
Psychological and Occupational Study of The Labor of Film Korean Production Workers– Focus on Interviews

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate what type of labor Korean film production workers actually experience in the film industry, what kind of occupational identity they form based on, and experience labor instability. In order to perform this, the researcher focused on the quality of the independent experience of film production workers. Furthermore, this study answered the question, 'How do Korean filmmakers actually accept their working lives?' As a theoretical model, film labor was examined based on good and bad labor presented by Hesmondhalgh and Baker. To this end, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 film production workers in different occupations. Through this, the researcher was able to derive the characteristics and meanings of good labor conditions and bad labor in film production.

Keywords: Korean filmmaker, Producer research, Good labor, Bad labor, In-depth interviews

1. Introduction

South Korea has the world's fifth-largest film industry and achieved remarkable achievements in international film festivals, but behind the impressive achievements, there have been issues such as such seriously unstable working environments and poor treatment of film production workers. Considering the characteristics of the project-based film industry (the average filming period of four months), film production workers repeatedly face job search and loss. In particular, the reality in which the film production schedules have been delayed or suspended due to COVID-19 since 2020, and the film-related staff was struggling while working various part-time jobs, has raised awareness of a problem in the Korean film production industry.

In this regard, this study aims to identify what kind of labor Korean film production workers experience in the current film industry, what sort of occupational identity they create based on that, and how they experience labor instability. To this end, the researcher focused on the quality of the subjective experiences of film production workers. Furthermore, this study sought to answer the question, 'How are film production workers in Korea currently accepting their working lives?'

As a theoretical model, film work was examined based on good work and bad work presented by Hesmondhalgh and Baker(2013). To this end, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 15 film production workers in different occupations. Through this, the conditions for good work in film production and the characteristics and meaning of bad work was derived.

2. Theoretical background

The influence, artistic value, and popularity of films have contributed to active research related to films in academia. Film-related research typically includes text research that deals with film content, audience research that focuses on perceptions, relationships, and consumption behavior of the audience, and research on an industrial scale and institutional analysis. However, studies focusing on film producers are limited to statistical surveys on current working conditions or a sporadic approach toward the general level of interest, such as fragmentary studies on working environments. The lack of research on film producers is largely due to the exclusivity of film production worker groups and the low possibility of access (or the possibility of observation) to film production sites.

In particular, there is a lack of studies that perform detailed, multifaceted, and in-depth analyses of the

working environments of Korean film production workers. The negligence of research on cultural industry producers eventually contributed to alienating industrial capital and labor sites from academic interest. This can be a problem in that it makes academia and industry more isolated, as well as it causes a loss of connection between industry and academia. Therefore, this study aims to answer the following questions: ‘What kind of labor do Korean film production workers experience in the current film industry? What sort of occupational identity do they create based on that?’ This study attempted to highlight the quality of the subjective experiences of film workers. Furthermore, this study answered the question, “How are film production workers in Korea currently accepting their work lives?” The question of how film producers accept their working lives was further supported by asking them of their reactions to their current way of life. This question is based on the belief that today’s labor at the expense of workers’ creativity’ in creative industries, including the film industry, should be more beneficial to workers.

This study further aims to identify the kind of labor being experienced by creative workers in the cultural industry. Do their working environments resemble the aspects presented by the past advocates of creative labor or the researcher who stood against it? In a study by Hesmondhalgh and Baker, they presented a research model that can fill the lack of qualitative research [1]. They interviewed workers in creative industries within the cultural industries such as television, music, and magazines. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed, and based on their analysis results, we examined creative labor based on a framework of good and bad work, which was suggested as a theoretical model. Hesmondhalgh and Baker did not aim to evaluate whether the observed creative labor was good or bad work. In this paper, the researcher attempted to analyze creative labor as a cultural producer and evaluate it from a normative perspective. Through this, the conditions for good work, and the characteristics and meaning of bad work in terms of creative labor were derived.

