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The Host and D-War

Complex Intersections of National Imaginings and Transnational Aspirations

The more problematic it becomes to categorize films within the boundaries of national cinema, the more pressing it becomes to grapple with the transnational reach of national film industries by considering global flows of images, texts, capital, resources, and labor. This naturally raises the perennial question of what makes a national cinema “national.” In the search for a nuanced answer, it is difficult to sidestep the facile trap of essentialist notions of national identity, while simultaneously avoiding the pitfall of over-emphasizing the importance of transnational flows. Even as notions of mobility and mutability rise in status in discourses on transnationality, the question of nationality retains its rhetorical and symbolic power, which in turn produces material and tangible effects legible not only in the film texts themselves, but also in the surrounding discourse.

As a case in point, the notion of “Korean-ness” retains discursive and tangible power, or to borrow Raymond Williams’s words, it still produces a “structure of feeling” with affective value. The term “Korean-ness” is at once problematic and productive, because it is both versatile and ambiguous in the way it is used and perceived in popular discourses on national identity, even as it refers to anachronistic ideas relating to the unified and essential nature of national identity, nationalist sentiment, cultural authenticity, and place of origin. As ideas of the nation become incorporated into global systems of exchange, it is necessary to consider how to rephrase the question “what is Korean about Korean cinema?” to fit into

a transnational register.

Produced, distributed and exhibited within the complex matrix of transnational flows in economic and industrial infrastructures, global media texts struggle with an identity crisis as they strive toward global mobility while retaining cultural specificity. The matrix of global flows of capital and labor complicates the task of associating any product with a single national origin – for instance, what is the place of origin for a product made from raw material from the Philippines, assembled in China, and financed by American capital? The task of affixing national labels on media texts is even more complicated, as they are cultural products that encompass various issues of cultural specificity, industrial and technological knowledge, geopolitical power, and national identity.¹ At the same time, as cultural *texts*, they raise questions of aesthetics, narrative structure, and intertextual references. In other words, the identity crisis of the media text occurs on both material and discursive levels. As a material entity that is implicated in a multiplicity of textual and contextual discourses, the media text straddles both realms of the material and the discursive.

A large number of contemporary films are products of the anxieties of these global times, embodying the difficulty of maneuvering between the often-conflicting forces of national essentialism and transnational aspirations. In this essay I analyze how two Korean films — *The Host* (*Gwoemul*, Bong Joon-ho, 2006) and *D-War* (Shim Hyung-rae, 2007) — re-insert national ideas into concepts of transnationality, an effort

that often conflicts with their rigorous endeavors to categorize and promote themselves as global products. The two films are sites of cultural struggle – commonly shared by many global media texts — in which the identity crisis between the national and the transnational takes form. I argue that these films attempt to re-create and re-envision “Korean-ness,” or the national identity of Korean cinema, even as they strive toward transnational relevancy by adopting and appropriating the conventional forms of Hollywood films that are often considered easily translatable to a global audience. I further assert that the two films are visually coded as transnational texts in the way they materialize global flows and imaginings through deterritorialized, imaginary spaces created by digitally enhanced visual effects.²

Discussing the identity politics of global media texts, the oft-quoted theorist of globalization, Arjun Appadurai asserts that the “structure of contexts cannot and should not be derived entirely from the logic and morphology of texts,” because the production of text and context have “different logics and metapragmatic features.”³ If the “complex imbrication of discursive and non-discursive practices” in which contexts are produced differs from the dense web of intertextual references in media texts, then it becomes necessary to consider cultural, industrial, linguistic, political and economic contexts when interrogating their nationality and cultural specificity. Hoping to put equal emphasis on the intertextual connections between media texts and the “global network of contexts,” I propose that we move *beyond* conducting textual analysis that rely upon conceptualizing films as reflections of national identity, and instead move *toward* integrating the material and the discursive by examining the textuality of the films in conjunction with the discursive context that envelops them — either in popular, critical or industrial discourse. That is, we should consider how configurations of cultural and industrial practices come together to challenge, erase, and sometimes re-emphasize the national identity of the finished media products.

