

## From ‘Screenwriting for Sound’ to Film Sound Maps: The Evolution of Live Tone’s Creative Alliance with Bong Joon-ho

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### Abstract:

In his article ‘Screenwriting for Sound’, Randy Thom makes a persuasive case that sound designers should be involved in film production ‘as early as the screenplay...early participation of sound can make a big difference’. Drawing on a critically neglected yet internationally significant example of a creative alliance between a director and post-production team, this article demonstrates that early participation happens in innovative ways in today’s globally competitive South Korean film industry.

This key argument is presented through close analysis of the ongoing collaboration between Live Tone - the leading audio postproduction studio in South Korea – and internationally acclaimed director Bong Joon-ho, who has worked with the company on all six of his feature films to date. Their creative alliance has recently ventured into new and ambitious territory as audio studio and director have risen to the challenge of designing the sound for the two biggest films in Korean movie history, *Snowpiercer* and *Okja*. Both of these large-scale multi-language movies were planned at the screenplay stage via coordinated use of Live Tone’s singular development of ‘film sound maps’. It is this close and efficient interaction between audio company and client that has helped Bong and Live Tone bring to maturity their plans for the two films’ highly challenging soundscapes.

Through practitioner interviews with Live Tone staff as well as the results of original empirical research into both English and Korean-language sources, we explain what a Live Tone ‘film sound map’ is, consider how it functions as an early blueprint for the design of ambitious soundscapes, and illustrate how it facilitates ongoing creative interaction among key personnel on *Okja* as well as *Snowpiercer*.

Keywords:

Live Tone, Bong Joon-ho, screenwriting, film sound maps, creative collaboration, *Okja*, *Snowpiercer*

In his 2011 article for *The New Soundtrack*, ‘Screenwriting for Sound’, celebrated Skywalker Sound practitioner Randy Thom makes a persuasive case that sound designers should be involved in film production ‘as early as the screenplay...early participation of sound can make a big difference’ (2011: 103, 106). In his words:

‘[S]ound design is *not* actually something that should only happen in post-production on a film or a video...rather...sound design is something that needs to happen much earlier, beginning with the script. And if not beginning with the script, then with re-writes of the script, or at least very early on in the production process, when there’s still time for sound ideas to percolate up and have an affect on creative ideas in all the other crafts. Unfortunately, today filmmakers really only begin to think about sound in serious terms during what’s called post-production. By that time decisions have been made and implemented in all the other crafts, and this has made narrower and narrower the number of possibilities available to the sound people to participate in the storytelling. As a result, in each project sound finds itself in a creative straightjacket in which the only thing it can attempt to do is to decorate what already exists, decorate what is a *fait accompli*. As far as I know there are no great film sound tracks that have been done that way. Great sound design is not something that you apply cosmetically to an existing piece of work.’ (Thom 2011: 103)

Drawing on a critically neglected yet internationally significant example of a ‘creative alliance between the director and post-production team’ (Beck 2016: 80), this article demonstrates that early participation happens in innovative ways in today’s globally competitive South Korean film industry.

This key argument is presented through close analysis of the ongoing collaboration between Seoul-based Live Tone - the leading audio post-production studio in South Korea - and internationally acclaimed director Bong Joon-ho, who has worked with the company on all six of his feature films to date: *Barking Dogs Never Bite* (Flandeuseu-eui gae, 2000 – hereafter *Barking*), *Memories of Murder* (Salin-eui chueok, 2003 – hereafter *Memories*), *The Host* (Geomul, 2006), *Mother* (Madeo, 2009), *Snowpiercer* (Seolguk-yeolcha, 2013) and *Okja* (2017). (A seventh collaboration, *Parasite*, is currently in production). This is a relationship that has developed and matured as each successive project has grown in scale, from the modestly budgeted early films to two recent international blockbusters. Budgeted at an estimated \$40 million (US), *Snowpiercer* (co-produced with the Weinstein Company) was the most expensive Korean film to date before *Okja* (co-produced with Netflix), which was budgeted at \$50 million (US).<sup>1</sup>

