

DESIRING FROM A DISTANCE: CINEMATIC THEATRICALITY AND SOUTH KOREA'S COLD WAR GAZE IN *MADAME FREEDOM* (1956)

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Han Hyōng-mo's *Madame Freedom* (*Chayu puin*, 1956) is often overshadowed by Chōng Pi-sōk's novel of the same title, which provoked public debates about representations of the moral decadence and practices of individual freedom of the upper class after the Korean War. Shifting critical attention from its relation to the original literary work to its cinematic achievements, this article elucidates how the particular mode of address intervenes in the spectator's viewing experience. I first propose the concept of "cinematic theatricality," which I coin from theatricality, but the concept goes beyond its association with the theater and theatrical performance, to discuss the display-spectator relationship that the film suggests. Second, I explore the political implications of the cultural Otherness of female dancing bodies by investigating public discussions of social dance in the 1950s. Finally, closely analyzing 'Madame Freedom' Sōn-yōng's gaze and the gazes upon her, I demonstrate how the film encourages the spectator to become aware of the act of viewing while creating a distance between the spectator and the displayed. I argue that by exploring cinematic theatricality, *Madame Freedom* invites the spectator to observe the gendered and ethnocultural gaze that emerged in mid-1950s South Korea and the attempt of the Cold War mechanism to place the individual body and desire under surveillance.

Keywords: *Madame Freedom*, Cold War South Korea, Cinematic Theatricality, Gaze, Female Dancing Body

Madame Freedom (*Chayu puin*, Han Hyōng-mo, 1956), which portrayed upper-class housewife, Pak Sōn-yōng's transformation into a "Madame" given up to dancing, is often cited as a controversial work of postwar South Korea. Film historian Yi Yōng-il recalls that the film questioned the idea of freedom that spread after

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the Korean War, addressing different understandings between old and new generations over how freedom would be practiced in the new democratic nation-state of South Korea.¹ The earliest public discussion related to the film traces back to 1954, when Chŏng Pi-sŏk's novel, on which the film is based, first garnered widespread popularity. The original literary work, "Madame Freedom," was a serial of 215 parts published in the *Sŏul sinmun* (Seoul Newspaper) from January 1 to August 6, 1954; it provoked a debate between the author and Hwang San-dŏk, a professor at Seoul National University. Hwang, calling the novel "an enemy of the state that is equal to 500,000 soldiers of the Chinese Communist army," claimed that it might have been written by someone attempting to follow Joseph Stalin's ideology.² For Hwang, the moral and sexual decadence of the upper elites, including college professor Chang T'ae-yun and his wife Pak Sŏn-yŏng, was nothing but "an unforgivable sin to our country [South Korea] and [its] people."³ Meanwhile, Chŏng defended the work with a strong emphasis on his royal summons as a writer who was concerned with the social impact of his literary works. He insisted that "Madame Freedom" ultimately provided moral lessons and enlightenment for the reader.⁴ Han Hyŏng-mo's prompt cinematic adaptation in 1956 might have reminded local audiences of the previous debate and led them to re-consider the political and cultural implications of Sŏn-yŏng's freedom-seeking and pleasure in dancing.

This article illuminates how *Madame Freedom* exposes the emergence of South Korea's Cold War gaze in the mid-1950s, paying attention to the cinematic theatricality explored in the film as a particular mode of address and a visual strategy. The film asks us to look into the Cold War mechanism, which was deeply involved in the psychological and aesthetic power struggles of producing and consuming cultural products, including works that were less propagandistic and ideologically-driven. As we see in the debate between Hwang and Chŏng, public discussions regarding individual desire and gender roles were easily integrated with ideology. The Cold War rhetoric in their discussions was not an exaggeration in its entirety given that 1950s South Korea was undergoing its passage through the ideological continuum from Japanese colonialism to the global Cold War and from the civil war to national division. Hwang's claim that the popular novel was as

¹ Yi Yŏng-il, "Chaep'yŏngga wa saeroun pijŏn" [Re-evaluations and new visions], *Yŏngbwa*, September 1975, 36–37.

² Hwang San-dŏk, "Tasi chayu puin chakka e" [Again to the writer of "Madame Freedom"], *Sŏul sinmun*, March 14, 1954, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴ Chŏng Pi-sŏk, "T'alsŏnjŏk sibi rŭl pakham" [Against a digressive dispute], *Sŏul sinmun*, March 11, 1954, 4.

dangerous as “500,000 soldiers of the Chinese Communist army,” and Chŏng’s redefinition of it as a work that aimed at enlightening the reader, were not merely rhetorical expressions but symptomatic remarks filtered through the vigilant mindset that was concerned about ongoing political struggles against communism. Likewise, *Madame Freedom*, a symptomatic popular film, addressed the Cold War as an ultimate understanding of a conflict of ideas and desires. It commented on the asymmetrical relationship between South Korea and the United States, which was forged in the global Cold War context, by representing Sŏn-yŏng’s unrestrained gaze; this was prompted by her interest in American popular culture and its counterpart of the camera or male gaze, which attempts to place her own way of looking under control. I define the Cold War gaze as the particular structure of looking politically and culturally proposed and practiced in mid-1950s South Korea and examine the female dancing body that was the ultimate site of ideological struggle and oppression that the Cold War gaze was imbued with. I demonstrate that multiple gazes of Sŏn-yŏng and the camera are at work within the tension between narrative and visuality, and cinematic theatricality stages the gazes and turns the viewer into a spectator who desires, but without identification.

The article comprises three parts. First, I propose the concept of cinematic theatricality in shifting our attention from the original literary work to the display–spectator relationship that the film suggests while rendering visible South Korea’s Cold War gaze. Second, I explore the political implications of and gendered views on female dancing bodies by investigating public discussions and popular representations of social dance in the 1950s. Finally, closely analyzing multiple gazes in the film, I demonstrate that the spectator becomes aware of the way in which one’s act of viewing is guided. I argue that cinematic theatricality in *Madame Freedom* invited the spectator, without depriving him or her of the *jouissance* of looking, to observe South Korea’s emerging gendered and ethnocultural gaze and the Cold War mechanism attempting to place the individual body and desire under surveillance.

CINEMATIC THEATRICALITY AND COLD WAR GAZE

Recent scholarship on the Cold War in Korea has expanded the scope of discussions to the field of culture and has gone beyond the traditional terrain of state politics and war. In his compelling book, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea*, Theodore Hughes examines the overlooked negotiation of the verbal–visual relation in Korean literature, film, and art to discuss the layers of purposeful forgetting, elision, excision, and epistemic violence in the formations

of cultural works under Japanese colonialism, occupation, and national division.⁵ Convincingly showing the connections between the works before and after 1945, he stresses a Cold War code-switching in them that turned post-1945 South Korean culture into a part of a transnational, global, and Cold War discourse, while representing the North as the past and a loss. Steven Chung's *Split Screen Korea* traces the unique trajectories of auteur Shin Sang-ok's career and films produced both in North and South Korea, proposing the idea of the enlightenment modality as a tool to analyze cultural productions in the ideologically discrete two states.⁶ He boldly challenges any assumptions of the rigid relationship between politics and aesthetics during the Cold War and argues that Shin's political ambivalence and aesthetic ambitions made his North and South Korean films belie explicit political and economic controls.

