

Panel 3: Remapping Cold War East Asia

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Funny Noises: Cold War (A)synchronies in Taiwanese and South Korean Film Comedy

In the post-colonial cinemas of Taiwan and South Korea, both emerging from the structures of Japanese cinematic modernity and the rubble of civil wars, film comedy took on an anachronistic cast. They revived the aesthetics of early sound comedy, which delighted in matching improbable noises to key sync points in physical comedy sequences. Like their predecessors in late 1920s and early 1930s Hollywood, these films played with the viewer's tendency to assign causality between the images of bodies and their sounds, disrupting the film's production of the comic actor as a unified cinematic presence. Sound synchronization was put, instead, towards the ends of creating comic bodies: bodies that offered the pleasure of comic incongruity in the asymmetry of sound and image.

This paper argues that the synchronic re-emergence of funny noises in mid-century Taiwanese and South Korean cinemas was not only due to their shared positionality within global cinema, but also because of their plunge into Cold War cultural currents. The anachronism of their asynchronous technique disrupted the mechanized time of the militarized Cold War state. The body of the citizen, increasingly regulated and measured in order to be integrated into a strong anti-Communist front, became satisfyingly anarchic through the disruption of integrative and realistic cinematic sound. A comparison of funny sound practices in these two cinemas reveals both their nuance and their replicability as filmic device during this period: a synchrony of asynchronous methodology.