Precarity in Korean Film Industry: A Cultural Research Perspective

INTERACTIVE ARTICLE COVER

Precarity in Korean Film Industry: A Cultural Research Perspective

Kyuha Ryoo
Lecturer, Department of Entertainment, Joongbu University, Korea.
Email: entertainowl@gmail.com

Abstract

The Korean film industry has achieved remarkable success in recent years. However, the filmmakers behind the scenes have received relatively little attention, leading to precarious labor conditions. This paper aims to shed light on the reality that filmmakers face through participatory observation at film production sites. Commercial film shooting sites were visited and observed 14 times over 3 months. The researcher observed various aspects of the film sites from a cultural research perspective. In particular, the researcher used the theory of flexibility to assess the type of employment, labor process, and socialization of filmmakers. The study revealed that Korean filmmakers experience labor flexibility and are constantly exposed to the risk of extreme work-life balance disruption and job loss. This is due to the nature of their work, which often involves long hours and tight deadlines. The study also found that Korean filmmakers are often underpaid and undervalued, despite their contributions to the industry. The researcher hopes that this study will raise awareness about the challenges faced by Korean filmmakers and encourage further research into this important topic. By shedding light on these issues, we can work towards creating a more equitable and sustainable film industry in Korea.

Keywords: Korean Filmmakers, Korean Filmmaking, Field Observation, Labor Flexibility

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the huge success of the Korean film industry, little academic attention has been devoted to the production site, especially the filmmakers. Behind the glamour of the film industry, there has always been a precarious labor of film production workers. This precarity of labor has a significant impact on the working conditions and lives of workers. Hence, this study aims to analyze the precarity of Korean filmmakers based on flexibility theory.

The theory of labor flexibility involves the uncertainty, instability, and unbalanced power relations that workers face in modern industrial societies. The Korean film production industry has such issues, including uncertainty in production schedules, instability in filming sites and staffing, and rapidly changing market trends. It is difficult to find stable employment in the film industry. Due to the nature of the short project industry, job loss and job searches are repeated. Due to unique labor flexibility, it is difficult to find a job at a film business. In the end, filmmakers must find a job every time with their own network and effort.

This precarity based on labor flexibility has a profound impact on the lives of workers in Korean film production. Due to unbalanced power relations and uncertain working conditions, they face unequal wages in exchange for their labor as well as job insecurity. There have been few academic discussions that shed light on the difficulties of Korean film production workers.

In line with this, this study aimed to shed light on the working conditions of Korean film production workers and their impact on workers' lives through field observation at film production sites based on flexibility theory.

2. Theoretical Background

Most of the creative work is profoundly precarious, taking place on a short-term project basis, not stable full-time work based on long-term employment. As discussed above, it has a structure of maximizing the efficiency of production according to the logic of neoliberalism. In neoliberalism, production is structured to be as efficient as possible. At its core lies productivity or efficiency—maximizing the use of workers with skills already present in the market to produce results in a short time.

The structure of project labor shows extreme flexibilization of labor. Without a stable job, workers find it difficult to lead a stable life. Even when they are employed, they have to worry about the next job and potential employment gaps. An employment gap causes emotional instability for creative industry workers, who tend to prioritize spiritual values such as creativity and art over economic values.

Similar results are found that analyze the labor of the Korean media industry in terms of flexibility due to the spread of flexibilization, increasing demand for creativity, and expanding insecurity. He argues that flexibilization consists of three layers: First, flexibility increases in employment and types of employment. Flexible employment reduces job predictability, making it impossible to make a life plan based on job security. It has become more difficult to find a full-time job, and irregular employment has become more prevalent; Second, the labor process becomes more flexible. There are no fixed, stable work schedules, and the forms and hours of work are also becoming more flexible. This diversification of working hours creates instability, blurring the line between work and leisure. Ultimately, this increases working hours and labor intensity, leading to an extreme disruption in the work-life balance; Third, the spread of flexible labor creates a constant state of flux which creates a flexible society.

The filmmaking industry is no exception to this trend. The nature of short-term projects makes it difficult for filmmakers to find stable employment. The lack of stability causes emotional instability for filmmakers who prioritize creativity over economic values.

3. Research Methodology

Since the subjects of the study are the filmmakers and film production site, participatory observation is selected as the main research method. Considering the limitations of the subject, we designed a specific participatory observation method as follows:

First, the exclusivity of the film production site should be considered. One of the biggest challenges of participatory observation as a researcher in filmmaking is getting permission. Because of the extreme confidentiality and exclusivity of production, it is impossible to conduct participatory observation without the full permission of the director or producer. However, this is not the end. At the filming site, a production supervisor (PS), dispatched by the investment company, will be present. Therefore, permission from the investment company must also be obtained.

Unlike drama scenes filmed in a specific location, movie scenes are often moved with the whole crew by transportation provided by the production company, and meals are also provided at the site. Therefore, researchers who are not related to production are only a nuisance that requires unnecessary expenditure from the perspective of the investment company. Participatory observation through investment companies is not always welcome. One producer interviewed in preliminary research said that if a field observation is requested through an investor, it would be assumed that an additional PS will be there to watch the site.

