

# KOREAN CINEMA'S FEMALE WRITERS-DIRECTORS AND THE "HEGEMONY OF MEN" / RICHARD HOWSON, BRIAN YECIES

**Abstract:** The South Korean film industry represents a masculine-privileged gender regime that over the last few decades has shown a newfound strength both at home and abroad. However, challenging this masculine privilege are a growing number of important though unheralded female writers-directors operating in both the independent and commercial sectors of the industry. In this article, the authors present a case study that explores the work of five of these female writers-directors within this context. They begin by asking two key questions: can female writers-directors find a voice within the Korean film industry that challenges the traditional gender stereotypes both within the industry and in the wider Korean culture? How can the Korean experience connect to the Western experience? The first methodological step in explicating the case study is to set out a particularly Western theoretical approach that emphasises the idea that masculine privilege exists hegemonically within the so-called 'hegemony of men'. The authors then go on to highlight specific elements in the work of these female writers-directors that expose aspects of both challenge and constraint within the hegemony of men. They conclude that, although the work of these female writers-directors indeed challenges tradition and gendered stereotypes sustained within the hegemony of men, such challenges represent moments of reformism rather than revolutionary systematic change.

**Keywords:** South Korean cinema, hegemony, hegemonic masculinity, men, film

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For readers in Central and Eastern Europe, this article introduces a region and culture that at first sight appears not only geographically remote, but also culturally alien. However, notwithstanding its 'exotic' subject matter, it engages with an emerging area of research that, following Raewyn Connell (see 2007), we believe should be given some priority within the field of Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities (CSMM) – that is, the analysis of gender relations beyond the Western paradigm. Although Asia can be said to exist on the periphery of the West, through the processes of globalisation and transnationalisation no one region or country can effectively lay claim to operating autonomously. Thus, the continuing task of building knowledge about gender, gender regimes and gender orders (see Connell 2000), and the place of men and women and their engagements with masculinities and femininities demands that we open our understanding to these new frontiers of knowledge. In this article, we apply a concept developed in the European or Western context – the 'hegemony of men' (see Hearn 2004) – to the film industry in South Korea (hereafter Korea) and the work of a number of its female writer-directors.

## Tradition and Hegemonic Masculinity in the Hegemony of Men

In Korea, tradition plays an important role, not just for an understanding of gender-based hegemony but also for determining cultural mores. In *Women's Experiences and Feminist Practices in South Korea*, edited by Pil-wha

Chang and Eun-Shil Kim (2005), the chapter by Lee Sang, 'Patriarchy and Confucianism: Feminist Critique and Reconstruction of Confucianism in Korea', shows that the field of women's studies in Korea continues to be dominated by the influence of traditional culture (S. W. Lee 2005: 70). These traditions, Lee argues, fundamentally privilege men and originated with the arrival of the Confucian system from China during the Chosun Dynasty (1390–1910). Most importantly, in today's Korea Confucian principles still form the basis of gender relations (ibid.). Of prime importance are the two principles of *segregation* and *obedience*. Korean culture sustains a structure of gender segregation that privileges men; at its centre is the idea of spatial segregation that restricts the role of women to the private affairs of the family. As an extension of this segregation principle, the virtue of obedience ensures the supremacy of men and the subservience of women even in the private sphere as a woman moves through the three phases of female identity recognised in Korean culture – from daughter to wife to mother (S. W. Lee 2005: 71). While Korean women increasingly operate within the public realm, the efficacy of this tradition is that as a culture there is complicity with these key principals that act as a constraint on women's public life and work.

The example of modern Korea as a neo-Confucian culture shows that it is impossible to understand gender relations and their hegemonic operation disconnected from tradition. According to Sabine Hering (2011), the position of women in Eastern Europe should also take into

account the operation of tradition. Specifically, it should be understood in the context of the various social and cultural traditions that have influenced and continue to influence gender relations, such as the many patriarchal attitudes and practices that have historically sustained a traditional culture and that is now being blended with the relatively new traditions introduced by the various communist parties that ruled most of the region in the postwar period. With reference to the emergence of Hungarian feminism, Judit Acsády (1999) also argues that Hungary never had a national feminist movement because 'feminism runs contrary to "our" traditions'. What we see within these arguments is, in Gramscian terms, the existence of tradition as a form of 'commonsense' (Gramsci 1971: 323–326). In this understanding, commonsense represents a form of knowledge and practice that will produce a temporary hegemonic unity, but not the kind that can be sustained historically. Inevitably, hegemony determined by tradition will produce tensions and ultimately dislocations between people within a given hegemonic situation. Henceforth, hegemony becomes dangerously unstable and to stabilise it requires the creation of new structures.

