

(DIS)AGREEMENTS

**BEYOND THE SPORADIC
SUCSESSES OF ASIAN FILMS:
THE CIRCULATION
OF KOREAN AND JAPANESE
CINEMA IN SPAIN**

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| introduction

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Greeted by audiences and cultural critics alike as the successors to traditional mass media as providers of audiovisual experiences, digital streaming platforms constitute a compelling object of interest. Their emergence as heirs to the home audiovisual market has also been studied as a key to understanding the manifest tension between the “global” and the “local” in an increasingly digitalised media context. The use of the internet by the audiovisual industry as a distribution platform has resulted in a complex relationship between infrastructures and services that allow film and television distributors and consumers to cast a much wider net in both temporal and geographical terms. On the one hand, this situation of quasi-simultaneity in the consumption of content may resemble a utopian media scenario stripped of all barriers to access, with none of the inhe-

rent boundaries or restrictions of space and time thanks to universal access to content anywhere and anytime (Iordanova, 2012). However, the logistical obstacles that can affect any region (from bandwidth speed and coverage to content access restrictions arising from licensing conflicts) pose issues that remind us that this supposed ubiquity is always dependent on contextual factors (Evans, Coughlan & Coughlan, 2017).

The promises of access anytime from anywhere that underpin the rhetoric of its promoters and defenders thus need to be contrasted against the irrefutable reality of what is actually available to viewers and how they interact with it. In this way, digital distribution of audiovisual content invites us not only to reconsider the “global/local” binary but also to analyse the significance of the conditions for access and consumption that form part

of popular culture today (Tryon, 2013). This is the case of processes like the participatory environments of so-called media convergence (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013), new forms of consumption like binge watching (Mikos, 2016) or recommendations based on algorithms (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016). These are all contemporary examples of how inseparable the audiovisual experience has become for millennials and other demographic segments that are increasingly considered important as media targets.

The growing prominence on these platforms of hugely popular genres like K-drama, Japanese *doramas* and anime (Hernández Hernández & Hirai, 2015; Wada Marciano, 2010) should not be allowed to obscure the sustained importance that Japanese and South Korean films have enjoyed for some time now on the international festival circuit—both at festivals specialising in the horror and fantasy genres (Brown, 2018; Tezuka, 2012) and in arthouse films (Ahn, 2012; Chung & Diffrient, 2015). What is the role of film festivals in this changing context? Academic research on this question has focused mainly on the dissemination, reproduction and consumption of Japanese and South Korean audiovisual production in English-speaking and Intra-Asian contexts (Chua & Iwabuchi, 2008; Iwabuchi 2004; Kim 2008, 2013, 2019), while their reception and impact in the Spanish-speaking world has been largely overlooked. In an effort to shed some light on these questions, in this edition of *(Dis)Agreements* we turn to the festival directors, whose role we believe to be decisive for the circulation of Japanese and South Korean films in Spain. As obvious authorities on the historical performance of these films in our country, the participants—Quim Crusellas and Domingo López (director and programmer, respectively, of the Asian Summer Film Festival in Vic, Catalonia), Menene Gras (director of the Asian Film Festival in Barcelona), José Luis Rebordinos (director of the San Sebastián International Film Festival in Donostia, Basque Country)

and Ángel Sala (director of the Sitges Film Festival)—share their experiences on the ins and outs of Japanese and South Korean film distribution, from the evolution (and multiplication) of their audiences to the emergence of subscription video-on-demand platforms, among other issues. ■

discussion

I. Are there any predominant aesthetic, narrative and representative features in the contemporary Japanese and/or South Korean audiovisual productions screened at festivals (in the Spanish-speaking world)? If so, to what extent do these features favour the transnational consumption of this content? Or conversely, to what extent have these characteristics traditionally hindered their consumption in other geo-cultural contexts?

Quim Crusellas

I think that there are certain “patterns” or models in the Asian films imported by festivals, cycles and exhibitions. The massive range of Japanese and Korean film production has a logical thematic and stylistic diversity, often conditioned by its platforms and channels of distribution. We thus have everything from big-budget commercial productions, with very Hollywood-esque intentions and box office returns, to video products with very small budgets but with considerable creative and ideological freedom. But the best-known and most recognised directors set the agenda for the festivals when they plan their programming, so there are high-quality films that conform to patterns that are totally acceptable to Western audiences, and even the most radical and innovative directors, like Takashi Miike or Sion Sono, in the case of Japan, or Kim Ki-duk, in the case of South Korea, are obviously accessible. At festivals with an auteur label they do seek out more inaccessible, more minimalist and ground-breaking titles, but you find these on the general festival circuit or in catalogues presented in film markets. This means that a lot of the most interesting audiovisual production gets relegated to local consumption in the country of origin, where it already has specific and generally very restricted distribution channels. Everything is globalised and everything is distributed by clearly identified groups, so that we can find films ranging from the “Koreeda style” to the Korean thriller—uncompromising, dynamic, and violent, with extreme, very well-drawn characters and an effective and masterful *mise-en-scène*—or “upscale” anime films that can

make it into the top festivals, and everyday Korean dramas that remind us of more intimate European cinema.

