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Global Intimacy and Cultural Intoxication: Japanese and Korean Film in the Twenty-First Century

Since the economic downturn of 1997 (the so-called Asian Financial Crisis [AFC]), films from mainland China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong have enjoyed considerable success throughout East Asia, and, increasingly, on a global scale. Once the dictate of international film festival jurors and critics, changes to trading conditions, industry infrastructure and the rise of social media and internet-driven business have expanded the reach of these national cinemas. In particular Japanese and South Korean (hereafter Korean) films have attracted worldwide attention, sometimes on a blockbuster scale, (see Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer*, 2013); and, thanks to clever marketing strategies, DVD sales of 'quality' or 'extreme' films have found increasingly knowledgeable audiences. Genres such as horror, period, classroom and family dramas, melodrama, science fiction, crime, slow cinema, and violent revenge narratives have characterized the field, but these labels are simply insufficient to define the work. The twenty-first century has seen a rise in queer subject matter, female directors, and films addressing *zainichi* (or Korean residents in Japan) and 'outsider' perspectives from both regions; and tastes, styles, ancillary marketing and a 'newly emerging geography of digital cinema' (Wada-Marciano 2012: 45) have diversified the industries and intoxicated the marketplace.

In 2005, Third Window Films announced their pledge to bring 'quality Asian cinema' to British viewers' homes, via a range of DVDs that reach 'beyond long-haired ghost films and mindless Hollywood action copies, sourcing the finest works in new *Far Eastern* Cinema (author's emphasis)'. One example is *New Directors From Japan* (2014), which showcases films by young, 'unique' directors Kosuke Takaya, Nagisa Isogai and Hirobumi Watanabe, providing the only means of distribution for their work either in Japan or abroad. Overall, Third Window's aim, it seems, is to circumnavigate the inevitable lull in interest in the 1990s imports branded under Tartan's now defunct 'Asia Extreme' label (as discussed by Stringer 2007;

Dew 2007; Wada-Marciano 2009) by offering a re-branded alternative to an educated audience (these particular films ruminate on themes such as global capitalism, sexual perversion, and obsessive sibling rivalry. While various studies have noted the cultural specificity of recent Japanese and Korean cinema – the folkloric and literary roots, the oblique references to the atomic bombs, the performance styles originating from traditional *butoh* or *kabuki,* the technological environment of modern Tokyo or Seoul, the vengeful *onryo* – (Hand, 2006; Phu, 2010) they have also acknowledged the transnational impulse that defines their reception, and ultimately their cross-cultural afterlife in the form of co-produced re-makes. Stringer notes how, in the case of Japan, 'it becomes possible to engage with some of the complex inter-media and cross-cultural relations forged in recent years, both inside and outside Japan, among remade, recycled and re-circulated, and popular as well as highbrow, cultural artefacts' (2007: 298). In the case of Tartan Asia Extreme, this intertextuality accounts equally for the international awareness of Korean films of this period, such as Park Chan-wook's *JSA* (*Joint Security Area,* 2000) and *The Vengeance Trilogy* (2002-2005) or Kim Ki-duk's *The Isle* (2000) and *Bad Guy* (2002).

The popularity of parallel industries such as gaming, comic books, fan magazines, television and music, and the easily packaged extremes of cuteness and horror/violence, has only served to fuel film successes. Arguably, the sustained success of Japan's soft power, for example, is largely thanks to ancillary products and cute (*kawaii*) anthropomorphic characters and fashion styles (such as gothic-lolita) that can be found in the most unlikely shops (as well as specialist ones) the world over. Sharon Kinsella offers that in Japan 'Individualism generally and youth culture in particular have been interpreted, first and foremost, as a form of willful immaturity or childishness,' (1998: 291) and certainly the adoration surrounding *cosplay* (character fancy dress) or characters such as Sanrio's Hello Kitty shows that the catharsis of being childish has caught on. Syncretized with the ubiquitous rush of social media's recycled or quoted images, the thrill of danger, violence or commodity fetishism, and the paradox of fame and anonymity that twenty-first century life brings, *kawaii* culture is also a lasting component of recent films such as *Samaritan Girl* (Kim Ki-duk 2004), *Kamikaze Girls, Memories of Matsuko, Confessions* (Nakashima 2004; 2006; 2012)*, Love Exposure*

(Sion 2008)*, Sakuran, and Helter Skelter* (Ninagawa 2006; 2012) in which a postmodern mix of styles and attributes meld tradition and consumerism, and tread a line between parody and pastiche.

Global hits such as Psy's 2012 *Gangnam Style*, Studio Ghibli's animated films, Nintendo games, *Pokémon*, the films of Park Chan-wook, Kiyoshi Kurosawa, Kim Ki-duk, Naomi Kawase, Hirokazu Kore-eda, Kinji Fukasaku, Takashi Miike; and the international renown of novels such as Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (2015) or Haruki Murakami's fiction have all contributed to an awareness of Japanese and Korean cultural outputs, and more specifically, to a cine-literacy that is reliant upon a range of artistic, industrial and consumerist practices, but which has historically evolved unevenly across the two nations.

