

1-1-2004

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Recommended Citation

Yecies, Brian M., Reading Korean stardom: number 3 and the reel, real and star transformation of Song Kang-ho 2004, 34-61.
<https://ro.uow.edu.au/artspapers/378>

Yecies, B., 'Reading Korean Stardom: Number 3 and the Reel, Real and Star Transformation of Song Kang-ho', in *Number Three*, New Korean Cinema Series, Yonsei Institute of Media Arts, Seoul Korean, pp.35-60, ISBN 89-5864-073-104680.

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Reading Korean Stardom: *Number Three* and the Reel, Real, and Star Transformation of Song Kang-Ho¹

"Every actor and actress constructs a persona over the course of his or her career, but few become stars. A star is an actor whose persona transcends the sum total of his or her performances." – John Belton²

This article focuses on *Number Three* and attempts to provide a window of understanding of Song Kang-Ho and the development of his artistry, which became crystallized in the early part of his filmography.³ *Number Three* is an important film because Song Kang-Ho's recognition and popularity began to spread after his performance in it. However, to date, few scholars have methodically explored and analyzed the transformation of his persona.⁴ Over the last seven years Song has appeared in some of the most popular films as well as on the covers of numerous issues of *Cine21* and *Film2.0*, two of Korea's largest film magazines. At least three recent films end with a close-up of Song looking into the camera and, thus, at us in the audience and inward to society: *The Foul King* (Dir. Kim Jee-Woon, 2000); *Y.M.C.A. Baseball Team* (Dir. Kim Hyun-Seok, 2002); and *Memories of Murder* (Dir. Bong Joon-Ho, 2003). Song Kang-Ho is literally one of the more prominent faces of modern Korean cinema.⁵ At the same time, his face possibly has come to represent the larger contemporary Korean society. Trains, busses, billboards and shop windows all over urban and rural Korea are littered with a variety of Mr. Song's product endorsements, ranging from the national lottery (Lotto) to traditional Korean alcohol (Baekseju). The obvious point is that Song is ubiquitous in Korea and so is his face. Song's face represents the maturity and vitality of contemporary Korean cinema. At the same time, he has emerged to represent new tropes or images of manhood in contemporary Korean cinema.

This article offers a framework for analyzing the reel, real, and star persona surrounding Song as though they are layers or masks that constitute his complexities as popular film personality. To begin with, I define "reel" as the diegetic character(s) and images constructed for the screen and the world of the story. Next, the "real" is the individual personality self-expressed by the actor, and the one known to close friends and acquaintances. Finally, I define "star" as the image(s) of the actor outside of the story world, perceived by film directors, the industry and generated (or limited) by promotional discourses. Inherent in these three layers or personae are shifts and overlapping discourses. As we will see, they are not fixed categories, as there is often a state of flux between, in and around them. In addition, each category influences and is influenced by each other. Thus, the reel, real, and star persona of Song are always transforming as they are with any actor in Korea or other national cinema. Let us now take a closer look at the framework involving these transformations by examining personal interviews, trade articles, and of course Song's own performances, words and thoughts. A well-rounded analysis of one's stardom can be found after considering all of these intertextual and extratextual elements. It is my hope that the following analysis will help illuminate some new and interesting points about *Number Three* – a seminal film in Song's expanding portfolio.

The Reel

In order to discover Song's "reel" persona, one needs to examine more recent press articles and views of his performance in *Number Three* because Song simply was not as well known then as he is now (in 2004). At that time, his role and his reel persona were relatively small compared to that of Han Seok-Gyu, the central protagonist of the film. Audiences were initially attracted to *Number Three* by him rather than Song. Remember that most of the film advertisements and movie posters prominently displayed Han Seok-Gyu as the main character. After all, he was an actor with mass appeal. Later, when the *Number Three* DVD was released, Song's image was still limited. For example, the bonus materials on the DVD gloss over Song's character. Part 1 of *Behind the Scenes* has only a 30 second sound bite from Song. He is completely absent from the nineteen-minute making of documentary, overview of the cast and crew as well as the twenty-minute documentary: Part 2 of *Behind the Scenes: Applause for the Lower Classes*. In addition, there are no reel pictures of Song in the digital photo gallery – only his three "disciples" are represented in a single image out of seven production stills. This is not to say that there is a conspiracy or a scandal to omit Song from the promotional materials surrounding the film. Song's low profile is understandable given that his film career had just begun.