Conducting participatory research on location as a crew member is one option, but commercial film crews are often characterized by a strong core of people who have worked on many independent films. In addition, participatory observations conducted by hired crew members have limitations in seeing the whole picture through the eyes of a subordinate crew member.

In a preliminary study of the production process, the researcher followed an acquaintance who was the youngest member of the art team to try participatory observation. However, this method has limitations in terms of seeing only one aspect of film production.

Table1. Observation information

Observation Locations	No. of sessions	Description
Gangnam Production Office	1	Gosa rite
Samgyeopsal Restaurant	1	Staff Dinner
Cheongpyeong Set	5	Shooting on indoor sets
Pocheon Daejin University Gymnasium Basement	5	Shooting indoors
Police Hospital	1	Shooting indoors and outdoors
Songpa Seoul Detention Center	1	Shooting indoors and outdoors

During the participatory observation, we tried to raise new issues through careful observation and experiencing the atmosphere of the site, rather than establishing theories and hypotheses in advance and testing them. Rather than relying on a few pre-set observation points, we conducted observations fluidly and observed the site as actively as we could. Due to the nature of qualitative research, the direction of the study changed occasionally and new observations were made at each moment. Participatory observation is the direct experience stage where the researcher attempts to understand the factors that affect the occupational identity and labor precarity of filmmakers on the film sets. The main observations include the three directions discussed in the previous chapter: the working conditions that affect labor precarity; the methods of communication among filmmakers as part of the working environment experienced by filmmakers; and the structures, processes, and practices of the filmmaking. First, working

conditions are objective factors that affect labor precarity, including the place of work, hours of work, intensity of work, etc. Second, the communication among filmmakers on the set was observed. Filmmaking is a creative industry that requires the collaboration of multidisciplinary, professional teams. Han (2006) examined the communication between filmmakers through participatory observation and revealed that contrary to existing literature that suggests filmmaking is driven by a strict hierarchy at the top, a film is produced by consensus among key teams. Communication between teams and departments is a part of the working environment for filmmakers, and becomes a core element of their occupational identity. Third, the structure, process, and practices of film production are observed. They affect the working conditions and labor precarity of the filmmakers, which in turn, influence the formation of their occupational identity. The main points of participatory observation are summarized below.

Table 2: Points of observation

Research Content	Questions
Working Conditions	What is the workplace, environment, and daily work hours like?
	How does the day start, progress, and end?
	What is the intensity of the work? What are the challenges?
Communication	How do they communicate in the film set?
	What are the internal and external conflicts among workers in the set?
	How much autonomy do workers have?
	How are disagreements resolved?
Film Production Structure and Process	Is the production site atmosphere vertical or horizontal?
	In what ways does the atmosphere change as the production progresses?
	What is the specificity of the language of the production site and does it exhibit hierarchy or symbolism?
	Are there any behaviors or practices that are only employed by filmmakers?
	How is the precarity of the workers manifested?

Data obtained through observation were classified into a total of 8 items to meet the goal of observing labor flexibility. These observation points are described through eight chapters in the body.

4. BODY

4.1 Place of Work

Due to the nature of filmmaking, there is no fixed place of work, and the filmmakers move around the country. The filmmaking sites where participatory observation was conducted were located across the country, including Seoul, Namyangju, Paju, Incheon, Cheongju, Cheongpyeong, Suwon, Pocheon, and Hwaseong. If a local shoot was scheduled, the crew would travel as a group to a hotel (usually a motel) close to the film location to stay for the period of shooting. A large portion of a movie's shooting takes place on the set, often in remote locations with no surrounding infrastructure. Sets are often built in rural and remote locations to save production costs and due to the noise-sensitive nature of cinematography. When filming on set, crew members cannot commute from home. Not only is there no reliable transportation, but it's also a very remote location. It's not surprising for the staff to stay together in a motel in a neighborhood about a half-hour bus ride from the set.

Figure 1: Outdoor Film Set Observed

Working conditions are also very poor. All resources on the set are focused on making a good movie. Therefore, the location is either outdoors or on a set, a temporary structure built for the movie. These spaces are often without cooling or heating systems, for which the crew should always be prepared. It was a cold winter during the participatory observation period, and the workers complained of cold from working long hours outdoors, even though they were heavily armed with long padded jackets and hot packs. Indoor shooting is not much better. Most of the indoor filming locations are remote, uninhabited spaces. In the case of the basement of the Pocheon Daejin University gymnasium and the Seoul Detention Center in Songpa-gu, it was difficult even to breathe without a mask due to decades of dust and dirt accumulation. The crew

complained about dizziness after working there. They said that dust came out of their noses as if they had been in a coal mine.

Figure 2: Indoor Film Set Observed

The lack of a fixed place of work drives workers to precarious working conditions. Although moving and adapting to new environments every time is part of the job film crews have to deal with, many say that it is the hardest part of being a film crew member. It is not just about going to new places. It was clear even for observers from the sidelines that travelling long distances in a group, setting up heavy equipment, controlling a different site each time, and interacting with new people in the area is physically and psychologically demanding.

