

News and Reviews

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COURTESY OF FILM MESSENGER



The Unforgiven

■ Directed by Yoon Jong-bin. 2005. 120 minutes.

Born as a college graduation project of the director Yoon Jong-bin, *The Unforgiven* (Yongsŏ Batji Mor'hanja) has generated significant

REVIEW

ripples in Korean society and beyond since it was released in 2005. Turning painful experiences of his own compulsory military service into a narrative of three young men, director Yoon presses the hot-button issue of military service in contemporary South Korea.

The first man we meet in the film is Yi Sŭng-Yŏng, a college student who began his military service relatively late. He has serious trouble adapting to a military subculture that sanctions the abusive and violent treatment of subordinates by superiors. He often confronts bullying superiors verbally and once physically. Hoping to change this military subculture, he tries to protect Hŏ Ch'i-un, his only subordinate, who appears to be rather slow-witted. Ch'i-un is unable to adjust himself to the military subculture. To make the situation worse, he is also dumped by his girlfriend. After this crisis, he commits suicide in a restroom.

Ryu T'ae-jŏng is Sŭng-Yŏng's immediate superior. Because they were junior high school class-

mates, T'ae-jŏng tries to protect Sŭng-Yŏng from other bullying superiors. After completing his service, T'ae-jŏng struggles to run a small business. The film's narrative is intercut with a visit Seung-yeong makes to T'ae-jŏng while on leave. Urgently drawn to T'ae-jŏng, Sŭng-Yŏng tries to communicate his complex feelings toward him and his difficulty with military service, but T'ae-jŏng is not in tune with him. Although they talk over food and drinks, T'ae-jŏng is not ready to listen to Sŭng-Yŏng's feelings and concerns. Finally, Sŭng-Yŏng kills himself in a motel where he checked in with T'ae-jŏng because he cannot bear the trauma of Ch'i-un's suicide and the rejection of his homosexual feelings for T'ae-jŏng.

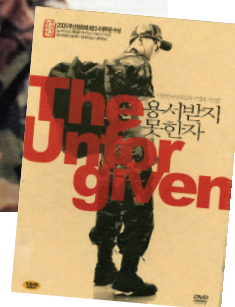
The three main characters can be seen as representatives of different social groups of Korean men who cope with the violent military subculture with varying degrees of adaptability. T'ae-jŏng represents a majority of Korean men who manage to learn how to survive in the military and repress traumatic experiences of physical and psychological violence during their service. Sŭng-Yŏng represents a minority of Korean men who come from the educated middle strata and cannot accept barracks

subculture because it is a foil to their cherished values of rational discussion and individual autonomy. Ch'i-un also represents a minority of Korean men who come from lower-class, provincial backgrounds. Lacking the toughness and street smartness of other lower-class conscripts, soldiers like Ch'i-un are frequent targets of violent abuse and therefore are often destroyed by the experience.

Focusing on the daily lives of these conscripts in military barracks, the film reveals intimate details of the military subculture and conveys a poignant critique of it. Beneath the apparently simple and rather tedious depiction of daily routines among Korean conscripts, it provides the audience with revealing insights about the logic of bodily dominance of older, higher-ranking soldiers over their subordinates. This subculture is starkly opposed to the normative values of rational thinking, equality, and individual autonomy that the educated public understand to be necessary for democratization in Korea.

To make a new recruit into a docile and useful soldier, various techniques of discipline, including

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The Asian Educational Media Service (AEMS) is a program of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Our mission is to help educators at all levels, from elementary through college, find multimedia resources for learning and teaching about Asia, to promote understanding of Asian peoples and cultures. Our free services include:

- *News and Reviews*, published three times a year;
- An online database of audiovisual materials;
- Reference service;
- Educator workshops on teaching with film;
- Lesson plans, streaming video, film recommendations and other web resources;
- A lending library for local educators

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Focus on South Korean Cinema

For the first time in several years, we are exploring a single theme with an issue of the AEMS newsletter, building off of our successful South Korean Film Festival last September. The fourth annual Asian Film Festival hosted by the University of Illinois's Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies and AEMS, this three-day event brought together Korea scholars from around the country, the local Korea studies community and the local ethnic Korean community to view, celebrate and discuss five recent feature films from Korea. For more information about the film festival, please see our website: www.aems.uiuc.edu/events/filmfestival.

