanges with Japan. Yet entering into cultural dialogue with the former enemy proved to be far more complicated and emotionally fraught than anticipated. It brought up repressed issues of decolonization and highlighted the blind spots of nationalist cultural politics in postcolonial South Korea. As films of the 1960s presented new subjects, themes, and attitudes toward the colonial past, the legacies of colonial popular culture also came to the fore, reshaping the onscreen representation of the colonial period in the ensuing decades.

### THE “JAPANESE COLOR” CONTROVERSY

After liberation, South Korea maintained a completely closed-door policy toward Japanese culture and imagery. At times there were signs that the government might relax this policy, but dramatic change proved difficult to achieve. Key to understanding the cultural politics of Korean-Japanese film exchange was the heated and protracted controversy surrounding the concept of “Japanese color” (*waesaek* in Korean), the perceived threat of the encroachment of Japanese popular culture into South Korean society, that persisted throughout the 1960s. The increasing cultural visibility of Japan gave rise to this defensive discourse, which tied directly into South Korea’s troubled relationship with its colonial legacy. Further, the repression of postcolonial reflection on colonialism as a cultural system was

bound up with a new Cold War order in which South Korea and Japan were allies and partners. Cinema, in particular, was an arena for contestation, for it was where an “acceptance” of Japan challenged the mandate of disavowal or negation that had effectively established discursive parameters on ways of imagining, remembering, and narrating the colonial experience for the people of South Korea.

The visual nature of the new Japanese cultural encroachment placed tremendous pressure not only on how cinematic nationalism would be visualized but also on the unrecognized forces that encouraged such visualization in the first place. I would argue that the crisis of colonial representation provoked by Japanese color in the 1960s explains the advent of such new types of films in the 1960s as the *kisaeng* film and the gangster film. Confrontation with now-visible images of Japan triggered memories of forced assimilation and implied the failure of cultural decolonization. The cultural discourse informed by dread of Japanese cultural infiltration reached its height in the mid-1960s, in response to South Korea’s normalization of relations with Japan in 1965. However, it is necessary to return to an earlier period to trace the shift that galvanized the momentum for cultural exchange with the former colonizer.

South Korea’s April Revolution of 1960 not only ended the authoritarian regime of Syngman Rhee, but also brought a progressive spirit to all areas of culture, challenging and dismantling various cultural regulations and censorship practices. The revolution was a watershed event in the truest sense. As Kwon Bodurae convincingly argues, the young generation of college students that came to center stage through their decisive participation in the radical events of 1960 threw off the pejorative label of “the silent generation” that they had received earlier and attained a generational “self-validation,” opening up a new space of possibility for social and cultural change in postwar Korea.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most conspicuous signs of revolutionary change in South Korean culture was the increased availability of Japanese popular culture, which had been suppressed under the staunchly anti-Japanese Rhee government. The younger generation’s eager embrace of hitherto unavailable Japanese culture created an important cultural trend in the early 1960s.<sup>2</sup> Long-established censorship practices and regulations were revised, if not outright ended, during this period. Japanese cultural works quickly gained visibility, with a multivolume translation of Japanese modern literature, in particular, being acclaimed by cultural elites.<sup>3</sup>

The effort to capitalize on the liberal trend of the era was not limited to publishing. The film industry made equally vigorous attempts to cash in on the era’s Japanophile frenzy. Less than ten days after the collapse of the Rhee government, the Korean Film Producers Association (hereafter KFPA) filed a petition with the Ministry of Education, the then government branch in charge of supervising film imports, not only to revise film statutes and censorship laws but to consider relaxing the prohibition on Japanese film imports.<sup>4</sup> The ministry responded favorably to the association’s appeal for change in censorship practices, which had become

stringent and repressive toward the end of the Rhee administration. However, the request to permit Japanese film imports was met with resolute rejection.<sup>5</sup>

The drive to bring in Japanese films intensified by means of a shrewd publicity campaign. The KFPFA issued a press release stating that it had collected a list of Korean films that its members wished to export to neighboring countries, including Japan. The report added that the five major Japanese film studios had jointly drafted a letter expressing interest in importing and releasing Korean films in Japan.<sup>6</sup> By publicizing the plan to export Korean films to Japan, the KFPFA framed the importation of Japanese films as an act of reciprocity and exchange. The call for the availability of South Korean films in the Japanese film market would mean the reciprocal availability of Japanese films in South Korea, for the mutual benefit of both countries.

The impetus for film exchange was fueled in part, by a larger diplomatic drive to integrate culture and film markets across the liberal Pacific region. The annual Asia-Pacific Film Festival, in particular, provided a crucial foundation upon which South Korean film producers could promulgate a permissive, if not liberal, attitude toward Japanese film and work against the current ban. Started in 1954, the Asia-Pacific Film Festival advanced its agenda to integrate the liberal capitalist bloc of the Asia-Pacific region by connecting film markets and facilitating film traffic and coproductions across the Pacific archipelago of US Cold War allies.<sup>7</sup> South Korea won a major award at the seventh festival, held in Tokyo in 1960, opening an avenue for South Korean film attendees, that is, film producers, to begin dialogues with major Japanese film studio personnel to normalize film exchange in the future.