In an interview, the youngest member of the crew shared, "It's easier to shoot in Seoul, and it's a relief to commute from home even if it takes longer. Although it is for work, it's hard to sleep away from home, but this movie... There are more **local shootings**."

However, some also said that frequent traveling and visiting places that they wouldn't normally be able to visit is an attractive aspect of working in the film scene.

"I don't know if it's because I must have itchy feet, but I love being able to see and move around a lot. I don't think I could stand to be in the same office for years like everyone else," a cinematographer shared.

"I'm a bit of a rebel, but I love being able to see and move around a lot. I don't think I could stand to be in the same office for years like everyone else," said another cinematographer.

The problem of working conditions due to workplace mobility is exacerbated coupled with flexible working hours and staying together in the same place, which eliminates private rest and living. Living nearby together with other staff places a significant burden on workers, mixing public and private life. They have no private time to take a rest. This is similar to the blurring of work-life boundaries in creative labor. Group housing does not allow space for privacy or rest. Workers interviewed during participatory observation said they share motel rooms, two people per room. This is an improvement from the four per room in the past, but there is still no privacy. It is even more stressful when sharing a room with a supervisor or a coworker with whom you've had work issues.

"Taking a rest is not a rest, it's like sitting on pins and needles. **There's no clear distinction between rest time and work time.** When I have to eat and sleep with my supervisors, it is not resting. It's sitting on pins and needles. Until the moment you sleep. At the end of the day, there's

always a drinking party at the motel, as well as every meal, and it's even harder if you don't like drinking." (The youngest member of the production team)

Group housing has the effect of extending the workday into the rest time. Most of the time, they gather for dinner before going to bed, and the dinner is like a meeting, starting with talks related to the day's shoot and ending with talks of the next day's shoot. Living in group housing and dinners in the form of meetings does not count as working time. These hours are not subject to the 52-hour workweek, which is the minimum protection required by law.

4.2 Spaces of Filming: Isolated Spaces

According to Foucault (1979), space is where discipline and power are practised by how it is located and divided. In a filmmaking space, there are fixed positions for crew members and divisions of space assigned by convention. The storyboard prepared in the pre-production stage shows the movement of the actors and the corresponding shooting movement. In the shooting space, camera directions, angles, and microphone positions as well as the division of the space were set to maximize the effectiveness of recording actors' movements and dialogues. The space is divided into specialized areas so that the prepared content can be followed in a short time and also be constantly modified and supplemented in the best direction if required. While the specifics of each divided space on a film set may vary from location to location, many similarities have developed over time within the culture of filmmaking. In this study, we divided the set into eight separated spaces (S) as follows. These divisions are based on the division of the site.

Figure 3: Spaces of Filming

While the staffing of a set has been established over time to ensure a smooth shoot, there is discipline and power that centers on the director. The filming set is controlled in the monitoring-directing space (S1), led by the director. The director starts the shot, and cuts or signs NG through the monitor. The director's instructions are relayed to the other crew members via the assistant director. It is also the assistant director's job to announce the next shot. The assistant director and the production team are often located around the camera (S2) and serve as a bridge between S1 and S3.

Next to them, is a scripter from the production team, who monitors a secondary monitor, notes actors' performances, prop costumes, camera positions, and so on, and finds NGs that the director missed. S1 is where the key people in the movie are located, including the producer, art director, and lighting director, who listen to the director's instructions and coordinate their respective teams. In other words, S1 is where the highest level of disciplinary power occurs and where the heads of each team are gathered so that it is easy to disseminate and receive feedback on the shoot. Many other team members are waiting around S1.

Figure 4: Photos of S1

S2 is where the actual shooting takes place. Depending on the environment, it may be adjacent to S1 but often separated. The Director of Photography is the center of operations, and he or she sets up the overall shot and angles with the actors according to the script. Next to him, the first camera assistant acts as a 'focus puller' to keep the subject in focus. The camera crew is waiting to handle camera tasks such as moving cameras and changing lenses. The lighting team is also in the same space to control the lighting, as the camera and lighting are usually a team effort. S2 usually communicates with S1 by voice or via individual microphones, but for longer instructions, they meet in person to coordinate. This depends on the personality of the director, but with this study, the team member who wanted to communicate went directly to the other team member's space, rather than calling for the team member.

S3 is where the actors perform and is adjacent to S2 by nature. It is also s space with high tension where unnecessary movements are not allowed. Usually, there are several rehearsals before the main shooting, but even during the rehearsals, the actors perform as if they were real. The movie we observed was an action movie where there was always a risk of injury due to a large amount of gunpowder used, so it was prohibited for those not related to work to approach S3. It was also important to prevent anyone from touching the precisely placed props. In addition to the actors, microphones are placed outside the camera's field of view and managed by the recording team. The actor's performance is ultimately the director's responsibility, but if there is an acting director or martial arts director on the set, they are located in S3 to guide the camera's field of view. Once the 'cut' is said by the director, the actor will usually move to S1 to monitor their performance or to be coached by the director and receive feedback on their performance or scenario. This feedback often takes place in S1, but sometimes in the more relaxed atmosphere of the S8 smoking area.