Attempting to enhance the current critical studies on the cultural dimensions of Cold War Korea, I explicate South Korea's gendered and ethnocultural gaze both articulated and problematized in *Madame Freedom* by focusing more on the cultural contentions between South Korea and the United States in the mid-1950s, instead of the military tension between North and South Korea. The film as a popular melodramatic work, not a state-sponsored one, revealed or released something contained or latent in the moving images being made under the new order of the Cold War. In particular, it addressed the issue that the national, gender, and cultural hierarchies inscribed in the gaze emerged from social anxiety toward the dominant cultural presence of the United States in postwar South Korea, as much as from South Korea's ideological competition with North Korea. While Hughes' thorough discussion of *Madame Freedom* approaches the film as a work about writing and language and examines the ways in which the visual invokes the verbal, I provide an account of the tension between narrative and visuality punctuated by cinematic theatricality. Chung's intriguing historical investigation of the symbiotic relationship between the fashion, print, and film industry in 1950s South Korea resonates in my detailed analysis of the foreignness and cultural Otherness in Sŏn-yŏng's intense gaze desiring American popular culture and commodities.

Han recreated the literary work into a film melodrama that offers an emotional and sensational viewing experience, with some minor changes to the serial novel, "Madame Freedom." It might not have been possible to produce the film without the wide appeal of its 1954 literary predecessor. The initial success of "Madame

⁵ Theodore Hughes, *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea: Freedom's Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁶ Steven Chung, *Split Screen Korea: Shin Sang-ok and Postwar Cinema* (Minneapolis and London: University of Press, 2014).

Freedom” in the newspaper soon led to publication in book form. The work sold 140,000 copies and became the first South Korean book to sell more than 100,000 copies after the Korean War.⁷ The novel’s continuous commercial success in the publication industry drew film producers’ interests, and Chōng Pi-sōk finally decided to allow Han, who had a reputation as a popular genre filmmaker, to adapt his work into a film. The film was released in 1956 and set a new box-office record for the year. The narrative of the film follows Sōn-yōng’s transformation from a traditional housewife and mother to the so-called “Madame Freedom,” an individual subject who freely expresses her sexual and economic desires. After commencing work at a boutique that sells Western goods, she gains her new identity as “Madame” and is less interested in caring for her husband, Professor Chang T’ae-yun and son, Kyōng-su. She learns to dance from a college student Ch’un-ho and has an affair with Han T’ae-sōk, the owner of the boutique where she works. Sōn-yōng’s extra-marital affair is eventually uncovered in a hotel room by Han’s wife. After the scene revealing Sōn-yōng’s humiliation, the film culminates with melodramatic emotional excess. With Yves Montand’s “Les Feuilles Mortes” playing as background music, Sōn-yōng walks alone for a while. She arrives at her house and pleads for Professor Chang’s forgiveness outside the house. Without the possibility of a closed ending, the film shows a theatrical *tableau vivant* shot that presents Sōn-yōng and Kyōng-su hugging each other and crying in the streets and Professor Chang watching them from afar. This open ending deviates significantly from the ending of the novel, which narrates Sōn-yōng’s contrition for her behavior and her respect for Professor Chang, who becomes a national leader for his re-establishment of the Korean phonetic script *Han’gūl* as the national script of South Korea.

Among the aesthetic media of the mid-1950s, cinema was considered the most appropriate form for the adaptation of “Madame Freedom.” The audiovisual language of cinema transformed the literary imagination of dance performance to spectacular moving images, re-igniting the curiosity of audiences who were already familiar with the literary work. After the commercial success of the novel, the well-known theater group Sinhyōp adapted it for the stage in 1955, but it did not garner public and critical interest. Unlike the theatrical adaptation, the filmic version satisfied the expectation of cultural critics and reviewers who had wanted to see how the exotic dance hall and visceral dance movements were visualized. Deploying intermedia aesthetics between literature and cinema, the film brandished its full capacity to transform the literary imagination of dance into visceral movements. The opening credit sequence implies that the film is about

⁷ Hō Su, “Pesūtūsellō wa kūmsō ūi pyōnjugok” [Variations of bestseller and forbidden book], in *Uri nūn chinan paengnyōn tongan ōttōk’e sarassūlkeka* (Seoul: Yōksa pip’yōngsa, 1988), 141.

dance culture as well as the story of a fallen woman, Pak Sŏn-yŏng. This sequence consists of a series of vignettes that visually epitomize the narrative of “Madame Freedom.” Their semantic elements might have reminded the audience of visual illustrations in the “Madame Freedom” series published in the newspaper. At the same time, the vignettes, depicted from diverse camera positions, differentiate themselves from the previous still illustrations on the printed pages. The dance hall vignette especially emphasizes the kinetic movement of the dancers, showing their bodies in motion from a bird’s eye view.



Figure 1: *Madame Freedom* (Han Hyŏng-mo, 1956)

Even for the members of the audience who were familiar with the story of “Madame Freedom,” the opening sequence on dance culture could have justified their reason for seeing the filmic version.

The melodrama offered in *Madame Freedom* was an apt mode of representation to expose tumultuous postwar experiences characterized by the ambivalent emotions of confusion and expectation. Both Peter Brooks and Thomas Elsaesser demonstrate that literary or theatrical melodrama emerges from a matrix of conflicting determining factors such as social, ideological, and economic upheavals like the French Revolution.⁸ Melodrama comes to the fore in times of major social change and is thus seen as an aesthetic and cultural response to radical historical reconfiguration. The melodramatic mode in *Madame Freedom*, which was made and released amid massive political and social transformations in

⁸ Peter Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Thomas Elsaesser, “Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama,” *Monogram* 3 (1972): 2–15.

immediate postwar South Korea, also exemplifies this. Contemporary reviewers defined the film as social melodrama in that it takes a critical stance on the moral corruption perpetrated by the upper class and participates in public discussions on whether the pursuit of sexual desire could be tolerated in the name of practicing individual freedom. Film critic Kim Ch'o-mun, pointing out the lively dialogue and elaborate mise-en-scène, appreciated the film's contemporaneity and claimed that it showed "fine results that one can see only in a timely work."⁹ In contrast to the mythic past that was central to the historical film *The Story of Chang-hwa and Hong-nyŏn* (*Chang-hwa Hong-nyŏn chŏn*, Chŏng Ch'ang-hwa, 1956) released in the same week, *Madame Freedom* set in contemporary urban Seoul was indeed able to draw the audience's strong interest. Its melodramatic mode addressed the public's shifting understandings of gender roles and social anxiety about the dominant presence of American popular culture, allowing the audience to approach Sŏn-yŏng's freedom-seeking from a non-Manichean perspective. It de-emphasized moral clarity or moralistic resolution in its narrative ending, and Kathleen McHugh claims that moral ambiguity in South Korea's golden age melodrama had to do with "the fallibility of human social and political systems and their sometimes nefarious effects on human relations and communities."¹⁰