The partnership between Bong and Live Tone is significant because, amongst contemporary Korean directors, Bong stands out as a leading figure who demonstrates the quality and ambition of the country's commercial filmmaking. In 2013, the Korean Film Archive (2013) published the results of a poll conducted to select the one hundred greatest Korean films. The list contains seventeen films made between 2000 and 2012, three of which – *Memories*, *The Host*, and *Mother* – were directed by Bong. Moreover, *Memories* was ranked in the top ten as the only title from the 2000s. These impressive results indicate the critical recognition of Bong as a popular auteur-director in the contemporary Korean film scene. In addition, his films are highly acclaimed by overseas critics and audiences. For example, *The Host*, a creature feature and domestic box-office record-breaker, was invited to the Directors Fortnight Section at the Cannes International Film Festival before being selected, in 2011, as one of the ten best films of the 2000s by *Cahiers du Cinema*. And both of Bong's more recent large-scale titles were shot primarily in English. *Snowpiercer*, a post-apocalyptic sci-fi parable featuring major stars and a multinational cast, is a benchmark achievement for the globalizing contemporary South Korean film industry. *Okja*, a satiric fable about the greediness of capitalism and a love between a young girl and a genetically modified super-pig, opened worldwide on Netflix in June 2017, shortly after it had stirred controversy at Cannes since it was produced for the online streaming service as a commercial feature 'film'. In all

these ways, among others, Bong Joon-ho is not just leading Korean movies' globalizing drive. He is also pushing the boundaries of international moviemaking and distribution.

However, despite the fame and significance of Bong's films, little scholarly writing currently exists on their carefully crafted soundtracks.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, notable accounts of Bong's films have constructed a dominant understanding of his oeuvre based on the filmmaker's use of *mise-en-scène*. Korean film journalists have a predilection for dubbing Bong's directing style as 'Bong-tail' – a neologism, formed by conjoining his surname and the English word 'detail', deployed to indicate his mastery of fine details.<sup>3</sup> This approach, which claims that Bong's *mise-en-scène* is charged with multiple layers of meaning within a distinct aesthetic manner that is interesting to explicate, is sometimes also focused around use of an alternative moniker, 'the Bong Joon-ho style' (Huh 2008: 42). Either way, though – and in common with most inquiries into *mise-en-scène* in academic film studies – accounts of both 'Bong-tail' and 'the Bong Joon-ho style' are habitually presented solely in terms of *visuality*, or 'the image'. Such a lack of research into the soundscapes of Bong's films epitomizes the long-standing conventions that prioritize image over sound in academic Korean film studies.<sup>4</sup> Yet as this article hopes to demonstrate, Bong Joon-ho's film style cannot be fully comprehended without understanding the key role that audio design plays as one of its constituent elements.

As its work with Bong, among other internationally renowned directors, testifies, Live Tone is a major sound studio whose growth is closely entwined with the recent development of the South Korean film industry as a globally competitive enterprise.<sup>5</sup> The diversity of the company's filmography vividly illustrates the industry's artistic, generic and commercial trajectories over the past two decades.<sup>6</sup> It has accompanied Bong on his cinematic journey since his debut feature, and both the popularity and critical reputation of the director's work indicate that the partnership between him and Live Tone has been significant as well as close and ongoing.

In what follows, we explicate how the creative alliance between Bong and Live Tone has evolved to the point where their collaborative projects are now planned at or even before the screenplay stage via coordinated use of Live Tone's singular development of 'film sound

maps'.<sup>7</sup> It is this intimate and efficient interaction between audio company and client that has helped Bong and Live Tone bring to maturity their plans for the highly challenging 'glocal' soundscapes of *Snowpiercer* and *Okja*. Following the benchmark achievement of *Mother* – the first Korean film ever to be nominated for a prestigious Golden Reel by the US-based Motion Picture Sound Editors (the leading international society of audio engineers) – the production of these two complex projects demonstrate that this union has ventured into new and ambitious territory in ways that resonate with Thom's call for sound's early participation.

### **Live Tone and Bong Joon-ho: 'Realistic with Impacts'**

Before getting to the heart of the matter, then, it is helpful to consider how the partnership between Bong and Live Tone developed across the director's early films.

