

South Korean Film Festivals for Mobile Cinema: Sites for Cultural Translation or Vehicles for Segyehwa?

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Abstract

The growing international and trans-national practice of making films with mobile, non-professional cameras find new means of exhibition and novel routes to distribution in online screening venues, but primarily at dedicated or supportive film festivals. This paper investigates how such film festivals function as sites of cultural translation of moving images in South Korea. This dynamic has evolved from a somewhat passive reacting to external cultural influences, to become a vehicle for expressing the official South Korean government's policy strategy of *segyehwa* (Shin, 2005; Kim, 2005): of turning outwards to the world to express contemporary notions of South Korean national identity.

I draw on case studies from two film festivals in South Korea during 2011: Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF) and Seoul international Extreme-Short Image & Film Festival (SESIFF). As venues for innovative cinematic practice, they foreground contemporary South Korean society's influence in the use of mobile phone and Digital SLR cameras as filmic apparatus, indicating the take-up of new methods of film production and exhibition that negotiates a complex dynamic of socio-cultural translation of moving images.

Introduction

This article interrogates aspects of a media phenomenon emerging from film festivals held in the Republic of South Korea, which reveals important cultural and societal shifts in that country's engagement with moving image media. Although not currently well documented or understood, such festivals provide important sites for the cultural translation and presentation of Korean filmmaking and culture, positioning it trans-nationally at the leading edge of contemporary digital media production.

Filmmaking using non-professional cameras, such as mobile phones and digital SLR cameras, urges curious filmmakers and those with limited financial means to explore new ways of making moving images, challenging or subverting hegemonic practices of film production. I argue that the breadth and creative ambition of South Korean cinema in general finds a new expression in its adoption of filmmaking using mobile devices, at once influenced by and influencing its integration with developments in mobile technologies. Film festivals devised to promote and support marginalized films and their audiences create alternative means of film distribution to those of, say, traditional cinema release or televised broadcast. As such, film festivals contribute to new modes of cinematic discourse which, to borrow a term from Felix Guattari, begin to describe a 'minor cinema for minorities' that is more expressive of South Korean society from which it emanates (Guattari, 2008, p. 271). Moreover, the widespread adoption and utilisation of such media throughout South Korean popular culture, contributes in significant ways to the global expression of South Korea's developing digital, cultural and national identity. Therefore, this article describes the collision of these factors, indicating important

ways in which international film festivals present contemporary South Korean cinema and society to a global audience.

Contemporary film festivals in South Korea instigate a creatively disruptive environment within which innovative film production and distribution can take hold and thrive. This mode of innovation presents contemporary moving image media as an increasingly central feature within South Korean society, contributing significantly to the perception, within and outside its national borders, of South Korean nationhood as paradigmatically rooted in digitally and visually literate expressions of its national character. The possibility of this new mode of mediated expression constitutes an emerging trans-national and, I believe, a trans-cultural phenomenon with a particularly vigorous profile at film festivals in South Korea. The use of the prefix *trans* is of course crucial to consider, indicating the possibility of translating aspects of nationhood and culture from one societal context to another. Simon, Bassnett and Lefevere (1996) point to inherent problems revealed in the cross-cultural translation of all media texts:

Translation is most often used by cultural studies theorists as a metaphor, a rhetorical figure describing on the one hand the increasing internationalization of cultural production and on the other the fate of those who struggle between two worlds and two languages (Simon, Bassnett and Lefevere, 1996, p. 127).

Therefore, the rhetorical act of translation introduces a level of abstraction into the process of meaning making for a secondary audience for cultural artefacts. In a general sense, international film festivals function as sites for the cultural translation of media texts in that they provide a means of disseminating films to audiences beyond their country of origin, necessitating some form of negotiation of cultural differences in the process. Increasingly, a number of film festivals do this whilst capitalising on the characteristic mobility of digital media, utilising factors such as the

ease of digital distribution of moving images over the Internet and via increasingly ubiquitous smartphones (see Goggin, 2011; de Souza e Silva and Frith, 2012). A major corollary of such mobility has been a fluid dissemination and democratisation of cinematic expression, increasing in its pace and reach as amateur and non-professional filmmakers react to the possibilities offered by 'mobile filmmaking' (Schleser, 2010, p. 208).

