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## KOREAN OPERA-FILM *CHUNHYANG* AND THE TRANS-CULTURAL POLITICS OF THE VOICE

**Abstract.** This essay examines a Korean opera-film *Chunhyang* (2000) to show how it departs from the standard practice of Western opera-film and how its uniqueness is generated by the characteristics of indigenous Korean opera, *P'ansori*. In spite of its uniqueness, however, *Chunhyang* shows its affinities with its Western sisters by confirming what has been criticized by many feminist scholars as one of the most serious problems in the Western tradition of cinema, especially Hollywood's classical films: namely, the gendered politics of the voice.

**Keywords:** *Chunhyang*, Korea, Opera-film, *P'ansori*, Trans-cultural, Voice.

*Chunhyang* is a Korean film produced in 2000, directed by Kwon Taek Im, the recipient of Best Director Award at Cannes in 2002. This film is a cinematic production of a *P'ansori*, traditional Korean musical theater, which can be considered to be “opera” in the broad sense that the story is articulated by singing in a theatrical setting. *Chunhyang* represents an interesting embodiment of the “East-meets-West,”<sup>1</sup> not in the more common sense of musical hybridization but at the level of the hybridization of genres: a marriage of *P'ansori*, an indigenous Korean art form, and cinema, which was originated in Western cultures although it has now become a universal or global genre, losing its original cultural identity.

This paper examines how *Chunhyang* differs from most of Western “opera-film” – a cinematic production of opera exemplified by Joseph Losey's *Don Giovanni* (1976), Franco Zeffirelli's *Otello* (1986), and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Parsifal* (1982) among others—and how those differences are generated by the characteristics of *P'ansori*, differentiated from those of Western operas. In spite of those stylistic differences that situate *Chunhyang* in a unique position in the repertoire of opera-film, however, I will show how this Korean opera-film reconfirms and reinforces what has been criticized by many feminist scholars as one of the most serious problems in the Western tradition of opera and cinema: namely, the gendered politics of the voice. Finally, I discuss the cultural identity of the genre of opera-film in general and Im's *Chunhyang* in particular.

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<sup>1</sup> Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau, ed., *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music* (Middletown, Wesleyan University Press), xv.

### ***Background of P'ansori and Chunhyang***

*P'ansori* is a folk musical theater developed in pre-modern Korea in the early eighteenth century. It is distinguished from Western opera in several ways. First of all, it is not a fully dramatic genre but in between narrative and dramatic genres, containing a narration as well as dialogs. A more drastic difference is the fact that *P'ansori* employs only one singer, who takes the roles of all of the dramatic characters *and* the narrator. Accompanied by only one instrument *puk*, a double-headed drum, *P'ansori* was originally intended for outdoor performance at a market place without any scenery, costume, or stage props. Influenced by Western opera after Korea was introduced to Western music, *P'ansori* was evolved to a full-fledged operatic form called *Ch'angguk* around the turn of the twentieth century. *Chunhyang* has been one of the most popularly performed *P'ansories* and was the first work adapted to *ch'angguk*, which was premiered in 1905, and provided the narrative source for the libretto of the first modern Korean opera composed by Chemyong Hyon in 1950.<sup>2</sup> The narrative source of *Chunhyang* is a folktale. Although different versions of the *Chunhyang* tale exist, the one that has been used as the source for operatic adaptations presents the following plot:

The story is set in the early eighteenth-century pre-modern Korea. Chunhyang, the heroine, is an illegitimate daughter of a noble man and Wolmae, a *kisaeng*, the name of the class of the female entertainer and courtesan in pre-modern Korea, which is comparable to *geisha* in Japan. The hero Mongyong is a son of the magistrate in a town named Namwon. Mongyong falls in love with Chunhyang and secretly marries her without telling his parents. When his father gets a new government position in Hanyang, the then capital of Korea, Mongyong has to follow his family to Hanyang. He promises Chunhyang to come back at the farewell. Despotic, womanizer Hak Do Pyon comes to Namwon as a new magistrate replacing Mongyong's father. He has many concubines and heard about Chunhyang's exceptional beauty. In spite of his awareness of Chunhyang's marriage with his predecessor's son, Pyon summons Chunhyang and demands her to be his mistress. When she adamantly refuses his demand, he tortures her but she endures it with miraculous fortitude. While Pyon is wielding his tyrannical power and involved in political corruptions, Mongyong passes the highest governmental examinations and comes back to his hometown Namwon, appointed as a governmental inspector. During the peak of Chunhyang's torture Mongyong rescues his beloved. Pyon steps down from his post and Chunhyang becomes Mongyong's official wife.