S4 is an area with drinks and light snacks, located on the way to the set and usually used by members of the production team. Depending on the location, a crew member may also be in

charge of blocking pedestrians. When there's a break in the shoot, crew members will go to S4 or S8 for smoking and restrooms.

In S5, there are costumes and props, makeup, and actors waiting. Members of the art team are stationed here to assist the actors with costumes and makeup according to the script. There are lighted makeup mirrors, and makeup is applied according to the shooting situation. S5 is also where the actors' agency personnel often stay. In addition, S6 is where the ambulance stays in case of injuries, and S7 is where food is prepared and eaten.

Shooting spaces are organized for efficient work arrangements for optimization. When the camera is not rolling, production personnel are free to move around and are largely independent of their assigned space in a horizontal relationship. However, once the camera starts rolling, it becomes a differentiated space where a vertical disciplinary relationship is formed, with S1 as the vertex, completely independent of the outside world. This space is characterized by the change of spatial power depending on whether the camera is moving or not.

4.3 Various Types of Labor in the Disconnected Space

The filming space, disconnected from the outside world, is a space for artists. It is more than just a place but a world for filming, where artistry and creativity are expressed, completely cut off from the outside world. In other words, it is a space of symbolic systems produced by filmmakers, operating as a space that distinguishes filmmakers from the entire social space. In this sense, you need to take a step away from the filming space to get out of this disconnection. This disconnection is maximized by immersion at the moment, especially when the camera is rolling. At this moment, even the slightest movement or noise that has nothing to do with the shot is forbidden.

There is a constant pattern of tension during filming and then relaxation when filming stops. Even for a casual observer, the change of air in the room can be felt at the moment of the shot. Since over 100 staff members have to work together to create each scene, the atmosphere of the set was very serious even though there was a lot of laughter and chatter in private. A single mistake can suspend the work of the entire crew, so there was a lot of shouting on the set. The tension and relaxation of the filming moment lead to mental stress, at the same time excitement.

"It's nerve-wracking because if I make a mistake, the whole team is on the line. Mistakes are bound to happen, but I can't stand the feeling that the whole team is criticizing me." (The youngest member of the production team)

However, incidents or accidents caused by external events are bound to happen.

"We were filming at a karaoke bar, and all of a sudden, a bunch of gangsters burst in. They were making a big deal about whose permission they were filming, and it was up to the production team to handle it. In the end, all they wanted was to take pictures with the actors and get their autographs, but that was one of those cases where we were really lucky to get away with it." (Producer)

"You're in the middle of an outdoor scene and a car drives by and you hear a song, and you have to stop and do it all again. I had to pay a lot of money in the past for a song that got into the microphone like that. It's just one of those things happening." (Producer)

But they are unpredictable. Incidents and accidents cause delays in filmmaking and force unreasonable schedules. This is where long hours, irregular work, and overwork come from.

"We have to have confirmation when the production team builds the set as ordered, and usually after the confirmation, we start shooting right away. But if we do it as ordered but there's an objection, we're in trouble. We know their schedule, so if there's a problem here, we can't shoot, and we're all in trouble." (Set Director)

In most jobs, when something goes wrong, there is time to fix it and resolve it, but in filmmaking, if a problem is not fixed right away, it can bring the whole team to a standstill. These are some of the most challenging moments for filmmakers, which can cause panic attacks.

"Sweat breaks out on my back. I feel dizzy like I can hear everyone cursing at me." (Second Production Assistant)

The work in the movie set is gruelling. In the filming set, you have to move and set up heavy equipment and sets according to the pre-set order repeatedly, which often leads to reprimands. High-intensity works that have to be done in a short period often result in the exploitation of staff members.

"It's not a regular office, it's not something I'm in it for the long haul, what's there for me to read others' minds, I've worked like that before… I can tell them to do whatever I want, still, I'll see them at the next location." (Cinematographer)

Sometimes, this exploitation, which is not simply a manner of forcing them to do hard labor, leads to emotional and verbal abuse, which can cause some people to leave the industry.

"For many reasons, if you start with 100 staff members, three or four will eventually drop out. It's not surprising given that working in movie sets is hard, and the main reason is conflicts between staff members." (Production company representative)

A low-level staff member said that (s)he could put up with the hard work, but not the emotional exploitation and troubles. Particularly because they are often required to stay in the group housing even after their shift ends. Without the time and space to relax in a personal space, this is even more difficult for them.

One staff member was excited to work in film after graduating from a film-related department. But the work given to the youngest staff was similar and repetitive everywhere, and it was difficult to express the "creativity" (s)he had hoped for. Expecting the atmosphere to be different at each movie set, (s)he started the next movie after the difficult first movie, but things were similar. Even more unbearable was the team's collective mistakes and the resulting rigid atmosphere, no matter how good you were at your job. As the youngest member, (s)he felt like walking on eggshells among the senior members. The problem is there was no place to escape from the tensions as they were staying together in group housing. After the second movie, with particularly many incidents, (s)he decided to give up on his (her) dream of working in filmmaking. This was a huge loss in terms of career, including graduating from a related program, but (s)he was not sure if (s)he could continue this lifestyle for many years to come. Retiree 2 wants to start over and is preparing for a job in the video (not film) industry.