More recent evolutions in new and trans media, and the democratizing potential of making film digitally, can shed new light on the affective and creative ways in which Japanese and Korean film industries respond to global cultural flows, and which filmmakers approach their subjects. Aihwa Ong notes that an analysis of global cultural flows does not necessarily account for 'their embeddedness in differently configured regimes of power' (4), and Koichi Iwabuchi echoes this sentiment, proposing that 'Globalization processes flows will continue to relentlessly capitalize on intra-Asian cultural resonance, at the same time reproducing unequal cultural power relations in multiple and multilayered ways' (2002: 210). In terms of global consumption, older trends embedded within the structure of the international film festival match Iwabuchi's and Ong's observations. The much-cited 'opening up' of Japanese cinema to the West with Kurosawa's *Rashomon* taking the Silver Lion at Venice in 1951, encouraged an exoticist cinephilia that was based on region and auteur value. Yet it was only after 41 years of competing at Venice that a Korean director won the Golden Lion (Kim Ki-duk for his 18th feature film, *Pietà*, (2012) the dark portrait of a son atoning for his sins). What is interesting is how 'East Asian' art cinema has evolved in symbiotic relation to the international film festival (Busan [Pusan] International Film Festival, 1996 – present, is a key example – see Gateward 2007) and the rise of independent distributors and lobbyists for national cinemas (see Galt and Shoonover 2010). Dudley Andrew's evaluation of the 'duality' (regional/polyglot audience) resulting from festivals' autonomous selection process (2010 vii) is echoed in Leo Ching's assertion that regional markets

are inherently complict in globalization, allowing 'the contending forces of global integration and local autonomy [to] converge' (244).

This chapter briefly consolidates the historical links and ugly intimacies[1] that existed between Japan and Korea in the past, and how these continue to shape their respective cultural industries. More specifically, it draws on key films, filmmakers, genres and trends that can be said to define 'Japanese' and 'Korean' cinema in the twenty-first century, and their place in an increasingly intimate and culturally intoxicated marketplace. It also takes for granted the continued project of 'De-Westernizing' film studies (after Bâ and Higbee 2012) and reflects upon recent scholarly debates surrounding the mapping of increased reverse cultural flows (from East Asia to Hollywood) and intra-regional flows (within East Asia) (see, for example Ciecko 2006; Galt and Shoonover 2010; Lee 2011a; Gates and Funnell 2012) and the wider discussion on national, transnational, diasporic, regional and hybrid cinemas that weave through this book.

Japan and Korea: Global Intimacy and the Other

Often thrown together under the umbrella of East Asian cinema, there is undoubtedly a *global intimacy* in the ways in which Japanese and Korean films and filmmakers negotiate their intertwined geo-politics, and in their, often very subtle, self-effacing humor in the face of horror. However, a mutual reciprocity in terms of style and influence is at marked odds with the roles played out in stories of battle, political and cultural displacement, diasporic communities, enforced prostitution, and mass migration in which the roles of oppressor and oppressed are nationally defined. These histories tell of inequality and suffering: the systematic invasion of Korea by Japan (1592-1598); colonial rule of Korea by Japan (1910 to 1945); the occupation of Japan by the United States, from 1945 to 1952, the Korean War which divided the country into Northern and Southern territories, from 1950 to 1953; the violent Gwangju uprising [Democratic Uprising] of 1980 and on-going issues involving *zainichi* rights. In addition, both regions also foster an ambivalent relationship with the United States expressed through on-going issues relating to constitutional

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[1] The term 'ugly intimacies' is inspired by an international symposium held at University of California, Berkeley, and organised by Karen Vallgårda and Padma D. Maitland, May 17th, 2016.

rights, U.S. military presence, commerce and industrial regulation, and ideological differences. Scholarship focused on Japanese and Korean cinema, and their interrelation, has burgeoned, and most recently reflects the speed and diversity with which films are created in relation to socio-political concerns, but also to competitive market share (both local and global). A range of persepctives represented in the diverse work of Aaron Gerow, Isolde Standish, Michael Raine, Frances Gateward, Abé Markus Nornes, Julian Stringer, Yuriko Furuhata, Rayna Denison, Tony Rayns, Jinhee Choi, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, Mark Schilling, Chris Berry, Dal Yong Jin, Lee Dong-hoo, Mika Ko, Yomota Inuhiko, Koichi Iwabuchi, Darcy Paquet, Misuhiro Yoshimoto, and Jasper Sharp, among many others, (including the *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema*, 2009 – edited by David Desser) illustrates the impossibility of a mono-cultural approach. As well as established forms of criticism focused on auteur theory and genre, the international enterprise of East Asian film studies fosters diverse approaches to non-heterogeneous and diasporic experience from within cosmopolitanism, and on the inclusion/exclusion that global circulation engenders.

