

# 01

The Exhibition of Moving  
Pictures and the Advent of  
Korean Cinema

1897~1925

新派新劇座金陶山一行的  
京城에서 大連鎖劇

攝影된

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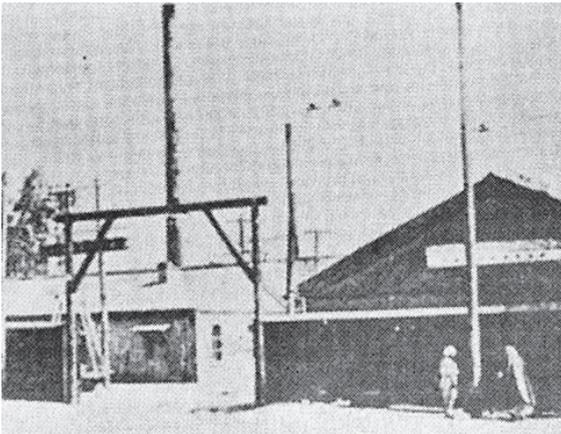
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1. Fight for Justice advertisement (Maeil Shinbo newspaper, 26 October 1919)
2. Hwangsung Shinmun newspaper moving picture advertisement (23 June 1903)
3. The Story of Shim-chung (Lee Kyung-son, 1925)
4. Hansung Electronic Company Dongdaemun Power Plant

## The Exhibition of Moving Pictures

Until popular moving pictures made their appearance, the competition to create new things to watch was unremitting. However, centuries of technological developments combined with the human desire for recreation and changes in the social environment to produce one of the indispensable resources of modern civilization—the “moving pictures.” *The Cinématographe* invented and displayed by Louis and Auguste Lumière in France was the culmination of corrections and improvements to a series of moving image technologies. It was a versatile device, handling photographing, developing and projecting. This remarkable innovation was not only smaller and lighter than Thomas A. Edison’s Kinetoscope (invented in 1894), but also allowed a larger number of people to watch at the same time.

The Lumières’ programs of films including *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* caused a sensation among the audience, who spoke of “living, moving pictures.” It spread around the world like wildfire. Britain imported these moving pictures first. It took them only two months to cross the Dover Strait and land in London after their first commercial exhibition in the Salon Indien of the Grand Café on Paris’s Boulevard des Capucines. The London showing began on 20 February 1896, then they went on to screen in Russia on 17 May, The United States on 29 June, and Cuba on 24 January 1897. They were also shown in Asian countries, such as India on 7 July 1896, China on 11 August, and Japan on 15 February 1897.

It has been commonly believed on the basis of archives of advertisements for film screenings in *Hwangsung Shinmun* newspaper that moving pictures were introduced to Korea for the first time at the end of June 1903. However, related documents and testimonies, and the commercial and geopolitical relationship with Japan tell a different story—moving pictures were imported around 1897 or 1898 and certainly well before 1903. At that time, factual shorts called *actualités* (actualities) from Pathé and Gaumont dominated theaters in Korea. The audience, at first satisfied with the mere fact that the pictures

were moving, began to ask for more. A less than ten-minute reel of film with a simple plot and plain techniques could no longer attract people. Therefore, fictions with cinematic tricks started appealing to audiences through the efforts made by early pioneers like Georges Méliès and D. W. Griffith.

### **Kino-drama Accompanies Actualities**

There were two routes for moving pictures to gain popularity with the public. In the film exporting countries, it was invention, production, and then distribution, whereas in the importing countries, it was import, production, and then distribution. The latter was a passive process led by foreigners. Examples included India, China and Korea. Korean society at that time felt a strong need to open up to the world, but its rigid Confucianism hampered the creation of a welcoming environment for modern Western culture. Opening the country was a rising tide nobody could hold back. Until the 1920s, imported films were dominant in Korean movie theaters. Some 2,570 were screened during the twelve years after 30 August 1910, when advertisements appeared in the *Maeil Shinbo* newspaper. In 1919, as many as 218 films were imported, marking a high point for foreign films.