A number of scholars, such as the Film Festival Research Network, are increasingly turning their attention to the film festival's role as a medium for trans-national film distribution and its concomitant cultural influence. Bill Nichols (1994) has recognised that film festivals are platforms where trends in national filmmaking can be played out, serving as cultural taste makers within global cinema markets. More recently, although still not entirely current, Owen Evans suggests that film festivals function as the 'loci of cultural dialogue between Hollywood and the rest of the world's cinema' (Evans, 2007, p. 24).

New ways of exhibiting cinematic stories, originating from and about contemporary South Korean society and culture, tell us much about its current character and health. In their expressive presentation of current preoccupations in popular culture, these mobile films, located in the structuring regimes of film festivals, contain signifiers of technologically enabled creativity and point toward a possible taxonomy of their international, trans-national and trans-cultural influence. I argue that this new tendency of using the contemporary film festival as a medium for the exhibition and dissemination of mobile filmmaking, exemplified in the Republic of South Korea, evidences contemporary South Korea's preoccupation with the technological presentation of certain images of itself, inwardly as a nation and outwardly to the rest of the world. Through its dissemination in an internal-external-internal flow,

the transmission of filmic representations becomes an important way of expressing something intrinsically Korean to an international audience (including The Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the North) and, equally importantly, to be reflectively directed back to South Korean society.

The South Korean film *Bread* (Kwak, 2011), presents a widely experienced social problem to an audience both within and outside the national boundaries of South Korea, where the action takes place. The film's narrative involves an adolescent girl, Min-hee, who sits by a river in school uniform, tearfully talking to a man. Absently, she seeks some kind of comfort in continually eating pieces of bread as they discuss a pressing matter. A translation of the Korean dialogue reveals the girl is pregnant and the man, acting as a broker or fixer, has arranged for her to travel to China to have an abortion. As the man becomes impatient, the girl continues to eat more bread in a futile attempt to postpone her inevitable decision of whether or not to go with the man. Shot on an often unstable hand-held mobile phone, and with occasional lens flares from the late afternoon sun degrading the image quality still further, the film exemplifies a privileging of dramatic content driven by narrative concerns over proficiency in technical aspects of filmmaking. The narrative presents Min-hee's situation calmly and without histrionics, suggesting that this is a common experience for the man but an almost impossible dilemma for her to resolve. An element of almost fatalistic boredom appears to infect their exchange as Min-hee tells the man that she will 'definitely go when she finishes eating the bread'. However, as she continues to eat, their conversation and the film come irresolutely to an end. Min-hee's inability to finally decide on a course of action allows the film to avoid being didactic. Although presented in the context of South Korea's restrictive abortion laws (Woong, 2012), the drama does not depict a specifically

Korean situation, but one which potentially represents the experiences of many young women in similar situations.

Ultimately, as she sits beside the river left with her thoughts, Min-hee's silence leaves a space for audiences from various cultural or national backgrounds to insert their own readings, interpretations and possible conclusions. *Bread* was made by a young South Korean woman, Kwak Eun-mi, on a mobile phone and with minimal technical support. Set in just a single location, the film's simplicity aids to its universality as an example of cultural referencing of a particular social issue of concern within contemporary South Korean society. Its subject matter undergoes a translation from specificity to generality through its mediation by digital media. Kwak's use of digital filmmaking, and submission of her film to both of the film festivals discussed in detail later, capitalise on South Korea's widespread integration of digital media production into trans-national film festivals as a new mode of cultural distribution.

Another South Korean film, *Money Bag* (Kim, 2011), again filmed entirely on a mobile phone and described on YouTube as a *Thriller/Black Comedy*, evidences a clearly trans-national aspect in that it sits astride a deliberately ambiguous aesthetic of indeterminate located-ness and a thematically universal narrative. Filmed ostensibly at night, employing a single interior location and several dark exterior streets that will perhaps be familiar to residents of Seoul, the action might well take place in a number of urban locations. In omitting the use of dialogue, the film avoids the need for an additional layer of complicated language translation. This allows the narrative to be carried by visual elements and the remaining soundtrack that features a comedic pop song with Italian references, further muddying the audience's sense of the film's cultural origins. Primarily, *Money Bag* clearly references the Hollywood