In examining the filmic achievement of *Madame Freedom*, I propose "cinematic theatricality" as an analytical tool that allows us to see its aesthetic and historical uniqueness. Cinematic theatricality, which I define as a mode of address and a visual strategy, was intensively explored in the film to show spectacular dance movements that could not be presented in the novel in a manner that would offer a visceral experience. I coin the term "cinematic theatricality" from the concept of "theatricality," which applies to the stage but does not solely belong to theater or theatrical performance. The term has been discussed in various academic fields such as theater and performance studies, anthropology, politics, and psychoanalysis.¹¹ Josette Féral states that there is a theoretical divide between those who subscribe to theatricality as being exclusively associated with the "artistic world" and those who characterize theatricality as "a dominant structure present in all social manifestations."¹² In the first category, usually employed by theater and performance historians to illuminate the process and effects of creating dramatic

⁹ Kim Ch'o-mun, "Chayu pūin, P'iagol, Yujŏn ni aesu ūi Han'guk yŏnghwasajŏk wich'i?" [*Madame Freedom, P'iagol, Sadness of Heredity in the history of Korean cinema*], *Han'guk ilbo*, September 9, 1956, 1.

¹⁰ Kathleen McHugh, "South Korean Film Melodrama: State, Nation, Woman, and the Transnational Familiar," *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 25.

¹¹ For details, please see the special issue on "Theatricality," in *Substance* 31, no. 2 & 3 (2002).

¹² Josette Féral, "Foreword," *Substance* 31, no. 2 & 3 (2002): 3–13.

art, theatricality remains a descriptive term to refer to performance. In the second category, redeployed as an analytical formulation, theatricality is considered a device to examine the significance of social relationships, political events, and cultural practices that occur beyond the theater. According to Féral, the spectator's active engagement becomes a crucial factor in transferring theatricality from a performance-based analysis to an understanding of its implications in the cultural sphere. Theatricality can be a type of social communication on the part of the spectator who becomes aware of competing or conflicting signifying systems that ostentatiously display audiovisual works.

The spectator's active participation is also emphasized in Michael Fried's *Absorption and Theatricality*, which may be one of the most-cited critical works on theatricality.¹³ Analyzing mid-1700s French painting and Diderot's writings on painting and drama, Fried develops his idea of theatricality. He associates it with a foregrounding of the display–spectator relationship and epistemological problems involved in knowing that something is consciously displayed for the spectator. Most of all, theatricality is a contrast to absorption in terms of the act of looking. It refers to the idea of something displayed for the spectator, while absorption indicates figures engrossed in an activity, as if to deny the presence of the spectator. In paintings, absorption is practiced in works in which the main figure is absorbed in his or her intent and does not directly regard the spectator, while theatricality is seen in artworks in which the subjects are represented as shaping and directing the spectator's gaze. The use of absorption aims to present representations as if they were not explicitly intended to be regarded by the spectator. By contrast, theatricality tends to clearly acknowledge the position of the spectator and the fictional interpretation of the situation. Although Fried's preference for absorption over theatricality for the sake of the arts is debatable, he sheds light on the significance of the spectator's consciousness and the relationship between the spectator and the displayed in practicing theatricality.

My use of cinematic theatricality places emphasis on the display–spectator relationship suggested in *Madame Freedom* and the formal quality of deliberate staging in melodrama. Melodramatic works—whether stage drama, film, or literature—use theatricality as a technique or style to imbue a sense of artificiality and distantiation, which often works against realism. *Madame Freedom* as film melodrama explores theatricality not only as a cinematic language developed in

¹³ Theatricality is a topic that has occupied his entire intellectual career. Refer to Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Also see Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998); Michael Fried *Manet's Modernism or the Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

the process of production but also as a quality that belongs to the relationship between what is displayed on screen and the spectator who is aware of his or her own act of looking. In the film, this is most explicitly expressed through frontal camera movements that open up a filmic world for the spectator. A major apparatus used in making the camera movements was a crane designed by Han Hyōng-mo himself. From the pre-production stage, Han, who studied cinematography at Toho Studio in Japan and participated in the colonial Korean film industry as an art director and a cinematographer, carefully planned to address the sensation of dance movements by deploying elaborate camera movements composed of dynamic camera angles and shot scales.¹⁴ By combining frontal and crane shots usually starting from a high angle and ending with an eye-level perspective, he invited the viewer into the fictional world of an exotic dance hall.

The cinematic theatricality achieved by deliberate camera movements turned the local audience and film community of the mid-1950s into spectators, keenly aware of what was displayed on screen. To Han, it might have been an essential mode and a visual strategy to establish a strong relationship with the spectator and offer a visceral experience that cannot be provided in the original literary work. While being guided by an active and aggressive address punctuated by cinematic theatricality, the audience became aware of what was consciously displayed. Filmmaker Yi Pong-nae stated that “[the cinematography of] the film is precisely executed, and there is no awkwardness in the sense of direction.”¹⁵ Film critic Yu Tu-yōn also praised the technological achievements of the film.¹⁶ Comparing it with contemporary popular genres of historical film and vernacular literary film called “*munye yōnghwa*,” he commented favorably on the film in that it gracefully presented dynamic visual scenes that were rarely seen in domestic cinema and that met the audience’s expectation of contemporaneity. He added that the film was most successful at demonstrating what local filmmakers and technicians could accomplish with the inadequate film equipment that remained after the war.

Cinematic theatricality prompts us to engage with theoretical discussions of the gaze in cinema in that it acknowledges the position of the spectator and encourages him or her to actively practice the power in his or her gaze. The display–spectator relationship emphasized by cinematic theatricality solicits the

¹⁴ No In-t’aek, a staff member of the art department of *Madame Freedom*, mentioned that the film “must have been the first film to use properly made dollies and cranes.” According to his testimony, the dolly and the crane were made based on director Han’s personal drawings. “Chayu puin ūi kisulchōk sōngch’wi” [Technical achievements of *Madame Freedom*], in *Chayu puin* (Seoul: Korean Film Archive, 2004). See also *Han Hyōng-mo* (Seoul: Korean Film Archive Press, 2008), 88.

¹⁵ Yi Pong-nae, “Kūllae ūi k’waejak” [Recent masterpiece], *Han’guk ilbo*, June 7, 1956, 4.