In an important article within the CSMM field, 'From Hegemonic Masculinity to the Hegemony of Men' (2004), Jeff Hearn challenges researchers to reconsider the ways in which they conceptualise and then theorise the relationship between gender and hegemony. Hearn's argument is that rather than placing the emphasis within hegemony on some aspect of it, such as masculinity or femininity, it is more important to focus analytic attention on the activity and formations of men that, in turn, sustain a system legitimation and privilege that men employ to produce a form of authority understood as the 'hegemony of men' (ibid.).

Although Hearn's emphasis is on men and their practices and formations, in this article we seek to give space to the role of hegemonic masculinity in the hegemony of men. Here, Hearn suggests that rather than moving from hegemonic masculinity to the hegemony of men in a way that assumes the leaving behind of one moment for another, the task is to explore the nature and operation of marginalised and subordinate identities and practices and how they impact on and influence legitimacy and power. To effectively locate the role of hegemonic masculinity in the hegemony of men it is important to consider the claim that hegemonic masculinity 'requires all other men to position themselves in relation to it' (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005: 832), as well as women, particularly via identification with 'emphasised femininity' (see Connell 1987). This, in turn, necessitates the application of a socio-political approach that seeks to uncover the 'ontology'<sup>1</sup> of masculinity's hegemonic authority.

At this point in our consideration of the theoretical development of hegemonic masculinity, it is helpful to remember

that hegemony itself is about the building and sustaining of authority through the exercise of power and the creation of its legitimacy. However, this is not achieved on the basis of the modernist imperatives of truth and progress, or the even more problematic notion of pure domination. Rather, as Joe Buttigieg (2005: 37–38) explains: 'Hegemony, as theorized by Gramsci, is not imposed; quite the opposite, the governing class achieves hegemony (that is, becomes hegemonic) through leadership and persuasion, so that instead of imposing itself on the subordinate or subaltern classes, it acquires their consensus.' But this consensus is always precarious and unstable (Gramsci 1971: 182), and the hegemonic group (in our case, men) must constantly take up the task of producing a signification or representation that is perceived to be universal, closed, coherent and static. However, the very nature of the hegemonic – certainly when it is infiltrated by forms of commonsense – ensures that it is fundamentally 'incommensurable' (Laclau 2005: 70–71) with the reality of men's (and women's) lives. In other words, while the challenge for masculinity in assuming hegemonic status is indeed to move beyond commonsense to become the authority on how men and women 'should' practice gender, to achieve this result it must marginalise and/or subordinate forms of masculinity and femininity that do not embody its 'hegemonic principles'<sup>2</sup> (see Howson 2006).

This process of creating masculinity as hegemonic is the specific task or function of those within the hegemony Gramsci (1971: 5–23) referred to as 'intellectuals'. The intellectual's function is education, but this is achieved by developing the mechanisms that provide legitimacy, the strategies for leadership and the intellectual content that informs the people. In hegemony there is always the possibility for the emergence of two groups: the traditional intellectuals whose function it is to ensure the existing hegemony is protected and the organic intellectuals whose function is to challenge the hegemony. The importance of the intellectual function is made more critical when we consider that masculinity as hegemonic does not lead to all men assuming a hegemonic masculinity or all women assuming an emphasised femininity. Rather, it leads to configurations of practice that express complicity with and support for the hegemonic principles of a privileged masculinity. We see this in hegemonic mechanisms such as the media, the family, the workplace, religion and sport, as they embody the powerful legitimising processes and meanings of gender that not only set the benchmarks for gender relations and practice but, even more importantly, obfuscate the precarious and unstable nature of hegemonic masculinity and, thereby, men's hegemonic authority. This process makes identifying the purity and truth of masculinity within the hegemony of men secondary to the hegemonic task of persuasively de-legitimising and marginalising femininities and some forms of masculinity that deviate from the hegemonic norm.

