IS CINEMA CONTAGIOUS? TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE CASE OF KOREA

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Abstract

Overused and under-theorized, the term "transnational" remains crucial for any dynamic examination of problems and processes in World Cinema. It sits between local context and global context. While national and international approaches have the advantage of clear demarcations, they do not respond to the unofficial life that cinema lives transnationally. Like other bottom-up phenomena (fashion, religion, even disease), films do not obey national boundaries. In this regard the position of Korea is anomalous, for here a national policy put into effect in 1995, aims directly at transnational results. This article looks briefly at pre-1995 Korean films and then at those that have come since, in order to gauge the extent to which a national policy can promote a transnational consequence (different from mere export).

I.

The term "transnational" retains the "national" in an era that assumes that the real action has raced beyond it aiming at whatever is "global." Transnational film or literary studies enables those who care deeply about a national culture to keep their focus fixed while zooming out to a view of a wider system to which local literature contributes and from which it increasingly gains its nourishment. An intermediate, or third, term, "transnational" is most often employed in relation to small countries. One hears little of "transnational American film." Instead the adjective "global" is deemed suitable to characterize Hollywood's incalculable resources and reach, not to mention the culture it purveys. The adjective "transnational" seems to apply best to junior national cinemas that are asking, or have been asked, to play in the big leagues.

Korea is in my sights because its ascendancy has been so dramatic and recent. Still not listed as one of the forty "common national cinemas" in IMDB, it was so junior as to be effectively invisible before 1995, not appearing on the world cinema map. True, from the mid-1960s on it has averaged almost 80 films per year, yet until 1995 it had but a single auteur whose name was recognized: Im Kwon-taek. Korea's lift-off from obscurity to brash upstart on the world stage makes it a uniquely instructive, though hardly representative, case study of transnational cinema.

Tellingly, the most comprehensive essay on cinematic transnationalism was written by Mette Hjort,[1] whose books include *The Cinema of Small Nations* and *Small Nation*, *Global Cinema*.

Her essay, commissioned for an anthology entitled *World Cinema*, *Transnational Perspectives*, draws up a taxonomy of multiple "transnationalisms." South Korea inhabits the seventh of her eight categories, the one she designates "modernizing transnationalism." Hjort's is a moralizing taxonomy, there being good and bad versions of the process, just as for Andrew Sarris there were seven categories of auteurs, from top tier to worst, and for Comolli/Narboni in 1969 there were six categories of political cinema, graded a-f, according to their revolutionary potential.[2] Hjort is equally moralizing. She rightly fears that the term "transnational" is not just banal, it has been kidnapped by market strategists. And so she forthrightly divides the uses of this term into those that are unseemly, like "globalizing" and "opportunistic" transnationalism, and those that are healthy, such as "affinitive" and "milieu-building" transnationalism. The latter apply to small national cinemas that band together in mutual self-survival, such as Denmark and Scotland. South Korea doesn't figure here (though it does at times cooperate with other modest national cinemas like Thailand). Instead it falls into her category of "modernizing transnationalism," whereby a nation improves its conditions through the nurture of cultural relations beyond its borders. Officially underwritten by the State, cinema in Korea serves not just to rally national filiation at home but to be a leading edge as Korean entrepreneurs venture out to engage other societies and markets. Korean cinema, Hjort insists, has helped the nation enjoy unprecedented growth in stature not just by exporting its self-image but by fostering a progressive approach to cultural exchange, in short as a kind of business model in which the health of the system (in this case film art and industry) takes precedence over the advantage gained by any one participant in the system.

Hjort rightly points to the Jeonju Film Festival held each Spring since 2000 because it screens films from all over and because its "Digital Shorts" project has resulted in thirty mid-length movies made by masters from around the world, like Zhang Yuan, Naomi Kawase, John Akomfrah, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Harun Farocki, Pedro Costa, Idrissa Oeudraogo, James Benning, etc. More than a gesture of the cosmopolitan brotherhood and sisterhood of cinephilia, these omnibus digital films exemplify Korea's progressive entrepreneurship in transnational business affairs. Such efforts have opened up lines of finance and communication between Korea and the nations these directors hail from that can be utilized by the nation's cultural and mercantile sectors. But where Hjort applauds, I instinctively draw back, for whenever culture is "accounted for" by the ledgers of business, it loses its critical force.