The Korean audience's taste changed over time. They preferred fictions such as *The Scenery South of Marseilles* (which screened at Youkwang-kwan Theater in 1912) and *Heolhasisan*, a movie about the Russo-Japanese War (which screened at the theater in Hwanggeum-yuwon Park, 1913) over actualities. Among the hit movies were Francis Ford's western series called *The Broken Coin* (Woomi-kwan Theater, 1915), D. W. Griffith's *Way Down East* (Daejung-kwan Theater, 1922), and Abel Gance's *J'accuse!* (Dansungsa Theater, 1922). Enchanted with Western actors, the audience also sought satisfaction from new-school plays such as Hyeokshin-dan troupe's *The Twin Jade Pavilion* (1913), Moonsoosung troupe's *Youth* (1914), and Chwisungjwa troupe's *Autumn Moon* (1918).

In the run-up to the 1920s, Korea reached a turning point in realiz-

ing its dream of film production. This was the age of the kino-drama. Although it was not a complete form of film, this was a stage play with moving picture scenes of outdoor scenery. It imitated Japanese *shinpa* melodramas in style and content. On 27 October 1919, *Fight for Justice* was the first kino-drama, and it was produced and put on the stage at Dansungsa Theater by Shingeuk-jwa, a new drama group led by Kim Do-san. The modern look of the kino-drama, with its combination of two genres, became popular nationwide. Unfortunately, it failed to maintain its popularity, because it diluted the uniqueness of each genre.

Despite this shortcoming, some twenty kino-dramas were produced up to the beginning of 1923, and they made a great contribution to the birth of Korean cinema. In light of the technical and financial restraints faced by the Korean cinema in those days, we can see that this was a good opportunity for new drama groups to try and break through the stagnation of Korean plays by borrowing from the novelty of the kino-drama. It should be noted that *Fight for Justice* was not the only Korean production Koreans watched in 1919. We must not forget that *The Panoramic View of the Whole City of Kyeongsung*, a short documentary film, was also screened on the same day. It not only complemented the half-baked kino-drama but also had unique significance in Korean Cinema.

### **Inherent Limits Caused by Reliance on Japan**

It was 1923 when the first complete Korean feature film appeared. *The Border*, an action-drama directed by Won San-man, was quickly followed by *The Vow Made below the Moon*, an educational film by Yoon Baek-nam. Starring silent film narrators called *byunsa* in Korean (*benshi* in Japanese) and female entertainers called *gisaeng*, they caught the public's attention. Around the same time, *The Story of Chun-hyang* based on a Korean classic, by Japanese director Gosu-hu Hayakawa (早川孤舟), was a hit. This provoked the owner of the Dansungsa Theater, Park Seung-pil, to create an in-house production

department and produce *The Story of Jang-hwa and Hong-ryeon* (Park Jung-hyun, 1924) based on a Korean classic, too. This film is historically significant as the first purely Korean feature film. On 11 July 1924, Chosun Kinema was founded in Busan and went into full operation. It had 200,000 *won* in capital, which had been raised by influential Busan residents including businessmen, lawyers and a Japanese medical doctor called Gato (加藤). Gancho Dakasa (高佐貫長, Korean name: Wang Pil-ryul) was appointed as Production and Managing Director and Yoon Baek-nam was made Chief of the Directing Department. Wang directed *The Sorrowful Song of the Sun* (1924) and Yoon directed *The Story of Un-yong* (1925), a tale about Prince Anpyong. *The Sorrowful Song of the Sun* was made by an all-Japanese crew, except for actors such as Ahn Jong-hwa and Lee Wol-hwa. It was a common melodrama about a tragedy over two generations of a family, involving a young man from the city who gets lost during his hike on Mount Hanra and falls in love with an island girl. This was the first Korean film shot with a Parvo camera made in France. Furthermore, many different locations around Seoul, Daegu, and Mount Hanra and Seogwipo on Jeju Island were used. However, the film was not a success in Korea, in contrast to the welcome it received from the Japanese audience when it screened at the Osaka Kinema Society on 16 October 1924. It received barbs from critics such as Lee Ku-young, writing in his column, "Impressions of Chosun Cinema," that, "Considering its story, *The Sorrowful Song of the Sun* has a good oxymoronic title but tickles the fancy of young men and women with cheap sentimentalism" (*Maeil Shinbo* newspaper, 1 January 1925). Despite such attacks, Chosun Kinema's first movie racked up a profit of 3,000 *won*. The company was dissolved after releasing four movies in total, including *Am Gwang* (Wang Pil-ryul, 1925), the title of which was changed after censorship, and *A Hero in a Small Village* (Yoon Baek-nam, 1925).