The two central scenes of *Chunhyang* from the musical and dramatic points of view are the "Farewell Scene" and the "Torture Scene." In both the original *P'ansori* and its operatic adaptations, the most elaborate music is

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<sup>2</sup> Eunah Kong, "Music at the Interface of Cultural Identity: Opera of Korea, 1948 to the Present," Ph.D. diss. (University of California, Los Angeles, 1998), 21, 36.

employed in these scenes. As demonstrated in its plot, the *Chunhyang* tale contains several social issues, one of the most visible of which is a class conflict. *Chunhyang*'s triumph over Pyon signifies not only a moral reward of her chastity at the personal level but also a social victory of the oppressed lower class over the tyrannical ruling class. The co-existence of a strong social consciousness and a touching love story is unusual among the *P'ansori* repertoire, and has made *Chunhyang* one of the most favored *P'ansori* and operatic adaptations, captivating composers, listeners, and performers alike. The fact that it gained a special popularity among the performers of pre-modern Korea is a logical result, considering the fact that the social classes of the two groups of the *P'ansori* performers, *kwangdae* and *kiesaeng*, were among the eight lowest classes.

### *Chunhyang and Its Western Sisters I: Chunhyang's Koreanness*

Considering the continuing popularity of the *Chunhyang* tale, it is not surprising that it inspired Kwon Taek Im, one of the most renowned Korean film directors, to produce the first Korean opera-film. Im's *Chunhyang* takes the form of a theater-within-a theater: it presents a mock stage performance of the *P'ansori Chunhyang*, which is interrupted by and crosscut with the visual illustration of the *P'ansori* narrative. In other words, the narrative space of the film's diegesis is not unified but divided into two different levels, and the cinematic images have double functions, as a presentation of the mock *P'ansori* performance and the visualization of the story of *Chunhyang*.<sup>3</sup>

This schizophrenic diegesis is the first element that distinguishes *Chunhyang* from the tradition of the Western opera-films.<sup>4</sup> Ingmar Bergman's *Magic Flute* (1975) presents a mock performance and was filmed as though it were a recording of a stage performance. Jean-Pierre Ponnell's *Orfeo* is produced in the same way, but in these opera-films, there is no diegetic transgression between the (mocked) stage performance and the fully cinematic visualization of the operatic narrative as in *Chunhyang*.

Schizophrenic diegesis of *Chunhyang* renders the voicing of the film very intriguing in that the operatic singing voice from the mock stage co-exists with the speaking voice enunciated by cinematic actors and actresses during the visual illustration of the *Chunhyang* tale. While the cinematic speaking voice is

<sup>3</sup> The term "diegesis," derived from Aristotle's poetics, is a new jargon frequently used in recent film theories. E. Ann Kaplan defines diegesis (Greek for "recital of facts") as the "denotative material of film narrative including the fictional space and time dimensions implied by the narrative; the fictive space and time into which the film works to absorb the spectator, the self contained fictional world of the film." See E. Ann Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 187.

<sup>4</sup> To my knowledge, *Chunhyang* is the only opera-film whose narrative space is divided in this way.

confined to the diegesis where it belongs to, the singing voice transgresses the two diegeses. In other words, the singing voice is often used as a voice-over that accompanies the visual illustrations of the singing. For instance, when the content of the *P'ansori* performer's singing is describing the landscape of the place where the hero Mongyong meets the heroine Chunhyang, the image track moves from the operatic stage to the realistic cinematic images of that landscape, over which the singing voice continues as a voice-over.

