

Consumer Culture and the Black Market

Mise-en-Scène

Han Hyung-mo's films are marked by a distinctive *mise-en-scène*. They are visually dense and lush, their frames full of alluring objects that catch the eye, with Western material culture, especially consumer items, often taking pride of place. This dimension of Han's style is apparent in *Madame Freedom's* (1956) Paris Boutique. We first see the shop's interior after the remarkable mobile camera shot, discussed in the previous chapter, in which the camera sweeps down across a bustling sidewalk and comes to a rest up against the shop's display window. A cut brings the viewer into the boutique, with the camera now peering into a glass display case filled with an array of enticing objects: a jar of Ponds cold cream, a box of Coty face powder, bottles of perfume, pressed powder compacts, lipsticks, men's shirts, a cardigan sweater. Each item, vividly rendered via a crisply focused cinematography, attracts the viewer's attention and solicits an acquisitive desire. Into this still life enters Mme Oh, neatly coiffed and prettily made up, as she kneels down and removes a bottle of perfume, as if to hand it to the viewer (figure 16). The Paris Boutique is an oasis of commercial plenitude, filled with distinctive consumer objects and representations of them, from Chanel's rectangular perfume bottles to men's fedoras. In a period of postwar scarcity, Han's *mise-en-scène* provides the visual pleasure of material abundance. The shop is also a cosmopolitan oasis: all of the items on display are of foreign origin. The dialogue highlights their Western provenance as Mme Oh tells one customer that "the perfume and powder are from France, and the others are all from America," and offers another, in English, a set of "American Max powder." The sales clerks and customers, dressed in Western clothes and sporting the latest in hats, gloves, and purses, bring the shop's inanimate goods to life as they discuss them, handle them, pay for them, and wrap them up.



FIGURE 16. Han Hyung-mo's mise-en-scène: an oasis of commercial plenitude in *Madame Freedom*. (Courtesy KOFA)

Mise-en-scène refers to everything that the camera films: setting, costume, décor, props, lighting, color, and the composition of all of these within the frame. Han's mise-en-scène was a key component of his Cold War cosmopolitan period style, part of what made his films so popular with viewers, attractive to investors, and inspiring to his colleagues. Like many of his films, *Madame Freedom* deploys a mise-en-scène that mirrors the glamour and visual density of Hollywood. I want to read Han's mise-en-scène, however, as more than an instance of neocolonial mimicry by interpreting it in two ways, as I did with setting, cinematography, and sound in the previous chapter: as an expressive element creatively deployed to construct meaning within the films themselves, and as historical evidence that reveals something significant about Korea's experience of postwar modernization. Han's films served as advertisements for, and products of, an emerging consumer capitalist modernity. They offered visions of a material lifestyle that was widely desired but not yet widely achieved

Thomas Elsaesser has argued persuasively that mise-en-scène is central to the expressive powers of the melodrama and key to its ideological complexity. He suggests that at their core, melodramas work through the "sublimation of dramatic

conflict into décor, colour, and composition of frame.” Writing about postwar Hollywood, he describes melodramas’ *mise-en-scène* as richly expressive of the pressure, repression, and social alienation experienced by the individual within the claustrophobic social atmosphere of the American family. Individual material objects—a fountain, a mirror—symbolize and metaphorically condense characters’ inarticulate inner lives, visualizing their interpersonal conflicts and fraught relationship to social conventions. *Mise-en-scène* thus serves as visual expression of ideas and feelings that cannot be articulated openly at the level of story and dialogue. This tension between *mise-en-scène* and narrative is central to melodramas’ ability to serve as what Elsaesser calls “critical social documents,” allowing them to cast doubt visually on the very ideologies that they reinforce narratively.¹ Thinking about Han’s *mise-en-scène* textually, we can see how it often works the same way, pushing against the ideological thrust of the narratives and expressing characters’ distance from dominant norms and values even as the stories seem to embrace them.

Cultural anthropologists and consumer studies scholars, in turn, can help us think about Han’s *mise-en-scène* as a form of historical evidence that reveals something about the world beyond the films. These scholars have focused on the social function of consumer goods and acts of consumption, calling attention to how they work in modern (and modernizing) societies as a “system of human communication” that is “charged with cultural meaning.”² Carefully chosen consumer objects can locate their possessor within a social order, enabling her to make, according to Robert Oppenheim, “claims about who one is in the world.”³ As products of modernization themselves, they can serve as an “idiom” for thinking through what Daniel Miller calls the “problems of modernity” and for negotiating the new and unfamiliar worlds and identities that modernization creates.⁴ Such objects thus serve both a creative and a mediatory function, enabling their owners to invent new social identities through which they engage shifting social conditions. Arjun Appadurai expands the analytical framework of consumer culture even further when he invites us to investigate “the social life of things.” He urges us to explore how material artifacts are embedded within networks of social, cultural, political, and economic relations. The meanings of objects, he writes, are inscribed in their “trajectories”: “it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.”⁵ To understand the full range of meaning that an artifact carries, he suggests, we must recover its ties to the networks that made its production, circulation, and consumption possible. Such recovery becomes even more essential when these networks cross national and cultural boundaries.

Cultural historians of the Cold War have emphasized the extent to which consumer goods in the 1950s carried ideological meanings about the rewards of capitalist democracy. The postwar years were the heyday of international trade exhibitions, which provided a platform for the United States to trumpet the fruits of its humming industrial economy. These consumer goods—from washing machines

to cars—were imbued with the ideas of freedom, equality, abundance, leisure, and the just rewards of hard work, a political message that Vice President Richard Nixon articulated clearly in his 1959 “kitchen debate” with Nikita Khrushchev at the American National Exhibition in Moscow.⁶ Hollywood movies were intimately linked to this political symbology, and the State Department valued them as visually enticing advertisements for the products of American industry.⁷ It was, in part, this linkage of *mise-en-scène* to Free World economic ideology that led the State Department to work with the big eight studios, via the Central Motion Picture Exchange (CMPE), to facilitate film exports into postwar Asia.

Thinking about the expressive capacity of *mise-en-scène* invites us to ask: what role did it play in Han’s depiction of gendered modernity? As with the modern girl in the earlier part of the century, the postwar *après* girl was characterized by her interaction with foreign consumer goods. When Mme Oh’s independent-minded niece awaits her lover in a coffee shop, she reads *Reader’s Digest*. When Miss Park goes on a date with Professor Jang, she orders coffee. When the heroine of *Hyperbolae of Youth* (1956) participates in the *enjoi* lifestyle, she drinks Coca Cola. When the heroine of *A Female Boss* (1959) asserts her right to monopolize a public phone in defiance of the men waiting in line behind her, she feeds her dog a Fig Newton cookie. Han was certainly not alone in associating the *après* girl with Western objects: the heroine of *Holiday in Seoul* (1956), for instance, daydreams of riding in a streamlined motor boat after she sees an advertisement for one in an American magazine. Han’s films do stand out, however, for their sheer abundance of consumer items and for the central role that they play in expressing character and theme.

Thinking about style as historical evidence leads to a different question: How was it possible for Han to create such a rich *mise-en-scène* so soon after the Korean War, during a period of widespread poverty and limited economic growth? In what kinds of networks were these consumer items embedded? *Madame Freedom* hints at an answer in its subplot about Mme Oh’s involvement in a smuggling scheme run by her friend Mme Choi. This subplot invites us to investigate the connections between the film’s vision of capitalist modernity and the trajectories—legal and illegal—through which consumer goods entered Korea.

This chapter explores *mise-en-scène* from three perspectives. The first section offers textual analyses of *Madame Freedom*, *Hyperbolae of Youth*, and *The Hand of Destiny*. Beyond simply marking the *après* girl’s modernity, Han’s use of setting, props, and *décor* helps characterize women who are engaged in the work of self-making. Anthony Giddens has argued that the construction of “self-identity” is a core feature of modernity. As traditional, collective social identities lose some of their vitality and relevance, individuals take on the task of active self-development, constructing an individuated personal identity by making choices from among a range of options. Such constructions of self-identity are stimulated by globalization, which opens channels for the inflow of information from other cultures

and facilitates the formation of social relationships of unprecedented geographic scope. The work of self-making is also enabled by commodity capitalism, which makes possible the cultivation of “lifestyles” that “give material form to a particular narrative of self-identity.”⁸ We can see this dynamic in Han’s films. Through their consumer-capitalist *mise-en-scène*, they show women creating and inhabiting new individual identities that depart decisively from Confucian social identities. Working through Elsaesser’s mechanisms of symbolism, metaphoric condensation, and sublimation, material objects in Han’s films convey the cultivation and performance of a modern female self.

The middle portion of the chapter explores the material dimensions of Cold War cosmopolitanism by exploring style as historical evidence. It investigates the “social life” of Han’s *mise-en-scène* by showing how the material artifacts out of which it was composed were embedded in transnational economic and military networks. It traces the historical development of these networks, revealing their roots in the Japanese colonial system and their expansion via the construction of the US military base system in the Pacific. The influx of consumer goods through these networks, in turn, fueled the growth of a vast black market that made American and other foreign goods widely available to those South Koreans who could afford them. Han’s *mise-en-scène*, when taken seriously as historical evidence, sheds light on how consumer capitalism emerged in postwar Korea and the central role played by the black market as a social and economic institution.

The chapter’s final section brings us back to the metaphor of *budae jjigae* cinema by investigating poaching as a widespread material practice within the commercial film industry. It explores how filmmakers relied on resources procured from the black market and US military bases to bring their films into existence and to achieve the high-quality production values that attracted viewers. This section brings the expressive and historical dimensions of *mise-en-scène* together. It reveals how the US military functioned, ironically, as a South Korean cultural institution, inadvertently supplying Han and other filmmakers with some of the resources they needed to make films that depicted female self-making with such tactile vividness.