Mika Ko's invaluable work on 'otherness' in Japanese Cinema (2010) raises the perennial question of identity emerging from years of cultural displacement and migration following Korea's double separation from Japan and North Korea. She reminds us that the opposing perceptions of *'nihonjinron'* (discourses of Japaneseness) and the *kokutai* or unified national body' (62) on the one hand, and 'no such thing as a coherent unified Korean identity' on the other (126) divide the experience of belonging along lines of privilege and discrimination that are complex and individual. Myung Ja-kim argues that Kim Ki-duk's filmmaking in addressing miscegenation and shameful pasts, pushes for an acceptance of difference, whereby 'Prejudice against a marginalized group, whether it is related to class, race, ethnicity, or gender, is another projection of the psyche of the colonized victim, signifying the need for the other.' (260) Similarly socio-politically motivated, scholarship over the past decade discusses how the Korean 'renaissance' (Choi 2010), or 'New Korean Cinema' – which presents 'its dazzling colours to the world in multiple versions […] across diverse territories' (Stringer 2005: 7) – and a renewed interest in melodrama, documentary and heritage films also coincides with recent political debates on *jeongsindae* (comfort women, or military prostitutes) deployed to entertain, respectively, the Japanese and American soldiers, and the Korean army.

Such emotional scars are clear to see in many contemporary films such as the monumental hit *Assassination* (Choi Dong-hoon 2015) depicting Korean independence fighters, monochrome biopic *Dongju: The Portrait of a Poet* (Lee Joon-ik 2015) which portrays the life of the eponymous resistance poet, Korean-Japanese co-production *My Way* (Kang Je-Gyu 2011) or even the long-lasting legacy of the original *kaiju eiga* (monster film) *Gojirā/Godzilla* (Honda 1954); and in films centered around issues of borders and border-crossings: *The Yellow Sea* (Na Hong-jin, 2010), *Shiri* (Kang 1999), *2009: Lost Memories* (Lee Si-myung 2002) or the 2002 television drama *Friends* (a co-production between TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System) and MBC (Munhwa Broadcasting Company, Korea). The cross-cultural flows that resulted in greater cross-pollination between the Japanese and Korean industries did not truly emerge until the twenty-first century, bringing the two nations into a close proximity that had not really been seen since the days of colonialism. What Dal Yong Jin and Dong-hoo Lee term 'cultural regionalization', the 'process of change from relative heterogeneity and lack of cooperation towards increased cooperation, integration, convergence, coherence and identity in culture within a given geographical space' (2012: 27) has been greatly propelled by the region's reciprocal interest in soft power. Convergent cultural identities are also reinforced through the family drama, a central tenet of both cultures in which 'The family confers a sense of Asian values widely shared between South Koreans and other Asians: values such as filial piety and parental responsibility, kinship and loyalty, cohesion and harmony' (Teo 174). Each in her own way is also defined through the layered psycho-geographies built up over years of invasion and migration, and ring-fenced by an insular and defensive attitude and (at various points in history) literal barriers to international trade: an 'island mentality', or 'complex' [*shima-guni konjō*] in the case of Japan, and the 'hermit kingdom' signaling Korea's isolationism adopted throughout the period of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897), each designed to strengthen the nation against threat while maintaining key state ideologies. Surely we can see echoes of these ideas in the behavioural traits of the *hikikomori* (stay-at-home), a social condition in Japan (seen as an illness rather than a choice) that confines young adults to their rooms, shunning the outside world; or similarly in the figure of the *otaku*, the often obsessive gaming or *manga* fan who seemingly lives a myopic existence glued to their media of choice (see Barral 1998; Kinsella 1998; Napier 2006). The result of

effectively shutting out the rest of the world had enormous repercussions in the historical past, and traces are still clearly evident in the language, behaviors and beliefs, and the, still, (transnational co-productions notwithstanding) largely mono-cultural spaces portrayed in the films of both regions.

During the colonial period, Japan instigated a slogan promoting the ideology that 'Japan and Korea are one' [*naisen ittai*], a sign of 'cosmetic mutliculturalism,' (Ko, 2010) a superficial integration that masked the real plight of the colonized and deterritorialized. Such historical attempts to gloss over oppression and inequality offered a pseudo-transnational 'togetherness' that functioned at political and economic levels, but which has continually been challenged by filmmakers. More recent developments in relations between the two regions have replaced this problematic colonial slogan with a range of governmental policies that aim to address the painful memory of Japanese rule and its enslavement of Korean nationals. A key turning point was in 1998, when the 'Open Door Policy/Good Neighbour Policy' summit held between President Kim Dae Jung and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi led to Korea opening its doors to Japanese popular culture, thereby ensuring a platform for pan-Asian co-production, diversification of the motion picture, publishing, music and television industries, and opportunities to build greater understanding between the two countries. Recent Japanese films present worlds governed by mythical or romantic elements to create an embodied filmic experience through which to experience the 'other', in most cases a *zainichi*.