The fact that the *P'ansori* performers not only sing but sometimes use a speaking voice as a narrator contributes to the uniqueness of *Chunhyang*, distinguishing it from the standard practice of Western opera-film. The sung part in *P'ansori* is called "sori" and the spoken part, "aniri." The inclusion of the spoken dialog can be found in the tradition of Western opera, such as Singspiel and opera comique, but the singer's double role as a character and a narrator is a novel characteristic of *P'ansori* compared to the tradition of Western opera. This double role creates a potential to make a cinematic production of *P'ansori* more complex and sophisticated than that of Western opera in terms of the interaction between cinematic images and operatic singing. Examining the image-music relationship in *Chunhyang* would reveal how this potential can be realized.

In most of the Western opera-films, there is not much difference between the visuality in theatrical performance of an opera and that in its cinematic production except the fact that cinematic images tend to be much more realistic and naturalistic than theatrical stage settings.<sup>5</sup> Some opera-films exploit cinematic techniques unavailable in operatic theater, such as flashback: Frédéric Mitterand's *Madama Butterfly* (1995) presents Cio-Cio-Sang's recollection of her past life as a geisha and of her father's suicide before her own suicide as flashback images. Even when flashback images are employed, those images belong to the narrative of the opera. In *Chunhyang*, however, the performing images of the *P'ansori* singer at a mock theater are from the meta-narrative of the film, and these multiple narratives (or diegeses) render the relationships between image and music more complex and diversified than those in the standard repertoire of Western opera-film.

At the largest level, the music-image relationships in *Chunhyang* can be divided into four types. The most simplistic type is the embodied performance of the *P'ansori* singer: in other words, the image shows a performance of *P'ansori*, whether singing or speaking,<sup>6</sup> at a mock theater. Second, as I

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<sup>5</sup> Some European opera-film directors have shown anti-realistic approaches. Hans-Jürgen Syberber is one of such directors. For detailed discussion of his opera-film *Parsifal*, see Jeongwon Joe, Hans-Jürgen Syberber's *Parsifal: The Staging of Dissonance in the Fusion of Opera and Film*, "Music Research Forum" 13 (1998): 1-21.

<sup>6</sup> In *P'ansori*, the distribution of singing and speaking is not regular. In other words, some dialogs are set to music while others are spoken. Likewise, the narration can be either spoken or sung.

mentioned earlier, the narration of the *P'ansori* singer, whether in singing or in speaking voice, accompanies as a voice-over the visual illustration of the content of that narration. This is the moment when the two levels of the diegesis are combined: the voice is from the meta-diegetic world, and the image, from the diegesis of the *P'ansori* narrative. Third, both the image and the voice leave the meta-diegetic world of the mock stage of *P'ansori* theater and move into the diegesis of the *Chunhyang* tale: this is the moment when the film becomes fully cinematic as though it were a filmic adaptation of *Chunhyang*, the moment when the operatic voice stops, replaced by the cinematic, spoken dialogues of the actors and actresses. Most intriguingly, in the forth type of the music-image composition, the cinematic speaking voice is simultaneously presented with the operatic singing voice, which I call the “double voicing.” A detailed analysis of the “Torture Scene” would provide more concrete examples of the four types of the image-voice relationship in *Chunhyang*.

As mentioned above, the “Torture Scene” is one of the two central scenes of *Chunhyang* both in the original *P'ansori* and its operatic adaptations. In Im’s film, too, this scene, is the most intriguing not only in terms of musical elaboration and emotional intensity, as in the source *P'ansori*, but more importantly in terms of the cinematic orchestration of music and image, for it exploits all of its four types outlined above. The “Torture Scene” opens with the third type, the cinematic visualization of the *P'ansori* narrative: when the image moves from the *P'ansori* performance to the site of torture, the singing voice stops and is replaced by the speaking voice of the actor who plays Pyon; he orders the preparation for *Chunhyang*’s torture. Then Pyon’s cinematic voice disappears and the singing voice from the stage comes back to the soundtrack as a voice-over, which describes the silent images of the torturer, such as how he moves his body and how he selects torture instruments. This composition of the voice and the image illustrates the second category of the voice-image typology discussed above. What follows is a return to the third category, but this time, not the *P'ansori* performer’s singing voice but his speaking voice functions as a voice-over, providing a verbal description of *Chunhyang*’s mind and bodily movements while being tortured. The dramatic and musical climax of the “Torture Scene” is *Chunhyang*’s aria of the “Ten Blows,” in which *Chunhyang* is severely reproaching Pyon, expressing her adamant decision not to obey to his obscene and despotic desire.<sup>7</sup> Im’s cinematic rendition of this aria provides an example of what I called “the double voicing”: both the speaking voice of the female actress on screen and the singing voice from the un-seen stage enunciate the same lyrics of the “Ten Blows” aria, and both voices are heard simultaneously over the image of the execution of

