Nation, Subculture, and Queer Representation: The Film *Namja kisaeng* and the Politics of Gender and Sexuality in 1960s South Korea

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A TALL MAN WITH A MUSCULAR body loves knitting, needlework, and doing laundry. Inspiring the abhorrence of his company president due to his effeminacy, he is fired. Working in a *kisaeng* house in female masquerade to make ends meet, he eventually becomes its most popular entertainer. Still beset with guilt over his "immoral" lifestyle, he abandons his newfound profession to marry his girlfriend and begin a proper life as a cosmetics salesman.

This is the storyline of the comedy film *Namja kisaeng* (Male hostess). This film, part of a boom in the genre of comedy films in the late 1960s, relies on the audience's immediate recognition of the kisaeng figure—a female entertainer in premodern Korea who served men—in 1969, just when the kisaeng was transforming into a hostess who worked in bars during the day and as a prostitute at night. Its director, Sim U-sôp, who directed over thirty films between 1968 and 1970, was particularly prolific in this genre.[1] Many of his films went on to set box-office records, particularly *Namja singmo* (Male maid), which attracted over 120,000 people in its first two weeks of screening in Seoul and saved the famous but financially struggling Shin Film from bankruptcy.[2] Despite these films' technical flaws and stock plot elements (typically focusing on poor and

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[1] In Korean naming practice, last names come before first names. I use Korean naming practice for the Korean names in the text and endnotes.

[2] Because South Korea operated under an indirect distribution system from the middle of the 1960s to the early 1990s, it is difficult to determine exact statistics for audience numbers. However, considering that the population of Seoul was 2.5 million in the late 1960s, the film would appear to have been a remarkable box-office hit. It is often said that if the theatrical opening of a film (*kaebongkwan*) had an audience of 100,000, the production cost would be covered. For detailed studies of the old Korean film distribution system, see Kim Mi-hyŏn, ed., *Han'guk yŏnghwa paegŭpsa yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Korean Film Commission, 2003), 14–28.

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rural men and women who overcome the adversities of life to find love and a family), audiences loved them.

These comedy films often exposed audiences to queer motifs, such as cross-dressing and gender role reversal,[3] and they displayed diverse sexual themes of male sexual impotence, sadomasochism, and homosexuality.[4] This particular historical moment of South Korean popular culture during the regime of President Park Chung Hee (1963–79) was brimming with what Judith Butler has called "gender trouble."[5] Although the political and economic aspects of this regime, along with Park's seemingly omnipotent rule and the counterinsurgent social and political movements against his economic policies, have been thoroughly investigated, we know far less about the social and cultural dynamics of this regime.[6] In fact, it is only

[3] In particular, there were many comedy films with queer motifs. The following films and scenarios are archived in the Korean Film Archive: *Ch'onggak kimch'i*, directed by Chang Il-ho (1964, Taehan yônhap yônghwa), scenario; *Namja nûn anp'allyô* (Man is not for sale), directed by Im Kwôn-t'aek (1963, Taewôn yônghwasa), scenario; *Yôja ka tô choa* (I prefer being a woman), directed by Kim Ki-p'ung (1965, Yônbang yônghwasa), scenario; *Salsari mollatjji?* (Salsari, you didn't know?), directed by Kim Hwa-rang (1966, Asea Film, Korean Film Archive, D0159), DVD; *Manjyôman popsida* (Let me just touch), directed by Kim Ki-p'ung (1966, Yônbang yônghwasa), scenario; *Namja singmo* (Male maid), directed by Sim U-sôp (1968, Shin Film, Korean Film Archive, D0317), DVD; *Namja miyongsa* (Male hairdresser), directed by Sim U-sôp (1968, Yônhap yônghwasa, Korean Film Archive, D0183), DVD; *Namja kisaeng* (Male kisaeng), directed by Sim U-sôp (1969, Shin Film, Korean Film Archive), VOD; *Namja singmo II* (Male maid II), directed by Sim U-sôp (1970, Saehan Film, Korean Film Archive), VOD.

[4] This might be related to a boom in movies with sexual themes at this time. See, for example, *Chuch'ajang* (The parking lot), directed by Kim Su-yong (1969, Kûktong Film), scenario; *Nô ûi irûm ûn yôja* (Your name is woman), directed by Yi Hyông-p'yo (1969, Asea Film), scenario; *Sibaljôm* (The beginning point), directed by Kim Su-yong (1969, Yônbang yônghwasa, Korean Film Archive), VOD; *Saranghanún maria* (Lovely Maria), directed by Chu Tong-jin (1970, Yônbang yônghwasa), scenario; *Ae wa sa* (Love and Death), directed by Ch'oe Kyông-ok (1970, Anyang yônghwa), scenario; *Manim* (Madam), directed by Chu Tong-jin (1970, Yônbang yônghwasa, Sambu Production), VHS; P*ijôn* (Queen's palace), directed by Yi Hyông-p'yo (1970, T'aech'ang hûng'ôp), scenario; *Pang ûi purûl kkôjuo* (Please turn off the light), directed by Yi Hyông-p'yo (1970, T'aech'ang hûng'ôp), scenario; *Haebyôn ûi chôngsa* (Sex at the beach), directed by Sin Pong-sûng (1970, Tongyang yônghwa hûng'ôp), scenario; *Ch'ôt kyôngghôm* (The first experience), directed by Hwang Hye-mi (1970, Pohan san'ôp), scenario; *Purûn ch'imsil* (Blue bedroom) (1970, Asea Film), scenario.

[5] Criticizing the formulation of gender as a monolithic and singular construction, Judith Butler emphasizes that nonnormative sexual practices challenge the stability of gender (*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* [New York: Routledge, 1999], 1–25).

[6] This type of scholarship often focuses on state-led economic plans and hegemonic sociopolitical structures as the driving forces of the nation-state. See, for example, Academy of Korean Studies, ed., *5.16 kwa Park Chung Hee chôngbu ûi sôllip* (Seongnam: Academy of Korean Studies Press, 1999); Kang Man-gil, *Han'guk chabonjuûi ûi yôksa* (Seoul: Yoksabip'yŏng, 2000); Kim Eun Mee, *Big Business, Strong State: Collusion and Conflict in South Korean Development, 1960–1990* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997). Others focus on the recalcitrant and dynamic counterhegemonic movement of *minjung* (the masses). For an excellent overview of the counterhegemonic minjung movement in South Korea, see Hagen Koo, ed., *Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

recently that historians and other scholars have begun to pay attention not only to how the "technology of government" operated from the top down but also to how that technology permeated the capillaries of people's everyday lives during this regime.[7] Feminist scholarship has been particularly productive in this regard, employing the lens of gender to explore the ways in which public policies interacted with private life to consolidate the male-centered regime of Park's militarized developmentalism. Park's regime has been described as "developmental" in the sense that it set economic development as the most significant national agenda, implementing various economic, educational, and legal policies that were meant to expedite economic development. Feminist scholars have demonstrated that the normative structures supporting this regime were premised on family-oriented definitions of gender and sexual identities that constructed the male as the "pillar of industry" and the female as the "homemaker."[8]

But the mode of feminist analysis that focuses on this separation of male and female roles has had the unintended side-effect of reinforcing the heteronormative gender binary, and it does not explore adequately the multiplicity of marginalized sexualities during the Park regime. Also, it contributes to a focus on the omnipotence of this regime and its system. These authors tend to concentrate on state-sponsored violence, such as the national promotion of prostitution near American military bases and sex tourism for Japanese visitors, without paying enough attention to the marginalized voices of the historical actors of those industries.[9] In order to provide more balance to the history of gender and sexual norms during this era, this article explores how the ideological recuperation and cultural appropriation of diverse queer representations in the comedy films of the late 1960s provide evidence for the multiple "state effects" of this developmental regime and the degree to which it relied on assumptions

