The Changing Face of Korean Cinema
1960 to 2015

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This chapter investigates some of the representative producers and production companies that have made important contributions to the expansion of the Korean film industry since the early 1990s. It addresses the key roles they have played in its transformation from an industry suffocated by government censorship and dominated by foreign productions to a powerful and innovative vehicle for showcasing popular Korean culture and media to the world. As part of this discussion, we chart the rise and impact of major industry players and explain how the varied business strategies they employed triggered a paradigm shift that challenged the traditional filmmaking system in Chungmuro—the symbolic (and former geographic) center of Korea's film industry.

Whilst each of the producers discussed below has followed one of many—often risky—pathways and faced numerous challenges along the way, the collective capacity they have built over the past quarter-century by achieving operational efficiency and economies of scale, as well as an international standard of business transparency, has enabled early twenty-first-century Korea to enjoy a cinematic golden age—in terms of maturity and diversity, as well as the quality and quantity of films produced. Each participant has played a uniquely important role in defining the stories, styles, creative talent, and audience tastes that have made Korean cinema what it is today.

To bring these developments to life, we build on several earlier but limited studies by focusing on female industry leaders, whose numbers now equal—if not exceed—those of their male colleagues.¹ This group of leading women producers has changed the face of Korean cinema in the post-censorship era by creating successful small-to-medium (SME) production firms and producing a diverse array of critically acclaimed films with strong appeal to both local and global audiences. In addition to their business prowess, each of the producers and SMEs discussed in this chapter has been able to work effectively with the flood of talented directors, actors, and production technicians who flocked to the industry following the lifting of censorship restrictions by the Kim Young Sam administration (1993–1998) in 1996.
In particular, Samsung's entertainment arm became Korean cinema's first real-world "training academy" for film production planning and management. (Film production courses at KAFA, for example, became available only in 1993, while most university film programs focused on directing and the study of film theory.) Samsung and other chaebols also attempted to remedy the dearth of Korean films that had come about due to a long-standing preference for foreign films (and a growing dissatisfaction with the derivative genre films discussed in Chapter 7). At the same time, these corporate managers, who now took on the role of "executive producers", were positioned outside of the film industry and looked to new sources of inspiration to rejuvenate Korean cinema. Thus, the chaebols and their organizational approach to the film and entertainment business via their entertainment subsidiaries played a major role in enabling Korean cinema to become the international success story it is today.

With the domestic industry now subject to a systematic regime—another way of saying that professional practices in Korea were becoming aligned to those common in the US film industry—a new type of "planned film" (gihoek yeonghwga in Korean) emerged. These were commercial "concept films" that combined funding from a chaebol with expertise provided by a new generation of producers who managed the entire filmmaking process from financing and pre-production to line producing, post-production, and marketing. Some of the best-known planned films of the 1990s include ShinCine Communications' Marriage Story (1992), Mr. Mamna (1992), The Fox with Nine Tails (1994), and Gingko Bed (1996); Kang Woo-seok Productions' (later known as Cinema Service) Two Cops series (1993, 1996); Myung Film's Contact (1997); and of course Kang Je-gyu Film and Samsung Entertainment's record-smashing hit Sihir (1999). These genre-specific and commercially oriented films explored a wider range of stories than Korean filmmakers had attempted before; they set new trends that became a major hallmark of the "New Korean cinema".

As we discussed in detail in Chapters 1 and 5, before the early 1990s films were mostly designed and planned under the careful eye of a director or director-producer, often with input from a film company owner (filling the role of an executive producer whose major task was to recruit funding), and thus were lacking the professional production and marketing expertise that the chaebols were able to offer. Between the mid-1950s and the early 1990s, most film projects were small relative to today's standards, and production companies usually lacked a planning department. The choice of films to be made was determined by the company president and the individual directors. During this period, most film companies generally consisted of a president who arranged funding and maintained a broad overview of production; a producer who managed the entire production process; a line producer who assisted with practical tasks such as shooting schedules, equipment preparation, managing the production crew, and logistics; a production manager who was responsible to the line producer; and a bookkeeper.

As one of the earliest domestic 'planned films', the 1992 production Marriage Story holds a significant place in Korean film history. Directed by Kim Li-seok, Marriage Story is a socially engaged romantic comedy that follows the marriage, divorce, and re-coupling of a young urban professional couple who work in the same broadcasting company. While executive producer Ikyeong Films controlled business and legal matters and mobilized funding from Samsung and other regional distributors, ShinCine Communications (hereafter ShinCine) established in 1988 by Shin Chul managed the day-to-day production process. Not only was Marriage Story a box office hit, but ShinCine became a seedbed for Korea's next generation of producers, including Oh Jung-wan (aka Oh Jeong-wan), Ahn Soo-hyun, Kim Mu-ryeong, Yu In-tack, Cha Seung-jae (aka Tcha Seung-jai), Kim Sun-ah, Lee Mun-myung, and Kwon Byeong-gyun. In an unprecedented decision initiated at the script development stage, ShinCine undertook market research and focus group interviews with a group of newlywed couples living in Seoul. The plan was to develop a story that would appeal to its target audience of young urban dwellers between their late teens and thirties. The effort paid off; Marriage Story was a huge success, becoming the top cinema box office hit of 1992 and attracting audiences of more than 500,000 in Seoul (and many more when Dreambox released it on videotape). Until the late 1990s, Marriage Story remained among the biggest box office draws of Korean cinema.

Compared to more familiar offerings, Marriage Story was fast-paced and had a fresh visual style and sense of humor, features that impressed audiences and critics alike. Shim Jae-myung, who went on to found Myung Film, adopted some innovative techniques to market the film, including running a series of newspaper advertisements with suggestive taglines such as 'Sleep, No Sleep, Light off, Do it?'—an obvious reference to the couple's sexual preferences. Dreambox, Samsung's videotape company, funded this production, which was one of the earliest projects to receive investment from a chaebol. This type of corporate funding differed significantly from the ad-hoc and random funding sources previously pursued by influential regional distributors—who in any case were badly out of touch with younger audiences. In turn, this innovative funding system enabled a host of new producers to make films that appealed to Korea's large pool of cinephiles under 40. Moreover, Marriage Story and its many successors became vehicles for promoting household and leisure products such as Samsung's white goods, which in the 1992 production were used as set props in the couple's house. The longstanding tradition of product placement in Hollywood films, to which Korean audiences had been exposed as far back as the 1920s, now became a key production feature of domestic films. In sum, all of these elements, which reflected the new commercial foundations of the industry, signaled the rejuvenation of Korean cinema.