Yoon Baek-nam departed Chosun Kinema prior to its collapse and opened the first independent film company, Yoon Baek-nam Pro-

ductions in Seoul. He hired Lee Kyung-son, an assistant director at Chosun Kinema, to direct *Story of Shim-chung* (1925), but it was Na Woon-kyu who took the spotlight in this film. Na Woon-kyu, a 25-year-old novice actor, played the role of Shim-chung's blind father in middle age. This happened only two months after he made a brief appearance as an extra in *The Story of Un-yong*. Na, once a nobody, leapt into the leading role in a single bound. He later achieved immortality with *Arirang* (1926).

Before moving on to the next topic, we need to ask how we should judge those early Korean films that were initiated by Japanese filmmakers. So far, film history has accepted these movies without discerning their lineage. The situation was unavoidable, because Korea was a weak and small country under Japanese rule, closed off from the outside world, and forced to be dependent on the Japanese in almost all areas. We were one of many countries relying on help from foreigners. Russia, Spain, Mexico, Australia, Finland, the Philippines, and Indonesia made their first films with the assistance of either early pioneers such as the Lumière Brothers from France (which had the most advanced film industry), other imperial powers, or neighboring countries that introduced foreign films earlier than them. I believe that the universal characteristics of film and the place in which the filmmakers resided should be taken into account in considering such matters. In other words, if the filmmakers based themselves in Korea and made films for Korean audiences, even though they were Japanese the movies they made should be classified as part of Korean cinema. By this logic, *Patriotism* (Jung Ki-tak, 1928) and *The Yangtze* (Lee Kyung-son, 1930), made in Shanghai, as well as Shin Sang-ok's *A Chronicle of Escape* (1984), made in North Korea, and *3 Ninjas Knuckle up* (1995), made in Hollywood, cannot be considered Korean films. Therefore, we should keep an eye out for jingoism when it comes to film production.. (Kim Jong-won)

## Exhibition of Moving Pictures

It is generally accepted that moving pictures were introduced to Korea in 1903, based on advertisements for them in the 23 June 1903 issue of the *Hwangshung Shinmun* newspaper. The advertisement reads: “Moving pictures of wonderful city scenery in Korea and Europe, screening now at the machine warehouse of Dongdaemun Electronic Company. Hours: 8:00~10:00 p.m., except for Sundays and rainy days. Price: 10 *jun*.” Dongdaemun Electronic Company was another name for Hansung Electronic Company, founded by two Americans, Henry Collbran and Harry Bostwick, under the direction of Emperor Gojong. It contributed to Korea’s modernization by laying rails for streetcars from Seodaemun to Cheongnyangni and for trains from Incheon to Noryangjin.

If the advertisement is correct, it means that it took six years for Korea to import foreign films after they were first introduced to Japan. Considering Japan’s immense economic influence over Korea and geographical proximity, this is unconvincing. Moreover, the ever-increasing number of Japanese living in Seoul after 1894 made this a time when interest in new gadgets from the West was increasing. This indicates that moving pictures must have been introduced to Korea earlier than 1903.

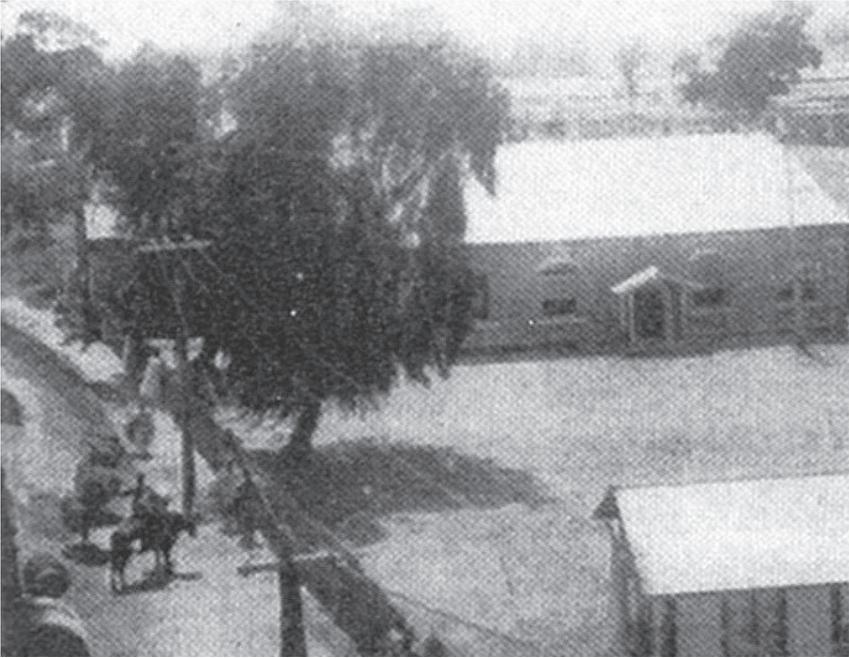
An editorial of the 14 September 1901 edition of the *Hwangshung Shinmun* newspaper provides evidence supporting this claim. The writer mentions some moving pictures of marching soldiers probably taken during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, enviously asking when Koreans might make such magic pictures.