Such emotional exploitation occurs because filmmakers are hired for a project, often on a short-term basis. Labor exploitation is also common. Again, this is partly due to the short-term nature of project work. For regular full-time work, there are several institutions in place under labor law

to ensure stable work. Also, since workers are expected to work together for a long period, they are more likely to bond with each other within the confines of the company and respect each other to some degree. However, there are no institutional protections in short-term, project-based filmmaking. Production companies often disappear after a single movie, and there is no clear entity to protect filmmakers. One staff member expressed his () frustration that (s)he decided to file a civil lawsuit because of a problem during filming, but there was no entity to sue. Due to the short-term nature of the work, there are cases of extreme exploitation among production workers.

Another characteristic of the work is that it is dangerous. In particular, in the case of action movies, like the one the researcher observed, injuries often occurred in fighting scenes, explosion scenes, etc., and the filming process was interrupted. Due to the dangerous nature of the work, an ambulance was always on standby outside the set.

4.4 Fierceness for Art

As discussed above, the filming space is disconnected from the outside world, where the symbolic power of the filmmakers is at work. In that space, there are mechanisms of distinction that differ from those of the outside world. Classes and hierarchies are formed in this disconnected social space. Art is generally formed on the axis of symbolic power based on economic and educational levels, but the hierarchy on the production site is formed primarily through their own 'distinctions,' including director, first, second, third assistants, and youngest member, etc. The hierarchy on the set is strict, and filmmakers have to work fiercely to achieve their symbolic values.

The field of movie production is independent of the outside world, but not completely free from external influences, including power and social space. In particular, commercial films are not free from the influence of investors and production companies. Once the investment is received, the filmmakers have to finalize the schedule and daily shooting plan in the pre-production stage, based on which they are supposed to proceed with filming. But in the process, the production company constantly interferes. For large-scale commercial movies, it is not uncommon for the investment company to send a PS to monitor the situation on-site.

In the approaches to filmmaking, there is a stark contrast between investors and production companies and filmmakers. An investor's primary goal is to make a profit by putting money into a movie project that appears to be profitable. Therefore, their primary concern is not to make a quality or artistic movie, but a profitable movie that will attract a large audience for as little money as possible. They often force filmmakers to produce the movie within the initially planned budget to reduce their losses on the investment. Delays in production mean increased budgets, to which investors are very sensitive. Last but not least, it is important for investors to see that the scenarios are faithfully reproduced as promised. The investment decision was made based on the scenario, and it is a basic requirement of the investment contract that the scenario is faithfully realized. It is also important for the production company to produce a profitable movie based on the investment.

On the other hand, the position of the filmmakers is different. As the ones who are making the movie, their main goal is to make the best use of their investment and make the movie as complete as possible. To be sure, they consider the profitability as well, but their priority is to

create an aesthetically pleasing and faithfully representing movie as originally planned. Sometimes, it is unavoidable to modify the original plan and add things to the movie. Not surprisingly, the filmmaker's perspective that prioritizes the completeness of the movie differs from that of an investor or production company, which values the timeline and existing plan.

Excessive interference with production companies and investors, and the insistence on sticking to timelines, exacerbate the working conditions of filmmakers. Investors, often distant from the production site, are concerned with ensuring that the movie is produced according to the initial timeline regardless of the reality of the production because a delay in the schedule increases the production cost. In contrast, filmmakers have to consider all the variables on the set. In a movie set with more than 100 people, various incidents and injuries can happen, and in the case of outdoor filming, there are weather and other factors. It is not uncommon that several events make it difficult to proceed with the filming according to the initially planned timeline, but investors tend to insist on meeting the promised completion date without considering those variables.

This makes it highly likely for the working conditions of filmmakers to be compromised to meet the schedule. Despite the various factors that may delay or extend the schedule, the deadline must be met even with extra work. During the field observations, the researcher saw an injury during an action scene involving gunpowder, causing a delay in filming. However, the shooting could not be simply postponed to the next day due to a problem with the location. All they could do was to wait indefinitely before resuming filming. This situation is very common on the filming site and a typical example of the deteriorating working conditions of filmmakers.

"The biggest job for a producer is to stick to the schedule. At the end of the day, the schedule is the money. If (the movie is) delayed, that's more money. You have to stick to it no matter what so you can get to the end of the movie." (Producer)

In commercial movies, filmmakers, even with an artist's identity, are limited by the logic of capital—efficiency and commercialization. Filmmakers try to strictly adhere to the shooting plan prepared in the pre-production phase. In this process, they are required to limit the quality of the footage and creative expression.

"Most importantly, you have to **complete the movie according to the schedule.** To be sure, if you have more time, the quality will be better, but realistically it's difficult because of the location, casting, and budget. The completion of the movie is the most important goal." (Producer)

As filmmaking is increasingly industrialized and large amounts of capital are required due to technological concentration, the autonomy of film production is declining. According to the 2020 Film Staff Survey, 31.4% of filmmakers worked on films with a budget of 8 billion won or more as of 2020, which is increasing every year (Korean Film Promotion Committee, 2021). Ironically, based on the standard of commercial films with a budget of more than 4 billion won, the salaries of filmmakers, other than directors, are decreasing as the budget increases.