GO (2000), for example, is a popular novel written by Kaneshiro Kazuki, a third generation Korean living in Japan, which investigates the subject of nationality focalized through a *zainichi* high school student. A year later, it was made into a critically acclaimed film of the same title (Isao Yukisada) starring Japanese heartthrob Yōsuke Kubozuka as main protagonist Sugihara. This casting is significant in that Kubozuka appeals to both Korean and Japanese audiences, and his star persona thereby supersedes the more negative and incendiary connotations of Sugihara's outsider status. In line with popular Korean and Japanese films of the early 2000s, the film enlists the tropes of teen romance and violent, stylized, revenge narratives (the film's intense anger is located within a presumed 'Korean' sensibility) in order to highlight the discrimination that determines Sugihara's path. Sugihara falls in love with Japanese student Sakurai, who

manages to break the pattern of her parents' prejudice against North Korea and to reciprocate his love. The film asks its audience to identify not with one side or the other, but with a shifting scale of emotions that are tied and untied to their protagonists. On one level, this encouragement to identify with the constraints and unfairness of discrimination that continues for *zainichi* in Japanese society seems positive, however, as Iwabuchi warns, 'a young [Korean] person who reads manga does not necessarily forget the political implications of the past' (2015: 20). Progress is often slow and, perhaps superficial: **'**In many cases, the use of minority groups in Japanese films has simply provided a "multicultural gloss", whereby minority cultures have become the object rather than the subject of representation and consumption' (Ko 2010: 172). Mark Schilling has referred to the 1990s as a creative and hopeful decade in Japanese film history, a decade that saw a boom in cinema-going, and the rise of the multiplex in rural, suburban and city centres, but no real rise in the overall market share (1999). What is particularly striking about this period is that against the failing economy, in the wake of the AFC, the industry saw a rise in the number of new directors, a rise in the number of small theatres and 'the stubborn vitality' of the independent film sector buoyed by private and corporate finance (Schilling, 1999: 24). Directors such as Hirokazu Kore-eda, Naomi Kawase, Takeshi Kitano, Takashi Miike, Tetsuya Nakashima, Shunji Iwai, Shinji Aoyama, Sion Sono, Hideo Nakata, Hayao Miyazaki created a buzz around the domestic film, despite the domination of foreign imports at the box office. However, back in the late 1990s *Hallyu* [the Korean Wave] and 'things Korean [were] not fashionable in a narrative of the cosmopolitan atmosphere of contemporary Japan' (Yomota 2003: 84) because 'Koreans [had] been too close a presence for Japanese to build them into a positive stereotype in cinema' (87). This was all to change, (as has been discussed in Gateward 2003; Choi 2010; Kim 2011; Dal and Lee 2012 and Dal 2016) when the sheer force of *Hallyu* washed over film industries and audiences the world over.

The Jaw-Dropping Success of K-Film in the Twenty-First Century

While Japanese cinema has enjoyed a longer period of consumer and critical attention internationally thanks to a sustained interest in auteur cinema (led not only by *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1960s, but also thanks to the work of Noël Burch and Donald Richie), this millennium has seen the Korean film industry take the

lead, garnering its place in the global imagination. In 1986, the Korean Motion Picture Law (MPL) allowed direct distribution by major Hollywood studios, combined with a reduction in the screen quota for domestically produced films, paving the way for a greater Hollywood share of the market. Clearly the Korean market needed to change, and the industry began to harness the potential of conglomerate money to distance itself from the films of the 1980s. The government's realization that economic growth and global acumen could be achieved through cultural products meant that change happened in all areas. For example, the Korean Film Archive in Seoul (1974) and the North Korean film archive in Pyongyang (1961) were established late into the twentieth century; but in the era of New Korean Cinema, the movement of the KFA to the $2 billion Seoul Arts Complex (completed in 1993) and its upgrade from a nonprofit to a government affiliated foundation in 2002; the restructuring of the Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation (KMPPC), into the Korean Film Council (KOFIC) and the explosion of cinemas and festivals into the 2000s show an unprecedented investment in the industry. As Jinhee Choi has pointed out, the boom in financial and governmental support was matched by increased visibility and renown on the international film festival circuit. Certainly, as all writers on contemporary Korean cinema since the 2000s have described, the combination of a willing government, *chaebols* [large, often family-owned, business conglomerates] with money to burn, directors with a greater freedom to express criticism about the past, the creation of a regional trend, and a booming star culture that spans music, film, television and promotional goods (crossover stars such as Song Joong-ki, Lee Byung-hun, Son Ye-jin or Hai Ji), propelled Korea to a success, which in terms of visibility and box office takings, clearly surpassed that of Japan.