In focusing on *mise-en-scène* as an essential element of Han’s style, we can understand Cold War cosmopolitanism as a vein of material culture, one that was brought into existence by the transnational networks that carried into South Korea a flood of goods from various parts of the Free World.

HAN’S STYLE OF MISE-EN-SCÈNE

Han Hyung-mo participated in crafting his films’ *mise-en-scène* to a degree that was unusual at the time. His involvement may have arisen out of his wide-ranging aesthetic interests, which extended well beyond cinema. As a youth, Han’s first passion had been painting, and he worked for two years designing sets for the

Sintaeyang Theater Group.⁹ Later, when his film career began to slow down in the early 1960s, Han took a two-year break and turned to architecture, designing and building Western-style houses—similar, perhaps, to the homes featured in *Yŏwŏn*'s pages—which he then sold. As his colleague Kim Kee-duk recalled, his creative ambitions and modern sensibilities found expression in “a certain upscale house which nobody had seen the likes of before.” His commercial instincts were as astute here as elsewhere, and his houses were as popular as his films: “Because he had very keen eyes and was fashionable, once he built his own house, people went for it.”¹⁰

Han worked closely with his regular art director, Lee Bong-seon. Lee was an unrivaled figure in the film industry, a first-generation art director whom colleagues regarded as possessing a “very modern sense” of aesthetics.¹¹ Lee's roots were in the consumer-oriented arts of capitalism. Lee and Han had met as youths in colonial Manchuria where they both worked in a department store (most likely a branch of Japan's Mitsukoshi chain), Lee as an art assistant and Han as a sign painter.¹² Han brought Lee into the film industry, where he began working on films for which Han was the cinematographer. He served as art director on Han's *Breaking the Wall* (1949), *The Hand of Destiny*, *Madame Freedom*, *A Female Boss*, and other films. Lee continued working with department stores after the Korean War, taking charge of the interior designs of Seoul's Midopa, which had been damaged during the war, and Shinsegye, which had been home to the Eighth US Army PX. He also worked with an event management company that staged political events, including a birthday celebration for Syngman Rhee. Han had such respect for Lee's skill, and such appreciation for the material and financial constraints within which Lee worked, that he often adjusted his shooting plans to accommodate the sets as Lee had constructed them. Lee's commercial orientation is evident in his use of what today would be called product placement: Lee had a side job creating logos for liquor companies, and he sometimes incorporated signage for his clients' products into his set design, as he did when he placed a large, flashing neon sign for Crown Beer in the middle of a nightclub stage in Han's *A Female Boss* (figure 17).¹³

Working together, Han and Lee used *mise-en-scène* to explore the idea of women's self-development through the tools that capitalist modernity was making available. They deployed setting, décor, props, and other material artifacts to convey the idea that women could lead lives that departed drastically from dominant norms. In *Madame Freedom* and *The Hand of Destiny*, consumer objects become a means through which the heroines create new lifestyles and express new subjectivities. They are tools through which the *apprès* girl characters manufacture the modern ideal of an individual, authentic self.

In *Madame Freedom*, Han creates a Korean version of a Western icon of modernity: the shop girl. The young woman presiding over an emporium of material delights appeared across late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Western



FIGURE 17. Product placement: a flashing neon sign for Crown Beer in *A Female Boss* (1959). (Courtesy of KOFA)

literary and visual culture as part of what Lise Sanders has described as the “heated debate about the nature of social, sexual, and moral practice for women employed in the public sphere.”¹⁴ Han’s arrangement of Mme Oh amidst the setting of the shop (see figure 15 in chapter 5) echoes classic Western imagery, such as James Tissot’s painting *The Shop Girl* from his “Women of Paris” series (1883–85) (figure 18). Like Tissot, Han uses the glass window and door to link his shop girl to the modern city outside and to suggest that she, too, is on display, part of the array of visual spectacles that the city offers to sidewalk strollers. Tissot’s shop girl, cradling a wrapped package in her arms and gazing directly at the viewer, suggests that her life is defined by participation in commercial networks rather than by motherhood, while the exchange of glances between a man on the street and another shop girl gestures towards new forms of interaction with the opposite sex. The tumble of ribbons on the counter, in turn, hints at erotic *dishabille*. In postwar Korea, as in 1920s–30s Japan and turn-of-the-century Paris, the shop girl was a familiar type of modern woman, and she appeared in the pages of *Yōwōn* as the “Hope of Our Workplace” and as a defender of the dignity of women’s work.¹⁵ Like other working women, her presence in the commercial public sphere was facilitated by the US military: shop girl was one of the many jobs opened up on the bases for Korean women, who frequently staffed post exchange stores and Korean concessions.

The primary “action” that takes place in the Paris Boutique over the course of the film is Mme Oh’s self-transformation, through her engagement with consumer goods, from a “wise mother, good wife” into a professional woman and “liberated wife.” Grant McCracken has written about consumer goods as “instruments of the self,” expressive tools through which people engage in the inherently modern



FIGURE 18. Icon of modernity: *The Shop Girl*, from James Tissot's series, "Women of Paris, 1883–1885." (Courtesy of Art Gallery of Ontario)

“enterprise of self-creation” and “express new notions of gender.”¹⁶ For Daniel Miller, this self-making always implies a relationship to a social world, with consumer goods acting as forms “in which we construct our understandings of ourselves in the world.”¹⁷ As a shop girl and a consumer herself, Mme Oh undertakes precisely such a project of personal reinvention. When she first arrives, she wears a *hanbok* and styles her hair in the traditional bun worn by married women, but over time she begins to wear Western fashion and hairstyle. This external change visualizes her more profound inner transformation. Like countless Western literary female consumers before her, Mme Oh is engaged in a project of shedding a self-abnegating identity rooted in the family and crafting a new identity as an autonomous individual. The shop functions as an educational space in which Mme Oh learns how to be modern: how to be a saleswoman (rather than an unpaid domestic laborer), how to flirt with men (rather than be an attentive wife), how to recognize the latest fashion (rather than maintain sartorial customs), and how to participate in a market economy (rather than manage a household economy). While in this space she receives encouragement from other women who spur her on to master these new skills, attitudes, and behaviors: she earns her boss’s praise not for being demure, but for actively increasing sales, selling the most expensive items, and providing excellent service. The qualities for which she is now valued are public and commercial, not private and familial. Mme Oh’s embrace of a cosmopolitan consumer identity entails spurning a woman’s traditional role as a producer of Korean household goods, a rejection that becomes apparent when she sneers at the handmade tie that Miss Park gives her husband as a gift. Such a homely item, along with the female subjectivity that it symbolizes, no longer has any appeal for the modern Mme Oh.

Emboldened by her new sense of herself as a professional woman, Mme Oh also boldly rejects as “uncivilized” Mr. Han’s teasing comment that women who “decorate themselves” with the shop’s cosmetics gradually develop a “prostitute-like nature.” She asserts instead that “makeup is an absolute necessity for the beauty of a woman’s life and mind.” While this exchange constitutes a bit of foreshadowing of her affair with Mr. Han, it also links a woman’s outer, bodily transformation via consumer goods to a more profound inner one. Through makeup, a woman can symbolically lay claim to an autonomous life and mind not defined through her relationship to a man. This exchange resonates with the long history of cosmetics used as instruments of self-definition for women as they shed purely domestic identities and enter the public sphere.¹⁸ It is precisely through consuming the goods that she sells, and imbibing the meanings that they contain, that Mme Oh transforms herself into a self-possessing individual.

As part of her new identity as a shop girl, Mme Oh becomes a disseminator of modern ideas and a purveyor of a lifestyle that gives them material form. In addition to selling consumer goods, she also schools her customers in their use and in the ideals and practices they embody. “What is this thing called bed perfume?” asks

one perplexed male customer. "It's perfume you can spray on your bed," answers Mme Oh with a smile, as his female companion gives him a knowing nudge. Mme Oh is not just selling a toiletry here: she is selling the concept of sex as a sensuous and pleasurable experience, and not just an exercise in marital duty undertaken for the purpose of extending the male family line. Through this consumer object, Mme Oh redefines an everyday feature of Korean life—sexuality—and infuses it with new meanings. Mme Oh is dispensing what Laurel Kendall has called "embodied modernity": an experience of being modern that takes place at the level of bodily sensations and practices.¹⁹ The Paris Boutique functions as a "schoolroom" for embodied modernity, teaching people how to express new versions of themselves by consuming new kinds of material goods.²⁰ As she educates her customers, Mme Oh also educates the film's viewers, who are just as likely to be unfamiliar with bed perfume. In this role, Mme Oh becomes a kind of alter-ego for Han Hyung-mo and Lee Bong-seon, displaying consumer goods and their associated values in an attractive way.

The shop's goods help Mme Oh renegotiate her social relations. When deployed as gifts, they become instruments of female empowerment, enabling Mme Oh to usurp some of the markers of male privilege. When her handsome neighbor Mr. Shin comes by the store before his departure for America, she gives him a shirt and tie from the store's stock—*not* a handmade gift. Previously angry with him for "sporting" with her affections, she now gently teases him for his inability to afford such things himself. Smiling at his visible discomfort, Mme Oh claims for herself the power to bestow expensive foreign gifts on a romantic partner, a power that has heretofore been possessed only by the shop's male customers. The shirt and tie serve as metaphorical condensations of Mme Oh's new subjectivity as a woman who has liberated herself from the constraints of normative gender roles. By giving them to Mr. Shin she claims a new position in the social hierarchy, placing herself above a high-status male college student on his way to America.

