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## Buddhism, Uncertainty and Modernity in A Hometown in Heart

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# **Buddhism, Uncertainty and Modernity in *A Hometown in Heart***

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## **Contents**

1. Introduction
2. Analysis of the ten sequences
3. Conclusions

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## Abstract

*A Hometown in Heart* (*Maeumui gohyang*, 1949), written by Ham Sedeok (1915-1950) and directed by Yun Yonggyu (b.1913), is said to be the first Korean Buddhist film. It depicts Buddhism in a remote mountain region without even electricity. The main character of the film, an orphaned child monk, must decide what to do with his life. This paper argues that the central aspect of the Buddhism-related symbols represents Korean tradition and that the supporting characters represent socio-political forces in post-liberation Korean society just after liberation, pulling the young generation of Koreans in various directions. In particular, the film centers on feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and avoidance pressing challenges of a rapidly changing world. The authors explore what the film tells us about the filmmakers' view of these anxieties and the role Buddhism plays in solving them. To this end, it explores shared motifs found in Korean cinematic history. These motifs include the orphan, nostalgia, modernity, and karma. The article finds that while the film advocates breaking away from tradition to engage the modern industrialized world, it does so by supporting the notion that we all carry the most important aspects of Buddhism within our hearts. This is symbolized in the film by the *Heart Sūtra* and the Red Lotus iconography of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The article concludes with a comparison of the period-specific elements in *A Hometown in Heart* and those in its 2002 remake, *A Little Monk*, directed by Ju Gyeongjung (b. 1959).

Keywords: *A Hometown in Heart*, Korean Buddhist film, modernity, nostalgia, *A Little Monk*, Yun Yonggyu, Ham Sedeok

## 1. Introduction

*A Hometown in Heart* was directed by Yun Yonggyu (b. 1913) and released in 1949. It was based on a play titled *A Little Monk* written by Ham Sedeok (1915-1950). In 1948 the playwright moved to North Korea. After adopting the story into this film, Yun Yonggyu also left his family and went to North Korea, apparently baffling critics by this move. For example, Kim Jong-won writes, “There is no clue as to why he left Seoul after making a lyrical literature film with no hint of politics or ideology. Much later, he made *Chunhyang-jeon* (1980) there,” that is, in North Korea.<sup>2</sup> However, if we look at how many of the same elements the director uses in *A Hometown in Heart* are employed in other films of the time and before, we begin to see a subtext in which nostalgia and the idea of being orphaned as a subtle criticism of the political situation faced in the daily lives of Koreans; this subtext is similar to that appearing in *Chunhyang-jeon* (Story of Chunhyang). Film critic and historian Kim Jong-won points out the following:

Most of the films of the time were enlightenment or anti-Japanese liberation films about resistance to Japanese colonial rule or building a country after liberation; examples include *Hurrah for Freedom* (*Jayu manse*, Choi In-gyu, 1946), *The Adventure of Tolttori* (*Tolttoriui Moheom*, Lee Gyu-hwan, 1946), *Yun Bong-gil*, *The Martyr* (*Yu Bong-gil uisa*, Yun Bong-chun, 1947), *The Dawn* (*Yeomyeong*, Ahn Jin-sang, 1948) and *The Motherland* (*Jogug-ui eomeoni*, Yun Dae-ryong, 1949).<sup>3</sup>

But these films depict the hardships of Korean people due to oppression imposed by a previous government that had been disposed. They were made at a time when it was finally safe and even politically expedient to do so. Kim continues, “But this film was uniquely focused on family; a boy’s destiny and the karma of his parents.”<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, we can look at *A Hometown in Heart* as an exposition on the Korean people orphaned by being severed from their past, unable to return to their traditions due to the rampant poverty. These conditions that were a product of a rapidly modernizing country witnessed a new generation of Koreans being lied to about the situation at every turn, even if by those who feel paternalistic in so doing, and faced with a decision about where to go next and how to get there.

In August 1948, the year the play was performed, Korea was under US military occupation. *A Hometown in Heart* can be seen as the only so-called “Buddhist film,” a widely recognized genre in Korea, made during this period. In the same year, the Republic of Korea was established in the south with Syngman Rhee as president. A month later, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was established in the north with Kim Il-sung as premier. The next year, when *A Hometown in Heart* was released, the independence activist Kim Gu, who was fighting for Korean reunification, was murdered in his home by the South Korean Army lieutenant An Duhui. By the middle of the following year, 1950, the Korean War began.

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The Korean Government’s Romanization System, revised in 2000, is used for Korean terms. If names have not previously been romanized, the authors have done so using East Asian Standard Romanization Systems. Foreign terms, those not included in the *Webster English Dictionary*, appear in italics.

<sup>2</sup> Kim Jong-won, “The little monk’s song of longing for mother,” in *A Hometown in Heart*, a booklet included in the Korean Film Archive Collection DVD release (Seoul: Korean Film Archive Collection, 2011), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

Yi Gangsu of the East-West Studio wrote a screenplay under the penname Gwak Ilbyeong based on Ham Sedeok's play *A Little Monk* and produced a film of the same title in 1949. Ham Sedeok, one of two major playwrights along with Yu Chijin (1905-1974) in the 1940s, submitted the play titled *Do-nyeom* after the name of the child monk protagonist to the second National Play Contest, which the national daily newspaper *Dong-A Ilbo* hosted in 1939. He crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel in 1948.

Yun Yonggyu was born in Daegu in 1913 and joined Dōhō Studios around 1939. He studied film direction and theory, served as an assistant director to Toyota Shirō in Japan, and returned to Korea to make films. He was elected as an executive committee member of the Seoul Chapter of the Joseon Film Alliance in 1946. He directed his first film in 1949. He and his staff used an outdated manual parvo camera without a motor. Because they could not obtain rolls of film from the photographic film production companies, they gathered fragments of films from three companies: Kodak, Fuji and Agfa. For this reason, the quality of the film is not what it would have otherwise been.

Yun crossed into North Korea in 1950 just before the Korean War. In 1952 he began working for the National Film Studio, directing *People Keeping Their Hometowns* in 1953, *A Daughter of Partisans* in 1954, *Newlyweds* in 1955, *The Story of Chunhyang* in 1980, and *The Story on a Gayageum, a Twelve-stringed Korean Harp* in 1986, all in North Korea. He was active as an actor for the National Film Studio from 1964. He was appointed as a provisional member of the Central Committee of the North Korean Alliance of Literature and Arts in 1955 and became a regular member in 1964. He also became a member of the Central Committee of the North Korean Alliance of Film Workers and the North Korean Government recognized him as a merited artist in 1964.