South Korean cinema has been experiencing a renaissance in the last ten years or so, alongside Korean pop culture in general, and Jung Sun Park provides us with a helpful introduction to this phenomenon, known as *hallyu*, or "Korean wave." The three films reviewed in this issue were all screened at our film festival. We were privileged to host Yoon Jongbin, the director of *The Unforgiven*, as our honored guest at this event, and Robert Cagle has provided us with an excerpt of an interview with him. Also, on our website, you can read Daniel Kim's report on using *The Unforgiven* in his undergraduate class on Korean film (www.aems.uiuc.edu/publications/notes/notes.html).

Two of the other films, both suitable for younger audiences, are reviewed in this issue. Hyunju Park, who presented at our teacher's workshop, provides a critique of the comedy *Please Teach Me English*, while Chan E. Park, an expert on Korean folklore, provides an analysis of the animated feature *Empress Chung*. It is unfortunate and unforeseen that the latter film is not yet available on DVD; if you would like to be notified when it becomes available, please drop us a line.

We are currently planning our next Asian Film Festival, this time focusing on Southeast Asian popular productions.

This issue also features the second installment of our "Teaching and Technology" column. Alwyn Spies has allowed us to witness a teaching experiment in progress, warts and all, and in this segment reflects on what worked and what didn't. I am eagerly in search of more writers for this column; if you or someone you know is engaged in a new way to use technology in the Asian studies classroom, I would love to hear about it!

In fact, I encourage submissions and suggestions of all kinds for the AEMS newsletter—accepted year-round—and for our website. We are launching several new features of the website this spring: online-only film reviews; reviews of web resources; and "Notes from the Classroom," where teachers report on how they have used AEMS-reviewed materials in their classes. To stay up to date with AEMS services, please subscribe to our new RSS feed.

I have had the privilege this year of guest editing the special AEMS Multimedia Section for the spring issue of *Education About Asia*. This section includes ten film and website reviews, as well as essays on teaching, representing a diversity of themes. If you do not already subscribe to this extraordinary resource, I encourage you to do so. Subscriptions and single copies of back issues are available at www.aasianst.org/ea-toc.htm.

Finally, please don't forget to fill out our 3-minute online survey at www.aems.uiuc.edu. We would like to know more about you, our readers and patrons, and what you would like to see from AEMS.

With that, I hope you enjoy our special issue on South Korean cinema. As always, I welcome your feedback! ■

—Tanya Lee, Editor

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What Is Hallyu, the “Korean Wave”?

Hallyu, or the “Korean Wave,” refers to the increasing popularity of South Korean popular culture in East/Southeast Asia and beyond.

The term originated in China, following the overwhelming success of Korean TV dramas and

pop music in China and Taiwan in the late 1990s. Since the late 1990s, the transnational circulation of South Korean popular culture in East and Southeast Asia has increased rapidly and become a regional cultural phenomenon. Based on its regional growth, *hallyu* has also spread to other parts of the

world, including the US, Europe, and South America. While TV dramas and music initiated *hallyu*, films are

also one of the phenomenon’s core genres. The success of the Korean media products then led to the popularization of Korean fashion styles, food, cosmetics, and electronic goods in some countries, and *hallyu* sometimes refers to this broader phenomenon.

Although in Asia TV dramas are at the center of *hallyu*, in the West films are what made Korean pop culture visible. In the past decade or so, a growing number of Korean films have won awards at various

prestigious international film festivals and more Korean films were shown in the West than ever before, often eliciting critical acclaim. The positive international reputation of Korean films has drawn Hollywood’s attention as well and resulted in Hollywood’s remake of some (one example is Warner Brothers’ *The Lake House* [2006], a remake of *Siwora*, or *Il Mare*, [2000]). Moreover, some Korean films, such as *The Host* (2006), were commercially released in the U.S. and Europe, indicating the growing presence and influence of Korean movies in the West.

Besides increasing international recognition, Korean films have also enjoyed tremendous domestic success—they have had a greater than 50 to 60% market share at home since 2001, an unusually high figure in this era of Hollywood’s global hegemony. New sales records have been made one after another, the latest by *The Host*, which by 2006 had attracted an audience of

approximately 13 million (the South Korean population is just over 48 million). Overall, Korean films have had remarkable critical and commercial success in the past several years.