Han's consumer goods-based style of *mise-en-scène* reaches its apogee in his domestic interiors, which reimagine the postwar home as a site of what Kristin Hoganson has called "cosmopolitan domesticity."²¹ Han makes the contrast between traditional and modern domestic spaces the visual centerpiece of *Hyperbolae of Youth*. Han structures this romantic comedy around a trading-places story line. Two young men, once friends in college and now of vastly different economic fortunes, become reacquainted in a doctor's office where they have sought treatment for their respective stomach ailments: the rich man, Bu-nam (Yang Hun), is suffering from the effects of overeating, while his poor friend, Myeong-ho (Hwang Hae), suffers from malnutrition. The doctor proposes an unusual cure: each man should move in with his friend's family and live and eat as they do. The body of the film depicts the misadventures that follow, playing them for comedy and romance, since each young man has an attractive sister. Han stages the story in contrasting domestic spaces that express each family's degree of social modernity and their

corresponding values. The poor family, led by a widowed mother, lives in a leaky, one-room shack that resembles a *hanok*. The space is small and sparsely furnished, and the few material objects that do exist are functional rather than decorative. Furniture is minimal and consists mostly of thin *yo* mattresses, a small bureau, and a small *soban* table-tray. This single room is used for eating and sleeping, both of which are done on the floor, while cooking and household chores are conducted outside or on the *maru*, a small porch. The traditional décor harmonizes with its inhabitants' traditional behavior. The home is a site of work done in traditional ways: the daughter Jeong-ok (Ji Hak-ja) irons clothes using a charcoal-heated iron, while Bu-nam learns to split wood with an axe and haul water in a bucket. The home is infused with a sense of Koreanness, evoked by a portrait of the father, who was kidnapped by North Koreans during the war, and by the sweeping natural vistas of Busan harbor and the surrounding mountains. When Bu-nam asks Jeong-ok why she is darning a sock rather than simply buying a new one, she responds with a nationalistic defense of frugality: "Imagine if everyone wore their socks for an additional fifteen days. It's a problem that Koreans pretend to have a lot when they actually don't." In sharp contrast, the wealthy family lives in a spacious house that has separate bed- and living rooms and is full of Western-style furniture and objects, including a piano, a record player, and a telephone. This house is a place of leisure, where the daughter Min-ja (Lee Bin-hwa) dances to Western music, eats fresh fruit, and wheedles money from her father to go clothes shopping. It is suffused with an air of cosmopolitanism: "Your house is like a restaurant, coffee shop, and a dance hall all in one" notes Myeong-ho. "I just feel like I'm in a different country."

Han makes the moral valences of these two households abundantly clear. The daughter in the poor family is dutiful and hardworking, and her widowed mother attends a Christian church and exemplifies the endurance that postwar Koreans deeply admired.²² A portrait of Jesus looks down on them from the wall. The daughter in the rich family, in contrast, is rather spoiled, and her father is a corrupt importer who lies to avoid paying taxes. The arc of the film's narrative breaks down these distinctions, however, as the rich siblings come to appreciate the values of their poor counterparts, and the poor siblings learn to enjoy Western-style leisure. In the end, the health of each man is restored by embracing the strengths of the other family. A happy medium is achieved when the two couples fall in love and, after agreeing to "forget about outdated tradition," get married in a double ceremony. The penultimate scene depicts both families ensconced in the rich family's living room, visually suggesting that while traditional values are admirable, progress and happiness are represented by the Western-style home.

Han's most sophisticated meditation on consumer culture, female empowerment, and cosmopolitan domesticity can be found in *The Hand of Destiny*, a generic hybrid that combines elements of film noir and melodrama. Set in Incheon during the Korean War, it tells the story of Margaret (Yoon In-ja), a fashionable

and affluent bar hostess who is also a secret agent working for a North Korean spy-master. One night, Margaret comes to the aid of a man, Yeong-cheol (Lee Hyang), who has been beaten and falsely accused of theft, and she invites him into her well-appointed apartment, where he tells her he is a poor student who must work as a manual laborer to support himself. They fall in love and Margaret begins to support him financially: she buys him new clothes, takes him out on dates, and urges him to give up his job so he can focus on his studies. The melodramatic moral conflict emerges as she experiences a contradiction between her feelings of love for Yeong-cheol and her work as a spy, and it deepens when she discovers that he is a counterintelligence officer. The film reaches its climax when Margaret, under orders from her spymaster, reluctantly brings Yeong-cheol at gunpoint to an isolated location in the mountains. When the spymaster commands her to shoot Yeong-cheol, she turns her gun against the spymaster, who dodges Margaret's bullet and shoots her instead. As Yeong-cheol cradles her dying body, the lovers kiss—the first in Korean film history. She asks him to call her by her Korean name, Jeong-ae, which is a sign—like the *hanbok* and white lace headscarf she wears—that she has renounced both communism and the morally tainted Westernized lifestyle it supported to become a good Korean woman.

As with *Madame Freedom*, the film's narrative arc and much of its dialogue invite a reading that reinforces patriarchal values, as it charts the transformation of the "impure," Westernized, and traitorous Margaret into the good, self-sacrificing, Korean Jeong-ae, who must nevertheless be killed as punishment for her misdeeds. The film can be seen as reinforcing nationalist sentiments by making a male representative of the South Korean state serve as the agent of her transformation. The film echoes the Cold War's humanist ideology, as well, by giving Margaret dialogue in which she renounces the Communist Party's "hate, scheming, and the startling defilement of man" in favor of the "freedom" to express her full humanity through expressions of love and generosity towards another.

An against-the-grain reading that focuses on the expressive capacities of style leads to a significantly different interpretation. The distribution of screen time suggests that the film's primary interest lies less in the spy plot, which takes up less than a third of the film's running time, and more in Margaret's *après* girl lifestyle and her relationship with Yeong-cheol. What the film expresses quite forcefully, in large part through its domestic *mise-en-scène*, is that Margaret is an extraordinarily powerful woman who is engaged in a romantic relationship that inverts the socially normative gender hierarchy. Margaret's home is a shockingly antipatriarchal space that serves as a stage for her performance of modern ideas about female autonomy and sexuality.

The film's opening scene introduces the viewer to Margaret's apartment, one of the most visually dense and ostentatiously modern domestic spaces in Han's oeuvre. Chock full of exotic foreign goods, it is clearly marked as cosmopolitan (figure 19). "It's a patchwork of what we'd seen in Japanese and American



FIGURE 19. Cosmopolitan domesticity: Margaret's apartment in *The Hand of Destiny* (1954). (Courtesy of KOFA)

books and magazines,” recalled Lee Bongseon’s assistant Noh In-taek.²³ Its decor includes Western-style furniture, including an upholstered couch and chair, a coffee table, a bed, bookshelves, and a vanity with a large round mirror; boldly patterned textiles used for curtains and upholstery; decorative items on the wall, including a mechanical owl clock with moving eyes; a fluorescent desk lamp; a telephone; a radio; and a bottle of Seagram’s whiskey. Margaret’s dialogue calls attention to this opulent décor, and she hints that it is the product of a disreputable line of work—“I may live like this, but please don’t doubt my sincerity”—which Yeong-cheol assumes is prostitution. As in *Madame Freedom*, where the items for sale in the Paris Boutique are linked to smuggling, and in *Hyperbolae of Youth*, where the wealthy family’s home décor is the product of corruption, Margaret’s décor is linked to criminality and moral degradation, the products of her work as a spy and a café hostess.

The visual presentation of the apartment, however, undercuts the moral condemnation of the dialogue and narrative closure. The opening scene’s cinematography and editing emphasize the importance of the décor and invite the viewer to gaze at it openly (video 5). A series of relatively long takes puts the décor on display at a leisurely pace that allows the viewer to absorb all its components and



VIDEO 5. Clip from *The Hand of Destiny*.

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.85.5/>



understand how they relate to each other spatially. After Yeong-cheol enters the apartment, he gazes around the room with an expression of bewilderment, motivating a series of strong point-of-view shots that display select decorative items in close-up, including a print of a Gauguin nude. (*Yŏwŏn* would reproduce a similar Gauguin painting in its April 1961 issue.) Yeong-cheol acts here as a proxy for the viewer, allowing us to openly ogle what most contemporary audience members would have regarded as a fantastically luxurious and exotic home. Members of the film's production crew were certainly in awe of the set and its decoration: "We didn't live with all that furniture set up like that," recalled Kim Kee-duk, referring to his childhood spent in a *hanok*. The scene presented "a lifestyle, an environment that we could not see in our own society." Other crew members, when they saw the finished film, exclaimed "wow, look at these new things."²⁴ The rooms are clean, the décor is in good shape, and the lighting is bright enough to reveal the space in its entirety. The film thus presents the apartment as attractive and comfortable, rather than tawdry or menacing, despite Margaret's disparaging comments. One item of décor stands out in particular: a round, oscillating fan prominently positioned between Margaret's and Yeong-cheol's heads so that it seems like a third party to their conversation. Electric fans were very desirable items in this period, much

sought-after during Korea's hot and humid summers; for contemporary viewers, it would likely have suggested physical comfort rather than decadence. Like the apartment as a whole, it suggests a welcome refuge from the rubble-strewn and violent street from which Yeong-cheol has just escaped.

The lifestyle Margaret lives within this apartment is as radically new as its decor. At a time when most Korean women lived with their parents, husband and children, or in-laws, Margaret lives alone and entirely outside a patriarchal familial structure. In her apartment full of Western objects she has neither mother-in-law nor man to constrain her actions, nor children to whom she must devote herself. As an economically independent working woman, she purchases her material goods to satisfy her own needs, rather than anyone else's—an unusual display of female consumer autonomy.²⁵ More shockingly, she uses her Western-style domestic space to entertain and seduce a man whom she finds attractive at first sight. After spending the night with Yeong-cheol in her Western-style bed and presumably having sex with him, Margaret expresses no shame and Yeong-cheol no condemnation. Yeong-cheol, in fact, goes out of his way to tell Margaret that her morally dubious work is not an obstacle to his love for her: "You have every right to be loved," and later, "What's so bad about being a prostitute? You helped a poor and hungry student who was working his way through school. And with no strings attached. Why shouldn't you receive praise from God himself for your pure heart?" Through consumer capitalism, Margaret has created a lifestyle—expressed both in her material surroundings and her intimate relations—that expresses a new way of being a Korean woman.

