Questions of Woman's Film: *The Maid*, *Madame Freedom*, and Women

Soyoung Kim

1. Is woman's Film in South Korea Comparable to Hollywood 'Woman's Film'?

Thinking about Woman's Film of South Korea during the post-colonial period requires a bit of detouring since its trajectory contains a twist despite the presence of a narrative that largely converges on the representation of gendered modernity[1] and feminine sexuality since 1955. Theorists have pointed out that the modern age has partly relied on the film medium to engender the constellation of modernity. In turn, the film as a heroic machine of modernity has played a pivotal role in shaping the modern age. The South Korean film scene, which has largely relied on films targeted towards the female audience, provides a way of understanding the nation's post-colonial period in which technologies of gender, sexuality and cinema are inscribed in the topography of modernity.

Post-colonial South Korea, in its hyphenated identity, betrays the modernity problematic to Korean cinema, which invites multiple looks into the various layers of colonization embedded in its history: Japanese, American, European which often could be translated into colonial powers. The hybrid formation of modernit(ies) over a short period of time has contributed to re-structure the previous gender construction in a highly condensed mode. It has also intensified the controlling gaze on gender role and feminine sexuality that have been implicated in and regulated under the sign of nationalism vis-à-vis modernization during the post-colonial period. The inauguration of military government in 1961 launched the project of state-initiated modernization, which involved controlling cheap female labor by controlling female workers sexuality.[2] On the one hand this social phenomenon triggered the film industry to churn out a series of films about Western Princess (*yangongju*: military prostitute), bar girls, and hostesses, which narrativize the rural migrant female workers' failed incorporation into the labor-intensive industry.

The entity known as South Korean cinema came into full existence with two big box office hits that helped build an initial cottage style film industry. They are *Ch'unhyangjôn* (*The Story of Ch'unhyang*,

Yi Kyu-hwan, 1955), a film adapted from the well-known medieval fiction that praises the virtue of feminine chastity and *Madame Freedom* (*Chayu buin*, Han hyông-mo, 1956), a film that deals with a female identity allegedly constructed through American modernity and its concomitant consumerism. It is interesting to note that these films have played a crucial role in the early formation of South Korean cinema by reflecting the shifting identities of women in this time through the depictions of the feudal woman, Ch'unhyang and the modern woman, Madame Freedom. At the same time, movie-going allowed women to extend their sphere of mobility outside home and as spectators women could venture into a public space.

The new field of interest both in the representation and spectatorship of women after the war also anticipated the emergence of Korea's first woman filmmaker, Pak Nam-ok. Her film, *The Widow* (Mimangin, 1955) was shown at the opening night of the First Women's Film Festival held in Seoul in 1997. This was accompanied by the now classic feminist texts such as *The Trip to Lyon* (*Die Reise Nach Lyon*, 1980) by Claudia Von Aleman[3] and *Born in Flames* (1983) by Lizzie Borden. In a viewing situation where a feminist reading is highly encouraged, the largely female audience present at the screening not only tried to respond enthusiastically to *The Widow* but also attempted to re-articulate the film within the frame of current feminist concerns of South Korea such as sexuality and identity politics. Social critics argued that Feminist issues such as sexuality and identity politics as well as (post)-modernity have allegedly disrupted a set of issues including class and nationalism in the 1980s. The emergence of such discontent points to the needs for a forum that would not only place the first woman filmmaker's work in the south Korean film history, but also to relate the film to the urgent questions of the 90s as well as the preceding period.