The recent success of Korean films is intertwined with the revival of the Korean film industry. This revival, ironically, began during the 1997 economic crisis in Korea with the high influx of capital to the film industry. At that

time, investors preferred high-risk/high-return “venture businesses” and the film industry fit this description. Along with in-

creased capital, the arrival of new talent added energy and vision to the industry. Unlike the previous generation of filmmakers who were trained by apprenticeship, the new generation has been trained in film school and thus tends to be well-versed in film theory and is knowledgeable about foreign films. This shift has brought a different aesthetic to Korean film. These new filmmakers are not afraid of crossing borders and borrowing ideas from different genres such as animation,

comics, and computer games, resulting in richer and more diversified storylines that are unique and refreshing.

Moreover, the emergence of a new fan base, both domestic and international, also supported the growth of the film industry. Fans of Korean films are mostly younger generation members who are familiar with various kinds of visual media. They are proactive and participatory consumers, and their high expectations, discerning eyes, and critiques (especially through Internet postings) have influenced the filmmakers.

The films that are reviewed in this newsletter address some of the central social issues in Korea. *Please Teach Me English* (2003) deals with the zeal for learning English as a survival tool in the highly competitive and globalizing Korea. *The Unforgiven* (2005) illustrates the struggle of a young Korean man of the generation that grew up in the post-democratization era and is faced

Korea is one of few places that currently produces films with energy, creativity, and new styles.

The films that are reviewed in this newsletter address some of the central social issues in Korea.



with the legacy of authoritarian times through his experiences in the army. Interestingly, this film’s take on how the army, as a powerful, coercive social institution, affects (and distorts) an individual’s life is somewhat different from that

of earlier films such as *Peppermint Candy* (2000) and *Silmido* (2003), which are more overtly and heavily charged with political ideologies and critiques.

The retelling of a Korean folktale in *Empress Chung* (2003) is related to

the current reinterpretation of the past and traditions in Korean society. Also, the fact that both South and North Korea collaborated in the production of the animation and that it was one of the few large-scale animation features produced by Koreans in recent years adds political and social meaning to it. Yet *Empress Chung* has not been successful in South Korea due to its Disney-like drawing style, liberal modifications of the original story, and an ineffective advertisement campaign. For comparison, I would recommend *My Beautiful Girl, Mari* (2002) and *Oseam* (2003), which are works by Korean animators who try to create a unique style, one distinct from both Japanese and American styles, and tell stories based on Koreans’ lives and traditions.

Many film enthusiasts agree that Korea is one of few places that currently produces films with energy, creativity, and new styles. Contemporary Korean films deal with a wide range of stories and genres ranging from experimental to commercial and from historical to science fiction. Regardless of the appearance, filmmakers’ views, interpretations, and analyses of Korean society are ingrained in them and that enables us to understand Korea through the lens of film. ■

Jung-Sun Park is associate professor and coordinator of the Asian Pacific Studies Program at California State University at Dominguez Hills. Her current research focuses on two themes: transnational flows of South Korean/East Asian popular culture and the changes in South Korean citizenship in the global era.



Please Teach Me English

■ Directed by Kim Sung-Su. 2003. 118 minutes.

Released as a romantic comedy in 2003, *Please Teach Me English* (Yŏngŏ Wanjŏn Jŏngbok) was originally planned as a social black comedy. The extreme enthusiasm for learning the English language in Korea is good material for comic satire, but also presents an uncomfortable self-portrait of Korean society. The film's ambivalence toward English is a good subject for debate in classes on Korean culture. The central conflict in this film centers on a diverse group of Koreans thrown together in a classroom to learn English. Even though it is enjoyable for younger students, the self-critical characters make this movie more appropriate for advanced students.

The plot revolves around a couple who meet each other in an English class in Seoul. The female lead, Yŏng-ju (Lee Na-young), an eccentric yet cute public officer, is chosen by her supervisor to learn English after the staff members in her office are embarrassed by their inability to communicate with an English-speaking patron. She attends a private institute where she meets Mun-su (Jang Hyuk), a shoe salesman who seems to be more interested in chasing girls than in learning English. However, as the movie proceeds, viewers discover Mun-su's motivation for taking English lessons.