This publicity campaign was part of the KFPFA's greater ambition to reshape the structure of the domestic film industry—specifically, to enter and gain control over the lucrative film import business. Its petition on May 27, 1960, illustrates its leaders' business goal quite bluntly. The requests included the reform of film regulations, an overhaul of the film censorship structure and practices, the establishment of public funds for domestic film production, a tax exemption for theater admission fees, tariff relief for film equipment, and a bid to host the Asia-Pacific Film Festival in Seoul. The most controversial item on the list was the appeal that importation and distribution rights to Japanese films be placed solely in the hands of domestic film producers.<sup>8</sup> This "proactive" appeal was designed by the association to procure the future benefits of the Japanese film trade by taking over what had been a separate business sector for film importers and distributors. The organization strategically applied the economic rationale of protectionism: because of the "special (historical) circumstances" of South Korea and Japan, Japanese film imports and distribution should be handled differently to protect the domestic film industry.<sup>9</sup> The KFPFA ultimately succeeded in reshaping the domestic industry in the years to come.

The association's use of Japanese cinema as leverage to gain a foothold in the film import sector reflected a growing awareness in the film business of the

opportunity to capitalize on the popular interest in Japanese culture. In addition to asserting its claim for involvement in the future of Japanese film importation, the KFPA made official its demand to restrict any foreign films showing Japanese color or themes (such as Hollywood films) until the ban on actual Japanese films was formally abolished.<sup>10</sup> This modest request reiterated in principle the existing cultural policy precept of South Korea: the suppression of onscreen cultural references to Japan, the center of colonial culture and indoctrination. The aesthetics of disavowal that had long dominated the previous era's filmmaking were exemplified by the film policy, and the organization invoked such disavowal for its future business strategy.

When the KFPA made its demand, Japan had already received great attention in film because of the growing use of its imagery in Hollywood films. In the midst of a relaxation of film censorship in the postrevolutionary period, the Hollywood-produced Korean War film *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* (Mark Robson, 1956) was released after the deletion of a four-minute scene that featured American soldiers on a leisurely stay in Tokyo.<sup>11</sup> Film importers read this move as a sign of change in the new era and submitted for review and release additional Hollywood films that featured contemporary images of Japan and close interactions between American and Japanese characters.<sup>12</sup> When the Ministry of Education granted release permission for *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (Daniel Mann, 1956) in the summer of 1960, the KFPA reacted vehemently.<sup>13</sup> It pointed out that films such as *The Teahouse of the August Moon* were not actually "Hollywood" films but coproduction works in which Japanese film companies were deeply involved.<sup>14</sup> According to this line of argument, making these films available to Korean viewers would mean opening the Korean film market to Japanese films. The KFPA also called for strong state leadership that would clear up these contentious issues.

The KFPA's argument illustrates how central the role of the state was to the discursive organization of the cultural politics of nationalism in the 1960s film controversies. The aesthetics of disavowal toward colonial culture led not only to the invisibility of Japan in South Korean films, but also to a particular discursive matrix. Cultural exchanges between Japan and South Korea were structurally difficult, if not impossible, to imagine when the issue was constantly viewed through the *political* prism of anticolonial nationalism. Inherent in the debate over the contemporary image of Japan was a repressed challenge to South Korea: How would it reckon with the colonial culture and its legacy in the present? The call for stronger state intervention as the solution to a problem that was visual and cultural in nature was an apparently counterintuitive impulse given the liberal cultural trend of postrevolutionary society.

The contention over the release of *The Teahouse of the August Moon* was expressed in a series of heated debates in newspapers and magazines that focused on how to protect Korean cinema and culture against the perceived threat of Japanese cultural infiltration. Some critics pointed out the deeper issue at stake:

the problem of the colonial cultural legacy. Yu Hanchŏl, for instance, located the root cause of the problem in the unchecked nostalgia of the older, namely, colonial, generation for Japanese culture.<sup>15</sup> In an extensive op-ed, Yu asserted that this troubling historical legacy justified a continuing disengagement from Japanese films and other cultural works. He criticized the film interest group for exploiting the political milieu, arguing that its attempt to bring in Japanese film was a cheap trick to take advantage of the liberal trend of the era.

Though largely adhering to nationalist rhetoric, Yu's article nevertheless was rare in addressing the problem of the colonial legacy and its effects on the Korean people long after the formal demise of colonialism. For him, the problem was not strictly a matter of establishing proper film laws or regulations; rather, it concerned the mental state (*maŭm-ŭi chunbi*) of the contemporary Korean people. Without sound mental preparedness, he predicted, South Korea would suffer the depressing fate of the Taiwanese film market, which according to him had become largely dominated by Japanese films.