¹⁶ Yu Tu-yōn, “Han’guk yōnghwa ūi wigi” [The crisis of Korean cinema], *Kyōnghyang sinmun*, July 23, 1956, 4.

spectator's active participation and does not strongly yield to voyeurism and fetishism on the part of the spectator. The tumultuous period of the mid-1950s hints at the historical and political implications of the less voyeuristic gaze in *Madame Freedom*. Laura Mulvey, in her most recent essay on politics in modes of spectatorship, critically states the historical specificity of the gendered gaze in classical Hollywood cinema.¹⁷ She argues that “various underpinning of Hollywood glamour and its investment in the spectacle of femininity reach a final but extreme point in the 1950s and the Cold War. Through Hollywood, the US could present itself to the world as ‘the democracy of glamour.’”¹⁸ Notably, *Madame Freedom* was made amid a flood of glamorous moving images of Hollywood films, which dominated domestic screens after the Korean War. The spectacular dance movements deliberately staged by cinematic theatricality were audacious, but desperate, attempts to draw local audiences' attention, which was usually given to refined Hollywood cinema. Unlike contemporary classical Hollywood films that often generate a voyeuristic gaze, *Madame Freedom* emphasized a direct mode of cinematic theatricality that would differentiate itself from Hollywood films by aggressively addressing its viewers and consciously displaying something visual for them. Cinematic theatricality, therefore, is the politically strategical mode of address and visual aesthetics that enables the viewer to see South Korea's national and cultural struggle for its own gaze, which is different from the voyeuristic gaze in classical Hollywood cinema that often leads the viewer to be absorbed in what is displayed on screen.

As I shall discuss later, the Cold War gaze represented in *Madame Freedom* articulates the power struggle between the ethnocultural and the foreign as well as the male and the female in inviting the local audience to practice how to look and desire within the driving ideological force of the new capitalist democratic nation-state of South Korea. In its depiction of the particular structure of looking, as politically and culturally suggested during the mid-1950s, the film attempted to reconstruct the way of seeing “the democracy of glamour” that the local audience usually perceived through moving images of classical Hollywood cinema. The mode of direct address emphasized by cinematic theatricality was what induced the viewer to look and desire without entirely being absorbed in the filmic world or being identified with Sŏn-yŏng. Cinematic theatricality proposed a distanced viewing position and encouraged the spectator to be aware of his or her way of seeing and to recognize the Cold War mechanism underpinning the film's

¹⁷ Laura Mulvey, “Introduction: 1970s Feminist Film Theory and the Obsolescent Object,” in *Feminisms: Diversity, Difference, and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures*, eds. Laura Mulvey and Anna Backman Rogers (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 17–26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

narrative and visuality. It ultimately served mid-1950s South Korea that, on the one hand, economically competed with communist neighboring countries and, on the other hand, was morally anxious about the dominant presence of cultural America. It not only displayed the allure of desirability in South Korean imagery demanded to build the capitalist democratic nation-state but also restrained the viewer from aspiring to consume the foreignness of American cultural products that may cause moral decadence.

Cinematic theatricality successfully distinguished *Madame Freedom* from the original literary work and proposed a unique display–spectator relationship, turning members of the local audience into spectators who become aware of their own act of looking. What we should further explicate is that what the spectator sees was not mere spectacular movements of dancing bodies but their political and cultural Otherness, which concerned 1950s South Korea as much as neighboring communist countries did and which implied gender, national, and cultural hierarchies in South Korea’s Cold War gaze.

FEMALE DANCING BODIES

Madame Freedom offers the viewer the ambivalent experience of pleasure and anxiety and addresses the tension between narrative and visuality. The camera movements that unfold spectacular dance movements enhanced viewing pleasure, and the first dance hall scene is a good example of this. The scene begins with an audacious medium close-up shot that presents a trumpeter playing “Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White.”¹⁹ After gradually pulling back to show a dance hall and dancers in high-angle shots, the camera comes down to approach Sŏn-yŏng and Ch’un-ho and follows their peripheral line of direction. The camera finally moves up once again to show the entire dance hall space and dancing people. Eliciting the spectators’ curiosity about the urban dance culture of the 1950s, the frontal crane movements guide their way of looking. Like Sŏn-yŏng, who visits the dance hall for the first time, the spectators look at the professional musicians’ and dancers’ performances in rapture while enjoying the exotic atmosphere of the dance hall staged for them.

The narrative of the film, on the other hand, alluded to public concerns regarding local dance culture and people’s frequenting of dance halls. In parallel

¹⁹ Kathleen McHugh states that “Cherry Pink and the Apple Blossom White” was the most famous song in the world in 1955 and 1956. It was written by Cuban composer Pérez Prado, who composed for and acted in the contemporaneous Golden Age Mexican cinema. See Kathleen McHugh, *ibid.*, 17–42.

with Sŏn-yŏng's fascination with dance, most dance hall scenes address the moral decadence the dance fad may cause. In particular, changing dance partners implies sexual promiscuity and moral corruption. One of the earlier scenes clearly indicates this. While Sŏn-yŏng and Ch'un-ho are dancing together, her niece Myŏng-ok, who is Ch'un-ho's girlfriend, approaches them and introduces her new dance partner. Myŏng-ok shows some jealousy and asks Ch'un-ho to dance with her. After Sŏn-yŏng is left alone, Han T'ae-sŏk, the owner of the boutique where she works, approaches her to ask whether she wants to dance with him. In a later scene, the spectator sees her being drawn into an extra-marital affair with Han, who becomes her new dance partner. After its release, the film again provoked public debates about its representations of sexual promiscuity and moral decadence amongst the upper class. Countering public concerns, Han maintained, "My film shows a woman turning back into a faithful housewife after her deviant behavior. Thus, even if the audience sees the scenes of deviation, they can learn ethical lessons in them, and it means that the film could be a good, enlightening work."²⁰ Later, actor Yi Min, who played the role of the college student, Ch'un-ho, recollected that the dancing fad was a serious social issue of the mid-1950s, and he thought that the film could have offered moral lessons to the audience. Despite their claims, the question of how to see Sŏn-yŏng's freedom-seeking remained unanswered for the contemporary audience.