In reality, as the commercial logic and investment increase, filmmakers' salaries decrease as well as their autonomy, leading to the infringement of directorial and production rights, not to mention a decrease in working conditions due to adherence to schedules.

4.5 Short-Term Employment and Team Culture of Filmmaking as a Project.

An apprenticeship may be the best word to describe the composition of the Korean film industry workforce. The industry is dominated by a team-based production culture. Filmmaking is carried out in teams with a certain degree of autonomy and freedom. In particular, employment contracts are often made on a team basis rather than on an individual basis, job duties are allocated and compensation is determined internally. The nature of the team differs depending on the culture of the job. Cinematography and lighting are more likely to have the same people as one project ends, and another begins, so their culture and cohesion are stronger than other "teams". On the other hand, the production and directing teams are more likely to be newly organized from project to project, so their unique culture and cohesion are weaker Jeong (2004). The 'team' recruits new members, called 'maknae, or the youngest', who work their way through the filmmaking process and gradually grow to perform key tasks in the 'team' as they gain experience. They are trained within the team, and it's up to the leader to decide which tasks they perform.

Even if they belong to a different 'team' in a new movie project, they are likely to do similar work as they did in the previous 'team,' and it is unlikely that they suddenly find themselves in a higher-level role that defies hierarchy. The team members are called by different names depending on the location and task, but in the movie set team that we observed, they were called C, B, A levels, etc. and the directing team used names such as youngest, third, second, and first. For example, if a C-level art carpenter goes to a different movie set, he or she will still be a C-level carpenter, and will only become a B-level carpenter after gaining a certain amount of experience and being promoted internally. Production workers are largely divided into creative and technical workers, but even technical workers do not participate in production isolated from creative workers. Rather, they collectively tend to care deeply about the quality of the productions they are involved in (art for art's sake) Chung (2017).

On the one hand, apprenticeship contracts can lead to a lack of sense of belonging to the production company and the movie they are working on, or a lack of responsibility for their work. This is because there is a stronger sense of belonging to the apprentice, than to the production company or the movie. In addition, unnecessary losses may occur due to the lack of thorough division of labour and coordination. The apprenticeship was instrumental as the only on-the-job training and retraining system with no other film education system. However, the apprenticeship system may facilitate the transfer of skills but has significant weaknesses in adapting to the emergence of new technology systems. Gradually, the role of the apprenticeship system is weakening due to its inherent irrational nature. Although the apprenticeship system is weakening in the education system and work management, it is still prevalent in contracting, especially in team-based collective contracts. The education and contracting system based on the apprenticeship is creating problems such as a lack of responsibility, lack of belonging, and unprofessionalism of the staff Lee (2006).

4.6 Realistic Comfort

The 'staff dinner' between filming sessions is also a very important ritual for filmmakers. In our participatory observations, it was found that filmmakers often stay together and shoot for short periods. On nights with no scheduled shoots, each team often has a 'staff dinner' with drinks. Those staff dinners served as a space for intensive feedback on filmmaking, as an extension of

learning, and for the formation of a sense of community among the 'filmmakers.' It was observed that the participants felt more part of the organization, that they were growing, and found comfort in developing their network.

Figure. 5 Staff dinner with drinks

Due to the budget constraints, dinners were mainly held at Samgyeopsal restaurants or beer places for the cost of the dinner was covered by the production fee. The parties are characterized by a fair amount of alcohol consumption and being seated regardless of position and team. The main topic of conversation at these dinners was naturally filmmaking, with conversations about previous shoots and the future. But as the time passed, they shared more personal stories. They talked about their struggles, hardships, loneliness, and insecurities on a profoundly personal level. Their stories were genuine and were relatable to anyone who works in filmmaking. At the end of the night, the last words were mostly the same. "Make a good movie and let's all succeed!" The dinners also serve as a place where the network of "filmmakers" is solidified.

Who you worked with is a matter of pride for filmmakers. Working with a famous actor or director, or the success of a film they've worked on, can be a big part of a filmmaker's career as a "filmmaker." Most times, a person's ability is recognized by having worked on a certain film. The main topic of conversation at the dinner table was about these experiences.

"The value of a film crew is directly associated with who they've worked with. It's enough to say I worked on a certain director's movie. You don't need to explain what you do. Being part of a great movie and working with famous people is a matter of pride. It's very empowering to be a part of a famous director's film." (The youngest member of the directing team)

Many filmmakers are disconnected from family and friends. 84.2% of filmmakers were unmarried and 88.8% had no children (Korean Film Promotion Committee, 2021). One interviewee said that (s)he went home less than one month a year, meaning that his/her coworkers on the set were like a second family to him/her.

"We can hold out with the support of coworkers. Everyone knows what's going on, so it's easier to talk to them. We eat and sleep together, and are closer than a real family. You can't live like this alone. **The comfort and support from each other keep us going**." (The youngest member of the crew)

4.7 Employment Precarity

Filmmakers are even more vulnerable to employment precarity than post-production staff. This is related to their shorter work tenure, on average a shorter period of involvement in filmmaking.