The movie offers social criticism on how English is used in South Korean society. The prevailing sentiment throughout the film is Koreans' self-deprecation around English language learning. Throughout the film, many of the characters speak very broken and ungrammatical English, and the main characters are aware of their deficiencies, poking fun at their own broken English.

A second prevalent image in the film is the presence of English everywhere. English is ever-present in Korean lives even though many Koreans lack basic proficiency in English. English brand names and signs are easily observed on Korean streets. English is not only a medium for international communication but also a language for local lifestyles.

There has been strong institutional pressure on Koreans to learn English, resulting largely from the Korean government's efforts to integrate Korea into the global economy. The decision to learn English is, in many cases, imposed on the individual by the government, companies, and universities. For instance, in the movie, Yŏng-ju does not decide to learn English of her own accord but rather is required to by her boss.

However, the pressure of learning English has consequences. One of those side effects is Koreans' emotional resistance to Western lifestyles infused into Korean society by English-speaking people. Koreans often consider Western lifestyles to be too liberal, especially in terms of sex. In this movie, the blonde English instructor is portrayed as a love interest, and the intimidating foreign patron in the public office makes a pass at Yŏng-ju. Native English speakers are also seen as tradition breakers. On the first day of Yŏng-ju's English class, the instructor asks students to take English names. Yŏng-ju does not want to have an English nickname but the instructor is adamant that she have one.

Another consequence is more serious: English divides Korean society. First, it divides Koreans into two groups—the young Korean-English bilingual and the old Korean monolingual. In one scene, a child who visits Yŏng-ju's public office teases her in fluent English because her English is clearly broken. Second, English exacerbates class stratification in Korea. As long as knowledge of the English language is a requirement for university exams and hiring, English speakers are at an advantage.

As a result, Korean speakers inevitably have an internal conflict. They know English is important as a global language, so it is necessary to learn basic English. Nevertheless, Koreans feel that English is foreign and painful to learn and are therefore somewhat resistant to it. In the movie, Yŏng-ju has a dream in which an English-speaking

SWAT team raids her class and interrogates students in English. If students answer correctly, they are free. Otherwise, they are arrested by the SWAT team. In Yŏng-ju's imagination, English is mapped to the police. Those who do not speak English will be punished by law. The metaphor of English police implies that speaking Korean and not knowing English is a crime.

These feelings of ambivalence toward English need to be negotiated—in this case, through a highly emotional encounter at the film's climax. It turns out that Mun-su needs to learn English in order to communicate with his long-lost sister, who was adopted by an American family when she was very young. To take her back into her Korean family is to wipe off the shame of past national poverty. Under these circumstances, therefore, learning English is acceptable because it is a tool to extend Korean identity, symbolize Korean economic growth, and develop Korean nationalism. Ironically, speaking English, here, reflects Korean national pride. This resolution on the personal level does nothing to address the national problem, however.

In the end, this film seems to lack a deep criticism of Korean society. It starts out with an apparent ambition to criticize the social conflicts that the zeal for English intensifies, but resolves them emotionally. Although this movie lacks incisive social criticism, it still provides us with a good illustration of Korea's linguistic landscape. From this perspective, this film can be a good source for generating class discussion.

The film could be shown in a language class or even a political science class. There could be a discussion on the frustrations of learning a second language. Teachers may ask students to think about the ambivalence toward English in Korea and the attitude of this movie toward English. Is it just a tentative way of legitimizing English prevalence in Korea and other countries? Why is there such strong resistance by the female character in the movie? Teachers might also lead discussions on the concepts of imperialism and nationalism. ■

Hyunju Park received her Ph.D in Linguistics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2006. Now she works in South Korea as a lecturer and translator.

Please Teach Me English is available on DVD from Tai Seng Entertainment. Price is \$11.96 for purchase.

Additional Resources

Video of Hyunju Park's presentation at the AEMS Educator Workshop "Teaching Korea Through Film": www.aems.uiuc.edu/events/educator_events/workshop.html.

Empress Chung

■ Directed by Nelson Shin. 2005. 95 minutes.

Telling a folktale is like lighting a timeless torch that illuminates the past as well as the present and future; could there be a present or future without a look at the past? Storytelling, especially of times and places different from our own, challenges us to locate elements both familiar and unfamiliar. Nelson Shin's animated feature, *Empress Chung* (Wanghu Shimch'ong), is one such telling of the story of Shim Ch'ong, the quintessential signifier of Korean daughterhood.