It is essential to investigate public discussions of social dance and popular representations of female dancing bodies in the 1950s to thoroughly discuss the political and cultural implications of the dancing woman, Sŏn-yŏng, and her freedom-seeking. I argue that *Madame Freedom*, in responding to public debates on dance culture, registered social dissent over the presence of America popular culture, projecting gendered surveillance on the individual unruly body—a threat to the national task of building an anti-communist ethno-developmental state. South Korean public discussions of social dance intersected with the containment and integration models, both of which are major approaches in Cold War studies. The containment model pays attention to the home front, private life, and personal behavior that attended to public policy and political values during the Cold War. Alan Nadel's *Containment Culture* demonstrates that Cold War American cultural products often engaged with the political norms of containment articulated by George F. Kennan and implemented by the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. Analyzing the Disney film *Lady and the Tramp* (Clyde Beronimi, Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Juske, 1955), *Playboy* magazines, and early James Bond films, Nadel insists that their narratives unify the sexual, political, and

²⁰ "K'isŭ changmyŏn ũi sibi" [Right and wrong in kiss scenes], *Tonga ilbo*, June 10, 1956, 3.

economic aspects of containment.²¹ Conversely, Christina Klein's *Cold War Orientalism* shifts our attention to what she calls the "global imaginary of integration" in American culture during the Cold War.²² By examining the relationship between the United States and the non-communist world and between domestic culture and the Third World represented in cultural works, Klein illuminates how the residual internationalism of the left proposed the idea of open doors to pathways between nations. The political rhetoric of integration was often used to address the belief that differences among nations could be bridged or transcended.

The South Korean dance culture of the 1950s requires us to recast the containment and integration models. It shows how local Cold War culture negotiated with the "global imagery of integration" widely transmitted by American popular culture while imposing the ideology of sexual and ethno-cultural containment upon the individual. Social dance was initially embraced in South Korea as a way of integrating with the global Cold War set by the United States and practicing the idea of democracy. However, it soon generated public concerns over the individual who indulges in dance and may thus cause social problems. The dissemination of social dance was inseparable from South Korea's military alignment with the United States. During the Korean War, social dance was introduced through social clubs and dance parties that only American military officials and upper-class Koreans were allowed to attend. Dance halls were built in Pusan to welcome the UN soldiers during the war, and after the end of the war, the dance hall was authorized by the South Korean government. It usually charged an exorbitant entrance fee, and thus, only the upper class and barmaids who served American military officers could access authorized dance halls. However, after the mid-1950s, the dance hall was propagated in urban areas and became accessible to the upper-middle class. The number of unauthorized dance halls increased, and from the late 1950s, there were 130 unauthorized dance halls in Seoul.²³ Most of them offered dance classes during the daytime and turned into dance halls in the evening, attracting upper and upper-middle class housewives and college students.

The mid-1950s marked a major rhetorical shift in public discussions of social dance from an emphasis on integration to one on containment. The earlier discussions of the late 1940s and early 1950s focused on informing the public

²¹ Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism and the Atomic Age* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995)

²² Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003)

²³ "Ttaensŭ nŭn kŭmji toeŏya hanŭn'ga" [Should dance be banned?], *Sint'aeyang*, January 1956, 130–131.

about the positive function of social dance. One of the articles in the *United States Information Service, Korea (USIS, Korea)* journal of December, 1949 introduces a range of social dances, including tango, blues, Charleston, fox-trot, slow trot, and slot fox. The article, written in Korean to reach local audiences, highlights that learning social dance is an enjoyable way of acquiring decent manners and etiquette in social relations.²⁴ It includes images of well-dressed American couples as it attempts to dispel any hint of sexual promiscuity. After the mid-1950s, public discussions dramatically changed the tone of addressing social dance. Popular journal and newspaper articles registered social concerns regarding local dance culture, which they argued was illegal and accused people frequenting dance halls of possible sexual promiscuity.²⁵ The articles often used the term “a dance fad” in their headings and sarcastically narrated secret discoveries. They problematized the unauthorized dance hall, stimulating the reader’s voyeuristic curiosity about the people in the dance hall. For example, the 1959 special report in the popular magazine *Yŏwŏn* exposed what actually happened in a dance hall in Seoul and the lives of the professional dancers and barmaids working there. According to this report, they served alcoholic drinks smuggled from abroad, and professional dancers had immoral intimate relationships with their upper-class customers.²⁶

In popular discussions of social dance and local dance culture, the gendered gaze was explicitly projected. In the same report in *Yŏwŏn*, two professional dancers are introduced in detail, both of them women. Their stories suggest that becoming interested in social dance or deciding to work for a dance hall was not entirely different from the sexual and moral decadence represented in *Madame Freedom* in that they were suspicious women maintaining double lives or fallen women trapped in unwanted lives. According to the report, the female dancer called “K” seemed like a decent young lady to her neighbors, but she, in fact, deceived them about her job as a professional dancer who could dance with “any man” at night. It addressed the social stigma that the female dancer may have had to deal with. She thought that if her neighbors discovered her identity as a professional dancer, she would be on the brink of ruin. The life of another female dancer, “L,” is narrated in a more dramatic way. When L was a college student, she learned social dance. She frequented the dance hall and met a man whom she thought would marry her later. However, it turned out that the man already had a wife, making her the victim of a fraudulent marriage. After parting with him, L became a professional dancer, a profession she thought would enable

²⁴ “Sagyo taensŭ” [Social dance], *Mi kongbonwŏn*, December 1949, 67–68.

²⁵ A good example of it is the incident of matrimonial swindler Pak In-su, who cheated sixteen women he had met at dance halls in 1955.

²⁶ “Yohwa nanmu hanŭn ttaensŭhol” [Dance halls rampant], *Yŏwŏn*, October 1959, 202–207.

her to earn easy money. The report ends L's story by asking who can be blamed for her past misfortune. Although it does not take a judgmental view on K or L, it indicates that social morality strongly imposes upon women who enjoy dancing to the extent that they feel a moral dilemma within themselves.

A similar gendered view is observed in immediate postwar films presenting a cinematic trope of the female dancing body that enjoys American commodities and popular culture. Interestingly, Han's previous work, *The Hand of Fate* (*Unmyŏng ūi son*, 1954) was one of these. It shows that the gendered and ethnocultural gaze centered on his filmmaking practices in the 1950s. Although the main thematic concern of the film is not social dance, it suggests that the female dancing body was an ideologically suspicious and morally decadent non-national subject. In the film, social anxiety toward communism had already integrated with the gendered and ethnocultural gaze that discerns who would be a potential threat to South Korea. The work follows the typical conventions of the Cold War anti-communist spy film. It features a female protagonist called Margaret or Chŏng-ae, who has a double identity as a spy working for the North Korean regime and a barmaid serving American military officials in Seoul, South Korea. She secretly inspects urban areas during the daytime and eavesdrops on the military officials' conversations at the bar in the evening. After she falls in love with South Korean counter-espionage agent, Yŏng-ch'ŏl, she begins to question her double life but keeps committing espionage. The film ends with her dying in his arms during a gunfight between South Korean secret agents and North Korean spies.