The first encounter between director and sound studio provided Live Tone with compelling evidence that here is a 'director who thinks in terms of sound' (Thom 2011: 108). For the opening scene of *Barking*, Bong supplied an excellent example of his own auditory awareness. Indicative of its inventiveness is its subtle use of the varying channels of the surround sound system, wherein, one by one, the noise of a barking dog is presented in continuous rotation. This sonic arrangement, requested by Bong, serves two functions. On the one hand, it immediately establishes a sense of narrative space for the audience. (The subsequent plot points unravel in tandem with the main character's confusion over the source of the barking sound in the vicinity of the film's main setting: a residential apartment complex). On the other hand, it allows the director quickly - and cleverly - to confirm whether the public exhibition space has been properly calibrated for the surround sound system. Once Bong hears the dog's bark floating around the speakers he can leave the theatre, satisfied that everything is in order.

On their subsequent breakthrough international hit, *Memories*, Bong and his by now preferred audio studio worked more closely together to convey his sonic vision - albeit a vision delivered, at this point, mostly at the post-production stage. From this film onwards, the soundtracks on which director and sound studio have labored are characterized by the multi-

layered articulation of generic cinematic tropes and local social realities, combined to deliver a powerful new force to the audience.

Consider in this respect, then, that one of the most agreed-upon perceptions of Bong's films by Korean critics is that he strives to maintain a sense of social reality for Korean audiences. Here, the director's films are believed to draw upon spatio-temporal aspects easily identified with, or that otherwise embody, 'the locality' (Han 2015: 262).<sup>8</sup> They are set in recognizable (often humdrum) places (for example, *The Host* is set on and by the Han river in Seoul), and refer to social and political issues relevant to the Korean public (for example, *Memories* is based upon a true life historical serial murder case). For these reasons, Bong's work lets Korean audiences immediately identify their settings and themes and so emotionally engage with the events depicted.

Equally, Bong's films are also perceived to convey local stories against the grain of wider, often international, generic conventions (Kim 2006). In this view, as he himself once commented, the primary characteristic of his work can be encapsulated as 'a clash between the mundane and the fantasy; and between the generic and the Korean' (quoted in *Cine 21* 2005: 24). Like other South Korean filmmakers of his generation, Bong grew up watching a range of American titles.<sup>9</sup> And his familiarity with US genre films functions as a compelling artistic resource. In the case of *Memories*, for instance, the director's intention reportedly was to make 'a crime movie set within the reality of Korea...but not in the style of a Hollywood genre movie.'<sup>10</sup> Conversely, while working on *The Host* he was conscious of the fact that it references 'a genuinely American genre' – the monster movie. 'This time,' he is quoted as saying, 'I am going for it while being clearly aware of the genre...[L]et's give this genuinely American genre a hard time while bringing it to a foreign land' (quoted in Park and Kim 2006: 285). Yet one result of injecting – or, if you will, introjecting – local issues with generic tools is narrative indeterminacy (Han 2015: 280). As Huh Moonyung (2008: 43) puts it: 'this attempt to create discomfort, which is connected with the introduction of local politics, delays the predicated course of the genre, sends it askew, and ultimately leads it to a totally unforeseen destination.'

To these intriguing general arguments concerning Bong's films can be added further insights regarding sound more specifically. In one of the few existing studies of the audio dimensions of Bong's output, Kim Nam-hee (2007: 116) defines the key qualities of *Memories* and *The Host* as 'highly fabricated realistic sound'. According to Kim, the realism of such works is created largely at the post-production stage; this is the point when real production sounds captured on set and location are combined with artificial noises derived from studio recordings. Kim notes, too, that multiple layers of audio, including ambient sound and music, are finely coordinated as sound montage by the extremely subtle volume control of each element. '[S]urround sound images' emphasizing audio direction and focus constitutes another vital ingredient of a Bong Joon-ho soundtrack as these facilitate the audience's immersion in the – at times disorienting – narrative drama via multiple channels (Kim 2007: 102, 109, 115).

