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Militarization of Culture during Park Chung-hee's Rule (1961–1979): Focusing on South Korean War Movies

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Abstract. The study aims to identify the characteristics of South Korean war films as a component of the militarization of culture during Park Chung-hee's rule (1961–1979). The surge in the popularity of war cinema in the 1960s stemmed from state film policies aimed at fostering the production and consumption of such films, along with heightened interest from both audiences and film companies. However, as the 1960s progressed, state intervention in the film industry increasingly influenced the production dynamics of war films, precipitating a decline in their quality and commercial success at the box office. By the 1970s, war cinema, having lost its appeal, sustained itself solely through government backing. One of the primary features of war cinema was its methods of depicting "us" and "them". From the state's standpoint, the ideologically sound portrayal of the enemy in war cinema entailed a dehumanized depiction of the communists, primarily North Korean soldiers, illustrating their brutality and aggression towards South Korean citizens. Such state's requirement, however, was paradoxical: on the one hand, the shared Korean identity theoretically allowed for the humanization of North Korean soldiers, on the other hand, their portrayal as strong adversaries committing cruel acts risked glorifying their militarized masculinity, a scenario the state sought to avoid. To reconcile this contradiction, film companies employed a strategy of their de-characterization, stripping them of individual traits and relegating to secondary roles on the periphery of the film narrative. In contrast, South Korean soldiers were portrayed as heroic figures, characterized by their individuality and robust masculinity.

Keywords: cinema, war movies, Korean War, Vietnam War

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Милитаризация культуры в период правления Пак Чонхи (1961–1979): на примере военного кинематографа Республики Корея

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Аннотация. Цель исследования — определить особенности военных фильмов Республики Корея в качестве элемента милитаризации культуры в период правления Пак Чонхи (1961–1979). Доказывается, что популярность военного кинематографа в 1960-х гг. была обусловлена как государственной кинополитикой, способствующей производству и потреблению таких фильмов, так и массовым интересом со стороны зрителей и кинокомпаний. Ко второй половине 1960-х гг. динамика производства таких фильмов стала в большей степени определяться вмешательством государства в сферу кино, что привело к снижению качества фильмов и коммерческим провалам в прокате. Став непопулярным, в 1970-е гг. военное кино существовало лишь благодаря государственной поддержке. Одной из основных особенностей военного кино были способы изображения «своих» и «чужих». С позиции государства идеологически верной репрезентацией врага в военном кинематографе был дегуманизированный образ северокорейца, коммуниста, проявляющего жестокость и насилие в отношении к южнокорейским гражданам. Данное требование государства само по себе было противоречивым: с одной стороны, принадлежность северокорейских солдат к одной, пусть и разделенной, корейской нации, делала возможным их гуманизацию, а с другой — образ сильного врага, совершающего жестокие действия, мог усилить репрезентацию его милитаризованной маскулинности, что было крайне нежелательно. Автор отмечает, что универсальным решением этого противоречия стала стратегия обезличивания северокорейских персонажей, то есть лишение их индивидуальных черт и удаление на периферию кинонарратива в качестве второстепенных персонажей-функций. В противовес такому образу врага южнокорейских солдат изображали как героев, обладающих индивидуальностью и сильной маскулинностью.

Ключевые слова: военное кино, Корейская война, Вьетнамская война

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Introduction

The rule of Park Chung-hee's (1961–1979) is often associated with the extensive modernization (Kor. 근대화, *geungdaehwa*) witnessed across various facets of South Korean society. However, this transformative process was intricately intertwined with a parallel phenomenon—*militarization* (Kor. 군대화, *gundaehwa*) of these spheres. In a chapter from the second volume of "The History of Everyday Life of the Republic of Korea", focused on the 1960s, Oh Jae-yong succinctly observes that " [the political] system of the Republic of Korea was created with the intention of using people as useful tools for economic growth and modernization. […] The power of the military and the [ideology of] militarism, which in fact were the basis for the power of the Park Chung-hee regime, were firmly entrenched at the forefront of all these processes. The 'modernization of the Fatherland' advocated by Park Chung-hee's regime […] essentially meant the militarization of the Fatherland" [1. P. 212].

One of the most insightful frameworks for understanding the interplay between these phenomena is the concept of "*militarized modernity*" advanced by Seungsook Moon. This concept encapsulates three interconnected socio-political and economic dimensions: the construction of the Korean nation as the "anti-communist body politic", the conversion of individuals into productive and docile members of the nation through methods of discipline and coercion, and the incorporation of military service into the framework of an industrializing economy [2. P. 18]. While acknowledging these attributes as pivotal, this article asserts that they were manifested in the prevailing ideology of *anti-communism* (Kor. 반공주의, *pangongjui*)[1], which, in turn, profoundly influenced the cultural landscape of the Republic of Korea. Anti-communism was also intrinsically linked with the formation of official nationalism, characterized by a pronounced militaristic inclination, thereby influencing the gender hierarchy within Korean society [5. P. 37–38].