As a melodrama, the film is centrally concerned with the dynamics of the relationship that is nurtured within this cosmopolitan space. Multiple scenes depict an inversion of the normative heterosexual gender hierarchy. Time and again, and in ways large and small, Margaret asserts power over Yeong-cheol who, although impoverished, is of higher social status due to his identity as a man, a student, and an agent of the state. From the outset she takes on the masculine role of seducer while Yeong-cheol assumes the female quality of sexual reticence. She finances his entry into the *enjo*i lifestyle, taking him out to a boxing match, a bicycle race, and a game of miniature golf. Having said she would assist him financially, she gets angry when she finds him working after he has promised to stop. Margaret essentially renders Yeong-cheol a kept man—and he shows no signs of being anything but grateful.

Margaret asserts her power most overtly in an early sequence of scenes that is constructed around Western consumer objects. The sequence begins on the docks at the port of Incheon, where Margaret watches hundreds of American GIs disembark from a troop ship, an intense look on her face (video 6). She is surrounded by material artifacts (and visual icons) of Western power and modernity. She leans nonchalantly against a large American car, wearing a tailored suit with decorative stitching and holding a white, woven purse (identical to the one Jane Russell



VIDEO 6. Clip from *The Hand of Destiny*.

To watch this video, scan the QR code with your mobile device or visit

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.85.6/>



holds as she boards a ship in Josef Von Sternberg's 1952 film *Macao*). A large military ship is visible behind her, its phallic smokestack paralleling her upright body and suggesting her strength. Although she is a woman in a decidedly masculine space, she radiates self-possession and confidence. A moment later Margaret notices Yeong-cheol resting after unloading crates from a boat and walks over to him, assuming a position above him in the frame. After eyeing his torn and dirty work clothes, she spirits him away from the waterfront, guiding him into the back seat of her car with an authoritative grip on his arm. Margaret's actions, like the mise-en-scène that surrounds her, suggest her power: she seeks out the man she is attracted to, tells him to leave his work, and takes him away for her own unstated reasons. Where does Margaret take him? Shopping. In a brief montage sequence, we see Margaret escorting Yeong-cheol out of a clothes store dressed in a new double-breasted suit. They stop to gaze into a shop window crowded with shoes and purses, and in a dissolve Yeong-cheol's worn-out shoes are replaced with a pair of two-tone spectator Oxfords. Smiling, Margaret tells him, "I've caught you in my spell" as she again takes him by the arm. This is a reverse Pygmalion scenario, in which Margaret remakes her lover according to her own desires, visually transforming him from a dirty dockworker into a respectable middle-class man. It is

an exercise of female power conducted through the medium of consumer goods—akin to what Mme Oh does when she gives Mr. Shin clothes he can't afford to buy for himself. In purchasing and gifting the suit and shoes, Margaret lays claim to Yeong-cheol in a way that a man typically lays claim to a woman—through the bestowal of expensive gifts. Consumer goods become gendered instruments of power in her hands.

When they return to Margaret's apartment, the inversion of the normative gender hierarchy continues. After closing the door with a Western-style lock and key (an exotic system of closure at the time) Margaret says to Yeong-cheol, only half-jokingly, "You are totally and completely my prisoner." When he stands in front of Margaret's large vanity mirror, gazing at himself and adjusting his tie—i.e., primping—Margaret looks at him admiringly and says, "The clothes look great on you." Margaret again assumes an authoritative gaze, as she did at the waterfront when she spied Yeong-cheol from a distance. Assuming a traditionally male prerogative, she eroticizes and objectifies Yeong-cheol through her look, admiring him as her creation and as the fulfillment of her own desires.

Margaret retains her position of dominance over Yeong-cheol through to the end of the film. Although she eventually renounces communism, and by implication her Western lifestyle, she doesn't actually give up her autonomy or her power over her lover. Refusing to die from the spymaster's bullet, she asks Yeong-cheol to shoot her—and he complies. Although Yeong-cheol holds the gun, it is Margaret who decides how it will be used. At the crucial moment, she looks at Yeong-cheol unflinchingly via a strong point-of-view shot, while he squeezes his eyes shut in anguish and turns his head away as he pulls the trigger. To the very end it is Margaret who commands the authoritative gaze.

Han was not alone in using *mise-en-scène* to think through the gendered dimensions of postwar modernity. For many filmmakers in the 1950s and early 1960s, the material trappings of domestic life served as a privileged means of visualizing ideas relating to changing gender roles, westernization, and consumption. Directors working in a realist style and interested in exploring masculine subjectivities also used domestic *mise-en-scène* expressively, albeit in a very different way. An alternative to the Hollywood-inflected Cold War cosmopolitan style, realism was at once a product of the limited resources available to filmmakers, who turned to exterior locations, minimalist props, and stories about working people out of necessity, and also a sign of the creative influence of European cultural trends such as Italian neorealism and French existentialism, which gave intellectual cachet to expressions of despair.²⁶ Kim So-dong's *The Money* (1958) and Yu Hyun-mok's *Aimless Bullet* (1961) present the opposite of the empowered woman's cosmopolitan home. Here, threadbare domestic interiors speak vividly of emasculation. These films imagine modernity as masculine loss and psychic collapse, which are manifest visually through the pointed absence of foreign consumer goods and material comforts. While the homes in these films are culturally

Korean spaces, they have been voided of all potency. Efforts to improve quality of life—through theft, black-marketing, and trading in Western goods—lead only to deepening despair. Postwar transformations have turned the male protagonists of these films into patriarchs *manqué*, unable to fulfill their traditional gender roles of providing materially for their families and anchoring them in society. The emptiness of their homes visualizes the experience of modernity as profound powerlessness.

(The tension between realism and cosmopolitanism as competing styles and attitudes towards postwar modernity came to a head in 1958, when officials at the Ministry of Education rejected the selection of Kim Sodong's realist film *The Money* as Korea's submission for the fifth Asian Film Festival in Manila on the grounds that it "portrayed the wretched shadowy side of Korea," and replaced it with Han's upbeat romantic comedy *Hyperbolae of Youth* [1956]. This decision prompted complaints from some film critics, who regarded Han's film as a lesser work of art.)²⁷

Director Kim Ki-young, in contrast, used domestic interiors to explore women's empowerment via a horror-derived style. In his expressionistic masterpiece *The Housemaid* (1960), Kim makes a bourgeois family's Western-style house the setting for his critical vision of westernization and the revolution in gender roles it was unleashing. Newly constructed at the wife's urging, the two-story house is stocked with the high-status consumer goods that Han's houses often contained, including a modern kitchen with a refrigerator, a TV, a Western-style bedroom set, and an upright piano. This modern décor expresses the changing gender roles of the inhabitants: while the mother works sewing clothes to finance their new lifestyle, the minimally employed husband cooks dinner for the family and serves his wife in bed after she falls sick from overwork. Kim offers up a nightmare inversion of Han's cosmopolitan homes and self-making women, in which a materialistic housewife and a sexually aggressive servant destroy the entire family. The house's staircase—which functions both as a marker of Western-style architecture and a symbol of the family's upwardly mobile ambitions—becomes the central stage for the enactment of the dark side of westernization, which Kim represents as marital infidelity, abortion, murder, and suicide. In this cosmopolitan domestic space, female-driven consumption and westernization appear as a kind of self-destructive madness. Rather than articulating contemporary feminist critiques of the patriarchal family, as Han's *A Jealousy* (1960) does, or imagining an alternative to it, as *The Hand of Destiny* does, *The Housemaid* depicts the erosion of masculine authority as a gothic nightmare.

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF MISE-EN-SCÈNE

In order to fully understand the meanings that Han's mise-en-scène conveyed, we need to consider the "social life" of the objects out of which it was composed.

This entails recovering the transnational networks in which these artifacts were embedded and through which they entered Korea and became available to Han and his art director Lee Bong-seon. At the same time, by exploring the social life of Han's *mise-en-scène*, we can see it as historical evidence that sheds light on certain aspects of Korean life beyond the boundaries of the film text, specifically the role of the black market as a social and economic institution.

Consumption was a vexed issue in the 1950s. "Frugality itself, as a public moral value," notes anthropologist Laura Nelson, "has deep roots in South Korea."²⁸ Grounded in Confucian respect for education over commerce, frugality as a national cultural value was further nurtured by Christian missionaries and by colonial-era nationalists seeking economic independence. Discourses about consumption, says anthropologist Laurel Kendall, "have a long history as moral discourses," with "moral disapprobation" accruing around acts of "getting and spending."²⁹ These cultural values persisted into the mid-twentieth century, when poverty imposed frugality on many, albeit in tension with widespread aspirations for modernization. As historian John Lie has noted, "material longings loomed large" in the 1950s, and "the impressive material culture" that Americans brought into Korea came to stand for modernity in toto. "Few South Koreans in the 1950s escaped the sweet lure of material plenty represented in Hollywood films," he observed, as "imported luxury goods became the most visible marker of modernity and prestige."³⁰ This social tension in the moral meanings of consumption percolated through Han's films, often manifesting in the formal tension between narrative and style.