[7] The concept of "technology of government" is outlined in Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 297. In a similar vein, there have been intensive debates over various technologies of Park Chung Hee's government. See, for example, the account of the debate between Lim Jie-Hyun and Cho Heeyeon on this subject in Chang Mun-sŏk and Yi Sang-rok, eds., *Kŭndae ŭi kyŏngkye esŏ tokchae rŭl iktta* (Seoul: Kŭrinpi, 2006), 1–8; Kim Chun, "Park Chung Hee Sidae ŭi nodong: Ulsan Hyundai chosŏn nodongja rŭl chungsim ŭro," in ibid., 257–92. For vivid anthropological accounts of public opinion in 1960s and 1970s South Korea, see Nancy Abelmann, *Echoes of the Past, Epics of Dissent: A South Korean Social Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and Lee Namhee, "Making Minjung Subjectivity: Crisis of Subjectivity and Rewriting History, 1960–1988" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2001).

[8] See Cho Hye-jŏng, *Sŏng, kajok, kŭrigo munhwa: Illyuhak jŏk chŏpkŭn* (Seoul: Chimundang, 1997); Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi, eds., *Dangerous Women: Gender & Korean Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); and Kim Hyun Mee, "Work, Nation and Hypermasculinity: The 'Woman' Question in the Economic Miracle and Crisis in South Korea," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2001): 53–68.

[9] Park Jeong-mi, "Paljŏn kwa sexŭ: Han'guk chŏngbu ŭi sŏngmaemae kwankwang chŏngch'aek, 1955–1988," *Han'guk sahwoehak* 48, no. 25 (2014): 235–64.

about the biological essentialism of sex to establish its gendered capitalist order.[10] I draw inspiration from Michel Foucault's discussion of how the governmentality of modern European states crucially relied on the control of sexuality and how the proliferation of discourses of sexuality worked to constitute a regime of truth around sex as a mode of biopolitics.[11] As in modern Europe, controlling sex was fundamental to the disciplining and normalization of people's bodies and lives in 1960s Korea. As in the Cold War United States, where discourse targeting homosexuality as a national threat was common,[12] people of nonnormative or perverse sexualities were rhetorically demonized either as a serious threat to the goals of anti-Communism or as an inferior cultural influence that might contaminate healthy national morality and culture.[13]

I will thus use these films as a window to discuss the sexual politics of the Park Chung Hee regime. Paying particular attention to the large body of what I call "gender comedy films" that contained "queer" or gender-dissonant elements in the 1960s, I ask how an ideology of national development based on sexual normalcy historically intruded into society and culture. The mass consumption of gender comedy films with queer motifs provides insight into the gender norms of Korean society, revealing how a newly emerging audience for popular culture was empowered through consumption to create an autonomous space to contest the seeming omnipotence of Park Chung Hee's heteronormative worldview. I argue that gender comedy films produced in late 1960s South Korea were complex cultural texts that revealed a liminal space between the heteronormative codes of mainstream national culture and the potentially transgressive codes of a marginalized sexual subculture. Resisting the impulse to see popular films as simply a manifestation of the state's top-down ideological force, as many cultural historians have tended to do,[14] I view them as a

[10] Timothy Mitchell argues that governance operates within the system of social practice and "yet still creates the effect of an enduring structure" ("Society, Economy, and the State Effect," in *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*, ed. George Steinmetz [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999], 77–78).

[11] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 3–13.

[12] On American Cold War homophobic culture, see K. A. Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949," *Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (2000): 515–45; Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); and Robert J. Corber, *Cold War Femme: Lesbianism, National Identity, and Hollywood Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

[13] In fact, it was not until the 1990s that a movement representing sexual minorities appeared in the South Korean public sphere, a development that continues to produce debates about valid sexual identities and the scapegoating of some groups.

[14] On the role of film in conveying ideological messages, see Yi Yŏng-il, *Han'guk yŏnghwa chŏnsa* (Seoul: Sodo, 2004); Chu Yu-sin, ed., *Han'guk yŏnghwa wa kŭndaesŏng* (Seoul: Sodo, 2000); Chang Sŏk-yong, *Han'guk nyuweibŭ ŭi chinghu rŭl ch'ajasŏ* (Seoul: Hundaemihaksa, 2002); Min Eung-jun, ed., *Korean Film: History, Resistance, and Demo-*

dialectical site of cultural struggle between hegemonic and antihegemonic discourses.[15] While the idealized image of family based on normative gender roles helped to regulate sexuality by functioning as a disciplinary and self-regulatory power, it always met both contestation and resistance. Queer representations in gender comedy films are but one example of this contestation. In the process of tracing the historical trajectory of the governmental regulation of sex in cultural products and industries, this article aims to illuminate the larger gender and sexuality politics of the Park Chung Hee regime in the 1960s.

Cinema as Part of the Ideological State Apparatus

Between 1950 and 1953 the Korean War brought massive physical destruction, the intensification of an ideological struggle between the now politically divided North and South Koreas, and irreparable psychological damage to the Korean people. The country's first president, Syngman Rhee, relied on colonial bureaucracy and Cold War politics as a means of exercising his authoritarian control, and anti-Communism prevailed as the ultimate form of ideological power. Historians who have explored this history have failed to appreciate that the Rhee regime drew on techniques developed by the Japanese colonial government during the Korean occupation of World War Two and continued to promote the film industry as a means of achieving ideological aims. The Japanese had relied upon the visual propaganda of film to promote policies of cultural assimilation. Such Japanese film policy remained limited in effect, however, due to the fact that most Korean people spoke only Korean, and the films were produced in Japanese. After liberation, Korean-language films could attract much larger audiences, and the government began to use film for anti-Communist propaganda.

After Park Chung Hee's military coup in 1961, the state became even more active in regulating film through the promulgation of laws and censorship codes. After seizing power, the Park government consolidated private film companies into an industry and standardized film production. Under the 1962 Film Law (Yônghwabôp) and its 1963 revision, the government forced over sixty film companies to merge into six with the goal of replicating the Hollywood studio system. Each company had to produce fifteen or more films per year to be economically viable.[16] As various cultural historians

cratic Imagination (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2003); Kim Si-mu, *Ŷesul yônghwa ongho* (Seoul: Hyŏndaemihaksa, 2001).

[15] Stuart Hall emphasizes the double movement of popular culture, which is both "containment [of traditional conservative culture] and resistance" ("Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular,'" in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981], 227–28).

[16] For a general discussion of the film industry's formative years as exemplified by Shin Film, see Steven Chung, *The Split Screen Korea: Shin Sang-ok and Post-war Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 88–102.

have argued, the films of this period tended to display highly ideological themes and motives and thus lacked their artistic values.[17] State-controlled film production was also responsible for propagating idealized images of the nation that idealized conventional gender and sexual roles.[18] Through the control of the contents of feature films, the government sought to regulate a normative vision of sexuality that made the family a metonym for the nation. The government began to produce so-called culture films (*munhwa yônghwa*), such as the "family plan" films (*kajok kyehwôk yônghwa*), which encouraged Koreans to reduce family size, and others that promoted a new model of a modern nuclear family.[19] Meanwhile, the depiction of "sex" in feature films and performances was strictly regulated.