Despite the presence of extensive research on the militarization of the economic, political, and social domains in the Republic of Korea during the authoritarian era, the examination of South Korean culture as a subject of such

[1] Scholars hold different perspectives on the nature of anti-communism, with most historians regarding it not merely as a binary ideological system, but rather as a multifaceted and often contradictory ideological construct. Lee Hana, for instance, attempts to deconstruct anti-communism into its constituent elements, highlighting ten components of anti-communist ideology [3], at the same time acknowledging that it is "a complex of heterogeneous statements, containing contradictory discourses and emotions" [Ibid. P. 204]. In contrast, other scholars, such as Yu Seung-jin, criticize this approach and assert that such a definition of anti-communism serves as an analytical, rather than a synthetic concept. Yu Seung-jin views anti-communism as "a logic that structures social practices" or, employing the terminology of Michel Foucault, as a dispositif (Kor. 장치) that reproduces power relations [4. P. 453].

militarization[2] remains relatively scant. From the author's perspective, the phenomenon of cultural militarization found its most pronounced expression in cinema, arguably the most heavily regulated sector of culture, particularly when compared to literature or music. For the authorities cinema served as a pivotal instrument that facilitated the dissemination of developmental ideology and anti-communism, while also functioning as a means for constructing a modern nation [7].

This article primarily focuses on the most conspicuous dimension of the militarization tendencies within the cinematic sphere—feature war films (*jeonjaeng yeonghwa* (Kor. 전쟁 영화) or *gunsa yeonghwa* (Kor. 군사 영화)[3]), while also addressing the impact of war-related documentaries, encompassing "cultural films"[4] and "news films"[5]. However, the article deliberately excludes the less overt aspects of the gradual militarization of society found in other film genres[6]. Our analysis of militarization is approached from three key perspectives: institutional, political, and visual, highlighting the portrayal and interaction of masculinities within these cinematic works.

[2] Despite the various approaches to militarism in contemporary scholarship, we adopt Emilio Willems' notion that militarism constitutes a "culture complex", that is, "a cluster of interrelated traits or elements deriving their meaning and function from a dominant or focal element", which in this case is war [6. P. 5]. Thus, the "militarization of culture" refers to the process of saturating culture with militaristic images and values, as well as broader dissemination of propaganda of "preparation for war".

[3] These terms reflect the prevailing terminology of the era widely used in, for example, newspaper articles, often with the inclusion of the word "spectacle" (Kor. 스펙터클). Lee Young-il, a renowned film critic of the period, utilized the term "war action cinema" (Kor. 전쟁 소재의 액션영화) to denote this genre [8. P. 368–371]. In English-language academic literature, it correlates to Jeanine Basinger's definition of "combat cinema" [9]. For a comprehensive examination of terms used by various scholars, see Chung Young-kwon's dissertation [10]. Nonetheless, it should be noted that Korean war cinema had a strong genre-mixing inclination [11] [12], which makes it hard to characterize some of these movies.

[4] "Cultural films" (*munhwa yeonghwa*, Kor. 문화 영화) are documentary (or sometimes semi-documentary) films utilized as tools for implementing cultural policies in the field of education or enlightenment. The Motion Picture Law of 1962 defines them as "films produced from documentary footage, created with the purpose of educational and cultural impact or the depiction of social customs across various fields such as society, economics, and culture" [13].

[5] "News films" (*nyuseu yeonghwa*, Kor. 뉴스 영화) are short documentaries created to report on current events, akin to newsreels. The Motion Picture Law of 1963 defines them as "films produced for the swift and accurate depiction of contemporary current events across diverse domains such as politics, economics, society, and culture" [14].

[6] For example, see the monograph "Hollywood War Machine: American Militarism and Popular Culture", which dedicates one of its chapters to this subject, covering genres such as westerns, noir, and others [15. P. 36–63].

Institutional Dimensions of Cultural Militarization under Park Chung-hee's Rule and South Korean Cinema

Unlike the previous regime of Syngman Rhee (1948–1960), Park Chung-hee, upon assuming power in 1961, initiated a *systematic* cultural policy. Cinema, in many ways, occupied a central position within this policy framework, as the government swiftly recognized its potential as a tool for enlightenment and mass mobilization[7]. The establishment of a comprehensive film policy became evident through a series of immediate measures implemented by the military regime that included the enactment of the first Motion Picture Law in the history of the Republic of Korea in 1962, alongside with the establishment of the National Film Production Center (Kor. 국립 제작소) in 1961 and the subsequent reorganization of the ROK Army Motion Center Picture Production Center (Kor. 국군 영화 제작소) within the Ministry of Defense in 1963. These film studios emerged as key producers of "cultural films" and newsreels, focusing extensively on themes related to the armed forces of the Republic of Korea, along with issues of security and war.

Before delving into the nuances of institutional control over the film industry, it is essential to contextualize this control within the broader framework of public governance. Two pivotal laws were instrumental in constructing the *anti-communist system* in South Korea: the National Security Law, enacted in 1948, and the Anti-Communist Law of 1961, imposed shortly after Park Chung-hee assumed power. Both legislations placed considerable emphasis on actions perceived to serve the interests of "anti-state organizations", primarily targeting the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The National Security Law, for instance, penalizes individuals deemed as "members of an anti-state organization" and those instructed by such organizations to incite or promote crimes committed in its "voluntary support" [17]. Similarly, the fourth article of the Anti-Communist Law delineated extended provisions aimed at combating communist influences[8].

[7] Immediately following Park Chung-hee's rise to power, numerous "cultural films" were produced to justify the coup itself and propagate policies pursued by the military regime, for instance, *Collection of Public Promises of the Revolution* (Kor. 혁명공약종합판), *Our Army* (Kor. 우리 국군), *This Shouldn't Happen Again* (Kor. 다시는 이래서는 안 되겠다), *To Build a New Country* (Kor. 새나라 건설을 위하여), *90 Days of Revolution* (Kor. 혁명 90일), and others [16].