Overall, Yu's critique resorted to the language and rhetoric of anticolonial nationalism, but also called for rapprochement with the new partner Japan. On the surface, Yu underscored the importance of decolonization in the cultural field and especially in the nation's collective consciousness. There was, however, a short-circuit in his argument that averted more rigorous reflection on the lacunae of cultural decolonization. He emphasized that an anticolonial mentality was essential for sound opposition to the encroaching Japanese culture, and he remained critical of any capricious policy that would permit Hollywood films with Japanese themes and thereby might corrupt the existing film forms, governed by what I call the "aesthetics of disavowal," that postcolonial South Korean cinema had collectively and cumulatively developed. However, at another point, Yu attacked the very principle he was defending for being old-fashioned and pedantic. "The anti-Japaneseness of the past is unreflective, as if it were used as a mere weapon [against the enemy]." He then wrote that contemporary Japan was no longer an enemy state but a partner of cultural exchange in a liberal world.

The bifurcating tendencies in Yu's argument warrant emphasis because the ambivalence he conveyed appeared repeatedly in the articles of other writers in subsequent years. His idea was not simply an expression of an individual view but a statement of the generational anxiety of those who had firsthand experience of colonial culture and indoctrination. This ambivalence originated from the failure to resolve the new challenges brought to the old scenario of anticolonial visibility. The changed circumstances of the early 1960s created a milieu liberal enough to accept cultural works from the former enemy state, bringing the void of representation into sharp relief and effecting a direct critique of the narrow anticolonial visibility of film.

Repeated calls for the suspension of film market liberalization were a desperate attempt to curtail postcolonial questioning that challenged the anticolonial

imagining and attempted to fill the void of *critical* decolonization. While what Yu advocated was an understandable response to what he deemed the challenges of Japanese cultural aggression, I would stress that such rhetoric ended up promoting a passive means of managing the crisis of the moment. Like many in cultural fields who imagined the normalization of bilateral relations as somehow happening eventually, Yu sought postponement of a mutual exchange of cultures until the proper time came. His article presupposed the powerlessness of writers like himself by demanding the state's direct action to protect the young or misguided masses who would otherwise be duped by the dangerous lure of Japanese culture. Instead of calling into question the remnants of colonial cultural indoctrination, Yu and his fellow writers directed their elitism toward the Korean people, who might not distinguish "good" art from that which was culturally corrupting. Hence, the only Japanese films that deserved approval for release were films of high artistic merit, educational films, and documentary films.

#### THE 1960s CENSORSHIP REGIME

The controversy over the release of the Japanese documentary film *The Torch* (*Sŏnghwa*) in 1960 revealed that the notion of culture was, in fact, at the core of the problem concerning filmic images of contemporary Japan. *The Torch*, about the Olympic Games, was petitioned for release as a "culture film," a category that encompassed all films other than feature-length narrative films or newsreels. As a separate film category, a culture film did not need to follow the established protocols and procedures of censorship that applied to narrative films. The film importer had already secured an import license for *The Torch*, but the import division of the Ministry of Commerce sought to block the process. The importer protested the decision on the grounds that the import license guaranteed the release of a non-narrative culture film. A newspaper article featured a critical view of the release of the film, calling it the creation of an "extraterritorial screening space" in South Korea.<sup>16</sup> The Division of Culture within the Ministry of Education, however, defended the film's release, as it was based on the decision of the advisory board, which had approved the importation and release of the documentary for its educational merit. The vice minister, in turn, came forward with a different view. Even if a culture film possessed educational merit, he argued, it still was too early to import Japanese culture films.<sup>17</sup> The Ministry of Education convened a meeting to review *The Torch* and identified its problems. One such problem was that the film featured disproportionate coverage of the Japanese national team and its activities. Moreover, it presented the Japanese national anthem. The ministry ordered the removal of the Japanese national anthem from the soundtrack and allowed the film's limited release thereafter.

The direct censorship of *The Torch* indicates how volatile the circulation of Japanese language was in the cultural politics of South Korea. International sports,

the film's focus, was one of the most popular subjects in culture films, and the Korean film audience often flocked to see historic moments of international recognition for Korean athletes' achievements in various events.<sup>18</sup> The sports arena provided a space of interaction and fair competition between countries and thereby fostered a sense of mutual understanding that was rare in any other cultural field. But the Japanese anthem scene in the film posed a direct assault on one of the founding principles of anticolonial nationalism in South Korea: monolingualism and the suppression of the use of the Japanese language and script in public space. For several critics, the strongest objection to the importation of Japanese films was that the films made audible the language of the ex-colonial power.