*A Hometown in Heart* was awarded the first Seoul Culture Prize in the field of film. The South Korean government used the film to promote cultural exchange with France in 1950. Afterward, the film was lost in Korea. However, because the original 35 mm film was discovered in the Japanese National Film Center in 2005, the Korean Film Archive obtained a copy with the center's support and made it available to the public. The South Korean Government's Cultural Heritage Administration designated the film as the 345<sup>th</sup> piece of national cultural heritage on September 17, 2007.<sup>5</sup>

Top film technicians of the time worked together to make the film. Han Hyeongmo served as its cinematographer, Go Haejin (1920-1985) as its illuminator, Yang Ju-nam as its sound recorder and editor, and Bak Hye-il as its music director. Of these four film technicians, we do not have information on Bak Hye-il. Han Hyeongmo shot Choe In-gyu's 1944 film *Children of the Sun*, his 1945 film *Vow of Love*, his 1946 film *Hurrah for Freedom* and his 1948 film *An Innocent Criminal* as the director of photography before working on Yun Yonggyu's 1949 film and directing his own debut film *Breaking the Wall* in 1949. Go Haejin served as illuminator Kim Seongchun's assistant for the Chōsen Film Production Co., Ltd late in the colonial period and participated in the production of news reels in the Joseon Film Construction Headquarters just after liberation. He also served as illuminator for Kim Sodong's 1947 film *Mokdan Ghost Story*, Kim Jeonghwan's 1947 film *The Angel Heart*, Im Unhak's 1947 film *The Way They Are Going* and Seo Jeonggyu's 1947 film *Passion of the Sea* before working on *A Hometown in Heart*. He illuminated more than 300 films before retiring in 1981.

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<sup>5</sup> Jeong Jonghwa, *Han'guk yeonghwa-sa* (Korean Film History) (Seoul: Korean Film Archive, 2008), p. 261.

Through the film, today's audience can see a number of historically important aspects of Korean customs in general and Korean Buddhist customs in particular, including the types of monastic clothing worn by monks just after liberation from Japan in 1945 and before the Korean War (1950-1953). Because Korean Buddhism radically changed its rituals, clothing, and customs with the beginning of Purification Buddhist Movement in 1954, the film helps us understand the extent of this change.<sup>6</sup> For example, Korean Buddhist monks wear a red surplice in the film just as they had worn during Japanese occupation. Since the Purification Buddhist Movement, they have worn surplices dyed by mixing three colors: blue, black, and red.

Further reflecting the financial difficulty of the Chosun Film Company at the time, *A Hometown in Heart* was shot in black and white at only two temple locations. The temple's external scenes were shot at Cheong'am-sa Temple on Mt. Buryeong in Gimcheon, North Gyeongsang Province and the temple's internal scenes at Gaeun-sa Temple near Korea University in Seoul. When it was screened in Sudo Theater in Seoul, it attracted a large audience.<sup>7</sup> The film features a cast of only about twenty people, only half of whom have speaking roles. It is said to consist of ten sequences, although this can be questioned depending on how we divide it. Each of these sequences begins with a fade in and ends with a fade out. The plot revolves around a thirteen year old orphan monk named Doseong. The following is a summary of the film that analyzes some of the Buddhist elements depicted and includes a discussion of its political implications. Because *A Hometown in Heart* has strong melodramatic elements such as the use of music, visual effects, and stereotypes meant to evoke emotional responses, which at times replace narrative plot development, some of these will be described as well.

## 2. Analysis of the ten sequences

The very title of the film sets up a nostalgic feeling for the "hometown" and loss of the past is indicated with "in heart," where that past is held rather than in the current world. Even though "heart" is central to the film, it has not received enough focus in criticism thus far. It is the heart of the *Heart Sūtra*, the heart of purity that holds the Buddha-nature of all beings, the incorruptible key to liberation from all types of oppression. A politicized version of the Buddhist idea of the Buddha-nature in our hearts is the main motif of the film.

The opening credits are written in calligraphy in a book illustrated with Buddhist images. As a hand turns the pages of the book to show more credits, we also see line drawings on the pages including that of a wooden fish, a Buddha statue, a pagoda, a temple building, a temple bell, a candle and mala, and a temple lantern. Thus, even before the characters are introduced, these elements set the mood. A similar technique occurs in other films of the time, such as Frank Capra's *Lost Horizon* (1937), a fantasy with political overtones loosely based on Tibetan Buddhism's idea of Shambhala.

The opening scene of *A Hometown in Heart* is a long shot, panning mountains and then across a mountain temple complex. We see a monk tapping a wooden fish as he walks and a

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<sup>6</sup> Chanju Mun, *Purification Buddhist Movement, 1954-1970: The Struggle to Restore Celibacy in the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism* (Honolulu: Blue Pine, 2011); Chanju Mun, "Purification Buddhist Movement, 1954-1962: Interconnecting Ecumenism and Sectarianism," *Daegak sasang* (Maha Bodhi Thought) 14 (2010): pp. 249-290; and Chanju Mun, "Purification Buddhist Movement, 1954-62: The Recovery of Traditional Monasticism from Japanized Buddhism in South Korea," *Hsi Lai Journal of Humanistic Buddhism* 8 (2007): pp. 262-294.

<sup>7</sup> Kim Mihyeon, ed., pp. 114-117.

younger monk, Doseong, striking a bronze temple bell on cue with the other monk as a call to services. Next, there is a scene of monks sitting in front of a Buddha statue, chanting the *Heart Sūtra*. The younger monk is among this group and he is falling asleep. We then see him carrying water, scrubbing floors, and cleaning a lamp. The boy looks outside the temple and sees other boys, led by Jinsu, hunting birds. Jinsu's father, Hwang Seondal, an affable, bearded working man with his shirt open, tells Jinsu not to hunt birds around a temple. Rather than seeing the morality of this, his son defiantly asks if the father is afraid of the head monk. This encounter sets up the idea that different generations of Koreans have different attitudes toward tradition. Then Hwang is called by a monk who asks him to bring firewood from Pungnyu Valley for the An family's 49<sup>th</sup> day rites, a memorial service held forty-nine days after a death. Doseong carries rice to the Buddha altar. The Pungnyu Valley seems to be fictional. Chinese graphs for the word *pungnyu* is 風流, meaning artistic, poetic, romantic, refined, elegant, tasteful, and so on. Looking down at his feet, Doseong sees a dead bird. Jinsu comes running and grabs the bird. Doseong tells him that he will be in trouble if the head monk learns that he has killed a bird on temple grounds. Jinsu replies, "Maybe a monk kid like you would get in trouble, but not me!" Then Jinsu and his friends taunt Doseong by singing, "*jung jung kkakka jung*," literally meaning, "a monk, a monk, a head-shaved monk." "*Jung*" is a pejorative word for monks, as opposed to the respectful "*seunim*." They continue by saying, "*jeobsi mit-e halt-a jung*," meaning a monk who licks the bottom of a dish plate. This means they consider him to be a beggar. This chant is one among several used to taunt monks.

Doseong runs off to measure his height against a notch carved in a tree by Hwang. Hwang has told him that his mother will come for him when he reaches the height of the notch. We see that a number of other notches are on the tree as well, indicating that Hwang has maintained this fabrication for years in order to keep the boy's spirits up. Doseong complains that it is a lie, but Hwang convinces him that his mother will come on New Year's Day. Doseong points to the distant mountains and asks if Seoul is on the other side as he has heard. Hwang confirms this and Doseong gazes longingly in that direction as the camera pans across the mountains, highlighting the beauty of the Korean landscape and the promise of its future. Here the scene fades out.