In the discussion below, we examine these theoretical positions through a case study drawn from one important area within the South Korean cinema industry that is the work of female directors or writers. The broad Korean cinema industry is today regarded as one of the most exciting, dynamic and commercially viable national film industries to emerge in the last thirty years anywhere in the world. Its achievement is even more remarkable when we understand that it emerged in a region that remains caught in the tensions produced by a dominant and growing market economy set against the cultural anxieties that are consistent with dramatic post-colonial political transformations (K. H. Kim 2004: 274). In this context, the focus on females and their work within this non-Western gender regime is a particularly important but also relevant contribution to the increasing body of work that seeks to explore gender and its operation within the broader global processes or what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 849) refer to as 'transnational arenas for the construction of masculinity'. In this context, our analysis of the Korean film industry, with its hegemony of men, is cognizant of its 'local' or national importance and simultaneously of its increasing reach across 'regional' boundaries (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005: 849).

A significant aspect of the hegemonic gender regime of the Korean film industry, both locally and globally, is the emergence of female writer-directors who are now involved in both the independent and commercial sides of the industry. This development is not just exciting, but also significant, because it occurs within an industry where male writers-directors have historically held and continue to hold hegemonic authority over the creation and dissemination of content. This is despite the large number of female producers and crewmembers currently working in the industry. Thus, the emergence of the female writer-director potentially represents a moment of instability and challenge within this existing hegemony. Or does it?

To cast some light on this situation, we turn to Hearn's 'hegemony of men' thesis and, in particular, to the agenda he sets out for further study (see Hearn 2004: 60–61). Of the seven elements he has identified, the case study presented below will pay particular attention to elements six and seven. Hearn's sixth element focuses attention on 'how women may differentially support certain practices of men, and subordinate other practices of men or ways of being men'. This brings us to the issue of consensus-building that Buttigieg emphasised (see above), and in this case, the conditions for women's consent within and with the hegemony of men (Hearn 2004: 61). In the context of the Korean film industry, this phenomenon – and in particular the way that women give or withhold their support from certain men's practices – is of crucial importance, because in Korea 'tradition' remains a strong influence on the ways in which hegemonic masculinity organises meaning and privileges certain gendered social relations over others.

Hearn's seventh element recognises the interconnect-edness of the other six; here he suggests that 'of most interest is the relationship between "men's" formation within a hegemonic gender order, that also forms "women", other genders and boys, and men's activity in different ways in forming and reforming hegemonic differentiations among men'. In this context, the following case study explores three questions. First, how do women writers-directors see themselves and their work within the Korean film industry? Second, how are their ideas expressed in the films they produce? With these questions in mind the task will be to assess the impact of women and their work on this localised but significant industry that in turn can shed some light on the nature of the hegemony of men more broadly.

### Methodological Orientation

The methodology employed in this article follows the conventions of the case study. The key reason for using a case study is to begin the process of exposing and examining the boundary and thereby interaction between the phenomena or female Korean filmmakers in the context of the hegemony of men. Also, as with case studies more broadly, and unlike more specific ethnographic methods, this study employs more than one qualitative method. To be specific, data were acquired from interviews with the study subjects and from a content analysis of a selection of their films.

In the broad field of social science research, the case-study method has historically been viewed as problematic in terms of the empirical requirement to 'generalise' research findings. In other words, how can data produced from an apparently isolated and singular setting such as Korean cinema be seen as relevant to and representative of a much broader set of contexts? As Bent Flyvbjerg (2006) points out, critics such as Donald Campbell and to a lesser extent Anthony Giddens have raised important concerns over the efficacy of the case-study approach. However, history is replete with examples in both the natural sciences and the social sciences (consider Marx and Freud as examples of the latter) where specific cases have been used to produce generalisable data. The case-study approach used here and the methodological debate it prompts is important in this setting, as it brings the Korean cultural context to bear on a theory developed and largely still operating within an alien (that is, Western) cultural and political context.

