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January 2004

# Film review: Wedding through Camera Eyes: A Trilogy of Wedding Photography in Korea

Jinhee Lee Eastern Illinois University, jl2@eiu.edu

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#### Recommended Citation

Lee, Jinhee, "Film review: Wedding through Camera Eyes: A Trilogy of Wedding Photography in Korea" (2004). Faculty Research & Creative Activity. 56.

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### Wedding Through Camera Eyes: A Trilogy of Wedding Photography in Korea

>> A film by Kijung Lee. 2002. 45 minutes.

his documentary features one of the most popular and interesting cultural practices in contemporary South Korea: the making of a photo album with photographs taken before, during, and after the wedding. Through interviews with three couples and their professional photographers, the film introduces a trilogy of wedding photos, underscoring the centrality of such visual records in the rite of passage. Following a brief introduction of each couple and the filmmaker himself-a native Korean author and recent recipient of a Ph.D. in visual anthropology—the documentary unfolds the stories of the newlyweds over the pre-wedding, wedding, and honeymoon photography, evenly divided into three 15-minute segments.

Under the subtitle, "Dream on Fantasy Wedding," the first story introduces the process of making a pre-wedding photo album, also known as "out-

door shooting." A professional photographer leads the prospective bride and groom to a number of carefully selected locations, such as the exotic amusement park Lotte World and a traditional palace ground, to create romantic images of the couple through photography. When interviewed at their new home, with an enlarged prewedding photo hung on the wall, the groom explains his motive and satisfaction in making the pre-wedding album which gave him the opportu-

The film suggests that the particular manners in which such popular and highly commercialized wedding photography is practiced can reveal certain social values and ideas that are embedded in contemporary South Korean culture.

nity to make his dream come true when he held his bride in her wedding dress for the camera. An interview with the photographer follows, elaborating on the meticulous skill and technique required to create these permanent images of the couple through photography. While making their best



Filmmaker Kijung Lee

efforts to follow the carefully staged poses and expressions for the photographer, the one-day hero and heroine change their costumes several

times throughout the photo-shoot from Western style ceremonial clothing to *hanbok*, traditional Korean clothing.

The second segment, "Wedding as a Rite of Passage," takes place in a commercial wedding hall. It begins with an introduction of the chronological order of the Western style wedding ritual, and moves on to talk with the bride and groom about the elaborate photographing practice during and after the ceremony. Their comments on the

photos from their traditional Korean ceremonial greeting, or *p'yebaek*, which consists of the last part of the wedding hall's ritual package, are particularly interesting: the bride recollects her feelings of unfamiliarity toward the "traditional" Korean ceremony not knowing much about the meanings of the detailed practice, while the groom tries but keeps failing to identify some of his extended family members in the photos who were receiving his traditional bow according to their age and genealogical ranks. The bride also recalls that her family was not allowed to participate in the traditional bowing due to the opposition from a wedding hall employee who claimed that there

is no such practice in "tradition."

The film then takes us to a photographed honeymoon of a couple at Jeju island, one of the most popular destinations in South Korea, for the last story of the trilogy: "Wedding into Tourism." The three-day honeymoon package includes a tour bus and professional photography service. The newlywed tour group visits various popular shooting locations that are predetermined by the Jeju Tourist Association. The photographer claims that "honeymoon tour means nothing without photographing," while the

young couple express their expectation for the role the honeymoon photos will play in their married life—however awkward they have felt during moments of rather unnatural construction to create romance and intimacy while in the eye of the public following the photographer's detailed directions. The groom recalls the uneasy feeling he had one time thinking, "Do we really need to do this much for the sake of photos?" Yet the couple seems to treasure their honeymoon photographs as a visual record of their very special moments together.

The film suggests that the particular manners in which such popular and highly commercialized wedding photography is practiced can reveal

## Follow Iade! Series: Let's Visit Chinese Kindergarten and Let's Go to Market in China

>> Produced by Master Communications. 2003. 30 minutes each.

₹ ollow Jade! is an excellent set of video tapes designed to teach Mandarin Chinese to young children. The tapes are best suited to the preschool level. Follow Jade! Let's Visit Chinese Kindergarten teaches children greetings and names, counting to 10, colors, and how to ask for water, juice, and milk.

Follow Jade! Let's Go to Market in China introduces body parts, fruits, farm animals, and actions such as clapping and stomping.

I watched the tapes with my 9-year old daughter. Both of us thought that the atmosphere was similar to that of Sesame Street: educational yet highly entertaining. The programs are filled with songs, actions, and bright colors. The tapes were done professionally with excellent quality in audio and video recording. Each tape is a little over 30 minutes, a good length for preschool children.

The teacher Jade Qian has a talent for connecting with children. She uses props to introduce new words, and follows up by teaching them to a few young students. Then she incorporates art works and games to reinforce the words, and finishes up with songs and activities. It is a great

I watched the tapes with my 9-year old daughter. Both of us thought that the atmosphere was similar to that of Sesame Street. educational yet highly entertaining.

way to bring many children into the action. The words are repeated with different faces and different voices. which adds novelty and interest. Little viewers feel that they are included, and get a sense of "I can do it, too."

My 9-year-old said that the Kindergarten tape is not for

her (understandably), but she enjoyed the market scene and the farm animal section in Let's Go to Market in China. If you are looking for Chinese learning videos for young children, this set is worth considering. For grade school children, get the Let's Go to Market tape. �

Chilin Shih is Assistant Professor of Linguistics and East Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Illinois.

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Follow Jade! Let's Visit Chinese Kindergarten and Follow Jade! Let's Go to Market in China are available from Asia for Kids. Price is \$19.99 each or \$35.98 for both in VHS format, or \$24.99 each or \$45.98 for both in DVD.



For more information, visit http://followjade.com.



#### Wedding

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certain social values and ideas that are embedded in contemporary South Korean culture. For example, what do they tell us about the weddings as a socially and historically transformative site? What kind of particular images of gender, marital ideals, and family relations are projected and constructed? How is "tradition" reproduced or invented through the rituals? How does the social hierarchy, professionalism, and commercialism manifest in such cultural practice? Although these issues are discursively present throughout the film, the primary focus of the documentary remains the role of photography in the weddings in contemporary Korea. Thus, while the documentary provides

a welcome and important addition to inform and intrigue any student of Korean culture and society as well as the visual anthropology in the realms of modern rituals, it falls short of providing the specific social and historical background and the dynamics in the emergence and the development of the cultural practice of wedding photography in Korean society. In this sense, the documentary invites future production of films that can extend and facilitate the discussions on these issues further, thereby bringing forth comparative aspects in the manifestation of such practices of visual cultures. Using this film with other historically informed and contextually specific readings on related topics will provide a more nuanced understanding of the cultural phenomenon of a "trilogy of wedding photography" in modern Korea. Those interested in Korean culture and society, weddings, and the role of photography in ritual practices will find this film worth watching. •

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Jin-hee Lee received an M.A. in Asian Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1996. She is currently enrolled there in a Ph.D. program in East Asian Studies. Her studies focus on the images of China in late Choson Korea and Tokugawa Japan through the eyes of Japanese and Korean political and cultural

Wedding Through Camera Eyes: A Trilogy of Wedding Photography in Korea is available from Documentary Educational Resources. Price is \$195 for purchase and \$50 for rental.