The next scene fades in to Doseong cleaning the temple porch in preparation for the 49<sup>th</sup> day rites. He asks a middle-aged monk if the An family is the one who built the Shrine of Seven Stars. Veneration of the Seven Stars of the Big Dipper for a long life and good health is a practice that emerged from Korean folk tradition, shamanism, and incorporated into Buddhism. The monk confirms that the An family had given money for the longevity and health of their child. They wonder why the child subsequently died since they had the financial means for taking good care of him. The monk offers, "Maybe he didn't create the right karma in his past life." This is the beginning of much speculation through the film about karma and fate, an interpretation of the history of Korea and the future of its people that the film will, in the end, reject. The monk then asks Doseong if he wishes the widow An was his mother. Doseong looks down sadly.

Two women from the An family arrive by crossing a bridge leading to the temple. We see this bridge through a shot from above from the mountain several times in the film. The bridge and the water beneath seem to mark the border between the rustic world of the temple and the imagined modernity on the far side. One of the women comments after crossing over, "It feels like a different world." We see them crossing another bridge in a shot from below showing the beautiful cascading spring waters of Cheong'am-sa Temple.

The director could have scarcely chosen a better location to represent Korean tradition than Cheong'am-sa Temple. The placard outside the temple says that it is Traditional Temple Registration No. Ga-89 and explains it as follows.

Cheong'am-sa is a Buddhist temple with a deep history of more than 1,000 years. Founded in 859 CE (the third year in the reign of King Heon An of the Shilla Dynasty), it is located on Buddha Spirit Mountain, in Jeung San Myeon near the city of Gimcheon. In 1647 (the 25<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King In Jo of the Joseon Dynasty) Master Heo Jeong Hey Won completed the first of several reconstructions of the temple, and from 1905 to 1912, Master Dae Un Byeong Taek completed the fourth and fifth reconstructions. .... Since 1711, when Cheongamsa was established as a Buddhist Seminary by Master Hoe Am Jeong Hye, the temple was renowned as a place of study.

Cheong'am-sa Temple is located in the mountains in the city of Gimcheon. It was founded by Dosen, a Korean Buddhist monk who lived during the Silla Dynasty. According to tradition, Dosen was learned in *fengshui* and the bridge and water entry are said to be significant in the following way.

A small spring across the way is Ubicheon. From a geomantic perspective, the site of Cheongamsa is said to be configured like a "cow lying down," with the spring representing the cow's nose. The nose of a healthy cow is constantly wet; likewise, it was believed that the nation and the temple would prosper so long as the spring waters flowed steadily.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the prosperity of the nation and that of the temple are tied together. Similarly, Doseong's future is tied to that of his generation in the film. As the placard further explains, the temple was vacant during the 1970s until it was transformed into a nunnery in the 1980s. Today it continues to be a nunnery and the site of a monastic seminary for nuns. Cheong'am-sa is a part of the Korea Foundation's Temple Stay program and thus offers lodging and a variety of learning opportunities to international visitors.

The two women, the widow and her mother, are greeted by the head monk, who leads them to the temple. He tells them he believes the deceased boy would reach nirvāṇa. The widow passes Doseong and touches his head. He watches as she continues talking and sad music plays. He next brings water and smiles at the widow before running off to speak to the temple cook, asking if all women from Seoul are beautiful, even his mother. The cook says his mother is indeed beautiful. We learn through dialogue with the head priest that the widow's child died at six years old, since he was born in the Year of the Hare. This sets the date of the activities in the movie. We learn that the widow had taken care of her son "like treasure" after his father died, but the boy died of measles. The head monk says it is all because of karma. Doseong rings the temple bell, watching the other boys in the distance returning from play. The scene fades out.

The next scene fades in to monks sitting in a temple room lit by a single lantern, chanting the *Heart Sūtra*. Staring at the sūtra book, Doseong can only see the widow, who

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<sup>8</sup> Kim Hyungyoon, "Gimcheon's Ancient Temples and Famed Pure Waters," *Koreana: Korean Art and Culture* 23.4 (Winter 2009): p. 74. Its digital version is seen at [http://www.koreana.or.kr/months/news\\_view.asp?b\\_idx=538&lang=en&page\\_type=list](http://www.koreana.or.kr/months/news_view.asp?b_idx=538&lang=en&page_type=list) (accessed June 9, 2015).



appears through a circle-in technique on the book, that is, through a superimposed circle effect created by narrowing the camera's iris. The head monk enters the room and tests the other monks, asking the first to recite the sūtra. He begins chanting the first lines of the *Heart Sūtra* from memory. The head monk stops him and asks Doseong to continue from that point. Doseong stammers and fails, although he says he has chanted the sūtra thirty times that day. The head monk sternly tells him he must have it all memorized by the next day. The scene fades out.

The next scene fades in showing boys playing and Doseong watching from a distance. He walks away toward the cook and Hwang, who are talking about his mother who abandoned him at the temple when he was only three years old. Hwang comments, "Damn world! One mother throws away her child like an old shoe; another can't forget her dead child." The cook responds, "The world is so unfair and that boy's is an unlucky lot," suggesting again the tyranny of fate. Doseong walks up and asks Hwang if his mother's prayer beads are really special, as Hwang must have told him in order to keep his spirits up. Hwang replies that if you look through the hole in the large bead, you will see a Red Lotus flower, whereas most malas have the image of a Buddha embedded in the large bead.

Doseong goes to the temple building where the widow is praying. Seeing him through the doorway, she takes sweets offered to her son on the altar and offers them instead to Doseong, who refuses at first but gives in with a smile. This is the first indication in the film that the widow would abandon her dead child for the living Doseong and metaphorically that those who thrived in Seoul during Japanese occupation are willing to adapt to the ways of post-liberation Korea. She asks his age. He is twelve. She asks about his mother and afterwards walks off. Doseong smiles and happily eats the sweets and upbeat music plays. Then he runs down a path and picks flowers, arranging them in her room. There he looks through her mala beads, but seems disappointed. He then picks up her feather fan and waves it in wonder. With a nice effect, the camera zooms in on the fan and then pulls back from it with a changed scene in which the widow is waving it. She sees Doseong and another monk ironing and asks to take the place of the older monk. Ironing with Doseong, she demonstrates a traditionally motherly action. Doseong asks about the fan and the scene fades out. The feather fan throughout the film is a symbol of the products of modern technology found in Seoul. Yet, to engage in manufacturing (that is, killing birds) is immoral by traditional standards.

The next scene fades in to Doseong bedded down for the night and thinking, as if he is remembering the events of the scene that just faded out. He wonders aloud to the monk next to him if his mother had a fan like that of the widow. Doseong says he should make his mother such a feather fan for when she comes on New Year's Day, saying he needs the feathers of a Turtle Dove to do so. He goes to sleep thinking of this and a fuzzy circle-in appears onscreen superimposed over his face to indicate he is dreaming. In the dream he sees his mother, whom he imagines to be like the widow and who has come to the temple for him. He asks if she has a feather fan and she replies that he should make one for her. Doseong wakes up crying for his mother and the scene fades out.