The Korean context is particularly important to the field of Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities, not least because it represents what Flyvbjerg (2006: 9) calls a 'critical case'. Byun Young-joo, one of Korea's leading and critically acclaimed female documentary and feature filmmakers, argues:

*Korea is a conservative and male-centred society ... [y]et, the Korean film industry is quite special and progressive when it comes to gender issues – especially compared to other industry sectors. (personal interview)*

It is no exaggeration to say that in Korea masculinity and men are privileged. This gender bias, as indicated above, developed in large part through the country's long history of Confucianism, which laid the foundations of current traditional beliefs and attitudes. Yet the operation of this distinctive gender order and in particular the gender regime of film production and its content – whose international impact has been enormous, even if one considers only its influence in northern Asia – has not been exposed to the kind of analysis that similar Western gender regimes have undergone in recent years. The present article seeks to contribute to the type of research within the CSMM that Raewyn Connell articulated in her book *Southern Theory* (2007) and in which was expressed the importance of exposing the many unheard voices across the global periphery. A task that is vital to knowledge and to better understanding the hegemony of the global centre.

### Data Collection

This case study brings together two qualitative forms of data collection: the semi-structured interview and (film) content analysis. Although these two approaches might be expected to produce very different data from very different sources, they have been specifically chosen as a way of linking the reflections and experiences of females working within the industry to the analyses of their work. As such, the objective is not to present both sets of data (interviews and content analyses) separately; rather, it attempts to bring both together around the analyses of films in a manner that offers insight into the way female writers-directors within the industry view their position as expressed via films. A further objective is to show how the meanings inherent to the films can illuminate not only the position of these female writers-directors as individuals within the context of the hegemony of men, but also, and simultaneously, the impact of their work on their audience. This approach, we believe, better shows the interconnectedness, as expressed in Hearn's seventh thesis, between the continued formation of men, particularly around tradition, and the simultaneous formation of women.

For this preliminary study, we draw from a selection of work by four female writer/directors: Su-yeon Lee's film *The Uninvited*, Ji-young Hong's film *The Naked Kitchen*, Jeong Hyang Lee's film *A Reason to Live*, and Chan-ok Park's film *Jealousy Is My Middle Name*. In addition, we draw on selected reviews with various industry sources and interviews conducted in Seoul between late 2014 and early 2015. Most importantly, the objective here is to show how these female writers-directors have re-imagined Korean culture and its hegemonic traditions. The stories presented span a range of genres and offer different and even controversial expressions and representations of Korean life. It is certainly the case that the ability to transgress the cultural codes that set out who we 'should' be represents a form of contentious expression. But does this translate into a challenge to the hegemony of men within this gender regime and the broader gender order?

### Challenging the Hegemony of Men in South Korea: The Rise of Female Filmmakers

Among the small but growing cohort of independent and commercial female writers-directors in Korea, the names Su-yeon Lee, Ji-young Hong, Lee Jeong Hyang and Park Chan-ok stand out. All four women undertook formal film studies at different times in their lives, with most entering the field after studying an unrelated discipline. This is a process that is quite a common pattern in Korea's contemporary film scene. Yet, despite this circuitous path into the industry, all of them argue that their earlier studies and experiences helped them develop a 'mature' view of the world from which they developed their diverse perspectives on Korean cultural life.

### The Uninvited: Horror and Femininity

Su-yeon Lee was born in 1970 and studied educational technology at Ewha Woman's University. After obtaining her degree, Lee received a Master's of Fine Arts in film studies from Chung-Ang University and then graduated from the Korean Academy of Film Arts (KAFA). The latter is one of the leading national institutions of film studies in the country and since 1984 it has supported the Korean film industry by training and giving a start to many writers and directors of both sexes. However, KAFA is often viewed as a male-dominated institution, where opportunities are organised around 'informal' apprentice schemes. This gendered approach to education within the Korean film industry was expressed by Su-yeon Lee when discussing KAFA, who claimed that this institution enables 'the authoritative position of men' (personal interview).

Lee's first feature film as a writer-director was entitled *The Uninvited* and was released in 2003 to mixed responses. Lee was praised by local and foreign critics for some aspects of the film, such as her casting of the female and male lead actors (respectively Jeon Ji-hyun and Park Shin-yang) in roles that challenged the traditional approach to casting in that they differed markedly from the types of roles those actors had become known for (Paquet 2003). Lee also received a positive critical response for the film's 'slick camera work' and moments of 'non-linear storytelling' (NIX 2004). The film won the Best Asian Film and Groundbreaker awards at the 2004 Fantasia International Film Festival, the Best New Director Prize at the 40th Baeksang Arts Awards, and the Citizen Kane Award at the 36th Sitges International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia. Despite this critical acclaim, *The Uninvited* was not included in the top ten domestic films of the year in terms of total ticket sales and was considered a box office failure. In many ways the lack of box office success can be attributed to the challenge to the traditional horror genre Lee's film represented through its 'arty mix of belief, guilt, infanticide and madness that slowly self-destructs' (Elley 2003). The film's emotional and withdrawn approach and its depictions of the way gender is assumed in tradition in the end failed to satisfy the

commercial expectations of its investors. This failure in the end expresses much about movies that challenge gendered norms and traditions.