Given that when it comes to the design of his own soundtracks Bong is himself an uncommonly savvy filmmaker, what does Live Tone contribute to the 'Bong-tail' phenomenon? Ralph Tae-young Choi, sound supervisor on all Bong's features to date, emphasizes that the audio team's key role is 'to understand the film director's subjective vision and help objectively to communicate it to the audience' (Choi 2010).<sup>11</sup> In other words, Live Tone enhances the emotional dynamics of the much-vaunted sense of place that typifies a Bong film by delivering an audio aesthetic that Choi (2015) articulates as 'realistic with impacts' – a core sonic concept that helps to define and guide the results of this close and ongoing collaboration.

Live Tone's notion of 'realistic with impacts' embodies a subtly different understanding of a Bong Joon-ho soundscape than Kim's perception that it presents 'highly fabricated realistic sound' – a phrase which (though very suggestive) merely draws attention to the fact that it is a naturalistic construction. By contrast, 'realistic with impacts' emphasizes the extra dimensions the company strives to bestow on the organization of noise as a powerful factor in the way the director's work engages its audience. Based on his experiences, Choi (2015) states that 'it is very difficult to balance the two elements: if we focus on impacts, it leads to Hollywood-style sound – exaggerated sound; if we follow the reality strictly, then the sound

goes weak.’<sup>12</sup> Viewed from this perspective, the soundtrack of a Bong Joon-ho film is the result of an effort to keep in alignment realistic (Korean) sound and audio elements with dramatic and sensory impacts more readily identified with Hollywood genres.

Practical applications of this key principle – ‘realistic with impacts’ - can be found in many key scenes in *Memories*.<sup>13</sup> For example, take the ways in which train sounds are used. (This aspect also provides a point of comparison with *Snowpiercer*, discussed below, which is set exclusively on a train). The sounds of trains appear six times, most conspicuously during two inter-related narrative climaxes.

To begin with, the scene in which the first prime suspect, Baek Gwang-ho, is fatally hit by a train illustrates how realistic – that is to say, mundane – local sounds are deployed for dramatic impacts. As mentally retarded Gwang-ho plays on the platform, detective Park (Song Kang Ho) approaches the tracks whilst shouting ‘Come down quickly! Out of the way!’. Although the train is rushing forward fast, its sound does not appear threatening at first as it can only be heard remotely in low volume. According to Choi (2015), this specific arrangement of audio aspects was intended to let the audience remain relaxed until the very last moment before the violent accident. But then the sound of the train is quickly manipulated to a high volume just before it connects with Gwang-ho’s body - and at the precise moment a sudden and loud high-pitched roar is briefly heard. The unexpectedness of this development intensifies the visceral shock felt by the spectator and allows the listener to empathize with the sense of horror that now overwhelms Park. A medium shot shows the stunned look on his face, followed by a close-up of his hand dripping blood from Gwang-ho’s pulverized body. The sense of guilt now experienced by the detective (visually signified by the blood-covered hand) mounts as the overwhelming sound of the train remains present for the entire length of this extended shot. Here, the sounds of the train are realistic and their source is apparent. Yet they also function as ‘insidious means of affective and semantic manipulation’ (Chion 1994: 34). The careful maneuvering between audio and visual dimensions adds an additional level of affect to the story as well as an extra layer to our understanding of detective Park’s emotions.<sup>14</sup>



Similarly, listeners can understand the psychological weight – the frustration – and the symbolic message that is delivered by the train sound during the paired climax at film's end. Once again, the noise of a passing train is used to emphasize how the detectives are stopped from resolving the ongoing murder case. As an enraged detective Seo shoots the last prime suspect in front of a tunnel, a train appears amid an ear-splitting roar. But because its carriages block Seo's view as they pass through the tunnel, the final suspect is able to vanish into the darkness. Once again, the sonic realism of a train sound is intensified for dramatic impacts. Now it metaphorically signals the dark power of South Korean history that nullifies all human efforts to grasp the truth.

Such examples of sonic coordination clearly signal that the aesthetic power and appeal of 'Bong-tail' are not just matters of visual *mise-en-scène*. Instead, the director's signature style is also achieved through complex manipulations of audio elements developed over a period of time working with Live Tone. To repeat: at this stage in the relationship between sound studio and client, such qualities were achieved in post-production. On subsequent projects, though, they have become based upon ever more sophisticated forms of pre-production planning.