The next scene fades in and Doseong is in the forest. He trades the remainder of the sweets from the widow's altar to Jinsu for the use of a slingshot so he can hunt birds in order to make the feather fan. Hwang sees him taking aim and stops him in a sense stopping him from participating in the ways of the modern secular world. But when Doseong tells him about his dream, Hwang takes pity and tells him he will bring a bird trap. In the next scene the widow tells her mother she wants to adopt Doseong. Her mother says it is a bad idea and that she should remarry instead. But the widow is not interested in this. In the next scene, like a father, Hwang

shows Doseong how to set the trap. Doseong tells Hwang he is a good person and runs off with this emotion, turning and calling out to Hwang that he should come to the kitchen after the ceremony and he will give him rice cakes. Hwang laughs. In the next scene the head monk tells Doseong to accompany the widow to the mountains and scolds him for being lax in his monastic duties. Going up the mountain, Doseong cries at being reprimanded and the widow tries to cheer him up. The scene fades to Doseong gathering flowers for the widow on the mountain. He tells her that he wants to go to Seoul. The widow asks if they should go to Seoul together. She says she will ask the head monk. She then tells Doseong to call her “mother.” She tells him that she will buy clothes for him to go to school in Seoul. Doseong says he wants to go to high school and to college.

In the next scene, the widow’s mother is asking the head monk if her daughter can adopt Doseong. The head monk says he has never considered that he would receive such a request. But, he says, even if Doseong’s mother were to come, he would not give the boy back to her. He tells them that Doseong’s mother’s is a distant relative to him, which means Doseong is a relative as well. In a sense, the head monk is like a grandfather to him while Hwang is somewhat like a father. This further cements the representation of the head monk as old tradition. When Doseong’s mother’s parents had died, the head monk had taken care of her as if she were his own daughter, he says. From this we learn of a second generation of orphans corresponding to the time of two government periods in Korea, and we see the orphans’ uneasy but dependent relationship with tradition, represented as Buddhism in the film. The head monk continues, saying that one day Doseong’s mother ran away with a hunter and later abandoned Doseong to get married again. Since the mother must have lived at the temple with the head monk, it is easy to imagine that she met a hunter just like Hwang, if not Hwang himself, again, a father figure to Doseong in the film.

The camera pans and we see Doseong standing at the edge of the porch listening. Throughout the film he picks up only bits and pieces of information about his past, told from a variety of perspectives. This is likely the filmmakers’ view of similar case of the Korean people of their generation concerning their identities . The head monk continues, “How could I let a boy with so much bad karma go out into the world? I absolutely cannot.” This seems to indicate the stance of Korean tradition about post-occupation Koreans, at least in their minds. If so, it is also a representation of uncertainty avoidance and anxiety that some scholars argue was very high in South Korean society at the time due to rigid codes of belief such as the version of Buddhism depicted in this film. Accordingly, the head monk in this film represents this traditional rigid code that hangs over the head of Doseong and Koreans of his generation, causing them to avoid becoming primary actors in the modern world. Doseong looks down gloomily, walking off before he can hear the widow’s passionate plea, saying she does not know what karma is but will take care of the boy. The head monk says he needs to think about it. The scene fades out.

The next scene fades in with a shot of a Buddha statue. Monks are chanting and the An family women prostrate before the Buddha in the Korean Buddhist style. We see a portable shrine outside and villagers gathered to observe some of the 49<sup>th</sup> day rites. Among those gathered is Doseong’s biological mother, watching for a glimpse of the boy. As her son (Doseong) exits the temple in procession with the others, she smiles and hides behind a tree. The head monk is informed that she is there and sees her. The scene fades out.

The next scene fades in to a close up of Doseong’s mother counting mala beads. Although she has acted in a way deemed immoral and that has caused herself and Doseong to suffer, it appears from this that she has not lost her respect for Buddhism, unlike, for example,

the boy Jinsu. In fact, there is a sense that all of her actions stem from poverty caused by the loss of her parents and the political situation. Metaphorically, this is the case for many Korean people of the previous generation that gave birth to those of Doseong's figurative peer group. The mala and its symbolism will play a key role not only in the overt plot but in the subtext of the film. The head monk asks her why she has come. She says that previously she could not take care of the two children that she had. But she separated from her husband and Doseong's younger sibling died, so now she wants Doseong. There is an interesting juxtaposition in this in terms of the two mother figures, both of whom have seen the death of one of their children. Likewise, Doseong has lost a sibling that he did not know and this relates to the child of the widow who wants to adopt Doseong, in a way like an older brother to her dead child.

Film critic Kim Jong-won writes, "The widow lost her own child to measles when he was around Doseong's age."<sup>9</sup> While this is an interesting idea about the widow's connection to Doseong, the age difference is important in the juxtaposition of the mothers and their shared loss. Both mothers are also without husbands. The fact that Doseong's father spilt with his mother vaguely suggests the reality of Hwang as father. It will be remembered that the head monk is also related to Doseong so that these three relatives are pulling Doseong, and metaphorically the politically orphaned Korean people of his generation, in different directions, wherein his future path is beyond his own volition. The head monk as the representation of Korea's traditional rigid code, the biological mother impoverished by the Japanese occupation and forced to abandon her child, and the would-be adoptive mother who has become rich in Seoul through the conditions of modernity, but finding herself widowed and suffering the loss of her child, representing the suffering of even those who prospered during occupation and orphaned with its end.

The head monk is firm with Doseong's mother, refusing her request to take him. She says she knows she has much bad karma but does not know what to do. The head monk looks away, maintaining his strictness but also expressing some sympathy on his face. The actor, Byeon Gijong, subtly captures here and elsewhere Korea's traditionalism, which, though rigid, is not heartless. Audiences may find the head monk to be callous.<sup>10</sup> However, the actor reveals that this is not the case but that he is truly concerned about both the boy's best interest as he sees it and the best interest of the world as we will see. Toward this end, he asks Doseong's mother to leave the monastery and not to return. In the next scene Doseong gives rice cakes to Hwang, who laughs. He also asks him how to make a feather fan. Leaving the temple, Hwang runs into Doseong's mother. Recognizing her, he says she should go to Doseong who has been waiting. She asks him to come with her. The audience never learns where they go or why. But it is clear that it must be to tell him that her request to take Doseong was refused by the head monk. It is also clear that the mother and Hwang have some degree of acquaintanceship, which must have been enough to know she has a mala with a Red Lotus at least. The sequence ends with a scene of the head monk sitting as in meditation, counting mala beads, and in obvious contemplation about Doseong's situation. The scene fades out.