Despite these shortcomings, *The Uninvited* makes a real contribution to the emerging diversity of Korea's longstanding tradition of horror films. In the words of one critic, the film 'is a moody and intelligent psychodrama about two bruised souls reaching out for mutual understanding in a world that doesn't understand their supernatural sensitivities' (ibid.). It becomes apparent that the traditional gendered approach to horror is set aside as the film's claustrophobic settings seek to present a chilling view of contemporary Confucian-oriented society, in which the recurring images of two children poisoned on a train, presumably by their mother, and who are encountered by the two lead protagonists create a sense of foreboding that pervades their lives. This bizarre reality ultimately connects the main characters but disconnects them from society and reality in general. Jeong-weon's male character represents an anxious, soon-to-be-married interior decorator, while Yeon, who lives in the same apartment complex, is an introverted clairvoyant whose baby was dropped from a high-rise apartment balcony by her best friend. Both characters exemplify challenges to the traditional understandings of gender within the horror genre by expressing a passivity that in the end is disconnected from traditional expectations.

Lee presents gender within the film in ways that mix traditional Korean values with feelings of unfairness and even abuse. This is reflected in one important scene at the film's mid-point. Here, Yeon (who began living apart from her husband after their baby's death) meets her mother-in-law in a coffee shop. At first, her mother-in-law appears to console Yeon, but quickly begins hounding her about when she plans to begin divorce proceedings. She then berates Yeon by blaming her for her grandchild's death. The older woman causes a scene by throwing a glass of water in Yeon's face and telling her that she should be ashamed for bringing bad luck on her son (the head of the family). The real horror of the film is in its depiction of vulnerability. Lee shows how females are blamed for or punished as the result of a family breakdown. Examples include the mother of the two children who at the start of the movie is seen with her children just before she kills them out of desperation brought on by poverty. Another example is the woman who drops her own and Yeon's baby off a high-rise balcony (apparently due to post-natal depression). And then there is the little girl who is killed accidentally by her older brother (the younger Jeong-weon) during a botched murder/suicide pact aimed at killing their abusive father. These horrors expose the fragility of women within the culture, and through them Lee is asking her audience to: '*contemplate gender within a patriarchal Confucianist culture*' (personal interview).

To date, Lee has yet to make a follow-up feature film. While male directors also face pressure to produce box office hits,

women writers-directors are rarely offered a second chance after producing a box office failure. Lee, nevertheless, stated that this was a particularly '*difficult reality*' and one that exposed the '*gender-biased environment*' that '*continues to hold back women filmmakers today*' (personal interview).

### **The Naked Kitchen: Love, Morality and Tradition?**

Ji-young Hong was born in 1971 and graduated from KAFA in 1999, going on to receive a Master's degree in philosophy at Yonsei University. She made her debut as a writer-director with *The Naked Kitchen* (2009, aka *Kitchen*). Hong's work has a reputation for offering real, albeit alternative, worlds for female audiences and *Kitchen* does not stray from this path. The film is a light-hearted commentary on adultery and the unpredictability of love, two issues that, are certainly carefully ignored by the mainstream in Korean culture, if not even taboo. The film presents a caricature of a married woman (Ahn Mo-rae) who becomes involved in a love triangle, which she pursues willingly and her husband condones. Hong offers her audience a liberal alternative to a conservative society's view of adultery, which between 1953 and 2015 was a crime and punishable by a jail sentence. Against this stern cultural backdrop, Hong constructs a story full of humour and optimism in which a free-spirited married couple creates a safe and pleasurable space for the wife to explore her sexual desires. The film asks the audience to consider the morality of love and whether as a people and a culture it is possible to judge and thereby impose a morality on love.