With this methodological task in mind, I set out in this essay to analyze how national and transnational ideas and forms co-exist by examining both text and context, or more

specifically, the production, post-production, distribution and exhibition practices deployed in the making of *The Host* and *D-War*. I also consider how the films, which raised a considerable number of media debates, were discussed and interpreted in popular and critical discourse in regard to their endeavors to attain global mobility while retaining elements of “Korean-ness.” Through discourse and textual analyses, I explore the tension and friction that often exist between national identity and transnational aspirations in global media texts.

The two films share many generic, visual and discursive similarities. They both feature huge, amphibious monsters, their visuals are laden with sophisticated CGI effects, they were huge blockbuster hits, and most importantly, they both raised a considerable number of debates on national and transnational identities in popular and critical discourse. I find it more relevant, however, to compare the different strategies deployed in the two films to negotiate the national and the transnational. A comparative analysis of the two films provides a varied perspective on the contentious issue of the “Korean-ness” of Korean cinema; it is striking how the two films, produced almost simultaneously, differ in the way they deployed strategies of globalization in their balance act between Korean specificity and transnational appeal. The two films are almost exact opposites in various aspects of production, such as cast, crew, setting and language, and in their critical reception.⁴

Both films garnered much attention in the Korean media for drawing record local audiences, and for their wide international release. After it was released in South Korea on July 27, 2006, *The Host* set new box office records when it attracted 2.7 million viewers in the first four days, and broke the one-million-viewer mark in three days, the shortest time ever.⁵ By the end of the domestic theatrical run on November 8, the number of viewers had surpassed 13 million, which made it the highest grossing Korean film thus far.⁶ It was also released theatrically in other countries, including Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia, France, Spain, Mexico, Argentina, the U.K. and the U.S., where the film achieved critical acclaim and modest box-office success. *The Host* also received much favorable attention at international

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film festivals. It premiered at the Cannes Film Festival on May 21, 2006, where *The New York Times* declared it one of the best films there,⁷ and also participated in the Hong Kong International Film Festival, the Edinburgh International Film Festival, the Toronto International Film Festival, the Vancouver International Film Festival, and the Festival de Cine de Sitges, a festival specializing in fantasy films.

Meanwhile, despite mostly negative critical reviews— or some would say because of them— *D-War*, after its theatrical release in South Korea on August 1, 2007, attracted 2.2 million viewers in its first four days,⁸ and earned \$53 million in the domestic market to become the nation's fifth largest grossing film thus far. It was released in U.S. theaters on 1,500 screens on September 14, 2007, and grossed \$10 million to become the highest grossing Korean-made film ever to be released theatrically in the U.S.⁹ Although *The Host* and *D-War* evince similarities in their success, the filmmakers and producers of the two films diverged in the production and promotion strategies they deployed to obtain the common goal of creating and marketing a “global” cultural product that would attract international audiences and, consequently, be released in overseas markets.

These aspirations and efforts of globalizing Korean cinema are not only shared by Korean filmmakers and producers, but also the South Korean government, which has played an active role in integrating global aspirations in their state policies. The government greatly influenced the growth of Korean cinema in both domestic and overseas markets through its implementation of a globalization policy that began during Kim Young-sam's presidency (1993-98) and continued into Kim Dae-jung's presidency (1998-2003). Under the slogan “*seggyehwa*” — the Korean version of “globalization”— the Kim Young-sam administration adopted globalization as a key campaign and publicly pursued major reforms in political, economic, social and cultural sectors to increase Korean competitiveness in international markets.¹⁰ These efforts extended to the development and promotion of various areas of culture and media, including the film industry. Kim Young-sam's “*seggyehwa*” policy envisioned a unique mixture of “simultaneous globalization/

globalism and Koreanization/nationalism,” and the president proclaimed that “[g]lobalization must be underpinned by Koreanization.... Koreans should march out into the world on the strength of their unique culture and traditional values. Only when we maintain our national identity and uphold our intrinsic national spirit will we be able to successfully globalize.”¹¹ Although the government's active support through its implementation of state policies was instrumental in both the domestic and international growth of the Korean film industry, the glib optimism of political rhetoric or the ambition of government-imposed policies did not readily translate into aesthetic quality or box office success. Nor did they provide concrete guidelines — not that they ever exist in any volatile global market— that helped bridge the seemingly conflicting forces of globalization and Koreanization, or to pin down the elusive nature of the “Korean-ness” that Kim suggests can be found in the nation's “unique culture and traditional values.”