The next scene fades in to Doseong walking in the forest to the bird trap. Jinsu sees that he has killed a bird on temple grounds. The head monk sends for Doseong. The An family packs to leave the temple. There is a close-up of the widow putting a Buddhist prayer book into her bag. This is likely for the 49<sup>th</sup> day rites, which continue for five days after the ceremony. The ceremony of the 49<sup>th</sup> day rites is held forty-nine days after someone's death. The ceremony is to

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<sup>9</sup> Kim Jong-won, quoted by Kim Jong-won, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> This is the opinion of Yu Si-hun, film critic, "A Hometown in Heart," *Daily Chosun Jungang*, Oct. 4<sup>th</sup>, 1949, quoted by Kim Jong-won, p. 24.

implore Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva, whose name means “Womb of the Earth”, to help the deceased to see their karma so that they will understand their deeds and thereby be reborn on earth or the Pure Land rather than in a Buddhist hell. The ceremony is also used to guide both the dead and the living alike to truth, to help them become liberated from defilement and suffering. It has at times been performed for the benefit of the state and people. In the film, it is, therefore, not only meant as a ceremony for the widow’s child, but subtly also for Doseong and metaphorically for the Korean people of the generation after liberation that he represents.

The head monk enters and tells the widow that he has decided to allow her to adopt Doseong. At the same time, Doseong runs behind the temple and puts the dead bird into a closet as Jinsu watches from a distance. Another monk tells Doseong that the head monk has sent for him. Doseong looks around, perhaps wondering if he could somehow know about the bird. Dramatic music plays briefly. The widow tells Doseong that she can take him and the head monk says he must study hard. Doseong runs away, happily telling everyone, including Hwang, that he is leaving with the widow. Hwang looks down and goes to tell Doseong’s mother about this development, adding that it would not be the same as being with his real mother.

The scene changes to farewell incense being burnt before a Buddha statue. Monks chant the names of the Three Jewels: “the Buddha, the Dharma, and the saṅgha.” The head monk says the following to Doseong: “Though you’re going out into the world, you’re still not free of your karma. So, you mustn’t forget the Buddha’s teachings.” He continues, “Though the body may be immersed in a worldly existence, the mind must always be cloistered with the Buddha. Remember this mindset night and day.” With this, he solemnly hands Doseong a sūtra book of the *Heart Sūtra*. This seems to be the advice given by Korean tradition to those stepping away from it to deal with the modern world, to keep their traditional identity in their hearts, illustrated in this scene through the *Heart Sūtra*. Although not translated in the English subtitles, the head monk tells Doseong that in order to do so he should chant the *Heart Sūtra* twice a day, once in the morning and once at night.

The scene changes to Doseong’s mother visiting the widow, asking her for Doseong. She explains why she left him, saying that it was because she was terribly poor. The widow says she was planning to raise him well, but could not possibly stop his real mother from taking him, adding that she will still support him financially. This seems to solve not only the two-mother dilemma, but metaphorically the issue with the abject poverty of some Koreans and the wealth of others after liberation. Though this might make for good speculation, redistribution of wealth would suggest socialism at the time and the filmmakers are aware that it is not to be in the new situation, neither for Doseong or South Korea. Doseong enters and there is a tense moment of silence. He happily calls the widow “mother” several times in his elation. There is a close up of the face of his biological mother, who decides not to reveal who she is, letting the widow raise him in economic comfort after all. Instead, she only exchanges prayer beads with Doseong, tells him to study well, and exits. She walks across the bridge leaving the temple grounds, and the scene is a long shot slightly from above in a classical mode of conveying the idea of fate. The scene fades out dramatically with the further loss of the mother to the conditions of poverty.

The next scene fades in to Doseong getting a haircut from a monk using old style non-electric clippers. Although there should be no further need for a final tonsure style haircut, it seems he is being groomed for his departure. He tells the other monks that if they come to Seoul he will treat them to a grand meal. They laugh. There is a beautiful shot from below of a bird perched on the temple roof. The bird watches the scene from above as if from a greater perspective. Its appearance reminds the audience that although Doseong is temporarily happy in

the thought that he is escaping his situation by being rescued by another, he is secretly and always carrying his own karmic baggage as a result of killing a bird. In this sense, the dead bird is always hovering over Doseong's head. The bird stands beside an iconographic image decorating the peak of the stone-tiled roof. Korean temples have a number of such roof ornaments including lotuses, honeysuckles, garudas, phoenixes, kylins, and various animal and demon faces inscribed in roof tiles. It is difficult to tell the iconography from the angle of the shot, but if it is a bird, it should be a phoenix or, preferably, a garuda. Monster and ghost faces are inscribed in roof tiles of Korean temples to prevent disasters and bad fate. To the right of the shot, balanced with the bird on the left and the roof ornament in the center, is the top of a pine tree, one of the most common symbols of longevity in East Asia. It seems likely that the artist and director Bae Yonggyun used this shot and references it as a central theme in his 1989 film *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?* Bae's film centers on a young orphaned monk who secretly kills a bird and is haunted by guilt from the act as well as by the orphaned mate of the bird that watches from the temple rooftop. The main motif of the film, as with *A Hometown in Heart*, is how Buddhism and Korean tradition generally can fit into the modern world. Bae's conclusion, not unlike that of Yun, is that one must act as an individual, which means eventually leaving the temple, while still being guided by the principles that are inherent in the heart, that is, the Buddha-nature of Seon Buddhism. In a very real way, *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?* updates the political situation implied in *A Hometown in Heart* to that of 1989 South Korean democracy and individualism, which is contrasted with monasticism.

Jinsu approaches with his sling shot while the An family is speaking to the head monk, saying they will pay for the restoration of the temples antique *dancheong* paintings. *Dancheong* is an old traditional style of Korean paintings that often decorate and protect the country's temples physically from the elements and spiritually from evil. The widow's desire to restore them is an indication of her financial support of Korean tradition extending to Doseong himself. *Dancheong* literally means "cinnabar and blue-green," the main colors of the paintings. The head monk suddenly looks down at his feet, surprised to see a dying bird. Apparently unaware of the monk, Jinsu jumps down from a ledge to pick up the bird he has shot. The head monk scolds him, saying it is wrong to take a life, whether it is on temple grounds or not. We have already seen that Jinsu is defiant of the tradition, if not hostile toward it. He accused his father of being afraid of the head monk, taunted Doseong with a song, and continued to hunt on temple grounds even after his father has told him to not do so. Slightly older than Doseong, Jinsu seems to be the model of the post-liberation Korean boy that the head monk and others fear Doseong will become if he shuns tradition and becomes selfish. It is no wonder he is afraid for the sake of the boy and society to send such a person into the world. The head monk accuses Jinsu of being a bad influence on Doseong. But Jinsu protests by saying that Doseong had killed a Turtle Dove and put it in the closet in the rear of the temple building. This confrontation with morality, Jinsu's and Doseong's, takes place in front of a *dancheong* painting that is of the *byeoljihwa* category, appearing to illustrate a story from a sūtra.<sup>11</sup> It is unclear if the director staged this confrontation here to coincide with the Buddhist story, which depicts two haggardly men, with looks typical of wrong doers in Buddhist iconography. Regardless, the effect is powerful. Shocked, the head priest and the two women quickly turn to check the closet as Jinsu claims the bird and hurries away. The camera gives us a point of view shot focusing on the closet door,