According to the traditional tale, Shim Ch'ong's mother dies at her daughter's birth, leaving the baby to survive in care of her blind father. Nursed by the kind ladies of the village, Ch'ong grows into a beautiful, loving, and gifted girl. When she is fifteen, Shim Ch'ong sells her life to a group of merchant sailors for three hundred bags of rice to be sacrificed to a sea monster so her father can regain his sight by the grace of Buddha. Heaven intervenes and she is resurrected to live the rest of her life as empress, and her father's sight is restored through the surprise and joy of their eventual reunion. Her heavenly virtue is hallowed in various forms of storytelling including stage and film remakes, and the efficacy of her incarnation is timelessly invoked in the rituals of healing and blessing in coastal fishing villages, where the sea's temperament dictates human life and death.

Filial piety is not an exclusive property of Korea or other Confucian societies. It is for her father that Beauty ventures into Beast's lair, after all, and Cinderella's tolerance of her stepmother or Hansel and Gretel's acceptance of their heartless father resemble filiality, but Shim Ch'ong's self-sacrifice is more extreme.

Acclaimed as the first technical and artistic collaboration between the two Koreas, the film was released on August 12, 2005, in the South and just three days later in the North, exactly sixty years after Korea's independence from Japan. The film's collaborative path from production to simultaneous release in both Koreas is a symbolic reunification at the hearth of one storyteller, after sixty years of playing ideological opposites.

A metaphorical masterpiece, the film *Empress Chung* recasts the old story as an allegory of Korea's dream-come-true, the political reunifica-



tion of North and South Korea. The events of the first half of the film—with an added political conspiracy leading to the collapse of the Shim family, Shim's loss of sight, and general hardship and sacrifice—symbolize Korea's suffering after invasion and division by outsiders. Shim Ch'ong's resuscitation and royal betrothal represent the promise of Korea's eventual survival and success. The father-daughter reunion represents the unified country, and the restoration of Shim's sight and title at the end can be

read as the restoration of national sovereignty and peace at last.

Empress Chung also plays well for viewers less familiar with Korean cultural and political climates. Director Shin attempts a softer landing for elements of the story more culturally remote (such as extreme filial devotion) by balancing the sorrowful with Disney-like farce, and lifting folkloric ordinariness to legendary heights.

Some alterations are enhancing, and some, problematic. For example, the more familiar version of Shim is as an ordinary gentleman gradually having lost all vision at age twenty and so clueless as to pledge a fortune to a temple for a promise of eyesight restoration. As a way of raising the sum her father pledged, Shim Ch'ong sells herself as human sacrifice. In the film, both his position and his person are consecrated to heroic proportion so that he is not to be blamed for the drowning death of his daughter.

She returns to life to become empress-designate; the court holds a royal banquet for the blind as a way to help find her father, and on the last day Shim arrives at the banquet. Here again, the story's flow is altered in the film: when he hears the news of a mysterious lotus girl from the sea capturing the crown prince's heart and thereby attracting vengeful intrigues upon her person, he somehow feels it could be his daughter and, fearful for her safety, hurries toward the capital. This deviation from the original story is a directorial reinterpretation of Shim's original character. We see that even as a person with a disability, Mr. Shim's aristocratic disposition simply would not accept "soup-line charity" for the disabled unless there is a compelling and righteous reason.

Unfortunately, this reinterpretation detracts

from the tale's timeless climax. In the original tale, as soon as Shim's name is announced, several officers rush him into the inner palace where the empress-designate has been anxiously awaiting the news of her father's arrival. Fearful that the invitation was a setup to arrest him for "selling my daughter to the sailors," he tearfully begs her to spare his life. Choking with emotion, Shim Ch'ong bolts from her throne, breaks open the coral screen, dashes down the aisle in stocking feet, and embraces him while crying, "Father!" The film version fails to do justice to this electrifying moment of recognition so powerful it flushes out the negative elements in his system that had obstructed his vision; his recovery is somewhat more perfunctory in the film.