Menene Gras

Yes, formally you can identify typical aesthetic and narrative features that are dominant in the audiovisual productions that reach us from Japan or Korea, just as there are in the films coming from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. Iran, for example, is a particular case that meets very specific expectations: Iranian films, especially those of the younger generations who only began working on feature films after making various shorts with a visible, solid background, have a recognisable narrative structure, plotline and script. However, despite the numerous analogies that could be made between the audiovisual productions of Korea and Japan, the cultural difference is always clear, so that you can easily recognise a film from one country or the other, not only for the way they compose a particular narrative, but also because the specific locations in each case are representative of the actual places where the films are set. Obviously, Japanese cinema has had a longer and more sustained history, dating back to the Second World War, but Korean cinema has enjoyed spectacular growth over a very short time. In less than two decades, film production from this country has begun vying with Japanese cinema. It has clearly distinguished itself despite the proximity that seems to affect the two countries’ models, if it’s possible to speak of narratives that share a specific continuity in their treatment of the image. The teachers of the generations of Japanese

filmmakers who are finding success today are still classic universal filmmakers like Kenji Mizoguchi, Yasujiro Ozu or Akira Kurosawa. These directors left an indelible mark on their successors, to such an extent that it has been said more than once that Hirokazu Koreeda was the new Ozu, a description associated as well with filmmakers who have made an impact at some festivals, like Naomi Kawase, Takeshi Kitano, Kihachi Okamoto, Masahiro Shinoda or Tetsuya Nakashima, to mention a few. Korean cinema, on the other hand, has been going from strength to strength with filmmakers like Lee Chang-dong, Shin-yeon Won, Kim Jee-woon, Yeon Sang-ho, and Na Hong-jin, who have been responsible for some of the biggest titles at international festivals. So the transnational consumption of content over the last three decades is not easy to map, given that it has been very uneven, and therefore a more thoughtful approach is needed to this question, considering these two countries in a broader context, to be able to consider it in all its complexity.

Domingo López

As is the case with all foreign film industries that manage to make waves on festival circuits in the West, Asian productions that break beyond their own borders do so by taking their international audience into account. Japanese directors are quite frank in describing a certain style of film in their country as “Cannes cinema”, referring to pictures by directors like Hirokazu Koreeda or Naomi Kawase, who receive much more attention in Europe (often with films co-produced by European companies) than in their homeland. There are various targets in the promotion of Japanese cinema in Europe (a phenomenon at the macro-level that could easily be extrapolated to markets like Latin America). On the one hand, there is a type of cinema with exotic elements and social issues that connects very well with a segment of the public that is mostly female and of a certain age. On the other is a style aimed at younger audiences that

adapts well-known manga stories, both in live action and animated forms. In the case of Korea, violent action films predominate, like what Hong Kong cinema used to be known for. As happens with many other film industries, whether Asian or not, this gives a totally skewed and erroneous image of what is being made in these countries, where most production has nothing to do with what is exported.

José Luis Rebordinos

I think that the Japanese and South Korean films screened at festivals offer a wide variety of forms, styles and themes; from the most radical films, which try out new ways of telling a story, to genre films, which are also selected widely by major festivals like Cannes, Berlin, Venice or San Sebastián.

Ángel Sala

I think the Japanese and South Korean films that have been presented at festivals in the last few years are widely varied, ranging from more independent cinema to very commercial big-budget productions. A certain directorial style has been promoted through the recognition at these festivals, very especially in the case of South Korea, above all with Bong Joon-ho or Park Chan-wook, which also reflects a similar view, especially within South Korea. In Japan it is different. While the talent of Takashi Miike or Sion Sono has been widely recognised, domestically they are not viewed the same way, perhaps because of the type of film they tend to make. A consensus has been established in relation to Koreeda and some anime filmmakers, like Hayao Miyazaki, or recently with Makoto Shinkai. The focus on these filmmakers has boosted the interest of transnational viewers in Korean or Japanese cinema. I think that without the success of Bong Joon-ho or Koreeda, certain viewers would not venture to explore more films from these countries. However, it is also true that the bubble that certain au-

teurs create bursts quickly. Think of the success in Spain of Kim Ki-duk—*Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring* (Bom yeoreum gaeul gyeoul geurigo bom, 2003) or *3-Iron* (Bin-jip, 2004)—or of Shunji Iwai in France and how forgotten he is to-

day. You might say that the consumption of Asian cinema in some countries is erratic; it still has big historical gaps and moves sort of in waves or fads, as demonstrated by the recent boom of *Parasite* (Gisaengchung, Bong Joon-ho, 2019).

2. What expectations does a Spanish-speaking audience have of Japanese and South Korean films? In the disconnect between supply and demand, what contribution has been made by these countries' actions of cultural diplomacy, and more generally of public diplomacy (e.g. the strategies of official cultural promotion agencies, government subsidies for the audiovisual industry or other programs to promote cultural industries)? What role do consumer groups, audiovisual industries and national and transnational distribution circuits play? In general, do these expectations arising from different sources operate as effective commercial strategies at the transnational level?