However, Song's creation of the stuttering character in *Number Three*, Jo-Pil, is significant for the overall narrative and the cause and effect relationships between the other characters. As one film critic has pointed out, "the real main characters of this film [*Number Three*] are found among the minor characters armed with their own lines and troubles".⁶

By analyzing Jo-Pil's motivations as well as his screen time, we can see how important he is to the core of the story as he helps drive the narrative forward.⁷ We are introduced to Jo-Pil dressed in black within a montage sequence that occurs in the first two minutes of the film. He is looking over two bloody, dead bodies in a parking garage and has a menacing sashimi knife in his hand. We quickly learn that Jo-Pil is a ruthless assassin who takes pride in his seedy work. Next, in a highly unexpected move, Jo-Pil uses his blood-soaked hands to catch and eat a cockroach. In this scene which lasts less than fifteen seconds, the dark and comical tone of the film is established. Song's screen, or reel persona is the first outstanding feature that sets him apart from other actors in other films. Through the Jo-Pil character, Song creates two personality trajectories – sinister and comic – that keep bumping into each other inside his head. One is a violent killer. The other, a cross between a jokester and a hooligan, provides comic relief.⁸ Even his name "Jo-Pil" is destined for denigration and failure. Easily pronounced as "Jo-ppiri," which is equivalent to "stupid fucker" in English, the name simply elides the aura of respect and integrity. Thus, Song makes it possible for the audience to laugh and enjoy the two sides of this black comedy.

The second feature, which makes Song's reel persona unique, is his ability to embody a near-perfect picture of the common man. One of the most memorable scenes shows Jo-Pil in a hospital bathroom preparing to assassinate a major crime boss who lies in a nearby room. His black clothes are a striking contrast to the hospital's white, sterile walls. After rummaging through his brief case, which is overflowing with miscellaneous items, including cigarette lighters, cans of tuna, packs of tissues, loose ramen noodles, and assorted pills, not to mention enormous knives, Jo-Pil begins to sharpen a 30cm hunting knife. Jo-Pil seems to feel comfortable within the clinical atmosphere. He is about to commit a violent crime, but not without first feeling the need to groom himself in the mirror. This character trait seems out of place, thus adding amusement to the comic subplot. Jo-Pil places dark sunglasses on his face, which hide his eyes. He is literally wearing a mask. Next, he applies a little ointment on a cold sore at the corner of his mouth. He is not overly handsome, and he is compelled to "doctor" his imperfections, which probably should be the least of his concerns before killing someone. This particular scene illustrates the caricature nature of Jo-Pil, or Song's

“reel” person. Underneath all of the mysterious looking black clothes is someone who we can all relate to – someone who has everyday problems and concerns.

Moving forward, the last we see of Jo-Pil (and Song) in *Number Three* is a close-up of his black boots. He has come upon his three disciples who have become owners/managers of their own outdoor food and drinking tent (pojang macha). Silent glances are exchanged. The disciples look at their former master as if he were some kind of apparition. Quickly, yet, with grace, Jo-Pil is on the move again, walking into another adventure (or assassination) that awaits him. At the same time, the actor is on the move too. Because of his experience with *Number Three*, Song can bring real characters to life on the screen in any genre.

Throughout his repertoire of films, Song’s characters are overtly preoccupied with protecting their authority and power over their cohorts. Often, his reserved manner of speech and detached behavior are designed to separate him from a group of men under his command. For instance, in *Number Three*, he believes having dinner with his cohorts is damaging to his self-esteem and therefore asks them to go out for dinner alone. The cohorts are rightly chagrined. Of course, his endeavors to protect and uphold this hierarchy and authority fail miserably in numerous occasions. It is distinctly in these types of situations in which Song derives his humor – from the gaps between his neurotic efforts to portray himself as a man of gangster honor and code, and the crude reality and instances that out-strip his pride. When challenged, Song’s characters act hysterically, but their excessive and startled reactions such as stuttering only testifies to their insecurity and vulnerability. One could say that he embodies the hilarious fallibility of manhood.

