

The Influence of Park Chung Hee's Motion Picture Law on Korean Society

Shangqian Wu^{1, †}, Tianhui Zhang^{2, †, *}

¹ Bangor College, Central south University of Forestry and Technology, Changsha, 410004, China

² International College Beijing, China Agricultural University, Beijing, 100083, China

*Corresponding author: zhangtianhui@cau.edu.cn

†These authors contributed equally.

Abstract. The term 'Korean wave' is broadly defined as the huge achievement of South Korean cultural economy industries around the world. It represented a big milestone when South Korea's movie "Parasite" won the Oscar for Best Picture, which was the first movie from non-English speaking country to win such award in the history. While lots of Korean filmmakers have been trying to produce their own films for more than 100 years, the cinema of South Korea officially started in 1945 and have been strongly influenced by events and political forces. This paper mainly studies the content and influence of the Motion Picture Law (MPL) issued during Park Chung Hee era in the 1960s and later strict censorship and propaganda in 1970s under Park's government control. It is worth exploring why the Korean film industry can achieve such achievements, and what role the MPL played in it. The experience and lessons are worthy of reference. This paper briefly reviews the development history of Korean film from a historical perspective, introduces the legal content and the historical background, and then discusses and analyzes its influence on the positive and negative sides at that time. Looking back at the twists and turns of the Korean movie industry is also of great significance to the development of other countries.

Keywords: Park Chung Hee, Film industry, Motion Picture Law.

1. Introduction

In 2020, South Korean "Parasite" directed by distinguished director Bong Joon-ho won four awards at the 92nd Academy Awards which were Best picture, best director, best original screenplay, and best international film. President Moon Jae-in said on social media, "Parasite has impressed the world with its most Korean story. Its performance, script, editing, music, art, and acting skills have proved the power of Korean cinema to the world. "Parasite's four Oscar wins give the credit to the continuous and unremitting efforts of all Korean producers and filmmakers over the past ten decades. The administration in Korea will continue to provide an environment where filmmakers can freely use their imaginations and make movies with confidence. I am looking forward to director Bong's next film" [1]. Film development in South Korea has a history of 100 years. In recent years, it has risen rapidly, winning awards and breaking box office records, making people sit up and take notice. Nowadays, Korean films not only firmly occupy a strong position in Asia, but also begin to influence the world, trying to be one of the world's film powers.

The brilliant achievements of Korean films cannot be separated from the policies and laws stipulated by the government. The Motion Picture Law (MPL) is the first film-related law in Korea, which has a great impact on the development of Korean films. A detailed analysis of its specific impact on the Korean films is discussed in this paper in order to find out How the Korean government, through the development and implementation of film policy, Controlled and influenced the development of Korean film.

At first this intro gives brief information about the big success of the Korean Film Industry and explains a little more in order to get a better understanding of the industry. The reason why Korean films have made such achievements is not only the tireless pursuit of Korean filmmakers in film art and commercial effects but also The Korean government's policy on film development. Nevertheless, not all laws have a positive impact on the film industry and society, many of them were like double-

edged sword. Behind the flourishing Korean film industry, The Motion Picture Law (MPL) is the most crucial policy to discuss about. Therefore, this paper will give a brief review on law and other organization come with that. Then three main influences are made before further discussion where the positive and negative effects of the film policy are compared. In the end, giving a statement to summarize the results of this investigation.

2. Review of the law

In 1961, Park Chung Hee overthrew the Chang Myon regime by military means and succeeded in taking control of South Korea, beginning his 18-year rule. After he came to power, on May 20, 1961, Park Chung Hee's junta quickly established the Ministry of Public Information (MPI), which is responsible for managing the censorship process. Later, the National Film Production Center (NFPC) was established on June 22, 1961, and the Motion Picture Law (MPL) was passed on January 20, 1962.

The creation of the NFPC and the passage of the MPL had strong political implications. They are not only to boost the development of the Korean film industry but also to promote political ideas through films. Thus, the NFPC is actually the official propaganda agency in South Korea, which aims to complement the domestic film industry by producing newsreels and cultural films to showcase the resources available to the government. For example, in 1961, the NFPC produced a short cultural film titled "May 16 Revolution and Changed Society", which conveyed the vitality of Korea after the reform by depicting the rising sun, a baby, and a busy street. Finally, the film summarizes the social policies and achievements of the new government and conveys to the public the main idea that the new government can bring a better life to the Korean people [2].