Han's *mise-en-scène* was rooted in the fledgling consumer culture that was taking shape in Korea's cities in the 1950s. Consumer culture, of course, is a distinctly modern phenomenon, one that developed historically in tandem with industrial modernization, colonialism, and global capitalist expansion. As Korea experienced different types of modernity in the twentieth century, it likewise experienced different forms of consumer culture. In the 1930s, Seoul was home to a thriving consumer culture that was created as an adjunct to Japanese colonialism.³¹ Four department stores—three of them owned by Japanese—sold a wide array of primarily Japanese manufactured goods and catered to middle-class Japanese and Korean women, making them one of the few public places where colonizer and colonized intermingled. Like virtually all of Korea's economic institutions, the department stores were thoroughly integrated into Japan's imperial economy and subject to the "fundamental imperialist goal of controlling Korea for Japanese national purposes."³² The consumer culture that took shape in the 1950s was different in many ways. Korea, of course, did not have an industrial economy capable of producing a broad range of consumer goods. What it had instead was an import economy, divided into legal and illegal sectors. Both of these sectors were embedded in US-centered Cold War transnational networks that partially overlaid colonial-era networks.

Korea's primary trading partners in the legal import economy were the United States and Japan.³³ Washington encouraged trade with Japan throughout the 1950s, both to support its Cold War policy of restoring Japan's economic strength and as a means of stretching the value of American aid dollars, since goods imported from nearby Japan were often cheaper than those from more distant countries. Given Rhee's bitter resentment of the Japanese, however, this trade was conducted on a limited and sporadic basis. This legal import economy focused on immediate consumption and was largely funded by US aid, which provided the foreign exchange needed to import reconstruction materials and bulk foodstuffs to sustain the population. Imports consisted overwhelmingly of agricultural commodities, fertilizer, and petroleum products which were then processed and sold by local businessmen. This aid-and-import system sustained a corrupt political apparatus, as Rhee bestowed lucrative import licenses upon politically allied businessmen, who kicked back a portion of their substantial profits into his political machine.³⁴ (Han gestures towards this practice in *Hyperbolae of Youth*, when the wealthy father lies to the tax collector about how much money his company has earned processing fertilizer.)

Only a small percentage of Korea's legal imports consisted of consumer goods, and these were subject to quotas and high tariffs that elevated their retail prices considerably. These imports proved both desirable and controversial. They were a point of conflict between American aid officials, who sought to maintain the focus on reconstruction, and members of the ROK government, who benefited from the lucrative profits and tax collections they generated. They also engendered ire among Korean manufacturers, who resented easily available foreign goods for undermining the nation's struggling efforts to industrialize.³⁵ Consumers often felt differently. Given the scarcity of domestically produced consumer goods and the poor quality of those that did exist, these imports were in high demand among the urban middle class. The influx of relief supplies during and after the Korean War had helped create this consumer market by training Koreans to prefer foreign goods over locally produced ones.³⁶ These legal imports of bulk commodities and manufactured goods contributed to Korea's social modernization and laid the foundation for a nascent consumer economy. They did little, however, to establish a material foundation for industrial modernization.

Legally imported luxury items turned up frequently in Han's films and those of other directors, where they served as visual shorthand for modernity. Foodstuffs were a significant import category. Imports of bananas, for example, increased from \$11,000 in 1956 (when they appeared in *Madame Freedom's* adulterous hotel room) to \$200,000 in 1959. Imports of coffee (a favorite beverage throughout 1950s cinema) fluctuated, from about \$12,000 in 1957 to \$78,600 in 1959. Electric irons (featured in *Madame Freedom's* opening scene) were imported to the tune of about \$40,000 per year, as were fluorescent lamps (visible in Margaret's bedroom in *The Hand of Destiny*), which peaked in 1958 at \$170,000. While women's clothing was

not imported at all and handbags were a tiny item (only \$4,000 worth in 1958), men's clothes were imported in much larger quantities, including items like felt hats and trench coats (\$360,000 and \$40,000 worth, respectively, in 1956), which attired Han's noirish characters in *The Heaven and The Hell* (1963). Musical instruments, like the grand piano featured in *I Am Alone* (1958), were a big category, with over \$600,000 worth being imported between 1955 and 1959. Clocks and watches, the latter a regular feature of men's costumes, were an even bigger import, with over \$3.2 million worth imported between 1955 and 1959.³⁷

The US military played a crucial role in financing the import of these consumer goods. While all imports had to be paid for with foreign exchange, such as American dollars or Japanese yen, US regulations prohibited the use of its aid dollars for the import of what it regarded as "luxury"—that is, nonessential, nonproductive—goods. These had to be paid for with Korea's own foreign exchange, which could only be generated through the sale to foreigners of Korean goods and services. The US military provided a vital source of this foreign exchange through its purchases of large quantities of Korean hwan. The UN command spent these hwan on "offshore procurement" (i.e., buying goods and services from Korean suppliers to support US, UN, and ROK troops) and to pay the wages of its Korean civilian employees. These hwan purchases generated much of the foreign exchange necessary to import consumer and luxury goods. During FY 1956, for example, sales to the US Army generated \$28 million, which was \$5 million more than the earnings from Korea's own exports.³⁸

Operating alongside this small legal consumer-import economy was a much larger illegal one: the ubiquitous black market. In Korea, the black market consisted primarily of the illegal trade in US military scrip, which was used on the bases instead of dollars, and the sale of goods that had entered Korea without paying import duties. Like the legal economy, the black market was fueled by goods brought into Korea from the United States and Japan and was intimately connected to the US military. This postcolonial black market emerged with the arrival of Americans at liberation in 1945, became institutionalized during the US military occupation government of 1945–48, and expanded exponentially during and after the Korean War, as the US military presence became a permanent feature of Korean life. By 1954 the black market had become, according to the *US News & World Report*, an "established institution in Korean life," and would remain so until at least the late 1980s when South Korea liberalized its trade laws and began legally importing more foreign goods.³⁹ While the size of the black market in economic terms is impossible to determine, in 1959 the UN's Office of the Economic Coordinator estimated that "merchandise valued at from 25 to 50 billion hwan"—or \$50 million to \$100 million at the official exchange rate—"reaches the market annually through illegal channels."⁴⁰ This is roughly 15 to 30 percent of the total value of all the legal imports (both aid-financed and privately financed) coming into Korea.⁴¹ Given that the overwhelming majority of legal imports were bulk

commodities and reconstruction materials, this suggests that most consumer items available in Korea came through black market channels.

The black market took a range of physical forms. It included the small shops in the camptowns outside US military bases, as well as the large open-air markets that emerged in Seoul during the Korean War, which consisted of “hundreds of long tables . . . placed so closely that the aisles permit only one person to walk comfortably.” In the southern port city of Busan the black market was ten times bigger and occupied a space about a mile square; when it burned down in 1954, it made news around the world.⁴² Extending far beyond these distinct locales, the black market also encompassed the middle-aged street vendors on “nearly every street corner” in major cities, the storefront shops in many smaller towns, and the sprawling Namdaemun (South Gate) and Dongdaemun (East Gate) market areas in Seoul.⁴³ These latter were known colloquially as “goblin markets,” from a Korean folktale about a magical creature who could make any desired object appear. In practice, there was little distinction between the legal and the black markets. Department stores regularly carried “tremendously large stocks” of black-market goods alongside Korean-made and legally imported items, and there was little effort made to disguise the illegal origins of these goods.⁴⁴ As large as these open displays were, an even larger portion of the black market remained invisible. As one Eighth US Army official observed, “It is like an iceberg. . . . For every part you see, there is two-thirds as much more underwater—or under the counter, as the case may be.”⁴⁵

Goods available for purchase on the black market, according to one American journalist, included “almost every consumer item that can be bought in New York,” including watches, toys, books, carpets, cigarettes, and fountain pens. Foodstuffs were common, and *budae jjigae*’s American ingredients—Spam, hot dogs, processed cheese—remained popular up through the 1980s; by 1960, three tons of coffee were entering the black market every day.⁴⁶ Japanese foodstuffs, such as Asahi beer, were openly displayed on the street.⁴⁷ Black-marketers retailed the bulk commodities that had been imported with US aid dollars, US military supplies, and building materials needed for reconstruction. With weary admiration the Americans tasked with eliminating the black market agreed that “if you want anything, they can get it for you. You may have to wait a day, but they can get it.”⁴⁸

Black-market goods entered Korea from abroad through two major avenues, the first of which was smuggling. The full scale of smuggling was unknown, since data was collected only on that small fraction of operations intercepted by the poorly equipped ROK authorities. Americans working with the ROK Customs Bureau, however, regarded the smuggling problem as being “staggeringly enormous in scope.” Data collected for 1953–57 showed that while the number of annual interceptions fluctuated from a low of 865 to a high of 5,855, the value of the intercepted goods rose steadily, with a total value for the five-year period coming to about 7.3 billion hwan (or \$14.6 million at the official exchange rate). The majority of smuggled goods—an estimated 70–80 percent—were brought into Korea

from Japan. Hong Kong was a distant second as a source of goods (14 percent), followed by the United States (7 percent) and Taiwan (2 percent). The majority of these smuggled goods were presumably of Japanese manufacture, and many of them had been legitimately purchased in Japanese department stores; however, Japan was a regional smuggling hub and host to a large US military force, so goods from other areas, including Hong Kong, Okinawa, and the United States likely passed through Japan on their way to Korea. The components of women's fashion, which comprised such a central element of Han's *mise-en-scène*, comprised a significant proportion of these smuggled goods. An ROK report identified textiles as the highest-value smuggled item in 1957, accounting for almost half of the total value of intercepted goods. This category was followed by accessories (11 percent), which included things like jewelry, and cosmetics/toiletries (9 percent). (Food/drink/tobacco products accounted for 7 percent and constituted the only category in which the United States was the major point of origin.) As one US report noted in 1958, "the presence in the 'market' of large quantities and complete lines of many items such as ladies' shoes, makes it quite apparent that this type of smuggling is a large scale operation." This smuggling data, like Han's gendered geography of modernity discussed in Chapter 5, points toward Japan's submerged presence in postwar cinema: the fashionable, Western-style costumes worn by Madame Oh in *Madame Freedom*, Margaret in *The Hand of Destiny*, and Min-ja in *Hyperbolae of Youth* were likely made from Japanese fabric. (The black market extended north as well: in 1955, Americans estimated that \$3–5 million worth of goods were being smuggled out of South Korea and into North Korea annually, much of it by ROK intelligence officers.)⁴⁹