<sup>7</sup> The “Ten Blow” aria is one of the two signature songs in the original *P'ansori*, along with *Chunhyang* and *Mongyong*’s “Farewell Song.”

Chunhyang's torture. In the middle of the aria, Chunhyang's speaking voice slips out of the double voicing as the image track moves from the site of the torture to the meta-diegetic world of the theater; and the *P'ansori* singer's voice is finally presented as an embodied form: in other words, we finally hear *and* see on screen the *P'ansori* singer, who is performing *Chunhyang* at a mock theater, an example of the first type of the music-image relationship discussed above.

### *Chunhyang and its Western Sisters II: Their Trans-cultural Affinities*

The previous section is focused on how Im's *Chunhyang* departs from the standard practice of the Western opera-film and how this departure is rooted in the indigenous characteristics of *P'ansori*, distinguished from the tradition of Western opera. In this section, I discuss the affinities between Im's opera-film and its Western sisters with particular attention to what has been one of the central issues in the feminist criticism of the Hollywood tradition, namely, the gendered treatment of female and male voices.

At the surface level of the *Chunhyang* tale, one can find some liberal and liberating elements in the fate of the heroine. Compared to many of the operatic heroines in Western opera, *Chunhyang* is not "undone": in other words, the story does not end with *Chunhyang*'s sacrificial death.<sup>8</sup> Instead, it embodies the fairytale narrative of "she lived happily ever after." In spite of this concluding happiness, however, *Chunhyang* shares a patriarchal and patronized fate of some operatic heroines in the Western tradition: namely, the fate of having to undergo and pass some trials before their ever-after happiness is secured and the fate of being excluded from the privilege of being informed of the hidden truth behind the disguised reality. Like *Griselda*, a peasant wife of a Sicilian king *Gualtiero*, who has to pass a series of cruel ordeals before she is formally accepted as the queen, *Chunhyang*'s chastity is tested by *Pyon*'s torture and more absurdly, by her beloved *Mongyong* himself: when he comes back to *Chunhyang*'s town, appointed as a government inspector, he hides his identity and asks *Chunhyang* if she would want to be his mistress (in this scene, *Chunhyang* is positioned at a place where she cannot see *Mongyong*'s face); *Chunhyang* answers in disgust and contempt, "You are just like *Pyon*, why are all of the high government officials the same?"

When *Orfeo* avoids looking at *Euridice* when they are walking out of the underworld, she is not informed of the profound reason why *Orfeo* averts his eyes from her and she becomes heartbroken. When *Tamino* has stopped speaking to *Pamina*, the princess also suffers, without knowing the reason for her beloved's silence, and she even tries to attempt suicide. Unli-

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<sup>8</sup> See Catherine Clement, *Opera or the Undoing of Women*, translated by Betsy Wing and foreword by Susan McClary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

ke the male protagonists, Griselda, Euridice, Pamina, and Chunhyang are all deprived of the privilege to know the hidden truth behind their sufferings.

A more intriguing and sophisticated affinity between Im's opera-film *Chunhyang* and her Western sisters can be found in the treatment of the female voice as opposed to the male voice. Before I show how *Chunhyang* reconfirms and reinforces the gendered politics of the voice codified in the tradition of the Western mainstream cinema and to some extent, in the operatic tradition as well, I will briefly examine major theories of the female voice developed by feminist film scholars.