Having been recognized, the transnational dimension remains latent in all approaches to Korean cinema, even those that do not focus on it. For instance a new anthology on Korean popular culture aims to identify and bring into line a century of distinct daily life practices and discourses. This apparent archeology of national roots, however, is framed by a larger mission: to learn the origins of the hazy phenomenon exported in the past dozen years as *Hallyu*, the Korean Wave.[3] If the adjective "Korean" has acquired value such that it literally inflates the price of whatever it qualifies when sold abroad (Korean handbag, Korean haircut, Korean comic book, Korean film), those who know best and care most ought to focus on – bring into focus – this amorphous phenomenon, "Korean Culture, " to determine its morphology and history.

However, this introspective inquiry will be satisfying only to a point, and satisfying mainly to those scholars content to remain within their home culture. Yet Korean studies, including Korean cinema studies, is not really centripetal; Mette Hjort is right: its growth pattern makes it coincident with, even an effect of, *Hallyu*, the wave broadcast from Korea. Everything Korean,

I'm saying, finds its value raised by its export quotient. Jung-Bong Choi insists on this in his astute introduction to a dossier of essays on Korea published in a new journal bearing the name *Transnational Cinemas*:

> *[The transnational] is an enzyme that prompts the organizational metabolism of the national. With transnational administered into the national body, the latter morphs into a semi-solid state with a higher degree of [...] elasticity. [...][Just as "transnational"] is an indicator of the chameleon-like adaptability of the national, 'Korean' must not be taken to be any obdurate insistence upon cultural distinctiveness. [...] Rather, 'Korean' signifies a transit platform located within an expanding grid of travelling cultures [...] reorganized and repackaged in response to shifting domestic and international demands.*[4]

Choi organized the first major conference concerning the expansiveness of Korean cinema, which took place in New York rather than in Seoul.[5] In the 1970s or even the 1980s, such a gathering in New York would have consisted chiefly of American scholars, with the addition of well-chosen native informants; in the cold war atmosphere it would have been undertaken in the name of "area studies," with those outside Korea anxious to learn what was needed about that culture so as to better operate in and around a country important to America's international interests. But today, to hold a Korean studies event in the US, and to do so in the name of "Transnational Korea," suggests a different conception of the object and a different aim. For *Hallyu* literalizes Franco Moretti's distinction between waves and roots in the study of cultural development.[6] The national approach examines films as arising from cultural roots planted in local soil and supplying nourishment to new branches and fruit. On the other hand, if seen laterally, that is, transnationally, literature and cinema develop through waves that wash across borders in just the way economic capital does, or diseases, or new trends in technology and ideas. The Korean Popular Culture anthology mentioned above traces roots; whereas the conference at NYU follows waves. Today's academic climate approves the latter, prizing flows and being suspicious when any given shape takes on a degree of solidity or is tied to roots. Both Korea (qualified at the NYU conference as a trans-National formation) and Cinema (qualified as cine-media) are assumed to be constantly dissolving and reforming within a deterritorealized Asian culture and an expanded sphere of media-hybridity.

The dramatic vocabulary employed by this and other movements (as well as by scholars of those movements) tends to project terminal states where all movement disappears. To return to fears of entropy that were rife when the discourse of globalization really caught fire a few decades ago, such elusive terms as "cine-media" and "trans-National formation" respond to the exponential rise in heat that is altering the state of many cultures and many media, like ice turning to water, or water turning to gas, until the containers that once kept substances intact cannot hold them any longer: they melt away or boil over or entering the atmosphere as steam. In just this way, cultures and media are said to be running together in shapeless pools that soon or eventually may merge in larger cultural waters until they reach a single sea without nameable differences, where hybridity is the norm and where, therefore, every instance carries exactly the same weight. In a hundred years, it's been suggested – or maybe in just twenty – a single subject area may exist, called simply, "Global Culture," without any qualification whatsoever: on the national side, the "trans" of *trans*national would have reached its global limit, and on the cinema side, final convergence

would have rendered all media interchangeable. We would then be concerned no longer with the cultural *field* but with cultural *fluid*.