Noteworthy about this work is the way in which Margaret/Chŏng-ae disguises her identity as a North Korean partisan staying in South Korea. She enjoys the Americanized modern life style—wearing Western suits, drinking wine, and listening and dancing to jazz music. By adopting the modern life style and appearance, she attempts to disguise herself as an upper-class woman. Her consumption of American commodities implies her ambiguous political, national, and cultural identity, and her pleasure in dancing alludes to her hypersexual desire. In the scene where she invites Yŏng-ch'ŏl to her house, she seduces him, asking him to dance with her. He refuses her request and asks her why she acts like a "foreigner." *The Hand of Fate* doubly condemns the female dancing body as the culturally and politically foreign by defining Margaret/Chŏng-ae not only as the non-national subject who enjoys American popular culture, but also as the communist who is an immediate threat to the democratic state. The political and cultural Otherness of Margaret/Chŏng-ae's body does not allow her to belong to either North or South Korea. As Hughes aptly points out, Margaret's body is controlled by the hand of the communist, who turns out to be a middle-aged North Korean male spy. She is not redeemed by South Korea until the end of the

film when she asks Yǒng-ch'ól to call her "Chǒng-ae," not "Margaret," as she is dying in his arms.

South Korean dance culture and its related public discussions in the 1950s cannot be understood without considering political and cultural changes brought on by the Korean War and shaped under the global Cold War. The consumption of American cultural products was, to some degree, intensified within the military and economic hierarchies between the United States and South Korea, the developed and the underdeveloped state, or the established and the newly created nation-state. Social dance tied local audiences to the global imagery of the Cold War by allowing them to embody the ideas of democracy and individual freedom. However, it simultaneously provoked public concerns regarding illegal dance halls, unruly individuals who indulged in dancing, and moral and sexual decadence possibly caused by the dance fad. The public discussions and popular representations addressed social anxiety toward female dancing bodies and imposed the containment ideology on women, projecting the gendered and ethnocultural gaze on them. The dancing woman was often considered to be an ideologically suspicious and morally decadent non-national subject. As South Korea took multiple pathways in the political tension with North Korea and in the military and economic alignment with the United States against North Korea, the female dancing body signified the ideological and cultural struggles that South Korea had undergone. It was the site of conflict that embodies both the allure of desirability, in contrast to the image of North Korean communism, and the anxiety about the overwhelming presence of cultural America.

It cannot be claimed that *Madame Freedom* offered entirely alternative views on the political and cultural Otherness of the female dancing body. To some degree, however, it allowed the spectator to experience both *jouissance* and anxiety by using cinematic theatricality that displays both intense power in Sǒn-yǒng's gaze and the gaze imposed upon her. Guided by cinematic theatricality, the spectator observed South Korea's Cold War gaze that articulates the hierarchies between the ethnocultural and the foreign, as well as the Cold War mechanism attempting to place the individual body and desire under surveillance.

DESIRING FROM A DISTANCE

Madame Freedom both articulated and problematized gender and cultural hierarchies in South Korea's Cold War gaze, leading the viewer to experience contention between the narrative and visual images of dancing women. Cold War studies demonstrate how the Cold War ideology attempted to control individual

behavior and enforce particular social norms. For example, Cold War cultural works often showed a heterosexual middle-class family as the norm, idealizing traditional gender roles and celebrating domesticity.²⁷ In a similar manner, the narrative structure of the film leads the viewer to see social dance through Cold War South Korea's moral and gender codes. It problematizes Sŏn-yŏng's transformation from a traditional housewife and mother to a working woman enjoying social dance as it associates her interest in dance with her sexual and economic desire, which may seem inappropriate for motherhood as well as a threat to establishing the patriarchal, anti-communist nation-state of South Korea. As if the film attempts to counterbalance its earlier narrative emphasis on her pleasure-seeking, but ethically wrong, behaviors, it ends with a scene that shows her regret, attempting to provide the viewer with a moral warning. Although the film does not explicitly state whether she is fully accepted by Professor Chang and can restore her place in the domestic space, the last *tableau vivant* shot that stages Sŏn-yŏng kneeling in front of him implies that she is now under the patriarchal order of Cold War South Korea.

While the narrative logic more or less controls the immoral and deviant female dancing body, the visual languages of the film implicate Sŏn-yŏng as both the individual subject who desires to look and the object of the male or authoritative gaze. In particular, cinematic theatricality as a mode of address and a visual strategy punctuates the ways in which she looks on and is looked at. The gaze refers to a mode of looking that creates a power relationship between the looker and the looked at. As Mulvey has illuminated, the institutional mode of representation of classical Hollywood cinema usually renders the gendered gaze that limits the woman's place to "bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning."²⁸ Interestingly, *Madame Freedom* neither faithfully adopts the representation system of classical Hollywood cinema nor consistently employs the male-centered gaze. Instead, it displays the power struggle between Sŏn-yŏng's gaze and the camera and male gazes that follow Sŏn-yŏng's transformation by using cinematic theatricality.

In the film, gazes are constructed throughout the narrative but are further heightened by visual languages that emphasize the major characters' look on, or

²⁷ Please see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Carolyn Herbst Lewis, *Prescription for Heterosexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Robert J. Corber, *Cold War Femme* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011); Susan Tuszynski, "A Cold War Cautionary Tale: Heterosexuality and Ideology in William Wyler's *Ben-Hur*," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 34 (2006/2007): 116–122.

²⁸ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18.

place the spectator within, the diegetic world of the film. In the first half of the film, the gaze of the camera is often identical to Sŏn-yŏng's look. She primarily leads the first half, and the film strategically marginalizes the role of her husband Professor Chang, which the novel highlights.²⁹ In the novel, Professor Chang becomes a highly esteemed and elite leader who advocates the simplification of Korean orthography in making *Han'gŭl* the revived national phonetic script of South Korea. His contribution to the nation ultimately leads Sŏn-yŏng to deeply repent of her behavior and regain her admiration for her husband. Unlike in the novel, only a few scenes in the film center on Professor Chang, and even in these scenes, his role as a respected member of the national elite is belittled. The scenes mainly dramatize his flirtation with a young typist, Miss Yang, to whom he teaches Korean grammar. To members of the audience familiar with the original literary work, it might seem that the filmic version retells the story since it follows Sŏn-yŏng, and her gaze most strongly affects their viewing experience.