A major turning point occurred in 1995 when Samsung established Samsung Entertainment, a subsidiary charged with leading the company and film industry into uncharted territory. From then on, all of Samsung's cultural and entertainment ventures—Naises (live events and music), Starmax (a videotape company), Dreambox (a videotape company that merged with Starmax in 1996), Catch One (a pay/cable TV channel), and Chell Communications' Q Channel (a documentary cable television channel)—would be organized under a single umbrella. Samsung Entertainment now took its place as a major entertainment company with a widely diversified portfolio.
The continuing expansion of this major corporate player, as well as the operational efficiency and economies of scale achieved—not to mention the international standard of business transparency that it and other chaebols introduced—signaled a paradigm shift for Chungmuro. As the previous three chapters have shown, heavy-handed government control throughout the 1970s and 1980s had kept Chungmuro wrapped in a suffocating blanket of parochialism from which producers (and directors) could not escape. These “old-school” film representatives had little choice but to maintain their narrow focus on preventing the local film market from being overwhelmed by the direct distribution of Hollywood films (and videos). However, thanks to an influx of capital and the experienced business managers who accompanied it, from the early 1990s producers had access to increased budgets and sophisticated accounting systems that enabled them to approach filmmaking as a well-organized and transparent manufacturing process. The fact that projects were now backed with adequate funding facilitated access to state-of-the-art equipment and experienced technicians (who in turn trained novice crew members)—all elements necessary to develop the systematic production methods and international standards that have contributed to the robust health of the contemporary Korean film industry.

As discussed earlier in the book, before the intervention of the chaebols into the film industry, Korea’s distribution network fell along regional boundaries, and individual exhibitors played a crucial role as investors by providing producers with shoestring budgets in return for guaranteed pre-sales of a given film. Such practices were heavily dependent on special deals made through personal networks, as well as the volatile box office performance of one-off film screenings. However, in the 1990s, the arrival of wealthy new players led to the creation of national distribution networks that were either built from scratch or acquired from regional exhibitors and consolidated subsequently. Ironically, major US distributors such as UIP also benefited from these newly formed national distribution networks—especially after the Korean government began allowing the circulation of more than six prints of a particular film tie. Shortly afterwards, as a result of CGV’s introduction of multiplexes in 1998 (followed by Lotte Cinema in 1999 and Megabox in 2000), the total number of screens underwent an exponential increase—from 507 in 1998 to 588 in 1999, 720 in 2000, 1,132 in 2003, through to 1,648 in 2005, leveling off at around 2000 in 2017.

In the middle of this upheaval in the industry, Kang Je-gyu, director of the fantasy-horror film Singko Bed (1996), made the spy action-melodrama Shiri (1999) which sent shock waves across the local industry and beyond; the ripples created can still be felt today. The last film to be funded by Samsung Entertainment, Shiri was an outstanding success in Korea, drawing over six million admissions nationwide. In fact, it broke all existing box office records—even those set by the Hollywood mega-blockbuster Titanic (1998). One newspaper reported director Kang Je-gyu and Samsung Entertainment’s triumph with the witty headline, ‘Little Fish Shiri Sank the Titanic’. Shiri’s success heralded many broken box office records to come, marking the beginning of a new age of Korean cinema. Thanks to the commercial success of Shiri, investment continued to flow from a number of new producer-distributors and venture capitalists who had had their eyes on the film industry for some time, including some former Samsung and Daewoo employees who created their own successful film companies following the industry’s shake-up in 1999.8

As a result of these positive synergies, a production boom ensued. The market began to expand as increased investment issued in the making of new and exciting commercial entertainment films and the emergence of a host of creative and adventurous directors bent on breathing a spirit of universality into their narratives and characters while maintaining a distinctive Korean voice. The chaebols paved the way for the vertical integration of investment, production, distribution, and exhibition—a new phenomenon for the Korean film industry.

Samsung and Daewoo dominated the film and video sector until they offloaded their entertainment businesses in 1999, after the Kim Dae-jung government (1998–2003) required chaebols to reorganize and sell off some of their smaller subsidiaries. This major initiative was part of government efforts to rescue Korea from the ‘IMF crisis’, which paralyzed Asian financial markets in 1997. As part of this restructuring process, the chaebols offloaded their entertainment arms in that same year—ironically at the pivotal moment when Shirihad broken all records and far exceeded expectations at the box office. Out of the ashes emerged a fresh cohort of producers and other industry players who were eager to occupy the newly industrialized playing field.

The New Industrialized In-crowd

At the turn of the 2000s, the Korean film industry continued to be transformed through a number of key developments. First was the establishment of a handful of producer-distributors, the earliest of which included Cinema Service, founded in 1995 by Kang Woo-seok, who since 1989 had been busy directing popular dramas and romantic comedies including Two Cops (1993), How to Top My Wife (1994), and Two Cops II (1996). Kang Woo-seok was joined by Kim Ui-seok and Kim Seong-hong, the directors of Holiday in Seoul (1997) and The Hole (1997), respectively. With a view to producing commercial films, this filmmaker-producer trio pooled their personal funds and other financial resources to form a new company. They teamed up with Kwak Jeong-hwan, aka Chungmuro’s Godfather, the powerful and seasoned owner of Seoul Cinema who controlled the capital and distribution channels necessary for developing an effective vertically integrated film company. Kang Woo-seok’s alliance with Kwak, who had acquired the Seoul Cinema in 1978, enabled Cinema Service to capitalize on the powerful industry networks and exceptional business acumen that Kwak had developed since the 1960s.9

Over three decades, Kwak had formed a loose distribution network with dozens of local cinemas, including the Daeyeong Geukjang in Seoul, Busan Academy Cinema, and Daegu Chungang Cinema. In addition, Kwak had negotiated lucrative direct distribution contracts with UIP around the time of the Seoul Olympics in 1988, enabling him to release memorable hits such as Paramount’s Ghost in 1990. Similar distribution contracts with 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros., and
Walt Disney followed soon after, cementing Kwak’s position as one of Korea’s most powerful exhibitor-distributors. The Kang–Kwak alliance enabled Cinema Service to become the most influential production and distribution companies of the late 1990s—particularly after Samsung and Daewoo unexpectedly exited the industry in 1999 in the wake of Korea’s economic crisis.

During its first decade, Cinema Service, which also invested in Primus multiplex cinemas in 2002, produced and distributed a regular stream of hit films including writer-director Jang Jin’s noir gangster comedy *Guns and Talks* (2001); Kang Woo-seok’s spy drama *Silmido* (2003), the first Korean film to draw audiences of 10 million; and director-producer Kang Woo-seok’s detective action thriller *Another Public Enemy* (2005). Unquestionably, the scale and success of these films, as well as Cinema Service’s distribution of Hollywood mega-hits such as *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), and *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003), cemented Kang Woo-seok’s status as an industry heavyweight. In fact, he was selected by *Cine21*’s annual survey as the industry’s “number one powerhouse” for eight consecutive years (1997–2004) for his capability as a commercial director, producer, and investor, as well as his commitment to social activism.