I have projected here such an entropic final state so as to highlight the thermodynamics of globalism, including the energy it requires and the energy it gives off. Now in reality, there exist many intermediaries that transform (in the electrical sense of the term) this globalizing energy so that it can be used in specific locations. Processes of dubbing, subtitling, advertising, and criticism help high-voltage films, often from distant sources, to successfully enter various local cultures, and to do so in different ways, place to place. Famously, *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000) did poorly (and was generally reviled) in the PRC, and did just modest business in Korea and Japan, while breaking every box office record in Taiwan and Singapore.[7] In each of these national cases, distinct issues concerning language, genre, and star appeal had to be dealt with. For instance, with the main actors coming from different Chinas, and so pronouncing Mandarin in a comical chorus, the film's English subtitles served as a homogenizing linguistic base. This means that from the outset such a "transnational" Chinese film aimed to be supra-regional too, with its clear Asian appeal meant to be supplemented by North American and European audiences. American distributors who worried that its foreignness could "shock" non-Asian mass audiences (in the electrical sense), saw their risk reduced by certain transformers, including those subtitles and the critical attention to "woman warriors." In short, a film that might have appeared to be an outlier flowed into the current of mainstream cinema everywhere, encountering a very wide, if uneven reception. This is usually how the term "transnational" modifies the extremes of the national on one side and the global on the other.[8]

Now entropy occurs most visibly where extremes prevail and are not reduced through transformation, as when a piece of ice is placed in an oven or when one culture injects itself forcefully into another (the U.S. entering Korea to establish a vast military presence after WWII). When the logic of opposition favors extremists (whether ethnic nationalists or one-culture globalists) it's time to look for a "third" position, something "in between" the extremes. This is when it is time to recruit the word "transnational," not as a sign of millennial change but as a sign of the historical, and one that has a history itself. We find the word drafted into the discourses of many fields in the 1980s and then massively in the 1990s. This new focus term helped disciplines cope with discussions that had lost their shape when confronted by the turn to issues of globalization in all domains. First in the social sciences (geography, demographics, sociology) and then in the humanities (history, art history, literature), the transnational managed debates that had too quickly taken the form of nation vs. world and local vs. global. It softened this stark yet banal opposition by opening space between them, inducing circulation, adjustment, compromise and, I believe, novelty capable of extricating us from either/or situations.

As a fundamentally historical, rather than nomological discipline, cinema studies should expect to triangulate problems that often come to it in binary form. Take, for instance, the perennial interrogative, "Is film a language?" This purely theoretical question constipated the discipline in the era of semiotics, even though Christian Metz had fairly early on declared cinema a "langage" not a "langue." I think André Bazin had intuited the answer in the title of a famous essay, *The Evolution of the Language of Cinema* (1958). Evolution (i.e. history) answers the questions that theory poses. As for our field's most primary question, *What is Cinema?*, let history answer again: cinema today is that which stands between writing at one extreme and the internet at the other,

between singular expression and public network. It stands as a "third" option progressively re-defined over time. We should always look for a third term in logical debates involving culture, searching for a concept that launches historical approximations. This is what Roland Barthes did when he inserted "écriture," into the middle of Sartre's uncompromising binary, "language and style."[9] Barthes came up with écriture to give himself and French literature some breathing room. It identifies the evolution at play when writers adopt and alter the conventions of language in instances of expression that cannot quite be called personal since they belong also to a given period with its norms and expectations. *Écriture* makes visible the existence of genres and styles; it makes of literature a cultural enterprise rather than either a logical given (language) or an existential one (style).

Paul Ricoeur introduced a similar "third" to historicize (and to humanize) the structuralist binaries that Barthes' schema had, despite its culturalism, helped bring about. The title of Ricoeur's brilliant response to Claude Lévi-Strauss' *The Savage Mind* (1962), I take for my template: "Structure, Word, Event."[10] His characteristic move in this seminal essay is to interpose a term between the dyad "langue/parole" of Saussurian linguistics, for Structure is the language system and Parole is the singular event of speech; that term, "mot" (word) carries thick traces of theology and history, upending structuralism's purely logical distinctions. Every word in the dictionary, Ricoeur points out, bears in its etymology the sediment of prior uses which amount to a history of experience. History can be accounted for neither by structural rules (langue) nor by an accumulation of individual events (paroles). Words – *les mots* – carry language forward from one use to the next; in their evolution words bear tradition, heritage, and a certain amount of credit that human beings draw on for a shared future.