The Korea-Japan smuggling trade flowed through networks rooted in both colonial-era and Cold War ties. A half-century of imperial economic integration, combined with physical proximity, rendered Japan easily accessible to the many skilled seamen in southern Korea's fishing industry. Colonial-era migrations, in turn, had created in Japan a sizable *zainichi* population. These were ethnic Koreans who had moved to Japan during the colonial era in search of opportunity or were later conscripted as industrial workers and imperial soldiers during the Pacific War. Widely discriminated against after 1945 and with a precarious legal status, they were consigned to marginal sectors of the economy. Numbering about six hundred thousand, they played an outsized role in Japan's own black market and the cross-straits smuggling trade.⁵⁰ The Cold War expansion of US military power created additional networks that sometimes overlapped with colonial-era ones. The Americans involved in smuggling, although few in number, included members of the US military who traveled between Korea and Japan. In 1956, for instance, more than thirty Korea-based GIs who were in Japan for rest and recreation were arrested after purchasing golf clubs and other items at US military stores on behalf of Japanese and *zainichi* black-marketers. American GIs also smuggled goods into Korea directly from America: late in the Korean war, for instance, an

Air Force clerk was caught trying to “carry into Korea 16 duffel bags loaded with powder puffs, face powder, face cream, zippers, wool mufflers, and cloth” via Air Force planes.⁵¹

US military installations constituted the second major avenue, after smuggling, through which black-market foreign goods entered Korea. As with smuggling, no one really knew the true volume of goods coming through this portal, although ROK officials estimated that prior to 1961, US goods accounted for about 30 percent of the goods in the black market. Given the amount of relief goods that had poured into Korea, including military surplus, it was sometimes difficult, however, to determine if any given item had been black-marketed or legally acquired. There were a variety of ways by which these American goods were poached from US military bases and found their way into the black markets. There was a good deal of direct theft by individual Koreans, known as “slicky boys” in the Army slang of the day. Pervasive stealing from Americans began with liberation. American homes were regular targets: thieves emptied bedrooms while their inhabitants slept, removing guns, wallets, and valuables from under pillows, and they stripped houses left alone for a few hours of their furniture. In the postwar years teenage boys, many of whom had lost their parents and families during the war, worked in fast-moving teams, distracting a GI at the front of his jeep or truck in order to steal the contents in the back. “Korean boys,” reported one journalist, “jump aboard Army supply trucks and toss off bundles to confederates before the startled drivers know what is happening.” In one engineering compound in the late 1950s, the Americans padlocked the toilet paper holders in the bathrooms to prevent thefts of the tissue by Korean “lady friends” who spent the night.⁵²

One can read such acts of poaching as attempts to assert some power within a vastly unequal relationship. For some poachers, their actions, like other “weapons of the weak,” no doubt expressed feelings of resentment against the quasi-imperial presence of the Americans and their not-infrequent expressions of racism. And the brazen young men who liberated goods from military trucks and warehouses no doubt felt an element of pride in their own skill at stealing from under the noses of the big, powerful Americans. Yet poaching was also a dangerous activity that often culminated in acts of violence against Koreans, as GIs took it into their own hands to punish the thieves whom the ROK government did so little to prosecute.⁵³ Local newspapers were full of stories of Korean men, women, and children being shot at and assaulted by American soldiers. In 1958 a group of officers and enlisted men stationed at ASCOM Depot caught a fourteen-year-old boy taking personal items out of their rooms; they beat him, shaved his head, daubed him with tar, stuffed him into a three-foot shipping crate, loaded him onto a helicopter, and flew him to the Uijeongbu airbase twelve miles north of Seoul, where he was unpacked and set free.⁵⁴

Han’s films, and those of his colleagues, were full of objects that may very well have entered Korea through the portal of the US military bases. Electric fans, such

as the one so prominently placed in Margaret's living room in *The Hand of Destiny*, were often stolen from US civilian and military offices. The Office of the Economic Coordinator (OEC)—that is, the head of the entire UN aid mission to South Korea—reported that twenty electric fans disappeared from his buildings in July and September 1958, a rash of thefts that prompted another bureaucrat to request 170 feet of chain and seventeen locks to secure the fans in two other buildings. (In 1958 the newly launched Goldstar company, predecessor to today's LG *chaebol*, began manufacturing an electric fan, Korea's first domestically made appliance.) The OEC's chief port operations advisor in Incheon had his bedroom robbed of thirty-five records and a portable hi-fi record player, similar, perhaps, to the one Mr. Shin has in his room in *Madame Freedom*. Office equipment, including typewriters and telephones, similar to the ones Miss Park uses, were so frequently stolen from US and ROK installations that the American brass finally asked the phone company to stop installing stolen phones. (The first Korean telephone began manufacture in 1961.) Gasoline was a big black-market item originating on US and ROK military bases, with observers estimating that stolen fuel accounted for fully two-thirds of the amount used to run the country's cars—including those, presumably, that appeared on screen.⁵⁵

Pilferage, or the large-scale theft of commercial goods and military supplies, took poaching to a higher level. "Pilferage from freighters, warehouses, trains and trucks" was "extensive," according to *US News & World Report* in 1954. In one instance, "an entire set of rail cars" loaded with "steel reinforcing bar . . . was rolled out of [a] . . . supposedly secure compound" in the middle of the night while Army Corps of Engineers bureaucrats slept nearby. In Busan, a tunnel was dug under an army warehouse, which was entirely emptied in one night of all the construction materials it held, including refrigerators—a domestic appliance found in both military housing and Kim Ki-young's *The Housemaid*. Korean guards were often involved in such thefts, and they frequently had American partners. In 1958 the average loss of US military supplies was estimated at \$96,000 per month, or over \$1 million annually. Large-scale diversions of military supplies were sometimes facilitated by the US military customs clearance officers who approved import requests. Partnering with Korean businessmen working on US military construction projects, these bureaucrats would sign off on requests for building materials far in excess of what was necessary for the job, with the extra materials fetching handsome profits on the black market.⁵⁶

The military's network of over 150 commercial stores constituted a third major military channel through which American goods entered the black market. Post exchanges (PX), which are similar to department stores, stocked about 14,500 distinct items in an effort to maintain something akin to the American standard of living for GIs. Because the PX was open to select civilians, they also stocked "a bewildering array of luxury items of little or no use to the military itself." A typical PX carried food, candy, liquor, cigarettes, men's and women's clothes, toiletries,

shoe polish, women's cosmetics, household appliances, sports equipment, and fabrics. All of these goods were diverted, at one time or another, into the black market. Coca Cola, which like American beer could not be legally imported, was a popular PX item on the black market—as it was in Han's films. The volume of Coca Cola thefts from Eighth Army Headquarters at the Yongsan garrison surprised even the military's distributors: "My depot has been sending to that bulk sales outfit every day 800 cases of Coca Cola. There's no business in the world that can handle that flow. If you go right outside the gate, you can see little boys on bicycles taking Coca Cola up the street."⁵⁷

Thefts from these stores were common, often perpetrated by some of the thousands of Koreans who worked as cashiers, clerks, stock boys, and guards. In her novel *The Naked Tree* (1970), set during the Korean War, Park Wan-so includes a scene in which Korean women employed at the PX make off with a load of goods:

The cleaning women entered [the employee break room], pushing a large trash box in front of them. They hitched up their skirts, pulled down their underwear, took out endless tubes of toothpaste and bars of soap from the trash box, and stacked them up on their calves, tying each row tightly with an elastic band. They heaped up the goods tier after tier, pulled up their underwear, and in no time they were fat with a layer of goods reaching from their calves, over their buttocks, to their waists. They pulled their skirts down, put on their coats, and swaggered out.⁵⁸

More typically, however, the PX goods that ended up on the black market began as legitimate purchases. GIs often used PX goods to pay for sexual services and gave them to Korean girlfriends, laundresses, houseboys, and friends, who in turn sold them to black-market vendors. Korean cashiers and clerks, many of them women, often bypassed point-of-purchase regulations designed to stop the flow of legally purchased goods into the black market. The American PX managers, in their turn, had little incentive to police legitimate purchases that ended up on the black market, since each PX was a self-supporting commercial enterprise whose profits supported the GI welfare fund.⁵⁹

Korean women were important facilitators of the influx of PX-based American goods into the black market and thus key actors in producing a modern and cosmopolitan standard of living for those who could afford it. In addition to working as PX employees, Korean women who married GIs were legal dependents and as such authorized to shop at the PX. With the assistance of Korean base employees such as cashiers, taxi drivers, and gate security guards, some of these wives would engage in a practice known as "racetracking," which involved rushing from one post store to another, making numerous small purchases to evade control systems, and then quickly reselling the items to a black-market middleman. The network of civilian Korean employees facilitated efficient black-market shopping: "The word about new items at the PX gets to the Korean wives before our people know about it," observed one American tasked with eliminating the black market. "As soon

as the new items appear, the Korean wives are at the PX in force.” Some of these marriages—out of a total of about 575 in 1959—were in fact business partnerships, entered into for the sole purpose of diverting goods out of the posts. Such marriages could be quite lucrative, since Korean women continued to have access to the PX for up to a year after their husbands returned to the United States. Korean wives received a lot of attention from US authorities, who sometimes kept them under surveillance. They stood out among the mostly white and black male customers at the PX, and their excessive purchases were easy to track; it also proved easy to compare the value of a wife’s monthly purchases to the salary of her husband and determine if she was spending beyond her legally earned means. In 1959, military police broke up a black market ring consisting of four Korean wives who were keeping one village well supplied with PX bicycles and women’s clothing, with one of the wives reselling about \$500 worth of goods each month. The military’s educational material urged GIs not to get caught in the “black market trap” set by Korean seductresses, warning, “Every soldier is their prey. Watch ‘em!”⁶⁰