As Serk-bae Suh has noted, national bilingualism was completely prohibited in postcolonial Korea. Both North and South Korea adopted measures to suppress the use of the Japanese language in public spaces and to make monolingualism irreversible.<sup>19</sup> It was claimed that the showing of a Japanese-language film would turn a movie theater into a rehearsal site for bilingual education, familiarization with Japanese culture, and the kind of imperial subject formation that many viewers had experienced growing up in the colonial era. Those who had received formal education during the colonial era were especially alarmed because for their generation, a Japanese-language film was not a foreign film but a native one. The producer Han Lim incisively observed that Japanese films would provide a viewing experience distinct from other foreign films, for Korean film viewers would easily understand the Japanese language without the help of subtitles.<sup>20</sup> Screening of a Japanese film would immediately trigger the ideological effect of interpellation, as older Koreans would be called on to react to the Japanese language much as they had done when they were subjects of the colonial era. In the face of this grave situation, one reporter astutely pointed out that what had to be prevented from entering Korea in films was not Japanese color or imagery but the Japanese *language*.<sup>21</sup>

For the younger generation, who had not received a colonial education in Japanese, falling under the sway of Japanese culture did not seem like a problem or a danger. Yet instead of soul-searching, critics emphasized the harmful effects that Japanese film would have on a naive audience of young people. In addition, after the end of Rhee's regime, a particular elitist view of the Korean film audience emerged in proposals to distinguish culturally worthy artworks from decadent and salacious films.<sup>22</sup> It was the state, these elite writers claimed, that should take an active role in selecting artistic films from Japan when the ban was lifted.<sup>23</sup>

That day grew nearer. Support for opening the Korean film market to Japanese films gained momentum as normalization between the two countries became a foreseeable reality in the mid-1960s. The Park Chung Hee administration, which took power through a military coup in 1961, implemented vigorous efforts to normalize relations with Japan, a reflection of the regime's pursuit of economic incentives as well as its compliance with US demands for greater integration of the anticommunist bloc in the region. The anticipation of normalization translated



into an intensification of campaigns to import Japanese films as well as forays into new types of domestic film production, both of which capitalized on a new public interest in Japanese culture and film.

Those who were in favor of liberalizing the domestic film market used the economic rationale of reciprocity to underscore the benefits of trade. As noted, the KFPA worked in tandem with the major Japanese studios to devise and plan future coproductions as part of a business model to benefit both parties. The lifting of the ban on Japanese films would not result in losses to the domestic market. Rather, the quid pro quo of film traffic would create an opportunity for Korean cinema to enter the Japanese market. The prospect of normalization on the horizon helped this discourse gain more support in the film industry. Furthermore, Japanese technological superiority in filmmaking was reason enough for many film producers to push for closer ties with Japan. The disparity was particularly pronounced in the area of the postproduction process. Since the conversion to color film, technological factors had played an important role in a film's overall box office performance. South Korean film producers, who had to send their holiday-targeted films to Japan because of its superiority in handling postproduction work, were eager to learn about Japan's technological advances from close interaction.<sup>24</sup>

The Asia-Pacific Film Festival of 1962 offered a prospect for normalization and stimulated liberal views on film exchange. Held in Seoul, the festival screened Japanese films in Korea for the first time since liberation. Four Japanese films were shown to a select audience, and the Ministry of Information set up an additional screening for Korean filmmakers and personnel. Some of the audience who saw all four films expressed satisfaction but also questioned the current ban on Japanese film, describing it as an "overreaction" to the threat of Japanese culture.<sup>25</sup> It is noteworthy that Shin Sangok's *Sŏng ch'unhyang* was released in Japan just a month before the opening of the film festival, creating the sense of a simultaneity of film exchange across the strait. The film was hailed in the South Korean press as the first wide-screen release in Japan, cementing Shin's reputation as the most influential filmmaker-producer of the era.

Meanwhile, controversies over Japanese imagery spilled over into Korean film production. In an effort to capitalize on the perceived attraction of Japanese imagery, several Korean filmmakers took the bold step of conducting film shoots that captured images of contemporary Japan, which they then used in domestic films. Kim Kiyoungh's 1961 film *Over Hyŏnhaet'an Strait* (*Hyŏnhaetanŭn algoitta*) is an early example of this film "smuggling."<sup>26</sup> Kim's film got through censorship because it did not showcase a diegetic event set in the real physical site of Japan. Kim merely used images he took in Japan as insert shots for his film.<sup>27</sup> The filmmakers who attempted actual location shooting in Japan were not so lucky, as the Ministry of Information still upheld the ban on direct references to Japan, its people, and its culture. The filmmakers had to either give up releasing the finished film



or suffer the compromise of having the offensive images removed from the film. The same government body, however, reacted very differently to Japanese “color” or themes in Hollywood films, generally giving them more liberal treatment. The obvious inconsistency had a galvanizing effect on the KFP A, which in 1962 made this aspect of film censorship a new target of criticism.<sup>28</sup>

