[page 109**]**

**THE CINEMA IN KOREA**

**A Robust Invalid**

**by James Wade**

(The author wishes to express his gratitude to the following persons for assistance in research on which this article is based: Paik Seung-gil, Associate Editor, UNESCO Korea Journal; Yang Jong-hae, documentary film producer for the Ministry of Culture and Information, Republic of Korea; Bae Sok-in, independent writer-director of features and documentaries; and Yu Hyon-mok, independent director. None of these, however, is responsible for matters of opinion or interpretations expressed below, though all have contributed personal insights as well as factual data, enabling the writer to formulate at least tentative judgements in areas not hitherto explored in an international publication.)

**I. HISTORY AND BACKGROUND**

A reviewer at the 1968 Cork (Ireland) Film Festival, approaching a South Korean1 motion picture entry with obvious trepidation, seemed rather relieved to be able to report that it could be classified as a pleasant surprise inasmuch as it reaches a technical standard comparable to a Japanese B production, and that’s a compliment. Also, it proved never dull, another compliment. “2

1. For obvious reasons, this essay can deal only with cinema in the Republic of Korea (South Korea), omitting any consideration of the Communist northern zone (People’s Democratic Republic of Korea), terra incognita for any American, except unlucky, unwilling guests such as the crew of the U. S. intelligence ship Pueblo.

2. Variety, Oct. 23, 1968. The film was reviewed under the title “True Love,” though the Korean title, Memil-kkot Pilmuryop,” translates “When the Buckwheat Blossoms.”

[page 110**]**

Whether or not the Koreans, with their long-standing dislike and jealousy of the Japanese, would consider this verdict flattering, it is probably a fair general evaluation of the current state of Korean cinema, and reflects—no doubt unintentionally—the close connection between the film histories of the two neighboring countries.

In all probability, the first showing of a motion picture in Korea occured in 1904，during the period when Japan was maneuvering to establish a protectorate over the weak, backward “Hermit Kingdom.”3 Thus it is not surprising that this film is said to have been a primitive newsreel documenting the victory of the Japanese navy over the Russian fleet in the Sea of Japan, just off the Korean coast, during the brief Russo-Japanese War of that year. The sequence was in all likelihood shown privately to high-ranking Korean officials in an effort to convince them of Japan’s invincibility, and therefore of the inevitability of the protectorate treaty.

About the same time (some say a year earlier), the first movie designed for the general public was introduced: a brief advertisement intended to promote an electric street car line just completed in Seoul by an American firm. This innovation had earned the disapproval of conservative Koreans, and the film sequence was evidently intended to help popularize the novel means of transport.

Imported Western-made films began to be shown in theater engagements during the following decades. Early hits with Korean audiences are remembered as “King of Kings,” “Broken Blossoms,” “Way Down East,” Fritz Lang’s Siegfried films, and Douglas Fairbanks as Robin Hood.

It is generally agreed that the first feature motion picture

3. This was accomplished in 1905, with full annexation coming in 1910 and lasting until the end of World War II in 1945.

[page 111**]**

made in Korea was “Chun Hyang” (“Spring Fragrance”)(1921)4 an old legend of true love, long-suffering virtue, political corruption, and the ultimate triumph of Confucian principles. (This story, the most popular folk tale of the Korean people, has appeared in virtually every conceivable artistic form,5 and has been filmed a total of seven times; its importance is such that we will return to a detailed consideration of it later, in an examination of themes in Korean cinema.)

An important and unique innovation of this era was the employment in movie houses of a live story-teller called a pyonsa, who explained the plot to the audience as the picture unreeled, and supplied dialogue for all the parts. The origins of this practice may perhaps be traced to the strolling player who from time immemorial had chanted long traditional ballad cycles called pansori, the principal theatrical diversion of the common people.