The Ministry of Culture and Education first announced limitations on the free expression of sexual themes in public performances in 1957. It prohibited the depiction of "sexual vulgarity" such as "incest," "immoral intercourse," "rape, sexual passion, sexual urges, and perversion," "the normalization of prostitution," as well as "violent and lewd kissing, hugging, and other suggestive postures."[20] For the first time in Korean history, the state thus set out to define the nature of a proper sexual relationship between a man and a woman.

These criteria actually had the temporary effect of blocking the growing production of popular films that had displayed gender inversion in postwar South Korean society. Before the new production codes came into force, sexually powerful women were often depicted in Korean film. For example, in the 1956 film *Chayu puin* (Madame Freedom), a melodrama that told the story of a middle-class housewife's affair, provoked controversy among intellectuals about its sexual morality. Other films described the luxurious lives of prostitutes serving American GIs (*yanggongju*), depicting the women as symbols of the threatened gender order. This sex inversion was largely due to the war experience, when many women had to work outside of the home to make ends meet.[21]

[17] Film culture under authoritarian regimes, such as Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Japanese Empire, has received increasing attention in recent years. See, for example, Steve Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922–1943* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008); Linda Schulte-Sasse, *Entertaining the Third Reich: Illusions of Wholeness in Nazi Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); and Michael Baskett, *The Attractive Empire: Transnational Film Culture in Imperial Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008).

[18] Cho Hae-joang outlines the history of father-centered family ideology and its role in gendering the nation state ("You Are Trapped in an Imaginary Well: The Formation of Subjectivity in a Compressed Development," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1, no. 1 [2000]: 62–64).

[19] Pyôn Chae-ran, "Taehan nyusû, munhwa yônghwa, kûndaejôk kihwoek ûrosô ûi 'kajok kyehwoek,'" *Yônghwa yon'gu* 52 (2012): 207–35.

[20] *Munkyo wôlbo* 32 (April 1957), Ministry of Culture and Education, Seoul.

[21] Regarding the gender inversion that occurred after the Korean War, see Yi Im-ha, *Yôsông, chônjaeng ûl nômô irôsôda* (Seoul: Sôhaemunjip, 2004). For a discussion of overt challenges to women's sexuality in Korean popular culture in the mid-1950s and its transi-

Most films made after the enactment of these production criteria, however, mimicked the narratives, film styles, and techniques of classic Hollywood films and focused on the theme of an emerging urban middle class. A distinctive theme of many films of the early 1960s was how a happy home could overcome the crisis of patriarchal authority that had been destroyed by the Korean War. Films like *Romaensŭ ppappa* (Romance papa, 1960) and *Samdûng kwajang* (A petty middle manager, 1960) depicted the mutual love and support of family members as central plot devices and generally ended on the happily optimistic note of the family conquering all.[22] The depiction of the everyday struggles of middle-class patriarchs and the emerging lifestyles of the younger generation were particularly popular themes. They were evidence of the growing centrality of family-based morality in the nation as a result of the leadership of Park Chung Hee.

Nonetheless, given the inevitable gap between these idealized images of happy middle-class life and the everyday struggles of people who were almost entirely responsible for the costs of their own social reproduction during this period,[23] the actual impact of such ideological depictions is uncertain. The happy images of family life in state-produced films and other forms of media in the early 1960s presented a stark contrast to the abject poverty of the vast majority of South Koreans after the Korean War.[24] Even if they were not, strictly speaking, propaganda, these films still played an instrumental role in disseminating idealized images of wholesome familial and national subjects; they reflected the concerns of those desperate to escape the poverty of the post–Korean War era.[25]

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tion in the late 1950s and early 1960s, see Kwôn Podûre, ed., *Afres-girl Sasanggye rûl ikta* (Seoul: Tongguk University Press, 2009).

[22] *Romaensŭ ppappa*, directed by Sin Sang-ok (1960, Shin Film, Korean Film Archive, 3293), DVD; *Samdûng kwajang*, directed by Yi Pong-nae (1960, Huban'gi Production, Korean Film Archive, 5582), DVD; *Haebaragi gajok* (Sunflower family), directed by Pak Sông-bok (1961, Taesông yônghwasa, Korean Film Archive, D0286), DVD; *Maidongp'ung* (Talk to the wind), directed by Yi Pong-nae (1961, Huban'gi production), scenario; *Insaeng kapŭlbyŏng* (Lives of A, B, and C), directed by Pak Sông-bok (1961, production company not known), scenario; *Sŏul ŭi chibung mit* (Under the sky of Seoul), directed by Yi Hyông-p'yo (1961, Shin Film, Korean Film Archive, 7931), DVD; *Romansŭ kŭrei* (Romance gray), directed by Sin Sang-ok (1963, Shin Film, Korean Film Archive, 8031), DVD; Wŏlgŭp pongt'u (The pay envelope), directed by Kim Su-yong (1964, Han'guk yesul yônghwasa), scenario.

[23] Whang Chŏng-mi, "Paljôn kukga wa mosông: 1960–1970nyôndae punyô chôngch'aek ûl chungsimûro," in *Mosông ûi tamron kwa hyônsil* (Paju: Nanam, 1999), 173.

[24] Although not many films reflected the lower class's situation, there were a few attempts to do so. *The Way of All Flesh* (Yukch'e ûi kil, 1959), *House Maid* (Hanyô, 1960), and *Coach Man* (Mabu, 1960), for example, portrayed the themes of imperiled middle-class patriarchal masculinity, the collapse of middle-class families, and the struggle of lower-class men to adapt themselves to a rapidly urbanizing life.

[25] No Chi-sûng, "Yônghwa, chôngch'i wa sidaesông ûi chinghu: Tosi chung'gan kyech'ûng ûi yokmang kwa kajok," *Yoksamunje yon'gu* 25 (2011): 169–76.

BURGEONING SEXUAL SUBCULTURES AND THE PRODUCTION OF GENDER COMEDY FILMS

It was not until the late 1960s that the theme of patriarchal and family crisis would reappear in Korean popular cinema. Public approval for these new films was exemplified in the unprecedented popularity of the 1969 melodrama *Miwôdo tasihanbôn* (Bitter but once more), which drew on one of the most popular themes of the period by depicting an extramarital affair between a married man and an innocent country girl. Unlike the focus on the nuclear family in earlier filmic allusions to the crisis of patriarchy, new films relied on themes of the troubled middle-class family, extramarital affairs, male sexual impotence, and representations of queerness. Among these films, the genre of gender comedy films was the fastest-growing B movie in the second half of the 1960s.[26] Seemingly far removed from the ideological manipulation of the idealized depictions of family in the early 1960s, these transgressive gender comedy films enjoyed their heyday between 1968 and 1971.

Before analyzing this emerging genre, it is important to understand the historical and economic conditions that helped to produce this thematic shift toward the production of gender comedy films. According to film historian Yi Yông-il, the first gender comedy, *Yôja ga tô choa* (I prefer being a woman), attracted almost thirty thousand viewers in Seoul in 1965. But the peak of the popularity of these gender comedies did not arrive until the late 1960s with the production of *Male Maid*. The success of *Male Maid* introduced new comic themes into the film industry and sparked a series of sequels and copycats, including *Namja miyongsa* (Male hairdresser), *Male Kisaeng*, *T'ûktûng pisô* (Top secretary), and *Male Maid II*. Though Sim U-sôp had been working as a film director since the late 1950s, he only became famous with the popularity of these films in the late 1960s. His quick turnover time and his sparing use of film (the most significant part of the production cost) made him particularly popular with production companies. When I interviewed him 2004, he told me that it took him only a week to make a film.[27] Sim's enormous commercial success led other film directors to complain that he was pressuring them to make films with ever lower budgets and shorter production schedules.[28]

The popularity of gender comedy films was due not only to the dexterous hands of their directors but also to the transformation of film-viewing

[26] I use the term "B movie" to refer to the "low-brow taste" (*chôsok ch'uihyang*) film of the late 1960s. As in Hollywood, the term is used in contemporary Korea to refer to films with little artistic value and cheap production values, such as those I discuss in this article. However, in the late 1960s, there was no equivalent term referring to these films. They were just called low-brow taste films.