Those who are impatient when they hear "transnational" are looking for quick or final solutions; but in cinema studies, as in most areas of culture, such solutions are illusory. Our fundamentally historical inquiry requires the kind of third term that Barthes came up with for literature and Ricoeur for language. The transnational dimension shows every film to have access to a past and a future extending beyond the flicker of its original projection, its local moment. For the film came into existence in a force field of pressures not all of which are properly national, and it may be viewed in later times and other places; these historical extensions derive from and modify its relation to the whole of cinema. And so we should not treat a film for what it is (ontologically, as if it were a fixed object, a stack of cans containing a movie on celluloid) but instead phenomenologically, for the way it has come into being and for what it has meant in its successive appearances. For example, the first Korean blockbuster, *Shiri* (Kang Je-gyu, 1999), means something different, something more, after having been screened at the Asia Pacific Festival and then after competing for the top foreign film award of the Japanese Academy. It means far more after its distribution in more than a dozen countries following those festivals, since it has been put into the orbit of the critical discourse brought to it by Japanese and French critics, and by enthusiasts who went on talk and write about it in many languages. Transnationalism is an effect of history in just this way; it urges us to abandon the search for a film's meaning (in E.D. Hirsch's sense) and to look for its *significance*, or better, for its developing significance.[11] Significance varies with circumstances and with perspective, which are the two components of history.

II.

Korean Cinema challenges this plea for nuanced historical inquiry. For no other cinema, except perhaps that of Iran, has moved so directly from the local to the global, with scarcely an intermediate stage. There seem to be just two Korean periods, the national moment up to the mid-1990s and the global one, which has since dominated all discussion. Compare this to Taiwan or to Yugoslavia. Like most mid-size cinemas, these two developed links to regional neighbors over a couple decades, before becoming partially global. Indicatively, several of their key filmmakers studied abroad in the 1960s and 1970s (Edward Yang in the US, Emir Kusturica in Prague). Before videotape made image circulation so convenient, films and filmmakers from these places interacted with others directly at festivals. Hou Hsiao-Hsien was a genuinely Taiwanese national filmmaker in the 1970s and 1980s, until the Hong Kong festival of 1983 brought him to the attention of Asian critics in Japan and France. After the triumph of *A City of Sadness* (Hou Hsiao-hsien) at Venice in 1989 he became the most recognizable for all Asian directors, along with Zhang Yimou. Characteristically, these two assisted each other in the 1990s, proving that cinema could circumvent the iron gates firmly separating the States of Taiwan and the PRC from one another. In the new century Hou would become the first director chosen by the Busan film festival for its annual "Asian Film Academy," thereby crowning him as the region's top transnational director. Yet Busan, despite its Asian emphasis, has achieved the stature of a global festival, and Hou, despite being so rooted in Taiwan has now made films in Tokyo and Paris for the global art cinema market. My point is that, while he may be a perfect example of a global auteur, it took three decades for him to move into that position from the nation, and he did so through the intermediate zone of the region where transnationalism operates thanks to spatial contiguity.

However, in the same four decades during which Hou Hsiao-hsien gradually emerged in Asia and then across the globe, Korea seems to have leaped directly from an inward looking national institution to its outward global phase without any intermediary stage. Surely the picture is far more complicated, but Jinhee Choi outlines it neatly in black and white, or rather inner and outer.[12] Before 1995, there was a recognizable progressive film movement, but it was internal, the *minjung* movement, which was anti-commercial and in its recovery of indigenous art and opposing mass culture; after the Pusan festival begins, *daejung* becomes the operative term, a more expansive movement embracing mass culture. The *minjung* group consists of directors attached to the politicized 1980s who fought the effects of American ideology which propped up a military government. By and large rejecting the government and its relation to the industrialized West, a great many artists made a pronounced turn toward Korea's native aesthetic traditions in painting, dance, literature and music. Cinema joined this in its own way, producing a national image that had little chance of being exported… this in defiance of a miracle economy fueled by exports, for that miracle came at the expense of personal liberty, a widening income gap in the social sphere, and a loss of Korea's core cultural values.