In 2005, Kang Woo-seok’s influence began to wane when CJ Entertainment acquired Cinema Service, after which CJ Entertainment’s CEO Park Dong-ho assumed Kang Woo-seok’s mantle as industry leader. This major move confirmed CJ Entertainment’s dominant position in the industry while signaling the arrival of a second wave of large conglomerates (including Showbox and Lotte Entertainment) that were vertically integrated across all aspects of production, distribution, and exhibition. Ownership of their own multiplex cinema chains (CGV, Megabox, and Lotte Cinema, respectively) separated these newcomers from their predecessors. Today, while Cinema Service, as a subsidiary of CJ Entertainment, continues to release a steady stream of films, it has scaled back its operations after experiencing a string of box office failures, including *Hwang Jin Yi* (2007), *Kidnapping Grammy K* (2007), and *Modern Boy* (2008), confirming the adage that audiences do matter.

In 2002, the Orion Group, one of Korea’s most senior conglomerates, added the film production and distribution company Showbox to its Megabox chain of multiplex cinemas (launched in 2000) and Os Media cable channels as a vertically integrated competitor to the CJ Group—and CJ Entertainment more specifically. (The Orion Group vice-chairperson behind Showbox and Megabox was Lee Hwakyung, the company founder’s daughter.) For five years, the Orion Group, which also owns confectionery and snack companies (including the famous Choco Pie chocolate-covered marshmallow and biscuit treat) and restaurants as well as sports teams, was a fierce competitor of the CJ Group, but following the film industry’s peak year in 2006 it sold Megabox to the Australian financial firm Macquarie Group, thus signaling a partial retreat from the entertainment industry. The sale of Os Media to CJ Entertainment in 2010 all but removed Orion Group from the entertainment playing field.

Lotte Group became a more serious competitor in 2003 when it established the film production and distribution company Lotte Entertainment to service its multiplex chain Lotte Cinema, which had opened in 1999. With its aggressive vertically integrated business model, by 2015 the Lotte Group, which is known for its department stores and shopping malls, had become the number two player in the industry behind CJ Entertainment.

Finally, in 2008, Kim Woo-taek, the former CEO of Showbox and Megabox—shortly after the multiplex chain was sold to Macquarie Group—launched the production and distribution company Next Entertainment World (aka N.E.W.). As the newest player on the block, with interests in the film, music, live performance, and ancillary rights sectors, N.E.W. is already making a major contribution to the Korean film industry, not least in its role as a leading independent film distributor. N.E.W. became a major player in the Chinese market virtually overnight at the end of December 2014 (see Chapter 11) after one of China’s biggest production studios, Zhejiang Huace Film & TV (controlled by Chinese billionaire Fu Meicheng), acquired a 15 percent stake in N.E.W. for around $52 million USD. This deal suggests that N.E.W. is set on a path that will diverge from those taken by Orion Group and Lotte Group but is already crossing with CJ Entertainment in China.

Since acquiring Cinema Service, CJ Entertainment has become the most senior of a number of producer-distributor companies that have left their marks on the local film industry. (CJ Entertainment began as a subsidiary company formed in 1995 by the *chaebol* Cheil Jedang—now known as CJ Group, primarily a food company.) In early 2011, CJ Entertainment became Korea’s largest media conglomerate after the CJ Group consolidated its broadcasting, film, gaming, music, and performance arms under the single banner of CJ Entertainment and Media (aka CJ E&M), with Samsung founder Lee Byung Chull’s granddaughter, Miky Lee (aka Mi-Kyung Lee), at the helm as vice-chairman of the restructured organization. (In 1993, Miky and her brother Jay Hyun Lee—currently CJ Group’s chairman—took over CJ from their father Lee Maeng Hee, the son of Samsung’s founder.)

Mikey Lee’s longstanding involvement in Korea’s entertainment industry began in 1995 when she successfully negotiated an exclusive distribution deal with DreamWorks after CJ invested $300 million (roughly 11 percent founding share) in the then new Hollywood studio created by Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg, and David Geffen. This arrangement opened up an unprecedented pathway into the US for CJ, giving it exclusive rights to distribute some of the most popular and profitable Hollywood films throughout Asia (outside Japan). Overnight, this deal catapulted CJ to the top of the domestic film industry, providing the company with a regular supply of US blockbusters and enabling it to open Korea’s first multiplex cinema in 1998: the CGV Gangbyeon cinema in Seoul. (In early 2006, following a highly profitable 10-year relationship with DreamWorks, CJ sold its stake in the US company to Viacom, the parent of Paramount Pictures.)

At the end of 2010, CJ Entertainment established Filament Pictures, a subsidiary with the dual aim of distributing international films and investing in low-budget domestic films costing between $175,000 and $850,000 USD to make. Distributing films from as far afield as Japan, China, and India, in addition to its low-to-middle budget Korean films, the new company aimed to entertain local audiences with a diverse mix of films drawn from popular domestic and Hollywood genres.

Today, CJ E&M’s vertical and horizontal integration across the sectors of film, broadcasting (CJ Media; On Media), a multiple cable channel company merged
China has become the open frontier on which CJ E&M and many Korean firms and practitioners have set their sights.

While the commercial sector of the East Asian production scene is dominated by a powerful, vertically integrated group of investor-distributors—CJ E&M, Showbox, Lotte Entertainment, and N.E.W.—several small-to-medium production companies run by both male and female producers are also flourishing. The so-called “power of the producer”—as opposed to the power of writer-directors such as Im Sang-soo, Kim Jee-woon, Hur Jin-ho, Lee Chang-dong, Park Chan-wook, Bong Joon-ho, and Kim Ki-duk—has reached new heights through this group’s willingness to finance globally marketable films and encourage talented young directors to make them. This cohort has been responsible for initiating innovative business practices and producing a long list of critically acclaimed commercial and independent feature films that, taken together, have given a powerful impetus to the fundamental re-orientation of the industry over the past 20 years.

The Rise of the Female Producer

One of the most significant signs of the changing face of Korean cinema is the rise of powerful female producers, such as Shim Jae-ryung, Shim Bo-kyoung, Oh Jung-wan, Kim Mi-hee, Lee Eugene, and Ahn Soo-hyun, talented filmmakers who began attracting attention from outside Korea in the 2000s. While helming CJ Entertainment, major player Milky Lee has inspired them all in one way or another—primarily by encouraging them to follow a different pathway from one blazed by CJ itself (and Korea’s other major integrated corporate producers, Showbox and Lotte Entertainment).