In January 1962, the junta issued the first film policy through the MPL, covering censorship fees, screening licenses, producer registration, and the import, export, and screening of films. These apply to the entire Korean film industry, and failure to comply could result in heavy fines or imprisonment. The main content of MPL is the producer registration system, film import, and censorship guidelines, which included the application of anticommunist and obscenity laws. MPI controls these three aspects strictly through MPL and encouraged Korean films by combining rewards and punishments to control the domestic film market. Import license reward system derived from film import regulations in MPL was an important policy affecting the Korean film market in the 1960s. This policy was designed to encourage local film production by giving studios the opportunity and license to import high-profit foreign films. In short, MPL pushed seasoned importers to transform themselves into producers to preserve their professional status. This policy forced further consolidation between the film production and marketing departments as part of the government's efforts to consolidate the industry. This is an important development in the government's attempt to create vertical integration within the system. The producer registration system and the producer reward system slowly established their position as the core mechanism that would govern the Korean domestic film industry for the next 20 years. From then on, a "studio system" akin to a factory assembly line has emerged. This combination of production and distribution has reduced the number of studios in South Korea. Moreover, the 1963 revision of the MPL introduced stricter standards that made it more difficult for existing producers in Korea to maintain their registration status. As a result, as shown in the Table 1, the number of South Korean film companies has been decimated by mergers and exits.

Table 1. Number of Registered Film Companies as Mandated by the MPL (1961-1970) [2]

Year	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970
No.	65 merged to 16	16	21 merged to 6	10	19	26	25 merged to 12	17	19	23

In the 1970s, especially after the Yushin regime came into power in 1971, the Park Chung Hee's government tightened its control over films by issuing film policies every year. In 1972, the Ethics Committee revised and rejected 58% of the film scripts, and by 1975, 80% of the scripts needed to be revised and cut.

3. Influence

It was the time when the Motion Picture Law was established, the government's intervention in Korean cinema officially kicked off and had a great impact towards citizens' ideological value as a political propaganda.

Under the repressive military regime of Park Chung Hee, the government controlled almost every cultural industry in Korea through the Ministry of Public Information (MPI) which has a strong power on censorship. By this way it almost achieved administrative control over every aspects of the film industry in order to turn the film industry into a completely propaganda machine for military government [3]. South Korea's news department mainly focuses on two kinds of public propaganda: one is the NFPC used the direct propaganda by producing newsreels and short films; The other way is more indirect, by targeting on the private film industries' material, such as anti-communist and ideologically driven features, totally guided by MPL. In South Korea, while a handful of contemporary filmmakers continue to make films that deal with cultural patriotism and national issues, the use of "propaganda" is more subtle and politically explicit than in the past.

3.1 Under the government's strict regime of film censorship the movie type in Korea is becoming univocal and stagnant.

The Park Chung Hee government also tightened censorship of films. Films with political elements, depictions of the dark side of society, anti-ethics and social reality were banned. However, it allowed action, comedy and romantic films which had nothing to do with politics to grow in the first place. Indeed, it was a short golden age for the development of Korea film industry. But in fact, in other side it was until 1996 when the MPL became the "Film Promotion Law" since it was issued in 1962 and continued to revise nine times in the following years. This process is definitely associate with controlling over the film industry and censorship, which extremely restricted creative space for film makers and the development of Korean film industry. The Film Law has a strong military politics and autocratic color, so the film policy in the 1960s and 1970s was the product of the bureaucratic command system, which did not conform to the reality of Korean films. The government's excessive intervention and ideological control run counter to the development of the film industry [4]. The 1963 revision of the Constitution even included a clause that "censorship of films and entertainment is permitted in order to preserve public morals and social ethics", which entirely overlooked the widely known notion in democratic societies that films as a portion of the media is the same as media and can not be censored [5].

The set-up of Grand Bell Awards could be seen as a practical example of government's intervention. By setting the anti-communist film award, the security section award and the enlightenment section award to praise those film companies which promoted government's policy in order to get enormous benefits. The following consequence of reaping huge fruits for film companies was that they must meet mandatory requirements and standard to produce fixed film which in return for receiving further right to import financially beneficial foreign pictures. Under the circumstances, it is hard for Korean movies to become competitive and creative. In this way, the 1970s were a decade of continued regression for Korean films, with local production falling from 209 in 1970 to 96 in 1979. The film is completely under the control of politics, and the director has no creative autonomy. Most of the films produced are political mouthpieces. Therefore, in this period boring genre films and political propaganda films catering to the government's need were almost the mainstream in Korean theatre.

During this period, realist films were extremely rare, while apolitical genres such as action films and romances gained ground. During 1960s, a striking range of genres were produced by filmmakers throughout their careers for the purpose of meeting the greedy demands of both the public and local film companies. War films, family comedies, youth-oriented dramas, and action movies were staples of the time. However, on the 1970s where Korean cinema had come to the darkest age. Under increasingly harsh military rule, flourishing film industry that had boomed in the 1960s was essentially destroyed by the harsh censorship and constant governmental interference on the film industry. In that period of time, under the influence of powerful censorship, a large number of films focusing on emotions and Korean culture appeared in the public eye.

3.2 The Film Import Quota Regime brought about by the Producer Reward System has lowered the quality of Korean films

Film import quota systems exist in many countries and are designed to protect local films from being squeezed out of the market by imported films.