This employment precarity is due to two main factors. First, the production period of a movie is short, four months on average, and there is no job succession, meaning that even if you join a production team on a movie, your future job is not guaranteed beyond four months. Since they are employed as temporary workers, the movie production company does not have responsibility for any employment succession. According to the 2020 Film Staff Survey, the average number of productions per year for film production workers is about 1.5 to 2.0. Considering the filming period of a movie of 4 months, a typical filmmaker cannot find a job in the movie industry for over four months of the year.

"You're lucky if you get one movie, but then **you never know when you're going to get a job again**. If the phone rings when you're not working, your heart is pounding." (Second Production Assistant)

Second, consider the law of supply and demand. The number of majors related to film and video has increased sharply while the size of the Korean movie market is growing gradually. The number of film-related majors in Korean universities and colleges has increased every year, from only 124 in 1999, reaching 349 in 2012, a 281% (Education Statistics Research Center, 2012). This number includes acting majors, more competitive than staff, but overall, the number of film majors is growing exponentially, making it difficult for the industry to hire them all. According to the statistics of entrance examination competition by department, despite the unstable situation of the film, film and video-related majors have a very high competition rate compared to other majors due to the preference for 'self-fulfilment.' This oversupply maximizes the precarity of filmmakers in terms of both employment and wages.

General staff are still relatively free from employment precarity. They can find work relatively easily and are expected to be prolific. In the case of commercial filming sites, there are more opportunities for them, as they are organized in a pyramid structure that hires more people with lower years of experience. It is said that there is even a shortage of the most junior staff in commercial films, as they need at least two or three jobs in independent and art films to join the production of commercial films. On the other hand, mid-level staff with some experience on film crews are suffering severe employment precarity. Getting one job a year is considered fine, and it is not rare to get one job every few years.

"As soon as we start shooting a movie, we start wondering when we'll be able to do the next one." (Second Production Assistant)

"Most of the hard parts of shooting are placed early on. Towards the end of the movie, the crew's minds are elsewhere, mostly focused on finding the next job. Even during breaks between cuts, all they talk about is the next movie. That's how anxious they are." (Production company representative)

4.8 Concerns About the Future

Worrying about the future was common across all departments and years of experience. The details of their worries, to be sure, were different. First of all, the second and third assistant groups, who have relatively little experience, were most concerned about whether it was right for them to work in the movie industry. It was this career group that was most concerned about changing jobs.

"The reality of filmmaking is very harsh, and I'm not sure if it's right to hang on. The biggest challenge is that the reality is **different from what I dreamed of** when I was in school. You should weigh it against other jobs." (Second Production Assistant)

Most of the directing staff were film-related majors and had directed a few short films after graduating from school. They were less likely to change jobs compared to other positions because they had already put in a lot of time working on films.

The youngest member of the directing team graduated from a film-related school and entered the commercial film industry after working on a few independent films. Although the youngest on the set, he was already familiar with the film scene through several independent film projects. However, the high labour intensity and lack of creativity in the work structure was a big challenge for him, especially when he thought about the future, he said that there is no end in sight. However, he tries to avoid thinking about the future as much as possible and focus on the task at hand. Like many filmmakers, he keeps himself going by thinking about the time he has put in and the movie he will make someday. He also finds it comforting to write his screenplays on his days off.

"Even though I'm the youngest, I've already spent a lot of time into movies. It's been 10 years, and it's hard to quit now just because things are difficult." (The youngest member of the production team)

As for the art department, especially the sets, second jobs were commonplace due to its nature. Since they could work in other construction-related industries at any time, not just on movie sets, they were less concerned about their future careers as filmmakers than others.

"Sets used for any movies or TV shows. Of course, there's a lot more work that goes into a movie set, but it's no different than what most companies do, with the difference in quality being the difference in budget, so it's more fun to work on a movie set." (Set Director)

"It is fun to make sets for a movie. But if I don't have a job, I'll go to another construction site the next day. I don't think you can make a living doing film art alone." (Second Set Assistant)

Depending on the level of experience, there were quite different levels of concern about the future as a filmmaker. At first, it was thought that the second and third-level filmmakers would be more worried about their future, but it was the opposite; the more senior the filmmaker, the more worried s(he) were about the future.

"It's always a problem to find a job because **it's a few months project.** But once you find a job, nowadays the working conditions are being set by law.... If you're a team leader or less, you can just wait a few months to find work, but if you're at a higher level, it's not easy to find work. If you shoot a movie this time, you don't know when you'll be able to work again. Taking a few years off is the default. The more senior you are, the more worried you are about your future as a filmmaker." (Producer)

One retiree was half-forced to retire after the last movie. Since the last movie was not a big success, it was difficult to find work afterwards, so (s)he retired and had to take a job that had nothing to do with movies. If given the chance, (s)he would like to return to the movie industry, but given his/her age and experience, (s)he has given up on the prospect. It is the biggest regret that (s)he is not able to utilize his career after retiring from the movie industry, but (s)he resigned

himself/herself. It is unusual in the movie industry to work under a team leader who is junior to you. His/her career as a filmmaker was over.