[27] Sim U-sŏp, interview with the author, 4 September 2004.

[28] Yu Hyŏn-mok, "Chôjil yônghwa chôngbu ka ch'aegim chôya," *Chosŏn ilbo* 29 (November 1970).

culture made possible by the rapid increase of the urban population in Seoul in the late 1960s. Although the Park government had promised economic development for the entire nation after seizing power in 1961, by the late 1960s the unevenness of national development especially between the urban center and the countryside had produced increasing social unrest. Demographic pressure exacerbated the situation. From 1968 to 1970 Seoul's population grew by more than 15 percent as young adults fled agricultural areas.[29] Far exceeding government projections, the population of the city jumped from 2.4 million in 1960 to 5.8 million in 1970.[30] High inflation and unemployment also became problems in urban areas, leading to the creation of large slums. Young adults without families were numerous among the 3 million people, one-third of the population of Seoul, who lived in dilapidated Seoul housing projects known as "beehives."[31] To accommodate the needs of this impoverished population and to ease the housing crisis, experts called for the development of suburbs. By the 1970s between 10 and 15 percent of the Seoul population had been transplanted to the suburbs. Urban neighborhoods such as Chongmyo, a red-light district, lost up to 55 percent of their population to one of the twelve new suburban centers circling the old city center.[32]

The demand for entertainment grew in tandem with this burgeoning urban population. Film production went up from around one hundred films a year in 1960 to approximately two hundred between 1968 and 1971.[33] The size of cinemagoing audiences also dramatically increased from approximately 58 million in 1961 to over 171 million in 1968; there was a 20 percent increase between 1962 and 1966, with growth peaking in the early 1970s. Much of this growth was confined to the cheap theaters located in the suburbs. For example, in 1970, 7 million of the 85 million visits to cinemas were to second-run theaters,[34] which used both a low admission fee and easy accessibility to attract audiences.[35] While first-run theaters retained their

[29] The incomes of farmers, which were higher than those of urban workers in the early 1960s, were almost 40 percent lower by the end of the 1960s. In 1969 the family income of the countryside was 65.3 percent of that of the urban laborer. Kim Su-haeng and Pak Sŭng-ho, *Park Chung Hee ch'eje ŭi sŏngnip kwa chŏn'gae mit mollak* (Seoul: Seoul National University, 2007), 62.

[30] Korean Statistical Information Service website, http://kosis.kr/.

[31] Kim and Pak, *Park Chung Hee,* 73.

[32] Seoul T'ŭkpyŏlsi, *Seoul tosi kipon kyehweok chojŏng surip* (Seoul: Seoulsi, 1970), 199–200.

[33] The numbers of film productions per year were as follows: 74 (1958), 111 (1959), 87 (1960), 79 (1961), 112 (1962), 148 (1963), 137 (1964), 161 (1965), 172 (1966), 185 (1967), 212 (1968), 229 (1969), 231 (1970). The number dropped sharply in the 1970s to around 100. Korean Film Commission, *Han'guk yŏnghwa charyo p'yŏnram* (Seoul: Korean Film Commission, 1978), 156.

[34] Ibid., 52.

[35] There were almost one hundred theaters in South Korea in the late 1960s, and many of them were located in these suburbs. Eight of these theaters were "first runners," while

prestige, second-run theaters began to exploit their commercial strength by demanding greater flexibility in booking new films.[36] All of this meant that in the late 1960s urban and suburban South Korean audiences had far more opportunity to see a new release film than they ever had before.[37]

The producers of gender comedy films took advantage of these new moviegoing possibilities to boost their profits. After the success of *Male Maid*, Sim went on to make *Male Kisaeng* for Shin Film and *Male Hairdresser* for Yônhap Productions.[38] Although neither film attracted as many people as *Male Maid*, which was released in the first-run Kukjje Theater, both films managed to be commercially successful because of their low production costs and the cheap theater rental fees of the day. *Male Kisaeng*, for instance, was distributed to five second-run theaters just before New Year's Day (see fig. 1). The film's advertising blurb, "Watch a famous film in your neighborhood," makes it clear that the distributor was targeting the so-called second-runners of Yôngdûngp'o (Seoul Theater), Yongsan (Yongsan Theater), Myôngdong (Korea Theater), Chongno (Tongdaemun Theater), and Ch'ôngryangni (Tongil Theater). In addition to highlighting the convenience of not having to travel to a first-run theater in the city, the distributors also emphasized their low admission cost (90 won compared to 130 won for a first-run theater).[39]

The emphasis on the low cost of gender comedy films as a chief selling point contributed to the tendency of critics to regard them as low-brow "cheap films" suitable only for common people in second-run theaters. By 1968 articles in tabloid weekly magazines such as *Sunday Seoul*, *Weekly Chosôn*, *Weekly Chung'ang*, and *Weekly Woman* provided film reviews and analyses to appeal to the tastes of popular culture. Beginning publication in 1968, these magazines featured many pages of celebrity gossip, sexual stories, and sensual photographs that did not often appear in major news-

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the rest were "second," "third," "fourth," and "fifth runners." See the testimony of Chin Hang-bŏm, Yi Kil-sŏng, Yi Ho-gŏl, and Yi U-sŏk, *1970nyôndae Seoul ûi kûkchang sanôp mit kûkchang munhwa yôn'gu* (Seoul: Korean Film Commission, 2004), 153.

[36] For example, in 1968 Yŏnhŭng Theater (Yŏngtŭngp'o region), Tong-il Theater (Ch'ŏngryangni region), Taehan Theater (Chongno region), Sŏngnam Theater, and P'yŏnghwa Theater all bypassed the dominant distribution system to demand the screening of new releases from the Central Cinema Distributor, a joint venture of five suburban theaters. Ibid., 141–53.

[37] Regarding the transformation of the regional distribution of films, see Kim Mi-hyŏn, ed., *Han'guk yônghwa paegûpsa yôn'gu,* 20–22. The growing popularity of second-run suburban theaters meant that more people had access to this cultural art form. While many media experts predicted the demise of cinema with the rapid increase of TVs in people's homes, they also expected an increase in viewership for suburban second-run theaters that catered to lower-class people who did not own their own television sets. "Kwangaek ûi 20% sangsil, TV wuihyôp soge hûndûllinûn panghwa," *Maeil kyôngje*, 20 February 1970.

[38] "Sirizûmul i chal pallyô," *Chosŏn ilbo*, 26 April 1970.

[39] On average, the regular theater entrance fee was 130 won in 1968–69. Kim Tong-ho, ed., "1960–70nyôndae ûi paegûp yut'ong kujo wa sangyôngkwan," in *Han'guk yônghwa sangyôngkwan ûi pyônch'ôn kwa paljôn panghyang* (Seoul: Munhwa kwankwangbu, 2001), 24–42.

Figure 1. Newspaper advertisement for *Namja kisaeng* in *Kyŏnghyang shinmun*, December 30, 1968.

papers and magazines,[40] thus helping to ensure that gender comedy films and B movies in general became fixtures of urban subculture. What we might therefore call low-brow popular culture was not entirely the product of economic stratification but was partly formed out of the initiative of a new subculture exercising its powers of consumption.[41]

Gender Trouble in *Male Kisaeng*

The films made for this newly emerging moviegoing culture catered to the tastes of second-run theater audiences and the lives of people who had

[40] The booming urban low-brow popular culture at this particular time needs further analysis.