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<sup>11</sup> There are four types of *dancheong* at temples, *morucho* that are patterns that decorate beams and eaves, *byeoljihwa* that illustrate stories, *bidan munui* that are geometric designs like lotus flowers, and *dandok munui* that illustrate a single animal or plant.

slowly and theatrically zooming in on the stick that latches it closed. They look inside and see two dead birds as dramatic music plays. The group confronts Doseong, who, to his credit, does not hesitate to tell the truth. A critic at the time quoted above, also commented that Doseong should have protested and explained that not he but Hwang's trap had killed the bird.<sup>12</sup> However, this would defeat the purpose of the scene. If Doseong had not told the truth and if he had not accepted responsibility for his actions, he would not have revealed his pure heart to the viewers and likewise he would have been incapable of eventually following that heart, which becomes the resolution of the main dilemma of the movie, that is, the answer to how the young generation should act in modern times. Upon hearing Doseong's admission, the older woman exclaims, "We gave prayers and offerings with a killed animal behind the sanctuary!" The head monk does not know what to say. Both seem to believe that this has defiled the 49<sup>th</sup> day rites, which the audience by this time, knowing Doseong's purity, is disinclined to believe. That is to say, through the context of the film, the viewers have been convinced that one may act with a pure heart in ways that tradition condemns. This will be important for going forward in to the modern world. Still shocked at this turn of events, the head monk shouts, "Has an evil spirit taken hold of you?" Doseong explains about the fan he wished to make for his mother. But the head priest persists, "If you, Doseong, were thinking of your mother who committed so many transgressions, how could you commit such unethical acts by killing mountain birds?" The widow's mother adds, "If we adopt Doseong (as a substitute for her grandson Jongcheol), Jongcheol will be banned from the gates of a paradise without ever entering them (due to Doseong's bad karma accumulated by killing mountain birds)."<sup>13</sup> The head monk then reverses his decision to let Doseong leave the temple, saying, "I do not know what unethical acts Doseong will commit if you raise him in the secular world." Thus the head monk shows he is concerned not only for the sake of Doseong but with unleashing him on the world, again with implications for politically orphaned Koreans without Buddhism as illustrated through Jinsu. The widow pleads saying, "To lead him to the right path, I will have to raise him close to my heart. There's no other way." We see from this that Doseong is being pulled in the direction of those from prosperous Seoul, who think there is no other future for him. The head monk disagrees with this assessment saying, "Until he builds up extraordinarily good karma he won't be able to wash off the bad karma of his mother." This is an interesting understanding of karma, which seems to be based on Confucian, rather than Buddhist, thought. While Judeo-Christian traditions support in some way the idea that the sins of the father will be visited on the son to the third and fourth generation (Numbers 14:18), this is not a Buddhist view. However, it works well in the film to either attribute responsibility to the young generation for what happened to Korea before liberation or to illustrate that they felt that way whether they should or not. In fact, in the film, the audience certainly feels that this is not right, that Doseong did not inherit in the karma of his mother, and perhaps that his mother too is innocent, as we see from Doseong's next response.

Now, in one of the climatic moments of the movie, Doseong becomes assertive for the first time. "Why do you always speak ill of my mother?" he exclaims. "Didn't you say the Goddess of Mercy is as good at heart as she is beautiful? They say my mother is pretty too. So why would she be so unethical?" This connection of Doseong's mother to Gwanseum (Avalokiteśvara) is strengthened by what the audience knows she did in sacrificing her potential happiness so that Doseong could live with the rich widow. It will be further confirmed by the image in the mala she traded with Doseong. This idea that a non-monastic bodhisattva could be

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<sup>12</sup> This is the opinion of Yu Si-hun, film critic, quoted by Kim Jong-won, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> These lines are not clearly expressed in the English subtitles.

more pure or pious than monks, which is central to this film, is taken up again by Im Kwon-taek (b.1936) in his 1981 film that first brought him critical acclaim, *Maṇḍala* and again, in the context of a non-monastic female bodhisattva, in his 1989 film *Aje Aje Bara Aje*. The alleged transgressions of the protagonist in the latter film, Sunnyeo, resemble those attributed to Doseong's mother in a number of ways. But the head monk does not see his mother in this way. Instead he says, "We say that about Buddhism. But your mother is like a *yakṣa*." Doseong says he does not believe in it and that he wants to live with the widow. To this the head monk responds, "Do you want to go and live with her although you are supposed to be born in a hell after you die later?", a question for Koreans of the day in relation to their interaction with the modern world. Doseong affirms that he is willing to do so even at that expense, saying he does not want to be buried here in these mountains all the time. As in their previous exchange, the widow says what he needs is a mother's warm love while the head monk replies that "If you really love him, you shouldn't try to take him as a plaything to hold close." Significantly for our analysis related to Korean independence, the widow responds, "I am not adopting him as a plaything, I want him to grow up with a little more love and freedom." She finally says she will come back next year for Doseong. When Doseong says he does not like that idea, she responds, "I think that it seems like our fate." The scene fades out.

In East Asian Buddhism birds are particularly protected. At times emperors have sponsored the release of birds as a way to build merit. There is also a well-known story of the Buddha's cousin Devadatta shooting a bird and the young Gautama nursing it back to health. When Devadatta demands possession of the bird on the grounds that he shot it, Gautama counters that he is more entitled to the bird since he saved it. They seek an arbitrator who rules that one who gives life is more entitled than one who takes it. In the play from which the movie was adapted, the little monk kills a rabbit to make a stole. The choice of the bird in the film seems to have been a good one for the context, and is easily connected to karma and guilt cinematically.

The next scene fades in to Doseong sitting forlornly in the woods, looking at the mountain range toward Seoul. He stands at the notch in the tree and is disappointed that he does not measure up to it. He then goes back to the temple where Hwang and the cook are talking about fate, saying "We can't do anything about our fates. We have to live and die according to our lot." Doseong then overhears Hwang saying "He didn't get to meet his mother either after fretting so to see her. She was looking right at him, too. But she couldn't say he was her son. Such a sad business! That's her fate." Surprising them, Doseong asks if they are talking about his mother. They deny it, but he now does not believe them, saying they always act this way. Allegorically, this represents the time in a person's life when they question the narrative presented to them about their own history. Thinking about when his mother could have been looking right at him, he remembers her and the mala. He runs to find it and looks through the opening in the large bead. The audience gets a point of view shot created as another circle-in on the screen, similar to the daydream and dream sequences. With Doseong, the audience sees the Red Lotus in the mala bead. Doseong runs to look at the bridge and, while crying, calls out, "mother." The scene fades to black.