[8] Paragraph 4 of this law encompasses several provisions related to that: 1) Individuals who praise, encourage, or sympathize with the activities of an anti-state organization or its members, or who otherwise provide support to an anti-state organization, shall be subject to imprisonment for a period of up to 7 years. The same penalty applies to those who establish such an organization or join it with the intent of engaging in such activities. 2) An individual involved in producing, importing, copying, storing, transporting, distributing, selling, or acquiring documents, drawings, etc., with the intent of committing the acts specified in the preceding paragraph, is likewise liable to face the aforementioned penalties [18].

The inherent vagueness of the legal points outlined in the National Security Law and the Anti-Communist Law provided the state with broad interpretative latitude, allowing for their application across various facets of public life, including the cultural domain. Consequently, these laws established the foundation for ideological control within the domain of cinema. It is noteworthy that the Motion Picture Law included specific censorship clauses[9], but the National Security Law and the Anti-Communist Law undoubtedly assumed a more foundational role in relation to it.

The censorship of war cinema, owing to its profound significance for state ideology, underwent far stricter scrutiny compared to "ordinary" films such as family melodramas. This process often involved participation from multiple agencies, including the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) and the Ministry of Defense, alongside the Ministry of Culture, which bore formal responsibility for such matters. One of the earliest instances of KCIA involvement in scrutinizing "problematic scenes" in a film dates back to September 1961 [19. P. 45]. However, censorship efforts remained relatively discreet until a certain point—notably, even in the 1962 Motion Picture Law, the term "censorship" (Kor. 검열) was absent, with only "discussion/examination" (Kor. 심의) mandated for films. In general, censorship was not a prominent subject of public discourse during this period, marked by an environment in which film companies enjoyed a certain degree of freedom of expression. However, the situation underwent a significant shift in 1965 following a major scandal involving Lee Man-hee's war film *Seven Female POWs* (Kor. 7인의 여포로).

The film's plot, revolving around a North Korean soldier who saves captive South Korean female soldiers from abuse by the Chinese troops and escapes to the South with them, initially successfully passed through the censorship process, receiving permission for screening [4. P. 474–475]. However, the film, already completed, soon drew the attention of KCIA that charged the director with violating the Anti-Communist Law (paragraph 4 mentioned above) on several counts: sentimental nationalism, depicting the South Korean army as weak, praising North Korean soldiers, and exaggerating the hardships endured by *yanggongju*[10] [20]. Lee Man-hee was imprisoned

[9] For example, according to this law, a film was prohibited from screening under various circumstances, such as when it "was deemed to have violated the Constitution of the Republic of Korea or undermined the national prestige of the country" (paragraph 1), when it "was recognized that international friendship could be jeopardized by disrespecting the customs or national sentiments of 'free friendly countries'" (paragraph 3), or when "there was a risk [that the movie can] incite criminal acts by justifying or glorifying them, or by detailing the method of their commission" (paragraph 10), etc. [13]

[10] *Yangongju* (Kor. 양공주, literally "Western Princess") is a derogatory term used to refer to female prostitutes whose clients were primarily American soldiers stationed in the Republic of Korea after the Korean War.

for several months and subsequently found guilty, although his sentence was suspended. The film underwent significant re-editing and was released under a different title, *Returned Female Soldiers* (Kor. 돌아온 여군)[11].

In addition to symbolically affirming the state's authority over censorship, the case of *Seven Female POWs* clearly underscored the hierarchy of laws within the anti-communist system as Lee Man-hee was accused of violating the more "fundamental" Anti-Communist Law, rather than the censorship clauses stipulated in the Motion Picture Law. The magnitude of the scandal surrounding this film had significant implications for the further trajectory of cinema in the Republic of Korea. It sent a clear signal to all film companies, prompting them to exercise greater caution when tackling sensitive topics or avoiding them altogether [22. P. 94], which particularly pertained to the theme of the Korean War.

The government's film policy was not limited to censorship. Starting from the first Motion Picture Law, it was based on, on the one hand, regulation of the number of film companies through their mandatory registration, and on the other hand, restriction of the importation of foreign films via a quota system exclusively managed by the state. With the enactment of a revised version of the Motion Picture Law in 1966, the government intensified its protectionist film policy by further restricting the import of foreign films and imposing limitations on their screening time, along with legally mandating the exhibition of more domestically produced films [23]. Furthermore, under the revised legislation, censorship measures intensified, now encompassing both the script and the finished film. Additionally, the foreign film import system became linked to domestic film production, requiring film companies to produce a specific number of Korean films to qualify for foreign film import quotas.

However, this policy yielded unintended consequences: instead of bolstering the local film market, it distorted it, compelling film companies to churn out a higher quantity of low-quality films in pursuit of quotas for importing foreign films that were more popular among audiences and offered greater profitability compared to Korean productions[12] [24. P. 208–216]. Under the pretext of addressing this situation, in the 1970s the government introduced a production quota system, which not only limited the annual volume of domestically produced films but also required film companies

[11] Both films have not survived, but a comparative analysis of their scripts (including censorship edits) was carried out by Kim Jimi [21. P. 542–546].

[12] During this period, foreign war films, predominantly imported from the US and European countries, also enjoyed considerably higher popularity compared to domestically produced war movies. Notable examples of high-grossing war films imported to South Korea in the 1960s include *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *The Devil's Brigade*, *Von Ryan's Express* and *In Harm's Way*.

to obtain a quota to create any movie—while also promoting the creation of works that prioritized "national security" [Ibid. P. 252–253]. In addition to bolstering censorship measures in practice, a new Motion Picture Law enacted in 1973 imposed stricter criteria for establishing film studios, requiring each of them to obtain a special operating permit from the Ministry of Culture [25].