For Hong, questioning the morality about love within a culture was something that struck her intellectually while she was living in Paris. She recalls one special event in 2001 that she said changed her life, that event being a festival of 100 films focusing on the theme of infidelity, including Luis Buñuel's *Belle de Jour* (1967), Just Jaeckin's *Emmanuelle* (1974), Claude Chabrol's *Une affaire de femmes* (1988), Anthony Minghella's *The English Patient* (1996), Catherine Breillat's *Romance* (1999), and Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000). Unlike many of these films though, Hong's film is lively and light-hearted, both in terms of its presentation and content. In this way the film tries to please everyone by offering a story that opens up questions but does not go into any depth in answering them. Nevertheless, for Hong the idea of making a film is that it '*might begin to challenge conventional ways of thinking and behaving that are organised around men and masculinity in Korean society*' (personal interview).

### **A Reason to Live: Women, Violence and Forgiveness?**

Jeong-hyang Lee was born in 1964 and studied French and literature at Sogang University in Seoul before entering KAFA in 1988. After working as an assistant director for Jang-ho Lee (a leading male director) on *Declaration of Genius* in 1995, Lee made her writer-director debut with the feature film *Art Museum by the Zoo* (1998) and then re-

leased the equally successful *The Way Home* (2002). After a long break from writing and filming, Lee wrote and directed *A Reason to Live* (2011). The film starred the very popular pan-Asian actress Song Hye-gyo, who contacted Lee herself in a bid to work with a female writer-director in what has been and continues to be an industry weighted towards men. Lee has consistently been vocal about the 'handicaps' that she and other female writers-directors face in the industry. These include the fact that the small number of women interested in pursuing a film career means that there are very few role models to follow and females in the industry have often been exposed to discrimination inside and outside the industry. In this environment, it was nearly impossible for a female to be successful in the industry. In addition, the pressure to release a successful film in a period when funding was severely limited made it especially risky for female filmmakers to experiment with forms of presentation and content (Nam 1998; H. Kim 2001) and particularly with challenging cultural and gendered values and norms (Su-yeon Lee discovered this with her film *The Uninvited* in 2003).

*A Reason to Live* (2011) offers a range of viewpoints on the theme of forgiveness, which has traditional roots in religious practice and belief. The film presents two interwoven stories involving a female television producer, Da-hae, whose fiancé is killed violently by a teenage boy in a hit-and-run incident, and who then, with compassion and forgiveness, does not press for the death penalty following the teenager's conviction. Soon afterwards Da-hae is tasked with a project, commissioned by the Catholic Church, to produce a documentary that shows the inhumanity of capital punishment. Da-hae's friend's sister, Ji-min, is a teenage girl who is caught in a situation of violent abuse by her father. Perhaps because the father is a respected judge he makes it repeatedly clear in the film that his daughter has earned the beatings he metes out to her. As a result, other family members treat Ji-min in the same way, blaming her for everything that goes wrong and beating her to help her overcome her perceived shortcomings. This is the only way that her family, which is committed to Confucianism, knows how to show their love for her. Ji-min has little choice but to flee her violently abusive father and in the end abandons her family. The film expresses a message about the position of women and the difficulties that women inevitably face when they reject the practices of abuse and authority perpetrated by men. An interesting structural aspect of the movie is that perpetrator in Da-hae's story is a young man whom she does not really know, while in Ji-min's story it is a much older male, who however is someone very close to her, at the level of family. This suggests that violence and abuse occur across the culture and cannot be isolated to one incident.

Nevertheless, both female protagonists are influenced by Confucian traditions and values and are therefore encouraged to forgive the men who have caused them such deep

suffering. Lee also gives focus to the pain and suffering of family and friends who must deal with the profound emotions occasioned by the loss of a loved one. In so doing, Lee probes how these women come to realise that some people are innately evil and that forgiveness can never provide peace, and what peace can be found comes with a price; just as the role of religion in people's lives is not as a potential source of strength in times of emotional vulnerability, but rather as a system that holds women in a purgatorial existence without hope.