On the other hand, the film successfully humanizes the saintly Shim Ch'ong as flesh and blood: she is a tomboy with great physical prowess that no boy in the village neighborhood dares mess with, and she is a teenager enjoying the amorous gazes of scholarly boys struck by her beauty. Particularly reassuring is the loving kinship she shares with her three pets, Gahi the talking Goose, T'obong the Turtle who brings her back from the bottom of the sea, and Danch'u the Dog who faithfully cares for Shim during her prolonged absence. Animating the invisible and subtle workings of heaven guiding her through life, death, and resurrection should require ingenuity, and the fellowshipp of these allegorical characters works magic. The film's incorporation of indigenous sights and sounds of Korean village, marketplace, palace, music, and ritual into the narrative flow is a stunning success.

I am neither equipped nor inclined to evaluate the film's incorporation of the latest animation technology, but from a storyteller point of view, *Empress Chung* is a rare tool for not only teaching about Korea but also for providing quality cross-cultural education in arts and humanities. ■

Chan E. Park is associate professor of Korean Language, Literature, and Performance at Ohio State University. She is the author of *Voices from the Straw Mat: Toward an Ethnography of Korean Story Singing* (University of Hawaii Press, 2003).

Empress Chung is not yet commercially available. Inquiries may be made to KOAA Films, Inc.

Additional Resources

Video of a presentation on *Empress Chung* by Professor Heinz Insu Fenkl, given at the AEMS Educator Workshop "Teaching Korea Through Film": www.aems.uiuc.edu/events/educator_events/workshop.html.

Professor Fenkl's own retelling of the Shim Ch'ong story, with a critical essay: www.geocities.com/ifenkl/koreanfolktale.html.

Multimedia Telecollaboration in a Beginning Japanese Language Class: Part II

Editor's Note: This is the second installment of our report on an experimental classroom project. Last fall, Alwyn Spies piloted a collaborative, Internet-based project between two classes of beginning Japanese, one in Canada and one in South Korea. Hoping to encourage the students to use their Japanese language skills to communicate directly with one another, in a situation where using their native language was not an option, Spies and her counterpart in Korea, Ohnishi Hitoshi, devised a series of audiovisual assignments for the students to create in cross-cultural teams using Microsoft PowerPoint. Please see the Winter 2007 issue of *AEMS News and Reviews* for Spies's detailed description of the project. Here, she evaluates the results of this experiment and offers suggestions for others who may want to try something similar.



Further supporting this finding, in the official university course evaluations one student wrote that the projects took too much time away from “learning Japanese.” Although it was clear to me that students *were* learning communication skills in Japanese, if you have never gone to Japan or actually lived in an immersion situation, learning to feel

“tone” as they were might not seem useful. For example, students learned that the use of a strong imperative with a peer is counter-productive and made them get angry and refuse to do what you told them to. The textbook explains that the “shinasai” pattern means “do this,” but it does not explain the *social effect* of misuse or explain how patronizing it sounds. In other words, what I saw as “progress through process” was for some students perceived as a waste of time if their definition of “learning Japanese” was memorizing the textbook content, or “progress through mastery.”

Technological Issues

On a more practical level, we found that the emphasis on PowerPoint visuals killed the speaking and listening. Students relied on images and wrote *everything* out on the slides so that no one needed to listen to the narration. Since one of the major goals for the projects was improving pronunciation and listening skills, we ended up abandoning PowerPoint altogether for the third project and changed the assignment to a sound-only “storytelling” exercise. It was easier, more fun, took less time, and ended up being a lot more productive.

There were also problems recording narration. There are two choices for saving sound in PowerPoint: one embeds the files into the document, and the other just makes links to the files on the user's computer. If students chose the link option by mistake (a fifty-fifty chance!), they ended up sending the document without the sound files. The group would then miss their deadline because they had sent the document at the last minute, not allowing time to fix the mistake. The two groups in this case blamed each other and took the mishap as “proof” of some kind of cultural personality defect, unfortunately. This problem could have been avoided by using the “save as movie” function where PowerPoint finds the sound files and turns the slideshow into a movie that runs by itself. Unfortunately,

while Macintosh PowerPoint has the “save as a movie” function, only the very latest versions of Windows do, so most students couldn't easily use this option.

Ideas for Future Implementation

In the future, I would like to build telecollaboration into a series of courses that permits a slower linguistic and technological progression from simple email or photo blog exchanges to audio storytelling and then on to bigger multimedia collaboration projects. This might allow more time to learn software that has actually been designed for internet use, such as Flash animation, instead of PowerPoint.