To the Western readers who are keen on the development of feminist film movement in the last two decades, this scene must look rather uncanny. The revision of the woman director's text; the coupling of social concerns with reading against the grain kind of textual analysis; the (de)articulation of feminism with Marxism; and the festival site as the (alternative) public sphere. These all reverberate in the 90's feminist film movement in South Korea. Indeed, Debbie Zimmerman from Women Make Movies excitedly commented upon the heated ambience of the event as she listened to the ongoing debates: "It's just like our 70s."[4] The analogy sounded quite inviting and simultaneously puzzling if considering the list of screened films which ranged from the re-visioned Korean films from the 1950sto the one like *I Shot Andy Warhol* (Mary Harron, 1995) from the 90s. This encounter has stayed with me for a while and alerted me to recognize the

overlaid meanings embedded in screening and reception of women's and feminist films under the rubric of thematic film festival such as this occasion after a lapse of decades of cine-feminism in the West. Without a doubt, the legacy of cine-feminism has enabled local film critics to view a group of Korean films with a feminist perspective. At the same time, the cultural specificity inscribed in cinematic materialization tends to be overlooked in a metropolitan circulation of cine-feminism. For instance, women's film as an object of study in the Anglophone feminist criticism would never find its equivalent in the South Korean film scene in spite of the fact there is a genre and a set of films that desperately seek a female audience. On the one hand, it is a truism to say that the South Korean women's cinema is different from the Hollywood convention in the 1940s. The development of feminist film criticism in South Korean, on the other hand, doesn't seem particularly conscious of this difference.

In retrospect, woman in "Woman's Film' in South Korea has scarcely indicated the general category of women until feminist film critics re-categorized the previous female audience-targeted films as such. In Woman's film, a woman has been categorized as a wife, widow, maid, and mother but never as a woman in a general sense. In this context, it seems necessary to point out the difficulty attached to the initial translation of "she" into Korean although "he" is easily translatable. Furthermore, there is no commensurable term for the plural of "she"(*kûnyo dûl*) while a plural form of "he"(*kûdûl*) is available.[5]

2. "*Yôsông*" Film

Woman's film or "*yôsông yônghwa*" is a recently invented category, which only dates back to the early 90s. *Yôsông* in *yôsông yônghwa* is a translation for woman in Woman's Film. In fact, generic "women" in English can be translated both as *yôja* and *yôsông* in Korean. Often *yôja* has derogatory connotation.[6] In the Korean dictionary, *yôja* is defined as a person who is born as, which in turn, is defined as *yôja* with an emphasis on sexual difference. The re-appropriation of *yôsông* in the 90s feminist discourse among many female-related identities – *yôja,yôryu,* feminist and *"Yôsông undongga* (feminist activist), for instance – might be related to the growing interests in the politics of sexual difference derived from the feminist and gay movement in South Korea.

Before "*yôsông yônghwa,*" the film for female audience was simply labeled as weepies (*ch'oeryumul*) or other similar derogatory terms. Indebted to Anglophone cine- feminists' pioneering work and

the proliferation of feminist discourse in an area of cultural production and consumption, a few local film critics has invented in the ways of reading popular films since the early 90s. Well-known weepies series such as *Bitter, but Once Again (Miwôdo dasihanbôn,* Chông So-yông, 1968) were brought back under feminist scrutiny. The discussion ensued with contemporary films that featured "*yôja"* explicitly in their titles, which focused on women characters caught between their families and the careers. These films were viewed as examples of woman's film. At the time, lack of availability of feminist cinema encouraged feminist film critics to engage in the films for female audience, which as not unlike Mary Ann Dane's undertaking of reading 1940s the classical Hollywood text, women's cinema in particular. She writes,

> Because female identity in the cinema is constructed in relation to object-hood rather than subject-hood, an investigation of the contradictions resulting from an attempt to engage female subjectivity in a textual process such as the "woman's film" can be particularly productive."[7]

In 1993 Korean feminist cultural workers made an attempt to introduce the different kinds of women's cinema. More precisely, these were the feminist films that had not yet reached the local audience. Detailed information and reviews of films by Chantal Akerman, Helke Sander, Michelle Citron, and Sally Porter were disseminated in film magazines, public lectures, and books. In addition, the women's video festival under the title of *Riddles of the Sphinx* ran the Euro-American feminist avant-garde works. The appropriation of the specific term *yôsông* to designate different kinds of cinematic practices encouraged active reading of *yôsông* film rather than simply conflating woman audience targeting film and the feminist film. That the linguistic use of *yôsông* marked with sexual difference but oscillates between *yôja* and feminist (no equivalent term in Korean exist and the English term is currently in use) indicates the negotiated space and moment onto which the emerging feminism in the cultural area was grafted. The choice of *yôsông* among many female-related identities appeared less threatening not only to women of diverse positions but also to the mainstream media. For instance, women's magazines and the newly installed culture and women sections in the newspapers attempted to appeal to women readers who emerged as powerful consumers with a new identity as Missy.[8] The outcome was to categorize the locally produced films of the period by Pak Ch'ôl-su and Yi Hyôn-sûng as *yôsông* film. The exemplary text, preceding two directors' works, was even convincingly entitled as *Only because You Are A Woman* (*yôja*)(*Tanji gûdaega yôjaranûn iyumanûro*, Kim Yu-jin, 1990). It was praised as a breakthrough *yôsông* film during