[41] In his analysis of early twentieth-century audiences, Stuart Hall describes a new "popular class" that did not directly coincide with working- or lower-class status but was the product of the identity-forming effects of the consumption of popular culture ("Notes on Deconstructing," 229).

recently moved to Seoul.[42] For example, *Male Kisaeng*, the archetype for these films, told the story of a man from a rural area who, unable to find job in Seoul, turns to male-to-female masquerade in order to make ends meet. Instead of featuring urban development, gender comedy films seemed to revel in the atmosphere of panic about the breakdown of the family in the late 1960s. It was particularly common to portray the gritty reality of lower-class women's lives—a feature of urban life that was rarely represented in the grand narratives and political rhetoric of the Park regime. As the film titles suggest, the protagonists of these films were often women from the countryside, reflecting the lives of these lower-class women who lack the educational background or marketable skills to achieve a comfortable middle-class existence.[43] Despite their contributions to the economy, they were generally viewed as a threat to the nation's family-based social and economic system.[44] In gender comedy films, these working-class women in the service industry were simultaneously depicted as the source of most "gender trouble" and the entertaining subject of the voyeuristic gaze.

Male Kisaeng provides a compelling description of the complicated situation between South Korea's national development and the troubled family in this time period. With its recently urbanized audience clearly in mind, the film begins with a scene of the rural protagonist, Ku T'aeho, first entering Seoul.[45] Adopting Ku's point of view, the camera pans mannequins

[42] In a similar context, Yu Sôn-yông has examined 1970s Korean movies with sexual content and argues that this subculture actually created a certain cultural space for resistance ("Tongwôn ch'eje ûi kwaminjokhwa pûrojektû wa sex yônghwa," *Ŏllon kwa sahwoe* 15, no. 2 [2007]: 42–44).

[43] Many of these women found work as housemaids, kisaengs, hairdressers, and prostitutes. Licensed prostitution was officially outlawed in 1948, but these women continued to provide sexual services with the government's tacit approval. Though being a housemaid was more respectable, it also often left the woman vulnerable to the sexual approaches of a male employer. The barbershop also became an iconic site of female prostitution. See Pak Chong-sông, Han'guk ûi maech'un (Seoul: Ingan Sarang, 1994).

[44] This depiction of lower-class female workers in film is an accurate portrayal of their place in society. Park Jeong-mi has analyzed the paradoxes of the state's controlling system of sex workers and describes it as a "toleration-regulation" system ("Paradoxes of Gendering Strategy in Prostitution Policies: South Korea's 'Toleration-Regulation' Regime," *Women's Studies International Forum* [2013]: 73–84). Prostitutes who worked near American military bases suffered even harsher regulation. See Bruce Cumings, "Silent but Deadly: Sexual Subordination in the U.S.-Korean Relationship," in *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia*, ed. Saundra P. Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus (New York: New Press, 1993), 169–75. As I have argued elsewhere, these women were racialized and secluded from the society. See Kim Chung-kang, "Skin-Deep? The Politics of Black Korean Identity in Post-1945 Korean Literature and Film," *Journal of Literature and Film* 15, no. 1 (2014): 5–41.

[45] In the film, the last name of the actor is used for the character's name. For example, Ku is the last name of an actor, Ku Pong-sô, and Hô is the last name of an actor, Hô Chang-kang. Both of the actors were the stars at the time, and the scenario was written after the male protagonists were cast. But the female character's last name is not known either in the film or in the scenario. Thus, in the plot summary, I will use the last name for the male characters and the first name for the female character.

in clothing stores, the urban theaters and cultural centers, and modern townhouses. The film thus portrays the confusion of a country bumpkin adrift in a new and complex urban setting. Two contrasting spaces become central to the plot: the family home and the kisaeng house. Since *Male Kisaeng* was the third part of Sim's film series, viewers had already followed Ku in the previous two films, *Male Maid* and *Male Hairdresser*. In contrast to the Park regime's projection of an idealized patriarchal family, the family portrayed in *Male Kisaeng* is one where the wife wears the pants. Played by To Kûm-pong, an actress known for her "wild and sexy image,"[46] the housewife keeps her husband, Hô, the overachieving president of Tongsin Cashmere, under tight control; she squanders his money and even physically assaults him. The patriarchal father figure is thus transformed into an object of derision—a hen-picked husband. Meanwhile, Hô's former employee Ku has failed to make a living as a male housemaid and hairdresser after losing his job at Tongsin Cashmere. Both men flee to the kisaeng house, one as a patron and the other as an employee. Ku overcomes his moral reservations and begins masquerading as a female kisaeng. Whether as a refuge from a wild wife or as the last resort in face of economic necessity, the kisaeng house is the site of sexual promiscuity, which quickly leads to gender trouble.

The most troubled space of *Male Kisaeng* is the kisaeng house itself, where both male protagonists, Ku and Hô, nimbly cross gender and sexual boundaries. When, in the opening scenes of the film, a kisaeng mocks Ku for his masculine appearance, he responds by trying to win over his coworkers with a fictional justification for his career choice: "Who wants to be a kisaeng? Like others, I just wanted to be a good housewife. But that was not to be. Instead I fell in love with a college student. Our relationship developed until his parents, disapproving of my lower-class background, quickly put an end to our relationship." Having told his story in the manner typical of popular melodramas, soap operas, and weepies—the women's genres of popular culture—he starts to cry, compelling the other kisaeng to cry along with him and accept him into their female community. This scene likely elicited much laughter from the audience, who would have reveled in Ku's ability to masterfully exploit melodramatic genres. But when Ku starts trying to befriend the other kisaeng as a fellow woman, the film's queer subtext becomes clear. Having been accepted as a woman by the other kisaeng, Ku starts to date one of them, Chông-mi. Since Chông-mi is the only one who knows that he is a man, his close relationship with Chông-mi appears as lesbian desire—a misperception that Ku does nothing to dispel. He goes so far as to say: "Yes! We are involved in a same-sex love affair [*tongsôngyôn'ae*]!"

Ku's oscillation between male and female personas thus further complicates the picture of his sexuality, an effect that was heightened by

[46] Byôn Jairan, "Ch'ôn ûi ôlgul ûl kajin han'guk yônghwasa ûi san chûng'in, To Kŭm-bong," *Yŏngsang munhwa chŏngbo* (2002): 21–25.

Ku Pong-sô's star persona. Famous for his masculine and handsome but funny persona, the actor Ku could provoke laughter with a simple effeminate gesture.[47] Even when he was in full drag with heavy makeup and a long wig, the audience was never confused about Ku's male gender. The minor gender dissonance of the film's plot is thus never allowed to develop into full-blown gender subversion.

In contrast to Ku, the character of Hô, the company president and hen-picked husband, is depicted as actually possessing a strong and hidden homosexual desire. Hô, who had initially fired Ku because of his discomfort with Ku's effeminacy, ends up falling in love with him, not recognizing him as Ku, in his new disguise as a woman. Despite his stated hatred of the "womanly man," Hô is attracted to a manly woman who he says reminds him of his first love in a kisaeng house. In Hô's case, therefore, the kisaeng house becomes a refuge from his fixed gender and sexual identity as a heterosexual man.