Table 1. Criteria of good and bad work in creative labor suggested by Hesmondhalgh and Baker [1]

	Good work	Bad work	Category
Labor process	Good salary, appropriate working hours, and high job security	Low wages, overworked labor market, and low labor security	A
	Autonomy	Helpless	B
	Interest and participation	Boredom	C
	Sociability	Isolation	D
	Self-esteem	Low self-esteem and embarrassment	E
	Self-realization	Frustration in self-development	F
	Balance between work and life	Overwork	G
	Labor security	Risk	H
Products	Excellent products	Low-quality products	I
	Products contributing to the common good	Products that do not help others have good lives	J

According to this previous study, the imperative criterion for distinguishing good work from bad work in creative labor is autonomy. Autonomy means that workers 'perform independent work from other decision factors' in the production process in the creative industry and becomes the most influential work condition for 'exerting creativity' of workers. On the other hand, control that restricts autonomy not only makes creative workers feel helpless and meaningless of labor, but also makes them feel used by others or systems. This is again connected to the problem of self-realization, which means 'having faith in building the future that each one desires through the labor process,' and is the basis for leading healthy lives. It can also serve a basis for a discussion of ethical labor within the concept of social justice.

Furthermore, participation by interest in and motivation for labor was considered a condition of good work. Along with wages, working hours, job stability, work-life balance, and labor security, are frequently handled

issues due to the feature of creative labor. In addition, the authors mentioned that good results (products) do not necessarily come out, even if the good factors in the production process of creative labor are met. Even if there is work with the characteristics of good work, there are cases where the product quality can be poor; therefore, it is difficult to conclude that work is good work. Representatively, they also indicated that labor should have a direction to satisfy the public interest through labor. As a condition for good work, it is necessary to examine both the labor process and its results. However, the criteria of good work and bad work simultaneously function as a source of ambivalence for creative industry workers. In other words, it has a characteristic that it cannot be divided into either side because it can bring sacrifice, anxiety, and isolation along with autonomy and enjoyment.

The strength of Hesmondhalgh and Baker's theoretical model is that it presented a framework for research on media producers, which is rare to find. They collected extensive data through field research and interviews with various types of creative industry workers, and based on that, they presented a framework for evaluating their labor. Based on the results, this study attempted to analyze various characteristics of creative labor, especially the good work and bad work of film labor, in detail and comprehensively, through Korean film production workers.

3. Research method

This study was conducted using in-depth interviews and literature reviews. Literature research was carried out while focusing on the research on actual conditions of movie staff, which was conducted by the Korean Film Council, and the employment contracts of film workers. This study employed in-depth interviews as an essential research method to examine the lives of workers and explore their inner thoughts and identities.

An interview method is widely used to conduct systematic social research in various academic fields of social science. Interviews play an imperative role in qualitative research to the extent that they are sometimes used synonymously with qualitative research, and are the most frequently used research method in qualitative research [2]. In-depth interviews enable researchers to identify the attitudes, feelings, behaviors, and emotions of interviewees, which are difficult to observe directly [3]. Interviews also have the following limitations: first, it may be unable for interviewees to express honest thoughts depending on the interview atmosphere; second, interviewees' opinions on related matters may change over time. Such limitations remind us of the fact that the substantive truth and interview content can be different. However, if interviews are carefully designed in consideration of these limitations, it can be sufficiently utilized as research data [1]. This study utilized interview content as important research materials to identify the process, in which film production workers contemplate and find their own identities despite the labor instability, in-depth. Interviews are important resources for identifying identities and inner instability. The researcher attempted to achieve the purpose of the interviews in consideration of the aforementioned limitations. Human beings have defensive instincts, and these defense mechanisms are likely to be activated, especially when discussing with outsiders about work areas being closely related to their identities. Therefore, the researcher assumed that truthful answers via interviews can be obtained by a friendly approach as an insider colleague, rather than simply as an outsider. During the interviews, a friendly approach was taken based on the knowledge acquired, while observing film production sites in the past, in order for them not to feel a sense of estrangement. Furthermore, the one-sided process of simply asking questions was avoided to encourage interviewees to talk about their experiences and explore their own identities. This study focused on uncovering how film production workers think about film production and how they understand their identities, hence, the use of semi-structured questions. Such types of questions are intended to provide opportunities to present personal understanding and experiences. Interviewees were encouraged to raise questions and mention topics for discussion, and made efforts to devise a method to make them participate in this research to some extent [4]. Table 2 shows the semi-structured questions for interviews.