the period. To put it differently, critics are re-categorizing the *yôja* film as the *yôsông* film. Similarly, Pak's films – explicitly employ *yôja* in his titles such as *Today's Yôja* (*Onûl Yôja*, 1989) and *Yôja Who Walks On the Water* (*Murwirûl kôtnûn yôja*, 1990) – are particularly notable with regard to the above concerns.

Around the same time, there surfaced a series of issue-oriented films and videos in the newly formed independent film and video making scene: *Our Children* (*Uriné Aidûl,* Paritô: Women Filmmakers Collective, 1990) on the problem of daycare; *Even Little Grass Has its Name* (*Chagun P'uledo irûm itsûni*, Paritô, 1990) on the labor union movement of women workers in late 80s; and *Living in Asia as Women* (*Asiaesô yôsôngûro sandanûn gôt*, P'urûn Yôngsang Collective, 1991) on sex tourism. Even a brief look at the trajectory of the emergence of *yôsông* film both in the critical and filmmaking terrain in the early 90s reveals a quite condensed situation where the legacy of Anglophone cine-feminism intersects with two kinds of local filmmaking practices. Due to the fact that there has been a conscious reservation not to use the term feminist film for locally produced works, my focus on woman's film necessarily entails two modes of filmmaking. One is the resultant of market-strategy that is geared toward female audience, and the other is the works that are more consciously oriented towards women's issues. As a consequence, the popular film and the alternative film would inhabit the same ground known as women's film.

3. All the women Ch'ungmuro[9] allows and disallows : *Madame Freedom*, *The Widow*, and *The Maid*

As demonstrated by two films on the Comfort Women issue (*The Murmuring/Najûn moksori,* 1993 and *Habitual Sadness/ Najûn moksori 2*, Pyôn Yông-ju, 1997), the *yôsông* film in post-colonial South Korea inevitably deals with the colonial past, which provides a matrix of unresolved anxiety that spills over into the present. Between *The Widow* and *Habitual Sadness* lies a wide spectrum of film designed to draw a female audience that does not exactly overlap with the ideal audience constructed by feminist film critics in the 90s.

From the mid-50s to late 60s, films targeting a female audience were known as rubber shoes (signs of common or underclass women), handkerchief army, and tearjerkers (*ch'oeryusông*) that would be equivalent to women's film. Instead of generic term women, the metonymy was employed to indicate the desired but simultaneously degraded presence of female audience. The group of female

spectators, whom the film industry favored, was *ajumma* (derogatory term for married women) in rubber shoes and armed with handkerchiefs. The melodrama genre was conjectured as an outlet for the women's repressive experience under the transforming neo-Confucian patriarchy, the kind that would help women release their *han* (pent-up grief).