Hô's queerness emerges at the beginning of the film when he asks the bar madam whether she has a "new face." An employee who had been playing the guitar briefly disappears and returns disguised as a woman. This wo(man) with full makeup and wig wears a red bikini covered by a black see-through veil. Watching with lustful eyes as this presumably female body starts to dance to the tunes of exotic music, Hô reveals the dubiousness of his heterosexuality. The gender-bending effect is heightened, and Hô's queer desire for a male-to-female body is reinforced when the dancer removes his/her veil to reveal the heavily made-up face and body of the man who had just disappeared.

In depicting the repeated efforts of Hô to seduce Ku, the film intensifies the transgressive pleasures of an ambiguous queer sexuality. For instance, in one hotel room sequence, Hô gropes Ku's body and asks him to spend the night. Because the audience knows that Ku is a man masquerading as a female, this scene confronts us with the spectacle of two men about to have sex. The sexual tension dissipates when Ku wilily eludes Hô's grip. Although framed in terms of Hô's antics to win Ku's love, a certain pleasurable tension of homoerotic possibility remains.

Even after the two characters of Ku and Hô return to their gender-normative selves at the end of the film, they are not depicted as entirely straight. In the final scene, Ku, now working as a cosmetics salesman, confesses to Hô that he was the woman to whom Hô was attracted. Angered by Ku's revelation, Hô yells at Ku. But when Ku starts to cry and explains that it was fate that drove him to a life as a male kisaeng, Hô forgives him. After offering to take Ku back as an employee, Hô kisses him impulsively—a scene that is captured in a close-up. The ostensible recuperation of the two

[47] Such negotiations of male-to-female masquerade could be influenced by a director's own perception of gender normality. As the director Sim put it to me in conversation, "I did not really like the idea of making Ku a totally womanly man." He therefore purposely created a rather masculine male-to-female masquerade. Sim U-sôp, interview with the author, 10 December 2013.

characters into gender-normative selves is instantly rendered fragile, and viewers come to realize that their queer selves cannot be easily "straightened out." The film thus oscillates between acts of subversion and recuperation, producing the overall effect of an unstable mix of gender trouble.

These examples of queer pleasures provide evidence for the subversive potential of gender comedies. As Judith Butler has argued, gender parodies are potentially subversive of dominant notions of gender and sexuality.[48] This might be particularly true in the context of a politically repressive regime. Park's strenuous efforts to normalize gender division and the heteronormative family provided firm rhetorical boundaries that the film *Male Kisaeng* could exploit through parody. As Marjorie Garber argues, acts of drag/transvestism and same-sex desire / homosexuality can transgress strictly biological definitions of sex and create a certain *jouissance*.[49] Ku's drag and the same-sex desire of Hô subvert the conservative norms of gender and family and provide pleasure to the audience.

The State Effect: Censorship and the Discourse of High and Low Culture

The B movie constituted a subversive space under the authoritarian and gender-normative Park Chung Hee regime. This space of sexual freedom shrank, however, when the government instituted its repressive censorship on sexual expression. As discourses about troubled sexualities proliferated, state power penetrated into everyday modes of conduct, and the normative sexual culture of South Korea fragmented into categories of high/proper/healthy and low/improper/depraved sexuality.[50] The South Korean government regarded 1960s subculture—anything associated with drugs, hippies, gangsterism, prostitutes, and the nonnormative gender/sexual elements in gender comedy films—as low culture, and the government sought to purge that culture from the nation.

Following President Park's announcement in the late 1960s of a "purification movement" to stem the rising tide of low-brow popular culture, various popular dramas and radio programs immediately became targets of government censorship.[51] Representations of gangsterism, prostitution, and drugs in popular culture also became recategorized as "unhealthy

[48] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 146–47.

[49] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 10–11.

[50] My argument for Korea draws on more general insights in Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1:23.

[51] Debates about "vulgar" culture were common at the time. See, for example, "Tahamkke saeng'gakhae popsida: ûmran ûi hangyenûn?" *Kyônghyang Shinmun*, 17 July 1969; "Ûmnan sôhwa tansok munje," *Tong'a ilbo*, 17 July 1969; "Chit'an pannû ero chapchi ûi kyuje wa chônghwa ûi panghyang," *Tong'a ilbo*, 14 June 1969; "T'woep'ye p'ungjo tansok e sônheang hal kôt," *Tong'a ilbo*, 28 September 1971.

national culture."[52] In the "Detailed Enforcement Plan for the Purification of Decadent Culture," the government specified acts and entities that were considered to lie outside the perimeters of a moral visual culture, including the visualization of "the half or fully naked body of a woman," "pornography," and "homosexuality." Depicting such things in film was thought to disrupt the country's "moral order and customs."[53] In rejecting this vulgar culture as a manifestation of perverted Western influence, the government adopted a strongly nationalistic tone. Journalist Cho P'ung-yôn wrote that "sex morality in the West and our sex morality cannot be the same."[54] Sexual scenes of a "man's tongue being inserted into a woman's mouth" and "a woman's toes being sucked by a man" were mercilessly deleted by government censors as part of this new moral environment.[55] The directors and producers of films such as *Ch'unmong* (Spring dreams, 1967), *Pyŏk sok ŭi yôja* (Woman in the wall, 1969), *Naesi* (A eunuch, 1968), and *Nô ûi irûm ûn yôja* (Your name is woman, 1969) became subject to arrest and inspired moral controversies because of the overt sexual expression or deviant sex in their films. This type of film was often called "vulgar film" (*ûmhwa*).[56]

Film director Yu Hyôn-mok was charged with making vulgar films due to the indecent exposure of a naked female body for six minutes in his film *Spring Dreams*. An appeal of the charge by the film's director and producer was denied, and a fine of 30,000 won (US$300) was imposed.[57] In the ruling, the judge stated that the film contained "morally disgusting scenes" that corrupt "healthy and normal persons."[58] The context for such rulings is evident in the statements of the director of the Bureau of Public Information, Hong Ch'ôn, who insisted in 1966 that films should be "bright" and "constructive" because the nation was still technically at war with North Korea. In such an environment, explicit scenes of sex or nudity were seen as subversive acts undermining South Korea's anti-Communist spirit.[59]

[52] "Hwangakche ûi ssak put'ô challara," *Kyônghyang shinmun*, 25 February 1971.

[53] "T'woep'ye panghwa chônghwa pang'an maryôn," *Maeil kyôngje*, 2 October 1971.

[54] Cho P'ung-yôn, "Yônghwa wa sông moral," *Korea Cinema*, March 1971.

[55] Kim Su-yong, "'Kômyôl,' igôsi ôpsûmyôn kûkchang ûn sahwoe ak ûi sogul i twoelgosinga?," *Chu'gan han'guk*, 17 April 1966.

[56] For the first time in the history of South Korea, Yu Hyôn-mok, the director of the film *Spring Dreams*, was imprisoned for making a vulgar film (*ûmhwa*) in 1969. See the detailed ruling summary in *Kyônghyang shinmun*, 17 July 1969. Following this, Sin Sang-ok, the director of *A Eunuch*, was investigated because his film described lesbianism. Yi Hyông-pyo, who made *Your Name Is Woman*, was also investigated by the prosecutor because the film included overtly sexual expression.

[57] Today 30,000 won would be equivalent to 10 million won, or US$10,000. See consumer price index of Korea at http://www.index.go.kr/potal/main/EachDtlPageDetail.do?idx_cd=1060, accessed 26 April 2015.

[58] "Yônghwa ch'unmong yujwoe," *Kyônghyang shinmun*, 15 March 1967.

[59] The comment was made in a seminar on censorship held at Christian Academy, a religiously based NGO based in Seoul. The discussions of the seminar were summarized in "Yônghwa kômyôl ûn p'ilyohan'ga?," *Kyônghyang shinmun*, 25 May 1968.