One method used by several Korean filmmakers was to differentiate their products by aestheticizing traditional Korean culture, as in the case of the Korean auteur, Im Kwon-taek, who won the Best Director Award at the Cannes Film Festival for *Strokes of Fire* (*Chihwaseon*, 2002), a period piece about the tumultuous life of a 19th century Korean painter. Another method was to create art films for a niche audience, as in the case of film festival favorites Hong Sang-soo¹² and Kim Ki-duk,¹³ in order to specifically target international markets.¹⁴ It is questionable, however, whether these three filmmakers achieved a successful mixture of the global and the national. Although the three directors are well known and receive varying degrees of respect in Korea, their films do not usually fare well at the domestic box office, and are considered by some Koreans as prioritizing international film festival audiences at the expense of the tastes and sentiments of the local audience.¹⁵ This discrepant reception of films in domestic and international venues highlights the difficulties faced by filmmakers who aspire to create films with an appeal that is translatable across geographical and cultural borders.

Meanwhile, the two films, *The Host* and *D-War*, deviate from the aforementioned examples

in that the filmmakers did not necessarily aestheticize “Korean-ness,” but rather overtly attempted to emulate the “universal” or “global” appeal of Hollywood blockbusters, even as they tried to retain their cultural specificity as Korean products. *The Host* contains more obvious cultural codes of “Korean-ness” through its actors, setting, and references to modern Korean history. The filmmaker used Korean actors, most notably Song Kang-ho, who is well known to local and overseas audiences for his roles in several internationally-acclaimed films, such as *JSA* (Park Chan-wook, 2000) and *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (Park Chan-wook, 2002), and the film is set in Seoul, mostly around the Han River, which flows through the center of the city. The film, which integrates elements of the monster movie and political satire, also references memorable moments in recent Korean history that are immediately recognizable to local audiences — the violent student protests against the government that took place during the 1980s and early 1990s, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis that resulted in massive bankruptcies and layoffs, and the uneasy presence of the U.S. military in Korea. For instance, the first sequence of the film shows an American military doctor ordering his Korean subordinate to dump toxic chemicals into a drain connected to the Han River, which consequently creates the titular mutant monster.¹⁶ This sequence was inspired by an actual pollution case that happened in Korea in 2000, when Albert McFarland, a mortician who worked for the U.S. military, allegedly gave the order to pour formaldehyde used to embalm corpses down a drain that led into the Han River (He received a two-year suspension, after which he returned to his job at the morgue).¹⁷ Later in the film, the U.S. sprays a harmful, anti-bacteriological substance called “Agent Yellow” (as a thinly veiled reference to “Agent Orange”) in an effort to ward off a virus, later revealed to be non-existent. Also, the Molotov cocktail thrown at the monster toward the end of the film is an iconic object associated with the student demonstrators who used them in their protests against the Korean government.

So what makes this film “transnational”? Most notably, the filmmaker exhibits adroitness in mixing generic conventions and intertextual references. In interviews, Bong Joon-ho remarked that he was

inspired mostly by M. Knight Shyamalan’s film, *Signs* (2002), which also centers on a dysfunctional family’s struggle against a monster (aliens in this case), as well as other Hollywood monster movies, such as John Carpenter’s *The Thing* (1982) and Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979).¹⁸ Although Bong demonstrates his familiarity with the conventions of the Hollywood horror genre, his film does not simply mimic them as a faithful copy, but appropriates and references these conventions while injecting his own distinct, signature style of humor, and concocting a creative mixture of various genres, including science fiction, monster movies, action films, political satire, and comedy. While *The Host* rests upon a socio-political subtext that references specific moments in Korean history, the film also acknowledges the topical global issue — environmentalism — through the storyline of the toxic waste that creates the mutant monster, thereby providing a common point of reference.