On the premise that moving pictures were first imported to Korea in 1897, Shim Hoon, a writer and director, claimed in an article in the 1 January 1929 edition of *Chosun Ilbo* newspaper that the first screening of some short documentary films was done for a Japanese audience at Bonjung-jwa, a small barracks below Mount Namsan in Seoul.

One year after this first screening, a Frenchman running a business outside Seodaemun filmed some scenes of passengers getting on and off a streetcar, white-water rafting, and so on, and projected them on a screen using gas lamps at a warehouse near Namdaemun.

In addition, Fred H. Harrington, who went on to become a president of the University of Wisconsin, wrote in his 1937 doctoral dissertation at New York University that moving pictures were already introduced to Korea at some point around the 17 October 1898 inauguration of construction on a single line of rails between Seodaemun and Hongreung. He also mentioned that Collbran and Bostwick, who were in charge of the construction, hired acrobats and installed a theater to boost the morale of their workers.

Others who also believe the first public screening of moving pictures was around 1897 or 1898 include Son Wi-bin, author of the 28 May 1933 *Chosun Ilbo* newspaper article, “Chosun Cinema History: Changes over a Decade,” Sai Ichikawa (市川彩), author of the 1940 book, *The Creation and Construction of Asian Cinema* (アジア映畫創造及建設), Kim Jung-hyuk, author of the March 1946 article “Chosun Cinema History” published in *Inmin Pyungnon* magazine, and Lee Ku-young, author of the June 1970 article “Behind the Scenes of the Korean Cinema” published in *Youngbwa Segye* magazine. Lee Ku-young, who was the Public Relations Manager of Dansungsa Theater in the mid 1920s and later became a film critic and director, lent particular credence to the claim by testifying that he had heard a Japanese saying some Japanese watched moving pictures at a Honmachi-jwa (本町座, a.k.a. Bonjung-jwa) at Jingogae in 1897. Putting together all these pieces of evidence, it is fair to conclude that moving pictures made their Korean debut in the late 19th century, well before 1903. (Kim Jong-won)



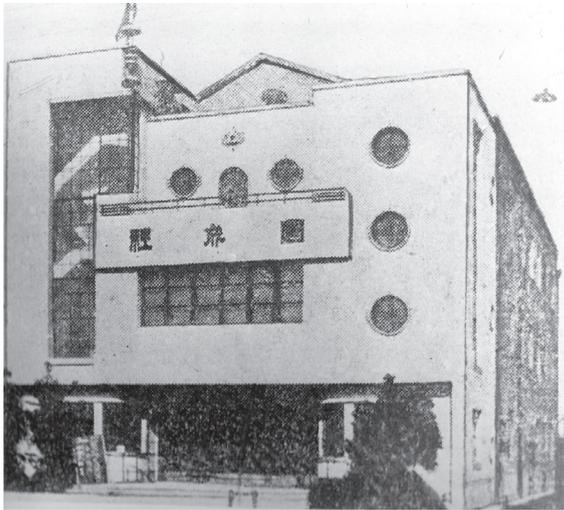
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- 1. Dongdaemun Moving Picture Venue
- 2. Kim Do-san
- 3. Yoon Baek-nam
- 4. Dansungsa Theater rebuilt in 1935

## The Establishment of Permanent Theaters

In 1906, the first permanent theater appeared when the machine warehouse of Hansung Electronic Company was named the “Dongdaemun Moving Picture Venue.” When moving pictures were first screened there in June 1903, newspaper advertisements vaguely mentioned, “moving pictures screening at a machine warehouse of Dongdaemun Electronic Company,” (*Hwangsung Shinmun* newspaper, 23 June 1903) and “moving pictures showing at a warehouse of Hansung Electronic Company” (*Mansebo* newspaper, 26 July 1906). In 1906, however, the official name, Dongdaemun Moving Picture Venue, which became familiar to movie fans, was bestowed on it.