These repressive measures provoked protests among both intellectuals and the filmmaking community, though the latter was stratified by class. Many so-called A-class filmmakers and journalists were less focused on resisting government censorship than they were on demanding fair and transparent standards.[60] They complained that B movies enjoying a "free pass" from the government censors, while A-class films were mercilessly censored. For instance, the film *Odae pokdôkbang* (Grandfather's real estate agency, 1968) managed to pass government censors despite its low-brow sexual content.[61] Conservative newspapers such as *Chosôn ilbo* argued that this B movie, which "raised the eyebrows of ordinary people," should be censored. Many filmmakers complained: "Isn't it ridiculous that B movies with vulgar titles like *Female Room* [*Yôja ûi pang*] and *Male Kisaeng* should not be censored, while more 'innocent' films like *Dark Clouds* [*Môkkurûm*] and *Wife's Sister* [*Chôje*] are?"[62] Public criticism of the Bureau of Public Information responsible for these censorship standards intensified with the increasing amount of nonnormative sexual representation in B movies. In a 1970 review of Korean films, cultural critic Yun Ik-sam criticized gender comedy films for displaying "a disproportionate number of female gangsters" and "female-masquerading men." He complained that "these films poison the minds of good citizens and turn them into 'drug addicts.'"[63] The metaphor of drugs highlighted the supposed unhealthy but seductive qualities of these illicit gender transgressions.

The ultimate effect of such censorship was to draw a clear boundary between high and low cultures. While intellectuals and A-class filmmakers believed that protecting freedom of expression was important in a democratic society, they were unwilling to support this freedom of expression for low-brow culture, which they considered beyond the pale of proper civility. So strong was this moral boundary making between these two cultures that the actor Ku Pong-sô, a fixture of the male-series films, admitted to me that he did not want them included in his filmography. He regretted taking roles in B movies because the films were never positively received by the film critics, and he was accordingly never regarded as a good actor.[64] Despite these attitudes toward B movies, it is clear that their directors and producers also had to accommodate themselves to the government's surveillance system. For example, when the film *Male Kisaeng* was first submitted to the Department of Culture and Public Information, its officials asked for the insertion of "and" between the words "male" and "kisaeng" because the title *Male Kisaeng* was unacceptable. To the censorship committee,

[60] For example, at the seminar described in the previous note, a scholar of the constitution, Yi Hang-nyông, was the only one who seriously criticized the standard of censorship published by the Bureau of Public Information as unconstitutional.

[61] "Yônghwa kômyôl ûi munjejôm," *Chosôn ilbo*, 22 February 1968.

[62] "Kawuijil in'ga nandojil in'ga? Yônghwa kômyôl," *Chugan han'guk*, 2 June 1968.

[63] Yun Ik-sam, "Han'guk yônghwa nûn sayanggil e sôtnûn'ga?," *Arirang,* December 1970.

[64] Interview with Ku Pong-sô, 2 September 2004.

composed mostly of men, the idea of a man going to a kisaeng house sounded acceptable, but not the idea of a male kisaeng. As a result, the original title of *Male Kisaeng* upon its release was *Namja wa kisaeng* (Man and kisaeng) in 1969.[65]

Such acts of accommodation and compromise within B movies were also visible in the practices of *taesak* and *hwasak*: the deletion of dialogue and the deletion of entire scenes. Together, they constituted the notorious "double" censorship of films at the levels of both scenario and the finished product. Given that films such as *Male Kisaeng* were heavily subjected to taesak and hwasak, it is difficult to conclude that B movies emerged entirely unscathed from censorship, as many contemporary critics seemed to believe. Nevertheless, Sim U-sôp and Ku Pong-sô both believe that the male-series films were rarely subject to heavy censorship. The term "heavy" is key, because the director had used various tactics and strategies to avoid the most oppressive acts of censorship, although he could not avoid it altogether.

INCONGRUOUS MOMENTS IN B MOVIES

The presumption that censorship was always and absolutely repressive is belied by the fact that filmmakers developed various techniques to avoid it.[66] As Doherty Thomas has argued for Hollywood, in its attempt to regulate, state censorship can inadvertently help to create a new language for film.[67] Similar filmmaking practices were routinely performed by Korean film directors. For example, to suggest sexual intercourse, directors used either a close-up of a man's back or the moaning sound of a woman. In order to suggest fellatio, the director of *Spring Dreams* showed a woman in a dentist chair with saliva drooling from her mouth. Despite the film's mounting sexual tension, created through ever-more-frequent close-ups of the female body, its sexual content is ultimately disavowed when all is revealed in the end to be nothing but a dream in the film. Such film techniques managed to portray sex in ways hidden from the surface of the script.

In addition to the use of allegory to deal with sensitive sexual matters, more overt strategies to fool the censors were common. For instance, the prolific film director of the 1960s, Kim Su-yong, deliberately added sexually

[65] The word "and" between "male" and "kisaeng" is in a very small font, likely in order to hint at the original title. See figure 1.

[66] Sô Kok-suk argues that many low-brow comedy films came to internalize the rules and regulations of the film code even though they were not seriously tampered with by the censors ("Han'guk yônghwa kômyôlkwa komedi yônghwa," *Yônghwa yôn'gu* 36 [2008]: 345–70).

[67] Doherty Thomas argues that classical Hollywood films started to create "mental images" rather than direct descriptions of sex scenes after the Hays Code started to regulate "sex, immorality, and insurrection" in early 1930s America (*Pre-code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930–1934* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1999], 2–3).

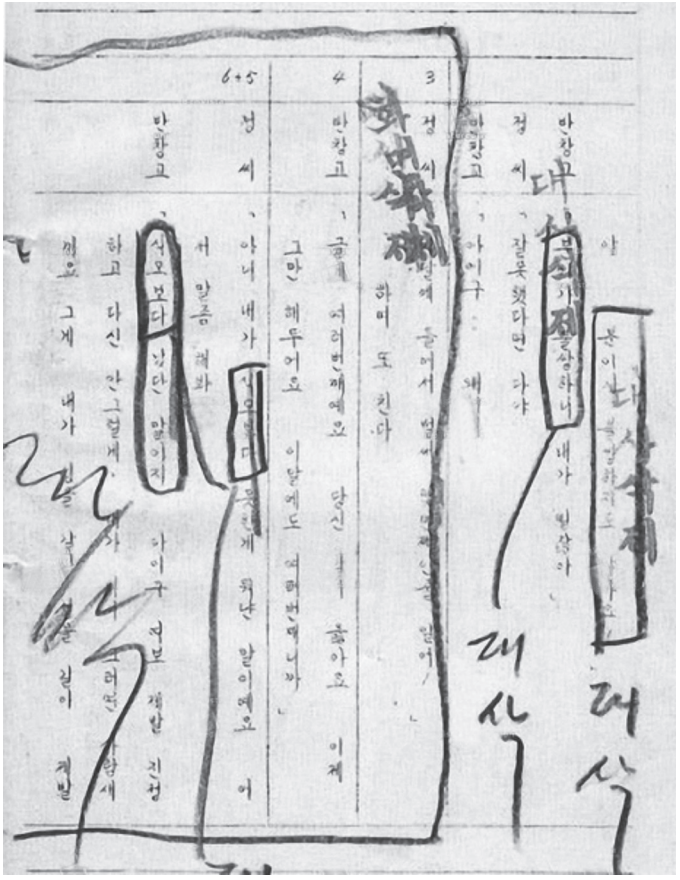

Figure 2. Censored script for *Namja kisaeng*. Courtesy of the Korean Film Archive.