In the context of production and post-production, however, the biggest evidence of the film’s transnationality is the special effects and visual effects, which took up approximately 40 percent of the budget — an unprecedented amount in Korean cinema. The creature design was done by a Korean game designer, Jang Hee-chul, the modeling was done by Weta Workshop in New Zealand, who worked on Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-03) and *King Kong* (2005), the animatronics were done by John Cox’s workshop in Australia, and the CG was done by The Orphanage, a visual effects studio based in California, whose credits include *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest* (Gore Verbinski, 2006) and *Iron Man* (Jon Favreau, 2008). Despite this multi-national crew, the filmmaker stressed the “Korean-ness” of the mutant monster’s appearance. In an interview with *Cine 21*, a weekly Korean film magazine, Bong said that his main concern when visualizing the monster was that it should be “realistic” and “Korean.” More specifically, he emphasized that it should not be as huge as a skyscraper and should visually match the Korean actors, who portray “ordinary people” in the film, rather than a Hollywood action hero like Arnold Schwarzenegger.¹⁹ While it is debatable whether the monster successfully visualized the indefinable, nebulous quality of “Korean-ness,”

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his efforts were well rewarded in terms of high box-office sales, and the popular opinion that the monster looked as “realistic” as could be expected of a fantastic creature. Most importantly, *The Host* enjoyed critical acclaim both at home and abroad that acknowledged the singular creativity of the film, despite its numerous references to Hollywood monster movies. In other words, the film’s re-envisioning of “Korean-ness” was also legible and translatable to international audiences.

Meanwhile, elements of “Korean-ness” are intentionally more veiled in the film, *D-War*, which went in the opposite direction from *The Host* in several aspects of production. The Korean filmmaker used an American cast, including relatively well-known Hollywood actors, such as Robert Forster and Jason Behr.²⁰ The film used English dialogue with Korean subtitles, was set in contemporary Los Angeles, and most of the action scenes were filmed in the downtown metropolitan area. The film’s narrative, however, is based on a Korean legend that includes mythical creatures and entities, such as dragons, *Imoogi* (a mythical serpent) and the *Yeouijoo* (a magical pearl that has the power to turn an *Imoogi* into a dragon). Also, in stark contrast to *The Host*, filmmaker Shim Hyung-rae used only Korean CGI technology for *D-War* through his company Younggu Art,²¹ a fact that the director continuously stressed throughout the production and promotion of his film. The visual effects in the film received much praise from audiences and critics who saw this as evidence that Korean CGI technology was catching up to that of Hollywood.²² This created the ironic situation that the nationalist pride of Korean audiences was based on the belief that Korean cinema was realizing transnational aspirations not by foregrounding “their unique culture and traditional values,” but by regarding Hollywood as a benchmark in transnationality.

The tension between national essentialism and transnational aspirations that conflicts global media texts was glaringly apparent in both the film and the surrounding discourse, most notably in Shim’s contradictory endeavors to simultaneously hide and highlight, erase and exploit the idea of “Korean-ness” in *D-War*, which caused much controversy in the Korean media. For instance, the filmmaker publicly targeted his film toward the

global market, but relied on nationalist sentiment and patriotic pride to promote it to Korean and Korean-American moviegoers, who ultimately constituted the majority of the film’s audience. Meanwhile, Shim’s decision to film *D-War* in English with Korean subtitles disqualified it from receiving government funding, so once again he turned to nationalism and regionalism to receive financial investment and promotional support from Asian corporations such as Samsung and Sony.²³ Many Koreans condemned Shim for choosing to include the iconic traditional Korean folksong, *Arirang*, at the end of the film. In a ploy to arouse an affective, sympathetic response from Korean viewers, the song was played over the ending credits, which also included a message by Shim vowing that “*D-War* and I will succeed in the world market without fail.”²⁴ Although Shim stressed that Korean films had to move beyond melodrama and focus on high quality action sequences and special effects to succeed commercially in the U.S. market,²⁵ the filmmaker ironically resorted to “melodrama” as a performative marketing strategy by giving tearful interviews on his trials as a filmmaker while promoting *D-War*.