To take the list in order, Shim Jae-ryung (aka Jaime Shim, 1963 - ) represents the first generation of film producers (of both sexes) who emerged in the reform era of the early 1990s and who remain active today. Since Shim’s founding of Myung Film, she has produced many of the innovative and successful genre films that have created and sustained Korean cinema’s reputation as a vibrant national cinema. Her extensive and varied filmography includes Kim Jee-woon’s The Quiet Family (1998); Happy End (1999); Park Chan-wook’s JSA (2000); Kim Ki-duk’s The Isle (2000); Im Sang-soo’s A Good Lawyer’s Wife (2003); and The President’s Last Bang (2005), both co-produced with Shin Chul; and Forever the Moment (2007). Myung Film was also responsible for the internationally successful children’s feature animation Leefie, a Hen into the Wild (2010) and Architecture 101 (2011), both of which were made in collaboration with Lotte Entertainment, which handled investment and distribution. Shim’s productive career and the strategies adopted by her company offer important insights into the industry’s larger trajectory.

While studying literature at Dongduk Women’s University in the mid-1980s, Shim followed in the footsteps of the aspiring Visual Age group of filmmakers, a movement heavily influenced by 1950s and 1960s French New Wave films and the New American Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. (Members attended regular film screenings at the French Cultural Center in Seoul, opened in 1968.) In her
mid-twenties, Shim entered the industry in 1988 with a public relations and copywriting position at Seoul Cinema, working under one of Korea’s most powerful regional investor-exhibitors, industry veteran Kwak Jeong-hwan. During her stint at Seoul Cinema, Shim developed an expanding network of contacts, including directors Lee Joon-ik and Kang Je-gyu, critic Jeong Seong-il, and producers Shin Chul and Seok Myung-hong, who have all gone on to become some of the most active members of the currentollywood film industry. In 1991, she moved into the pre-production and production area after landing a job at Geukdong Screen, a production and importing company with a reputation for introducing Korean audiences to Hong Kong action films such as John Woo’s noir action-crime drama The Killer (1989), starring Chow Yun-fat and produced by Tsui Hark. This phase of her career impressed Shim with the necessity for incorporating formal marketing (i.e., planning) strategies into the film business.

In 1992, Shim established the film marketing agency Myung Planning, which was renamed Myung Film in 1995. At this time, firms that employed marketing strategies of this type were new for Korea, despite the fact that major American and Japanese studios and distributors had introduced extensive advertising and promotional campaigns—including celebrity endorsements, product tie-ins, product placement, contests, ornate lobby displays, outdoor signage, and radio and print campaigns—to the Korean market as early as the 1920s. Nevertheless, Myung Planning was a local pioneer in this area, which began to make up an increasing share of a film’s total budget following ShinCine’s success with Marriage Story in 1992.

In 1995, Shim and her sister Shim Bo-kyoung, along with Lee Eun, whom Shim Jae-myung had recently married, joined forces to change the face of Myung Film. Shin Bo-kyoung had been working in advertising, and Lee was a director of independent films such as The Night before Strike (1990), a drama set in the democratic labor movement of the 1980s. Lee also had production management and budgeting experience acquired through his involvement with the Jangsungro film group, which made feature-length independent films (as opposed to commercial films). More than a name change, Myung Film was now a full-fledged film production company. Shin Bo-kyoung became head of planning and, following the formation of MK Buffalo in 2004, she took on the role of the new joint company’s planning director. In these early days, the professional planning skills deployed by the industry practitioners, in particular producer Shin Chul (and his company ShinCine), provided positive models for the trio to follow.

By 2001, the small number of critically acclaimed and commercially successful films produced by Myung Film had made the company one of the top Korean producers on Hollywood’s watch list. Rewarded with critical success and lucrative box office returns for well-crafted, commercially oriented art films such as The Contact (1997), Kim Jee-woon’s The Quiet Family (1998), Kim Ki-duk’s The Isle (2000), and Park Chan-wook’s Joint Security Area (2000, aka JS4), Shim and Lee (Shim’s partner and husband) developed a reputation for wielding “commercial and artistic success with grace, class and humility.” Myung Film was positioned squarely at the center of Korean cinema’s boom, the result of an increase in the total films produced annually since the success of Shiri in 1999 (up from 49 in 1999 to 80 in 2003) combined with the right mix of commercial and artistic qualities, all presented to eager audiences on an expanding number of multiplex screens. All of these elements converged to push the total share of domestic films released in the Korean market from a respectable 39.7 percent in 1999 to a sterling 53.49 percent in 2003. Although the entry of venture capitalists created new funding sources during this period to replace the previously dominant chaebols, there was still a shortage of funding to cover the costs of the increasing number of films in production.

In response, with the aim of providing a steady stream of funding for new projects—and to cash in on the industry boom—in 2004 Myung Film and Kang Je-gyu Film strategically merged to form MK Buffalo, becoming a listed company on the Korean stock market. At the time, floating a production company was a popular strategy, intended to compete with the increasing dominance of large investor-distributor firms in the film market by creating joint producer-investor-distributor initiatives. In 2005, MK Buffalo was renamed MK Pictures, and both companies retained their names in order to pursue separate projects that reflected their respective interests. (Eventually MK Pictures changed back to Myung Film in 2010, three years after the company was delisted from the stock market.) Meanwhile, other companies that were floated publicly at this time include Sidus in 2004; Tube Pictures and Spectrum DVD in 2005; and Prime Entertainment in 2006.

MK Pictures differentiated itself from other companies by backing diverse and creative projects and maintaining a focus on what it called its “exclusive producer system”. This was at a time when the industry was becoming increasingly dominated by three vertically integrated mega-companies—CJ Entertainment, Showbox and Lotte Entertainment—that produced mainstream commercial films for generic audiences. MK Pictures offered the type of personalized service and commitment the three industry giants could not—or were unwilling to—provide. Director Im Sang-soo, for instance, benefited from MK Pictures’ services when his film The President’s Last Bang (2005) became the subject of legal action by the family of former authoritarian president Park Chung Hee. By contrast, CJ Entertainment responded to the negative publicity and political pressure generated by Park’s family by reneging on its investment (20 percent of the total production budget) in The President’s Last Bang and withdrawing its pre-arranged distribution deal for the film.

The President’s Last Bang, the first film produced by the newly formed MK Pictures, sets out to recreate President Park Chung Hee’s last night on earth before KCIA Director Kim Jae-gyu (played by Baek Yun-shik) shot him at close range with a revolver. In its depiction of these events, the film offers a subtle critique of Park’s 18-year rule, treating the night the assassination took place as a microcosm of the rule of a man who was—and still is—revered by many of his countrymen and loathed by others. Scenes in which Park’s political opponents are imprisoned and tortured, and socialists and liberals are accused of being North Korean spies, serve as acute reminders of the realities of Park’s regime. We are also given an intimate view of his sexual proclivities and indulgences—for example, in the
opening scenes where bikini-clad women expose their supple breasts for the president’s pleasure. Later, we see call girls lined up (with their mothers), eager to give President Park—in the words of one of the characters—‘what made him happy’. No holds are barred on the political front, either, as the audience is exposed to Park’s coercive ideals and policies that became a means of inculcating his version of patriotism, his pro-Japanese leanings (he had been an officer in the Japanese army during the colonial period), and finally his extreme right-wing views on nuclear armament and Korea’s relationship with the US.