The number of theaters grew rapidly over the next seven and eight years. Theaters located south of the Cheonggye River were Songdo-jwa (1906), Uhsung-jwa (1908), Kyeongsung-jwa (1908), Kyeongsung Supreme Entertainment Theater (1910), and Hwanggeum-kwan (1913). To the north were Gwangmudae (1907), Dansungsa (1907), Jangansa (1908), Yeonheungsa (1908), and Woomi-kwan (1915). In Incheon there was Kabuki-jwa.

The theaters to the north targeted Korean audiences. Those with names ending in “jwa (座)” to the south, such as Uhsung-jwa in Namdaemun and Kyeongsung-jwa in Chungmuro, were based in Japanese commercial and residential areas.

The Gwangmudae (1907~1930) took over the location of Dongdaemun Moving Picture Venue and was run by Park Seung-pil from September 1908. At first, it screened movies, but before long it was given over exclusively to old theatrical plays. The Jangansa in Tongui-dong, Jongno-gu, focused more on traditional musical and dance than moving pictures, because of spatial limitations.

On 17 July 1907, the Dansungsa, located in Sueun-dong, Jongno-gu, was founded by businessmen and influential people including Ji Myung-geun, Park Tae-il and Joo Soo-young. It concentrated on tra-

ditional plays and charity shows under theater president Lee Ik-woo's management until the 1910 Japanese annexation of Korea. After opening, it went through various management crises compounded by a fire, and at one time was run by a Japanese businessman, named Damura (田村). But once Park Seung-pil, who was the owner of Gwangmudae, took over Dansungsa, it returned to normal and began to become established as a permanent theater. The new management began to revitalize the theater by bringing narrators such as Seo Sang-ho, Kim Duk-kyung, and Lee Byung-jo over from the Woomi-kwan and showing famous foreign films such as *Les Misérables* (1913) and *The Broken Coin* (1915).

The Kyeongsung Supreme Entertainment Theater conveyed the impression that it was far more advanced than those mentioned above by showing off Pathé's newest equipment and advertising itself as one of the world's best moving picture theaters. Its two-storey wooden structure with six hundred seats changed programs every four days.

The former manager of Dansungsa, Damura, opened Hwanggeumkwan on Euljiro 4-ga. This was a two-storey concrete building with a large stage and almost one thousand seats. In 1917, it introduced *The Vengeance of Civilization*, a Japanese kino-drama, to Korean audiences, who knew little about the form, and drew much publicity by using large-scale advertisements to explain what it was.

In 1915, the Woomi-kwan, a two-storey brick building located in Gwancheol-dong, Jongno-gu, took over Kyeongsung Supreme Entertainment Theater. In 1928, it attracted crowds by presenting a sound film for the first time in the north of the city. The Korean-funded Chosun Theater was a descendent of Yeonheungsa. It played a key role as one of Korea's three largest theaters with Dansungsa and Woomi-kwan. Its three-storey building housed about one thousand seats, including special seating for families. It was also equipped with an elevator and a restaurant. (Kim Jong-won)

## *Fight for Justice* and the Success of Kino-drama

Moving pictures imported from Japan became popular enough to eventually usher in Korea's own production. However, there was a unique transitional period when the moving pictures were made not in their own right but in order to buttress theatrical plays. As the resistance campaign against Japanese colonial rule gained momentum from the March 1st Independence Movement and spread throughout the nation, Kim Do-san's Shingeuk-jwa troupe premiered a kino-drama titled *Fight for Justice* at Dansungsa Theater on 27 October 1919. 1,000-foot moving picture inserts showing the outdoor scenery of famous places in Seoul—such as the Han River steel bridge, Jangchungdan, Namdaemun Station, and Noryangjin Park—were projected onto the backdrop against which actors were performing. This was the prelude to the birth of the Korean cinema. Japan, which created the genre, does not consider its first kino-drama, *The Female Samurai* (1908), as a film. However, Korea regards *Fight for Justice* as the starting point of Korean cinema because, whereas Japanese audiences had already seen several locally-made moving pictures such as *The Autumn Excursion* (1899)—a *kabuki* scene—prior to kino-drama, Koreans had not had any such experience.