Alongside that, the state sought to strengthen financial incentives for the creation of ideologically correct anti-communist films. In 1966, as part of the Grand Bell Awards, the government introduced prizes for the best anti-communist film and the best script for an anti-communist movie. Winning these awards granted the recipients the right to receive an additional quota for the import of foreign films. A substantial portion of such *usu yonghwa* ("outstanding, excellent films") were related to Korean War. However, it is noteworthy that many of anti-communist films, which served as a means to obtain additional import quotas, were of subpar quality and flopped at the box office.

The state also embarked on promoting the consumption of anti-communist cinema. Among the most significant initiatives since the early 1960s was the establishment of the "system of mandatory screening of 'cultural films'". This system mandated that before viewing any film in movie theaters, audiences were required to watch one of the designated "cultural films", which often included short films addressing military themes. While elements of this system existed earlier, the adoption of the Motion Pictures Law in 1962 formalized its implementation across all movie theaters in the country (paragraph 11) [13]. Furthermore, the revised version of this law in 1963 introduced mandatory screenings of newsreels alongside "cultural films" (paragraph 11) [14]. Moreover, mandatory screenings of war films and productions from the ROK Army Motion Center Picture Production Center were organized for men undergoing compulsory military service, as well as for students and schoolchildren[13]. With the increasing prevalence of television, certain feature and documentary war films were also shown on TV, including during prime-time slots [28. P. 191–193], contributing to their widespread accessibility and exposure to the public.

[13] As Chung Sung-il points out, films released by the state-owned Korea Cinema Promotion Company in the 1970s were utilized as part of anti-communist education through group screenings in educational institutions [23]—he specifically mentions the mandatory screening of the war film *Testimony* (1973) in schools [24]. It is worth noting that a substantial number of war films were deemed suitable for schoolchildren and had an appropriate age rating (국민학생 이상), which can also be viewed as a means of promoting the consumption of such movies.

From Korean War to War in Vietnam: Political Dynamics of Representing War on Screen

In her examination of commemorative practices surrounding the Korean War during the 1980s and 1990s, Sheila Miyoshi Jager observes that "in South Korea, official memory about the war has always been constituted within a discourse of national self-definition aimed to promote the legitimacy of the State" [29. P. 118]. The narrative of the Korean War indeed served as a pivotal component in supporting the legitimacy of Park Chung-hee's regime, which necessitated not only rigorous ideological scrutiny of war cinema, but also engendered the promotion of war imagery that aligned with the established narrative.

South Korean cinema began a comprehensive exploration of war themes following the 1961 military *coup d'etat*, a transition primarily attributed to political imperatives, as highlighted by Kim Kwon-ho [30. P. 90]. The institutional mechanisms of regulating the film industry, as discussed above, facilitated effective control over cinematic content, but even when governmental control was relatively tenuous, particularly in the early days of the military junta, authorities could readily impose bans on movies deemed subversive[14]. On the other hand, political factors were coupled with market conditions: as at the beginning of the 1960s, the Korean War was still vivid in the memories of most Koreans that directly witnessed it, which underpinned a mounted interest in its cinematic portrayals, particularly in the format of large-scale war films. Consequently, the convergence of governmental and audience interest in this subject matter inevitably prompted film companies to cater to such demand, making it only a matter of time before such productions emerged.

Kim Ki-duk's *Five Marines* (Kor. 5인의 해병), a relatively low-budget war film, released in 1961, stands as a seminal work that showcased the commercial viability of a burgeoning genre. According to Shim Aegyong, the success of *Five Marines* showed the potential for material support from the government and military, including access to explosives, weapons, ammunition, and soldiers as extras[15], and this significantly fueled renewed

[14] From this perspective, it is highly symptomatic that one of the first films banned from screening shortly after the military seized power was Yu Hyun-mok's *Stray Bullet* (Kor. 오발탄) that not only openly depicted the prevailing poverty in post-war Republic of Korea but also portrayed Korean War veterans as lost and traumatized individuals, markedly different from conventional hero depictions.

[15] However, it is worth noting that a similar situation was typical for feature war films even before the period discussed. For instance, the 1955 film *Piagol* (Kor. 피아골) received assistance from the North Jeolla Province Police Department and the Ministry of Internal Affairs [31. P. 72]. Nevertheless, during that period, the scale of such support was considerably smaller compared to the 1960s.

interest in the war movie genre among film companies [12. P. 185]. Subsequently, in the following years, several war films, actively backed by the Ministry of Defense, entered the cinematic landscape. Among these, two particularly influential and popular productions that became box office hits, each mobilizing an impressive number of viewers, were Lee Man-hee's *The Marines Who Never Returned* (Kor. 돌아오지 않는 해병, 1963) and Shin Sang-ok's *Red Muffler* (Kor. 빨간 마후라, 1964). These films not only spurred a series of movies clearly drawing inspiration from them, but, most importantly, their financial success paved the way for a notable array of second-tier productions, including *The Men of YMS 504* (Kor. YMS 504의 수병, Lee Man-hee, 1964), *Angry Eagle* (Kor. 성난 독수리, Kim Ki, 1965), *8240 K.L.O* (Chung Jin-woo, 1966), *Incheon Landing Operation* (Kor. 인천 상륙작전, Cho Geun-ha, 1965), *Blood-soaked Mountain Kuwol* (Kor. 피어린 구월산, Choi Moo-ryong, 1965).