The pyonsa not only obviated the need for expensive subtitling, and translation of subtitles of foreign films; he was also able to inject into local films an element of political satire and protest against Japanese domination, which became outright oppression after the annexation in 1910. Thus the 1928 film “Arirang” (titled after a Korean folk song that, similarly, had no political overtones, but which nevertheless became a resistance symbol), made by the first great Korean actor-director, Na Un-gyu,6 is considered patriotic and anti-

4. Some claim that “Wol Ha Eui Maeng” (“Oath Under the Moon”) came first, and assign “Chun Hyang” to 1922.

5. Including oral ballad cycle, drama, traditional opera, three Western-style grand operas (one by a Japanese composer), several comic parodies, and two Broadway-style musicals (one by an American Jesuit).

6. Na died prematurely of tuberculosis in 1937, and in true Hollywood fashion was recently honored with a biographical film on his life, also called “Arirang” (1966).

[page 112**]**

Japanese, although this must certainly have resided more in the pyonsa’s explanations than in the film’s visual elements, which the Japanese could censor, though they could scarcely control what the pyonsa might say in Korean, a language few Japanese ever learned to speak well.7

With the advent of sound films in 1928, the pyonsa of course began to disappear,8 and Japanese movies―especially the early “samurai epics”―started to take over the Korean market, in part due to the Japanese government’s policy to propagandize Korea with its new belligerence, which soon led to the 1937 “Manchuria incident” and the subsequent invasion of China by way of Korea.

Nevertheless, Korean producers did make a few sound films before the war, the first being the inevitable “Chun Hyang” in 1935. From 1938 until the end of the Pacific War in 1945, cinema activities were exclusively in the hands of the Japanese, and directed entirely toward crude propaganda ends.

With Liberation came political chaos and the tragedy of national division, the north being occupied by Soviet forces which set up a Communist dictatorship, and the south by the American army, which—lacking any practical policy directives from Washington—was never sure exactly what it was supposed to do, surrounded as it was by contentious local political factions that mushroomed after long suppression.

Despite the political and economic disruption, lasting until the establishment of the Republic of Korea government late

7. No prints of any pre-1945 Korean films survive, so any evaluation or description of them is entirely guesswork.

8. The usage may in a sense be said to survive in the present practice of professional “voice actors” dubbing sound tracks instead of the stars who appear on the screen.

[page 113**]**

in 1948, about 20 feature films (mostly silent, in 16 mm., though including a few 35 mm. entries) appeared in the five-year period before the Korean Wan Almost all of these are recalled as being extremely inept, due to lack of equipment, experience, and financing. Only one, titled “Chayu Mansei!” (“Hurrah for Freedom!”) (1946), made a strong impression and started a cycle of nationalistic anti-Japanese films which—understandably in the circumstances―broke all box-office records, but which will be ignored here as being of negligible importance to the overall view of Korean cinema.

The Korean War (1950—1953) shattered the fledgling industry. Even the obsolete equipment and facilities previously available were lost or destroyed as large parts of the peninsula were fought over not once but in some cases three or four times. The movie industry was reborn only after the war, when the U. S. foreign aid program and several private foundations, realizing the importance of films as an educational and socially cohesive factor, brought in new equipment and set up a modern studio complete with sound stage.

These facilities were under ROK government control, but available on rental to qualified private producers. For its part, the government began producing newsreels for local consumption and documentary shorts for overseas publicity. Many fine cultural films have been made, an outstanding example of which is the film on Korean Buddhism called “Nirvana,” produced by Yang Jong-hae, which won the prize as top documentary in the 1965 Asian Film Festival.

Soon after the government studio opened, a private movie center was also set up in Anyang, just south of Seoul (It should be remarked here, perhaps, that by 1968 directors were again complaining of the obsolescence of equipment, [page 114**]** especially the cameras, probably caused by overuse , carelessness, poor maintenance, and lack of spare parts and skilled repairmen.)

As a final catalyst precipitating the revival of the postwar Korean film industry, the government, also in 1955, removed the heavy entertainment tax from movie tickets, for the first time making it possible for a successful film to be reasonably profitable to its makers.

The first smash hit in the Renaissance of Korean cinema was, predictably enough, “Chun Hyang” (1955), directed by Lee Kyu-hwan, which was seen by 90, 000 people during its 21-day first-run showing in Seoul. Composed in simple, graceful shots, with sharply contrasted black and white photography, well acted, artfully paced and cut, this version (in the opinion of the present writer) is the best of all postwar filmings of the celebrated story, and the first surviving Korean screen classic. Others may prefer the later color adaptations, but these seem to get slower and more elephantine all the time. Brevity, dictated by scarcity of film stock, may have helped make the 1955 version memorable!