### **Jealousy Is My Middle Name: Masculine Emulation and Complicity**

The fourth female writer/director in our analysis, Park Chan-ok, was born in 1968 in a small farming town in southwest Korea. She studied theatre and film at Hanyang University in Seoul as a mature student after quitting her job of four years as an art teacher. Park used her degree as a stepping-stone to enter the prestigious Korean National University of Arts established in 1993, where she took her place in the first cohort of graduate students. She made her debut as a short film director with *To Be* (1996), a closing-night film and the recipient of the Excellence Award at the 1st Women's Film Festival in Seoul in 1997. Her next film, *Heavy* (1998), won the Best Short Film Award at the 1999 Pusan International Film Festival, the largest festival and market in the world for Asian cinema, and a key networking location for promoting Asian films to the global film industry. A few years later, she became the assistant director to the quintessential male art-house writer-director Hong Sang-soo on his third film, *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (2000).

Park received critical acclaim as a writer-director following her first feature, *Jealousy Is My Middle Name* (2002), a film whose story is told largely through the naïve but observant eyes of a male graduate student, Weon-san (played by Park Hae-il). He works for magazine publisher-editor Han Yun-shik, who has a Casanova effect on women. Regardless, Weon-san has a good relationship with his boss, and his boss trusts him too, enjoys having him around, but nonetheless manipulates him. The story exposes the reality of infidelity through a womanising editor who has a number of affairs with young and older women, and ultimately this will include Weon-san's new girlfriend. The film reflects on the nature of everyday life, but also on how sometimes everyday life can have an impact on people in a way that changes them. The part of everyday life that is represented in this film is the ineluctable reality of men assuming control of people and situations. Most importantly, the film exposes the relationship between the two men; one is powerful, rich and sexual and the other is subordinate, poor and sexually insecure. In this way the film almost bypasses the manipulation and use of women to focus on the manipulation of complicit and even marginalised masculinity by a hegemonic male. Further, it also looks at how the manipulation and

marginalisation of Weon-san's character in the end produce a vengeance that in turn leads to the manipulation of women where there was none. What Weon-san wants and believes is to be like his boss, because this form of emulation ultimately represents a configuration of complicit practice that provides him with assurance of his place in the world.

### Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the above works attempted to show that the work of these significant female writers-directors (working within the Korean film industry as a male-privileged gender regime) is providing their growing national and regional audiences with a new way of looking at cultural tradition, gender and, most importantly, gender relations. This is not a simple task, nor is it one that is expected of Korean writers-directors, regardless of their sex. What we see here is an industry that has become one of the most commercially viable film industries in recent decades, but not by simply looking back at tradition. Instead, we see an industry that is opening up, but where, nonetheless, Kyung Hyun Kim (2004: 275) can still rightly ask: 'Where is the woman's place in Korean cinema?' This opening up of the Korean film industry began most importantly when the government ceased the practice of censorship in 1996, a policy that not only provided writers-directors with a new space to work within, but also initiated a reconfiguration of the industry as a gender regime. We have discussed and shown the circuitous path that many female writers-directors have travelled to enter the industry, not least because of the lack of apprenticeship opportunities that their male counterparts enjoy. We have presented selected works that these female writers-directors have produced and shown that their sometimes provocative, visually stunning and sometimes genre-bending work, whether successful or not so successful, always challenges gender and, most importantly, the tradition of male privilege and asks new questions. These questions emerge from the radical content of these films, which have included the horror of female desperation and poverty, women's forgiveness in a violent male culture, women and love beyond the traditional frame of marriage, and female manipulation and the emulation of the hegemonic. The answers the audience must reach for themselves are sometimes clear and sometimes obfuscated behind a sensitised view of Confucianist values and the culture's post-colonial trauma.

Nevertheless, in the context of our analysis there is evidence that traditional conceptions of gender and in particular Korean culture's conception of hegemonic masculinity are beginning to be challenged. Hearn asks us as researchers of gender to explore the activity and formations of men or, in other words, the conditions that must be put in place and maintained to create and sustain a system that legitimises the privilege of men and produces a form of authority that we now call the hegemony of men. But even more important is that this authority must act as a benchmark with which all men and wom-

en align themselves and in so doing are complicit with its hegemonic principles. Here we would argue that, from our analysis, two important conditions can be seen to exist that support the premise that these female writers-directors and their works are challenging the existing hegemony of men.