Bitter, but Once Again provides a good example of this genre. It is not surprising that this film was subjected to heavy criticism when it was released. It is unlikely that a film with an excessively sentimental tone and coincidental narrative that pivots on the fall of an innocent girl would qualify as an art or literary (*munye*) film. Now, of course, it is the emotional excess that attracts the particular attention of feminist film critics. The film deals with the illicit love relationship between a girl and a married man. As a result of the relationship, the girl ends up as a single parent to a boy whom she sends to his father when he reaches schooling age. Her suffering increases as she watches her son being ill-treated by his father. Unlike *Stella Dallas*, however, she takes her child back. In this sense, although its sequel follows the Stella Dallas type of ending, the inflated valorization of the maternal in Korean culture appears to dictate a different ending. Along with a detailed depiction of the female protagonist's suffering, the film succeeds in capturing the pain of her lover's wife who not only endures her husband's affair but faces having to raise his illegitimate child. The pathos is derived from inarticulate grievances and blockage. As a maternal melodrama, the film touches upon the social and emotional constitution of motherhood. One of the contradictions that haunt the female audience lies in the filmmaker's ambivalent treatment of the maternal. While the film severely condemns motherhood outside the family, it highly valorizes the emotional element of the maternal, in particular, the virtue of maternal sacrifice. The film demands the female (*ajumma*) spectators to over-identify with this element of the maternal which is inscribed in both women characters. Simultaneously it elevates the spectators to a position where they could cast a condescending gaze to the leading woman character.

Between the oscillation of two spectatorial modes lies a gray area which aims to provoke tears, frustration, and anger from female spectators who are asked to derive meanings from the film according to their own experiences as women. This kind of film fully mobilizes the structure of female emotion to allow women viewers to recognize their own sense of entrapment. Unfortunately, however, the recognition does not always lead them to reach a diagnostic understanding of the system of patriarch. Instead, the film provides only a temporary release of "bitterness" and a momentary glimpse of the repressive system.

During the modernization of the 60s, unmarried migrant female workers like the heroine of *Bitter, but Once Again* migrated to Seoul - a social phenomenon that influenced the depictions of women in films of this period. As South Korea went through a social transformation during the nascent industrialization in the 60s, young rural girls became the most vulnerable and exploited group in the new urban society. Once in the city, they provided cheap labor mostly either in light industry as factory workers (*yôgong*) or as domestic helpers (*sikmo*). The feudal term for female servant *hanyô* had long been substituted with sikmo and few films that dealt with the *sikmo* social type were *Sikmo* (*The Housemaid*, Pak Ku, 1964) and *Three Sikmo Sisters* (*Sikmo samhyôngje*, Kim Hwa-rang, 1969). In these films, unmarried female workers are suspected of being underclass femme fatale and pose dangerous threats to the urban middle class families. Feminine sexuality combined with working class status place them in an abject position. This abjectness affords the film to draw maximum emotional affect from the *ajumma* viewers. The success of the film like *The Housemaid* (*Hanyô,* Kim Ki-yông, 1960) can be contextualized in this vein. The reception of female audience at the time is well delivered in the scene where the maid seduces her married male employer. It is said that the female audience excitedly responded to the screen, "Kill the bitch!"[10] The antagonism among women according to their class differences and marital status is quite strongly marked in this kind of spectatorship. *The Housemaid* (based on a real incident) displaces class conflicts with threatening feminine sexuality and discloses the anxiety of the newly forming urban middle class towards the emerging other.

The film opens with the leading male character (Kim Chin-gyu) reading a newspaper and closes with him directly addressing the viewer. In the middle, the film contains a disturbing story seemingly triggered and constructed by his imagination in response to a report in the newspaper. The female character that dreams of being upwardly mobile is presented as a monster to the middle class family. The character of the housemaid is represented as a hybrid monster born out of the repression of the feminine sexuality and class mobility. Her uncontainable and dispersed identity is designed to disturb not only her employer's family but the audience as well. The incoherent development of the character in *The Housemaid*, a negative attribute often noted in South Korean film, is productively mobilized to a greater extent in order to create a sense of fear and unpredictability.

The female audience-targeted film preceding the *aujmma* film like *Bitter, but Once Again* is *The*