By 2005 Korea had become 'the fifth largest theatrical market in the world, with $890 million in box-office receipts' (Choi 2). This 'awe-inspiring' rise in economic fortunes at the turn of the millenium (Jeong 110) is coupled with a rise in conglomerate and venture capital flowing into the film industry, enabling '386 generation' directors to make commercially viable films for mass audiences. The term 386, while referring to the speed of an Intel computer chip, also refers to a generation in their thirties, born in the 1960s and witness to the political turmoil of the 1980s, a term, that as Choi points out, is more political than 'baby boomer' (4). Under Kim Dae-jung's presidential steer, directors such as Park, Bong, Lee Chang-dong, Gina

Kim, Im Kwon-taek, Hong and Ing Sang-soo, flourished and the era of the Korean blockbuster arrived: 'In both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea, the rise of blockbuster consciousness is linked to dismantling trade protectionism under intense lobbying from the US' (Berry 2003: 218). The rise of the big-budget blockbuster has certainly attracted record audiences for Korean films domestically, but has also garnered success in regional markets and at American, Latin American, and European film festivals.

In 2008, Christina Klein examined the reasons 'Why American Studies Needs to Think about Korean Cinema, Or, Transnational Genres in the Cinema of Bong Joon-ho'. Selecting a director who is responsible for one of the highest grossing films in Korean box office history (*The Host*, 2006, which, in 2016 remains in the top five behind James Cameron's *Avatar*, 2009, and Kim Han-min's naval epic *The Admiral: Roaring Currents*, 2014), Klein examines the 'ambivalent' and schizophrenic relationship with Hollywood genre film that is tested in Bong's *The Host,* and *Memories of Murder* (2003). Largely considered an auteur of the blockbuster, Bong's films are slickly produced, spectacular, metageneric, and involve increasing levels of domestic and international investment, as is the case with 2013's *Snowpiercer* starring Tilda Swinton and John Hurt and shot in a range of transnational locations. Korea's quest for a cinema that pushes national concerns, while remaining capable of attracting a mass audience, inevitably relies upon the most globally successful storytelling means, as Nikki J. Lee suggests: 'Korea's pursuit of indigenous movie blockbusters has turned it into an international producer and distributor of localized global movies' (2011b: 61) whereby 'Korean filmmakers use Hollywood's archives to navigate through their own globalized cultural economy (Klein 873). A case in point would be Tartan's highly sexualized packaging of Je-Kyu Kang's 2003, mega-hit *Shiri* (universally accepted as Korea's first blockbuster) for its Asia Extreme DVD series in Europe featuring an image of lead actor Yunjin Kim tantalizingly holding a gun, placed above the *Empire* magazine tagline: 'A mix of *Nikita* and *Die Hard'*. The explosive domestic success of *Shiri* milked the film's global signifiers highlighting sex, spectacle, the violent pursuit of a threat to national security, and something of the thrill and the banality of the *Die Hard* franchise (1988-2013).

However, the notion of a K-blockbuster is not always considered favorably, with sceptics labeling the trend 'Copywood' (Dal 2005; Klein 2008; Suh 2008), seeing the 'K' of the 'Korean' blockbuster as a cheap add-on marking it as imitation. However, as far as directors Park and Bong are concerned, working within and against the boundaries of genre allows for resistance and creativity that is *particular*. More recently (October, 2016), Park attended the UK premiere of his film *The Handmaiden*, an adaptation of Sarah Waters' acclaimed novel *Fingersmith* (2002), and reiterated for the audience the significance of generic codification in the film's mise-en-scène (Q&A, London International Film Festival). Within the confines of a gothic tale characteristic of those penned by the Marquis de Sade, or Sacher von Masoch, Park emphasizes the imagined superiority of the Japanese way of life that remains like an 'invisible' trace (Kim 2012: 426) in postwar Korea – cultural superiority embodied in art objects, literature, and language. Waters' lesbian feminist text becomes a pretext for an exploration of a composite Korean identity based on trauma and revenge – Park's political and stylistic auteurist preoccupations.