The Army/Air Force Post Office (APO) channeled American consumer goods directly into the hands of GIs, bypassing the PX system altogether. Some GIs would ask family and friends at home to ship them items that could then be sold or otherwise transferred to Koreans. The Sears Roebuck catalogue circulated widely throughout Korea in the 1950s, a stimulus to both fantasy and actual consumption. For American civilians who did not have PX privileges, it was a vital source of clothing and supplies.⁶¹ Koreans with contacts on the US bases would often ask their American friends to order things from the Sears catalogue on their behalf and have them shipped right to the bases. As with other black market channels, the APO route was often tied up with sexual relations between American men and Korean women. In GI circles the catalogue was known as the “moose-manual,” with *moose* being the dehumanizing slang term for a Korean woman, derived from the Japanese term *musume*, which means girl. “It’s inevitable that the girlfriend will ask you to order from the United States items which are unavailable locally,” warned the author of one Eighth Army information bulletin. “Using the so-called ‘moose-manual’ mail order catalogues as a guide, she will point out what she wants.”⁶² This use of mail order catalogues to buy American clothes and goods began during the Korean War. According to Pat Frank, a writer on an UNKRA documentary film project, “the Sears Roebuck catalogue was the most widely circulated English language publication in Korea. . . . When a soldier was wooing a Moosie-Maid, he would borrow the catalogue from the company clerk and hie himself to his girl’s house, and they would spend hours deciding whether she would look best in Sweater VT-2385, or VT-2387. A steady stream of postal money orders flowed to the mail-order houses Stateside, and a steady river of packaged durable goods poured back.”⁶³

The last major channel for illegally moving American goods into the Korean market involved the sale by GIs of their personal belongings before they transferred

out of Korea. Sometimes these personal goods included such large and expensive items as pianos, which were status symbols among middle-class Koreans and could be sold for “fabulous prices,” and American cars, so common in 1950s films, which some GIs brought with them only to discover that the streets of Korean cities were too chaotic to navigate. By 1958 Korean authorities required that all GI vehicles be completely dismantled before they could be sold.⁶⁴

Recovering the “social life” of Han’s *mise-en-scène* makes visible the black market as a complex social, political, and economic institution, one that was tightly integrated into the transnational networks through which consumer goods flowed. The meanings that this institution carried for Koreans varied, and that variety inflected the many postwar films that touched on the black market through their narratives, characterizations, and *mise-en-scène*.

Many of the black market’s meanings were negative and drew on the deeply rooted moral discourse of frugality. The transnational and illegal dimensions deeply offended those with strong nationalist sentiments and interests. Some regarded the fawning over foreign goods as a sign of national humiliation and self-abasement. The author of a 1959 ROK report on smuggling chastised his fellow citizens for having an “unwholesome national spirit” that led them to “admire foreign manufactured goods unconditionally” and to prefer to “use smuggled goods rather than the domestically produced” ones.⁶⁵ The black market helped fuel the rage against political corruption that culminated in the April Revolution of 1960 and the installation of president Yun Bo-seon, an “austerity minded” figurehead who publicly supported the “post-revolution student campaign against the widespread smoking of U.S. cigarettes sold on the black market.” That same year nationalist university students seized more than fifty jeeps, most of them owned by National Assembly legislators, arguing that Korea already had too many cars for a nation that did not produce any gasoline and that too much money was being diverted into the black market to buy fuel.⁶⁶ These negative associations were clearly visible in those postwar films that linked black-marketing with criminality and corruption, such as Kim Sodong’s *The Money* and Shin Sang-ok’s *Flower in Hell* (1958). The association of the black market with women, in turn, clearly inflected the *apprès* girl characters, who were so strongly defined by their fondness for Western goods. In *Madame Freedom*, for instance, Mme Choi’s participation in the black market leads to her arrest, public humiliation, and suicide.

The black market was also an ordinary part of postwar Korean life that was maintained by a wide swath of society. For the many Koreans without regular jobs or with poorly paying ones—a category that included refugees, veterans, members of families without male wage earners, civilian employees of the US military bases, and even ROK military officers—the poaching and selling of American goods offered a desperately needed source of income. For consumers and businesses hamstrung by the paucity of domestic manufacturing, the corrupt diversion of aid supplies, and the limits on legal imports, the black market often provided the only

access to high-demand consumer goods and such basic reconstruction supplies as hammers. Americans as well as Koreans patronized the black market. Civilians such as CIA staff, economic advisors, construction supervisors, missionaries, and private relief workers all shopped for the goods they needed to do their jobs and maintain a reasonably comfortable quality of life. While US military brass went to great lengths to quell black-marketing, quite a few Americans viewed the underground economy with sympathy. Regarding poaching as a legitimate means of survival in trying times, they saw the “slicked” goods as just another form of foreign aid and saw their own black-market purchases as unofficial “offshore procurement.”⁶⁷ Yu Hyun-mok taps into this “everyday” aspect of the black market in *Forever with You* (1958), in which he depicts the criminal activities of its young male protagonist as an unfortunate but wholly understandable consequence of poverty and limited life options. In *The Widow* (1954), Park Nam-ok treats black-market goods in a morally neutral fashion as part of the everyday life of a young widow and her sex-worker neighbor, who struggle to get by as best they can.

Consuming black-market goods became a small way for ordinary Koreans to claim a place for themselves at the table of capitalist modernity and to assert that they, too, belonged in the Free World alongside the more economically advanced residents of Japan and Hong Kong. Anthropologist Grant McCracken views consumer objects in relation to “displaced meaning,” which he defines as treasured ideals that are impossible to fulfill in ordinary life and so are displaced onto distant spaces or times. America was the site of such displacement for many Koreans, the place where the ideals of modernity, democracy, freedom, education, and material comfort resided. For McCracken, consumer goods can serve as “bridges to displaced meanings,” insofar as they enable the consumer to “contemplate the possession of an emotional condition, a social circumstance, even an entire style of life, by somehow concretizing these things in themselves.” In this way consumer goods become “objective correlatives” of values that are hard to achieve in reality. In the 1950s, the possession of American consumer goods enabled Koreans “to rehearse” a much larger set of attitudes and feelings about their own modernity that they were not always able to inhabit in their everyday lives.⁶⁸ As newspaper columnist Lee O-young wrote in the early 1960s, “Each time I drink Coca-Cola, I think about American civilization,” whereas drinking *makgeolli*, a humble rice wine, evoked for him only Korea’s history of poverty and “oppression.”⁶⁹ Such condensed symbolism and displaced meaning suffuses Han’s films.

The black market functioned as a contact zone where Koreans and Americans interacted with each other outside the bounds of official state and military partnerships: as business partners and violent antagonists, as occupiers and resisters, as victims and victimizers, as customers and employees, as wives and lovers, as poachers and hosts. It encapsulated a complexly ambivalent relationship that Shunya Yoshimi, writing about local attitudes towards US military bases in Japan, has characterized as one of “desire and violence.”⁷⁰ Which brings us back to

The Hand of Destiny and the scenes set at the Incheon waterfront, where Koreans and Americans are shown as occupying a shared physical space.

As Margaret leans against the large American car before whisking Yeong-cheol away for the shopping trip, she watches a troop of American soldiers disembark from a ship. Carrying heavy duffel bags and rifles, they line up in rows as a rousing military tune plays on the soundtrack (video 6, earlier in the chapter). (This footage was itself poached from a newsreel.)⁷¹ When she returns to the waterfront in a later scene, she walks in front of train boxcars clearly labeled “USA” and “US Army.” These shots do little narrative work, as neither the soldiers nor the train cars play any role in the story (although presumably Margaret is reconnoitering troop movements as part of her spy work). One of the few such direct representations in postwar cinema of the large US military presence, these shots offer what Elsaesser would call a “metaphoric condensation” of the postwar history of Korean consumer culture. While the southern city of Busan was the major entry point for goods smuggled in from Japan, the northern city of Incheon was the gateway for American goods. Virtually all the material imported into Korea by the US military passed through Incheon, from where it was transported via train to the nearby ASCOM Depot, the central storage facility and transportation hub that warehoused PX goods and military supplies before they were distributed to bases throughout the country.⁷² In locating Margaret at the Incheon waterfront and train yard, Han positions her at ground zero for entry of American consumer goods into the country. In occupying this space, Margaret seems to be absorbing for herself some of the power associated with America—a power which she immediately exercises over Yeong-cheol via the purchase and gifting of consumer goods. Margaret’s steely expression as she leans against the car now reads less as a spy’s penetrating gaze and more as a woman’s frank acknowledgement of the foreign source of the ideas and objects that enable her to reimagine her way of being in the world.