Most importantly, since developing social and intercultural communication skills is the point of the exercise, more time spent promoting group bonding so that students have a sense of responsibility to their e-groupmates is necessary. Furthermore, the projects should be pass/fail (rather than given a numerical grade) to make sure students understand that the *process* is the goal, and that they should use language their groupmates can understand, rather than using a big vocabulary to impress the teacher.

Conclusions

While we can't do away with memorization and textbooks, there is a need for teaching the skills necessary to bridge the gap between the classroom and the street. Because the results from this experiment suggest that teaching with broadband technology and online collaboration may facilitate the development of language and social skills necessary for function in a second-language environment, it is being followed by a larger action research project to evaluate this kind of telecollaboration in language classes. If anyone is interested in participating in an action research team, knows of such research already being done somewhere, or wants more details about the projects, please e-mail me alwyn.spies AT ubc.ca. ■

Theoretical Musings

The most important result of this teaching experiment was finding that higher test scores did not correlate with successful collaboration or better media products. This may show that students with different learning styles or more practical concepts of language learning were given a chance to prove strengths that a more traditional curriculum discourages. I have long suspected that university language classes weed out the kinds of students who have the creative social and cultural skills necessary for second-language competence because of their focus on assessment. Despite the need to memorize the verb conjugations, real-life communication requires much more ingenuity, flexibility, good faith, and non-verbal observation than can ever be measured on a paper test.

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A Conversation with Director Yoon Jong-bin

In October of 2005, first-time director Yoon Jong-bin became an overnight sensation at South Korea's Tenth Annual Pusan International

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Film Festival (PIFF), one of the premier film festivals in Asia. Yoon's film, *The Unforgiven*, which the young director made as his senior project in film school, was the most talked-about feature film at the 2005 festival.

Not only does the film dare to tackle the formerly taboo subject of mandatory military service in South Korea, but it does so in such a way that avoids seeming one-sided or preachy. The film was widely praised by critics for its no-nonsense approach to telling its story and for the young actors (Ha Jung-woo, who has since become a new darling of South Korean cinema; Suh Jang-won; and Director Yoon himself, in a particularly thankless role as the hapless victim of pranks and mistreatment) who portrayed the three main characters were singled out for providing a startling realism to the work.

Yoon was seen (rightly so) as a daring young talent with great promise.

Director Yoon was the guest of honor at the 2006 EAPS/AEMS Asian Film Festival here in Champaign, Illinois, where, after a standing-room-only screening of his film, he graciously discussed the work with the crowd. Yoon also spoke at length with me, one of the organizers of the event, about his work and Korean cinema in general. Kim Jin-hong of the University of Illinois and Shin Jee-young of Indiana University provided much appreciated assistance as interpreters. What follows is a brief excerpt of our interview.

RLC: Who are some of your favorite directors and what are some of your favorite films? What works were formative to your development as a director?

YJB: Martin Scorsese's films have been very important to me.

RLC:(Laughs) What is it about Scorsese? All Koreans seem to love this guy.

YJB: When I see his films, the impression I get is that he's not only superb in expressing stylistic things, but also the depth of characters, objects. He shows a real depth to objects and characters.

One has the feeling that this is what life is really like in the US—this isn't just some superficial representation. He focuses more on characters than on mere action or story details. I also like Woody Allen and Eric Rohmer. I also like Mikio Naruse.

RLC: I was impressed by all of the glowing reviews from last year's Pusan International Film Festival about *The Unforgiven*. It was characterized as an independent film, but when I watched the film I was very surprised, because somewhere in my mind I had an idea of what an indie film should be like. But when I saw your film I was struck by the fact that the opening sequence has such high production values. Was it difficult to create such a film within such strict budgetary constraints?

YJB: The reason the image was so clear is that

I was shooting the film with a digital camera. Although, when I was shooting this film I did feel the limitations of using a digital camera because I didn't like the colors of the image as shot with digital.

There were a lot of things I was unable to shoot because of budgetary constraints. There were days, too, where I had to change the script at the last moment—right before shooting. So when I watch the movie over and over again it breaks my heart because I think of what I wanted to show, and I think of the scenes I was unable to shoot.

RLC: What was especially interesting to me was the fact that it shared a certain quality with a lot of other Korean films and dramas—the inability for characters to communicate with one another, and the element of time. When people finally do find the means to communicate with one another, it happens too late. Why do you think this is such a popular theme in Korean culture and what motivated you to include it in your film?