Twenty-First Century Diversification

'Global mass cultural formats […] also work as an inter-nationalized interface that highlights the specific nationality of cultures and […] propagates the idea of the nation as the unit of global cultural encounters in which people are urged to participate.' (Iwabuchi 2002: 13) We need look no further for a better exemplar of this than 2016's (already seemingly anachronistic) global obsession with *Pokémon Go*, the hybrid game-child of Niantin, Pokémon and Nintendo that syncretizes the 'real' space of Google maps with those of a virtual game and film franchise, and connects its players via Android and iPhone mobile devices across the globe. Rayna Denison's work outlines the ways in which conglomerates have altered the landscape of film production over the past decade as part of the wider media systems networks, and examines how big name companies such as Fuji TV network, or WOWOW TV channel, produce high-budget film franchises as part of 'already-profitable textual networks' through adaptations, re-makes, and serialized films (2016: 68). Participation via ancillary products and tie-ins is also on the rise; Kadokawa publishing company promotes the hybrid form of a book-magazine, or 'mook' [*mukku*] to stimulate active participation, and expansion of the films themselves. This particular brand of popular filmmaking most importantly, for Denison, provides a

way of investigating local and transnational products within a 'transmedia intertextuality' that operates at the level of global technology and consumption (88). Similarly media brands trade on the notion of consumers buying into a lifestyle, or 'world', which has generated impressive results for Studio Ghibli and director/TV star (*tarentō*) Takeshi Kitano/Beat Takeshi's 'Office' (see Napier 2006; Davis and Yeh 2009). Such strategies have become the rule rather than the exception for producing and marketing films in Japan, even for independent films, which also rely on conglomerate funding. What is particularly striking about such enterprises is that the role of film is undiminished despite the equally high profile of each of the associated texts (manga, TV anime series). One example of this is the *Umizaru* series directed by Hasumi Eiichirō and based on a manga by Satō Shūhō (1998–2001), (and examined by Denison) which demonstrates clearly how the high concept film helps to sell the franchise: 'Scale has consequently become the central concept around which such preplanned serial productions are organized' (85). On the PonyCanyon Inc. webpage for the fourth film in the series – *Umizaru 4: Brave Hearts* (2012) – taglines urge the viewer to jump aboard a sinking ship and make ready for: 'A maritime thriller on a spectacular scale!' in which the titular *umizaru* coastguards risk everything to save those on board (with advanced special effects and surround sound). Similarly, Fujiko F. Fujio's robot cat Doraemon, a much-loved children's manga character, has become a hugely popular franchise, with the most recent film (the 36[th,] a remake of 1989's *Nobita and the Birth of Japan*) described by the *Asahi Shimbun* as 'the latest Doraemon blockbuster,' exceeding all previous records to become the biggest to date (June 2, 2016). This impressive feat follows hot on the heels of 2014's *Stand by Me Doraemon*, which was released in over 50 countries, and did especially well in China, Hong Kong, Korea, Thailand, and Italy. Despite the fondness for the character as a national symbol, the animated films form part of what Iwabuchi terms '*mukokuseki* cultural forms' – or a cultural 'odorlessness', whereby a likeable image of 'modern "Japaneseness"' supplants the 'historically constituted, problematic, and uneven relationship with other Asian countries' of the imperial and colonial past (2002: 53). Denison's analysis of a regional market benefitting from a transmedia form of global intimacy is compelling and offers a realistic reading of a collaborative back-and-forth that nevertheless retains the 'cool' branding of the local.

Meanwhile, with the title of his latest monograph on the contemporary Korean media markets, Dal moves forward to *Hallyu 2.0,* and a digital world in which local presence is no longer a pre-requisite either for transnational collaboration or as a physical marker of national branding: 'K-pop powerhouses are hiring Western composers, and game corporations use social networking sites as their platforms for global game users. The increasing role of social media and digital technologies has consequently prompted adjustments in corporate policies' (2016: 173). Dal describes the significance of Kim Young-sam's government-led KII initiative in 1995 to 'construct an advanced nationwide information infrastructure consisting of communications networks, Internet services, application software, computers, and information products and services', which was designed to enable Korea's survival in 'the digital mode of global capitalism' (155-56), and raises one of the most pertinent questions of the 2010s: What does it mean when the contraflows between Western and non-Western regions have become more symmetrical due to computer and smartphone use? In answer, capitalism still favors the West- Apple and Android still own the lion's share of software.

Between 'nation branding' and 'cultural odorlessness'

Lastly, the facets of the wider 'brand' of J and K- films in the twenty-first century are comprised of a number of recurring generic styles and thematic preoccupations; and within these a number of key terms, or concepts mobilize to illustrate specific feelings or experiences that are tied to ideas of national identity that pits particularity against 'cultural odorlessness' (Iwabuchi 2002; Okada 2012), a circulatory exchange between the specific and the universal that has bolstered both Japanese and Korean film industries since the 1990s. Many of these films display the generic markers of earlier decades; many also enjoy a postmodern romp through genre parody and pastiche that leads to more culturally hybrid forms. In Korean cinema, for example, although crime and horror genres have proved extremely popular, more traditional national tropes explored through trauma and melodrama nearly always underpin the protagonists' quests for self-knowledge.