POACHING AS FILM INDUSTRY PRACTICE

Shin Sang-ok’s *A Flower in Hell* includes a scene of pilferage from a US military base. A noir-melodrama set, like *The Hand of Destiny*, in and around the ASCOM Depot area, the film revolves around a prostitute who works in the camptown, her gangster boyfriend, and his plan to rob a military supply train. Like *The Hand of Destiny*, this film’s mise-en-scène is full of black-market goods. The scene in question is set on a US military compound at night, and it cuts back and forth between events taking place inside a service club, where Korean prostitutes and scantily clad performers entertain GIs, and in the yard outside, where the Korean gangsters cut through a barbed-wire perimeter fence and steal a load of goods. Three of the prostitutes are in league with the gangsters: at a preordained time, they leave the club and lure the patrolling military police away from the gangsters. While the

women flirt with the MPs, the scene cuts back to the club interior, where the camera ogles a feather-clad erotic dancer, traveling up and down her body in close-up and pausing at her hips as she makes sexually suggestive motions. Meanwhile the gangsters, having located a stack of pallets, transfer the booty onto a pushcart and spirit it away.

Kang Beom-gu, the cinematographer who shot the scene, recalled that many young Koreans in the 1950s saw the Americans living among them as both powerful exploiters and as a resource to be exploited. This exploitation had both sexual and economic dimensions. "All the stylish" and "pretty" young women, says Kang, including those who graduated from "good colleges," took "US soldiers and officers as lovers," which was, of course, "devastating" for young Korean men like himself. But many of these young men were engaged in their own profitable relationships with the Americans. "Our young people lived off the US soldiers" in the 1950s, says Kang. "If you didn't do that back then, you couldn't live. The young people deliberately gave their lives to the U.S. Army, like prostitutes . . . and emptied their pockets, as well." *Flower in Hell's* scene of theft, Kang suggests, was a thinly fictionalized depiction of a common practice with which Kang was quite familiar: "Back then," he said, "breaking into the US army base was, if there's a wire fence like this you cut it and make all the guards drunk and put some women with them so they wouldn't look this way."⁷³ This scene speaks to the complexity of postwar power relations between Koreans and Americans. At the outset the American GIs exert their dominance over Korean women via a militarized male gaze that reduces the women, in classical Laura Mulvey fashion, to segmented and sexualized body parts. By the end of the scene, however, the Koreans have seized the upper hand, the women by distracting the naïve MPs and the men by making off with a large quantity of military goods. Significantly, it is the act of poaching that transforms a scene of sexual exploitation of Korean women by Americans into a scene of material exploitation by Korean men of Americans. Poaching functions here as an assertion of power against the Americans.

Kang Beom-gu's comments invite us to recognize filmmaking as a material practice that was intimately bound up with the US military and the black market. The black market was not just a source of consumer goods and reconstruction materials. It was also essential to the development of South Korea's film industry. Kang's obvious familiarity with the techniques of stealing hints at the reliance of the film industry itself on the very type of poaching that this scene depicts. As discussed in chapter 3, the postwar film industry was plagued by shortages of virtually all the resources necessary for commercial film production. Filmmakers responded with admirable creativity, creating nighttime stars by attaching shards of shattered reflector bulbs to black fabric with "cooked sticky rice," and improvising camera movements by hoisting cameramen up and down with rope.⁷⁴ They also responded by availing themselves of the relative bounty of the US military, treating military bases as pools of material resources upon which they could draw.

Sometimes filmmakers accessed these resources through legal means. The portable Eyemo cameras that many filmmakers used had often begun their social lives with the US military, which used them to shoot wartime newsreels, before being turned over to the Korean Office of Public Information, which rented them to commercial filmmakers. When Han shot on a location without access to electricity, he would sometimes send a crew member to the Eighth Army construction and engineering battalion to borrow a generator for the day. Other filmmakers rented lighting equipment from the still photography studios at the Yongsan garrison. They also accessed military resources via the black market, including hard-to-get film stock, which was purchased in complete reels and in short pieces left over from newsreel productions that were then spliced together. Steenbeck and Moviola editing tables, in turn, “floated out” from the US Army film department.⁷⁵

Han Hyung-mo produced the distinctive style of his films in part by tapping into the resources of the Eighth US Army and the black market. For example, as Mme Oh walks home through the city streets at night at the end of *Madame Freedom*, a light snow drifts down, settling on her hair and clothes as she kneels at her husband’s feet and embraces her son (see figure 12 in chapter 4). This snow was created from a variety of materials, all of them poached from Eighth Army supplies. For the snow on Mme Oh’s head, Han and his art team used Lux laundry soap, which was only sold at the PX and which the art team liked because the flakes “look like scales of carp. Very light and flat” (figure 20). When they couldn’t get Lux, which was difficult to find and expensive, they would crumble into powder the Styrofoam packing material that “was brought in with foreign goods.” For snow in the background, they used down feathers from GI sleeping bags. Han’s mobile cinematography—produced by a crane that rested on four US helicopter wheels—was likewise indebted to the black market. When it came time to light interior scenes, Han’s crew sometimes poached the power supply from the Korea Electricity Corporation, bribing the company to add another transformer to the electricity pole just outside the building and running a line into the set. (Like other forms of poaching, this could be dangerous: technicians were sometimes hurt when a transformer exploded.) Han’s soundtrack most likely relied on poached albums: American records stolen from GIs’ personal belongings and from PXes appeared frequently on the black market, and music director Kim Yong-hwan was known to ask US soldiers to bring him back albums from Japan when they went there for R&R. This is an instance where one can see the Eighth Army as a facilitator of cultural flows within America’s Cold War alliance, creating a channel for the flow of recorded music among the United States, Japan, and Korea. The cars that appeared so prominently in postwar films often had ties to the military: because privately owned cars were rare in Seoul, Han would send a crew member (and translator) to stand outside the gate to the Eighth Army headquarters at Yongsan and ask GIs if they could rent their car, sometimes hanging around for days at a stretch until they got the make they wanted. Eventually something akin



FIGURE 20. Boxes of Lux and Ivory Snow soap flakes for sale at a Busan PX in 1951. (Courtesy NARA)

to prop-rental houses emerged, stocked with household goods disposed of by GIs who were finishing their tour of duty.⁷⁶

Han also used poached material to build his sets. The cave interior which provides the setting for the final scene of *The Hand of Destiny*—and which constitutes part of the Korean nature to which Margaret returns—was constructed out of heavy paper that the Americans used as packing material. Plywood was rare and expensive in the 1950s, so Han's art department built sets out of wooden boxes used for shipping relief supplies. (Plywood would become a significant export industry in the late 1960s.) The set for Margaret's luxurious apartment, for instance, was built from "construction materials and boxes from the US Army base." The art team "gathered up cleaner plywood from that and made doors and windows," and used painted cotton cloth nailed to the wooden frames for the walls.⁷⁷

Han and his crew members also engaged in small-scale importing/smuggling themselves, bringing in props and other materials via the Asian Film Festival's transnational networks. Whenever Han or other filmmakers, producers, or actors went abroad for the festival, "they bought bags and bags of stuff, using it later for making films." One year Han brought back Japanese Shiseido cosmetics as gifts for his actresses, which greatly endeared him to them and which they used during filming, since there were no professional makeup artists. The actors, in turn,

sometimes offered their own personal goods for use as props. All the items on display inside the Paris Boutique's glass case, for instance, were items "that actors bought when they went overseas, things that Han Hyung-mo borrowed." Several of the decorative items in Margaret's apartment in *The Hand of Destiny*, including the fluorescent desk lamp and owl clock, were Han's personal items that he had purchased in Japan, suggesting again the possibility of reading his *après* girl characters as alter-egos for himself as a self-consciously modern Korean subject who inhabits Western-style spaces. Creating domestic spaces like Margaret's apartment laid the groundwork for Han's work designing and building Western-style homes in the early 1960s. He also purchased in Japan the boldly patterned textiles used for her curtains and furniture upholstery, which were unknown in Korea at the time. These fabrics were so precious that the art team, instead of cutting them, taped and pinned them to fit the furniture so that they could be reused; they appeared again in the rich family's home in *Hyperbolae of Youth*.⁷⁸ This fabric is typical of the presence of Japanese artifacts in 1950s cinema: vital to the vision of Korean modernity that these films projected, but without obvious markers of their national origin.

By rediscovering the ties between the fledgling film industry and the black market, we can see how the US military functioned in the 1950s, paradoxically, as a cultural institution. For the film industry, military bases functioned as pools of material resources that enabled the production of movies made by, for, and about Korean people. The fostering of local cultural production was an unintended consequence of the expansion of US military power into Korea. Acts of material poaching made it possible for Korean films to begin to approach the production values of Hollywood films. Such acts of mimicry, however, were always undertaken with the goal of competing against Hollywood films and reclaiming from them a share of audiences and box office earnings. Emulation and competition went hand in hand. As the pilferage scene from *Flower in Hell* suggests, poaching could be an assertion of power against Americans as much as an act of cultural affiliation with them. Like the black market itself, the production of *budae jjigae* cinema was a cultural space of cooperation and contestation with a much more powerful partner/rival.

Ultimately, understanding the social life of things in Han's films allows us to recognize foreign consumer goods as densely compressed symbols for the emerging web of relationships that was binding Korea to the United States, Japan, and the rest of the Free World. When we see the electric iron, the can of Coca Cola, or the bottle of Chanel perfume, we should infer the diverse social, economic, and military networks that made their appearance on screen possible. These objects are the visual traces of the country's colonial past and its Cold War present. They are textual evidence of an aid- and import-based economy and the political corruption it bred, of colonial-era migrations that created a disenfranchised *zainichi* population in Japan, of a network of US military bases that spanned the country and the region. They are the material and visual residues of transnational relationships

of conflict, cooperation, assistance, exchange, theft, and resistance. They are the material tips, as it were, of a vast geopolitical iceberg. To read style as historical evidence is to be able to perceive these networks and relationships beneath the polished surface of Han's films. It's all there in the shot of Margaret leaning against the car at the Incheon waterfront, if you know how to look.