The burgeoning prominence of war cinema in the early 1960s had two important implications. Firstly, while it was private film companies that spearheaded the production of feature war films, *the creation of large-scale war epics was de facto possible only with substantial government backing*, inevitably entailing additional ideological constraints on directors[16]. Secondly, *collaboration with the state proved mutually beneficial*: government support facilitated greater formal innovations and enabled the exploration of unique settings, which distinguished these films not only from their 1950s predecessors [33. P. 335] but also from other popular releases of the early 1960s. A hallmark of war films was their visual spectacle, often lauded in contemporary press: in this context, it is particularly noteworthy to highlight the meticulously directed large-scale battle sequences depicted in *The Marines Who Never Returned*, the innovative aerial cinematography and the use of color film in *Red Muffler*, and "a bona-fide depiction of naval warfare" [11. P. 30] in *The Men of YMS 504*. The convergence of ideological messaging and captivating cinematic spectacle in these films is eloquently articulated in one of the newspaper articles of that time: "such films help in spreading the ideas of victory over communism (Kor. 승공) and anti-communism among the nation and contribute to a deeper understanding of the [importance] of the army. For this reason, military authorities often provide them with significant support, which is why these films achieve such results" [34].

The subsequent trajectory of South Korean war cinema vividly illustrates the pronounced influence of the state. In late 1964, the Republic of Korea declared its involvement in the Vietnam War, with the dispatch of the first

[16] In the first half of the 1960s such support appeared to rely on informal arrangements, however, in 1965, the Ministry of Defense adopted the "Military-Related Film Production Support Regulations" that mandated that films receiving such support must "promote fighting spirit", "foster the advancement of military culture" etc. [32]

combat units of South Korean soldiers to Vietnam in 1965. The nation's military engagement became subject to active coverage through newsreels and "cultural films", predominantly produced by state-run film studios[17]. Feature films made by private studios also emerged, benefiting from comprehensive state support, which underscored the explicit political importance assigned to these productions. For example, as evidenced during the pre-production phase of the first South Korean feature film on the Vietnam War, *Operation Tiger* (Kor. 맹호작전), the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Korea sought assistance from the US Ambassador, and this request was justified by asserting that "the psychological impact of a film of this nature will be beneficial in preparing the public for the dispatch of troops to Vietnam" [19. P. 281].

However, in spite of the extensive documentary coverage, the Vietnam War remained an unpopular topic within South Korean society, largely perceived as distant and irrelevant, eventually resulting in the emergence of the "forgotten war" phenomenon. Furthermore, the number of feature films touching upon it was dramatically smaller compared to those focusing on the Korean War. According to statistics provided by Kim Kwon-ho, only seven such films were produced during the 1960s–70s period [30. P. 91–94], although attempts to create them were made by such famous and recognized directors as Lee Man-hee[18]. With the exception of a few early films (*Operation Tiger*), these films failed to resonate with audiences and got lukewarm reception.

Despite its significant impact on the militarization of daily life in the Republic of Korea [2. P. 26], the artistic influence of the Vietnam War on cinema, including documentary filmmaking, remained marginal. As Park Seong-yeon demonstrates, the majority of patterns of Vietnam War cinema imagery derives from Korean War films and military footage, which has been repeatedly emphasized through both formal and narrative techniques [28. P. 200–215]. Furthermore, the documentary boom surrounding the Vietnam War proved to be relatively short-lived, dwindling notably by 1968, with a sharp decline in film production on the subject[19]. Subsequently, the Korean War reemerged as the dominant content of the programs.

[17] Notable among these productions were the newsreels from the National Film Production Center, including *News from Vietnam* (Kor. 월남 소식) as part of the *Korean News* (Kor. 대한 뉴스) releases, alongside various *munhwa yeonghwa* dedicated to the Vietnam War. ROK Army Motion Center Picture Production Center contributed its own series of newsreels, such as *Vietnamese Front* (Kor. 월남전선, 1966–1975), *National Defense News* (Kor. 국방 뉴스, 1966 — present) and *Flag Bearers of Korea* (Kor. 배달의 기수, 1970–1989). Additionally, it also produced various *munhwa yeonghwa*.

[18] Lee Man-hee made several films about the Vietnam War, including *Heat and Cold* (Kor. 냉과열, 1966), *A Spotted Man* (Kor. 얼룩 무늬의 사나이, 1967) and *The Goboi Bridge* (Kor. 고보이강의 다리, 1972), a rare case of a feature film shot at the ROK Army Motion Center Picture Production Center.

[19] As noted by Park Sun-young, several factors contributed to this shift, such as evolving US stances on the war and heightened international criticism of American military actions, as well as internal

Vietnam War films failed to fill the gap left in the supply of combat films that began widening in the latter half of the 1960s, as indicated by statistics compiled by Kim Kwon-ho [30. P. 91–94] and Jo Jun-hyeong [33. P. 345]. Chung Young-kwon observes that by the end of the decade war movies began to lose their genre specificity: with the exception of *A Glorious Operation* (Kor. 결사대작전, 1969), most of them resembled "ordinary" anti-communist films, lacking elements of "military action" and minimizing the portrayal of actual military operations [10. P. 186–187]. The genre crisis was further underscored by several commercially unviable attempts to produce sequels or remakes explicitly referencing films that catalyzed the initial wave of war movies in South Korea, as seen in *Special Marine Corps of No Return* (Kor. 특공대와 돌아오지 않는 해병, 1970), *The Last Flight to Pyongyang* (Kor. 평양폭격대, 1971), and *The Man in Red Scarf* (Kor. 빨간 마후라의 사나이, 1972).