Song claims that he does not have any particular comic or tragic acting technique. He simply delivers the essence of the script and the character in the most realistic way he knows how. Thus, the third aspect of Song’s reel persona is his ability to construct his characters effectively through physical training, manipulation of the body and dialogue adlibbing. When asked about Song, Choi Min-Sik once said: “An actor should express things through his body. The instinct itself cannot make a person as an actor. In his case, Song Kang-Ho’s acting matches with his instinct perfectly...”⁹

[] ... This instinct includes breaking away from the written film script and adding lines of dialogue on the spot, which is a style that Song began utilizing in *Number Three*. Since then, he has become known for using adlibs at times when he thinks it necessary. Song has also become known for changing his physical appearance for a role. For example, while acting in *The Foul King*, he took wrestling lessons in order to develop speed and accuracy with realistic moves in the ring. In addition, Song has lost and/or gained a large amount of weight for a particular role, enabling him to undergo significant physical changes. He lost about ten kilograms for *Sympathy For Mr. Vengeance* and gained more than ten kilograms for *Memories of Murder*. Song began perfecting this acting style with his performance in *Number Three*, which I suspect originates even earlier from the live theatre where he delivered performances to large crowds with amplified gestures and animated body language.

Since appearing in *Number Three*, Song has honed his skills before the camera and has learned to express the inner emotions of his characters. It may be, as Lee Sang-Yong has remarked, “we can say that we love his ‘mask’, not him. Whatever it is going to be – an adlib or a unique accent, we expect Song Kang-Ho to be a foul king with a comedy actor’s mask.”¹⁰

However, at the core of all of Song’s characters, no matter what they look like or sound like, is an image of the common man – someone who represents the middle and working class. This is the key to understanding Song’s reel person, which further relates to his real and star persona.

The Real

I became introduced to Song in 1999 through Kim Jee-Woon's 1997 dark and witty feature, *The Quiet Family*, which was screened at the 48th Melbourne International Film Festival in Australia. He was very entertaining to watch. Song brought to the screen a certain magical quality and a depth of human feeling and compassion with a comical undercurrent. He used a high pitched voice and a mischievous attitude to portray Young-Min, the lazy son character. Thus, when I met Song in person for the first time, it was a memorable experience. He and I met in the lobby of the Grand Hotel during the Pusan International Film Festival in October 2003. He was dressed in a long black coat and was wearing sunglasses. We shook hands and he agreed to have an interview. Song was flattered that I was a fan of his. This was a rare opportunity to see the real actor in person. I may be a little biased, but no one can deny that Song is a great actor – an artist brought to life on the silver screen. What about the man? Who is the real Song Kang-Ho? How is his personal background connected his work?

Song was born in 1967 and grew up in a rural farming area of Gimhae near Busan. He began his career as an actor at the age of twenty-two on the live theatre stage, spending a lot of his time at the Yeonwoo Theatre. He then began appearing in films at the age of twenty-nine. As a child, Song had dreams of acting on stage, and from early on, he had an audience to practice before. As a young teenager, he made his middle school friends laugh by delivering interesting stories in animated ways. His classmates all believed that he would be a great actor someday.¹¹ But while in the theatre, he never dreamt of becoming a film or TV star.

Song is private person. He is shy and sincere and does not like to be interviewed. In many ways, he does not seem comfortable with his recent fame because of its intrusion into his daily life. For example, he is a little uneasy when he is in public. He is usually recognized rather quickly and is rarely able to go out with his family without being bothered. Like so many other stars we read and hear about, Song does not like the unwanted attention. When asked, he usually says that he does not have any hobbies. There is little that he likes to do apart from working on his film projects. In mid-September 2002, when Baek Eun-Ha interviewed Kim Hye-Soo, the female lead in *YMCA Baseball Team*, Ms. Kim mentioned, "Song Kang-Ho only knows film and his family. Film is his everyday life, and the core of his life."¹²