The challenge posed by films’ use of contemporary images of Japan took an unexpected turn in 1963, when the South Korean film *Happy Solitude* (*Haengbokhan kodok*; Shin Kyōnggyun, 1963) was submitted for a censorship review and release permit. The film’s inclusion of location images from Japan provoked ire, adding further confusion about the definition of Japanese color. The film is based on the true story of a Japanese woman who married a Korean man against the opposition of her natal family. She leaves Japan in pursuit of love and settles in Korea with her husband. Given the nature and scope of the narrative, it would have been impossible to meet the stipulation to avoid Japanese elements and images. The film was, after all, the story of a Japanese woman whose troubled interaction with her family was an important part of the whole narrative. Yet the visual references to her Japanese ethnic identity and upbringing, such as her kimono, a Japanese song, and the images of Japan as her natal country, were subject to suppression for violating the established codes of anti-Japanese film aesthetics.<sup>29</sup> To secure the film’s release, the film’s producer complied with the injunction of the board by removing seven problematic scenes deemed inappropriate.<sup>30</sup>

The miscalculation of the domestic film producer did not occur within a vacuum. Since the advent of the Park administration, the normalization of relations with Japan had been accepted in film circles as a *fait accompli*, although the terms of such a development remained unclear. This perception, in turn, encouraged the industry to seize the benefits of the anticipated availability of Japanese culture and imagery. The government fueled the anticipation by its liberal handling of Japanese color in Hollywood films. While this elicited vehement criticism from some film and cultural sectors, it also convinced Korean film producers to simultaneously include Japanese color themselves.

*Happy Solitude* was a bold attempt by the Korean film production company Ihwa Yōnghwasa to respond to the signs of a change in the times. It also signaled a shift in the approach of Korean film producers, from defensive actions that curtailed the importation of foreign films that included Japanese visual and cultural elements to active filmmaking that featured the interaction of Koreans and Japanese on screen. The treatment of a Japan-related theme in *Happy Solitude* was innovative enough for other film producers to follow suit and underscore the close proximity of the two countries through themes of interethnic romance, understanding, and reconciliation.<sup>31</sup> On the basis of these developments, film critics and industry leaders went so far as to suggest three gradual phases of introducing Japanese color to abet film exchange and market liberalization: the state would

allow first the importation of Western films that showed contemporary Japan as the background of a story (or were shot on location in Japan), then films that showed Japanese actors, and finally Japanese films proper.<sup>32</sup>

Such expectations were to prove too hopeful. South Korean filmmakers failed to recognize how protean the definitions of Japanese color would become in subsequent years.<sup>33</sup> *Happy Solitude*, moreover, created a political crisis within the KFPA. The film's supposed promotion of Japanese color gave ample reason for film importers who had been defensive about the issue of Japanese color to wage a publicity campaign against the KFPA. The film represented a filmmaking practice that deviated from the state's official agenda of opposing films of Japanese color, so some members condemned *Happy Solitude* for taking advantage of the current Japanophilia, while others insisted on full support for unrestricted domestic film production. The controversy tarnished the reputation of the KFPA, for it had been vocal about the corrupting influence of Japanese color on the minds of Korean viewers. To many Korean viewers and the censorship bureau, the case of *Happy Solitude* revealed inconsistent, if not contradictory, actions on the part of the KFPA.<sup>34</sup>

The controversy over the film illustrates how even an austere drama that stressed the affirmation of national identity could be subject to censure for violating the established visual protocols of anti-Japanese ideology. The film hence stands for the conundrums that faced the postcolonial film industry in depicting new terms of exchange with Japan. The film's treatment of the interethnic romance deserves particular attention for this reason. Its narrative depicts the female protagonist's conversion from a Japanese to a Korean identity through marriage and thereby reinforces the centrality of the Korean national identity. It is an inversion of the late colonial cultural policy that was geared toward assimilation and conversion of Koreans into docile and faithful subjects of imperial Japan. The film's narrative therefore attempts to "deprogram" this anterior political indoctrination by promoting ethnic harmony and understanding from the privileged viewpoint of the contemporary Korean and having a Japanese woman come to terms with her country's colonial violence through her willing embrace of Korean culture and identity. The state's intervention blocking this postcolonial fantasy scenario of interethnic harmony showed that it was structurally difficult, if not impossible, to faithfully depict a Japanese person—the elementary visual "module," so to speak, necessary for any plausible narrative configuration of the Japanese Other in interaction with the Korean nation in a contemporary setting. Having been deprived of this dimension of visual properties because of the established parameters of the anticolonial mandate, South Korean cinema faced a fundamental and critical crisis of representation concerning Japan. In an effort to sustain the existing masquerade, the government blocked the cultural effort to construct new terms of exchange and relations with Japan onscreen.<sup>35</sup>

It was during this period of experimentation with Japanese themes that South Korean cinema faced yet another charge. Critics began to voice concerns over the pervasive practice in South Korean cinema of copying narrative materials from Japanese film and literature. This disingenuous filmmaking practice, critics argued, was increasing as Korea moved steadily toward normalization with Japan and was a sign of a troubling tendency within the industry to capitalize on the lure and bankability of Japanese culture.<sup>36</sup> Some went so far as to demand that the state take action to curtail outright infringement practices rather than pursue the trifling matter of identifying and eliminating Japanese cultural references in Korean cinema.<sup>37</sup> According to this line of argument, a troubling infiltration of Japanese culture had already occurred. Unchecked, Japanese film sources had been “smuggled” onto the Korean film screen. In particular, the success of “youth films” (*chŏngch'un yŏnghwa*) testified to the phantom presence of Japanese cinema in South Korean culture.<sup>38</sup>