Audio team and director started to work more closely together at the script stage - or, 'screenwriting for sound' - on *The Host*. As evidence of this, as well as further illustration of the implementation of the concept of realistic with impacts, it is worth quoting Choi (2007) at length:

'I received the script from Director Bong Joon-ho in early January 2005. After reading it, my response was "What the hell!!". [I]t is a story about a monster, as a creation of the director's imagination, that lives with us in our daily life in the contemporary world. Such a setting causes a problem – how the fictional sound of a monster can be mixed with the sound of our daily contemporary world. First of all, I had to consider how the realistic sound of the Han River, the sewages and the city as the background can be mixed with the fictional sound of the monster. In order to deal with this issue, we produced many test sounds. We also referred to the pre-produced design graphics, photos and continuity cuts of the monster in order to set

out the sound concept of the film. We also referred to the test images sent through by the US CGI company. In May 2005, before beginning filming, we tried such test versions of the monster's sound over the animatrix images that were made for setting out the concept of filming. Then the director and I concluded that the sound concept of *Alien* or *Godzilla* would not suit this project. It means that we need to create something totally new from scratch without any guidance. Due to the various factors of the filming environments, we agreed that we couldn't rely on the location sound recording so much and planned to record most of the dialogues as ADR in the post-production process...In early January 2006, we held a meeting over a draft edit and agreed that 80% of the dialogue should be recorded as ADR and the sound of the monster should be confirmed by late February.'

The subsequent production of *Mother* – as evidenced by its historic capture of a Golden Reel award – testifies to the difference made by Bong and Live Tone's greater move towards early participation of sound.<sup>15</sup> Such projects demonstrate, in Gianluca Sergi (139, 144) words, why it is important that analysis of film sound ought to 'move away from the concept of individual authorship and take[s] more into account the complex web of relationships in any given contemporary soundtrack...the degree of creative input and choice that sound people will be allowed varies tremendously according to who is in charge of the overall movie project'. In this particular instance, it is clear that the director is in charge. But Bong's relationship with his audio team has changed and matured over the years, and company and client have built trust and understanding through working together time and again.

To date the most significant innovations in the partnership between director and audio crew have been forged through the challenge of bringing to maturity the soundscapes for Bong's recent international co-productions. It is to pre-production planning on these two major projects that we now turn.

### **Film Sound Maps for Korean Glocal Productions: *Snowpiercer* and *Okja***

What is a Live Tone film sound map? Through practitioner interviews with Choi, chief sound supervisor on both *Snowpiercer* and *Okja*, and thanks to the studio granting us exclusive

access to its confidential internal documents, we provide below an explanation of this concept, illustrate how such materials function as blueprints for the design of ambitious soundscapes, and consider how they facilitate early stage coordination among key personnel.

The evolution of the creative alliance between director and audio team on *Snowpiercer* and *Okja* illustrates how, in the words of Thom (2011: 105) Bong likes to ‘throw open’ the door to sound, how he gives ‘the sound design some space to breathe.’ Put differently, Live Tone implements Bong’s vision, but with creative agency. Choi (2018) on working with Bong:

‘In the process of pre-production, we make efforts to share the sound concept beforehand and discuss how the production sound recording (or location sound recording) should be done at the filming sites. In order to realize the sound design, which the filmmaker wants to direct, we discuss the concept for the production design, the camera angles and the continuity design etc. to consider at the filming sites. To location recording engineers, we also provide the technical guidelines which they can refer to for location recording in the sets and filming locations. In the process of production, the post-sound team refer to the agreed sound list for the sound they would need in the post-production sound design. Then they visit the filming locations (or sets) to record the group walla sound, the foley sound which can only be recorded on the filming sites, or the gun tail sound of the space in gun-shot scenes.’

The film sound map is the mechanism through which such arrangements are formulated. And as the above quotation suggests, this method of sharing the company’s specific sound concept among relevant colleagues before the start of production is an example of ‘the craft of sound influencing other crafts from an early stage’ (Thom 2011: 111).

To the best of our knowledge, the key difference between Thom’s notion of ‘screenwriting for sound’ and the Live Tone ‘film sound map’ is that the latter offers a full-service written document detailing all manner of conceptual and logistical arrangements at the earliest stage of pre-production.<sup>16</sup> This information is first offered to a film’s director as part of initial contract negotiations, on the understanding that the client may or may not accept what is in effect a project proposal for all aspects of possible sonic work.