It was after the liberalization that came about with parliamentary government that filmmakers found themselves ready, indeed primed, to open up to foreign influences and to entertain larger audiences. In the 1990s genres and styles from all over were adopted, especially from Hollywood. As had been the case with the fifth generation in China, the Korean filmmakers of the 1990s were intimately familiar with many cinema traditions, through their active participation in clubs or their time spent in film schools (including American ones in a couple cases). There need be no

contradiction here. Kang Je-gyu can be a cinephile fascinated by Michelangelo Antonioni and Jean-Luc Godard while still making blockbusters like *Shiri* and *Taegukgi: The Brotherhood of War* (2004), just as Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese are consummate cinephiles while making *The Godfather* (1972) and *The Departed* (2006). But surely something did change when the top filmmakers looked to send their work into the world market whereas many of them before, Im Kwai-Taek at their head, had aimed to foster national filiation among fellow citizens. Jinhee Choi allows little middle ground: films and filmmakers either look inward (as Im Kwon-taek's *Sopyonje* did in 1993) or target the global market as *Shiri* did just five years later. Often called the most important of Korean films (and the one with the largest Korean audience), *Sopyonje* did win an award at the Shanghai festival and later played briefly on a screen in Holland and one in Paris, but that was the extent of its initial career beyond Korea. By contrast, *Shiri* was immediately released in more than fifteen countries. It went global!

This choice between addressing one's fellow citizens and addressing an audience in the larger world is felt almost everywhere except in the so-called centers of media power, and especially Hollywood where most films simply presume comprehensive distribution. By contrast, films in small countries need to reach a larger market. Look at West Africa, or Romania or Slovenia. Korea, I would say, may stand as the clearest case with which to examine this issue. Its cultural singularity is striking; its language is spoken outside the peninsula only by émigrés; its writing script is unique. Terrible circumstances of colonization and of civil war made it "belated" in modernization, belated in developing political institutions and in catching up to modernity. Furthermore, since postwar modernity flew an American flag, many intellectuals and artists must have felt – must still feel – conflicted, given America's massive military and business presence in their midst. What Korean artist would not be troubled by the Americanization of culture in their world? And so, perhaps the most thoughtful filmmakers were content to be left undiscovered, left out of the film festivals of Europe and North America and even of Hong Kong and Taiwan. For they could think of theirs as a fully local national cinema until the mid-1990s when an all-out effort was made from government and industry to go global.

I'm reluctant to call this Renaissance a "success story," as so many scholars do. In market terms, they may be right, but might not the market be stripping Korean films of their role in contributing to the public sphere? If the first wave directors cut their teeth on the country's conflicted political past (Jang Sun-Woo's *A Petal* in 1996, Park Kwang-su's *A Single Spark* in 1995), once Korean filmmakers got a taste of festival fame, many directors largely dispensed with Korean subject matter to take up universal issues with international appeal, topics like sex and revenge. Jang's next film, *Lies* (1999), emulates Alain Robbe-Grillet in mixing soft-core eroticism with a narrative enigma that includes the production of the film as part of its plot. It played in some twenty countries, mainly at festivals, while not particularly engaging its home audience.

It may seem natural to mix marketing questions with those of subject matter, but answers to those questions are multiple. For instance, festival programmers prize unique subject matter. The Chinese fifth generation's reputation was built on cultural exotica, as Rey Chow later lamented,[13] and African filmmakers in the 1980s found the success that had eluded them by "returning to the roots" of their culture, employing versions of oral storytelling, representing esoteric rites, and so on. How else can films with small budgets compete except to bypass the genres that have already been exploited so thoroughly (and with such substantial budgets) by first world industries? Some

have taken lessons from Europe's alternative to Hollywood genres: authorship. Hong Sang-soo, Park Chan-wook, and Kim Ki-duk set themselves up, and are positioned by Korea, to compete with the likes of Olivier Assayas, Cristian Mungiu and Mohammet Haroun. In its twists on genres and in the uniqueness of certain of its auteurs, Korean cinema exists well beyond its borders. Bong Joon-ho proves to be the most interesting example. A sophisticated intellectual, fully informed by art cinema, he nevertheless works with popular genres and sometimes, as in *The Host*, with relatively large budgets ($ 11,000,000, plus a subsequent 3D version). Especially popular in South Korea and across Asia where it could be seen as resurrecting the Japanese sci-fi terror films of the 1950s, *The Host* reached a cross-over audience in the West, attracting fans of the genre as well as fans of this rising auteur.[14]