Fluid cinematography by veteran cameraman Kim Woo-hyung takes the audience on an emotionally charged journey as KCIA Chief Kim decides that ‘tonight is the night’ to kill the president—ostensibly in the name of ‘democracy’. We follow KCIA Chief Agent Ju (played by Han Suk-gyu) and another KCIA operative, Colonel Min (played by Kim Eung-soo), as they collide to carry out the killing at a private dinner. A bloody gun battle ensues between Park’s bodyguards and the rebel agents after Director Kim shoots the president, splattering his blood across the dinner table. Following the assassination, chaos breaks out among the Korean military as senior officers jockey for position and attempt to maintain civil order. The film offers a sardonic yet indirect portrait of Park Chung Hee, who significantly remains nameless throughout the film and is often simply referred to—with massive irony—as ‘the highly respectable one’ (gakho).

With its excessive portrayal of violence and frequent use of vulgar language, Im’s film depicts a ‘dirty old man’ who sent students, pro-democracy leaders, and other alleged communist sympathizers to be brutalized and humiliated in the KCIA’s torture cells. In The President’s Last Bang Im ventured into highly provocative and uncharted waters, with full knowledge that he was broaching what had hitherto been a taboo subject. It might be thought that a developed country with a maturing democracy, in which censorship was longer an issue, would have encouraged such exercises in self-examination—or at least would have the confidence and self-reflexive skills to face up to critical, albeit painful, portrayals of its recent history.

Nevertheless, on 31 January, 2005, only three days before the film’s scheduled public release, the Seoul Central Court ruled that parts of the film be cut. This decision was prompted by litigation by Park Ji-man, the son of the late President Park, who attempted to get the film banned by arguing that the inclusion in the opening and closing credits of stills and footage of protest marches and of his father’s funeral ceremony blurred the boundaries between fact and fiction. Im and MK Pictures immediately appealed the court’s ruling. Although the court stated that the film was a fictional treatment that audiences would interpret as a creative work, Park Ji-man was successful, at least initially, in getting the film censored. Im and MK Pictures (producers Shim, Lee, Shin, and Kang) were left with two legal options: either cut scenes from the film or to pay $30,000 USD in fines each time the original version was commercially screened in cinemas or on television. The filmmakers chose the first option and deleted scenes containing documentary footage. To put the matter plainly, the court feared that the film would violate the privacy—and privilege—of the Park family. Im Sang-soo’s deconstruction of the mythical aura surrounding President Park was perceived as audacious and even insulting, given the high profile enjoyed by Park’s daughter Park Geun-hye as chairwoman of the center-right opposition party (and, as of 2013, president of Korea).19

The damage done by the court case was minor compared to the new hurdle that MK Pictures was confronted with in January 2005 when its domestic and international distributor (and co-investor) CJ Entertainment abruptly withdrew its distribution arrangements through its CGV cinemas as a result of the court case and the controversy surrounding the film. As a result, when The President’s Last Bang was eventually released (during the Lunar New Year holiday season), it attracted smaller audiences than expected both in Korea and overseas, although the sensation surrounding the court case and its dark portrayal of Park Chung Hee had lent the film a degree of notoriety at home. Its poor box office performance was partly the result of restricted screenings in smaller multiplex cinemas not affiliated to CGV. It was released on around 190 screens with 31,000 seats, only half as many screens as the top five domestic films released in the same year (keeping in mind that the total number of screens in 2005 was 1,648). By comparison, Another Public Enemy (2005) opened on 370 screens (with 85,000 seats) and Marathon (2005) on roughly 300 screens (with 66,000 seats), while King and the Clown (2005)—made on a budget of S4 million USD like The President’s Last Bang but co-distributed by Cinema Service and CJ Entertainment—eventually sold more than 10 million tickets, becoming the kind of commercial success known in the industry as a cheonman yeonghwa or ‘10 million audience film’, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 10.20 In short, the 10-million audience mark has become a key indicator for Korean cinema’s expansion and vitality.

As a result of these constraints, The President’s Last Bang failed to attract large numbers of cinema-goers in their 20s and 30s—the prime target audience for new releases in Korea. In addition to being influenced by the negative hype surrounding the film, audiences may have failed to identify with the story, or even comprehend why President Park had been assassinated, an understandable response given the lack of open discussion of this troubled period in the nation’s recent history.21

In a counter-protest against Park Ji-man’s legal actions, the filmmakers appealed the Seoul Central Court’s 2005 decision and Park’s efforts to discredit the film. In August 2006, MK Pictures was successful in overturning the censorship decision: the appeals court took the side of freedom of expression. Although the deleted documentary footage was restored, the producers were directed to pay Park Ji-man around S106,000 USD for defaming his father’s character.22 The case was finally settled in 2008; Park was required to return the settlement sum to MK Pictures provided that the company add a caption to all film prints stating that The President’s Last Bang was an imaginative work of fiction.

After selling the majority of their shares in MK Pictures in mid-2007 to Kangwon Networks—a cable company seeking opportunities to expand its activities into production and exhibition—Shim and Lee sought to restore Myung Film’s reputation for innovative filmmaking; they acquired it after producing Park Chan-wook’s
Oh Jung-wan is another outstanding female representative of Korea’s first generation of film producers in Korean Cinema. She entered the film industry after graduating in sociology from Yonsei University in 1987 (around the time that directors such as Im Sang-soo and Bong Joon-ho were studying there). In 1988 Oh married Shin Chul and joined ShinCine as a founding member after first working in advertising for about a year. Through the leadership and experience provided by the company’s CEO and founder Shin Chul, Oh learned vast amounts about producing a film and the inner workings of the newly rationalized industry, including planning and marketing. Oh’s first production (with a formal credit) was the socially engaged romantic comedy Marriage Story discussed above. In 1997, Oh left ShinCine and became a freelance producer before establishing her own company, BOM Productions, in 1999 (the year in which she and Shin Chul divorced).

After striking out on her own, Oh recruited likeminded creative colleagues and began producing a diverse body of stylish commercial–art films. Within a relatively short period, BOM had earned a reputation as a successful boutique production company after making a series of critically acclaimed and profitable films, beginning with Kim Jee-woon’s Foul King (2000), followed by Kim’s A Tale of Two Sisters (2003) and A Bittersweet Life (2005), and E J-yong’s Untold Scandal (2003). (At the time, Untold Scandal was one of only three Korean projects to receive support from the Hong Kong Asia Film Financing Forum.) Oh also showed early involvement in international co-productions through her work on the Korea–Japan–Hong Kong omnibus films Three (2002) and Three Extremes (2004). Not only did these early efforts include box office successes and critically acclaimed films with high production values, but they also boosted the careers of directors Kim Jee-woon, E J-yong, and Hong Sang-soo, who have all been central players in the changing face of Korean cinema. BOM’s more recent productions include Hong Sang- soo’s Woman on the Beach (2006) and Night and Day (2007), You Are My Sunshine (2005, with Oh as executive producer), the action film Countdown (2011), Lee Yoon-ki’s My Dear Enemy (2008), and Come Rain, Come Shine (2011).