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Song is known for his professionalism. Among his peers that know him well, he is considered a good guy and generally pleasant to be around because he is witty.¹³ His talent and thorough approach to a film project is highly respected; he treats acting very seriously as though it were a life and death situation. He enjoys talking about films at every chance he gets, whether he is on location, at a party or casually drinking with friends. His whole life seems to revolve around film. In person, Song is calm more often than not. He does not like to talk much, especially to strangers. Nevertheless, once he starts drinking with friends, his true colors begin to show. At times, it has been said that the real Song acts like the characters he plays in his black comedies. That is to say, he often laughs with a high pitched voice and has a mischievous attitude.¹⁴ As John Belton observes: "At the base of the human pyramid known as the star lies an actual person, whose physical attributes and, in some instances, psychological make-up provide the foundation for the construction of the personality of the actor, or actress, who appears on screen."¹⁵ In the case of Song, and probably for many other notable actors/actresses in Korea, the real person provides the core from which his characters emerge. He finds the original sources for his talents from within himself. He brought his schoolyard abilities to the live theatre stage and then to the film screen.

Cine21's acknowledgement of Song as the best actor of 2003, shared with Moon So-Ri, gestures to how well he is received by Korean critics and fellow actors.¹⁶ On the one hand, as Lee Sang-Yong observes, Song's foundation is made up masks that often "provides more sincere language and an

inner world of him”.¹⁷

This is a point that we can use to build upon John Belton’s theories of the star system. Although Lee has an interesting point for Song’s comedies, Lee indicates that his more serious films do not contain any masks. However, given what we know about the real Song, I would suggest that the “mask” concept works even better in his more serious films – a point that could be addressed in greater detail at a later time, for example, with an analysis of *Shiri*, *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Memories of Murder*.¹⁸ On the other hand, as Baek Eun-Ha points out, the real Song has surrounded himself with multiple resources: “accumulating his characters in layers and storing them around him... When he moves, these layers move together with him.”¹⁹ [] 꺾

... . However, Song has not limited himself or his abilities according to his critics. Thinking of all of his personalities and changing faces, he has never forgotten who he is: “All of the characters I have played in the different films start and end with Song Kang-Ho as I really am.”²⁰

Hence, we can begin to see the connections between the real Song and the characters he has portrayed and probably will portray in the future. He has become an expert at drawing upon both his comical and serious sides and alternating between them depending on the situation he encounters. In this article, I suggest that Song has built a collection of both masks and layers that he has access to at any time, depending on the real and reel situation. Over time, his resources will grow, enabling him to draw upon his collection of layers or masks as he gains more experience and expands into new roles. As we will see now, Song’s motivations for his reel and real personae have fed into his star image.

The Star

“the star is not simply a performer, but a figure with particular associations of glamour and charisma” Paul McDonald²¹

It should come as no surprise that Song’s star persona, which emerged after *Number Three*, has earned him affections from audiences of all ages. Simply put, audiences love Song Kang-Ho. As Shim Young-Seup points out, “Song Kang-Ho appeals to audiences with ease since he shows his real heart.”²² . He is always cast in the role of the middle-lower class and portrays his characters as one of us – a good neighbor, friend or co-worker we all know. His mass appeal reaches beyond the physical attractiveness of other actors such as Lee Byung-Hun or Chang Dong-Geon.

Song’s star appeal is most clearly pronounced when he navigates homo-social environments such as the gangster underworld in *Number Three*, wrestling arena in *The Foul King*, and police stations in *Memories of Murder*. These are all environments that are habitually occupied by men and their interactions. In short, Song seems most comfortable when he interacts with other men, often under hierarchical settings. Along the same line, Song appears awkward when interacting with women, as exemplified, for example, in *YMCA Baseball Team*. This, of course, implies that he frequently represents an incompetent and feeble man – at least throughout most of his films. As previously mentioned, he is split in doing the “sinister and comic.”