Houseguest and My Mother (*Sarangbang sonnimgwa ômôni*, Shin Sang-ok, 1961). The director of the film, Shin Sang-ok is known for his versatility in various kinds of genre films: action, horror, costume drama and the musical. Among these he is best known for melodrama genre. The overdose of the sentiment that is often related with *shimpa* melodrama produced during the Japanese colonial period becomes less present in Shin's films. His subdued and sophisticated approach to melodramatic materials is well manifested in his 1958 films, *Hell Flower* (*Chiokhwa*) which stars Ch'oe Ûn-hi (legendary actress and wife of Shin Snag-ok) as a Western Princess (military prostitute for the Us soldiers).[11] The female character becomes involved in a love triangle with her smuggler lover and his brother. The action genre element – car chase scene for example – is incorporated in the highly melodramatic narrative. The film reaches this climax when the smuggler character commits a double suicide when he finds out her betrayal, a recognizable element from *shimpa* mode. *Hell Flower* resonates with his Evil Night (*Akya*, 1952) which treats the similar subject set in the midst of the Korean War. Shin Sang-ok's breakthrough film, *The Houseguest and My Mother* set in the 1920s, touches upon the delicate subject matter in Korean society such as widows. As the family of three generations of women – the widow (Ch'oe Ûn-hi), her daughter, her mother-in-law (her self a widow), and the maid (To Kûm-bong) – host the deceased husband's painter friend at a guestroom (sarngbang), a mutual attraction develops between the widow and the painter. As it is marked in the beginning of the film through the little daughter' voice-over and her drawings, the film is located in a small city which is not totally untouched by the constituents of modernity – the church, piano, the western style painting. The pervasive possibility of the young widow's remarriage also presents the sign of modernity. The resolution sought by the widow character, however, indicates the sense of immobility imposed on her by the residual Confucian order still working in the former *yangban* (aristocrat) class. The congenial mode of collective spirit depicted in the beginning of the film – the familiar neighbors clustered around alleys – is soon to be shifted to the claustrophobic mode when they clutter by the riverside. The talks and the gazes of the neighbors are presented as a mode of surveillance that functions to safeguard Confucian norms. In spite of the fact that the film ends with the widow withdrawing from the relationship, it remains critical of Confucianism.

While *The Houseguest and My Mother* employs a subdued approach to the issue of widow's remarriage, *The Widow* connects it to other aspects including economic independence, motherhood and sexuality of a middle-aged woman. In *The Houseguest and My Mother*, the relationship between the mother and the guest is romanticized only to be disrupted by the Confucian ideology. *The*

Widow, however, reveals the ways in which the leading character attempts to seek the possibility of a second marriage explicitly out of economic, sexual, and maternal necessities. Three male characters that meet her requirements are presented in a schematic way: one with money, the other with romance and another with paternal care for her daughter. When the widow realizes that her relationships with all three men have problems, she begins to see the obstacles impose upon a middle-aged widow, *mimangin* (lit. a person who could not follow her husband to death). Her new self-awareness persuades her to find a more independent way of living without depending on male support. The ending, although missing from the presently available print, is said to capture her determination to start a new life with her daughter. Despite its realistic representation of the status of a war widow, this low-budget independent film did not reach a large audience.

Madame Freedom, a huge box office hit in 1956, was based on a serial novel in a major newspaper and caused a controversy with its scandalous representation of a professor's wife. From the perspective of the Korean film industry, it also played a crucial role in constructing a platform for South Korean cinema. In that respect, we could say that the post-colonial and post war cinema declared its birth with the discursive construction of dangerous woman in the form of *Madame Freedom*. Since then films with the same titles have been re-made three times in 1969, 1981 and 1990 although none of the remake broke the record of the first work. In the film, a leading female character, the wife of a well-respected professor, works in downtown as the manager of a boutique called Paris. Exposed to the smuggled commodities on display, she gradually transforms into a consumer of western goods. *Madame Freedom* articulates the notion of freedom implicit with Americanization and sexual liberation in the form of promiscuity. When the film was first shown, the kiss scene between the leading woman character and her illicit partner caused a great deal of controversy, which invited censorship. The expression of feminine sexuality, that of a married middle class woman in particular, as severely condemned at the time. In striking contrast with the widow character in *The Houseguest and My Mother*, the wife and mother character in *Madame Freedom* momentarily enjoys freedom outside home. American modernity under the signifiers of consumerism and sexual freedom slips into the film to converge on the Madame Freedom figure. As discussed before, post-colonial South Korean cinema, in its attempt to face the constellation of modernity, has heavily focused on the representation of modern women figures and the elaboration of feminine sexuality which is simultaneously taken as dangerous and desirable. Madame Freedom becomes an object of desire, and subsequently of punishment, only when she masquerades herself in a western style costume. The mobile camera deftly captures this newly formed area of desire.