The red of the Red Lotus is related to the "heart" of *A Hometown in Heart*. In Buddhism a lotus flower represents the growth of the spirit out of the mud of the mundane world, which is Doseong's and Korea's situation. In particular, a Red Lotus symbolizes Buddha-nature and purity of heart. It is the lotus of love, compassion, and all the other qualities that come from the heart. Significantly, it is the flower of Avalokiteśvara, the female bodhisattva of compassion to

whom Doseong has compared his mother. In the film, the image of a Red Lotus in a mala is unique and perhaps even singular to his mother. Thus, even though there is a wide disparity between the way the head monk understands his mother and the way Doseong imagines her, the Red Lotus confirms the truth of the former. As possessor of it, his mother is again transposed with Avalokiteśvara. Her compassion and the Buddha-nature in Doseong's heart allow, in the final scene, for the resolution of the problem faced by him and his generation, that is, how to deal with modernity. Yun Yonggyu seems to have used the Red Lotus and the *Heart Sūtra* to indicate this.

The final sequence fades in with a long shot of mountains and clouds like the opening scene of the film. Again we see a monk tapping a wooden fish, but this time the bell does not ring on cue. The monk goes to check but Doseong is not there, nor is he in his room. He tells the head monk, who looks worried, folds his hands while holding his mala, and bows his head. The scene changes to Doseong walking away along a path, wearing a backpack. The temple bell sounds and he stops to look back before continuing. He looks at the mountains, perhaps toward Seoul and certainly toward the modern world. There is a long shot of the valley followed by a close-up of Doseong's smiling face. He walks down the winding road that we see with a shot from above is long ahead of him. Upbeat music plays and the scene fades out.

As with the shot of the bird on the temple roof, this shot of resolve and walking the winding path into the secular world, shot from above, also appears as the final scene of *Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East*. In Bae's film, this scene is related to the tenth drawing of the famous "Ten Ox-herding Pictures" of Seon Buddhism. In those pictures, awakening to Buddha-nature is depicted as a boy monk's dealings with an ox, at first trying to tame its wild nature before coming to terms with it. In the end, after many difficult trials and errors, he returns to the world, but now wiser because of the difficulties he has experience, and so better able to deal with the secular world. This seems to be the message of *A Hometown in Heart* as well. Both Doseong and, by analogy, South Koreans of his post-liberation generation can deal with the harshness of their situations and the newness of modernity by opening their hearts to the wisdom possessed therein, which, accordingly, is far greater than that possessed by institutions and other well-meaning parental figures. Looked at in this way, we can now return to the observation of the film critic, Kim Jong-won, who was puzzled over director Yun Yonggyu's decision to go to North Korea as the playwright Ham Sedoek did before him. Kim said the film had "no hint of politics or ideology." However, according to our analysis, the opposite is the case. If so, both men may have immolated Doseong in walking away from their respective institutions, following their hearts beyond uncertainty anxieties.

### 3. Conclusions

In this paper we have suggested that the supporting characters in *A Hometown in Heart* can be seen as representing various socio-political forces in Korean society just after liberation, pulling the young generation of Koreans of the time, represented by the main character, Doseong, in various directions. According to this analysis, the director and playwright are suggesting through the story that Koreans let the inherent truth in their hearts guide them to act morally while being active in the new conditions of modernity. Therefore, while the film advocates stepping out of the isolation of a mountain monastery, it does not reject Buddhism and other traditions of Korea, but embraces them as internal guides. We would like to conclude with a further piece of evidence to support our assessment about the period-specific nature of these



elements, by comparing *A Hometown in Heart* made in 1949 with the 2002 remake as *A Little Monk* directed by Ju Gyeongjung.

Ju, who also wrote the screenplay for *A Little Monk*, was born in 1959 and grew up in much different social conditions than those that shaped writer Ham Sedeok and director Yun Yonggyu of *A Hometown in Heart*. Some of the differences in the two films reflect this. The first of these differences is the absence in *A Little Monk* of two of the three supporting characters that are the main forces impacting the young monk in *A Hometown in Heart*, who is named Donyeom in the later version. Most conspicuously absent in *A Little Monk* is the boy's biological mother. This corresponds to the original play of the same title by writer Ham Sedeok. Yun Yonggyu is known to have created the mother character for *A Hometown in Heart*. In it, the biological mother serves to represent one of the forces in the film's ultimate dilemma. She is used to show the audience the possibility that defilement is actually purity or, in Buddhist terms, from defilement comes purity. Related to this, she is connected to the Bodhisattva of Compassion. By excluding the mother in *A Little Monk*, though more true to the original play, we lose the revelation about the transformation of karma into merit, a Buddhist concept that is central in providing the political message in the 1949 film. Accordingly, we lose a valuable part of Yun's message about how to resolve uncertainty anxiety about the modern world, a theme that is replaced in *A Little Monk* by a non-metaphorical and less philosophical dilemma of sex versus celibacy.

The second symbolic representative force in *A Hometown in Heart*, the widow, appears in *A Little Monk*, but her role is drastically minimized in it. Whereas in *A Hometown in Heart* she is in the forefront of the entire story, she only appears for a few minutes near the beginning and end of *A Little Monk*. The absence of these two women as central forces in the film also means that when Donyeom leaves the monastery at the end of *A Little Monk*, he is likely not going to Seoul to find them as implied in *A Hometown in Heart*, but to find Suyeon, his girlfriend who moves to Seoul with her family. This introduction of a girlfriend in *A Little Monk* is a radical departure from the plot of *A Hometown in Heart* and becomes central to the overarching theme of the later film.

Likewise, other secondary characters who have relatively minor parts in *A Hometown in Heart*, such as the cook and other monks at the temple, become only one monk, Jeongsim, in *A Little Monk*, whose role is vital in that film and second only to that of Donyeom. A reoccurring part of his role is asking the head monk for money without explaining why he needs it. Finally, he admits it is to get circumcised because people tease him in the public bath. After the master rejects this request, he returns pleading with the justification that sometimes it smells. It becomes comic relief in the movie. In addition to Donyeom having a girlfriend, twice in the movie he and Jeongsim, who is in his twenties, encounter and enjoy flirtations with girls, once on temple grounds and once in the city. Jeongsim asks the head monk if having a wet dream is a violation of the precept against sex. The head monk says it is. He tells Jeongsim "the Buddha said it was bad enough that a man has one penis. If a man had two, there wouldn't be a single monk in the whole world." While this is important to the film, it poses sexual desire as the foremost obstacle to both enlightenment and Buddhism in general. Donyeom, who is only nine years old in *A Little Monk*, peeks through a slightly opened door to watch the widow undress. He later looks at his girlfriend's legs in awe as she walks and otherwise sexualizes the preteen girl in the movie. Suyeon takes Donyeom into her room and leaves him there to look around while she prepares food in the traditional role of a female. In the room Donyeom sees a ceramic figure of baby Jesus being carried by the Madonna. Of course this relates to motherhood and Donyeom's childhood,

but it also puts it into the realm of Christianity, not Buddhism. Therefore, the Madonna in this film replaces the Bodhisattva of Compassion in *A Hometown in Heart*, because the recognition of the Christian mother of compassion has become widespread in Korea by the time the film was made, and Christianity has mistakenly become identified with modernity, that is, it is the religion of the most technologically advanced societies. This emphasis on Donyeom's exposure and attraction to the non-traditional modern world is further suggested when his girlfriend returns with cooked chicken that she and Donyeom heartily and suggestively enjoy. Donyeom only offers meek protest similar to that of Jeongsim to the girls he encounters, before giving in to her persuasiveness.<sup>14</sup>