The next year came a very different and even more popular hit, “Chayu Puin” (“Free Wife”) the story of a college professor’s wife who flouts convention by having an extramarital love affair. That this Korean equivalent of “A Doll’s House” had such an immense success indicates that the rigid Confucian moral order was in process of change ; but no systematic research has so far been undertaken to determine accurately the role of films in initiating or crystallizing such changes. It may be noted, however, that a group of college professors protested the showing of this film, on the grounds of general danger to public morals and specific defamation of their profession. This pattern of attempted suppression [page 115**]** was to appear persistently at a later date.

In 1958, the first locally-processed feature film in color was completed. It is probably superfluous to mention that it was “Chun Hyang” again.9 The initial full-length animated color cartoon, “Hong Kil-dong”, a folk tale Disneyfied for children, came in 1967.

At the time of the revival of Korean sound films in 1955, nearly all movies used music tracks taken from pirated imported phonograph records, since Korea is hot a member of the inter-national copyright convention. Korea soon began to dispense with this practice, however, unlike other non-copyright areas such as Taiwan.10 By the 1960’s, most features boasted original sound tracks by leading composers such as Kim Dong-jin and Jeong Yoon-joo. The generally excellent scores are still handicapped by the use of undermanned, under-rehearsed pick-up orchestras and slipshod recording techniques.

In the field of foreign film imports, the government has established an import quota to protect domestic producers. Through a rather complicated system， the minimum quota for imports is allocated among Korean producers on the basis of their own yearly numerical production levels, to which may be added various bonuses for producers whose products have been shown abroad, entered competitions, or won festival prizes. In the early 1960’s, imported films approximately

9.Two more Cinemascope and color remakes of this durable classic had appeared by the mid-1960’s, as well as a wild black and white spoof, in which the traditionally-garbed characters rode in convertibles, drank Scotch, and danced to a juke box.

10.In the 1966 Asian film Festival held in Seoul, the jury awarded the Pest Music award to the “composer” credited with the score of the Taiwan entry “Orchid”, oblivious of the fact that the music had been pieced together from recordings of Rachmaninoff, Wagner, Saint-Saens, etc.

[page 116**]**

equalled domestic production; but foreign film imports have steadily declined since then (sec Tables I and II).

Judging by recent imported hits, Korean audiences favor French and Italian love stories (though these are heavily cut in nude and erotic scenes), lurid documentaries of the “Mondo” series type, the Italian-made “macaroni,” cowboy movies, and U. S. musical, crime, and Western dramas, approximately in that order. “Cleopatra” had a successful run, and the Disney True Life Adventures keep coming back over and over, with good audience response.

Due to the cautious government attitude in regard to recently (1966) re-established diplomatic relations with Japan, no commercial features from the neighboring country have been shown in Korea since 1945. The exceptions to this comprise entries, shown before invited audiences only, to the Asian Film Festivals held in Seoul in 1962 and 1966. To these, it is generally agreed, Japan sends “second-string” entries, both to avoid taking the lion’s share of the prizes due to her technically more sophisticated productions, and also to save her best films for more prestigious festivals.11

**II- THEMES AND IMPACT**

The Korean film, apparently from its earliest examples

11. But the exception in turn to this occurred in the 1962 festival, when Japan sent the brilliantly photographed “Ueo Muite Aruko” (“Keep Your Chin Up inventively directed by Toshio Masuda—an upbeat forerunner, in a sense, of “West Side Story” (which in its film version had then yet to appear). This fine movie launched the meteoric Occidental career of Japanese singer Kyu Sakomoto, whose performance of the film’s catchy theme song in Japanese later made a hit in U.S. record markets under the meaningless title “Sukiyaki.” Festival audiences in Seoul heard it first! (The present writer has always wondered why the Japanese did not dub and export this exhilirating, if rather simplistically sentimental, film.)