In the case of *Snowpiercer* and *Okja*, the information contained in the company's film sound maps include (among other details): full cost estimates for sound deliverables from staff expenses, facilities and equipment to special work orders such as mastering in multiple formats like Immersive 3D Sound, Dolby ATMOS, CGV SoundX and CGV ScreenX; a breakdown of work schedules and timetables for dialogue, ambiance design and editing, pre-mixing sessions, SFX design and editing, foley recording and editing as well as final mixing; and a segmentation of story arcs that maps key aesthetic elements such as voice design to the given film's overall narrative movement. In other words, such documents provide a sense of what the company's projected sound concept is, an explanation of how the audio track will be designed and delivered, and a costing of all projected expenses including preparing trailers as well as Blu-ray, DVD and HDTV releases.<sup>17</sup>

This way of working has evolved most effectively with Bong as, among contemporary Korean directors, he is 'the only person who has a clear concept about the sound from the pre-production process' (Choi 2015).<sup>18</sup> As Choi (2015) elaborates: 'Bong asks questions and discusses with me even from the stage of screenwriting and he gives me homework. Bong seems to like the idea that he has somebody who can share his ideas in that way... Other directors only have a couple of meetings before production. When I receive a screenplay, I mark up all the sound elements while reading, in order to make a sound map... It is a sound breakdown. I present this to the director in the pre-production meetings. From this map we can estimate the sound production schedule. Only Live Tone does this in Korea.'

Such shared dialogues helped all concerned bring to maturity the core sonic concept behind *Snowpiercer* - namely, the linked development of two types of narrative movement: physical and emotional. On the one hand, the story concerns a protagonist, Curtis (played by Chris Evans), who embarks on an odyssey that takes him from the tail of the train to its front. As Bong explains (Kim 2013), such physical movement takes Curtis away from one father figure, Gilliam (John Hurt), and towards another, Wilford (Ed Harris). On the other hand, Curtis' journey of separation from Gilliam and the other denizens trapped in third class constitutes a disturbance of mind. As he plunges up to and beyond first class, seeking to track down

Wilford, the man who invented the train and who now rules over it from his position in charge of the front engine, Curtis' feelings become disarranged. The agreed view between Bong and Live Tone was that to express these two levels of dynamic action, a core aesthetic principle should be observed: when the train sound is important, it should be emphasized with proper auditory impacts; but when the film needs to concentrate on the drama, the soundtrack should focus on dialogue (Choi 2015).<sup>19</sup>

Effective delivery of the movie's sound concept across Live Tone's twelve weeks work assignment also provided opportunities to enhance realism with impacts. *Snowpiercer* is the first of Bong's titles to be geographically and temporally removed from a contemporary South Korean setting. However, its principal locations – the separate railway carriages – nevertheless permit further exploration of 'a clash between the mundane and the fantasy'. (Consider, for example, how the mise-en-scène is neither new nor futuristic but comprises familiar images from past and present.) Simply put, the audio track for *Snowpiercer* is filled with affective sounds rendered from mundane sources to set out a realistic science fiction soundscape that manage to 'locate the listener within the diegesis' and 'within the minds of the characters in the diegesis' (Whittington 2007: 126).<sup>20</sup>

The forging of a form of joint thought leadership among lead filmmaker and chief sound supervisor is also evident in the production of *Okja*. Here 'director Bong created the continuity storyboard with the sound concept in his mind after he and I discussed the concept and he offered some opinions' (Choi 2017). This time around the sonic concept was to 'express and realize the character of Okja...The Okja creature has its personality as an introvert and timid female; and should be able to express emotions and to communicate with human beings. The voice should express such character and personality of Okja. On the screen, we should show that Okja is acting with other human characters in seamless coordination.' (Choi 2018)

Before the script had even been prepared, Live Tone 'received the image shots, concept art, animation and modeling works of the Okja character and began to develop the sound concept. After the script was finalized, we had a sound meeting with Director Bong three times. The

agenda of the meetings were how to design Okja's voice, how the voice can express Okja's emotions and how to record the voice of a female actress for designing the voice of Okja.' (Choi 2018) As Choi (2018) elaborates, the film 'offered a chance for us to develop the methods of approaches and expressions for the sounds of a creature who can communicate with human beings and who has the same emotions as human beings.'