chase film in its overall narrative construction (see Tasker, 2004; Purse, 2011) Most tellingly, the film's final image before fading to black features the English words 'Money Bag' written prominently on the eponymous bag. In this way, language is used to locate the film in an international context and suture visual narrative and language together to clearly signpost to the audience what *Money Bag's* main genre concerns had been: Couched within a cyclical chase film that hints at a pre-story of murky duplicitousness, sex and criminal theft, the retribution of the film's *femme fatale* will eventually be overturned, so that the central male character can happily escape with the bag of money that provides the film's title. *Money Bag* clearly reaches out to a global audience, familiar with the chase film's narrative conventions, and does so whilst retaining a sense of *Korean-ness* or of a national identity which, in featuring male and female Korean actors, mise en scene and use of locations within contemporary Seoul, is identifiably South Korean.

Further evidence of *Money Bag's* trans-national credentials is that, following its success in competition at Seoul International Extreme-Short Image and Film Festival in 2011, *Money Bag* went on to be chosen as the South Korean submission for the Hong Kong Mobile Film Awards in March 2012. From a line-up that drew on films from Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Greece, Hong Kong, South Korea Singapore, Spain and Taiwan *Money Bag* was awarded the Gold Award for Best Drama and the festival's Grand Award. Therefore, *Money Bag* can be seen as a successful example of mobile filmmaking in South Korea in 2011-12. It structurally integrates the American (or international) genre convention of the chase film into its dramatic narrative, and re-translates representations of contemporary South Korean culture as a kind of global media connectivity.

Significantly, the two films discussed above avoid definitively pinning down whether they originate from or express a particularly Korean, American (or any other) nationality or set of cultural mores. In their lack of specificity they embody a vague use of visual and aural signifiers, from which the audience can only derive a partial sense of identification with their stylistic and aesthetic components, and with the characters' indeterminate or ambiguous geneses. Both filmed using the in-built cameras of mobile phones, such films are representative of recent developments in digital filmmaking pursued in many parts of the developed world. They speak of South Korea's digital film culture extending beyond national borders, positioning it as characteristic of a kind of contemporary media practice that is coextensively shared by filmmakers in several countries. These are features that are not reserved for what might be regarded *minority interest* film festival events only: Consider Busan International Film Festival (BIFF), begun in 1996 and regarded as 'Asia's largest film festival [...] [w]ith an emphasis on the expanding Asian film world' (Relaxnews, 2010). During its 2012 edition, BIFF had 221,002 people attending the festival to see 304 films from 75 different countries (Busan International Film Festival, 2012), representing a year-on-year increase in film exports (Noh, 2013).

Film festivals that cater for filmmaking using non-professional cameras, of course, sit within a broader nexus of social, cultural and industrial conditions. Factors contributing to the ways in which film festivals cater for filmmaking using non-professional cameras are, of course, several. Reflecting how we might consider aspects of the geographical located-ness of film festivals, and our understanding of their contribution to cultural production, Pierre Bourdieu has shown that we must 'reconstruct these spaces of original possibles' (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 32). As a novel or innovative mode of discursive engagement it is therefore important to historicise and

thereby better understand digital moving image media at film festivals in an appropriate social and cultural context.

The first significant factor concerns the perceived low number of showing days for films in the late 1980s and the South Korean government-sanctioned increases following the establishment of the Screen Quota Civil Society in 1985. Remarking in 2006 on the drop in the domestic market share of Korean films between 1984 and 1993, which was perceived at governmental level at the time as a crisis of national identity, Hyangjin Lee has written that 'the thriving film culture in contemporary Korea is due to a cultural resistance to the power of Western-led globalization' (Lee, 2006, p.182). Darcy Paquet regards 1992 as a significant year in the history of the Korean film industry, when the domestic box office success *Marriage Story* was 25% financed by Samsung Corporation (Paquet, 2005, p. 36). This made Samsung the first *chaebol* (the commonly-used word for a small group of leading companies of national and strategic importance) to get into financing film production, soon to be followed by Daewoo and LG. Also around this time, a new breed of entrepreneurial film producer began to attract co-production agreements following international festival successes by such directors as Im Kwont-aek (2002; 2005) and Park Chan-wook. It can be argued that these events have led to a successful internationalization of South Korean cinema or, at the very least, a reaching out to the world through the moving image.