[page 117**]**

over 40 years ago, has reflected the special qualities of the Korean people, sometimes known as “the Irish of the Orient,” and the characteristics of their ancient theater arts: earthiness, irony, volatility, violence, nostalgia, and sentiment. Not that other peoples have railed to express their nature accurately in film and drama; but the modern Korean actor or director—deeply instinctive, extrovert, and unburdened by traditions of stylization or restraint―throws himself into film making with an uninhibited physical and temperamental involvement that evokes instant empathy in any audience.

The risk, in other words, is not that a Korean film will be dull or static, but that it may be flamboyantly melodramatic—to the point of caricature, so far as a Western audience is concerned. The best directors have avoided such excesses, and even approached New Wave boredom, whether deliberately or not; but the tendency remains marked in most films.

Every Korean movie, for instance, is equipped with at least one lengthy and harrowing scene of the heroine weeping. (Sometimes men will be drawn into such a scene in subordinate roles like that of the premier danseur; but, as in the case of ballet, it is essentially a virtuoso female performance. )

Sophisticated or Westernized Koreans (the terms tend to be synonymous, at least when used by foreigners) deplore these crying jags, but the producers insist they must use such devices to guarantee popular success―and not only in rural areas.

There are also signs of a rather morbid dwelling upon wounds, torture, bloodshed and mortal illness in many movies.

Both these tendencies, of course, can be seen—and in more extreme form, occasionally—in both Japanese and over-seas [page 118**]** Chinese films; and may have had their cinematic origin in these, so far as Korea is concerned. Also, parallel or overlapping common factors in the legends and traditions of all three countries suggest much earlier mutual influences, which have been documented exhaustively by scholars.

To glimpse the special Korean twist to these and other themes, let us examine the perennial favorite “Chun Hyang,” an 18th century story filmed seven times already, and still going strong.

The son of a provincial magistrate, Yi Doryong, meets Song Chun-hyang, lovely young daughter of a former kisaeng (geisha) and thus socially unacceptable as the wife for a scholar-aristocrat. Nevertheless, they fall in love and marry secretly (upward social mobility is an important theme 12). But Do-ryong’s father is transferred to the capital, and Do-ryong must go too, in order to take the annual Confucian academy examinations that lead to political preferment.

The new magistrate, Pyun Sat-do, is a villain who squeezes the poor farmers and commandeers the fairest girls of the district to glut his sensuality. Hearing of the beauty of Chun-hyang, he sends for her, but she refuses to become his mistress, saying that she is already married. Pyun has her beaten and thrown into prison, threatening to execute her as part of the entertainment at his impending birthday banquet unless she accedes to his demands (political oppression and injustice are recurring themes in both Korean literature and cinema).

Do-ryong returns in rags as a beggar, stating that he has failed his examinations and been disowned by his father. He visits Chun-hyang in jail, and she has her obligatory weeping

12. CF Korea: The Politics of the Vortex by Gregory Henderson: Harvard University Press, 1968. [page 119**]** scene as the doomed wife faithful to death (marital fidelity is a much-valued traditional virtue in Korea—but only for wives).

However, Do-ryong has lied: having passed his examination with highest marks, he is now a secret emissary of the king, travelling in disguise to seek out and redress injustices. Thus at Pyun’s birthday party Do-ryong interrupts and denounces the magistrate as an enemy of the people—in an elegant, allusive Chinese poem that proves he is no illiterate beggar. Royal troops hidden nearby break in and the villain is led away to punishment, while Chun-hyang, rescued on the very brink of execution, is reunited with her husband for a future of bliss. The theme of reform within the established system is an obvious corollary of Confucian thinking. )

That the hero let his wife believe until the last moment that she was about to be executed seems wantonly cruel, since he could have told her the truth, or at least held out some hope to her, during their clandestine meeting in the prison the night before. This suggests, when viewed with other similar cliff-hangers, that one major theme of Korean cinema is, “Women must suffer—that’s what they’re for.” (Indeed, in one old version of the story, the heroine dies immediately after her rescue, of tortures received in prison. )

Traces of this theme in more up-to-date garb may be found in the fine comedy-drama “Sarang Bang Sonnim Kwa Omoni” (“Mother and the Roomer”), directed by Shin Sang-ok, which won a top prize in the 1962 Asian Film Festival. The story takes place in the early modern period, and is seen largely through the uncomprehending eyes of a child.