Madame Freedom, unlike contemporaneous films such as *The Stray Bullet* (O*balt'an*, Yu Hyôn-mok, 1961), *Barefoot Youth* (*Maenbarûi ch'ôngch'un*, Kim Ki-dôk, 1964) and *The Coachman* (*Mabu*, Kang Tae-jin) which investigate the anxiety of the marginalized urban male, focuses on a middle class female character. Once she obtains a disposable income, Madame Freedom adopts a sexual and consumerist identity. The narrative marks her both as a salesperson and a consumer who is well versed in the names of western goods. Her changed perspective regarding her husband and her home reveals the shift brought by American modernization in both private and public spheres. Her presence in the public is left ambiguous. On the one hand, her new identity is related to the notion of illegality (a sales person dealing with smuggled goods) and sexual promiscuity. At the same time, however, the display of her tailored suit and free-floating life style also provokes a longing for a consumerist life style on the side of the female spectators. The protagonist pays dearly for her "freedom" when the film reaches the final scene where Madame Freedom confronts the wife of employer and partner to her shame and finds herself rejected at the threshold by her husband after running back home. Despite of the imploring cries of her son on her behalf, the professor abandons her at the threshold. In comparison with her husband's conventional clothes that suit the traditional-style house, her dress clearly signifies her non-belonging. The mise-en-scène of the ending indicates the precarious position of woman during the period. The woman, after tasting a bit of consumerist culture faces her final condemnation and punishment. In a society where consumer culture is pervasive, the female identity as consumer is often glamorized and idealized. Madame Freedom, set in impoverished, war-stricken South Korea, associates a female consumer with a sign of decadence in spite of inevitable fetishism thereof.[12] The film in a way exhibits a non-synchronous manifestation of the system of desire and that of economy in unevenly developed society.

As noted above, what the notion of woman in the re-claimed Woman's Film during 50s and 60s betrays is not so much associated with the generic woman. Differences among women are often translated into frictions and divisions among them. The recurrent subject positions of leading female characters – fallen housewife, widow and maid – create a striking contrast with the targeted audience, married women (*ajumma*).

4. Woman Filmmaker and Comfort Women

The colonial past under the Japanese occupation is the most under-represented subject in the post-colonial South Korean cinema if not completely silenced. Shrugging away from excavating the multi-layers of modernity in which Japanese colonial modernity is formative, South Korean cinema has focused on the materials of the pre-colonial past and the present. Frequently visiting scenes of underdeveloped simulacrum of American modernity (the vicinity of the US military base such as Itaewôn) and hinterland outside the attention of state-governed modernization (forlorn countryside), it has seldom confronted the legacy of Japanese colonialism. Or, it has hardly considered colonial legacy as a marketable subject. De-colonization process is displaced with a nationalistic narrative, which glosses over "Korean hyper-masculinity and vigilance about female chastity."[13] Then, it should not surprise anyone that Comfort Women issue has never been properly remembered and represented on the screen until it re-emerged in 1991 when three former Comfort Women came forward in public. The South Korean military government's complicity with Japan also contributed to the silencing of the comfort Women issue. In spite of political silence, the notion of feminine sexuality and body in the Post-Colonial Korea has been associated with the shame attached to comfort women, which in turn demanded to construct the nationalistic narrative as it is poignantly pointed out by You-Me Park:

> I do not remember the exact plot. It was one of the numerous stories in Korea in the 1970s that used the metaphor of women's bodies being violated and raped to narrate the story of Japanese occupation and the U.S. presence after the Korean War. Korea as a nation was compared to a virginal body that was trampled upon and violated by aggressive outsiders. Again and again, these (almost exclusively male-authored) texts deplored the lost virginity and the shame inflicted upon their mother country by foreign forces.[14]