In her book *Echo and Narcissus*, Amy Lawrence explores how woman's voice has been silenced in classical Hollywood cinema—"voice" in the sense of possessing the authorial points of view.<sup>9</sup> She has illuminated how woman's "speech" as opposed to "singing" is constructed as a problem and in so doing, how woman's discursive power is marginalized, if not entirely silenced. In such films as Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946) and Anatole Litvak's *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1948), the heroines initially seem to have the power of speech, for they talk much, probably too much. However, their speech is constructed to reveal their discursive impotence in that it does not have any power to control the narrative of the film. Furthermore, women's speech is sometimes presented with a misogynistic contempt and trivialized as "talkativeness," often associated with a telephone: in *Sorry, Wrong Number*, telephone is portrayed as "the woman's instrument."<sup>10</sup>

In classical Hollywood cinema, female characters, particularly femme fatale figures in film noir, are sometimes characterized by their hostility toward speech or a verbal language. Using the Lacanian concepts of language, E. Ann Kaplan notes that "if language is by definition 'male,' women who speak it are alienated from themselves."<sup>11</sup> In *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), for instance, the heroine Norma Desmond whispers or groans like a wild animal, distinguished from other characters'—especially the male characters'—normal speech. Amy Lawrence has shown that femme fatale characters' discourse sometimes depends on music instead of the verbal language. In other words, music functions as a substitute for their voices. As an example, Lawrence discusses Lewis Milestone's *Rain* (1932) based on Somerset Maugham's short story "Miss Thompson." Although the heroine Sadie is deprived of the authorial voice and discursive power, she is the person who controls the diegetic music of the film: music is always on when the male characters visit her and she resists to turn it off; loud and brazen

<sup>9</sup> Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>11</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Methuen, 1983), 93.

music is her weapon to challenge the male dominance; and it is only when she is about to accept O'Hara's marriage proposal that she turns the music off.<sup>12</sup>

The silencing of the woman's speech and the gendered dichotomy between speech and singing in the cinematic tradition has a long history in the Western culture, implicated in the Ovidian mythology about Echo and Narcissus: Echo longs to speak to Narcissus but can only repeat his words, deprived of her own voice.<sup>13</sup> Examples of this dichotomy can also be found in operatic works. In opera, singing is the means by which the characters communicate with each other. However, self-conscious singing, or what Carolyn Abbate names the "phenomenal song,"<sup>14</sup> tends to be associated with female characters. In *Carmen*, the heroine refuses to talk and instead starts to sing, "Tra, la la la..." when Zuniga inquires her what has happened after her fighting scene near the end of Act I (Carmen's libretto reads "Tra la la la la la la la/cut me up, burn me/ I'll tell you nothing/tra la la/I defy everything—fire, steel, and heaven itself!"). In the "Tower Scene" of Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande*, Pelleas exoticizes Melisande and her voice when he says "What are you doing there/At the window?/Singing like a bird who is not from here?" This exoticization, as Carolyn Abbate argues, reveals that Pelleas perceives Melisande's singing as a pure sound, focusing on the physicality of her voice, in spite of the fact that she sings recognizable words.<sup>15</sup> Another example can be found when Pelleas, enchanted by the beauty of Melisande's voice, exclaims, "Oh, *how* you say that!" (Italics mine); *what* she says is irrelevant to Debussy's male protagonist. The association of singing with women in both opera and cinema is rooted in the patriarchal construction of the discursive hierarchy between singing and speaking, speaking as a language of Reason, and singing as "the enemy of negation of Reason," as Richard Leppert puts it.<sup>16</sup> Slavoj Zizek reformulates this gendered dichotomy between singing and speech and the discursive hierarchy between the two as the conflict between voice and Word, respectively: voice is "a jouissance, which cuts loose from its anchoring in meaning and slides into a consuming self-enjoyment that effeminates the reliable masculine Word."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence, 88.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Abbate, *The Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Abbate, "Debussy's Phantom Sounds," in *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 170.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted from Lydia Goehr, *The Quest for Voice: on Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 125.

<sup>17</sup> Slavoj Zizek, "I Hear You with My Eyes or the Invisible Master," in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, ed. Renata Salecl and Slavoj Zizek (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).