A young widow rents her spare room to a handsome bachelor in order to make extra money. They fall in love, [page 120**]** but the old-fashioned mores of the community frown on remarriage of a widow. They decide to part, rather than risk social ostracism and persecution of the woman’s young daughter. This plot permits plenty of latitude for grief as well as comedy, as the little girl I fails to understand the situation. It also provides a virtuoso part for the Cute Kid stereotype, of which Koreans are quite fond.

Suffering is again the theme in “Ji-ok Mun” (“Gate of Hell”; not to be confused with the Japanese film of the same title), directed by Lee Yong-min in 1962. A tyrant king during one of the ancient dynasties practices unheard-of cruelties, such as the graphic drowning of an enemy and his young son in an immense palace cesspool (Korean cruelty as well as humor tends toward the excremental). Finally the king and his evil cohorts die and go to the Buddhist hell, where they are visited by a monk who left the court and entered a monastery after being sickened by the abuses of the tyrant. The monk is traversing hell to bring absolution and salvation to the spirit of his dead mother, who had been one of the wicked courtiers.

The most effective scenes are those showing the tortures of the damned, done with excellent special effects, in color. Thus the film is an equivalent of the average Hollywood “Biblical spectacular,” where a casual cloak of piety covers the real purpose: depiction of violence and depravity.

Following up the excrementel humor theme for a moment, there is one memorable sequence in the first Korean science-fiction film, “Wang-magui” or “King-Size Monster” (1967). When the giant ape from outer space begins to tear down the scale model of Seoul in the accepted international ritual, a street urchin leaps from a collapsing building and lands atop the monster’s head. He crawls into one ear, travels [page 121**]** through the Eustachian tube (apparently) into the nasal passages, and peers roguishly out one immense nostril as the ape continues to destroy the city. Suddenly the monster halts, roars, and begins to slap madly at his head: the scene shifts to a fleeting shot of the boy urinating against the wall of its nasal passage!13

Korean films, like those of other nations, tend to go in cycles. The earliest period,1921-1938, seems to have comprised “modern problem” stories and a few old legends, with anti-Japanese elements suggested in the former as much as possible. After the immediate postwar orgy of anti-Japanism, the industry groped a long time before a new trend appeared: juvenile rebellion and glamorized gangsterism, in a cycle starting in the late 1950’s. Most native observers agree that these films had a demonstrable—and unhealthy—effect on the speech, dress, and thinking patterns of Korean youth, producing a tough-guy or would-be delinquent image as the social ideal. (The James Dean and motorcycle gang movies from the U.S. about this time may have had appreciable influence too.)

The number of actual war films has been surprisingly small, due to a combination of reasons. Staging modern battle scenes is prohibitively expensive, and depicting Communist characters is politically touchy, as several film-makers have learned to their regret. Even the Vietnam War, in which Koreans are genuinely proud of their participation, has inspired few films.

The most successful military film was Shin Productions

13. The picture was a commercial flop: apparently the Koreans are not as fond of the cinematic spectacle of their cities being destroyed as the Japanese—perhaps harboring a guilt complex—seem to be, judging by Godzilla and his many quaint successors.

[page 122**]**

“Ppalgan Mafula” (“Red Scarf”) (1964), about the jet fighters of the ROK Air Force. The government assisted this production by providing the expensive aerial camera work and various stock footage.

Historical epics such as “Yonsan Kun” (“Prince Yonsan”) (1961), directed by Shin Sang-ok, who might with some justice be called the De Mille of Korea, had a vogue in the early 1960’s, followed by rather “arty” adaptations of modern literary pieces, such as “Manch’u” (“Late Autumn”) (1967). These stressed melancholy moods, nostalgia, and doomed love, with misty atmospheric scenic effects and restrained, naturalistic acting.