Although the lack of originality in filmmaking identified by critics raised concerns, the dispute was in no way comparable in scope and weight to the controversies over Japanese color. For one thing, the practice of infringement was too pervasive and structurally embedded in the mode of filmmaking of the time. Screenwriter Yu Hanchŏl was forthright about the widespread practice. Director Yu Hyŏnmok also acknowledged the prevalence of the problem and noted that it perhaps was too late to correct it on an individual level.<sup>39</sup> South Korea's self-imposed insulation ironically created room for the greater inflow and appropriation of Japanese cultural content into South Korean films.

I would like to complicate the picture of infringement a bit by reflecting on the nature of the disavowal that governed what was Japanese in the mid-1960s. The infringement issue entailed neither lasting debate nor policy repercussions. The serious dilemma of Japanese cultural encroachment was framed almost exclusively in terms of visual and linguistic references. The state required submitted works to be free of any visual or auditory allusion to Japan and suppressed any mention of Japanese sources – disallowing, for instance, the appearance of a Japanese author's name in a film's credits. Ironically, then, any effort by South Korean filmmakers to come clean about the Japanese sources of their narratives was institutionally impossible. Films that passed censorship scrutiny were not mere plagiarisms but translations or adaptations of Japanese originals because of the institutional mandate to sanitize and “indigenize” Japanese narrative sources.

Navigating the demands of the state and the populace was a challenge even for the era's most talented filmmaker. The film director and mogul Shin Sangok jumped on the bandwagon for making Japanese-themed films in 1965. In an effort to reflect the current zeitgeist, he examined the timely subject of South Korea's relationship with Japan through the production of a megahistorical drama, *The Sino-Japanese War and Queen Min the Heroine* (*Chŏngil chŏnjaenggwa yŏgŏl minbi*; Im Wonsik

and Na Ponghan, 1965). Set in the declining years of the Chosŏn dynasty, this epic historical drama rehearses the nationalist history lesson of the biographical films of the late 1950s. The film galvanizes anti-Japanese consciousness through detailed presentation of the historical events that led up to the gruesome assassination of Queen Min by Japanese assailants. Unlike other South Korean films that tried to tap into the perceived attraction of contemporary Japanese culture, Shin brought the old politics of anti-Japanese nationalism back to the screen.<sup>40</sup> The film proved to be the year's most prestigious work, winning four major prizes at the annual Grand Bell Awards.

Censorship records reveal, however, that the film had to undergo tortuous steps of review and compromise to earn the final approval of the ministry. In this case, the controversies did not center on a favorable portrayal of Japanese culture. Instead, the film's outright contrarian politics of anti-Japanese nationalism were the cause for concern. In fact, the censorship body in the ministry cited violation of the clause in the new film law that prohibited negative portrayal of foreign countries with which South Korea was about to develop diplomatic relations. For a regime that faced the opposition of the masses to prospective normalization with Japan, the prestigious historical epic represented the type of dangerous filmmaking that could potentially incite dissenting views. Shin's move to incorporate a strand of oppositional politics into his film thus was not so successful. The stringent application of the film law showed how difficult it was, even for a seasoned filmmaker like Shin, to produce films with a strongly anti-Japanese imaginary.

#### THE NEW ERA OF NORMALIZATION

When the momentous 1965 normalization treaty did come to pass, one direct result for South Korean filmmaking was the opportunity, finally, to pursue coproductions. Normalization promulgated a discourse of an equal partnership between South Korea and Japan in virtually all areas of interaction. Under the aegis of the United States, this new geopolitical integration facilitated production of various imaginaries that were in the service of the two countries' equal and reciprocal relationship. The anterior aesthetic precept of negation and disavowal entered a new phase of adjustment, if not transformation, for the circumstances required cultural productions to align with the expected view of the new partnership. The move toward coproduction gained momentum and support within the film industry, as it was understood by many as the safest and most viable form of filmmaking that would also comply with the new spirit of diplomacy.