Thus, positive changes in the commercial fortune of South Korean cinema on the international festival stage have contributed to a base level of popular credibility. As one of its corollaries, this has influenced the commercial and cultural nature in which film festivals have developed in South Korea, and the kinds of moving image media they incorporate. Additionally, movements in other areas of popular culture

have had a marked effect on the South Korean mass media landscape. Consider the phenomenon of 'K-Pop' (South Korean pop music); though partly derivative of Anglo-European and American girl and boy bands for its aesthetic, it draws on contemporary Asian popular cultural idioms of bright-eyed youthful exuberance and transient consumerism. It should also be remembered that the internationally successful song *Gangnam Style* by Psy refers to a district in the southern part of Seoul. After being posted on YouTube in July 2012, the accompanying video inspired parody clips and copycat videos ensuring, as Rory Cellan-Jones reported for the BBC, 'K-Pop is getting stronger and stronger, everywhere in Asia [...] China, Hong Kong, Taiwan. Maybe even in Japan' (Cellan-Jones, 2012).

Add to this the growing confidence in the possibilities opened up by an emerging global digital culture mediated to a certain extent through the handset and screen of the mobile phone. A recent article for *TechinAsia* reports that South Korea's local telecoms companies have reached a total of 29.97 million smartphone subscribers and is about to pass the 30 million mark (Martin, 2011). In South Korea particularly, the normalising of portable internet access to moving image production and consumption has ushered in the challenging of old ways, and of established cultural and societal norms. This presents South Korean culture as poised to establish a leading role within a globally connected media landscape; not following anymore, not similar-to but self-evidently its own thing, presented to the world in large part through moving images. A picture then emerges of several points of stress bearing influence in a compound fashion on popular and national culture within urbanised, metropolitan South Korea. This is a phenomenon not restricted to the Seoul area. The commitment to nation-wide availability of *high speed* (c. 40 Mbps) broadband connectivity throughout South Korea, and *super high speed* (c. 1 Gbps)

availability planned for completion by 2013, has effectively ensured the whole of the country was able to reliably access digital media files ahead of most other countries (Paul, 2009). Significantly, the locations of the three leading film festivals in South Korea: Seoul International Film Festival, Jeonju International Film Festival and Busan International Film Festival dissect South Korea approximately into thirds. In this way, South Korea's film festivals provide relatively easy access to local and international film culture of an innovative and radical nature on an annual basis, and tacitly showcase the country's regions to the larger country and to an international audience.

We often hear rhetorical pronouncements from politicians and those with business interests, including film festival promoters, hoping to overstate their power to shape the trans-national media landscape. However, in recent years the South Korean media industries have not merely followed innovations in global media, but have strategically planned development, politically, industrially and socially. Successive South Korean governments have accomplished a rebuilding of the industrial and commercial infrastructure of the country as part of a national project - to take a leading role in capitalising on what was quickly seen to be a potentially society-changing media revolution. I characterise this as a *national project* because this is effectively what it became: Jeeyoung Shin notes that the government of Kim Young-sam from 1993 to 1998 started to pursue a policy of internationalisation and globalisation known as *segyehwa*, (a shorthand phrase that translates into the two parts *segye* meaning 'world', and *hwa* meaning 'becoming' or 'turning into'). This process was continued and refined by the following government of Kim Dae Jung between 1998 and 2003, evidently to even greater effect (Shin, 2005).

Shin partly attributes the enthusiastic promotion of the cultural industries under Kim Dae Jung's presidency with the establishment of the Basic Cultural Industry Promotion Law in 1999 and the setting up of the Korea Culture and Contents Agency. She writes, 'Kim's government promoted particularly high-value-added culture industries such as film, animation and multi-media' (Shin, 2005, p. 55). Thus, in this atmosphere of the application of legal and cultural stimuli, we begin to see a shift in stress from a sense of the moving image as a component of commercial film production, to that of a medium for the delivery of national cultural expression. As Shin goes on to say, 'The governmental push to globalise Korea's cultural industries was intended not only to improve the competitiveness of the national economy, but also to promote cultural autonomy and integrity' (Shin, 2005, pp. 55-6). My argument is that innovation in the area of film festivals, of what they are designed to do and can potentially do, has become intrinsic to the South Korean concept and policy of *seggyehwa*. Moreover, it is within the implementation of *seggyehwa* that the contemporary global community not only observes a South Korean taste for cinematic entertainment, but that this is how South Korean culture is understood.