With this theoretical background in mind, let us go back to the double voicing in the “Ten Blows” aria of the *Chunhyang* film. The singing voice from the theater is male, while the cinematic, speaking voice is enunciated by an actress (Hyo Jung Lee). As in Kabuki and the Peking opera, *P’ansori* traditionally had been performed by male singers until the late nineteenth century. The mock performance in the film follows this tradition and in so doing, creates a gender conflict between the two voices of Chunhyang, a male singing voice and a female speaking voice.<sup>18</sup> This double voicing apparently reverses the gender association of speech and singing, which has recurred in many artistic practices of the mainstream Western culture including opera and cinema, as I discussed above. But does Chunhyang’s speaking voice truly function as the carrier of the textual linguistic meaning of the scene? Does it embody and enact the voice of Reason and the voice of authority? Does it take a higher position at the ladder of discursive hierarchy than Chunhyang’s (male) singing voice?

Both voices carry the same lyrics of the “Ten Blows” aria, but as its volume is getting softer, the speaking voice gradually fades out to the background of the soundtrack and it is reduced to unintelligible noises (the unintelligibility of Chunhyang’s speaking voice is visually supported when the close-up of Chunhyang gradually changes to a long-shot of the torture site). It is Chunhyang’s (male) singing voice that serves to convey the textual meaning of the scene to the audience. When I had an interview with the director of the film, he told me that he intended to make Chunhyang’s speaking voice in the “Torture Scene” a kind of sound effect, “the sound of suffering,” “the sound of pain,” as an aesthetic amplification of Chunhyang’s scream.<sup>19</sup>

The demoting of Chunhyang’s cinematic voice to a sound effect, depriving its linguistic power, is an evocation of Pelleas’ perception of Melisande’s voice as pure sound and also of the silencing of the cinematic heroines’ voices in the Hollywood tradition, as discussed above. In the double voicing of *Chunhyang*, the gender association of speech and singing is reversed when the singing voice is male, while the speaking voice, female, and the conventional discursive hierarchy between singing and speech is also reversed, for it is the singing voice that has the linguistic function. From the

<sup>18</sup> The singer in the film is 62 year-old Sang Hyun Cho, one of the most renowned *P’ansori* performers in Korea. For his film, director Im used Cho’s early recording made in his 30s.

<sup>19</sup> The interview was taken place on March 30, 2001. Im explained to me that the reason why he wanted to employ both the speaking voice and the singing voice in this scene was to express the dramatic and artistic importance of the scene and to distinguish it from other scenes of the film. As I mentioned earlier, the “Torture Scene” and the “Farewell Scene” are the two most central scenes in the original *P’ansori*. In the “Farewell Scene,” too, Im used the double voicing for the same reason.

points of the gendered politics of the voice, however, this reversal signifies that the *Chunhyang* film stays within the Hollywood tradition that privileges male voice as the carrier of discursive power, of the language of Reason.

*Chunhyang*'s compliance with Hollywood's long cherished politics of the voice is further supported by the frequent appearance of the *P'ansori* singer's voice as a voice-over, which provides a verbal description of the silent images on screen (i.e., the second category in the typology of *Chunhyang*'s music-image relationship I discussed above). As explored by many scholars of cinema studies, it has been a tradition of the standard Hollywood films, especially in documentary, that disembodied voice-over narration is predominantly conferred to the male voice.<sup>20</sup> There is a long history that associates invisible voice with the divine speech and power. To put it in Carolyn Abbate's words, God's authority "is predicated on the presence of his voice in the absence of his body."<sup>21</sup> Being omnipresent, disembodied voice in cinema signifies its omniscient power, transgressing the boundaries between the diegetic and non-diegetic worlds of the film, and thus transcending the limit of the diegesis. By employing the male voice for disembodied narration while confining *Chunhyang*'s female voice to a "recessed area of diegesis,"<sup>22</sup> *Chunhyang* conspires with Hollywood in excluding the female voice from the privilege of disembodiment, from the privilege of carrying the omniscient power.