The third veteran female producer to be discussed, Kim Mi-hee, also deserves mention. In 1988, after graduating from Dankuk University with a BA in Korean language and literature, she began working in the film industry as a copywriter and then a marketer at Hwacheon Films, a production company founded in the early 1970s. She also worked as a film promoter for Dong-A Export Co., which had been active in the industry since the late 1960s. During this time Kim was exposed to the conventional approaches and techniques espoused by Korea’s previous generation of film companies. Then, when Kang Woo-seok established Kang Woo-seok Productions in 1993 (renamed Cinema Service in 1995), Kim joined the company as a planning director and worked on three films—How to Top My Wife (1994), Two Cops II (1996), and Two Cops III (1998)—under the mentorship of Kang Woo-seok.

In 1998 Kim Mi-hee founded her own production company, FNH Pictures (short for Fun and Happiness), with director Kim Sang-jin (of Two Cops III); her company soon became linked with Cinema Service and Kang Woo-seok’s strategy for filling

JSA (2000) and female writer–director Yim Soon-rye’s Waikiki Brothers (2001). Whilst MK Pictures capitalized on new opportunities in production and distribution, aided by venture capital from Lotte Entertainment, the company now found that it was overburdened by an increasing number of projects, which had multiplied from one or two films per year to eight films per year.23 The company was expanding faster than expected and was hard put to meet the demands on its resources, especially after the departure of Shim Bo-kyoung. After departing Myung Film in 2005, Shim Bo-kyoung established BK Pictures, building on the marketing and production skills and strategies that she had honed while working at Myung Film. In 2009, MK Pictures produced several notable films directed by women filmmakers, including Park Chan-ok’s Paju (2009), which is discussed at length in the next chapter.

After Paju, Myung Film produced Cyrano Agency (2010), Leafie, A Hen into the Wild (2011), Architecture 101 (2011), and Venus Talk (2014)—all films notable for exploring familiar subjects in unconventional ways. After drawing a massive 4.1 million viewers to the cinema, Architecture 101 became the top-grossing domestic melodrama romance in Korean cinema history. Leafie was Myung Film’s first feature-length animation, achieving unprecedented box office results for a film of its kind, primarily because of its high production values and outstanding story line. In addition, Leafie is one of only a handful of feature films officially exported to China and was Korea’s first feature-length animation to play on China’s growing number of multiplex screens. More recently, Myung Film has produced veteran director Im Kwon-tack’s Hwajang (2014)—his 102nd film—and Jeju Island-born female director and Korean Academy of Film Arts graduate Boo Ji-young’s Cart (2014). (The Korean word hwajang has the dual meaning of cremation and make-up.) A medium-budget production (generated through crowdfunding), Cart tells the story of female supermarket workers who form a union to combat labor exploitation—a scenario reminiscent of Martin Ritt’s Norma Rae (1979), which portrayed the daily struggle of mill workers and the poor treatment of women in 1970s America. In 2015, Myung Film is actively pursuing the Chinese market with the strategy of remaking its hit Korean films for a whole new (and very large) generation of fans.

Although previous studies have glossed over the longstanding impact of her work in local and international circles, Shim Jae-nyung’s status as one of Korea’s most influential female producers is undeniable. In December 2012, Shim Jae-nyung was selected by The Hollywood Reporter as one of the world’s ‘International Power Women: The 12 Execs Making Waves Worldwide’, being described as ‘The Godmother of Korean Cinema’.24 And in 2015, Shim was selected by peers and critics alike as the second most powerful member of the Korean film industry. In a survey conducted by Donga Daily, more than 30 of Korea’s leading film industry professionals awarded Shim second place to CJ E&M, Korea’s uncontested global movie conglomerate.25 Better than anything else, the award illustrated Korea’s David-and-Goliath division of producers, with Shim Jae-nyung and SME companies like Myung Film on one side and the giant CJ E&M on the other.
the gap created by the withdrawal of the chaebols from the local industry. FnH’s first film (which Cinema Service distributed) was Attack the Gas Station! (1999)—a seminal genre-bending film that showcased the talents of up-and-coming stars Lee Sung-jae, Yoo Oh-sung, Kang Seong-jin, and Yu Ji-tae and attracted global attention to Korean cinema. Kim also produced the erotic drama and debut feature film Arador (2002) made by well-known female documentary filmmaker Byun Young-jo, which grossed over $2 million USD in Korean cinemas. She also dallied in action films including the urban martial arts drama Arahan (2004) and the historical detective film Bloody Rain (2005), thereby enlarging the scope of domestic genre films and expanding her company at the same time. At the end of 2005, curating a peak in the fortunes of the industry for which Kim was owed much of the credit, FnH merged with industry heavyweight Sidus, owned by Cha Seung-jae, and the new Sidus FnH company was promptly listed on the Korean stock exchange.

This period coincided with the entry of Korean wireless and mobile telecommunication companies into the film industry and the new funding sources they brought with them. In 2005, as Korea’s wired/wireless telecommunications and high-speed Internet giants such as Korea Telecom (KT) and SK Telecom (SKT) were commercializing Digital Multimedia Broadcasting (aka DMB), they jockeyed to underwrite the production of new media content and acquire existing media archives (TV programs and movies) for their DMB channels. While SK Telecom acquired iQ, investment from KT led to the merger of Sidus and FnH and the purchase of the new company, Sidus FnH, by KT. Despite the new owners’ intentions to create an effective synergistic organization (comparable to Myung Film), Sidus FnH failed to produce the type of box office hits under the executive leadership of KT that Kim and Cha had achieved in their former separate companies.25 The pair left Sidus FnH in 2009.

Since 2012, Kim has reclaimed her place in the spotlight with her new company Studio Dreamcatcher. The company debuted with Pacemaker (2012), a sports drama about an injured runner who overcomes his limitations and transforms himself from a racing team’s pacemaker into a marathon contestant in his own right. Although Pacemaker failed commercially, Studio Dreamcatcher’s second film, Hide and Seek (2013), a thriller about an intruder who torments a family in their own home, made a big splash at the local box office, attracting audiences of 5.6 million nationwide. Hide and Seek became the top Korean thriller of all time, surpassing the previous record holders Memories of Murder (2003, 5.24 million) and The Chaser (2008, 5.02 million). With this outstanding success, Kim has reinvigorated not only her own seasoned career, but Korean cinema in general.