Quim Crusellas

The audience grows with the cinema. And their knowledge and preferences grow with the expansion of possibilities for accessing that cinema. In the case of Japan, TV anime, the Japanese animated series that found success in Spain in the 1970s, created a group of viewers who recognised the narrative qualities, and especially the stylistic qualities, of these products. Series like *Marco, 3000 Leagues in Search of Mother* (Haha o Tazunete Sanzen Ri, Isao Takahata, Fuji TV: 1976), *Heidi, Girl of the Alps* (Alps no Shōjo Heidi, Isao Takahata, Fuji TV: 1974) or *Mazinger Z* (Tomoharu Katsumata, Fuji TV: 1972-1974) were the precursors to *Dragon Ball* (Daisuke Nishio and Minoru Okazaki, Fuji TV: 1986-1989) and the whole manga and anime phenomenon that came after them. And very soon, types, genres, styles, etc., were established within the anime movement. And today, anime audiences and manga readers are expert consumers of animation, knowledgeable and capable of classifying many different spin-offs from a single artistic source. In other genres, the progression has been slower or later, but there are successful cases, like J-Horror or Korean *noir*. Historically,

there have been the *kaijū* (Japanese monster movies), *chanbara* (samurai cinema), ninjas, *yakuza*, *tokusatsu* (Japanese special effects films) and the wisdom of the classics, like Ozu, Mizoguchi or Kurosawa. Identifying in some way with a genre, a filmmaker or a fashion establishes some huge expectations every time a new project is released. For the producers and distributors of these countries, the support of government departments and the diplomatic corps is good news. It is a good boost for promotion and prestige, in addition to facilitating the release and distribution of their films beyond the local market. And for the public agencies involved it is an honour and an obligation to promote the culture and the film catalogue of their countries. This makes for a convergence of interests. And in this endeavour all the players are important: the audience receiving a sometimes invisible film industry in search of a market, and the distribution circuits with the possibility of drumming up business on different fronts, from pay-TV platforms eager to reach all kinds of customers even in the most difficult niches, to the traditional channels for cinema, DVDs and Blu-rays, with a much more restricted but loyal audience.

Menene Gras

It cannot be denied that there is an interest in discovering new film industries, but the consumption of certain productions that seem to show signs of a welcome reception is never guaranteed. The mechanisms in place to ensure a fluid distribution to all the potential markets and audiences for Asian cinema in the West, or for films made in the West in Asia, are probably insufficient. This is true not only for cinema, but also for literature and visual arts, or for cultural production in general. Why isn't there more interaction in these fields, in a society that shares the potential for speedy transmission of media content and a global market? It may be that the saturation resulting from the omnipresence of screens in our lives is one of the factors behind the resistant attitude that seems such a common reaction to the new, to what comes from far away and therefore affects us less. In any case, it's not always possible to speak of expectations met in relation to the role played by public diplomacy on both sides, if we accept that we can speak of parties on two sides in this field where promotion is essential to get a response from the audience that is supposed to consume the cultural product in question. It is obvious that the efforts of the Japanese and Korean governments have been decisive, both in terms of film creation and production and in terms of promotion. Japan is still the country that spends the most after the United States on exporting its culture, and the country that coordinates the most assistance programs for audiovisual creation and the promotion of its cultural production. Since the Korean government was able to begin implementing these programs and funds for audiovisual production, its success has been indisputable. In both cases, institutions of public diplomacy like the Japan Foundation and the Korea Foundation have also been important for supporting promotion, whatever trajectory they have taken. In any circumstance, they have always constituted a major reinforcement of the direct action taken by these government agencies in their respective countries.

On the other hand, distributors have in turn contributed considerably to boosting these film industries, demonstrating their interest both through the sale of rights to European and North American distributors and in the awards received by productions from Japan and Korea at the biggest international festivals in the Western world.

Domingo López

In the end, it is the viewer who has the last word, who decides whether a product is accepted or not, regardless of the efforts made by diplomatic promotion offices. At most, these offices manage to create cycles for film libraries that often do little more than baffle a viewer whose expectations are not going to be met. If a Korean thriller fan is presented with the real hits of the year in South Korea, they will only be disappointed to find a bunch of parochial comedies and dramas.

José Luis Rebordinos

Spanish-speaking audiences generally view Japanese and South Korean films with the expectation of something exotic, different, with a slower narrative tempo, etc. However, the keener film-lovers, who go to festivals like Sitges or San Sebastián, already understand the full complexity and variety of the cinema from these countries. I think that in the case of these two countries, the importance of the work done by their official promotion agencies is not as great as that done by other countries like France or Chile. I think that here what is more important is the positioning of the audience itself and of the distribution companies—consider, for example, the case of *Your Name* (Kimi no na wa, Makoto Shinkai, 2016) and *Selecta Vision*. Cultural diplomacy, with its focus, also contributes to getting the films of its country programmed more regularly.

Ángel Sala

I think there is a big historical problem with the distribution of South Korean and Japanese audio-

visual content for Spanish-speaking audiences. Dubbing is impossible (it has proven ineffective) and the need to screen the films with Spanish subtitling, with the financial crisis and the decline of specialised circuits, is proving more difficult. The crisis in viewer numbers and their ageing (not only chronologically but culturally) is making exhibitors and distributors look for independent products and unusual film industries that appeal to the tastes of these consumers. And that's where we find a predominant taste that is somewhat conformist and not really open to surprises or visual excesses, which radically filters out a lot of films coming from Japan or South Korea in favour of bourgeois comedies and inconsequential show-cases, or an occasionally harmless US indie film. And this explains why Koreeda, beyond the question of quality, finds success with a style of storyline that appeals to this sector of viewers, or titles like *Sweet Bean* (An, Naomi Kawase, 2015) and even some of Hong Sang-soo's films. You can see that today nobody remembers Kitano, who was a success in niche film circuits in the 1990s, perhaps

too violent and rough for these contemporary audiences. And this isn't helped by the lack of risks being taken by distributors and exhibitors, which are more concerned about not losing this conformist audience than recovering a more open audience or attracting a younger one. Moreover, distributors specialising in Asian cinema have all but disappeared, and the ones that remain operate more for home video or platforms. In Spain, the only ones still carrying the flame are Media3 for more general films (and focusing more on re-releases), La aventura and, above all, Selecta Vision for anime, along with some historic distributors of art-house, like Golem, with its relationship with Koreeda. The official agencies of these countries, like the Korean Film Council or the Japan Foundation, have a good relationship with festivals, but they could do more to support the promotion of the product at these forums, as well as outside the festivals through museums, film libraries and other spaces, in addition to reminding us more actively of their country's film history, an educational task that has yet to be fully addressed.