*Fight for Justice* is an action kino-drama in eight acts and twenty-eight scenes about rewarding good and punishing evil. Song-san was born into a wealthy family but lost his mother at his early age and had a miserable youth. Discovering that his stepmother and her relatives are conspiring to kill him for his inheritance, he reluctantly punishes them. Even though this is a kind of blood-and-thunder drama, it is also in line with the *shinpa* melodramas that were popular in the 1910s, because it has a typical good-and-bad plot line, conflicts and confrontations on money between Song-san and his stepmother, and a happy ending. It was written and directed by Kim Do-san, starred Lee Kyung-hwan, Yoon Hwa, and Kim Young-duk, and was filmed by So-

nosuke Miyakawa (宮川早之助), a cinematographer from Tenkatsu (天活) Film Company. Kim Young-duk was famous as an *onnagata* (女形俳優) male actor specializing in female roles, and he became the talk of the town by playing the stepmother. Despite ticket prices running as high as one-and-a-half *won* for VIP seating, the show was a hit and ran for a whole month. This was partly because of a favorable newspaper report about “a tide of people flowing into the theater early in the evening” (*Maeil Shinbo* newspaper, 29 October 1919). Kim Do-san followed up with *This Friendship* (1919), *The Chivalrous Robber* (1920), *Gyungeunjungbo* (1920), *The Calling* (1920), and *Blue Sky* (1920), marking the age of the kino-drama.

Kim Do-san's real name was Kim Young-geun. He was born in Chungmuro, Seoul, and became a pupil of Lee In-jik, one of the originators of the new-style novel and a playwright. Acquiring knowledge and experience, Kim began to build up his own theater career by joining Im Sung-kyu's Hyeokshin-dan troupe in 1911. When Lee In-jik's Yesung-jwa troupe, an affiliate of Wongaksa Theater, disbanded, Kim put together his own troupe of about thirty actors, including some from Yesung-jwa, as well as Lee Kyung-hwa, Byun Ki-jong, and Kim Young-duk. He was twenty-six years old at the time. After presenting fusion dramas combining the Japanese old- and new-style plays, such as *Man of Valor*, *Galloper*, and *The Story of Jung Eul-sun*, he came to produce *Fight for Justice* after watching kino-dramas of the Japanese Sedonaikai (瀬戸内海) troupe. Kim Do-san produced seven kino-dramas, including the eight-act and thirty-scene work *This Friendship*, before he died of pleurisy during the night of 26 July 1921. (Kim Jong-won)

## *The Vow Made below the Moon:* Fiction Films Begin with an Educational Film

*The Vow Made below the Moon* (1923) was an educational film sponsored by the Japanese Government-General of Korea. Two reels and 1,021 feet long, it was made to encourage savings. Although there is room for dispute, the film is generally regarded as Korea's first fiction film. Written and directed by Yoon Baek-nam, shot and edited by Hitochi Oota (太田同), and starring actors from Yoon's Minjung troupe such as Lee Wol-hwa, Kwon Il-chung, Moon Soo-il, and Song Hae-chun, *The Vow Made below the Moon* premiered at Kyeongsung Hotel in Seoul on 9 April. The story is about a brother and sister who make a vow below the moon to save money and restore the family fortune wasted by their uncle. Given its educational purpose, the film was shown free of charge to attract larger audiences.

*The Vow Made below the Moon's* status as the first Korean fiction film can be disputed because one or two other educational films were earlier. Many people probably acknowledged the existence of earlier disinfection campaign movies, but dismissed them as fiction films due to their poor quality. Among the indisputable evidence for an earlier educational film called *Demon in Life* (1920) is the 6 June 1920 issue in *Gyeonggi Dobo* newspaper, stating that "the Gyeonggi-do Provincial Office's Public Health Department has asked Chwisung-jwa troupe to make a two-reel film to help contain the cholera outbreak and screen it throughout the province" (cited in Kim Jung-hyuk's article "Chosun Cinema History," in the March 1946 edition of *Inmin Pyungnon* magazine). The film is about a scrupulously hygienic family that survives a cholera outbreak and another one without such awareness that suffers the consequences.

