

PREFACE

This anthology was compiled for the Korean Film Council (KOFIC)'s English-language website to provide foreigners with a better understanding of and easier access to Korean films. It aims to meet the increasing demand for in-depth study of the Korean cinema, as more and more Korean films are exported into foreign markets. Various topics appropriate to the brief essay format best suited to the web were selected for the chapters on the ten different periods of Korean film history. Some topics are treated repeatedly in different periods, sometimes with different approaches. Eleven other important subjects were selected and discussed in separate chapters of their own. After selecting topics for different periods, thirty authors were carefully chosen. This anthology is a culmination of their efforts, as they went to so much trouble to read old documents, analyze old films (which are difficult to gain access to), and discuss the topics with many people. We believe the result captures the very essence of Korean cinema better than any other existing work.

Though the book covers Korean film history chronologically, it does not have a single consistent point of view, nor is it organized to be balanced. Rather, it shows the present and the past of Korean film history by emphasizing the achievements of Korean cinema. Each author has her or his own interpretation of each period and topic. Some focus on films and filmmakers, others on factual data, the relationship between genre and industry, or the discourse and images of public culture. This was not standardized in the editing process. Such differences were al-

lowed to persist in order to provide diverse points of view on Korean film history.

Second, the relationship between Korean cinema and society and its role within society were accentuated through subjects like the Korean film law, genres and discourses. By studying how films affect society, the social essence of a mass medium is discovered. The book is a comprehensive repackaging of the achievements of the Korean cinema, rather than redefining history or presenting a completely new point of view.

Third, the book embraces a wide base of readers from the general public to scholars. I hope the book proves interesting to all readers by providing a broad perspective on Korean film history and sometimes inspiring researchers with new ideas.

Research on Korean film history is making progress from the very basics, such as the research environment. The Korean Film Archive is making efforts to provide easier access to old Korean films, while compiling oral histories and documents from film industry veterans into research materials. With more research on the relationship between Korean modernity and popular culture from literature, theatrical plays, and architecture to comics, the underlying basis for understanding the historical and national ideological role of Korean cinema is becoming stronger.

However, research on Korean film history still requires stronger fundamentals. Above all, means of accessing primary sources must be extended, for example by discovering and restoring films. All the films made after 1997 are preserved thanks to the regulation that requires the presentation of a specimen copy to the authorities since 1996. However, not many films from before 1996 have been preserved. From 1919 to 1996, a total of 4,893 feature films were made (5,573 until 2005). However, only 39.1 per cent, or 1,915 films, are preserved. This preservation rate becomes lower as one tracks back into history. Only eleven films from the colonial period are with us today. History can never be totally objective, but is subjective according to the selection of factual data and the method of description. However, the history of the Korean cinema can be and must be told without the films themselves. If the public experienced the same history and films mediated it, then the history can be written on the basis of the contemporary background and social imagery.

Korean cinema is already more than a century old. As with the film histories of other countries, Korean film history has always been closely linked to the formation of modern society. Thus, Korean film history must be part of the same social and historical foundation that modern society is based on. In Korea, films were only an exotic spectacle when first introduced. Then, when Korean filmmakers had just started making films, they had to go through severe censorship during the colonial

period and various military governments. It has not been an easy journey for Korean cinema to grow into a world-renowned success story. It had to survive many external and internal threats and moments of crisis. It is natural that many people are eager to know how the domestic film market share soared from a mere 15.9 per cent in 1993 to 60 per cent in 2004, the box-office quadrupled over one decade, and such diverse films are made. The key to success has been creativity and powerful content, supported by the greatest accomplishment of the Korean film industry: the abolition of restrictions and censorship. There is also the common experience of national division and the history of dictatorship. Some foreign film professionals ask me what policy was required to achieve Korea's success. I always give them the same answer: if there is any restriction, abolishing it is a prerequisite, as freedom of expression is more effective than any other support. The history of the Korean cinema itself proves this.

During the past year of working on this book, the earliest feature film ever found—*Sweet Dream* (Yang Joo-nam, 1936) was discovered, *The Host* (Bong Joon-ho, 2006) set a new admissions record, and a reduction in the number of screen quota days was announced. Korean film history must be continuously re-written, not only because new data are discovered, but also because the way we look at the same factual data continues to change.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the thirty authors who participated in

the project, and advisers including Huh Moon-yung, Joo Jin-sook, Lee Yeon-ho and Shin Kang-ho. I also give my special thanks to my co-editor An Jae-seok, Communication Books and Um Jin-seop, Lee Soon-jin, the president of Sodo Books who provided some of the photos, and An Cheong-sook, Chairperson of KOFIC who showed deep interest in this project. I would like to also thank the copy editor Professor Chris Berry. This book was also published in South Korea as *한국영화사 : 開化期에서 開花期까지*. I hope it will promote better understanding of Korean cinema and lay a foundation for future research on Korean film history.

2006

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