3. The relatively recent success of some Japanese and South Korean film offerings has generally been marginal in terms of box office returns in the Spanish-speaking world. However, they continue to increase in numbers at these festivals. How can we explain this divergence between what we could call their marginal presence in the "general market" and their success in spaces of "specialised consumption"? Might this dynamic be due to the audience's tendency to identify Japanese and South Korean cinema with certain genres (action thriller, horror) that traditionally fall outside mainstream tastes? Might the need for cultural references or metanarratives complicate their enjoyment and recognition by a broader audience?

Quim Crusellas

The general market continues to be held hostage by the major studios. Most cinemas are still tied to contracts with big distributors, which are the ones that have the most promotional channels and outlets. The audience is an American mainstream movie audience. Asian cinema, and

in this case Japanese and Korean films, have a very small but loyal audience. The festivals have become the alternative to this mainstream circuit. They're like little specialist shops compared to the huge department store filled with familiar brands and a sensation of product "cloning". Even so, Japanese and Korean films, with successes

like *Your Name*, *Sweet Bean*, or more recently, *Parasite*, have managed to make inroads thanks to some valiant independent distributors. Asian cinema followers deconstruct the assimilation of Asian titles with certain mainstream genres. The horror genre in Japan is not really the same as it is in the United States, and comedy or detective films certainly are not. There is a certain type of viewer who is more specific about the genre or topic: it isn't just a thriller, but a Korean thriller. It isn't just a "horror movie" but a "Japanese horror movie". And adding the demonym to these genres turns them into something much more specific and identifiable. For decades we have been used to seeing American cinema and it is comfortable for us as viewers when we watch Hollywood movies. But the diversity that we are fortunate to be offered by festivals, new broadcasting platforms, etc., has led to new cultural connections, habits and even ways of telling a story that are becoming increasingly accepted. The exotic is not rejected any more; instead it has become something intriguing and attractive. Asian cinema continues to be an escape for more curious viewers, but it is opening up more and more to a broader public outside the conventional patterns of film distribution.

Menene Gras

What happens at film festivals doesn't have much to do with the products that find commercial success in this sector. However, there are exceptions like *Parasite*, to give a current example, directed by the Korean Bong Joon-ho, which is breaking box-office records in Europe after taking the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Festival. South Korean and Japanese cinema is not always identified with the horror or the action thriller genre. It might seem that way if we think of the audiences that attend a fantasy film festival like Sitges, where a third of the programming is Asian genre cinema. Films like *Intimate Strangers* (Wanbyeokhan tain, Lee Jae-kyoo, 2018), for example, would probably

never make it into our theatres, although we did select it for the Asian Film Festival in Barcelona (AFAA). In fact, despite the efforts of certain European distributors to introduce different national film industries to the market, a lot of films commonly only get screened at festivals, regardless of the interest they arouse or the awards they win. We are a very long way from achieving an exchange of productions between Europe and the United States and the Asian continent. At last year's AFAA (2019), we featured 133 films and 25 shorts from 23 different countries: Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Philippines, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Laos, Macao, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan (China), and Vietnam. All the productions were originally released in 2018 or 2019, except for one in 2017. Of all the countries represented, some attracted attention because their films are already well-known, and a significant contribution was expected from them in terms of what the new generations are producing right now. In countries like Afghanistan or Kazakhstan, there is considerable curiosity about what is happening in the sector, as there is about the stories being told in some countries of southeast Asia, like Singapore or Indonesia, where the film industry is growing exponentially, especially in the latter case. There is still a lot to be done, however, to bridge the distances between countries and cultures that still know so little about each other.

Domingo López

Genre films (whether horror films or thrillers) have always formed part of the mainstream, but Asian cinema has always been part of a separate niche of fans, like manga or opera lovers. It has never become part of general mainstream cinema (with the exception of a few isolated successes) and it is unlikely that it ever will be. Most audiences are used to the narrative codes of Hollywood and anything that doesn't conform to that model

seems strange and needs the stories concerned to pass through the filter of a remake. Beyond the festivals and conventions, there is more access now than ever to Asian cinema via platforms like Amazon Prime or Netflix, which include hundreds of titles from all over Asia in their catalogue for consumption by the Asian population living outside their home countries. However, most of these titles are unknown even to Asian cinema fans, because they haven't been filtered for their tastes and they end up tired of watching things that don't fit with the idea they had of what Korean cinema was, for example.

José Luis Rebordinos

What happens in Spain to the films from these two countries is not so different from what happens to films coming from Latin America, or even from other European countries. Any films that don't come with the support of the huge promotional machinery of the US film industry have a hard time at the box office. And it has nothing to do with the identification with a genre; on the contrary, genre films are popular and commercial, so if that were the case, they should attract a large number of viewers. Every film that is released ends up being marginal unless it is from the United States, except for the odd isolated case. Sometimes there are pleasant surprises, like the big box office success all over the world, including Spain, of *Parasite*.