To this end Live Tone prepared an elaborate film sound map to provide a clear breakdown of tasks, schedules and costings on what would prove to be a complex international shoot. As in the case of *Snowpiercer*, it also coordinated the creation of the resulting soundscape with sound designer Dave Whitehead from Park Road Post, Wellington, New Zealand (*The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* franchises): 'We recorded a voice of a Korean female actress and sent the recorded sound source to Dave for him to mix it with the animal sounds [e.g. New Zealand native pigs]. Every week he sent the work-in-progress sessions for confirmation. We confirmed them with Director Bong and sent him a list of changes to be made.' (Choi 2018) The documentation provided by the company on this matter reveal that this outsourcing included Okja voices and movements, hard SFX design, mastering for non-theatrical releases and trailers and other tasks across a significant portion of the project's total twenty four weeks work timetable (Live Tone n.d. 2).

Word constraints regrettably preclude detailed analysis of *Okja*'s intricate soundtrack at the present time. However, consulting its film sound map suggests that opportunities to create realism with impacts were structured around the physical characteristics of the title character, including the super-pig's interactions with both rural and urban physical environments. Ironically, though, Choi reveals that all this careful pre-production planning still ran up against humdrum contingencies when producer Netflix put off the schedule for the sound repetitiously to extend the amount of time allocated to visual effects (Choi 2017).

As we have been at pains to point out throughout this article, the construction of a Bong Joon-ho soundtrack is a complicated matter, albeit one that has benefitted from increasingly close pre-production planning with South Korea's leading sound studio. Bong's own ability to comprehend each of his cinematic creations in sonic terms is certainly an under-

appreciated virtue. Live Tone's contribution has been all but completely ignored. Yet from *Memories* and *The Host* to *Snowpiercer* and *Okja*, sound and image are finely coordinated, aligned with professional skill to immerse moviegoers in dramas of intense emotion.

Let us therefore draw to a close by observing that so far the most detailed film sound map developed by Live Tone for Bong is for the biggest international co-production, *Okja*. This is entirely fitting. After all, in today's complex global filmmaking economy, where workflows are geographically dispersed and need to be organized efficiently, it is more important than ever to secure early stage coordination among relevant production units. When pondering this specific South Korean creative alliance, then, the story that emerges is of a triple odyssey: towards a closer working relationship, larger-scale projects and greater international success. As proof of all this, just listen to the varying achievements of the six films made to date. And as the partnership's next two planned projects – *Parasite* and the major Hollywood movie to follow – see light of day, mark our words. This is what the journey from 'screenwriting for sound' to film sound maps sounds like.

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(co-eds., Routledge, 2007) and *Regarding Film Festivals* (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming). He is currently working (with Nikki J. Y. Lee) on a book-length study of Live Tone and the development of globally competitive South Korean film sound.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Bong plans to follow *Parasite* with another major Hollywood production.

<sup>2</sup> For exceptions, see Stringer (2011 – on *Mother*) and Lee and Stringer (2017).

<sup>3</sup> Tellingly, perhaps, Bong has expressed discontent with this label, stating: ‘I am not a pervert devil who is so obsessed with all the minor details.’ (Quoted from the director’s commentary of *The Host*, included as a special feature in the DVD box-set of the film released in South Korea in 2007.) Yet despite his own attempts to repudiate the ‘Bong-tail’ tag, it has stubbornly stuck to him, as such things tend to do.

<sup>4</sup> Existing research on Korean film sound in English mainly focuses on the transition from silent to sound cinema in the 1930s (e.g. Yecies 2008) or on the technical development of sound recording equipment (e.g. Kim 2005; Chung forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> For overviews of contemporary South Korean cinema, see Shin and Stringer (2005) and Choi (2010).