The Host screened first at Cannes in May 2006, after which it spread up and down the Pacific Rim, starting in Seoul in July, then being rolled out in theaters in Japan, Singapore, Australia, Thailand, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Echoes of this transnational wave accompanied its festival appearances at Toronto, then New York, where I met the director after the press screening. He understood that although his film adopted the pose of pandering to the Asian taste for cheap genre thrills and contrivances, he was eager for his film to reach the cosmopolitan critics who attend festivals in Helsinki, Thessalonika, and Brussels where it was headed. Festivals like these transcend national interests and stand as powerful city-states, gateways to global distribution either in theaters or DVD.

Actually festivals originated as an "international federation" after WWII, with each nation selecting films for competition like the World Cup. It was only in the early 1970s that festivals took more hand in recruiting films themselves. Then in the late 1980s, Rotterdam and Sundance began to foster and even kick-start films by directors they found promising. All this occurred after 1975 when European festivals were challenged by major new ones in Toronto, Montreal, and Hong Kong. Since then, thousands of festivals have sprouted but none so important, in my view, as the Busan International Film Festival launched with substantial state and Samsung aid in 1995. Simply by announcing a Korean Wave, the festival created something that soon reached the shores of other countries. The so-called "first wave" of the 386 generation proclaimed by the festival[15] seems a misnomer, an advertising slogan, because those films of the early 1990s were scarcely propagated beyond the peninsula. The second wave, however, the one that followed Busan's rise as a major showcase, has indeed gone round the world.

But there's a difference between this post-Busan Korean wave and the canonical new waves of the 1960s and 1980s (France, Japan, East Europe, Latin America, China, and Taiwan). Korean cinema covets the reputation of those new waves but its situation is very different. Not just part of *Hallyu*, this new cinema has been pulled in the wake of Korean TV exports. Whereas, even if the French New Wave may have been an expression of a large youth movement, you can't imagine it having followed in the wake of French TV.

This is not to denigrate the Korean case *a priori*, for distribution patterns and strategies are not the same as they were in 1960 or 1989. The big festivals which were once the chief means of image transportation and national cinema recognition, today seem like dirigibles floating in the sky with advertising signs trailing behind. The same is true for criticism, so important to the "build up" of those earlier cinematic waves. Today things are different; with providential timing the Korean wave has ridden the greater technological wave of distribution in DVD, then digital

download. This technological wave has perhaps put an end to the always suspect metaphor of the wave once and for all. For if films are available anywhere by download or in (often pirated) DVD copies, no buildup is required. Images simply emerge here and there, one place or another; and they do so instantaneously.

We arrive here at a distinction not between Global and World film but between international and transnational, and this is evident on the covers of DVD boxes. The co-presence of languages for audio or subtitles (Japanese, French, Thai, etc.) and the more shocking map of six (presumably incompatible) zones that DVDs negotiate, remind us that cinema may claim to operate globally but that in fact it moves around region by region, country by country. This argues for the use the term "international" rather than world film, since the prefix "inter" recognizes a planned set of relations among nations. (Producers plan their distribution country by country; business agreements and protocols, like the ones that resulted in those six regional zones, are labeled "international.") Something is said to be "transnational," by contrast, when it arrives unbidden, occurring without respect for borders: diseases, terrorism, religions, pop music…and, yes, pirated or downloaded films. To best observe the constitutive by-play between the "local and the global," the international economy of differences among national players may be the goal, but in reality we ought to drop down a level, to cinema's *transnationality*. For this involves a cinema's particular, rather than general, economy, as films moves beyond their home locales. This intermediate scale of magnification – larger than the nation but smaller than the entire world – keeps most pertinent aspects in view even while cinema as a whole, and each film, signifies a bit differently in various places at the same time as well as in the same place at different times.