The first condition is drawn from the theory of hegemony itself and relates to the activity of women within the system. The creation, maintenance and expansion of a system of male privilege as hegemonic will always require what Gramsci (1971: 12) referred to as the operation of 'intellectuals', whose function it is to ensure that people come into contact with and acquire the ethical sensibility, values and principles to accept the authority associated with the given hegemony. As introduced above, intellectuals operate across civil society and can be identified in terms of their relation to the hegemony. 'Traditional intellectuals' are those whose function is to ensure the on-going legitimacy of the given hegemonic principles. These intellectuals have traditionally been located in culturally dominant institutions such as the media, government, religion and the family. In this context, those who control the film industry are able to harness a significant socio-cultural resource capable of not just touching the masses, but also of representing a social model to which the people should aspire. In this way, film globally, and in Korea more specifically, has the authoritative and intellectual role of empowering and legitimising people's traditional sensibilities and ensuring that male privilege is seen as culturally appropriate. In contradistinction, Gramsci identified another group of intellectuals whose function it is to challenge the traditional system of ethical sensibility, values and principles. These 'organic intellectuals' emerge from the subaltern milieu of civil society and are tasked with the function of challenge. We would argue that what we are seeing in these female writers-directors is no less than the emergence of a new organic intellectual. Most importantly to this organic function is the ability to infiltrate hegemonic institutions and begin a process of re-education, in which people begin to question tradition.

Today, these female writers-directors, whether operating independently or as part of vertically integrated Korean conglomerates, are building a strong presence for themselves in the film industry. This presence will also ensure that more female writers-directors will be inspired to enter the industry and build alliances with actors and other women in the industry, as was evidenced when actress Song Hye-gyo initiated contact with Jeong-hyang Lee to ask for the main role in the latter's *A Reason to Live* (2011) because she wanted to work with a female director. Even though alliances are crucial to building/changing hegemony, each writer-director introduced above has contributed in her own particular way to expanding and opening up Korean film, and in so doing we argue that, via their works, they have begun a process of questioning. They invite audiences

to reflect upon and critique the nature of gender relationships in Korean society.

The second condition that challenges the system of men's authority is the on-going challenge to the conception of hegemonic masculinity and how it relates to men in the Korean culture. Each of the films presented showcases in very different ways, sometimes subtle and sometimes overt, representations of Korean masculinity that no longer fit with either the Confucian-based traditions or Western models of masculinity. In *The Uninvited*, the lead male character appears as emotional and withdrawn, an approach the writer-director gives to the movie itself. In *The Naked Kitchen* the husband and the wife's lover are caught in a dangerous situation in which the cultural base of Korean morality, the family, is thrown wide open. Neither of them in the end comes across as rational and in control, leaving them in a position much removed from the hegemonic expectations of the culture. In the last two films men are portrayed as projecting hegemonic characteristics, but these are then used to show the dysfunctionality of men when they assume and act on these characteristics. What these works begin to unravel is the taken-for-granted nature and the value of complicity with the hegemonic. In other words, audiences can begin to imagine complicity with these representations of masculinity as problematic, dysfunctional or plain evil.

Today the evidence is that the reconfiguration of masculinity in Korea, as well as in most of northern Asia, is gaining significant momentum. However, the direction of this reconfiguration is not clear, as we can see in other forms of popular Korean culture, such as the K-Pop phenomenon, with its softened forms of masculinities, and, in contrast, also in the attempts to overcome the post-colonial political trauma which led to the emasculation thesis put forward by Kyung Hyun Kim (2004) that argues Korean masculinity in early post-war films was portrayed as anxiety-ridden and weak; a position that today he argues is being re-imagined in film and is being recreated by male writers-directors with a more dominant presence. The work of female writers-directors is located somewhere within this tension. However, as organic intellectuals who challenge the notions of a hegemonic masculinity, they show through their work that while tradition and expectation are truly fluid, for the challenge to continue women must populate a range of different positions within the industry, such as producers and financiers, in order to ensure the longevity of their work.

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**Notes**

**1** According to David Howarth (2004: 266), this term is used to express the various conditions that give rise to social realities; and, as Ernesto Laclau (in Bowman 1999: 99) pointed out, it also exposes the logic of their emergence.

**2** In *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity*, Howson (2006) introduces the term hegemonic principals, whose objective is twofold. First, these principals define and describe an aspect of hegemony by setting out the content or, in other words, the broad demands that then determine the identifications, configurations of practices and relationships that in turn become legitimate and, ultimately, normative. Second, these principles and their content come to represent the desires, interests and values that the hegemonic is able to extend into social life, whereby the hegemony around them is controlled and expanded.

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