Female producer Lee Eugene (aka Lee Yu-jin), the fourth on our list, has also made a significant contribution to the transformation of Korean cinema. Lee and Ahn Soo-hyun (discussed below) are two of the most active members of Korea’s so-called second generation of film producers; they received their training in the 1990s at the hands of first-generation producers such as Shim Jae-myung, Oh Jung-wan, and Cha Seung-jae. This younger cohort established production companies in the mid-2000s, going on to create a fresh crop of critically acclaimed and commercially profitable films.

After graduating in education from Ehwa Women’s University, Lee worked as a copywriter and then creative director for the major Korean advertising firm Korad (1991 to 1997). In 1998, she joined the film industry where one of her first tasks was to develop the marketing campaign for E J-yong’s An Affair (1998). Between 2000 and 2005, she worked for BOM Productions under the leadership of Oh Jung-wan, producing films such as E J-yong’s Untold Scandal (2003, with line producer Cho Neung-yeon) and female writer-director Lee Soo-yeon’s The Uninvited (2003). She then went on to produce Kim Jee-woon’s A Bittersweet Life (2005) and Park Jin-pyo’s You Are My Sunshine (2005). By the end of 2005, high-profile productions such as these had given Lee the experience and confidence she needed to form her own production company, Zip Cinema, which was modeled on international firms such as Working Title Films and Focus Features—well known for their expertise in producing, financing, and distributing groundbreaking films.

To build Zip Cinema into an effective competitor to Myung Film, BOM, and Sidus FnH, Lee recruited a core group of loyal writers, actors, and crew members and produced a steady flow of well-written and well-cast films made on a medium budget. By the end of 2007, Lee had become sufficiently well known for Variety magazine to tout her as one of the world’s top 10 up-and-coming producers.27 Zip Cinema’s filmography includes Park Jin-pyo’s crime thriller Voice of a Murderer (2006) and Hur Jin-ho’s melodrama Happiness (2007); Choi Dong-hoon’s choreographed action film Woochi (2009, aka Jeon Woo-chi: The Taoist Wizard or Woochi: The Demon Slayer); and the supernatural action thriller Haunters (2010), which added its own powerful punch to the recent boom of Korean horror films, attracting the largest number of advance ticket sales of any domestic film in 2010.28 More recent films with strong international connections include the romance comedy All About My Wife (2012)—a licensed remake of the 2008 Argentinian hit A Boyfriend for My Wife—which generated over 4.5 million admissions and box office takings of $30 million USD; and Cold Eyes (2013), a remake of Hong Kong action-adrenaline filmmaker Johnny To’s Eye in the Sky (2007). The connections forged by Lee with international film financiers, producers, and distributors in 2003—the year that BOM’s Untold Scandal won co-production support from the Hong Kong Asia Film Financing Forum—have likely contributed to Zip Cinema’s ongoing success with its projects in Asia and beyond.

One of Lee’s major business coups was the signing in 2007 of a management contract with the Los Angeles-based Creative Artists Agency (CAA), a peak talent agency in the US. As one of the first Korean producers to forge such connections, Lee’s move has opened doors for the transnational flow of not only actors, but also technicians and stories across both film industries. In late 2011, the continued success of Zip Cinema attracted investment from the New York and Hong Kong-based investment firm Spackman Group.29 Following this latest international linkage, two of the company’s films, All About My Wife and Cold Eyes, have benefited from enhanced funding inflows.30 In 2014 Zip Cinema produced My Brilliant Life, based on the bestselling 2011 novel My Palpitating Life by Kim Aekan directed by E J-yong (of Untold Scandal fame) and co-written by E J-yong and Oh Hyo-Jin. My Brilliant Life is a drama about a teenage couple (played by
Hallyu stars Song Hye-kyo and Kang Dong-won) whose baby is born with progeria, a rare genetic condition that causes the swift and premature onset of the aging process, beginning in early childhood. As a teenager (trapped in the body of an 80-year-old man), their son attempts to document his parents’ love story and their shared family experiences and present his efforts to them as a gift before he dies. On account of its rare theatrical release scheduled for China, as well as Japan and Vietnam in 2015, _My Brilliant Life_ already has a significant place in Korean cinema’s current wave of expansion into Asia.31


Ahn returned home in 2000—around the time Korean cinema’s new wave was breaking—where she worked with director Hur Jin-ho (of _Christmas in August_ fame) and executive producer Cha Seung-jae ‘Sidus’ on the award-winning romance drama _One Fine Spring Day_ (2001). BOM Productions’ Oh Jung-wan then hired Ahn to produce _The Uninvited, Three Extremes_, and _You Are My Sunshine_, working alongside fellow female producer Lee Eugene (a cousin of Oh Jung-wan’s). After a short stint freelance producing films such as _Voice of a Murderer_ (2007), produced by Lee Eugene (by now head of Zip Cinema), and director Park Chan-wook’s critically acclaimed multi-award-winning horror-thriller drama _Thirst_ (2009), Ahn married director-screenwriter Choi Dong-hoon, one of only a handful of Korean directors to have enjoyed an unbroken run of successful genre films.

Choi’s box office hits include the action crime film _The Big Swindle_ (2004), _Sidus Film’s_ crime comedy _Tazza: The High Rollers_ (2006), fantasy martial arts film _Woooli_ and international blockbuster “caper” film _The Thieves_ (2012). All these films have performed extremely well in terms of audience numbers: 2.12 million admissions for _The Big Swindle_, 5.68 million for _Tazza: The High Rollers_, 6.13 million for _Woooli_, and around 13 million for _The Thieves_. This latter film, which Choi made with Ahn, was shot on location in Macao, Hong Kong, Seoul, and Busan and was produced by Caper Films, a company founded jointly by Ahn and Choi in 2011. At the time of writing, _The Thieves_ has pulled in one of the largest audiences in the history of Korean cinema (12.9 and 13 million), underscoring the value of Ahn’s systematized production regime. Caper Films’ next blockbuster project _Assassination_ (2015), an action thriller set in the 1930s during the Japanese colonial period and telling the story of a group of hitmen who target Japanese collaborators in Seoul and Shanghai, became another 10 million film. As of October 2015, it attracted audiences of more than 12.6 million. The company’s track record, as well as the combination of a gripping plot, international cast, and outstanding shooting locations—not to mention the finely honed expertise of the Ahn–Choi production and directing team—helped to set _Assassination’s_ new record at the box office.

It is precisely the trend-setting, genre-bending, and audience-pleasing films produced by women such as Shim Jae-myung, Shim Bo-kyoung, Oh Jung-wan, Kim Mi-je, Lee Eugene, and Ahn Soo-hyun that continue to elevate Korean cinema to ever greater heights. Although space prevents us from discussing all of the female (and male) producers who have made valuable contributions to the Korean film industry, few would dispute that this core group of female producers ranks among the most skilled and visionary members of the domestic film industry and continue to leave their mark on the changing face of cinema in both Korea and the wider world.