Starting in 1966 there was even a brief fad for quasi- travelogues, led off by the Cinemascope and color feature “Paltogangsan” (“Sights of the Eight Provinces”; dubbed in English as “Six Daughters”). This film has an interesting origin: the government wished to produce an upbeat documentary stressing economic and social gains made under its aegis, as part of the buildup to the 1967 national elections. Bae Sok-in, a director of official documentaries, was assigned to the task, and top stars recruited. The finest facilities and equipment were made available, together with an unusually generous budget.

Realizing that the propaganda would have to be adroitly sugar-coated to be successful, Bae wrote a clever script in which a comic old couple sets out on a tour around Korea to visit six married daughters. Each episode includes an entertaining human vignette, a glimpse of regional development, and a scenic-musical travelogue, well integrated into the plot. Korea’s most popular stars participated , headed by Kim Hee-kap, who has been playing foxy-grandpa roles so long that it is difficult to realize he is only in his mid-40’s.

[page 123**]**

This film is an obvious example of the social-mobility theme: Bae even cannily included one sequence of a family living in poverty and privation, all the while saving to invest in a fishing boat that would eventually boost them from rags to relative riches.

The picture was a smash box-office success, and the incumbent party won re-election, whatever the connection between the two facts may have been. But every Korean movie fad seems to burn itself out at meteoric speed, as director Bae found when he quit his government job to make further independent feature-documentaries that were only moderately successful.

The most tenacious type of Korean film, always popular when well done, is the family comedy-drama, sometimes based on well-known radio soap operas or newspaper serial stories. This genre is popular with foreign viewers, too, since the films usually have variety and pace, which many Koreans movies lack.

The typical plot will involve the vicissitudes of a big family of three generations living in the same house (the sly, silly, bibulous, witty old grandfather is always Kim Hee-kap): parental problems, job troubles, in-law troubles (including the marrying off of a son or brother of the head of the house), and especially the generation gap, stressing all the imaginable scrapes newly-emancipated Korean youth might possibly get into.

The actors are lively and attractive, the tempo frenetic, the pantomime diverting, and nothing is taken too seriously, unless it is the Weeping Scene. The family is always of the upper-middle or lower-upper income group, underlining audience aspirations for sell-improvement (somebody is always getting ready to go to the States), as well as general disap- [page124**]** proval of the very rich, who appear in these films as loud-mouthed, vulgar bosses or nouveau riche snobs.

**III. TWIN BURDENS: Financing and Censorship**

Korean movies today are dominated by a rigidly stratified star system. The top dozen or so players, incredible as it may seem, sometimes act in as many as 20 to 30 different films shooting simultaneously. The competition for their services is so keen that they can command salaries of as much as $2,000 per picture, making them among the highest-paid of all Koreans, as revealed by income tax statistics.14

The reasons for tins fantastic situation, and the cause of many long-standing deficiencies in Korean cinema, lie in the method of financing films, one of two major drawbacks the industry has yet to conquer.

Bank loans, source of most business and industrial funds in Korea, are not in general available for film financing, which is considered a risky and precarious investment Money to make movies usually comes from the theater owners themselves, the only group with a vested interest in seeing to it that films are made at all.

The theater owners naturally have strong ideas about what succeeds at the box office, with perhaps more justification in experience than the famous “New York bankers” who tend to get all the blame for Hollywood’s alleged mediocrity. The independent producer must sell the idea for a new film to a major theater owner in order to secure a

14. The question of whether Korean movie stars have strong influence over their public is moot； but that international stars have strong influence on Korean stars is indicated by the fact that, at the height of the Elizabeth Taylor-Richard Burton affair, the Korean screen idols Kim Ji-mi and Choi Moo-ryong offered their own version, which got them temporarily jailed for adultery in rather puritanical Korea. (See Time, Nov. 16, 1962, p. 31.)

[page 125**]** loan, and the latter will be interested only if the services of big-name stars can be assured; and will also feel free to insist on changes in the scenario and screen play.