Song owes much of this early development as a star to the directors he has worked with, most notably being Kim Jee-Woon (*The Foul King*, *Quiet Family*) and Park Chan-Wook (*JSA*, *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*). At the same time, these directors might owe much of their film’s success to him. It is a well-known fact that these directors had Song in their mind from the beginning of their film projects. For example, when it was time for Kim Jee-Woon to decide on a lead for *The Foul King*, his second film, Song was the first name on his list: “I was totally dependent on Song Kang-

Ho during the making of *The Foul King*. It was the first time for him to have a leading role. He was cast while he was not recognized as a major actor [a major star]. However, I strongly believed in him and in only working with him for my film.”

...

... Clearly, Song and Kim Jee-Woon helped each other in a great way, and to this day, their relationship is stronger than simply star and director.²³ In the case of *Sympathy For Mr. Vengeance*, director Park Chan-Wook sought after Song for his film in an aggressive way. He could not think of anyone else other than Song for the central father character in the film. Though Song initially hesitated in accepting the role, the film eventually became an important turning point for him and his acting portfolio. If Song became a great comedy actor while working with Kim Jee-Woon, then he became an even better serious actor while working with Park Chan-Wook.

Song is one star whose image of the common man has become stronger as his stardom has grown. As previously discussed, most of his characters seem to be from a similar social class – the middle lower class (except in *Sympathy For Mr. Vengeance*). Each of Song’s characters is located within everyday Korean life. As one critic observes, he is an actor that can “mix the essential human nature, both laughter and crying without exaggeration.”²⁴

(mix) . In his discussion of the actor who wears a mask, Lee Sang-Yong compares Song to great comedy actors such as Charlie Chaplin and Woody Allan from the United States and Roberto Benigni from Italy.²⁵ In this way, Song’s acting as well as his star image potentially exists on an international level. Lee also comments that people “love his ‘mask’, not him”²⁶ (), which sounds sad to read. But it makes the point that people are more familiar with the characters that he has constructed rather than the real person.

For general audiences, Song is a star – someone who is followed around by the press and made famous by all the attention given to him and his reel person on the screen. Though, his stardom has not exceeded his talent and capacity to deliver a believable and likable character. At the same time, Song has learned to take control over how his star image is represented. He chooses his words carefully in a self-editing style. He tries to use the media rather than be used by them, which suggests that he is aware of his position as a star in the public eye. At least one critic has found Song’s meticulous attention to detail a bother to reporters.²⁷ After being hounded by the media, it finally sounds like the shoe could be on the other foot.

In the end, we should keep in mind that Song’s talent is not fixed with his ability to speak with a rural dialect or make people laugh with jester-like facial expressions, though he does both very well. His true talent lies in his ability to “read” a script closely, pour all of his heart and soul into the story, and create a new character from a world that we are all familiar with. Whether his character is a low life gangster, lazy son, city detective with a straight face, struggling salary man, sensitive North Korean soldier, meticulous factory boss, adventurous scholar from the Japanese colonial period, small-town detective or Antarctic explorer, Song represents the common man with two sides – someone who has daily problems we can all relate to and understand. He may be one of the faces of Korean cinema, but it is his ability to make people sympathize with his characters’ emotions that make him a star.

Conclusion

This article and research has attempted to complicate and expand our understanding of Song in ways that have not been examined before. This project has attempted to read Song’s reel person, real person and star persona while conceptualizing their commonalities and overlapping elements.

These three categories have significance for thinking about the achievements and reception of contemporary Korean film actors. All three of Song's personas are intertwined in the industry discourse that surrounds him.²⁸

In this regard, Song is the quintessential representative of many male characters in contemporary Korean gangster films who are often made fun of because of their failure to maintain the burdensome aura of pride, authority and power. Yet, his aura of the common man is distinguishable from other filmic representations, for example, as compared to Hong Sang-Soo's "realistic" films, which are known for their intimate portrayal of trivial, everyday matters and affairs.²⁹ Men in Hong's films are often called honest and selfish and occupy an entirely different static space – a space that is difficult to imagine Song playing a leading man in. Whilst Song's characters and the male characters in Hong's films both deal with the "everyday", they are worlds apart. Representations of education and class seem to be decisive factors of distinction. Song is often portrayed as an uneducated lower class man and when he is not, as in *Y.M.C.A. Baseball Team*, he is chasing a lifestyle that is not in accord with the traditional literati class of Yangban. Nevertheless, there is an amiable authenticity to Song's portrayal of social male others, which he seems comfortable and competent in playing.