<sup>6</sup> For further information on the history of Live Tone, see the articles referenced in note 6 (above) as well as Stringer (2012). Within just a few years of its establishment (in 1996), Live Tone had started to work with a string of young directors who would go on to number among

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South Korea's most esteemed filmmakers, as well as the studio's most valued long-term collaborators - most importantly Bong and Kim Jee-woon (all but one of his seven features from *The Foul King* [Panch'igwang, 2000] to *The Age of Shadows* [Milchöng, 2016]). Other celebrated titles audio designed by the company include *Beat* (Pit'ŭ, 1997), *Christmas in August* (P'arwörŭi k'ŭrisŭmasŭ, 1998), *Peppermint Candy* (Pakhasat'ang, 1999), *Die Bad* (Chukkōna hogŭn nappŭgōna, 2000), *Oasis* (Oasisŭ, 2002), *Typhoon* (T'aep'ung, 2005), *The Chaser* (Ch'ugyōkcha, 2008), *Tidal Wave* (Haeundae, 2009), *Secret Reunion* (ŭihyōngje, 2010), *Cold Eyes* (Kamsijadŭl, 2013), *The Admiral: Roaring Currents* (Myōngrang, 2014), and *Train to Busan* (Pusanhaeng, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> We hasten to add here that the concept of the 'film sound map' in this Korean context is very different from current usage of the term 'sound map' in English contexts, i.e. to describe digital geographical maps concerned with the sonic representation of a specific location.

<sup>8</sup> All translations from Korean sources cited in this article are by Nikki J. Y. Lee.

<sup>9</sup> Aside from also being exposed to European and Asian art movies later on in his youth. See Bong 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Bong 2005, 35. The director remarks in one interview that 'I was not conscious of it until the press conference. Journalists at the conference were annoyed as I could not tell them which genre *Memories of Murder* belongs to. At that moment I instantly came up with the term "countryside village thriller"'. Quoted in Park and Kim 2006, 285.

<sup>11</sup> In recent years, we have visited Live Tone's offices in Seoul on a regular basis and built up a good working relationship with its staff. Since 2010 we have conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with Choi, who is also the studio's chief executive officer and chief sound supervisor.

<sup>12</sup> In the interests of brevity, we put to one side here the contentious claim that 'Hollywood-style sound' equates to 'exaggerated sound'.

<sup>13</sup> Since the movie is based upon a real life incident, Live Tone aspired to replicate authentic Civilian Defense Drill announcements of the period to conjure memories of the 1980s among Korean moviegoers. It also recorded trains at a small city (Jecheon) to recreate the sound of

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old carriages passing through Hwaseong, where the narrative is set. In addition, it hired a particular model of car, Daewoo's Maepsina, to further recreate period ambience. Such authentic sounds were then meticulously layered into the mix for maximum dramatic impact and to induce audience empathy. In this respect it is worth mentioning, too, that one key component of Live Tone's global competitiveness concerns the building of its own sound library. The studio has amassed a large databank of sources captured in South Korea over the past two decades. In this way, it is not reliant on renting audio assets from major suppliers in the United States and elsewhere.

<sup>14</sup> Titles such as *Memories* and *Mother* display clear affinities with the thrillers of Alfred Hitchcock. Because of a lack of space, analysis of the influence of this and other international filmmaking styles on Bong's work will not be pursued here.

<sup>15</sup> See Stringer 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Further research is required to determine whether this practice exists elsewhere in the global screen industries.

<sup>17</sup> All subsequent references to the film sound maps for these two movies refer to Live Tone (n.d.1) and Live Tone (n.d.2).

<sup>18</sup> In this same interview, Choi (2015) humorously reports that Bong will clue him in on plans for upcoming projects well in advance of structured pre-production discussions. [On *Okja*] 'He kept sending me some data via Kakaotalk [a smartphone chatting app]. I asked him why are you sending this to me? He responds "please think about the sound from now on". If I say, "I don't want to work with you anymore! Why don't you work with somebody else?", he responds: "Oh, please!". In this way he constantly sends me some ideas to think about.'

<sup>19</sup> '...most often the correct way to approach a sequence in terms of sound is to allow a single category of sound to dominate at a time, whether it be dialogue or music or sound effects, instead of trying to fire all the ammunition at once' (Thom 2011: 110).

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the audio assembly of *Snowpiercer* as a South Korean global film, see Lee and Stringer (2017)