The prototype of film quota systems is the Producer Reward System, which means that if a film company wants to obtain permission to import foreign films, the company must first produce or export Korean films. The requirement to produce and export a certain number of domestic films in exchange for a license to import foreign films. It should be noted that, at that time, foreign films were often considered more profitable than domestic films [6]. Export high-quality Korean movies to earn foreign currency and use the money to produce new Korean movies. Then, the new domestic films are produced in return for licenses to import foreign films, and the money earned by foreign films can be used to continue making films [7]. But how to define “quality”, especially “high-quality”, is not an accepted standard. In 1966, the “quality-based” incentive system was replaced by a strict “quantity-based” system in which to import a foreign film, three Korean films must be made [8]. In this case, Korean film companies have to produce films as quickly as possible to obtain more import quotas. Far from the original intention of the intended virtuous circle, the quantity-based system incentive South Korean film producers to make low-quality films and then export these films to gain permission, which can allow them to import more foreign films to make high profits. Therefore, the import quota system in the later stage of implementation instead put the entire industry in a disadvantageous situation.

During the period 1980 to 1986, for example, South Korea exported only 17 movies a year, compared with an average of 80 in the 1970s. The reduction of South Korea’s film export also leads to the reduction of imported films to some extent. In the 1970s, South Korea imported 489 films, with an average of 48 per year; from 1980 to 1986, South Korea imported 232 films, with an average of 33 per year [9]. During the import quota system, South Korean companies carefully select foreign films to cater to local tastes. Because since all imported films released in Korea are carefully selected, domestic audiences consider all foreign films to be of high-quality. In addition, the overproduction of domestic films leads to low quality, which in turn makes Korean audiences prefer imported films.

In 1986, by contrast, after the import quotas were lifted, a wide variety of unselected foreign films were released in South Korea by foreign companies. This is because foreign companies think that any imported film will sell well in Korea, but that is not the case. As a result, South Korean audiences are realizing that not all foreign films are of good quality. To some extent, this has optimized the audience base of Korean movies.

3.3 Korean movies experienced a decline in the period (1970-1979), causing the development of the film industry instability

Overall, since the first film law was enacted in 1962, the Korean film industry has grown. By 1971, 100-200 films of all genres were being produced each year. In 1972, the Park Chung Hee regime issued the new Constitution, closed the political space, granted him the position of president for life with unrestrained administrative power, and established a bureaucratic dictatorship system.

The Park Chung Hee government, which focused on the development of labor-intensive industries in the 1960s, shifted its focus to heavy and chemical industries in order to upgrade the industrial structure. Along with the economic transformation, the Korean economy has entered the track of rapid growth, and the entertainment industry, including television, has also been rapidly developed. But in this situation, far from the golden age of 1960, the film fell into a dark downturn in the 1970s. More ironically, the Korean film industry is on the verge of bankruptcy as it is inversely proportional to the growth curve of the Korean economy. In the name of protecting domestic films, the Park Chung Hee administration financed the production of domestic films through an import quota system for foreign films, but the quality of domestic films declined. The increase of the entry threshold of the film industry and the film censorship system also strangled the impetus of the development of Korean film itself, making the film deviate from the track of artistic development. From 1969 to 1976, the number of Korean moviegoers dropped from 178 million to less than one third, the number of movies per capita dropped from five to six per year to 1.8, and the number of theaters nationwide also dropped from 659 to 541. At the same time, the popularity of television and the development of other entertainment industries have further aggravated the slump of Korean movies [10].

4. Discussion

According to the foregoing, Park Chung Hee's film law did great harm to the film industry. Such restrictions not only affect the profits of the Korean film industry but also affect the quality of Korean films. In contrast to movies made during the Park Chung Hee era, Korean movies have developed rapidly since the abolition of film censorship. In 2020, the Korean film *Parasite* won four awards at the Academy Awards, has made movie history in Korea and Asia. Of course, the development and progress of Korean films are also inseparable from certain government protection. Korea also retains a part of the quota system to protect domestic films. Therefore, Park Chung Hee's film law has some merits to some extent, but its disadvantages still outweigh its advantages. It has brought more harm to the Korean film industry than its protective advantages. In the context of cross-cultural communication in the world today, Korea's prudent choice of film law undoubtedly gives other countries inspiration.

The research of this paper also has some limitations. For example, it is difficult to measure the change in film quality with data, and film quality is often a subjective evaluation. For further research, a film quality evaluation system should be established to improve the comparison of relevant data, so that the conclusions will be more accurate.

5. Conclusion

Compared with the Korean film industry today, the Korean film industry under the influence of the Motion Picture Law during the Park Chung Hee era was dark. As a tool of political propaganda, the Motion Picture Law strictly limits the content of films, which makes the Korean film content gradually one-dimensional. Second, the Motion Picture Law, which aims to protect local films, has led to a decline in the quality of Korean films due to unreasonable protection policies. Eventually, the Korean film industry declined during the period 1970 to 1986. Since the abolition of censorship and the renewal of film laws, South Korea's film industry has developed rapidly and its culture has spread rapidly.

The tortuous history of the Korean film industry is worth discussing, and it is also a warning to other countries that are trying to develop their film industry. For the film industry, the government should not carry out excessive protection and control. The government must comply with the film market and audience preferences when making relevant policies. As the film market develops, the censorship system should be more flexible to prevent films from being single.

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