Above all, *Number Three* is a special film for Song because it has enabled Korean and foreign audiences to get to know him and think of him as a genuine film actor – one who commands presence. Since appearing in *Number Three*, Song's "star persona" has grown. His "reel person" and "real person" have changed as well. Song has continued to mature as an active contributor to contemporary Korean cinema while further developing his acting talents. His filmography now contains as many serious and thought provoking roles as notable comical ones – all of which embody a unique portrayal of Korean manhood.

In an interview in October 2003, Song was asked how he felt about the close-up of his face appearing at the end of *Memories of Murder*, and how he felt about his image as a representation of Korean culture and Korean cinema. He simply replied that his feelings were not important. The decision was director Bong Joon-Ho's and not up to him. For Song, it was more important that the film be well made.³⁰ Yet, he never imagined that his face could nor would become so powerful. With this in mind, I believe that it is significant three different contemporary Korean directors (Kim Jee-Woon, Kim Hyun-Seok, Bong Joon-Ho) have decided to end their films like this – a picture of Song as the representative portrait of the common Korean man and the face of hope for a bright future for Korean society. Reflecting back, Song has also discussed how his talents have changed: "acting is not like getting black belt in Taekwondo. It does not upgrade itself automatically with long and hard work."

After *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, Song began to see the world from a different point of view. In his own words, he admits that he had not thought a lot about what acting was in his early days.³¹ What this suggests about the real and "reel" person and star is that Song has come a long way with natural talent and instinct, which he began perfecting in *Number Three*. His star reputation, acting, personality, and of course his face, are inspiring and comfortable to us. For it has been said that: "We will always be attracted to familiar faces and personalities, for we seem to have a psychological need for the familiar, the predictable, and the comfortable."³² Song Kang-Ho is in deed one of the larger faces of modern Korean cinema, and for this reason, *Number Three* will always be an important film.

Song Kang-Ho's Filmography

The Day a Pig Fell into the Well (Hong Sang-Soo, 1996)

Green Fish (Lee Chang-Dong, 1997)

Bad Movie (Jang Sun-Woo, 1997)

Number Three (Song Neung-Han, 1997)

The Quiet Family (Kim Jee-Woon, 1998)
Shiri (Kang Je-Gyu, 1999)
The Foul King (Kim Jee-Woon, 2000)
JSA (Park Chan-Wook, 2000)
Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance (Park Chan-Wook, 2002)
Y.M.C.A. Baseball Team (Kim Hyun-Seok, 2002)
Memories of Murder (Kim Jee-Woon, 2003)

¹ I would like to thank Ae-Gyung Shim for her translation and editorial assistance and Jin-Soo An for his insightful comments and suggestions. This article is dedicated to Mr. Song Kang-Ho. I am grateful to Song Kang-Ho for sharing his thoughts, stories, and views. Song Kang-Ho. Personal interview. 7 October 2003. Busan, Korea. Song Kang-Ho. Personal email interview. 12 January 2004.

² See John Belton, "The Star System," *American Cinema/ American Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), p. 89. Also see Christine Gledhill, ed. *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (London: Routledge, 1991). Whilst I believe that the Korean cinema is distinct from other national cinemas, it remains part of a global industry. Belton and Gledhill's discussions of how (mostly American) stars are born – by nurturing multiple layers of persona – are useful in conceptualizing the general development of stars throughout the world.

³ This is not to say that his earlier role in *Green Fish* (Dir. Lee Chang-Dong, 1997) is unworthy of praise. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Song Kang-Ho's performance in his second film, *Green Fish*, should be given more attention. For it is here that his talent began to manifest itself.

⁴ The analysis and discussion of *Number 3* (Dir. Song Neung-Han, 1997) contained in this article is based on the 106-minute widescreen DVD version published by Spectrum DVD and distributed in June 2002 by the *DVD review* magazine.