"When you're the youngest, you don't have worries. As long as you're willing, you can still get a job. The biggest problem at the head of the crew is losing your touch. If you **have a long break**, or if your last movie didn't do well, people say you've already lost your touch. You get discouraged. Eventually, you just quit the movie business." (Cinematographer)

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We analyzed the contents of participant observation based on Park's (2011) model of the flexibilization, and the result can be summarized as follows: First, filmmakers show extreme flexibility in employment and types of employment. They have to be constantly in and out of jobs depending on the project labor. This type of employment reduces job predictability, making life planning based on job stability impossible; Second, the labor process of filmmakers is also becoming more flexible. They have to endure unstable shooting hours according to the schedule. Also, the content of their daily work varies depending on the location. This variation in working conditions causes precarity, especially since filmmakers often live in dormitories with their colleagues, further blurring the line between work and rest. This, in turn, increased working hours and labor intensity, which leads to an extreme disruption of the 'work-life balance'; Third, this spread of flexible labor among filmmakers creates a constant state of flux, which creates a flexibility in socialization. They always assume the risk of job loss due to the nature of project labor and are forced to acquire skills more rigorously to prepare for unemployment and reemployment. While their enthusiasm and joy for cinema are what drives them to put up with these poor working conditions, it can be overly exploitative and burdensome in the overall film system. Filmmakers are pushed to "build their specs," and they become part of a larger system of control in the filming industry.

The structure of project labor in filming a movie requires prepared workers, unlike many other industries. The employer, the movie production company, does not try to improve the workers' skills. It is up to the filmmakers themselves to improve their skills. Even in a state of unemployment, creative industry workers bear the burden of constantly developing and maintaining their creative skills. But it's not always possible to focus solely on improving their creative skills while unemployed. They must work for money, even outside of the creative industry, to make ends meet while job hunting for the next project. In the world of flexible labor, all the burden falls on the filmmakers.

Curtin & Sanson (2016) dealt with the labor vulnerability of American film producers about production structures. Focusing on the structure of exploitation, it explained the pain of workers' low wages, abnormal working hours and consequently uncertain job security. Behind this background is the logic of capital that aims for high efficiency and low cost of the American movie system. The intention to maximize the rate of return by reducing the budget of the lower-level labor force and suppressing production costs was analyzed. The appearance of Korean film production workers reflects the instability shown in these preceding studies. The difference is that the intensity of the difficulty is greater. The lack of collective action such as unions and protection of labor laws that are weaker than those of the United States may be the cause.

6. CONCLUSION

Filmmakers, especially in commercial films, are often limited in their autonomy. This is especially true depending on their position. Disconnected from the rest of society, filmmakers have their own set of strict rules. In such a space, filmmakers are often faced with emotional difficulties, but there is rarely a time or place to resolve them. This is compounded by the blurred line between work and rest. This type of labor involves staying together for more than half of the filming period, which is rarely found in other creative industries. Seriously, this further accelerates the phenomenon of labor flexibilization.

Creative industry workers in project labor structures are also in the blind corners of the national social security system. Short-term, temporary workers hired on a project basis have difficulty recognizing their worker status and are vulnerable to social security continuity.

In terms of precarity, their working conditions are far from good. The ideals they envision when they think of the movie industry significantly differ from reality. The factors of labor precarity are complex, consisting of a combination of several variables, and the precarity may differ greatly by individual workers.

In conclusion, film production workers in Korea are experiencing extreme labor flexibility. The difficulties of work itself and the imbalance between life and work testify to such flexibility. In particular, the biggest problem is job instability. Due to the nature of project labor for several months, job loss and job search are repeated, and these difficulties must be endured only by the individual. It is difficult to find practical national policy guarantees, industry support, or help from labor unions.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement

References

Cho, Y. (2012). Internet and Ethnographic Approach in Audiences Studies: Theorizing Internet Ethnography. Media, Gender & Culture, (21), 101-134.

Chung, SunWha. (2017). Financing and Knowledge Accumulation in the Film Industry: Spatial Characteristics of Korean and American Film Industry. Journal of the Korean Economic Geographical Society, 20(4), 453-485.

Curtin & Sanson. (2016). Precarious Creativity. University of California Press.

Education Statistics Research Center. (2012). Korea Educational Development Institute.

Foucault, M. (1979). Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison. Vintage.

Han, H. (2006). Study on Practice of Film Reality Producer with particular reference to art in the film. Department of Media Arts Graduate School of Journalism & Communications Kyung Hee University.

Jeong, Y. (2004). A study on the structure of the labor market in the cultural industry. Proceedings of the Sociological Conference of the Korean Sociological Association, 561-565.

Korean Film Promotion Committee. (2021). Film staff working environment fact-finding survey 2020.

Lee, S. (2015). Study on the Systems and Structures of Writing for Television Dramas and Movies in Korea - Focusing on its Characteristics and Problems. Journal of The Korea Contents Association, 15(10), 66-82.

Lee, Y. (2006). A study on the working environment of Korean film production sites. Master's thesis Graduate School of Industrial Management Chung-Ang University.

Park, J. (2011). Flexibility, creativity, precarity - A new way of problematisation on the media work research. Media & Society, 19(4), 41-86.