Ángel Sala

Festival audiences are looking for something different, to escape the wasteland that the film

theatre has turned into. Asian genre films find success at niche festivals through a tradition that was born in the 1990s with the impact of J-Horror or the new Korean fantasy or action genre and that continues into our times in the form of following certain filmmakers or trends, and seeking out new innovations. But they are also successful at generalist festivals and not just with genre films, although the division between genres is blurrier in Asian cinema. *Parasite* is a comedy, drama, horror and suspense, as was *The Handmaiden* (Agassi, Park Chan-wook, 2016), which was an extraordinary blend of genres. Today, horror and science fiction dominate the tastes of mainstream viewers. There's no need to look further than the box office, but based on an American template, at the level of both the blockbuster and the indie film. Perhaps in some filmmakers it is possible to see the influence of Asian cinema on the mainstream, such as in the work of Christopher Nolan, Mike Flanagan or the odd indie director like Oz Perkins, but the Asian stylistic models are viewed today as belonging very much to a niche. I don't think this adversely affects the perception of films from these countries in general, as although there are viewers who identify Japanese or Korean cinema with "violence" or "weirdness", the success of Koreeda, Kawase or Hong Song Soo give it a reputation for sensitivity and detail, as well as high quality. The idea of Japanese or Korean genre films comes from the cult film (sometimes with a massive following), from the festivals, and now from streaming platforms, now that direct home video has practically disappeared.

4. To what extent has the internet transformed the impact of niche festivals? In this context, do you believe that the festival brand benefits more from its role as a content influencer for niche audiences, or that instead it should be identified with the expansion of new horizons through new film industries?

Quim Crusellas

The internet is what the local movie theatre was in the 1980s. The most unexpected films are there, and some of them are copies of dubious origin. And this “guiding” enthusiast hooked into the “torrent” is also a festival fan. Instead of an illegal way of watching a film with no distribution in our country, it has turned into a place to explore and discover titles. And the fact that online platforms have become popular throughout the population is thanks to this launching pad. Personally, I think the internet is an excellent support for festivals like ours. It’s a display window that informs, nourishes and spreads our work; and through digital media and forums from different countries we discover titles in pre-production and advances, and we find out about other festivals, film industries, etc. It is the movie house of the twenty-first century.

Menene Gras

The internet has contributed, paradoxically, to the dissemination of film industries that were previously out of reach, with ease of access to some productions thanks to platforms like Netflix or Filmin, or due to widespread piracy, in the case of films that are uploaded to the internet illegally. However, it is also true that this dissemination has occurred to the detriment of film theatres, where audiences used to share the experience of watching a picture. This has been largely lost, yet cinema continues to serve an irreplaceable function. In this sense, the role of festivals responds to initiatives launched in the sector to show films that don’t tend to make it to the commercial screens, as they are projects that make their particular proposal, which the distributors try to exploit, although not always successfully. Consequently, it is impossible to guarantee that festivals

will not turn into niche events or become content influencers for niche audiences. The expansion of horizons is also still related to the inclusion of new geographies in the context of everything that comes out of the cultural turn in geography, to the extent that it is not only a geographic expansion of the regions where films come from, but a proposal that allows the audience to explore film industries and narratives which, in principle, are unknown to them or not as familiar as is sometimes assumed.

Domingo López

Film festivals function as events where thousands of fans come together to share a passion, expecting certain identifying features in the programming that will ensure that they can repeat the kinds of moments they have enjoyed in the past. The festival thus functions in both ways, offering viewers what they expect to see, while at the same time they discover directors and styles that may fit with their tastes, always within the festival’s parameters.

José Luis Rebordinos

The internet has changed everything. The immediacy it offers allows users to share opinions and reviews in real time. But it also complicates the ability to distinguish between stakeholders and non-stakeholders. We have access to more information than ever, but it’s impossible for us to analyse it in depth. That’s why influencers are more important than ever. And festivals are increasingly occupying that space. And yes, festivals are a good place to access new categories of films, either in terms of their place of origin or in terms of their formal, aesthetic or narrative qualities.

Ángel Sala

Platforms, both general and niche, and festivals are bound to go hand in hand, based on content influencing (which is already very difficult through the promotional press or critics) or promotion. But the activity of a festival shouldn't stop the-

re, as it is essential for it to be researching new markets, emerging film industries and young talent, as well as audiovisual archaeology through recovering titles that were lost, poorly distributed or worthy of another look, and the restoration of indisputable classics.

5. To what extent do specialised festivals have a responsibility to know about film industries outside the hegemony of English-language production? How can they give visibility to film traditions eclipsed by historiography (taking advantage of the interest in certain genres, based on commercial successes that don't get exported, expanding the range of genres, exploring new languages)? And, most importantly, do "peripheral film industries" constitute a source for renewing the language of contemporary cinema, contributing to cultural hybridisation, or alternatively, are they merely exotic contributions to the Western view of cinema?