Sŏn-yŏng is both the object of male gaze and the individual subject who practices the power of her own gaze. A few earlier scenes indicate that she is under the male gaze, but it can be argued that the gaze is not voyeuristic in that she is aware of herself being seen through such a mechanism. For example, in the scene that shows her first going out, Sŏn-yŏng is not afraid of being the object of the male gaze and attempts to control the gaze. She is greeted by Ch'un-ho, who compliments her on her appearance. He asks her to allow him to take a picture of her. She is not shy and welcomes having her picture taken as she consciously performs in front of the camera. In the later scenes, once she starts to work as a manager at a boutique that sells Western goods and attends social gatherings, she more actively expresses the power in her gaze and becomes the looker. The scene of the reunion at the restaurant explicitly addresses her repressed desire to become the bearer of the look. The scene is staged by cinematic theatricality, which consists of frontal and moving crane shots. It begins with a frontal medium close-up shot of one of the members singing a song, "Saturday for Avec" center stage.³⁰ As the camera pulls back, we see Sŏn-yŏng and other members staring at the singer and enjoying the song, which candidly expresses a couple's affection for each other. Between interludes, Sŏn-yŏng's friend, Madame Ch'oe turns her attention to the other members' diamond rings and necklaces, which may have been imported or smuggled. These Western commodities are seen from

²⁹ Theodore Hughes closely compares and contrasts the representation of Professor Chang in the literary work with that in the cinematic version. See Theodore Hughes, "Ambivalent Anti-communism," in *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 119–128.

³⁰ Singer Paek Sŏl-hŭi appears as one of members of the reunion and sings "Saturday for Avec."

Sŏn-yŏng's point of view, implying her desire to look as well as to consume. The scene of the reunion suggests that she becomes aware of her own sexual and economic desire as she practices the power of her gaze.

Sŏn-yŏng's gaze awakens most intensively in the scene of her first visit to the dance hall, which is deliberately staged by cinematic theatricality. The scene's spectacular dance movements empower her gaze and subjectivity as the looker. Lasting a total of seven minutes, the scene emphasizes her explicit gaze at professional performers on the stage and other people dancing. It features musical performances from Pak Chu-gŭn and His Band and professional dancer Na Pok-hŭi, both of whom were well known to the local audience of the mid-1950s. The excessively long scene consists of frontal and moving crane shots that present the spectacular dance movements for Sŏn-yŏng and the crowd in the dance hall and the audience in the movie theater. What draws her attention most is the onstage performance of Na Pok-hŭi. Wearing a form-fitting midriff dress, Na aggressively mambos down a stairway in the middle of the band playing Pérez Prado's song "Mambo".



Figure 2: *Madame Freedom* (Han Hyŏng-mo, 1956)

Her dance is orchestrated with sensual shots that emphasize her body movements. She is confident about presenting her dancing body to the crowd in the dance hall.



Figure 3: *Madame Freedom* (Han Hyöng-mo, 1956)

Her bold physical dance movements indicate her pleasure in dancing and performing as a visual spectacle in front of the crowd in the dance hall as well as for the spectator in the movie theater. Na's self-conscious performance leads Sön-yöng to be fully aware of her own act of viewing, stimulating Sön-yöng's desire to gaze and dance. In the scene, cinematic theatricality ultimately invites the spectator to observe Sön-yöng becoming the bearer of the look as it emphasizes the intense interaction between Na's and Sön-yöng's gazes. Frontal medium or full shots of Na's aggressive mambo carefully alternate with frontal medium close-ups of Sön-yöng's continuous stare at her. The spectator sees Na's direct and vigorous dance movements intensify Sön-yöng's curiosity about the pleasure of dancing and ignite her desire to join in. Sön-yöng's appreciative look at the dancer implies that she admires Na, who knows how to express her desire and display her body in front of the crowd.



Figure 4: *Madame Freedom* (Han Hyŏng-mo, 1956)

It is significant to note that in the scene, Sŏn-yŏng plays the role of the internal spectator who strongly affects the viewer's experience. Richard Wollheim draws a distinction between the internal spectator and the external spectator in paintings.³¹ The internal spectator, who usually takes the perspective of characters in paintings, picks a viewing position within the work and the virtual space it creates, while the external spectator marks the position that the viewer takes up outside the world of the art work. Sŏn-yŏng is positioned as the internal spectator and serves the viewer as a point of experiencing the spectacle of the exotic dance hall and the bold movements of the female dancing body. Thus, in the scene, the viewer is no longer positioned as the external spectator in the movie theater and is allowed to inhabit the fictional world that the scene opens up. The viewer is present in the scene of Sŏn-yŏng's fascination with the dancer and is aware of the power in her gaze. In a word, as Sŏn-yŏng is drawn to the *jouissance* that Na's dance performance evokes; the spectator is drawn to the *jouissance* in Sŏn-yŏng's intense gaze.

Meanwhile, the film does not encourage the spectator to identify entirely with Sŏn-yŏng by depriving her of the power of her gaze in the latter part of the film. The last two scenes that re-place Sŏn-yŏng under the gaze of the camera confirm the loss of the power with which her gaze was imbued. The scenes begin with her long and lonely walk in the streets after her sexual promiscuity is unveiled by Han Tae-sŏk's wife. Sudden snow seems to evoke either moral punishment for her wrong behavior or signal a moral redemption that may transform her back into a virtuous wife and mother. After the scene of her long walk in a melodramatic mode, the spectator sees the scene of a struggle between her and her husband

³¹ Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987)

Professor Chang. Pointing to her selfish desire, he at first does not want to accept her and locks her out of the house. However, as their son Kyōng-su cries out for her, he finally opens the door for her. Cinematic theatricality dramatically stages their reunion, directly addressing and inviting the spectator to be present in the climactic moment. The melodramatic scene in which Kyōng-su cries out and literally renames Madame Freedom Sōn-yōng “Mom” seems to suggest that her virtue as a mother and wife, once lost, could be restored. The last scene, which ends with the three family members in the doorway, however, does not offer a firm conclusion. The last shot of an upper eye-level *tableau vivant* looks down on Sōn-yōng and seems to address the necessity of the redemption by virtue of a higher moral position.



Figure 5: *Madame Freedom* (Han Hyōng-mo, 1956)

In the film, the gendered and ethnocultural gaze works upon Sōn-yōng’s transformation, competing with her gaze. Being seen through the gendered and ethnocultural view and through narrative logic, she is the cultural Other who enjoys American popular culture and commodities. Her gaze seems intense and attractive to the spectator but remains the cultural Other in mid-1950s South Korea, which was anxious about the overwhelming presence of American cultural products after the war. What awakens her subjectivity as the looker are exotic social dance and the consumption of imported or smuggled commodities, both of which generated public concerns. The cultural Otherness is substantially highlighted in the scenes of her workplace, “Paris Boutique.” She works at the boutique as a manager, selling expensive imported Western goods. In the scene that first introduces the boutique, cinematic theatricality combined with a frontal

and moving crane takes the spectator closer to the world to which she belongs. The camera slowly approaches the shop window, featuring close-ups of shiny Western shoes, watches, and bags. The boutique can be seen as her own world in which the commodities are arranged and ordered by her. After frequenting the dance hall, she begins wearing Western suits at the boutique and willingly displays herself with the Western goods for customers. In most of the boutique scene, the power of Sŏn-yŏng's gaze is more confidently exercised as her understanding of her customers' desires to consume the commodities enables her to arrange items to appeal to customers. Her interest in social dance and her pleasure in looking at and arranging imported Western goods are reminiscent of the Americanized lifestyle favored by North Korean partisan Margaret/Chŏng-ae in *The Hand of Fate* discussed in the previous section.