Not only is Korea still scarred and traumatized by its colonial era and the Cold War, but - given

the continuing US military presence and occasional threats of war from North Korea – it has yet

to claim a true postcolonial and post-Cold War identity. (Kim 2011: 212)

In Korea, the Golden Age of melodrama (McHugh and Abelman 2005) is characterized by a paradoxical tension bridging consumerist desires flailing in the wake of Western modernization and 'a collective trauma in the national psyche and pride, which was deeply connected to the nation's neo-Confucian tradition and to the ideals of Korean masculinity' (Jeong 2). The exquisite pain evoked in melodramatic discourse, such as that expressed in Yu Hyon-mok's 1961 film *The Aimless* (or *Stray*) *Bullet*, proved irresistible to Korean audiences. A bleak portrayal of the Seoul slums shot in high contrast black and white, focalized through a displaced North Korean working-class family, *The Aimless Bullet* reverberates with tremulous emotions. Chol-ho's mother's anguished cries of 'Let's get out of here!' Yong-ho's violent outrage at being cast in a film solely for his war scars, and Myong sook's despair, which turns her to prostitution and into the arms of American soldiers, find no means of escape beyond hopeless dreams. *The Aimless Bullet* endures as a marker of a key moment in Korean (film) history, a 'refraction' (Choi 2010: 10) of the multiple experiences and processes that it captures. Moreover, it works through the 'impossibility of a belief in the nation as a place of collective belonging' (Cho 2005: 101), locating national pride in the individual, or the coincidental drift of the characters, rather than the country itself. Mchugh and Abelmann consider melodrama to be the most suitable vehicle with which to represent Korea's turbulent history and the 'lived impact (4) that the war, deterritorialization, poverty, emasculation, and female labor had on the people. In 2016, following the December 2015 agreement between Japan and Korea, in which Japan apologized and agreed to award reparations to the remaining victims of enforced prostitution, a documentary film entitled '*Spirit' Homecoming* (Cho Jung-rae) topped the domestic box office, showing a continued interest in the subject, and the desire for global recognition for the women subjected to these horrors (Kahng 2016).

Naturally it is a highly problematic task to try to define a national cinema according to stereotypical characteristics or essentializing generalities; however, certain cultural particularities necessarily contribute

to an understanding of life in a region, affecting the ways in which it is represented on screen. For example, words exist in both Korean and Japanese languages that are used to signify a mood, atmosphere or affect that is particular to the wider culture of each country. The folksong Arirang, for example, derives from an indigenous oral tradition that evokes *han* (or *haan*) – feelings that are closely associated with loss, pain, yearning and nationhood.

> *You are going over Arirang hill*
>
> *My love, you are leaving me*

Although Arirang's refrain might seem wistful, evoking rural scenes imbued with melodramatic longing, it is also a uniting chorus that expresses: 'The quintessentially Korean emotion of suppressed rage and sorrow' (Klein 881). It is worth noting that Kim Ki-duk employed the folksong in his low-budget, quasi-documentary *Arirang* (2011) as a musical motif to express a series of particularly traumatic events, thus demonstrating the interconnectedness of national identity and suffering. *han,* or *haan* (Son 2000), is part of the Korean psyche, both a philosophy and 'an irresolvable grudge born of colonial occupation and wartime partition' (Davis and Yeh 2009: 16), which, as a rather complex nebula of feelings, resonates anew in every person. *Han* does not have a direct translation in English, but its cinematic realization shows a tendency for outward expression; revenge or quest narratives; and unresolved crimes, feelings, memories that favor darkness over light. Although *han* may be represented through stories of individual trauma and revenge – from the ruinous and ruined female protagonists who transgress domestic rules in *Madame Freedom* (Han Hyeong-Mo, 1956) and *The Housemaid* (Kim Ki-Young 1960; Im Sang-soo 2010) to more familiar cult hits such as *Oldboy* (Park 2003) or *The Yellow Sea* – it is 'not simply the private emotion of a person who has suffered a lot; it is a pervasive "collective" emotional state among Koreans' (Yoon and Williams 2015: 41). Yoon and Williams also point out that one of the principal fascinations with the term is that within its negativity it also carries hope and inner strength, a need to overcome. Often in Korean films the figure of an observer appears in order to provide a position of calm, a mediating space to allow characters experiencing *han* to be momentarily released from their pain: Hee-jung's older female friend in *Right Now, Wrong Then*

(Hong Sang-soo, 2015) or the little girl in the ultimate scene of Bong's *Memories of Murder* (2003) each serve to provide space for the main character's reflection. We might see the uncensored bursts of grief, rage, or love in Korean films as something connected to *han*, a cathartic on-screen release or '*han*-venting' (Yoon and Williams 117). Despite the relative fluffiness of Korean rom-coms such as *My Sassy Girl* (Kwak Jae-young, 2001) or the comedic parody *How to Use Guys with Secret Tips* (Lee Won-suk, 2013), the majority of Korean romantic comedies, even the happier ones, seem to harness the contradictory mood of *han*, ensuring that sickness (*More Than Blue*, Won Tae-Yeon 2000; *Man in Love*, Han Dong-wook 2014), disability (*Always*, Song Il-gon 2011), crime and adversity (*Maundy Thursday*, Song Hae-sung 2006), and numerous other themes, including immigration, class issues, and suicide, failure and repression, always interpenetrate the central conceit of love.