Quim Crusellas

In our case, this hybridisation is essential. We are not just a movie theatre. We like to show the cultural, historical and ethnographic dimension of the films. In Vic there is a large Asian community that participates actively in our festival. They prepare meals from the countries of origin of each film, there are performances and exhibitions of dance and martial arts before each screening, and at some of them, like the ones dedicated to the Bollywood film industry, we offer a natural recreation of an Indian film screening, with people singing and dancing songs during the film, getting up and whistling when the leading man or woman appears, etc. It is essential and exciting to imbue the film with what it has in its suitcase: its origin and complementary dimensions. This turns it into a unique experience, distinct from a conventional show in a Western film theatre.

Menene Gras

That responsibility is taken on in most offerings made at festivals insofar as their resources allow. Obviously, there is an interest in expanding the geographical range of the productions selected for

screening at most festivals, because you always want to be presenting something that is not accessible or has been successful in other parts of the world. It is equally true that festivals don't always manage to give visibility to film traditions eclipsed by the hegemony of the English-speaking tradition or the dominance of Eurocentrism over other cultures. But this is not the case only in cinema, as it exists in any area of audiovisual culture and culture in general. The never-ending debate over the Eurocentric positions that are sometimes repressed but nevertheless still present does not end when you think you've adopted measures to address it, despite their explicitness. There is a lot of talk of Eurocentrism without acknowledging that it comes into play almost unconsciously in a lot of cases. The result of its stagnation is the absence of other worlds that are also our world for our particular radars. This situation exposes the damage that this focus has caused and how hard it is to correct its impact. On the other hand, peripheral film industries make an important contribution to the renewal of the language of contemporary cinema, both for the cultural difference they reveal and for the stories they tell. Without

doubt, despite contributing in some cases to the maintenance of the exotic nature of their origins (as, for example, is the case of Afghani cinema, where audiences expect to obtain information related to everyday life, both urban and rural, in a country about which they know very little), most film industries that the West considers “peripheral” in Eurocentric terms obviously take part in the cultural hybridisation resulting from contact, which is inevitably associated with the contemporary diasporas and other phenomena that have established a need to know the Other. It is clear that this has favoured the renewal of languages and narratives, and it has also had an impact on the perception of those others that we cannot go on ignoring. Cinema is one of the best ways for us to get closer to one another.

Domingo López

It is clear that all international cinema, and especially Asian cinema, has had a huge influence on Western cinematic traditions, especially among genre films. We try to carry out the work of cinematic archaeology through cycles like the ones we have organised dedicated to Panna Rittikrai, to *kaijū eiga*, to *tokusatsu* or to Stephen Chow. We can't fight against the commercial sameness imposed by Hollywood, but we can show spectators that there is much more beyond the mainstream, and leave it up to them to explore it, after giving them a little taste. Insofar as Japanese cinema is concerned, comedy is one of the genres that has never made the leap into the West (again, with the odd exception of award-winning titles) and at the festival we try to give visibility to titles that are very well accepted by our audience, both indie works and more commercial fare.

José Luis Rebordinos

As festivals we have the responsibility to give a voice to different films that don't merely reproduce the same old features of the dominant film tradition. Peripheral film industries often represent

an opportunity to gain access to other ways of seeing. They are usually in countries undergoing economic, political and social transformation, which make films with less money, but sometimes with much more freedom (this is not the case of Japan or South Korea, but it would be of India, Peru or Bolivia). But increasingly, the periphery is getting closer to the centre; the global world is making distances much shorter, but it also tends towards cultural hegemonisation. In any case, what we need to do is get away from the exotic view of emerging film industries...

Ángel Sala

Peripheral film industries are being incorporated into the world of audiovisual culture as a base for information on trends and talent. Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe are all on the rise in this sense, although Hollywood's synergy and sympathetic relationship with talent agencies has many filmmakers very quickly seduced into the US theatre of operations, which itself is increasingly global and diverse and is being enriched (and should be enriched more) by these peripheral film industries. In the last few years, commercial films and Oscar winners have been directed by filmmakers outside Hollywood that have more or less adapted to the system, like Ang Lee, Guillermo del Toro, Alfonso Cuarón, or Iñárritu. A few decades ago, it was unthinkable that a film like *Roma* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2018) would be nominated for best film given its country of origin and its off-theatrical release (Netflix). Yet Cuarón won the award for best director. Hollywood is changing little by little and this has been influenced by many factors, including those peripheral film industries.

6. There are suggestions that the new subscription video on demand (SVoD) platforms are making mass audiences more active and demanding, both in relation to content and to its reception. How does this affect the programming and development of a specialised festival? Are we really witnessing a paradigm shift in the status of the spectator, even in the case of the less specialised viewer?

Quim Crusellas

In our case, VoD is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it helps so much to promote titles that are not easily accessible to the general public and offers them the possibility of enjoying a different type of film. There is very little distribution of these kinds of films on VoD platforms, but there are also social network channels (Twitter and Facebook) that give them visibility. On the other hand, the purchase of recently completed titles released via platforms conditions the programming. Some titles are dropped in the middle of negotiations because they get purchased by Netflix or another platform. But it is always important to find a middle ground, a collateral support, and that's what we have done with Movistar. Through this platform, we have access to some very powerful titles and we can offer a joint première at the festival and on the platform, publicising it on both sides and giving lovers of Asian cinema the chance to see the same film at home and on the big screen at the festival.