Given the market logic of capitalism, we ought to expect Korea's near neighbors to be its most important extra-national relations, as films cross short expanses of water to meet viewers who share a great deal as East Asians. But would this be right, given the troubling historical circumstances that make Japan, Mainland China, North Korea and Russia problematic for South Koreans, if only in terms of passports? Perhaps America looms larger? I have tried to begin to map the highly complex paths of image movement by using a particularly compelling example, the Asian ghost film.[16] Like the title character in Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), this genre travels by sea and by land spreading its shadow across many places, though its effects differ place to place. In the PRC, for instance, it has had till lately almost no effect. No ghost films were produced there till 2005, none permitted on screen; ghost films are hardly spoken of in the journals, though one can find pirated DVDs slipping across from Hong Kong. Maybe this is the most appropriate way such films travel, like Nosferatu himself.

Ghost films spread contagiously, sometimes transforming themselves so as to enter a new population, as *Ringu* (Hideo Nakata, 1998) did by being literally remade in the USA. *Double Vision* (Chen Kuo-fu, 2002), my favorite example, couldn't penetrate the West, despite money from Warner Brothers and an American actor. This may be been because it relied on Taoist themes, impenetrable to viewers outside Asia. Meanwhile it turned out to be the biggest Taiwanese hit to date in its home country, after *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon*, the perfect transnational film. *Double Vision* played well in Japan and, I suppose, in Korea, and to the same audiences that flocked to other Asian ghost films, such as the Korean offering *Sorum* (Yoon Jong-chan, 2001).

Now, do *Sorum* and other Korean genre films spread outward like the wave they are said to comprise, hitting the shores of neighboring lands first and only later reaching the world lying

on the other side of the sea? Do such films progressively mount up on the sea of cinema? Are they propagated through being hosted on one shore before moving to the next? Post-industrial distribution seems to have changed the model, as the DVD and the web have lifted Korean cinema to its current stature through electronic circulation which occurs both more randomly and more instantaneously than a wave.

Perhaps two vocabularies are required, two quite different ways to account for a single phenomenon, as in physics where light is dealt with sometimes as a wave and sometimes as particles. Evidently *Hallyu* behaves like a genuine wave, and the films that are pulled along behind its coveted apparel and culinary tastes as well as TV stars have affected near neighbors first. Korean films have played best in Japan, just next door, and are well known in Mainland China even if not always welcomed by the authorities there. On the other hand, Korean cinema appears less regional to me than films from other East Asian cultures. Here is my scant evidence. Nearly all the 450 Korean films catalogued in Yale's library carry subtitles only in English (with a few offering Japanese and a very few Chinese). Now DVDs from Thailand, Taiwan, and even Mainland China routinely come with subtitles prepared in three or four Asian languages. Adopting English as its second language, Korean cinema seems to have gone global without the intermediate transnational stage that would have spread to Asia first. Korea has not had the patience routinely to solicit Malaysian viewers, for instance, the way so many Hong Kong films do. I may well be wrong here, yet even if Korean cinema is comparatively less regional than, say, Taiwanese or Thai or Philippine cinema, it is unquestionably more cosmopolitan in its scattered reception by urbane cinephiles and cult fans in the US, France, Germany, Latin America and no doubt the Middle East and elsewhere.

Led by the metaphor of contagion, I have focused on transnational distribution and consumption. A different tale of transnationalism might result from a study of production, and here the Korean Film Council obliges by publishing statistics and yearbooks that make it convenient to recognize trends in sources of funding or in the constitution of casts and crews.[17] A quick scansion of these materials reinforces the view hinted at above, that Korea remains a strongly national cinema that turns to the vocabulary and strategies of transnationalism to spread its products. The fact that Korean audiences have been won over by their own films, also confirms that the national paradigm remains secure there. I chose Korea because it most starkly raises the question of a proud national cinema (protected by a state government which subsidizes it and controls competing imports) in an age when nations need to be bigger than themselves; they need to be trans-nations, bleeding over beyond their borders while still believing in their core. The incredible burst of Korean cinema upon the world after 1995 raises another kind of question: has transnationalism as a "third term" between the local and the global been obviated by the ubiquity of world wide web that wraps itself around us? In *Night and Day* (2008), Hong Sang-Soo can have his characters materialize either in Seoul or Paris by pressing a single key on his editing program. They seem ubiquitous. Now he can do the same thing with the movie as a whole, which appears in theaters in Paris and Seoul simultaneously through digital downloading whereby theaters access the digital files through a Key Delivery Message. Moreover, individual viewers watch it anytime, anywhere, by streaming the film to their PCs. The difference is that in the age of transnationalism, films moved by contagion across borders; today they can go viral.