⁵ Other critics, though in a less detailed way than in my analysis here, have also discussed the use of close-ups of Song Kang-Ho's face. See Kim Young-Jin, "Picturing A Face of the Time Period: Memories of Murder and Director Bong Jun-Ho,"

Film 2.0 (15 May 2003)

http://www.film2.co.kr/feature/feature_final.asp?mkey=1674. Accessed 11 January 2004. Kim Young-Jin suggests that in *Memories of Murder*: "Song Kang-Ho's close up will remain as summary of the time period."

⁶ See Lee Sung-Wook, "No 3, (3)" *Hangyeore* 23 September 1999. Accessed 17 December 2003 <www.cine21.co.kr/Db-104/subject_search03.c21?id=511>. Lee's short film review is helpful in appreciating the importance of the minor characters in *Number 3*.

⁷ Jo-Pil appears in nineteen scenes for a total of about 16 minutes and 16 seconds, or 15.25% of the total screen time. The first 12 minutes of the film leaves the audience with frenzied flashes of Song Kang-Ho, which last from 3 to 24 seconds each. Given this total screen time, one could say that the number and length of scenes are not as important as the amount of time the audience actually sees Song Kang-Ho's reel person on the screen. This suggests that Jo-Pil is more of a substantial character than previously considered. We can even feel Jo-Pil's presence while he is off-screen and after the film has ended.

⁸ Shim Young-Seup is one critic who has likened Song Kang-Ho's reel person to an unlikely hero – someone who audiences could turn to in order forget their worries during the country's economic troubles in the late 1990s. See Shim Young-Seup, "Star Click – Actor Song Kang-Ho, A star whose face is so friendly with us, ([])” *Cinema.chosun.com* (4 October 2000).

http://cinema.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2000/10/04/20001004000010.html. Accessed 20 December 2003.

⁹ Choi Min-Sik. Interview by Kim Jee-Woon, *The Quiet Family* DVD Bonus Materials. 2003.

¹⁰ See Lee Sang-Yong, “Magician of Language, Comic Poet – Regarding Song Kang-Ho,”

– *Film 2.0* (14 June 2003) No. 129

(http://www.film2.co.kr/feature/feature_final.asp?mkey=1731). Accessed 11 January 2004.

¹¹ See Yi Jee-Hoon’s comments and observations in: “Song Kang-Ho, An Actor Who We Cannot Even Be Jealous Of: Song Kang-Ho Through the Eyes of Reporter Yi Jee-Hoon,” 라

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Film 2.0 (14 June 2003):

http://www.film2.co.kr/feature/feature_final.asp?mkey=1729). Accessed 11 January 2004.

¹² See Baek Eun-Ha, “We Have Changed a Lot, We Are Still Changing, 계, 국

” *Cine21* No. 370 (17 September to 1 October 2002): p 83.

¹³ It is interesting to note that in an article written and edited by Baek Eun-Ha, Kim Sang-Gyung mentioned that he always thought of Song Kang-Ho as a comical person. However, after meeting him on the set of *Memories of Murder*, Kim Sang-Gyung learned that Song Kang-Ho was “very delicate and passionate” and far more serious than expected. See Utton

Johwaro-woon Bujohwa-ui Gi-uk “Memories of Harmonious Disharmony, 로

로,” *Cine 21* No. 399 (22 – 29 April 2003): pp. 96 – 99.

¹⁴ I am grateful to Kim Hyun Seok and Moon So-Ri for sharing their personal views about their friend and colleague, Song Kang-Ho. Kim Hyun Seok. Personal interview. 4 June 2003. Seattle, Washington. Moon So-Ri. Personal interview. 30 May 2003. Seattle, Washington. See also Baek Eun-Ha’s edited interview with Moon So-Ri in “Olhae-ui Baewoo Moon So-Ri, Chunguk-gwa Jiok Sai (Actress of the Year – Moon So-Ri Between Heaven and Hell, Between ‘Ready’ and ‘Go’ , 국 , ‘ ’ ‘ ’),” *Cine 21* No. 433 (23–30

December 2003): p. 56.