Menene Gras

It is no longer possible to talk of an audience, as there are now audiences, which are generally not homogeneous. It is therefore difficult to define an audience and a trend without considering the mix of genres and the evolution of responses in real time. I don't know whether we are witnessing a paradigm shift in relation to the status of the spectator: viewers always change from one generation to the next, but they will always be the recipient that the message in any film production is aimed at. Certainly, we hope for bigger participation and communication from them, and to reach them through common issues which, in the end,

are universal in any society and era that might be explored. For decades now, everyday life has been one of the subjects of most narratives to the detriment of so-called historical cinema, which has been largely relegated to the documentary genre. I also don't know whether viewers are becoming increasingly demanding or more apathetic, although they have better access to films, more viewing possibilities and options and are apparently better informed. There are audiences that are interested in one type of cinema—whether it be fantasy or horror, drama or comedy—and others who prefer films that don't explore issues or make them think about lives other than their own, or another reality that could make them feel empathy for what is happening on the screen. It is clear that people watch a lot of films and read very little. The moving image has a power over the spectator that no other medium has experienced to date. Cinema has been able to take over, because it is the medium of mass communication par excellence, whatever its national origin may be.

Domingo López

As I mentioned before, viewers on VoD platforms wind up lost and overwhelmed with such a wide range of options, and again they need a programmer to select and filter through the hundreds of titles. At the professional level it affects us a lot, because platforms like Netflix acquire most of the important titles even before they're finished, for global distribution, making the role of programmers more complex. However, I feel increasingly happy with this, as it makes programmers go beyond the catalogue covers and allows them to do their work from scratch, dis-

covering jewels and directors that will be important in the cinema of tomorrow.

José Luis Rebordinos

I don't think it is the platforms that are making the audience more demanding. In our case, we've had a very demanding audience for many years, before the platforms began impacting on cinema. What the platforms and, especially, new electronic devices are making possible is better and more continuous public access to audiovisual content, and therefore, better knowledge of that content.

Ángel Sala

The spectator at festivals today is very demanding, knowledgeable and with a level of influence that only critics had before. This is very extreme at festivals specialising in a genre, like Sitges. You can't pull the wool over anyone's eyes when programming or selecting films; you have to explain your decisions. There has to be a festival line. It doesn't have to be literally "approved" by the public. But it should meet expectations in relation to how the films are presented, beyond whether they like them or not. These days the audience creates trends, much more than critics do.

7. What perception do specialised festivals have of the work of critics who attend them? There is a widespread cliché that the critic is not necessary. Does their role gain strength in a context of minimal media coverage and limited academic publications?

Quim Crusellas

In our case, the critic and the specialist journalist are very necessary. Films from big distributors and big festivals have their own media megaphone, but we need the media dedicated to Asian cinema, their blogs, their fan spirit, as reflected in following and constantly disseminating information on Twitter, etc. The big community of Asian cinema enthusiasts feeds off those channels, where they generate followers, and therefore, an audience and an industry.

Menene Gras

The critic's role is, among other things, to witness an event. Even if it is only to make people aware of it, it is indispensable, although their opinion may be debatable and is often not helpful for the sale of projection rights or for the audience to consume a particular product. I don't know whether it is such a widespread cliché as the question seems to assume, but whether the critic is necessary or not is perhaps not the right question. Ordinarily, the

role of the critic and that of academic publications are quite separate, although that is not to say that the immediacy of certain publications covering daily events cannot contain more elaborate discourses like those that publications promoting academic studies by film historians and researchers are supposed to have. It is obvious that the critic's role gains strength to the extent that it can boost or sink a particular title and their opinion can be based on many aspects, which may in turn be rejected by other critics, despite the fact that agreement is more common than radical disparity between one critic and another. Criticism should occasionally be more disinterested and less partisan, but in both criticism and academic research in this field, when dealing with the film industries of a global society like the one we live in, there should be a sharing of interests and objectives.

Domingo López

Critics give visibility to the content of the festivals, although often they don't have the back-

ground necessary to judge a lot of Asian content, and most of the time they limit themselves to contextualising the film they have just seen with the few titles that have been distributed here, perpetuating clichés and stereotypes, conveying erroneous ideas, such as that most Korean films are violent thrillers or that in India all the films are musicals.

José Luis Rebordinos

The critic is very important. They are another necessary influencer. The problem is that these days there are very few serious critics. Most of them are film lovers, expressing urgent opinions, often about the title credits of the films without going further. There is a lot of headline and very little thoughtful analysis. Moreover, the democratisation brought by social networks means that there are thousands of people expressing opinions and that the audience has a hard task separating the interesting from the trivial.

Ángel Sala

The critic is experiencing a crisis produced by the weakening of the cultural dimensions of the media, based on the precarious condition of the media and the lack of a clear method. The festivals have changed; they've developed in many directions, and critics, or some of them, continue applying the same old criteria and trying to survive by means of an old and outdated analysis. There are many critics, not just the traditional ones but also new ones, who come out very much against the activity or the model of festivals, but in many cases the critics are unaware of their operational mechanisms or funding, which have changed, and a lot. But critics have not bothered to investigate and are holding onto a theoretical vision that has nothing to do with the pragmatic reality. Moreover, traditional critics haven't been able to keep up with the pace of evolution of the enlightened opinion of enthusiasts and spectators on social networks or online, and, little by little, they

have been displaced in the analysis of the impact of events and the creation of trends. Criticism is necessary, vital; it is a pillar of the festivals, but it needs to be restructured internally, to undergo a reorganisation and engage in dialogue with the festivals for a new model. This is urgently needed.

| conclusion

GUILLERMO MARTÍNEZ-TABERNER

When you have the privilege of bringing together a chorus of specialist voices to discuss a topic as multifaceted as the transnational circulation of Korean and Japanese cinema, it is logical and expected, and even to a certain extent intentionally sought after, that there would be certain dissonances in the opinions expressed. But the answers provided by this group of festival directors based on their vast experience converges in the explanations they give that nuance certain “clichés”, enhancing our knowledge and contributing to our understanding of the circulation of Korean and Japanese cinema in Spain, which was the ultimate aim of this section.