After its release, several prominent cultural figures in Korea denigrated Shim for the film’s lack of quality and his egregious marketing strategies. Unlike *The Host*, which was accepted as an imaginative interpretation of the monster movie genre, *D-War* was regarded by many critics as an unoriginal copy that mimicked the Hollywood formula and lacked creative vision. Fellow filmmaker Leesong Hee-il publicly criticized Shim’s film on his own website, writing that, “*D-war* is not a movie. It’s like a successful imitation of U.S. toasters assembled in *Cheonggyecheon* in the 1970s.”²⁶ He went on to deride Shim for deploying marketing strategies that appealed to the patriotic sentiment and national pride of Korean filmgoers. Fans of the movie retaliated, however, and flooded Leesong’s blog with so many incensed posts that it had to be closed down. Ironically, such criticism further fueled the debate surrounding the film, and consequently, tickets sales for the movie went up 10 percent.²⁷ Seeing him as an underdog, many Koreans rallied around Shim, and responded favorably to his interviews that related the difficulties he faced throughout the

pre-production, production and distribution stages of his film as an outsider, not only in Hollywood but also in Korea's own film industry, where he was allegedly treated with derision and prejudice as a former slapstick comedian. Because many Koreans sympathized with Shim for his efforts during the long drawn-out process (lasting approximately five years) of financing and producing the film, and saw his personal story as a national allegory of the underdog Korea challenging the superpower U.S., hardcore fans stoutly defended the film and condemned any criticism against it as unpatriotic.

This conflation of patriotism and support for the film generated another much-publicized cross-media debate. During a nationally televised debate on the phenomenon of *D-War's* local box-office success, prominent cultural critic/college professor Chin Jung-kwon openly expressed derision toward the movie, saying that its success was due to its nationalistic appeal and that it was "unworthy of criticism" for its lack of narrative logic and quality. This debate prompted a deluge of public response on the television network's **website, and continued** further on Chin's own blog, which was inundated by angry, caustic messages posted by die-hard fans of the movie. Some even went so far as to physically threaten Chin, and to condemn him as a national traitor for marrying a Japanese woman. Despite the onslaught of verbal abuse, the unrepentant Chin stood by his former statements, saying that the "era of blind patriotism must die out,"²⁸ and other critics took his side by deriding Shim for his patriotism-inducing marketing strategies and unabashed self-promotion as a national hero.

As discussed thus far, the two films, *The Host* and *D-War*, demonstrate that the national imaginary is neither archaic nor meaningless in the discursive and industrial practices of transnational filmmaking, and that the national and the global simultaneously collude with, and contest against, each other in the processes of production, post-production, and promotion. An analysis of the textual space in the two films provides another dimension to seeing them as sites of a cultural struggle between the national and the transnational. In the remainder of this essay, I explore how, through the visualization of a transnational space in the textual realm, the

two monster films most successfully accomplish the deterritorialization that contemporary media strive for in the era of global mobility. I argue that the imaginary spaces created in the two films through digitally enhanced visual effects actualize the transnational imaginings of modern subjects and materialize the transnational collaboration of cultural and economic forces.

Globalization scholar, Saskia Sassen, notes the existence of "frontier zones," or dynamic spaces where the global and the national overlap and intersect.²⁹ Although Sassen is referring to the more concrete space of global cities, this notion is also applicable to the imaginary realms of virtual space in global media texts, as they too can be described as "dense and complex borders marked by the intersection of multiple spatiotemporal (dis)orders."³⁰ This concept acknowledges the overlapping domains of the national and the global, where various spatial and temporal layers coalesce. In the case of film, this frontier zone can be translated into a form of cinematic visuality that is enabled by transnational collaborations in various stages of production and post-production.

In his discussion on global cultural disjunctures, Appadurai brings up the notions of "imagined worlds" and "mediascapes" in relation to the global consciousness that is imagined, created, and disseminated by transnational media. He notes that, due to the vast and complex web of images and narratives that are dispersed by various forms of audiovisual media, "[t]he lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes" are blurred, and that it becomes easy to "construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic objects."³² The imagined realms of *The Host* and *D-War*, in which fantasy plays a primary role, is an apt example of this global imaginary that is created, cultivated and disseminated through transnational media. Both films rely heavily on CGI effects to create an imaginary space that contains fantastic elements, a fact that generated much interest in the popular and critical discourse surrounding them. In part necessitated by the generic conventions of monster movies, this reliance on visual effects also manifests a close correlation to the films' aspirations for global mobility.