¹⁵ Belton, op. cit.. p. 87.

¹⁶ See the front cover and the cover story of *Cine21* No. 433 (30 December 2003): 54-56.

¹⁷ See Lee Sang-Yong, *Film2.0* No. 129, op. cit..

¹⁸ It may be interesting to note that in an email interview in early January 2004, Song Kang-Ho had remarked that *Memories of Murder* and *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (in that order) were his two favorite films. Song Kang-Ho. Personal email interview. op. cit..

¹⁹ See Baek Eun-Ha, “Hot Question Mark, Cold Craziiness (,)”,

Cine 21 No. 399 (22 – 29 April 2003): p. 101.

²⁰ Song Kang-Ho. Personal email interview. op. cit..

²¹ See Paul McDonald, “Star Studies,” *Approaches to Popular Film*, Joanne Hollows and Mark Jancovich, eds., (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) pp. 80.

²² Shim Young-Seup, “Star Click – Actor Song Kang-Ho, A star whose face is so friendly with us, ([다] 로 다)” op. cit..

²³ Kim Jee-Woon provided valuable material and insights for this research article. Kim Jee-Woon. Personal interview. 5 October 2003. Busan, Korea. According to director Kim, he discovered the essence of Song Kang-Ho while directing him in *The Quiet Family*. That is, Song Kang-Ho’s performance captured the nuance of Kim Jee-Woon’s humor and delivered it in the most accurate and appropriate way – a skill set that Song Kang-Ho brought from his earliest films. Apparently, Song Kang-Ho did not need much coaching or direction for Kim’s first film. He understood what he wanted from just a few words of explanation. Kim Jee-Woon observes: “Song Kang-Ho has a very acute sensitivity. He reads my code and particular humor well. I could build a valuable relationship between us with trust while we were working on *The Quiet Family* and *The Foul King*. He is the only actor who can do this for me.”

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²⁴ See Shim Young-Seup, “Star Click – Actor Song Kang-Ho, A star whose face is so friendly with us, ([다] 료 다)” op. cit..

²⁵ Lee Sang-Yong, *Film2.0* No. 129, op. cit..

²⁶ Lee Sang-Yong, *ibid.*

²⁷ Baek Eun-Ha, “Hot Question Mark, Cold Craziiness (,)”op. cit..

²⁸ Analyzing a mixture of film criticism and personal interviews are important. A star’s domestic and international fans are also important variables to consider in the definition of “star”. More research concerning audiences and fans in particular needs to be done elsewhere in order to provide yet another side of an actor’s stardom. In particular, websites offer a rich source of ephemeral materials. Some interesting examples of websites dedicated to Song Kang-Ho and his career and personal life include the *Korean Cinema House* (<http://www.koreanfilms.host.sk/>), run by Kevin Gilvear, the “Webmaster & OverLord of Korean Cinema”, and Tony. H, Matt. S and Bobbi, his three “contributors and disciples of the OverLord”; and the *Korean Talent Males' Site* (<http://myhome.shinbiro.com/~greenfox/star/talentm.html>).

²⁹ For an in-depth discussion and analysis of Hong Sang-soo’s films see: David Scott Diffrient. “South Korean Film Genres and Art-House Anti-Poetics.” *CineAction* 60 (2003): 60-71.

³⁰ Song Kang-Ho, Kim Sang-Kyung, and Bong Joon-Ho. Guest visit and Q & A interview for PIFF #8 screening of *Memories of Murder*. 8 October 2003. Busan, Korea.

³¹ See Baek Eun-Ha’s edited interview with Song Kang-Ho in Olhae-ui Baewoo Song Kang—Ho, Gachigwan-ui Hyukmyong-eun Yeongi-ui Hyukmyong-ul Natgo (Actor of the Year – Song Kang-Ho: Revolutionary Point of View Leads to Revolutionary Acting,),” *Cine 21* No. 433 (23–30 December 2003): p. 55.

³² See the discussion of the star system in: Joseph M. Boggs and Dennis W. Petrie, *The Art of Watching Films, Fifth Edition* (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 2000) p. 282.

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