In this sense, for example, while there has been some consensus expressed about the existence of aesthetic and narrative patterns characteristic of the film production of these two countries, the responses have underscored the richness and variety of their audiovisual production in terms of genre, themes, budget, quality, international impact, etc. This richness leads to categorisations that go beyond the already well-known use of demonyms like “Japanese horror films” to include a particular movement in Japanese cinema classified as “Cannes cinema”, an obvious allusion to films produced specifically with interaction with the European industry and viewer in mind, as Domingo López explains.

A second “cliché” that the conversation here exposes is the idea of “peripheral film industries”. Beyond the Eurocentric and Orientalist narratives, the constant contribution of East Asian cinema to the transnational film industry seems obvious, calling into question the idea of “peripheral” as something distant from a centre of content production and identifying it, as Ángel Sala explains, as a “film industry incorporated into the world of audiovisual culture as a base for information on trends and talent.” In this same sense, the discussion here highlights the influence of Asian cinema on Western film production, especially on genre films, making it a key source of influences, trends, genres, talent, etc., that hardly fits in a definition of “peripheral cinema”.

To understand the success of Korean and Japanese cinema, two basic variables are normally invoked: the quality of the product and its capacity for positioning in international markets. All the experts consulted here agree in describing the production of these two countries generally as being made up of quality films that have been internationalised with the support of their cultural industries, as well as their international promotion agencies, although these efforts to promote the film industry are not comparable to the huge promotional machinery of the American film industry, which in many cases determines box office success, as José Luís Rebordinos explains. Howe-

ver, all our participants stress that the cornerstone of the increasing circulation of Asian content in Spain is not the mechanisms and stakeholders in the global market, but the viewers. One of the most reliable pieces of evidence of this would be how the consumption patterns of millennials have contributed to the rise of Japanese and Korean audiovisual content available in Spain on the main digital streaming platforms. This is an audience which, as Quim Crusellas explains, is increasingly knowledgeable and mature in terms of its preferences.

The disruptive force of technology for audiovisual content distribution, the new generations of European viewers, and the variety of Japanese and Korean films, among many other factors, make it difficult to map out the transnational consumption of the films of these two countries, as pointed out by Menene Gras. But at the same time, this situation has sparked academic interest in tackling the challenge of connecting all these global and local forces into a complex narrative that will help make sense of the phenomenon of the circulation of Japanese and Korean cinema in Spain over the last few decades, possible future trends, and the capacity for transformation of local cultural industries. ■

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BEYOND THE SPORADIC SUCCESS OF ASIAN CINEMA: THE CIRCULATION OF KOREAN AND JAPANESE CINEMA IN SPAIN

Abstract

Continuing with the investigation of the monographic about the porosity of our audiovisual regarding its Japanese and South Korean counterpart, in the section of (Dis)agreements we congregate the people in charge of the most relevant festivals for the circulation of these cinemas inside the Spanish territory to monitor the situation from their role as gatekeepers of these cinematographies. Quim Crusellas and Domingo López (director and programmer, respectively, of the Festival Nits Cinema Oriental de Vic), Menene Gras (director of the Asian Film Festival of Barcelona), José Luis Rebordinos (director of the Donostiako Nazioarteko Zinemaldia in Donostia) and Ángel Sala (director of the Sitges Film Festival) answer to the questions posed by Guillermo Martínez Taberner and Antonio Loriguillo-López on facets of the circulation of these films, the evolution of the Spanish audiences, or the irruption of video on-demand platforms.

Key words

Film festivals; San Sebastian; Sitges; Nits Cinema Oriental; Asian Film Festival; Japanese cinema; South Korean cinema.

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MÁS ALLÁ DE LOS ÉXITOS PUNTUALES DEL CINE ASIÁTICO: LA CIRCULACIÓN DEL CINE COREANO Y JAPONÉS EN ESPAÑA

Resumen

Siguiendo con la indagación del monográfico sobre la porosidad de nuestro audiovisual con respecto a su contraparte japonesa y surcoreana, en la sección de (Des)encuentros congregamos a los responsables de los festivales más relevantes para la circulación de estos cines dentro del territorio español para monitorizar la situación desde su papel como puerta de entrada de dichas cinematografías. Quim Crusellas y Domingo López (director y programador, respectivamente, del Festival Nits Cinema Oriental de Vic), Menene Gras (directora del Asian Film Festival de Barcelona), José Luis Rebordinos (director del Donostiako Nazioarteko Zinemaldia de Donostia) y Ángel Sala (director del Festival Internacional de Cinema Fantàstic de Catalunya de Sitges) responden a las cuestiones planteadas por Guillermo Martínez Taberner y Antonio Loriguillo-López sobre facetas de la circulación de estas películas tan dispares como la evolución del público español o la irrupción de las plataformas de *video on-demand*.

Palabras clave

Festivales de cine; San Sebastián; Sitges; Nits Cinema Oriental; Asian Film Festival; Cine japonés; Cine surcoreano.

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