The heroic concept of *chamara* (to grit one's teeth and bear it) finds an equivalent in the Japanese *gaman suru*, where there is no option but to withstand adversity, never giving up. While *han* is particular to the history of the Korean peninsula and often turns to violent revenge, Japan's 15-year occupation drove film narratives towards a 'cultural inversion' whereby the '"tragic hero" archetype not only framed suffering within localized historical precedents, it also facilitated a project of forgetting (Standish 2011: 150). I would argue that to an extent, the tendency towards escapism and forgetting in post-war Japanese film has been replaced in more recent works with a spiritual or metaphysical quest to overcome. Films such as Miike's *The Bird People in China* (1998), Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Journey to the Shore* (2015), or Kawase's *Still the Water* (2014) explore the open-ended questions raised by reincarnation, rural superstitions, a school for flying, and the relationship between nature, metaphysics and humankind. As Kyoko confesses to the Shaman in Kawase's film: 'I can't understand my mother's suffering – her body is gone, but her thoughts fill up the world'. In Kurosawa's *Tokyo Sonata* (2008) and *Journey to the Shore*, home is always far away, somehow enigmatic and elusive, and Kurosawa's particular brand of biting social realism (present also in his earlier horror-inflected work) observes a society obsessed with outward appearance and decency. Since the golden days of Yasujiro Ozu and Kenji Mizoguchi an understated '*gamen*' has taken hold of characters facing the ills of the modern world. The iconic scene in Mizoguchi's *Sansho Dayu* (1954), in which Anjū

silently commits suicide, exemplifies the calm and poise with which, similarly, characters in contemporary Japanese films and dramas resign themselves to fate. As Japanese students related to me at the height of the 2007 Korean drama boom in Japan, it was actually the animated expressions of emotion in these television episodes that they preferred to the outwardly controlled expressions of love in many Japanese dramas. Critics too, are often bewildered by the more subdued sentiment in recent Japanese films. The criticism levelled at Kawase's most recent film *Sweet Red Bean Paste* (*An*, 2015), for example, finds its *gaman.* social awkwardness and titular sweetness to be unrealistic and kitsch. Peter Bradshaw writes in *The Guardian* of 'feeling exasperated by the sentimentality and stereotype being served up' (2015).

Conclusion

On 11 March 2011, following a 9.0 magnitude earthquake and a 15-metre tsunami, Fukushima, Miyagi and Iwate prefectures in the North of Japan's Honshu island were affected by widespread radiation, which occurred as a direct result of the loss of power to the region. The day after the initial devastation caused by the natural disaster, a leakage of radioactive materials was discovered outside the gate of one of the three nuclear reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi plant. A month later initial estimates of the radioactive damage to the area rose from level 5, to level 7, a severity not seen since the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. Statements from both the government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) during the month after the disaster failed to reassure citizens on facts, or strategies for coping. In fact, it emerged that deception and saving face seemed initially more important than testing and evacuating affected areas.

Similarly, the national handling of the sinking of the MV Sewol ferry in the Yellow Sea off the South Korean peninsula, on April 16th 2014, in which 294 passengers died, and 10 are still missing, (many of whom were high school students), caused national outrage. The reports following the disaster laid blame at the hands of the ferry company, the crew, and the coastguard, and subsequent investigations have been severely hampered by political and bureaucratic infighting. What links these two tragic events, is the way in which they have galvanised action in communities living across Japan and Korea, and the catalyst they have provided for creative responses to the crises through filmmaking. In two democratic countries, where

speaking out is still difficult, films such as Lee Sang-ho and Ahn Hae-ryong's *The Truth Shall Not Sink With Sewol* (aka *Diving Bell*; 2014) and Toshi Fujiwara's *No Man's Land* (2012, one of many films dedicated to this topic) have given voice and visibility to people directly affected by the consequences of these events. I will end this chapter with a line from *No Man's Land*: 'Images of destruction are always hard to digest'. The film considers the lack and/or abundance of images in our lives that are mediated through screens. How can a film make invisibility – radiation, the dead – visible, and what relationship might its words and images have to the idea of a nation and its people? Despite the flows of power and monetary exchange that these two national industries have witnessed and enjoyed, the images that are left for the viewer in the range of films produced carry within them the traces of history, culture and emotion that resist assimilation into a global product, and instead invite the viewer to participate in an exchange that connects the experience of the particular with that of the personal, home and belonging with affective experience.

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