What role does cinematic theatricality play in the spectator's viewing experience in *Madame Freedom*? I argue that cinematic theatricality consciously displays the female dancing body that embodied the military, economic, gender, and cultural hierarchies between South Korea and the United State and exposes South Korea's gendered and ethnocultural Cold War gaze attempting to impose upon Sŏn-yŏng, without depriving the spectator of the *jouissance* of looking. Cinematic theatricality as a mode of address and a visual strategy directly solicits the spectator's active viewing and invites him or her to see how gazes come into play. Being guided by it, the spectator becomes aware of the wake of Sŏn-yŏng's intense gaze, Ch'un-ho's fetishistic male gaze that attempts to frame her in a picture of a still image, and the loss of power in Sŏn-yŏng's gaze. Observing both Sŏn-yŏng's intense gaze and the male or camera gaze that attempts to control it, the viewer is transformed as both the internal and external spectator in the fictional world of *Madame Freedom* and mid-1950s South Korea that it imagines. In this respect, the spectator's viewing experience centers more on the awareness of the contentious working of a range of gazes instead of how powerful Sŏn-yŏng's gaze is.

Cinematic theatricality punctuated by frontal moving crane shots ultimately allows the spectator to desire to look without identification and creates a distance between the viewer and what is displayed on screen. This distance imbues the *jouissance* of looking rather than the pleasure of looking on the part of the spectator. The easy pleasure of reading remains within the conventional patterns of ideology, form, and value while the *jouissance* of reading involves the cooperation of the reader in exploding the conventions on which easy pleasures depend.³² Likewise, in *Madame Freedom*, the distance through cinematic theatricality exposes early Cold War South Korea's paradoxical visual mechanism that

³² Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975)

generated both Sŏn-yŏng's desire to look and the gendered and ethnocultural gaze upon her and thus offers the spectator the *jouissance* of looking.

The spectator desiring from a distance is a particular historical viewing practice that cinematic theatricality articulated for mid-1950s South Korea embracing capitalist modernity and moving toward the anti-communist patriarchal ethno-developmental state. As Mulvey points out, "the economics and politics of capitalism could acquire an allure of desirability in contrast to the image of Soviet communism."³³ Cold War South Korea required the individual subject to desire to look and consume, but simultaneously only allowed it within contained cultural practices. Chung, in his seminal discussions of the escapism of South Korean melodramatic or comic films, states specific senses of time and space that the 1950s generated to imagine a qualitatively different reality, which could not be represented by the realism that postwar Italian cinema pursued. In a similar manner, mid-1950s South Korea sought out its own mode of the spectatorship and visual mechanism, not entirely emulating "the democracy of glamour" that often entailed the voyeuristic and fetishistic gaze in classical Hollywood cinema. South Korea's Cold War gaze required the spectator to be aware of his or her act of looking in order to become a subject who knows how to desire in the capitalist democratic nation-state of South Korea. At the same time, it also attempted to repress an unbridled desire that the individual's intense gaze might prompt.

In this article, I have discussed the cinematic theatricality in *Madame Freedom*, which deliberately displays gazes at work without depriving the spectator of the *jouissance* of looking. Becoming aware of his or her own act of viewing and the emergence of the gendered and ethnocultural gaze, the spectator sees the ideological and visual mechanism of mid-1950s South Korea attempting to place the individual body and desire under surveillance. The visuality of the film does not explicitly impose moral lessons upon the spectator. Instead, by exploring cinematic theatricality, the film invites the spectator to be present in a complex web in which one's individual gaze is awoken while the gendered and ethnonational gaze attempts to impose itself upon the individual. The distance through cinematic theatricality proposes the unique relationship between the spectator and what is displayed by not asking him or her to be entirely absorbed in the moralist narrative of the film. One interview subject in Pyŏn Chae-ran's ethnographic study of postwar female spectatorship recollects her viewing experience of *Madame Freedom*: "I can't remember anything but the fact that the film broke the rule, and women also can move... (The film) gave me a lot of strength."³⁴ For her, the film was neither a threat "equal to 500,000 soldiers of

³³ Mulvey, *Feminisms: Diversity, Difference, and Multiplicity in Contemporary Film Cultures*, 23.

³⁴ Pyŏn Chae-ran, "Han'guk yŏnghwasa eŏ yŏsŏng kwan'gaek ũi yŏnghwa kwallam kyŏnghŏm

the Chinese Communist army” nor an enlightenment. It suggests that the gendered and ethnocultural gaze did not easily control the audience’s act of viewing. The film was about “movement,” allowing the spectator to experience the *jouissance* of looking and opening up a productive interplay between closeness and distance, intimacy and distraction, empathy and critical detachment.

The cultural phenomena and intellectual debates of the literary work, “Madame Freedom,” and its cinematic adaptation, *Madame Freedom*, resonate with the historical moment in which immediate postwar South Korea searched for its Cold War gaze, which would desire for the ethnocultural and gendered structure of looking. Chŏng Pi-sŏk’s essay, published after he permitted Han Hyŏng-mo to adapt his work into film, offers significant insights into the most pressing concerns of the mid-1950s.³⁵ The essay takes the form of imaginative dialogues between author Chŏng and a fictional character, Sŏn-yŏng, who is called “Madame Freedom.” According to it, she firmly restores her virtue as “a wise mother and good wife” of an upper-class heterosexual family. What is interesting about her transformation is that she does not have to give up her interest in social dance to be redeemed from her previous wrong behavior of sexual promiscuity and moral decadence. She now enjoys dancing with her husband, Professor Chang in their living room equipped with a phonograph. Her desire to move her own body is fulfilled at home, and thus, she no longer has to turn her gaze to the exotic and illegitimate space of the dance hall. In a word, her gaze is now contained within the “domestic” space, and her pleasure in consuming commodities is legitimately integrated with an advanced American technological product, the phonograph. It becomes clear that what provoked social anxiety and public debates over the female dancing body was the free-floating individual gaze and unbridled desire that could not be controlled in public space, not the social dance itself. Against the anxiety and debates, the cinematic theatricality in *Madame Freedom* allowed the spectator to desire from a distance and experience the *jouissance* of looking by creating a distance between the viewer and the displayed and by exposing the emergence of Cold War South Korea’s gendered and ethnocultural gaze.

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yŏn’gu” [Women’s film-viewing experience in the history of South Korean cinema], Ph.D. diss., Chung’ang taehakkyo, 2000, 45.

³⁵ Chŏng Pi-sŏk, “Chayu puin kajŏngbangmun’gi” [Visiting Madame Freedom], *Yŏwŏn*, May 1956, 48–55.

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