The two monster films include sequences that situate a fantastic figure, such as a monster or a

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dragon, in a familiar setting. As both films are set for the most part in urban landscapes — *The Host* in Seoul and *D-War* in Los Angeles, respectively — an uncanny sense of spatial incongruity is created through the insertion of an imaginary creature into a space that coincides with our conceptions of reality. As far-fetched as it may seem, the explanation for the monster in *The Host* is more believable and topical, because it is based upon a pseudo-scientific explanation that the monster is a genetic mutant created by toxic waste. Even so, a jarring effect is created when the fantastic suddenly disrupts the ordinary in the sequence where the monster first appears in broad daylight to wreak havoc on the unsuspecting crowd on the banks of the Han River. Meanwhile, the monster in *D-War* is a legendary creature that ruptures the boundaries between real and imaginary, and bursts out of myth into reality, or the “real” world of the film’s diegesis.

Their differences notwithstanding, both films also include sequences that are set in an uncanny, liminal space. In *The Host*, it is the defamiliarized realm of subterranean sewers inhabited by the monster. Although the underground sewage system, however unfamiliar, is still part of what we accept as reality, it is made “alien” in the film by the very presence of the monster that claims the space as its territory. Also, in their interviews, the filmmaker and actors often described the sewers as a strange place, mentioning how hard it was to move around because it was dark, slimy and wet, and how they had to receive shots to prevent contracting diseases that lurked *down there*. These comments further sustained the idea that this space was a foreign dimension set apart from familiar, recognizable territory. In *D-War*, the liminal space is an alternative realm to which the main characters are mysteriously transported — an otherworldly space not bound by the physical, temporal and geographical logic of our world. In the two films, these “other” spaces function as “frontier zones” where the various temporal and spatial layers overlap and the national and the global intersect, as these spaces do not visually refer to any particular geographical place. This liminal, imaginary space is coded as *de*-territorialized and *trans*-national, in that it is not connected to one region or nation — neither indexically nor technologically

— and because it is a space that is created by the imagination and technological finesse of a diverse group of people from various nations. In the case of *The Host*, this included creative workers who came from Korea, New Zealand, Australia, and the U.S. Therefore, this new form of cinematic visuality becomes a transnational cultural language that overcomes the persistent problem of untranslatability.

Thus in global media texts such as *The Host* and *D-War*, digitally enhanced visual effects materialize transnational flows and movements, and visualize the transnational imaginings that are in turn affected by our cognizance of the global reach of cultural and economic forces that converge in media industries. The two films discussed here make continuous references to this global reach through a layering of mediation in the text. For instance, in *The Host*, the private story of the main characters is interwoven with the media coverage of the collective crisis that is frequently broadcast through television and radio. The audience is also constantly exposed to televised news clips in the film *D-War*, as the main character is a television news reporter who is covering the story of the monster. Contextually, the importance of these imagined spaces is not only emphasized in the transnationality of the films’ production and post-production processes, but also reiterated in their promotion and marketing strategies.

Through a comparative analysis of the two films, *The Host* and *D-War*, I examined how ideas of the nation and nationalism persist in global media texts, causing friction with their transnational aspirations, and how they are perpetuated through certain forms and routes of production, exhibition and distribution. As discussed above, the two films were produced and promoted in ways that relied upon traditional conventions of invoking nationalist sentiment while visually and discursively coding themselves as transnational products. These two case studies demonstrate the desires of Korean filmmakers to create a transnational product that simultaneously emulates the “global” appeal of Hollywood blockbusters, while retaining the cultural specificity of Korean filmmaking. The identity crisis of the two films is produced by the efforts to fulfill the Herculean double task of concretizing the elusive nature of

“Korean-ness” and capturing the global imaginary. Arguably *The Host* was more successful in reaching a wide audience, having received favorable popular and critical reviews both at home and abroad, which translated well into profits at the box office. *D-War* received more attention in Korea for the heated debates on patriotism it raised than for its merits as a film, and though it broke the record for being released in the largest number of U.S. screens for a Korean film, the audience abroad

comprised mostly Korean immigrants. Through their similarities and differences, the two films are instrumental in re-envisioning the role of the national in a transnational register, and examining how specific cultural, economic, geopolitical and historical conditions of national cinemas affect efforts — at times concerted, at times contradictory — to produce films with transnational appeal in a globalized system of exchange.