With the implementation of the politically repressive Yusin system in 1972 and the subsequent tightening of film policies, the number of private film studios decreased by nearly half [24. P. 251]. In response to this situation, the state endeavored to reorganize war film production by establishing the state-owned Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation (KMPPC) (Kor. 영화 진흥공사). Under its auspices, several large-scale feature films about the Korean War were produced: Im Kwon-taek's *Testimony* (Kor. 증언, 1973) and *I Won't Cry* (Kor. 울지 않으리, 1974) and Lee Man-hee's *The Wild Flowers in the Battle Field* (Kor. 들국화는 피었는데, 1974). The underlying motivation behind these productions was evidently political, as they were supposed to "promote the implementation of Yusin's ideas in life" [Ibid. P. 227]. Despite receiving substantial financial backing from the state for that era, all of these films, with the possible exception of *Testimony*, fared poorly at the box office [Ibid. P. 229]. Subsequently, private companies' efforts to produce large-scale war films in the second half of the 1970s proved futile[20].

Concurrently, political transformations in the country inevitably influenced the tone of the militarized cinema of the 1970s. "Cultural films" began to put

factors such as intensified censorship and ideological controls. The advent of television also played a role, rendering the production of Vietnam War films economically unfeasible, compounded by personnel issues [32. P. 70–73].

[20] The majority of late 1970s war films blended elements of the "spy film" genre, with war cinema, setting their action against the backdrop of the Korean War, as exemplified in Sul Tae-ho's movies such as *Wonsan Secret Operation* (Kor. 원산공작, 1976), *Mission of Canon-Chungjin* (Kor. 캐논청진공작, 1977), and *The Third Mission* (Kor. 제3공작, 1978). A noteworthy exception to this pattern is Im Kwon-taek's large-scale war movie *Does the Nak-Dong River Flow?* (Kor. 낙동강은 흐르는가, 1976), which was acclaimed for its realistic and well-directed battle scenes upon its release [36]. However, despite substantial support and oversight from the Ministry of Defense, the movie faced backlash from the government and was suspended from screening shortly after its premiere [37. P. 428], and this setback contributed to its inability to attract significant audiences.

more emphasis on national security amidst the backdrop of tensions with North Korea. In general, *munhwa yonghwa* of that era predominantly revolved around narratives that "remind of the horrors of the Korean War, promote overcoming national crises, or depict the current state of inter-Korean confrontation and the defense capabilities of the Republic of Korea" [38]. Among the scant few feature films that managed to capture audience attention, such as *Testimony* or, to a lesser extent, Choi Ha-won's *Student Volunteer Army* (Kor. 학도의용군, 1977), North Koreans were unequivocally portrayed as "vicious and cruel creatures" [39. P. 29]. Kim Myung-shin encapsulates the prevailing sentiment of these films in the following way: "war is a struggle wherein there is an obvious enemy, and the primary emotion [experienced during war] is the feeling of hostility towards them" [Ibidem].

Nonetheless, the 1970s clearly demonstrated a noticeable decline in audience interest in war films. This shift was driven by structural factors: changes in the primary cinema audience demographic towards the younger generation ("*Hangeul* generation"), who had not directly experienced the Korean War and held less interest in war-themed cinema, the proliferation of television and viewer fatigue from the genre uniformity of such films [8. P. 368]. Additionally, one of the primary reasons was the diminished quality of war films itself, resulting from ineffective management of the KMPPC [40], extreme ideologization of such films [41], stringent censorship measures and heightened supervision over film production, which peaked in the latter half of the 1970s when the Committee for Compiling Military History of the Ministry of Defense imposed mandatory scrutiny over all war films to ensure their "compliance with historical facts" [42].

Fundamentally, it was the political rationale that guided the government's support and promotion of war cinema throughout Park Chung-hee's rule, exerting significant influence over the dynamics of film production. Initially, during the early stages of the military regime, when it needed to establish its legitimacy, this support intersected with widespread public interest in Korean War films infused with spectacle elements. However, as state intervention in the film industry grew, market forces receded, foregrounding the political dimensions of such films. One of the most important practical objectives of this state film policy was the militarization of South Korean male identity through the portrayal of ROK army soldiers, which was combined with intensified measures to address the persistent issue of draft evasion — culminating, notably, in the 1970s [2. P. 52].

The Image of the Enemy and the Dilemma of Militarized Masculinity and Violence in South Korean War Films

Despite the quantitative and qualitative differences between South Korean war films of the 1960s and 1970s, they shared a common feature: the gallery of images they presented to the viewer—specifically, representations of "us"

(South Korean soldiers) and "them" (North Korean soldiers). The dichotomy between "us" and "them" constituted a foundational aspect of anti-communism as a "strategy of exclusion" [3. P. 202], and for war cinema, which inevitably reflected the matrix of state ideology, the portrayal of communist enemies held utmost importance. Enemies had to be depicted as ruthless, negative characters posing an existential threat that must be eradicated. For those purposes South Korean war films frequently employed the genre's common strategy of depicting them causing widespread destruction and inflicting gratuitous, inhumane violence against defenseless civilians, a theme particularly vividly depicted in war films of the 1970s.

However, straightforward adherence to these conventions encountered several contradictions. Firstly, as Kim Cheongan points out, the *portrayal of enemies committing cruel acts may inadvertently highlight their masculinity* [43. P. 98], thus undermining the intended depiction of an adversary whose masculinity is weaker. Simultaneously, according to the general logic of war cinema, enemies should be portrayed as formidable adversaries, making victory over them difficult, as "an image of a powerful enemy is essential to legitimizing war and its horrific consequences" [15. P. 37]. Second, even in the midst of ideological confrontation North and South Koreans belonged to one, albeit divided, nation, which inherently allowed for the *potential humanization and complexity of the enemy's character*—a notion already present in several war films from the 1950s, most conspicuous example of which was the 1955 movie *Piagol* [44. P. 148–160]. In this context, *Seven Female POWs* can be seen as one of the most notable attempts to humanize the North Korean soldier, showing that for him a shared sense of national identity and justice can supersede ideological differences.