YJB: I think that the breakdown in communication is a theme that's common, not only in Korean film, but also in European film, too.

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RLC: In the US and in Europe, there's the myth of the happy ending. In Korea, this isn't the case. There's always the fantasy that after the end of the film that things will get better, whereas in

Korean films, there's a sense of finality that cannot be reconciled.

YJB: I think it's simply because Koreans have always had very hard lives. I think that as a creator, the theme of breakdown in communication is the kind of thing where you can maximize the dramatic potential of a scene. So, if it is really true that this theme of miscommunication is really salient in Korean films, it is most likely because creators in Korea have unconsciously reacted to their past where they were not able to resist things—due to forces that were imposed on them.

RLC: Although some critics resist the idea that *han* (a combination of regret and contempt) is a motivating factor in the popularity of melodrama as a prevalent mode of representation in Korea, it truly seems to be undeniably the case. It's almost as if these critics want to disavow the existence of such an emotion, however, it is not so much the idea that it actually exists, but that people believe it exists that is important. Do you agree?

YJB: In Korean film there are no heroic characters. This is mainly because when Korean audiences see a film with a hero they have difficulty identifying with that character. The kind of heroic character that Korean people would fall for is the kind of person who always tries to achieve something, but ultimately fails. Superman, for example, is not popular in Korea. I think it's because we don't fall for that kind of heroic character. We'd rather fall for outsider characters, like Batman or X-men—the kind of hero that starts out having nothing and then achieves something on his own. ■

Robert Cagle is the Library Cinema Studies Specialist and an assistant professor of Cinema Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is currently writing a book on Korean cinema.

Additional Resources

Video of Yoon Jong-bin's question and answer session following the screening of his film on September 29, 2006, in Champaign, Illinois: www.aems.uiuc.edu/events/film_discussions/unforgiven.html.

The Unforgiven

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verbal abuses and physical beatings, are employed by the group of superiors. To survive in this culture and avoid brutal beatings and harassments, all subordinates have to obey the following rules: (1) do only what they are told to do, (2) answer only when they are asked, and (3) do not talk back to their superiors under any circumstances. These rules are intended to deprive human beings of their ability to think and talk. Repeatedly punished with beating, harassment, and shouting, subordinates are remolded into unthinking and obedient bodies. At one point in the film, T'ae-jōng tells Sūng-Yōng that "What is good is to be obedient." Obedience is the core moral value in the warped universe of the military barracks. The pervasiveness of physical domination in the barracks blurs the boundary between physical punishment or "play" on the one hand and sexual harassment on the other hand. Yet a subordinate is not supposed to resist this kind of behavior because, as T'ae-jōng says, "It's absolutely a taboo

to talk back and mess around with your superior."

Narrated from the perspectives of young Korean men who served in the military as conscripts, this film can be a useful resource for courses on social change, culture, and gender in contemporary Korea. Teachers might focus on the role of military service in constructing masculinity and femininity. While the film's depiction of women is only cursory, it allows for the exploration of what sort of femininity is required to sustain the specific version of militarized masculinity that Korean men acquire through the repression and denial of physical and psychological violence during their military service. Teachers also might want to discuss the uneven burden of military service borne by lower-class men both in Korea and the United States despite the obvious differences between systems of mandatory conscription and "all-volunteer" military service. This attention to commonality will enable teachers to avoid reproducing the logic that foreign cultures are fundamentally different or, in this case, somehow barbaric in comparison to American culture. ■

Seungsook Moon is associate professor of Sociology and director of the Asian Studies Program at Vassar College. She is the author of *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Duke University Press, 2005) and is currently editing a volume entitled *Gender and Sexuality in the Global U.S. Military Empire*.

The Unforgiven is available on VCD and DVD. YesAsia offers the VCD for \$11.99 for purchase. DVD Asian has the Region 3 DVD for purchase for \$28.95.

Suggested Reading

Moon, Seungsook. 2005. "Trouble with Conscription, Entertaining Soldiers: Popular Culture and the Politics of Militarized Masculinity in South Korea." *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 64–92.

Additional Resources

Video of Seungsook Moon's presentation at the AEMS Educator Workshop "Teaching Korea Through Film": www.aems.uiuc.edu/events/educator_events/workshop.html.