Therefore, in analysing the functioning of contemporary film festivals in South Korea, what does this tell us about the ways in which innovative moving image making has become an intrinsic feature within the historical progression of South Korean national identity? I will answer this by looking at two different film festivals in South Korea during 2011: the Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF), and the Seoul international Extreme-Short Image & Film Festival (SESIFF). It is not my intention to compare these two film festivals occurring within the same country and contrast them in some binary, oppositional way. Instead, I hope to reveal a sense of

how they each, separately but nonetheless similarly, promote and express new ways of engaging with mobile cinema and digital moving images that are currently popular within South Korea.

Jeonju International Film Festival (JIFF) ran from 28 April to 6 May in 2011, and held its 13th edition in 2012. Jeonju city is located roughly in the centre of South Korea, half-way between Seoul and Busan – in what JIFF describes in the first line of the ‘Overview’ section of their website as ‘a traditional and beautiful city of Korea’ (JIFF, 2011). As with other film festivals in South Korea, I believe this is a significant contributing factor for how film festivals in South Korea are scheduled and located. Thus, the film festival connects to notions of South Korean traditional culture, and as part of a more general tourism offer within Korea.

The JIFF website also announces the festival’s intention to focus on ‘unique voices of independent films from all over the world’ and to introduce ‘new films by world famous master filmmakers and a wide range of programmes each year’ (JIFF, 2011). Where JIFF’s *unique selling proposition* becomes overt is when the website also states that ‘JIFF is always trying to get with the flow and changes in the film industry’ by producing two categories called ‘Jeonju Digital Project’ and ‘Short! Short! Short!’ described as ‘the two main projects of JIFF’ (JIFF, 2011).

This author’s experience of JIFF in 2011 bears out much of the promise contained in the pre-publicity. Whole areas of the centre of Jeonju were taken over by the film festival. Apart from the screenings of the opening and closing films and ceremonies, screenings were mostly held within a small area of central Jeonju, referred to universally as ‘Cinema Town’. Interior and exterior spaces were linked physically and psychologically as Cinemas, and a street re-named each year for the festival as ‘Cinema Street’ linked other venues for festival-associated events. Some

of the 313-strong band of student festival volunteers guided traffic away from the blocked-off areas and helped visitors with directions, or just added to the smiling, youthful 'buzz' of the festival atmosphere. For the duration of the festival, the centre of Jeonju enthusiastically gave itself over to a particular kind of festival cinephilia, which it manifestly attempted to infect local inhabitants and visitors from outside the city with, as a kind of pleasantly benign malady.

Figures from JIFF's 2011 festival evaluation report, produced immediately following the festival's end, indicate that JIFF could be regarded as a medium to large film festival when compared internationally, operating with a total budget of 3,200,000,000 Korean Won or £182,023,000 (JIFF, 2011). Crucially, further statistics from JIFF's website reveals the festival's emphasis on presenting an internationally inclusive story of commercial success:

Number of Screens:	14
Number of Films Screened:	190 from 38 countries
Average seat occupancy:	86%
Number of paid cinema seats:	77,590 (67,095 sold)
Press Attending (Foreign Press):	820 (111)
Number of guests (domestic/international):	1,892 (1,758/134)

(Jeonju International Film Festival evaluation report, 2011. <<http://eng.jiff.or.kr/index.asp>>)

In an additional piece of publicity information, the festival report estimates the combined audience during the period of the festival for outdoor events, exhibitions, programmes of talks and visitors to Cinema Street, to have been 3.8 million people (JIFF, 2011).

Disregarding for a moment the bare statistics contained in the figures above taken from the English version of the JIFF website, this tells us something important about the kind of information that JIFF wants to communicate to the world, and what it wants to say about the festival: Notably, the compilers of the report felt the need to

highlight that approximately 7 per cent of the total festival 'guests' (V.I.P.s etc.) were visitors from outside South Korea.