The universal solution to these contradictions was the strategy of *de-characterization* of enemies that effectively stripped them of any nuanced individual traits and relegated to the periphery of the film narrative, highlighting their utilitarian function, often as "objects" to be killed. While this strategy effectively stripped away most of the "human" character traits that might evoke empathy among the audience, it also precluded any dialogue aimed at elucidating internal motives of these characters, thereby sparing films from the necessity of delving into the ideology of communism itself, which could also be considered dangerous [31. P. 74]. Thus, "a superficial portrayal of anti-communists [that] leads to the opposite effect of reducing the persuasiveness of [such films]" [41] was often a pragmatic choice made by directors and film companies dictated by the stringent requirements of the state.

At the same time, such *de-characterization* dispersed the depiction of violence throughout the film, rather than confining it to specific negative characters, as exemplified in, for example, faceless hordes of enemies in *The*

Marines Who Never Returned. The pinnacle of this representation strategy was an image of an enemy tank, a recurring motif in large-scale war films of the 1970s (*Testimony*, *The Wild Flowers in the Battle Field*, *Does the Nak-Dong River Flow?*)[21] that depicted the adversary as a formidable force capable of destruction and violence, while completely avoiding the problem of representing the enemy as a human being, as a man that can possess masculinity.

Although the depiction of faceless and impersonal enemies is a common trope in war movies, evident in WW2 combat film [9. P. 60–62], the South Korean context presented slightly different ideological underpinnings for such choice due to the unique circumstances of a divided nation. Furthermore, Hollywood WW2 combat movies of the 1940s not only included imagery that deviated from that trope, but they also demonstrated that the portrayal of enemies could become more nuanced as the genre evolved. For example, US-produced Korean War movies of the 1950s often treat enemies "with more respect" and depict them as having an ideology that "must be discussed and rejected" [Ibid. P. 177], as epitomized, for instance, in *Steel Helmet* (1951) [Ibid. P. 182]—a notion unimaginable in South Korean war cinema during Park Chung-hee's rule.

The reasons why aspects of "humanization" and "characterization" posed challenges for the authorities within the realm of anticommunist cinema in general need further explanation. As demonstrated by Yu Seung-jin, characterization itself wasn't always problematic [4. P. 469–472]. Yu Seung-jin references another Korean War drama film, *North and South* by Kim Ki-duk (Kor. 남과 북, 1965), which rather empathetically portrays North Korean lieutenant Jang Il-gu as he defects to the South to find his beloved wife. Despite being released amidst the unfolding scandal surrounding *Seven Female POWs*, *North and South* not only evaded attention from intelligence services but also received significant audience acclaim. Yu Seung-jin interprets this occurrence as indicative of the fact that the censorship process was not always rigorously governed by strict legal criteria or internally consistent logic; rather, it was subject to various external influences capable of shaping a new paradigm of censorship [Ibid. P. 472]. This newly formed paradigm indeed materialized only following the *Seven Female POWs* scandal.

Nevertheless, from the author's perspective, the rationale behind such censorship decisions can become clearer when analyzing these films through

[21] *The Wild Flowers in the Battle Field* is particularly well-known for using the image of the tank. Best put by Jo Jun-hyeong, "the most impressive part of this movie is the [image] of moving tanks that instantly turn buildings, fields, and even people into dust. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the main character at the beginning part of this movie is a tank" [33. P. 366].

the lens of a key aspect of war-related cinema: *the portrayal of militarized masculinity*[22]. *North and South* encountered minimal censorship issues precisely because the portrayal of militarized masculinity of the North Korean soldier was significantly subdued. Jang Il-gu surrenders and does not pose a threat, and his depiction as an individual that has emotions and feelings, rather than one steeped in ideology, shown in his willingness to disclose the whereabouts of North Korean troops in exchange for a meeting with his lover, further mitigates his militarized masculinity that he possessed as a North Korean soldier.

From this perspective, *Seven Female POWs* garnered significant attention from the authorities precisely because it depicted a North Korean male soldier *rescuing* South Korean female soldiers by *confronting* Chinese soldiers, thereby openly displaying his militarized masculinity through an *act of violence* aimed at *protecting* these women. This is further underscored by the fact that for the KCIA one of the most problematic scenes in this film was the one where South Korean female soldiers salute the North Korean soldier for saving them, thereby affirming the military hierarchy. Furthermore, the court's indictment directly stated that the film "manipulatively portrays the North Korean as a *brave soldier* who prioritizes love for the nation over communism" [21. P. 542].

As highlighted by Lee Hana, any portrayal of North Koreans as the main characters in anti-communist cinema could be problematic [31. P. 78–79]. However, while anti-communist dramas set against the backdrop of the Korean War allowed for relatively complex depictions of North Koreans until the late 1960s, war cinema focusing primarily on North Korean and South Korean *soldiers* exhibited stricter ideological control. The prohibition of *any* films featuring North Korean protagonists indeed depended on the zeal of censors, but the representation of militarized masculinity was one of the pivotal factors influencing such decisions. Notably, among the censorship documents concerning *North and South*, we can find a note from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which contended that the film portrayed a North Korean soldier as "courageous and brave" and effectively "heroized the communists" by featuring a North Korean major as the central character, which can lead the "superficial public" to form a positive impression of the DPRK army [4. P. 476]. Nevertheless, the film's continued screening suggests that this viewpoint was not shared among other censorship bodies.