The hierarchical relationship between the male and female voices can be found in another aspect of *Chunhyang*, namely the role of the *P'ansori* singer as a mediator between the on-screen images and the audience—a mediator in the sense that he conjures up cinematic images and directs the spectator's gaze to those images. During the "Torture Scene," for instance, one hears the *P'ansori* performer's voice which sings, as a voice-over, "here comes the torturer," "look at *Chunhyang*'s suffering face," while seeing the images of the torturer and *Chunhyang* on screen. The role of the *P'ansori* singer as a mediator is akin to that of what Judith Mayne calls a "primitive narrator" in the cinema of spectacle, whose function is to "direct, or mediate, ... the visual pleasures of the cinematic scene."<sup>23</sup> Like Mayne's primitive narrator, the *P'ansori* singer in *Chunhyang* has the authorial power over the cinematic images.

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<sup>20</sup> Among the classic studies on this topic are Amy Lawrence's afore-mentioned book *Echo and Narcissus* and Kaja Silverman's *Acoustic Mirror: the Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Abbate, "Debussy's Phantom Sounds," 148.

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence, 149.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted from Rose Theresa, "From Méphistophélès to Méliès: Spectacle and Narrative in Opera and Early Film," in *Between Opera and Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa (New York: Routledge, 2002), 11.

Considering the ways the power hierarchy between female voice and male voice is constructed in *Chunhyang*, one can draw a conclusion that this film not only confirms but also makes even stronger Hollywood's gendered politics of the voice. This is because in *Chunhyang* such hierarchy is fortified by multiple means as I examined above: by reducing Chunhyang's female voice to a sound effect and thus drastically depriving it of the discursive power; by confining the female voice to the diegetic interiority of the film; and conferring the authorial power to the P'ansori singer's male voice as a producer of the cinematic images.

### *The Cultural Identity of Opera-Film*

Scholarship on the mutual influences between opera and cinema has been rapidly growing among the English speaking scholars over the past few decades.<sup>24</sup> Opera-film is one of the most visible examples that testify such influences. It has become a common knowledge that the history of opera-film dates back to the era of silent film and many silents were based on operatic works, including Georges Méliès's *Faust et Marguerite* (1904), based on Gounod's opera. One might posit a question about the cultural identity of the hybrid genre of opera-film; more specifically, whether opera-films produced in non-Western countries, such as Im's *Chunhyang*, embody the Western influence on the East.

Although the existing studies on the intersections of cinema and opera, or musical theater in the broader sense, have focused on such intersections found in Western-European countries and America, a modicum of studies devoted to Asian countries and the cinematic and operatic practices in such countries testify that the mutual attraction between stage and screen has a long history in Asian countries as well. In Japan, for instance, early films employed female impersonators (*onnagata*), following a long cherished tradition of the Kabuki theater. As Keiko McDonald has shown, some film companies during the infant stage of Japanese cinema were reluctant to employ actresses even after 1928 when it became a studio policy to replace female impersonators with actresses.<sup>25</sup> The history of Chinese-language cinema, too, testifies cinema's attraction to opera: as Teri Silvio's study illuminates, early Chinese cinema was modeled on traditional Chinese music theaters.

<sup>24</sup> Among the examples of book-length studies are Jeremy Tambling's *Opera, Ideology and Film* (St. Martin, 1984); Marcia Citron's *Opera on Screen* (Yale University Press, 2000); David Levin's *Richard Wagner, Fritz Lang and the Niebelungen* (Princeton University Press, 2000); David Schroeder's *Cinema's Illusions, Opera's Allure* (Continuum, 2002), the collection that I co-edited with Rose Theresa, *Between Opera and Cinema* (Routledge, 2002); and Michal Grover-Friedlander's *Vocal Apparitions: Cinema's Attraction to Opera* (Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>25</sup> Keiko McDonald, *Japanese Classical Theater in Films* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1994), 26.