In addition to this kind of literary imagination, the history of Comfort Women was appropriated either as a backdrop of gang-rape fantasy in sex-exploitation film or a leverage to promote a nationalistic rescue fantasy in the television documentary. Indeed, what these two kinds of representational practice fluctuate is between over-sexualization and de-sexualization of comfort women. Pyôn Yông-ju, a feminist and independent filmmaker, made possible an alternative approach to Comfort Women. Pyôn has launched her filmmaking career toward the end of the 80s when the independent film movement finally joined the populist *minjung* movement. The trajectory of her filmmaking itself is quite revealing. Pyôn

first documentary entitled *as Living as Women in Asia* traced sex tourism from the Cheju Island in South Korea to Thailand. During the filming, a sex worker for Japanese tourists in the Cheju Island, confessed that her mother was a Comfort Women: *The Murmuring* and its sequel *Habitual Sadness.*

Unlike women's film of Ch'ungmuro that tends to bypass the shared history of women, *The Murmuring* and *Habitual Sadness* recognize the post-colonial genealogy of womanhood stemmed from the colonial history that has not been reconciled. The two films disclose how the present notion of feminine sexuality and body is deeply entangled with the Comfort Women as if it were a historical transference. As such, the Comfort women provide a way in which an identity known as woman can be historicized during the post-colonial period. When the Comfort Women speak in *The Murmuring* after shattering the 50 years of silence, the female spectator is invited not only to partake in their grief but also to understand her own involvement in this history. The filmmaker explicitly declared that her films should address to female spectators who in turn responded to the film with enthusiasm. Many of them left their words of support on the board after the screening. Some of them related their own experience of sexual violence to that of Comfort Women's.

The revision of women's body is most clearly present in the final scene of *The Murmuring* when the camera dwells on a naked body of one Comfort Woman, who was forced to remain in China after having been released from "blood- Sucking House (the Comfort Women station)." The camera gently reveals her sapped and wrinkled body that seems to defeat the Japanese way of monetary reparation. In general, *The Murmuring* is quite removed from the emasculated narrative of nationalism, which has subjugated the Comfort Women to a fossilized realm of a nationalist trope. In fact, this new *yôsông* film is a collaborated product of women's movement (in particular with the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan) and the independent film movement.

Whereas *The Murmuring* depends on a confessional mode of utterance to process the over-due mourning through the film, *Habitual sadness* mobilizes songs and jokes as a detouring vehicle to articulate the Comfort Women's long repressed desire and needs. In the *Habitual sadness*, a group of Comfort Women lives together in a shelter (Nanumûi jip: The Sharing House) at the outskirts of Seoul. Growing vegetables on a small farm and sharing everyday

life, these women slowly move into a direction of self-healing process by exchanging their painful memories. The fact that the making of *Habitual Sadness* was actually requested by one of the former Comfort Women also indicates that direction. Upon learning of her cancer, Kang Tôk-kông asked Pyôn to film her while she was alive. The other members of the Sharing House also agreed to participate. Thus, instead of remaining as a passive informant, they actively involved themselves in the filming process. Kim Sun-dôk wants to be remembered as a hard working person and requests the filmmaker to shoot her working on the pumpkin patch. Sim Mi-ja and Yun Tu-ri take this occasion to reveal their wishes. Pak Tu-ri who was reluctant to be filmed in *The Murmuring*, throws jokes and songs at the film crew. Since it was initially Kang Tôk-kông who asked Pyôn to film her and her friends, the members of the Sharing House seem to articulate their own experience more voluntarily instead of remaining as a passive victims caught up between the nationalistic trope and the Japanese economic reparation.

Notwithstanding the fact that two films didn't reach a large audience, the discursive effect the film created was not negligible. The films toured the college campuses across the nation. The story of the films and the filmmaker was covered by the mass media including the major newspapers, television, and women's magazines. Women, the two films contributed, to a great extent, to inscribe the issues in the popular consciousness. In addition, the filmmaker put her effort to link the case of Comfort Women to the ever-increasing sexual violence in the present time. In the very last scene in *Habitual Sadness*, she compares the statistics of today's rape cases with those of comfort Women. Although it is not certain if the filmmaker's last minute attempt to make a connection is effective and persuasive, it clearly points out the historical burden imposed on today's women. In many ways, *The Murmuring* and *Habitual sadness* distinguish themselves from the preceding Women's Film of Ch'ungmuro not only in terms of their mode of production, distribution and exhibition but also in their approaches to women as historical beings.