[22] Militarized masculinity refers to attributes such as physical strength, aggression, bravery, aptitude for violence, self-sacrifice, and other traits associated with warfare and military environments, where "direct connections are formed between hegemonic masculinities and male bodies" [45].

At the core of all war films, whether explicitly or implicitly, was the underlying premise of comparing the militarized masculinity of North Korean and South Korean soldiers, with the latter's masculinity consistently positioned as superior. This comparative narrative is evident in both cases mentioned: the accusations against *Seven Female POWs* not only revolved around "glorifying the North Koreans" but also included the claim of "portraying the South Korean army as weak" [20]. Similarly, the critique of *North and South* highlighted that "compared to the major of the DPRK army, the captain of the South Korean army shows signs of weakness" [4. P. 476]. In the case of the most problematic war film from the 1970s, *Does the Nak-Dong River Flow?*, authorities specifically demanded to fix the scenes where "the enemy was portrayed as eye-catching and strong, and South Korean soldiers as weak and dull" [37. P. 428]. Within this framework, most war films allowed only sporadic displays of sympathy towards an enemy whose militarized masculinity was deliberately downplayed. Instances of that include the portrayal of a young and frightened North Korean surrendering as a POW in *The Wild Flowers in the Battle Field* or the depiction of a young North Korean soldier shedding tears on the battlefield, haunted by memories of the atrocities committed by North Koreans, in *Testimony*.

Representations of South Korean soldiers followed, as Kim Chong-gan writes, essentially two archetypes: in the first case, the heroes already possessed militarized masculinity and exhibited it through heroic acts; in the second case, soldiers who lack such masculinity were to acquire it in the course of the combat [41. P. 98–99]. Most war films underscore the collective endeavor of fighting for the homeland, depicting the actions of various military units (marines in *The Marines Who Never Returned*, navy in *The Men of YMS 504*, air forces in *Red Muffler*), the interactions among their members serving as a perfect context for the production of militarized masculinity. On one hand, these films depict *collective heroism*, showcasing units' readiness to confront the enemy until the last breath (*Blood-soaked Mountain Kuwol*, *8240 K.L.O*, *A Glorious Operation*, etc.), on the other hand, they highlight *individual heroic acts* and self-sacrifice (*Red Muffler*, *Testimony*, *The Wild Flowers in the Battle Field*, *Does the Nak-Dong River Flow?*). These themes not only reflect the prevalent grammar of war films during that era, including Hollywood war films from the 1940s [9. P. 15–82] [10. P. 49], but also two contrasting models of heroism associated with expressions of militarized masculinity [45. P. 174].

However, despite the shared basic patterns of representing South Korean soldiers, their portrayal evolved from the more nuanced depictions prevalent in the first half of the 1960s, which allowed for occasional skepticism about the war, had more pronounced themes of humanism and was often accompanied by "emotional excess typically associated with melodrama" [46. P. 151], to the more rigid representations in the latter half of the decade. Such transformation

is particularly evident in films centered on the Vietnam War that epitomized a more distilled expression of the representational strategies outlined above: soldiers were depicted as either embodying militarized masculinity, as seen in *Sanai U.D.T.* (Kor. 사나이 유디티, 1969), or acquiring it through rigorous training and engagement in combat action, as portrayed in *Major Kang Jae-gu* (Kor. 소령 강재구, 1966) [47]. The logic of contrasting images of "us" and "them" was also more explicitly manifested in "cultural films" focused on Vietnam War where "images of exotic landscapes of Vietnam, 'beautiful' Vietnamese women who should be protected by the South Korean military, and 'small and frightened' Viet Cong, emphasize the 'strong masculinity' of South Korean soldiers, making Vietnam Other and feminizing it" [35. P. 70].

During the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, control over the depiction of South Korean soldiers became markedly stricter, as evidenced by censorship documents. For instance, in *A Glorious Operation* (1969), one of the last major war films of the late 1960s, numerous censorship edits were required, demanding the correction of "irrational" and "unsound" scenes. Authorities insisted on removal of lines expressing "negative attitudes or resentment towards the war", the addition of phrases that underscored a "clearer sense of patriotism" and "discipline" and the highlighting of soldiers' actions as driven "solely out of patriotism", with their valor exemplifying the "spirit of a brave warrior" [19. P. 479–480]. Such demands reflected the desired image of soldiers sought by the state, both on-screen and in reality.

Conclusion

To sum up, the militarization of South Korean cinema during the 1960s and 1970s was predominantly driven by extensive state intervention in the filmmaking process. Implemented through various mechanisms, this intervention ultimately disrupted the equilibrium between supply and demand in war films, with political considerations superseding economic factors. Consequently, the once-popular genre of war films experienced a decline in popularity, particularly evident from the latter half of the 1960s onwards.

Government support was essential to the emergence of war cinema as a distinct popular genre of the 1960s, but ideological constraints imposed on this genre, which grew stronger over time, limited creative opportunities to reinvent it—thus, by the late 1960s, the genre of combat cinema faced a stalemate. The state, using various instruments, artificially prolonged its lifespan because it viewed it as an important instrument for achieving its goals in the militarization of Korean society.

The primary emphasis of South Korean war cinema revolved around the portrayal of "us" and "them", with a central characteristic being the depiction

of militarized masculinity. These films consolidated a portrayal of the enemy as cruel yet impersonal, lacking full-fledged antagonist masculinity. In contrast, South Korean soldiers emerged as individualized heroes, depicted as either inherently possessing robust masculinity or acquiring it throughout the narrative progression of the film.

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