explicit scenes that he knew would be censored as a smokescreen for the ones he actually wanted to keep. Yu Hyôn-mok also took advantage of the controversy generated by government censorship to boost audience turnout for the film *A Eunuch*, which depicted homosexuality between court ladies set in the Chosôn Dynasty. As a result, the film managed to succeed at the box office despite the critics' criticisms of its low-brow content. These tactics, although not always successful, illustrate the myriad ways in which film directors navigated the censorship system during this period.[68]

Another way for directors of B movies to try to navigate the censorship system was by superficially meeting the government's quality standards. The government had combined its censorship policies in the 1960s with efforts

[68] Kim, *Chugan han'guk*.

to impose the concept of "good" cinema. Good films were defined as those supporting the national policies of anti-Communism, for instance, and they were expected to include various public messages even though they were not propaganda per se. This led directors to comment that if they wanted to avoid government censorship they just needed to make "erotic films with anti-Communist themes."[69] Nonetheless, including direct anti-Communist messages was difficult for directors who made films such as melodramas, historical dramas (often set in premodern Korea), and thrillers with a more structured causative narrative and with more suspense.[70] In contrast, B movie action films and comedies could incorporate such moments because their stories were less plausible. For instance, one of the popular themes of action films was catching North Korean spies and becoming a millionaire overnight. These films often included an incongruous moment when a character disrupted the "fourth wall" of the filmic diegesis in order to preach the glories of the nation. These transformations of the medium of film into a didactic national epic earned these films the reputation of being low-brow, low-quality films by the film critics, although these were precisely the same features that made the government assess the film to be good.

There is an example of such a moment of incongruity in *Male Kisaeng*, when a male customer asks Ku to sing and dance. After he mounts the stage, he breaks into a song with the following message: "How foolish you husbands are! Do you really have that much money? If not, drink a glass of ice water and cleanse your stomachs. Then go home and take care of your families while you *think about what you can do for the nation!*" Ku is addressing two different audiences: the bar regulars in the film's diegesis, and the film's audience in the theater. There are innumerable other examples of such dual address. In *Male Hairdresser,* Ku again preaches to the female customers about the value of national cosmetics products, thus explicitly promoting the government's Movement to Support National Production campaign. While treated as comic, such jarring moments of incongruence, which might have been motivated by the desire to avoid censorship, ended up reinforcing the national developmental plan.

Inserting such incongruous moments into a film text inevitably involved a gendered dimension. At the end of *Male Kisaeng*, Ku tells the wives of the husbands who frequented the kisaeng house how to perform their roles: "In order to serve your husband properly, the first thing to keep in mind is 'service.' So is the second thing as well as the third." In this particular scene, Ku's male-to-female persona becomes an opportunity for him to preach to the women about how to perform the femininity that he himself is only mimicking. The moral voice of Ku asking for both the fathers to return to their homes and the housewives to properly perform their motherly/wifely roles thus served to bolster the state's goal of national

[69] Ibid.
[70] Kim Tong-ri, "1970 nyôn ûi munje," *Yŏngsang munhwa yŏn'gu,* August 1970, 15.

development. Although the narrative structure of the film actually centers around the breakdown of the family, gender norms, and sexuality, in the end, the film concludes that it is still important to keep the family system intact and insists that only a healthy family can provide the basis for national development. Further compromising the subversive nature of Ku's male-to-female performance in *Male Kisaeng* is the fact that once he reverts to his own male identity, he becomes extremely rational and self-controlled. In the final scene, for instance, Ku reflects upon his experience in the kisaeng house and tells his girlfriend, "I realized that man should be faithful and sincere to his own family." In response, she says, "Why don't we try to live clean and healthy lives even though it is just the two of us?" Through such scenes of ideological reassertion, the film reifies the normative images of a proper citizen and family.

In a 2004 personal interview with Sim U-sŏp, the director of *Male Kisaeng*, I asked him to comment on the didactic moments in his films. Contradicting the assumption of many film scholars that these films were a simple reflection of the government's control over the filmmaking process,[71] he replied that they reflected his own views of family. His answer can be read as support for the nation's family-centered ideology, or it can be read as a reflection of his desire to elevate B movies to a higher status as social satire through a critique of the dark sexual underside of the Korean nation. He could not answer why he put such excessive emphasis on the country's "dark side." When I asked him what kinds of films he wanted to make in the future, he replied that he wanted to make a film about the secretive sex lives of high school girls. Whether he wants to make such films to support sexual freedom for South Koreans or to criticize them remains uncertain. In case of gender comedy films, it is also uncertain what lessons the audiences of B movies drew from such didactic messages. Whatever the intentions of film directors like Sim were, one thing is clear: such moments of incongruity managed to describe the marginalized sexual cultures that would otherwise have remained invisible.

Conclusion: Representations of the (In)visible

This article has explored how normative sexuality was constructed under the regulatory regime of the early Park Chung Hee era and how such normative images changed in the late 1960s in response to shifting audiences and economic circumstances. By analyzing the appearance of "queerness" in *Male Kisaeng*, this article has discussed the subversive nature of popular forms of entertainment as a site for the exploration of nonnormative sexuality. Although Park Chung Hee's authoritarian regime remains infamous for its oppressive control of gender and sexuality, the representations of

[71] Yu Chi-na, "1960nyôndae han'guk k'omidi: Haeksim k'odů wa sahwoejok ûimi chakyong," *Yônghwa yón'gu* 15 (2000): 283–306.

queerness in gender comedies illustrate how the tastes of a new suburban audience were incorporated into the dominant national culture. To cater to these tastes while still staying ahead of the censors, the directors and producers of these films developed new filmic techniques of storytelling and representation. Gender comedy films often employed purposefully incongruous scenes that paradoxically combined the narratives of national propaganda with representations of nonnormative sexuality and thus served the goals of both entertainment and didactic messaging. As we have seen, under Park Chung Hee's rule, the convergence of emerging intellectual discourses on sex with the direct intervention of the state through censorship laws contributed to the stratification of national culture into high/normal/healthy and low/abnormal/depraved streams. Given these divisions, the use of incongruity in gender comedy films can also be viewed as a tactic of directors and producers of B movies to navigate the repressive censorship policies of a highly authoritarian society. Survival strategies and tactics made it possible for them to carve out a liminal space of nonnormative sexual expression within the seemingly omnipotent heteronormative culture of South Korea's developmental regime.

The stratification of national culture into such a high/low binary was entangled with the cultural politics of representing marginal elements of South Korea's social life during this developmentalist period. In December 1969, for example, *Chosôn ilbo* published a documentary report about a transsexual man that eerily mirrored the plot of the male series. According to this report, a man, Kim, first discovered his sexuality while experimenting with other boys when he was twelve years old. After being kicked out of his family, Kim worked for several years as a male maid, male kisaeng, and male hairdresser.[72] The films in the male series of the late 1960s thus not only were imaginative representations of the queer body but also spoke directly to the lives of marginalized sexual subjects such as Kim, who had to resort to such practices of gender bending and labor within the shadowy realm of a subcultural sexual economy in order to survive.

Even after the emergence of the gay and lesbian movement in South Korea in the 1990s, it is still difficult to find sexual minorities being represented as anything but outsiders in mainstream culture. B movies and their descriptions in yellow journalism could thus be said to have provided a valuable window into the liminal space of queer sexuality, a space that conservative society continues to disavow.

About the Author

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[72] "Yôjang 26nyôn ûi chungnyôn," *Chosôn ilbo*, 7 December 1969.

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