If the completed picture has a two-week first run, with an audience of from 50,000 to 60,000, it is considered a success. Profits are divided between producer and exhibitor on a 65%-35% or 70%-30% basis. After paying back the loan, the producer is free to contract for second-run and provincial showings. If the first run was not successful, his profits from these later engagements must go to pay off the debt, and he often winds up in the red. (See Table III) Under these circumstances, as one movieman put it, the producer is a salesman first, impresario second, and an artist last, if at all. Only a few quality productions are undertaken each year, mostly for entry in overseas competitions. The producers and even the public tire of the same faces of established actors, but the conservatism of the financiers inhibits giving new talent a break. 15

An average production (1968) costs between 10,000,000 and 20,000,000 won ($37,000 to $74,000 by 1968 exchange rates). Only 5% to 10% of this is paid as salary to director and technicians. Most of the rest goes for the actors, film stock, lab work, and editing, leaving a bare minimum for sets, costumes, and other niceties.

In such a situation, it is not surprising that every attempt must be made to conserve expensive imported film stock. Ratio of footage shot to that used is 2 to 1 on the average, never more than 6 to 1. In some cases, only 15,000 feet are

15. Dominance of the established star system, and shakiness of financing, are suggested by the saying in Korean movie circles: “For location shooting, actors travel in their own cars, the director in a taxi, and the producer by bus.”

[page 126**]**

shot to produce a 9,000-foot final print.

These figures refer to black and white shooting. In recent years, the popularity of color movies has elicited pressures from exhibitors for more of these, sharply increasing the risks of the already overburdened producers.

**TABLE I**

**Number of Korean Feature Films Produced** 1955—1968

1955 16

1956 36

1957 47

1958 92

1959 110

1960 91

1961 85

1962 114

1963 144

1964 148

1965 189

1966 124

1967 171

1968 212

Sources: 1955—1959: Korea, Its Lands, People and Culture of All Ages (Hakwon-sa, Ltd., I960); 1960—1966: Motion Picture Producers Association of Korea; 1967―1968: Ministry of Culture and Information.

**TABLE II**

**Source and Number of Foreign Feature Films Imported by Korea** I960—1968

Year U. S. British French Italian W. German Other Total

1960 93 6 22 10 1 3 135

1961 61 2 10 12 5 4 84

1962 69 3 5 5 3 1 86

1963 61 2 4 8 2 5 82

1964 36 4 8 10 ― 3 61

1965 42 ― 3 1 ― 7 53

1966 40 2 5 10 1 4 62

1967 20 2 1 12 ― 4 39

1968 40 1 3 4 ― 6 54

Sources: 1960—1966: Motion Picture Producers Association of Korea; 1967—1968: Ministry of Culture and Information.

[page 127**]**

**TABLE III**

**Number of Theaters and Attendance** 1961—1966

Year Number of Theaters Total Attendance

1961 302 58, 608’ 075

1962 344 79, 046, 162

1963 386 95, 059, 311

1964 477 104, 579, 315

1965 529 121,697,527

1966 534 156, 336, 340

Source: Korea Cinema 1967, published by Motion Picture Producers Assn. of Korea

If the caution of theater owners constitutes a de facto censorship over Korean motion pictures, the outright censorship of the government, as exercised by the Ministry of Culture and Information, is at least equally discouraging to serious film makers.

In response to the government’s continued claim of “clear and present danger” as justification for all types of censorship (sincerely believed by some knowledgable Koreans), the movie makers as a whole contend that self-censorship within the industry would suffice.

“We film people have common sense,” one well-known director told this writer. “If there were no censorship, there would be little tendency toward extremes. We too went through the Korean War, and we know more than enough about Communist cruelties to be able to show Communism as it really is, without needless exaggeration or childish distortion.

“There should be a committee of about 20 independent civic leaders set up to police the industry. At present, there is a so-called advisory council to the government on films, but in actual fact the decisions are made entirely by three government officials, who have no set standards, no experience in films, and no competence in artistic matters.”

[page 128**]**

Despite nearly half a century of extreme vicissitudes, and the chronic continued crises in which it presently exists, the cinema in Korea has proved to be a robust invalid indeed. As an industry it has survived and expanded; and as an art form, it has helped enlighten, encourage, and entertain its public, holding a mirror—however flawed—to the face of a society in rapid, pandemonic transition, and preserving a kaleidoscopic record of social change and historical upheaval.

Its future, if one may hazard a guess, looks just as perilous, exciting, and unpredictable as its hectic past and present.