**Conclusion**

In 1984, the Ministry of Culture and Athletics (now the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) rescinded the PRS, thus opening the industry to new players other than the cartel of government-registered production companies that for years had controlled domestic filmmaking and maintained exclusive rights to import foreign films. New companies such as Lee Jang-ho’s Pan Cinema, Hah Myung-joong’s HMJ Films, and Lee Doo-yong’s Doosung Films rushed into the market and began creating new spaces for commercial expansion. However, scarce production funding and continuing script censorship, as well as limited access to distribution and exhibition channels—yet to be consolidated on a nationwide basis (this was the pre-multiplex era)—restricted the growth and profitability of these new players. Coinciding with this development was a newfound interest in the industry among both family-run Korean conglomerates (chaebols) and a new generation of aspiring filmmakers. A flood of Hollywood films and videos, unleashed by the demise of the PRS, threatened the plans of all these parties.

Throughout the 1990s, but increasingly in the latter half of the decade, the chaebols began integrating their interests in the entertainment industry vertically across investment, production, and distribution channels, and on an unprecedented scale a new breed of filmmmakers was establishing their own small-to-medium production companies, with aspirations to professionalism and diversity. Korea’s domestic film industry was reshaped by the energy that flowed from this heady producer mix and also by the near-simultaneous increase in the number of screens, which in turn spawned new directors, stars, and practitioners involved in all aspects of the filmmaking process. Significant improvements in box office reporting procedures and technology, which provided a newfound level of accounting transparency, helped too. A virtuous circle was set in motion that enabled Korean cinema to achieve a renaissance comparable with the Golden Age of the 1960s.

At the time of writing, CJ E&M, Showbox, Lotte Cinema, and N.E.W. are the “big four” corporate players in the industry. Amongst them, CJ E&M and Lotte Entertainment have expanded vertically across all aspects of the film business,
exhibiting the kind of cost and market-control strategy for which Hollywood studios were well known in the 1930s. While this transformation of the economic basis of the industry has generated the regularized cash flows needed to sustain continuous production regimes, it has also caused major problems as a result of the monopolization of the market by CJ E&M and Lotte Entertainment. Nonetheless, a 2008 KOFIC directory, Who's Who in Korean Film Industry: Producers and Investors, presents biographical data and brief interviews with 47 other major players who have contributed to the so-called renaissance of the Korean cinema beginning in the late 1990s. Not all of the films made by this talented group of producers have been commercial successes, and their combined capacity was undermined by the recession that hit the industry in 2006—largely the result of illegal downloading and piracy and the subsequent erosion of ancillary markets, coupled with a succession of box office failures that contributed to the loss of international pre-sales and a decline in investor confidence. In addition, several of these smaller producers were hit hard by their decision to list their companies on the stock market through backdoor means. Yet, as this chapter discusses, a core group of female producers has only challenged the hegemony of these larger firms (and their male colleagues), but its members have also developed tested methods of working with them with the aim of improving the creative content of domestic films.

On the surface, the inclusion of only 11 women in Who's Who in Korean Film Industry: Producers and Investors (2008, published by KOFIC and made available on its extensive website) suggests that women have played limited roles in the fundamental transformation of the film industry since the late 1980s and increasingly throughout the 1990s and 2000s. However, nothing could be further from the truth: for some time now, the female producers discussed in this chapter, not to mention women working behind the camera and in other roles, have equaled if not outstripped their male colleagues. According to recent industry statistics, women outnumber men working full-time in film importing, as well as public relations and marketing, and also outnumber their male colleagues in part-time and contracted positions in production planning and producing, film importing, distribution, public relations, and marketing, as well as the exhibition side of the industry. This is not to argue that the contributions made by male and female producers to the transformation of the industry have fallen along gender lines, although female producers are often described (at least when it comes to the making of modest-budget commercial and independent films) as being more detail-oriented, more patient, and better communicators than their male colleagues. More to the point—and despite the continued relative neglect of their contributions—by producing arthouse successes as well as mainstream commercial hits, women producers have remained at the core of the domestic industry, often showing a willingness to work with new directors because they believe in them and their stories rather than solely in their potential commercial success. Their energy, vision, and dedication to exploring fresh stories and developing new talent have drawn local and global audiences alike to a constantly innovating national cinema that continues to expand along transnational lines.

Notes


2. Other smaller chosadul that became involved in the film industry in the 1980s included Byunkeun, Hisai, Hanbo, SKC, Sechang, and Jino—all seeking to profit from licensing Hollywood movies for Korea's insatiable videotape market.


7. "Little Fish Shiri Sank the Titanic." (Jugeun Mulgogi 'Shiri' ga Tainnikho Chimmosikin). Donga Daily (9 April, 1999): 21. Shiri is the name of a small fish found in the Han River around the DMZ.

8. The leading figures in Sunggum and Daeowo's entertainment divisions—people who later became key drivers during the industry's expansion period—included Choi Geong-yong (former executive director of Lotte Entertainment), Seo Byung-moon (former director of KOCCA), Choi Wan (CEO of IM Pictures), and Kim Ju-seong (former CEO of CJ Entertainment).

9. In 1964, Kwak had established Hapdong Film, and he rapidly amassed the personal connections and financial strength to become a leading member of the local production cartel. During the 1970s and 1980s, he directed several films including Oh, Frailty (1972) and I Want to Go (1984), moving into the exhibition business after acquiring the Seoul Cinema in the Jongno District—the (literally) center of cinema in Seoul until the large-scale roll-out of multiplexes in the late 1990s.


13. Leofig received international acclaim after winning the Best SiSges Family Film Diploma at the 2011 SiSges Film Festival in Spain, and Best Animated Film Feature at the 2011 Asia Pacific Film Festival in Australia.


20. King and the Clown was released in Korea in late December 2005, and it was exhibited until mid-April 2006. Between May and October 2006, the film was released commercially in Taiwan, Singapore, Canada, and Japan and then in Los Angeles in January 2007.
21. US-based Kino Video/Kino International holds the North American distribution rights to The President’s Last Bang and has yet to release the restored version of the film. The restored film was re-released in Korea in 2008. In early 2009, UK-based distributor Third Window Films released the restored version on DVD; this contained the four minutes of documentary footage cut from the original film.
30. According to KOFIC, All About My Wife (2012) and Cold Eyes (2013) attracted audiences of 4.6 million and 5.5 million, respectively.
32. Gomery 1986: 84–85. In the 1940s, the US government prohibited the film companies from maintaining monopolies of both production studios and the ownership of theaters, thus curtailing attempts at vertical integration. In Korea, since the early 1990s, successive governments have done little to impede or regulate the practice of vertical integration in the film industry.