More concretely, the first feature films produced during the first decade of the twentieth century were films of Peking opera performances. The dialect cinemas of Taiwan and Hong Kong, too, started with the genre of opera-film in the 1940s. During the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China, the films of twelve "model operas"—a hybrid that combined Peking Opera, Russian ballet, and socialist heroic narratives—were among the few approved for public viewing.<sup>26</sup>

The above examples are a testimony that in China and Japan, as in Europe and America, opera was a main source of inspiration for early film makers. The reversed influence, the cinematic impulse in musical theater, can also be found in China and Japan. In Peking Opera, two different musical ensembles are used, *wuchang*, a percussion ensemble, and *wenchang*, the melodic ensemble. While *wenchang*, like the orchestra in Western opera, provides incidental music and an accompaniment to singing, the roles of *wuchang* are not musical but dramatic, one of which is punctuating the actors' physical movements or amplifying the natural sounds. Given this, the sounds produced by the *wuchang* can be compared to the sound effects in cinema, and this affinity can serve as an example of the cinematic impulse in Chinese musical theater. The function of the musical ensemble *geza* in Kabuki is akin to that of the *wuchang* in Peking opera.

Considering these intriguing interactions between cinema and native musical theaters in Asian cultures, Korea's first opera-film *Chunhyang* can be situated in the continuum of the trans-cultural attraction between opera and cinema as well as being regarded as a product of the East-meets-West. In fact, the cinematic impulses in Asian music theaters such as Kabuki and Peking Opera precede those impulses implicated in the Wagnerian music drama, which is widely viewed as an ancestor of film. In his *New Yorker* review of the film, David Denby notes that *Chunhyang* combines drama and music in organic ways and the effect is akin to that of Wagner's music-dramas.<sup>27</sup> Denby's comment is insightful in that he found cross-cultural affinities between Im's opera-film and the Wagnerian music-dramas, although the specifics of the kinship between the two is yet to be explicated.

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<sup>26</sup> Teri Silvio, "Chinese Opera, Global Cinema, and the Ontology of the Person: Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine*," in *Between Opera and Cinema*, 179.

<sup>27</sup> David Denby, "Singing the Blues: A Musical Epic from Korea and a Cop Story from Sean Penn," *The New Yorker*, 22 January 2001, 91.

Ционџвон Цо

## КОРЕЈСКА ОПЕРА-ФИЛМ ЧУНХЈАНГ И ТРАНСКУЛТУРНА ПОЛИТИКА ГЛАСА

(Резиме)

*Чунхјанг* је корејска опера-филм произведена 2000. године у режији Квон Таек Има, добитника награде за најбољег редитеља у Кану 2002. Овај филм је кинематографска продукција *пансорија*, корејанског жанра који се може сматрати опером само у врло широком смислу. У овом раду се разматра како се *Чунхјанг* разликује од стандардних пракси западњачке „опере-филма“ (кинематографске продукције опере) и те разлике се повезују са карактеристикама које *пансори* одвајају од западњачке опере, уз посвећивање нарочите пажње двострукој улози певача *пансорија* као оперских ликова и наратора. Анализом централне сцене филма може се показати како ова двострука улога доприноси да однос између оперског гласа и филмске слике буде разноврснији, сложенији и софистициранији од оних у стандардном западњачком типу опере-филма.

Упркос овим разликама у односу на западњачку традицију, *Чунхјанг* показује изненађујућу блискост са својим западним сестрама утолико што потврђује оно што су многи феминистички писци критиковали као један од најозбиљнијих проблема у западњачкој филмској традицији, нарочито класичној холивудској: родно дефинисану политику гласа. *Чунхјанг* поприма форму позоришта у позоришту: он представља лажно сценско извођење представе *пансори Чунхјанга* која се прекида и пресеца са визуелном илустрацијом *пансори* наратива. Усредсређујући се на оно што дефинишемо као „двоструко оглашавање“ (“double voicing”), т.ј. на симултану употребу оперског певајућег гласа и филмског говорног гласа, демонстрирамо да је женски глас сведен на звучни ефект, лишен дискурзивне снаге, док је мушки глас предстаљен као свезнајућа моћ (као глас који прекрива остале – a voice-over) и као ауторска моћ над филмским сликама – моћ која се може упоредити са оним што Цудит Мејн зове „примитивним наратором“ у филму спектакла. У закључку се разматра културни идентитет жанра опере-филма. Иако се данашњи истраживачи подручја на пресеку опере и филма фокусирају на Западну Европу и Америку, тврди се да су такви пресеци транскултурни феномени и да су узајамни утицаји између опере и филма могли да се уоче и у азијским земљама.

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