After 1920, there was a boom in educational films about topics ranging from hygiene, savings, home improvement, and paying taxes, to the use of electricity. They played at the Japanese Government-General of



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- 1. Lee Wol-hwa
- 2. *The Male* (Hong Kae-myung, 1928)
- 3. *The Big Grave* (Yoon Bong-choon, 1931)
- 4. Park Seung-pil

Korea and subsidiary organizations free of charge. In this way, films started out as a way of educating people. This pattern extended to documentaries such as *The State of Affairs in Chosun* (1919) and *Chosun Traveler* (seven reels, 1923), made by the Moving Picture Department of the Japanese Government-General of Korea.

*The Vow Made below the Moon* is not a full first Korean fiction film, but it is certainly significant, because it marked the debut of the prominent director, Yoon Baek-nam, one of the great pioneers of the early Korean theater and cinema. In 1912, 24 year-old Yoon organized Moonsoosung troupe together with Cho Il-Jae and staged the play Little Cuckoo at Wongaksa Theater. The year after, he established Minjung troupe and performed creative plays such as *Lighthouse Keeper* (1922), contributing to the new play movement. After joining Chosun Kinema in Busan, he directed *The Story of Un-yong* (1925) and discovered a diamond in the rough, the actor Na Woon-kyu. He founded Yoon Baek-nam Productions in Seoul and produced *The Story of Shim-chung* (1925), inaugurating the age of independent film productions. (Kim Jong-won)

## Lee Wol-hwa, the First Korean Actress, and *Gisaeng* Actresses at Work

Lee Wol-hwa leapt to instant stardom playing the heroine in *The Vow Made below the Moon* at the age of eighteen in 1923. She was already renowned in the theatrical world as “the flower of Chosun troupes” and “the queen of entertainment.” In an age when women were not allowed to perform on the stage and men played female roles, she was one of a handful of actresses who succeeded in building a career. Ma Ho-jung of the Chwisung-jwa troupe and Kim So-jin of the Shingeuk-jwa troupe went on stage a little earlier than Lee. However, they stayed in plays and their fame cannot be compared with hers. She became the

focus of media attention with the premiere of *The Vow Made below the Moon* and was later cast in *The Sorrowful Song of the Sun* (Wang Pil-ryul, 1924), *An Ox without Horns* (Kim Tae-jin, 1927) and *Jina Street by Secret* (Yu Jang-an, 1928).

Lee played two roles in *The Sorrowful Song of the Sun*; a girl from Jeju Island who falls love with a young man, and also her own daughter. In *Jina Street by Secret*, she played San-wol, who is abducted to China and becomes a prostitute. In *An Ox without Horns*, she plays a woman living in penury as a maid. These roles moved from an unsophisticated and naive woman to an unrelenting woman coping with the rough and tumble of life. Such a progress was predictable from her stage performances. At the Towolhoe troupe, her performances as Katusha in Tolstoy's *Resurrection* (*Voskreseniye*) and as Carmen left a lasting impression and were acclaimed in newspaper articles that claimed, "she made Chosun's Nekhludoff and José laugh and cry" (*Donga Ilbo* newspaper, 19 July 1933) and "she played a femme fatale with irresistible charm" (*Chosun Ilbo* newspaper, 19 July 1937).

Lee was born in Yesan, Chungcheongnam-do. She lost her parents at an early age, and her life was full of ups and downs. Her real name, Lee Jung-sook, was most likely given by her adoptive parents. During the shooting of *Jina Street by Secret*, she registered as a *gisaeng* (female entertainer) at the Chosun Gisaeng Guild. This prefigured her retirement. She seems to have established a happy family with a rich Chinese man after moving to Shanghai, but she died tragically young at the age of thirty in Moji, Japan, at 1:00 p.m. on 18 July 1933.