1 Mette Hjort, *On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism*, in Nataša Ďurovičová, Kathleen E. Newman (eds.), *World Cinema, Transnational Perspectives*, Routledge, London-New York 2010, pp. 12-33. See also: Mette Hjort, Duncan Petrie (eds.), *Cinema of Small Nations*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2007; Mette Hjort, *Small Nation, Global Cinema*, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis 2005.

2 Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema. Directors and Directions 1929-1968*, Dutton, New York 1965; Jean-Louis Comolli, Jean Narboni, "Cinéma/Idéologie/Critique", in *Cahiers du cinéma*, nos. 216-217, October-November 1969 (eng. ed. *Cinema/Ideology/Criticism*, in Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, Leo Braudy [eds.], *Film Theory and Criticism. Introductory Readings*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1992, pp. 682-689).

3 Kim Kyung Hyun, Youngmin Choe (eds.), *The Korean Popular Culture Reader*, Duke University Press, Durham 2013.

4 Jung-Bong Choi, "Of Transnational-Korean Cinematrix," in *Transnational Cinemas*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2012, pp. 3-4.

5 This conference was held at New York University, November 2011 under the direction of Prof. Jung-Bong Choi.

6 Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History*, Verso, New York 2005.

7 Steve Rose, "The film is so slow - it's like grandma telling stories," in *The Guardian*, 13 February 2001, pp. 14-15.

8 See Tim Bergfelder, "National, transnational or supranational cinema? Rethinking European Film Studies," in *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2005, pp. 315-331. While this article deals with the European region, it effectively defuses the belligerent discussions pitting global Hollywood against small cinemas. The region comes in as a buffer that expands and contracts in relation to the careers of individual films and of long range strategies.

9 Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, Seuil, Paris 1953 (eng. ed. *Writing Degree Zero*, Jonathan Cape, London 1967).

10 Paul Ricoeur, "La structure, le mot, l'événement," in *Esprit*, vol. 35, no. 5, May 1967, pp. 801-821 (eng. ed. *Structure, Word, Event*, in Id., *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1974, pp. 79-96).

11 Eric Donald Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, Yale University Press, New Haven 1967.

12 Jinhee Choi, *The South Korean Film Renaissance: Local Hitmakers, Global Provocateurs*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown 2010. Note the terms in her title, "local" and "global."

13 Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions*, Columbia University Press, New York 1995.

14 By contrast, his foray into global Hollywood, *Snowpiercer* (2013), was a commercial failure, though alert viewers understood how distinctive and interesting it is.

15 386 is a term that became common in the 1990s, referring to those politically minded Koreans who came of age in the 1980s and put pressure on the government for democratic reform. But if the filmmakers formed a wave, it was strictly internal.

16 See my *Ghost Towns: Asian Cities*, in Yomi Braester, James Tweedie (eds.), *Cinema at the City's Edge. Film and Urban Networks in East Asia*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong 2010, pp. 37-47.

17 The astute anonymous reader of this essay for *Cinéma & Cie* suggested quite rightly that, beyond consumption, other dimensions of Korean cinema need to be addressed to assess its nationalism, transnationalism, and globalism. As for examining *Hallyu* and Korean culture in the Asia region, a prime English language source is *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* which frequently addresses the topic, occasionally through a dedicated issue (vol. 1, no. 3, [2000]). Internet bibliographies are replete with information on Korean popular culture including cinema. See http://angrykpopfan.tumblr.com/post/25567378491/academic-sources-for-k-pop-hallyu-studies, last visit 30 September 2013. To gain a survey of the best materials available on *Korean cinema*, see Kyu Hyun Kim, Korean Cinema, Oxford Bibliographies Online, Oxford University Press, http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791286/obo-9780199791286-0152.xml, last visit 30 September 2013.