The coproduction effort, however, encountered disarray and mishaps despite the measured steps taken by production companies. The story of the production of *Daughter of the Governor General* (*Chŏngdok-ŭi ttal*; Cho Kŭngha, 1965) is an example.<sup>41</sup> The production company, Segi Sangsa, entered into an informal business partnership with Toei and planned to barter an in-house actor for future



FIGURE 4. Poster for *Daughter of the Governor General*. Courtesy of the Korean Film Archive.

films. *Daughter of the Governor General* was the first instance of such an arrangement. In exchange for the appearance of the Japanese actress Michi Kanako in the film, the South Korean actress Kim Hyejŏng was to appear in an upcoming Toei feature film.<sup>42</sup> Segi Sangsa took the initiative to bring the Japanese actress to Korea to shoot the main segments of the film before it received formal approval for production from the Ministry of Public Information.<sup>43</sup> Coproduction by means of actor exchange appeared to many to be a reasonable strategy and encouraged more directors to plan coproductions.<sup>44</sup>

On July 13, 1965, a month after the normalization treaty, the Ministry of Public Information announced a plan to allow film exchanges with Japan. It would have

four phases: (1) permission to include location images of Japan in South Korean cinema, (2) the exchange of actors between South Korea and Japan, (3) coproduction, and (4) the direct importation of Japanese films. Because *Daughter of the Governor General* jumped straight to phase 2 and used a Japanese actress, the ministry blocked the film's release.

While the makers of *Daughter of the Governor General* were prematurely optimistic about the prospects of film exchange, phase 1 was implemented and location shots of Japan immediately proliferated in South Korean films. The director Kim Suyong benefited most from this policy change. Kim made four films in 1966 that prominently showed urban locales of modern Japan: *Affection* (*Yujŏng*), *Nostalgia* (*Manghyang*), *Love Detective* (*Yŏnae t'amjŏng*), and *Goodbye Japan* (*Charigŏra Ilbonttang*).

Many Korean film critics were provoked by what they saw as an excessive use of Japanese urban space in films and claimed that Japanese urban location imagery was being introduced primarily to cater to the tourist gaze of the film spectator.<sup>45</sup> Some critics complained about the prevalence of flat postcard-like imagery that served no dramatic purpose other than providing viewers a virtual form of tourist sightseeing in Japan.<sup>46</sup> Concurrent with increased imagery of Japan was the hiring of actors who were Zainichi (i.e., ethnic Korean permanent residents in Japan) for the roles of Japanese characters. Film producers resorted to this as a method of circumventing the ministry's ban on hiring Japanese actors (since this remained a principal form of censorship restriction). Kong Midori, an actress who first appeared as a Japanese woman in *Over Hyŏnhaet'an Strait* in 1960, played virtually the same role of an ethnic Japanese in two more films: *The Bridge over Hyŏnhaet'an Strait* (*Hyŏnhaet'an-ŭi kurŭmdari*; Chang Ilho, 1963) and *Goodbye Japan* (*Charitkŏra Ilbonttang*; Kim Suyong, 1966).<sup>47</sup> These attempts to evade the stringent restrictions did not garner commercial success or critical acclaim in the end. Yet they illustrate the South Korean filmmakers' difficulties in using and handling visual references of Japan without raising the concerns of the censorship agency.

The burgeoning filmic imagery and references to Japan in the mid-1960s continued to draw criticism, but this criticism began to reflect changes in perceptions of and attitudes toward Japanese cinema. When South Korean and Japanese film producers began their informal meetings at Asia-Pacific Film Festivals in the early 1960s, Korean filmmakers had sought the benefits of film exchange in part to emulate the critical and commercial success of Japanese art films on the international film circuit.<sup>48</sup> Major film auteurs such as Akira Kurosawa and Mizoguchi Kenji had enjoyed phenomenal success in the late 1950s, and the high reputation of Japanese film continued into the early 1960s. In the mid-1960s, however, Korean film critics began to recognize a decline of the Japanese film boom overseas as well as domestically. The rise of youth films and other types of films in Japan that



prominently featured sexual subjects and social problems were interpreted as a sign of the decline of Japanese cinema.<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, the salacious treatment of sexuality led to the demand by critics and film personnel that the state should protect Korean audiences from exposure to exploitative Japanese films. The argument that the state should exercise an active role in distinguishing good Japanese film imports from low entertainments gained the support of intellectuals. If coproduction with Japan relied on a rhetoric of exchange and reciprocity for the benefit of South Korea to catch up with Japan and its advanced cinema, growing worries over the decadent aspect of Japanese cinema led to recommendations that only high art or enlightening films should be permitted for import and screening in South Korea. I argue that this division of Japanese cinema into high art and low entertainment, along with the highly elusive notion of Japanese color and continued deferral of proposed changes, gave the government excuses to keep Japanese film at bay until the late 1990s. By acknowledging and incorporating these critical concerns into film policy, the state was able to claim a role as the sole protector of Korean culture against the corrupting influence of foreign culture.

Confusion over the parameters of permissible cultural exchanges with Japan reached its height when the government ordered the suspension of the production of *Lonesome Goose* (*Koan*) in late 1966. The film was based on the popular TV drama *Tokyo Vagabond* (*Tongkyōng nagūne*), written by the era's most prolific popular media writer, Cho Namsa. The story presents a romance between a young Korean shipbuilding engineer and a Japanese girl from a noble background. Most of the events take place in Japan, where the Korean protagonist stays to learn engineering skills. Technically, *Lonesome Goose* was not a coproduced film but was planned as a "collaboration project" between two companies: Han'guk Chungang Yōnghwa Chejak Hoesa of South Korea and Toei of Japan. The level of collaboration was unprecedented, however, as Toei was to be deeply involved in many aspects of the film's production, from its initial planning to the adaptation of the TV drama's screenplay, production design, music, and even partial support for directing. South Korea's Choe Muryong was to direct and play the leading role in the film. After the completion of principal photography in Japan, the film was scheduled for release in both Japan and South Korea in the following year.