After the head monk gives Jeongsim money for circumcision, the latter and Donyeom go into the city where they vigorously enjoy pizza. As mentioned, they also meet two girls and Jeongsim cannot stop thinking about one of them even after returning to the temple. He imagines having sex with her and viewers are subjected to a scene of their nude bodies intertwined. Again, this is a wide departure from *A Hometown in Heart*. To rid himself of the thoughts, Jeongsim chants vehemently, meditates, and even burns his index finger over a candle, which the critic Yi Hyang-soon believes is suggestive of castration.<sup>15</sup> But finding no escape from these thoughts, he packs his backpack and leaves the temple. We see Donyeom running after him and there is a voiceover of him talking to Donyeom, saying among other things that "sūtras don't make sense, at times I feel suffocated...and still we all live like this, just longing." Donyeom turns and runs back to the temple, crying. As Doseong in *A Hometown in Heart*, eventually he too will pack and leave the temple, perhaps to find his girlfriend in Seoul.

In *A Hometown in Heart*, the focus was on the truth in Doseong's heart and the heart of the Korean people. This is illustrated in many ways, including with the metaphor of the *Heart Sūtra* and the Red Lotus. In *A Little Monk*, the focus is no longer the heart but a lower part of the anatomy. Because sex is the central theme, not only are the roles of the two main women in *A Hometown in Heart* lessened, but so is that of the head monk. This might be a more apt representation of the problems facing Korean people and Korean Buddhism today than in post-liberation modernity. If so, however, we should be aware that while it is normal for an orphan to long for a family and a man in his twenties to long for a girl, a nine-year-old sexualizing his prepubescent girlfriend is not. Since psychologists often list such behavior as a sign of abuse, we can wonder at the filmmakers' intentions. Whether or not it is meant to indicate this, the repetition of this situation might be seen as an indication of social degeneration in post-industrial capitalism. In *Hometown in Heart*, individual love is universalized through the acts of the Bodhisattva-like mother and the selflessness of the widow, both of whom follow the head monk's advice about leaving Doseong if they really love him. In *A Little Monk*, the strongest force is lust and there is no attempt to universalize it through Buddhism.

In an interview about the film, director Ju said that in it, he attempts to track back motherhood through Buddhist themes, and that Buddhism represents the motherhood of the Korean people.<sup>16</sup> As we have seen, this is indeed central to the plot of *A Hometown in Heart*. But how is it shown in *A Little Monk*? We can only think that the little monk is orphaned by his

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<sup>14</sup> An argument could be made that the director is making an analogy to Eve's allure that persuades Adam also with food as a sexual symbol.

<sup>15</sup> Yi Hyang-soon, "Dongseung, hyangsu geurigo Han'guk bulgyo yeonghwa" (The Little Monk, Nostalgia, and Korean Buddhist Film), *Bulgyo hakbo* (Journal of the Korean Buddhist Culture Research Institute of Dongguk University) 50 (December 2008): p. 197.

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.koreafilm.co.kr/movie/little\\_monk/little\\_monk\\_main.htm](http://www.koreafilm.co.kr/movie/little_monk/little_monk_main.htm) (accessed June 12, 2015)

mother and then abandons Buddhism. This does not seem equivalent to Buddhism serving as mother to the Korean people. If we stretch our imagination, we can think Ju might be saying that institutionalized Korean Buddhism is not authentic Buddhism; that real Buddhism has been lost in Korea and so has orphaned its people. In that case, the boy leaving the temple in search of his mother means that the Korean people have or should leave institutional Buddhism to seek out its authentic teachings, a reoccurring theme in Im Kwon-taek's Buddhist-oriented films. But is this really in the film or do the monks simply leave the temple in search of girls and pizza? As the amateur film critic William Schultz says in the HanCinema review of the film, "*A Little Monk* goes into much more ambiguous territory, by giving us characters who don't actually seem to like Buddhism all that much, and yet they appear to have been forced into the faith by circumstance and don't really have any way of getting out."<sup>17</sup> Unlike the monks in *A Hometown in Heart*, this does appear to be the case in *A Little Monk*. While the director of *A Hometown in Heart* went to North Korea after making the film, the director of *A Little Monk* went on to make a 3D sexual love story, *3d Natal*, even though he is a Buddhist.<sup>18</sup> This too seems fitting for the respective times.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.hancinema.net/hancinema-s-film-review-a-little-monk--giveaway-68368.html> (accessed June 12, 2015)

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.pressian.com/ezview/article\\_main.html?no=8189](http://www.pressian.com/ezview/article_main.html?no=8189) (accessed June 12, 2015)

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## 한글 요약

함세덕 (1915-1950) 의 희곡 (『동승』) 을 기초로 윤용규 (b. 1913) 가 감독하여 1949 년 출시한 영화 『마음의 고향』 은 최초의 한국불교 영화로 알려져 있다. 그 영화는 전기조차 없을 정도로 문명의 혜택을 누리지 못하는 산사의 생활을 매우 잘 묘사하고 있고, 본 영화의 주요한 인물로 고아 출신 동자승인 도성은 산사에서 우리 조상들이 살아온 전통적 방식으로 계속 살아야할 지 귀부인의 양자로서 근대문명의 혜택을 누리면서 서울에서 살아야할 지 결정을 해야할 상황에 직면하였다. 그래서 본 영화는 해방 이후 한국사회가 처한 다양한 사회-정치적 상황 속의 한국전통과 불교를 주요 등장인물인 도성과 몇 명의 보조 등장인물들을 통해서 묘사하고 있다. 그 당시의 한국인들은 급변하는 한국사회 속에서 불확실성을 가질 수 밖에 없었고 그 불확실성에 대한 불안을 각자가 처한 입장에서 다양한 방식으로 해결하려고 노력하였다. 본 저자들은 고아, 향수, 근대성, 모성, 그리고 업과 같은 여러가지 모티브들을 채용하여 본 영화를 다양한 관점에서 학문적으로 분석하였다. 본 영화는 한국인들이 근대 산업화 사회에 참여하면서 한국전통을 버릴 수 밖에 없는 현실에도 불구하고 그들의 마음의 고향으로 불교를 소개하고 있고, 동승으로 대표되는 그들의 마음 속에 뿌리 깊이 내재해 있는 그들의 모성 (불교/전통문화) 를 드러내고 있다. 본 저자들은 윤용규가 감독하여 1949 년도에 출시한 『마음의 고향』 과 그 작품을 2002 년도에 리메이크하여 출시한 주경중 (b. 1959) 의 『동승』 을 비교 분석하여 본 논문의 결론을 맺었다.

키워드: 한국불교영화, 함세덕, 윤용규, 주경중, 『마음의 고향』, 『동승』, 불확실성, 근대성, 향수, 모성