In practice, Jeonju International Film Festival clearly provides a commercially sustainable platform for independent filmmaking, short film production, and for exploring the possibilities of mobile phone filmmaking by emerging South Korean and international filmmakers. JIFF puts a stress on proclaiming its 'strengthening appeal' to a varied audience (JIFF, 2011). As a participant observer at the 12th edition of the festival last year, I witnessed JIFF establish its credentials as 'a productive and sustainable film festival' (JIFF, 2011). It accomplished this by integrating aspects of independent, experimental filmmaking into a traditional film festival structure, whilst introducing digitally-enabled filmmaking using mobile phones to new audiences within and outside South Korea.

The third iteration of Seoul International Extreme-Short Image and Film Festival ran from 29 September to 4 October 2011. As can be seen below, the spread of films entered in 2011 meant that SESIFF was very much targeted at low (or no) budget filmmakers, artists and independent moving image-makers. The festival encourages its audience, filmmakers and would-be filmmakers to rally to the festival motto, announced on the festival's website and reiterated daily during the festival, of 'Anyone can make and enjoy films, anytime, anywhere' (SESIFF, 2011).

Located in two main screening venues in Seoul, SESIFF was a more compact, intimate and experimental film festival than JIFF earlier during the same year. Drawing on innovative and creative work from a larger constituency than JIFF yet, with a much smaller budget, SESIFF incorporated films and moving imagery that would not normally be found in other more mainstream film festivals across the world:

SESIFF International Competition	104 films
DSLR International Competition	30 films
Mobile International Competition	17 films
Forest Films Domestic Competition	15 films
International 3D Film Competition	27 films
Going Underground Competition	26 films
Kids Extreme Shorts	9 films
Love Extreme Shorts	10 films
Giggle Giggle Shorts	11 films
Bloody Night	10 films
Wong Fu Style	10 films
Korean Vloger Collection	10 films
Clermont-Ferand Lobo	12 films
U.F.O. Undiscovered Film of Youth	14 films
	<u>Total = 305 films</u>

(SESIFF website <http://www.sesiff.org/project/en_main.asp> 2011.)

As can be seen in the figures above, SESIFF's categories are relatively numerous but with a small number of films screened in each. As a festival, SESIFF feeds on and promotes experiments with new technologies such as the mobile phone and Digital SLR camera. In doing so, it serves to spread an inclusive net over new modes of making moving images, new filmmakers and new audiences.

Whilst both festivals discussed here include 'international' in their titles, they differ significantly in terms of size, number of visitors and films, the profile of filmmakers and types of films they attract. Both festivals incorporate innovative filmmaking, of differing kinds and in different ways: JIFF supports independently produced, narrative-driven filmmaking and provides opportunities for new filmmakers to reach an audience. SESIFF concentrates on encouraging new uses of small formats and new technologies - such as the use of mobile phones and digital SLR cameras to explore experimental narrative forms.

Soyoung Kim remarks that, 'Desire for cinema and desire for globalisation, often encapsulated in the official discourse of *saegaehwa* [sic], converge in international film festivals' (Kim, 2005, p.57, emphasis in original). Both JIFF and

SESIFF take pride in expressing a unifying passion for innovative cinema. As Kim perceptively points out, 'the proliferation of theme-based film festivals and the emergence of identity groups in 1990s Korea may be articulated with one another. There is something in cinephilic culture that can facilitate the process of identity and subject formation and festival politics' (Kim, 2005, p. 89).

Identities formed between film festival participants are the subject of affiliations with like-minded others, enthusiasts and fellow competitors in themed festival categories that draw people together to experience and share moving images. The spectacle of an audience gathered to watch digitally made films that also function as social media texts, inside the confines of a traditional cinema theatre, speaks of a powerful impulse in South Korean society: The desire to experience cinephilic pleasures as an avowedly social activity. Thus, the film festival dynamic is reaffirmed as an important site for the cultural translation of technologically mediated expression that is perhaps richer than the individuated, or even solitary, online viewing experience that might offer an alternative.