The role of *gisaeng* in establishing silent film cannot be underestimated. In an age when men took most female roles, they opened the door for women to pursue careers in the cinema by performing female roles. *The Story of Chun-hyang* (Goshu Hayakawa, 1923) is the first movie in which a *gisaeng* appeared. The heroine, Han Ryong (real name: Han Myung-ok), was a famous *gisaeng* in Kaesong. *Gisaengs* who followed her include Moon Myung-ok in *The Sorrowful Song* (Goshu Hayakawa,

1924); Kim So-jin in *The Twin Jade Pavilion* (Lee Ku-young, 1925); Ryu Shin-bang in *The Male* (Hong Kae-myung, 1928) and *A Deaf, Sam-ryong* (Na Woon-kyu, 1929); Im Song-seo in *A Story of the Day after Arirang* (Lee Ku-young, 1930); and Ha So-yang in *The Robber* (Yoon Bong-choon, 1930) and *The Big Grave* (Yoon Bong-choon, 1931). Films starring *gisaeng* were popular for almost a decade. In particular, *Road to the Twilight* (Chun Han-soo, 1927) became the talk of the town for its full mobilization of Chosun Gisaeng Guild's *gisaengs*, including Kim Nan-joo and Kim Nan-ok. This Chosun Gisaeng Guild-produced movie set in a peaceful sea village is about the tragic love of an innocent girl. (Kim Jong-won)

## *The Story of Jang-hwa and Hong-ryeon* and Producer Park Seung-pil

As commercial films came to the fore in the mid 1920s, the term “movies” took over from the more formal “moving pictures” in the public consciousness. This came about as increased imports of foreign films and the development of Korean film came together to drive the Korean film market. In 1921, the public were using “movie” much more often than “moving pictures.” Yet they coexisted for a while, for the images of “moving pictures” such as *The Broken Coin* (1915) and *Way Down East* (1920) left a deep impression.

In those days, the *byunsas* (silent film narrators) were stars. They were so popular that famous *gisaengs* were waiting outside for them after the show finished. Park Seung-pil, a show business genius, recruited top-class *byunsa* as soon as he took over the Dansungsa Theater. Park appointed Seo Sang-ho as chief *byunsa* and added Kim Duk-kyung, Kim Young-hwan, and Lee Byung-jo to the team. He also launched in-house productions with versatile Kim Young-hwan writing the screenplays. Behind this flurry of activity was a hidden agenda. Park was

provoked by the fact that the Japanese were the first to make a movie based on the Korean classic, *The Story of Chun-hyang*. He decided to produce his own film based on another Korean classic. To realize his ambition, he began to gather together both human and financial resources from across Korea. The first Korean-made, Korean-funded film, *The Story of Jang-hwa and Hong-ryeon* (1924), was born against this backdrop. Not only the producer, director, and actors, but also the rest of the crew, including the cinematographer, were all Koreans. Park Jung-hyun, later Park Seung-pil's successor, directed and Lee Pil-woo, who had shot the kino-dramas *A Truly Good Friend* (1920) and *Jang-hanmong* (1922), was the cinematographer. Jang-hwa and Hong-ryeon were respectively played by Kim Ok-hee and Kim Sul-ja, singers from Gwangmudae Theater. The role of governor went to Woo Jung-sik, Korea's first *byunsa*.

The movie was finished in three weeks during the heat of summer at a temple near Seoul. The two sisters Jang-hwa and Hong-ryeon are abused to death by their stepmother. Their ghosts appeal to the governor for revenge, which is granted in the end.

The movie was a great hit. The show was scheduled to run for a week from 5 September 1924 but was extended by two days thanks to continuous full houses. It attracted some 13,000 people in total. Despite the box-office success, it was not well received by critics. On 1 January 1925, a review by Lee Ku-young in *Maeil Shinbo* newspaper acknowledged "the excellence of the cinematography and the utmost efforts not to compromise the spirit of the movie as a collective art," but pointed out some evident mistakes made with props such as using winter bedding in a summer setting and actors standing like wax figures and making awkward facial expressions.

Park Seung-pil recognized the true value of moving pictures early and invested in the kino-drama *Fight for Justice* (1919). As a showman and producer, he was very aware of culture and had outstanding business skills. He showed his business ability by taking over Dongda-

emun Moving Picture Venue, Korea's first permanent movie theater, and transforming it into Gwangmudae Theater on 6 September 1908. However, he did not reach his prime until he began to work for Dansungsa Theater. In September 1914, he took over the management of the theater from Damura (田村) and rebuilt it as a movie theater, generously investing in domestic film production as well as introducing famous foreign films such as *Les Misérables* (1913), *The Broken Coin*, and Charlie Chaplin's *The Champion* (1915). (Kim Jong-won)