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NOTES

- 1 Noting this complexity, Stephen Crofts explains how problematizing notions of the nation and national cinema necessitates the emergence of new categories of analysis, such as production, distribution and exhibition, audiences, discourses, textuality, national-cultural specificity, and the global range of nation-state cinemas. Stephen Crofts, “Concepts of National Cinema,” *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies*, eds. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 386-89.
- 2 This essay is part of an ongoing research project on imaginary spaces in films that are created through transnational collaborations.
- 3 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 187.
- 4 Their similarities brought about a misinterpretation of filmmaker Bong Joon-ho’s words by Korean netizens, who spread rumors that he had spoken disparagingly of *D-War* in an interview, when in fact the director was referring to his own film, *The Host*. The confusion was created by Bong’s use of the words “imoogi,” which refers to a mythical creature in Korean mythology and appears as a main character in *D-War*.
- 5 “*The Host* Stomps to Multiple Box Office Records,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, July 31, 2006.
- 6 Not everyone was pleased with these numbers. With the film being shown on 38 percent of screens nationwide, concerns were

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raised over a possible monopoly of the market, which was seen as compromising the diversity of the Korean film industry.

7 “Monster Flick Ups Hype With Five-Poster Campaign,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, June 14, 2006.

8 “D-War’ Stirs up Sensation,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, Aug. 6, 2007.

9 Bruce Wallace, “Patriotism Rears its Fiery Head,” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 15, 2007.

10 Jeeyoung Shin, “Globalization and New Korean Cinema,” *New Korean Cinema*, eds. Chi-

Yun Shin and Julian Stringer (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 53.

11 *Ibid.*, 56.

12 Hong was nominated for the *Palme d’Or* twice at the Cannes Film Festival for his films, *Woman is the Future of Man* (2004) and *Tale of Cinema* (2005).

13 Kim won the Best Director Award at the Berlin International Film Festival for *Samaritan Girl* (2004) and at the Venice Film Festival for *3-Iron* (2004).

14 Shin, *Ibid.*, 56.

15 Despite his successes abroad, Kim Ki-duk ostracized himself even further from Korean moviegoers when, after several of his films fared poorly in domestic box offices, the embittered filmmaker declared that he would no longer release his films in Korean theaters. Korean netizens saw his attitude toward Korean audiences as contemptuous and derogatory, and posted a formidable number of tirades against the filmmaker on online forums.

16 The Korean title “*Gwoemul*” means “monster” in Korean.

17 “U.S. Army Keeping close Eye on Han River Monster,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, Aug. 11, 2006.

18 Scott Weinberg, “TIFF Interview: *The Host* Director Bong Joon-ho” (Sept. 13, 2006, <http://www.cinematical.com/2006/09/13/tiff-interview-the-host-director-bong-joon-ho/>)

19 Lee Da-hye, “Production Report on Bong Joon-ho’s *The Host*,” *Cine 21* (June 8, 2006).

20 In interviews, the Korean filmmaker stated that he even considered Anglicizing his name, so that his film would not carry the stigma of being directed by a non-American filmmaker.

21 The name of the CGI company (“**Younggu**”) **refers to a famous fictional character played by the director Shim Hyung-rae** in his days as a popular slapstick comedian. The company was designated an Advanced Technology Center by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Energy in 2004 for its expertise in visual effects.

22 “Korean Computer Animators Rising to Challenge Hollywood,” *The Chosun Ilbo* (Aug. 13, 2007).

23 Brooks Barnes, “New Tactics Aim to Make Korean Film a Hit in the U.S.,” *The New York Times* (Sept. 9, 2007).

24 This message was deleted from the version released in the U.S., but the closing credits still included a series of photographs showing Shim in various stages of directing the movie and one showing him standing in front of the Hollywood sign.

25 Barnes, “New Tactics.”

26 “D-War’ Stirs Up Sensation.” *Cheonggyecheon* is the name of a stream that flows through downtown Seoul, South Korea and also **refers to the adjacent area that was recently restored as part of a large-scale urban renewal project (2005). In his comment**, however, Leesong uses this term to criticize the low quality of the film by referring to a time when the name, *Cheonggyecheon*, was associated with the cheap imitations and second-rate merchandise that were produced and sold in the area.

27 *Ibid.*

28 Wallace, *Ibid.*

29 Saskia Sassen, “Spatialities and Temporalities of the Global,” *Public Culture* 12 (2000), 216.

30 *Ibid.*, 221.

31 Appadurai, *Ibid.*, 35.