Ch'ungmuro Yôsông Film has unfolded a limited scope of women's role as a wife, a widow, or a maid – that is, a woman is positioned only by her relation with her male counterpart or with her master. In contrast, *The Murmuring* and *Habitual Sadness* focus on women's collective life and their discontents with the history that needs to be-reconciled. Considering these two films' exceptional and simultaneously marginal status both in Ch'ungmuro and independent

film scene, Yôsông Film or cinematic re-writing of women – the film that will tell something else other than a maid, a widow, and Madame Freedom – has yet to come in South Korea.

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[1] Rita Felski in her The Gender of Modernity (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1955) re-traces the trajectory of modern "through the lens of feminist theory." On one hand, she criticizes the male-centeredness implicated in the notion of modernity in Marshall Benjamin's influential book, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*. On the other hand, she mobilizes the works that have already problematized the phalocentric theorization of modernity. Elizabeth Wilson, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Rachel Bowlby, Nancy Armstrong, Andreas Huyssen and Patrice Petro for example. I use the expression of gendered modernity in order to give particular attention to the gender politics operating both in the theory of modernity and the formation thereof.

[2] Young female workers were routinely raped by their supervisors in order to intimidate them so the female workers would not leave for other factories and sex industries. As the sex industry prospered in 70s, it was not uncommon that the female workers left for the sex industry to avoid the intense level of labor and make more money. The composition of female workers and sex workers was mainly rural immigrants and most of their earnings went to support their family members in the countryside. Under these circumstances the chastity ideology was reinforced in order to withhold the female workers' form shifting to the sex industry the hostess genre film (ones that starred a bar girl- she was called as a room salon hostess in Korea) partially carried out this role. The hostess genre film narrates and visualizes tribulation of a female factory worker-turned-hostess who often committed suicide toward the end of the film. Where as the real causer of her shift to the sex industry lies in financial need, the film displaces it with her sexual desire.

[3] In 1973, Claudia von Aleman organized the first Women's Film Festival in Berlin.

[4] Claudia von Aleman also expressed the similar view only after replacing America with the West Germany.

[5] I thank Chris Berry for suggesting Tani Barlow's article, "Theorizing woman" in Angela Zito and Tani Barlow eds., *Body, Subject and Power in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) when I pointed out the problem of translating the word "she" into Korean. I was also greatly indebted to his keen insight

and suggestion on Korean cinema in relation to gender and sexuality wile we jointly taught a class on the issues at Korean National University of Arts during the fall semester of 1997.

[6] For instance, yôja is often used in a sentence in that a female gender is suspected of violating the patriarchal codes of conduct.

[7] Mary Ann Doane, "The "Woman's Film," in Mary Ann Doane et al., eds., *Re-Vision* (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute, 1984), 69.

[8] One department store coined the term to lure the housewives in their 20sand 30s who surfaced as new consumers in the 1990s.

[9] Ch'unguro is a name for Korean Film Industry. It is a district name in downtown Seoul where film companies are located.

[10] An interview with Kim Ki-yông by Kim Soyoung for the *PIFF daily news*, The Second Pusan International Film Festival, Oct. 13, 1997.

[11] In relation to the issue of women's body and U.S. neo-colonial domination, see Chungmooo Choi, "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea" in Elaine H.Kim and Chungmoo Choi eds., Dangerous *Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 9-33.

[12] In South Korea of the period, the goods were scarce to find even on the department store display windows. In that kind of context, the film screen might have served as a widow to western commodities.

[13] *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, Ibid., 4.

[14] You-Me Park, "Against Metaphor: Gender, Violence, and Decolonization in Korean Nationalist literature" in Xiaobing Tang and Stephen Snyder eds., in *Pursuit of contemporary East Asian Culture* (Boulder: West view Press), 34.