

**South Korean Film Since 1986:  
The Domestic and Regional Formulation  
of East Asia's Most Recent  
Commercial Entertainment Cinema**

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## List of Abbreviations

CDMI	Cultural Diversity in Moving Images
CGV	CJ Golden Village
CJE	CJ Entertainment (Cheil Jedang Entertainment)
FIPRESCI	International Federation of Film Critics
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KOFIC	Korean Film Commission (Korean Film Council since 2004)
MGM/UA	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/United Artists
MPEAA	Motion Picture Exporters Association of America
MPL	Motion Picture Law
MPPC	Motion Picture Promotion Corporation
PEC	Picture Evaluation Committee
PPEC	Public Performance Ethics Committee
UIP	United International Pictures

## A Note on the Text

In order to consistently standardise the text for readability, without exception I follow the convention of putting Korean family names before hyphenated and mono-capitalised given names. This goes against the preferred moniker arrangement of some individuals, e.g. notable Korean scholars working overseas such as Kyung Hyun Kim, whom I refer to here as Kim Kyung-hyun. (Preferred name structures are utilised in the notes and bibliography.)

For the romanisation of Korean language throughout this thesis I follow the McCune-Reischauer system extended by the United States Library of Congress and the American Library Association, even in cases when there is already a commonly used transcription available, e.g. I use Kang U-sŏk rather than Kang Woo-suk. Among the few exceptions are the names of internationally recognised business entities, place names, and scholars (many of whose names in Korea's *han'gŭl* writing system are unknown and thus cannot be accurately romanised with certainty). In citations of previously published work the original romanisation is maintained.

For consistency, all monetary values are expressed in US dollars except where otherwise indicated. Conversions from the Korean *won* to the US dollar are based on year-end exchange rates found in Christopher Dent's *Foreign Economic Policies of Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan* (2002).

My frequent use of 'Korea' in this document refers to the Republic of Korea and not the entire Korean peninsula. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is referred to as North Korea.

## Summary

This thesis investigates the historically composed political and economic contexts that contributed to the late 1990s commercial renaissance of Korean national cinema and that have sustained the popularity of Korean films among local and regional audiences ever since. Unlike existing approaches to the topic, which emphasise the textual characteristics of national film production, this thesis considers relations between film production, distribution, exhibition, and ancillary markets, as well as Korean cinema's engagement with international cinemas such as Hollywood, Hong Kong, China and Japan.

I argue that following the relaxation of restrictive film policy towards the importation and distribution of foreign films between 1986 and 1988, the subsequent failure of the domestic film industry to compete against international competition precipitated a remarkable shift in consensus regarding the industry's structure and functions. Due to the loss of distribution rights to foreign films and the rapid decline in ticket sales for Korean films, the continued economic viability of local film companies was under enormous threat by the early 1990s. The government reacted by permitting conglomerates to seize control of the industry and pursue vertical and horizontal integration. During the rest of the decade, Korean cinema was transformed from an art cinema to a commercial entertainment cinema. The 1997/98 economic crisis led to the exit of conglomerate finance, but streamlined film companies were able to withstand the monetary meltdown, continue the domestic revitalisation, and, since the late 1990s, build media empires based on the expansion of Korean cinema throughout the Asian region.

**Declaration**

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or a diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

James Brown

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