Like the producer of *Happy Solitude*, the collaboration team behind *Lonesome Goose* gravely miscalculated the position of the South Korean government regarding rapid moves toward film cooperation.<sup>50</sup> The government's 1965 plan, which had allowed a first phase of film location shooting in Japan to begin in that year, did not lead to further steps. According to the timetable of the plan, the appearance of Japanese actors was also scheduled for 1965, then permission for coproductions in 1966 and full importation of Japanese films in 1967.<sup>51</sup> However, the government reversed itself after it received numerous complaints from various film sectors.



In the meantime, Choe took a proactive step to normalize film exchange with Japan through his de facto coproduction in 1966, an effort that was in line with the original time frame of Korean film market liberalization. The chasm between the enforcement of film policy and film production practice suggests the difficulty in reaching a consensus about the threat of Japanese cinema in South Korea. The government, which promised a lenient approach to the subject of Japanese film, was able to exercise a draconian suppression of filmmaking practices that were deemed inappropriate on the basis of a film law that had been in place since 1962. The government pointed out the disparity between the preproduction plan and the finished film content as being in violation of the existing film law and issued an immediate suspension of production of *Lonesome Goose*.

The fate of *Lonesome Goose* makes clear that the government was able to exercise unquestioned authority over the definition of Japanese color, even though the terms of the definition remained unclear and contradictory. In fact, the Japanese cinema that occupied the minds of Korean cultural elites, filmmakers, critics, and policy makers during this period has a phantom quality. Its presence never materialized, but the discourse surrounding its effects was real enough to forestall and ruin the prospects of two Korean films that ventured into the territory of imagining dialogue with modern Japan.<sup>52</sup> The subject of Japanese color belongs to a peculiar cultural ramification of the Cold War in which the exclusion of contemporary Japan from cultural productions was conceived as the sole approach to dealing with the problem of the colonial legacy and its effects, since it was the approach least likely to disturb South Korea's version of a new partnership with Japan that was required by Cold War politics and economic interests.

During the frenzy of Japanese location shooting in South Korean cinema in 1966, many filmmakers sought to explore themes of cultural exchange and harmony with Japan—and faced frequent censorship hurdles as a result. But the films that represented Japan without any objection from the censors were anti-communist espionage films, which proliferated during this period. Kim Suyong's *Nostalgia (Manghyang)* and *Goodbye Japan* are noteworthy for their portrayal of Japanese space as a dangerous ground of communist infiltration and indoctrination.<sup>53</sup> The principal character interaction takes place between a South Korean and a *chochongryŏn* (a Zainichi Korean) who turns out to be politically affiliated with communist North Korea. These films cultivated one of the most recurring Cold War themes associated with Japan in the ensuing years: the dubious political identity of members of the Korean-Japanese (Zainichi) diaspora and the absence of Japanese political leadership to curtail or suppress the activities of Korean communist subversives. Thus, it was through reemployment of the Cold War trope of international bipolar politics that the imaging of contemporary Japan finally made a full entrance into South Korean cinema. The Japan that existed as the backdrop of espionage films was marked as the Other space, filled with the danger of communist threat and indoctrination, a construction of difference that was

indispensable to the continued disguise of all other kinds of integration that were taking place under US hegemony.

Problems with Japanese color also affected the way colonial space was depicted in the films of the late 1960s. As noted earlier, normalization proliferated tropes and discourses of the two countries' future relationship in terms of exchange and equivalency. The normalization treaty of 1965 had encouraged South Korean cultural producers to imagine and pursue collaborations with Japanese partners on an equal footing. Seen from this perspective, it was not just a turning point in Cold War geopolitics. Conceiving the relationship between South Korea and Japan in the framework of equivalence, mutuality, and reciprocity meant that even though South Korea might show signs of underdevelopment in many areas, including filmmaking, it now shared a trajectory of historical progress with Japan and a destiny to defend freedom and fight communism. Japan implicitly represented a model of emulation for South Korea in the area of economic activities, as the two countries were set within the geopolitical structure of a US-dominated bipolar world. Consequently, critical engagement with colonial history and postcolonial reckoning and reflection were regarded as backward-looking resistance to normalization and were criticized as showing a timid reluctance to embrace change and progress.<sup>54</sup>

Given the way Japan had been opposed politically but excluded culturally in the previous visual renditions of the colonial era, the new conceptual framework of equalization was itself a major development. The coproduction efforts within the film industry were a direct application of this new principle. The impulse to bring together two entities with inimical relations created a new zone of proximity in South Korean cinema that, as we will see, gained prominence in films about *kisaeng* and gangster characters.