Writing in 2005, Soyoung Kim noted that 'The growth of cinephilia in Korea is linked to the growth of film culture through the proliferation of film festivals, art-house cinema theatres, cinemateques, videoteques, film magazines, journals and cinema groups housed in cyberspace and in real space' (Kim, 2005, p. 82). However, it is crucially important to highlight the shift in the nature of the South Korean love of the moving image, from cinema as part of a national story of growing cinephilia, to one of a comfortable familiarity with moving image in a post-digital world. My observations of JIFF and SESIFF during 2011 are in many ways confirmed in recent historical and cultural scholarship. This indicates a progressive socio-cultural trajectory within South Korean filmmaking and film festival activity, taking in developments in digital

film culture within South Korea. By absorbing, adapting and incorporating contemporary relevant films and filmmaking, international film festivals track, promote and affect South Korea's notions of national identity and global digital presence.

Harnessing the liberating potential of hand-held mobile screens and non-professional or semi-professional filmmaking practices, both festivals seek to balance a seemingly conflictual dynamic of being simultaneously a commercial, even populist platform for media exhibition and, at the same time, representative of innovative modes of moving image production. As Nicholas Rombes puts it: 'The mobility of the screen erodes the boundary between the place of dreams and everyday life' (Rombes, 2009, p. 65). The film programming at South Korean film festivals such as JIFF and SESIFF debunks the comforting ideology of the dream palaces of cinema theatres from an earlier time. Instead, we are presented with an affirmation of a more contemporarily relevant politics of filmmaker and audience interaction that speaks of a bottom-up dynamic of digitally enabled innovation emanating from a confidently contemporary South Korean culture.

Conclusion

We might ask why South Korean society is currently taking new forms of moving image making so seriously, finding films persuasive and entertaining ways of exploring innovation in cinematic forms, and choosing film festivals as a distinctive means by which it presents itself to the world? My answer would be that this follows a logical progression in the development of South Korea's sense of its national identity, its global digital presence: in short, a maturing recognition of what the film festival can contribute to how the world sees South Korea through its moving image

culture. Film festivals have effectively become another channel for the expression of cultural heritage. However, they are also capable of the transmission of a complex amalgam of messages to the world through the moving images they contain.

It should be noted that, as the visibility, international recognition and appreciation of South Korean cinema increases, South Korean filmmakers have achieved commercial, critical and festival success that has relevance for the arguments in this article. A salient example is that of Park Chan-wook, who has won multiple festival awards, most notably for his trilogy of films *Sympathy for Mr Vengeance* (2002), *Oldboy* (2003) and *Lady Vengeance* (2005). Responding to the filmmaking possibilities provided by new mobile filmmaking technologies Park, with his brother Park Chan-kyong, wrote and directed *Paranmanjang (Night Fishing)* (2011), shot entirely on an iPhone 4 adapted to accept professional quality lenses. Significantly, *Paranmanjang* won the best short film award at the 2011 Berlin International Film Festival.

Scholars such as Hyangjin Lee and Jeeyoung Shin provide important insights on what has influenced recent commercial cinema and the moving image in South Korean. Repeatedly, a kind of mantra is spoken of 'creating the future while reflecting on the nation's past' (Lee, 2006, p. 192). By these means, a new sense of South Korean national identity, post the digital turn, is being contested and formed. How this new tendency in South Korea's cultural life is being negotiated is encapsulated by Lee when he remarks that a 'hybridism of commercialism and artistic experimentalism' contributes to a new identity politics in Asia (Lee, 2006, p. 185). As evidenced by my account above of the international complexion of the audiences for JIFF and SESIFF, the notion and practice of *seggyehwa*, as Hyun Ok Park describes it, 'represents a de-territorialized national community among Koreans

[...] particularly in the ways that new technologies of communication and frequent travelling between home and diverse sub-communities may engender a border-transcending sense of belonging' (Park, 1996). The two South Korean film festivals I have been discussing actively promote this tendency and the contribution they make to the global dissemination of innovative filmmaking. They exemplify a challenge to audiences to engage with contemporary digital moving image making in unashamedly novel, trans-national and innovative ways. Finally, they exercise the fundamental humane function of communicating a distinctive sense of *Korean-ness* to a geographically distant but culturally empathetic audience.

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