Table 2. Semi-structured questions for interviews

No.	Questions	Related items
1	Gender, education, career in film industries, and family background	Basic survey
2	Where did you have your education related to film?	F

3	Does your life as a film production worker fit your professional, family, and financial goals?	A, D, G, H
4	How and what motivated you to enter the film industry? (Path of entry)	F, H
5	What kind of efforts do you make to have better networking within the film production industry? (e.g., social capital, and human network)	A, D, F, G, H
6	What are the duration and difficulty of finding a new film production work? And how do you manage this period?	A, H
7	Which team do you belong to, and what is your specific role at filming sites?	B, C, G
8	How does instability differ according to work experiences?	C
9	How does the decline in working conditions affect the outputs of films?	I
10	What are the aspects of the directive relationship and the conflicted relationship in terms of work?	B, C
11	How do you collaborate with other teams?	B, C
12	What kind of identity do you have, among artists, workers, and professionals?	E, F, G
13	Why do you work in film production industries, rather than other media production jobs?	B, C, E, G, I
14	Why are you engaged in the film industry despite labor instability?	B, C, E, G, I
15	How do you see your future as a film production worker?	A, B, C, F, G, H, I, J
16	If you are planning to move to other industries, what is the reason?	ALL
17	If you compare the thoughts you had before starting to work as a film worker, and now, is there any difference?	ALL
18	When do you feel proud or embarrassed about your work?	ALL

It was highly difficult to select interviewees because their tasks and roles in the film production process were diverse as well as the detailed divisions of work. However, the researcher tried to include as many job groups and positions as possible to increase the representativeness of the interviewees. he researcher secured interviewees through the recruitment section of community sites for film production workers [5] on the Internet. One-to-one interviews were performed with 15 interviewees for 90 minutes on average. The job groups and positions of the interviewees are as follows:

Table 3. List of study participants and information

Job Group	Job position	Work experience (years)	Gender	Status of marriage	Rephrased terms
Directing	Director	24	Male	Married	Director
Directing	The first assistant	7	Female	Single	Assistant director
Directing	The youngest staff	1	Male	Single	The youngest staff of directing team
Production management	CEO of production company	19	Male	Married	CEO of a production company
Production management	Producer	23	Male	Married	Producer

Production management	The second assistant	5	Female	Single	The second assistant of production management team
Production management	The youngest staff	1	Male	Single	The youngest staff of production management team
Cinematography	Director	13	Male	Single	Cinematographer
Cinematography	The third assistant	3	Male	Single	The third assistant of cinematography
Cinematography	The youngest staff	3	Female	Single	The youngest staff of cinematography
Arts (set)	Director	25	Male	Married	Director of film set team
Arts (set)	The second assistant	3	Male	Single	The second assistant of film set team
Retiree	The first assistant	28	Male	Married	Retiree 1
Retiree	The youngest staff	1	Female	Single	Retiree 2
Retiree	The youngest staff	1	Male	Single	Retiree 3

4. Body

4.1 Contract

labor is labor security [1]. Creations, creativity, and autonomy of creative workers in the Korean film production industry, as specified in the labor contract, paradoxically and clearly show the direction of increasing instability.

“Most commercial film contracts I have made clarified 300 working hours per month. The media says people can only work 52 hours per week, but I don't know why we have to work so much. I had no choice when signing the contract, but it is not an environment where I can later claim that this is illegal.” shared by an Assistant director.

“Without time for reading the contract, I had to sign it. It is impossible to read it and make objections to some details. What I had to do was just signing the part marked in fluorescent color. If there are people who raise objections, they will be immediately kicked out of production sites. Such situations have not changed at all, as I experienced the situation when I was working as the youngest staff.” shared by an Assistant director.

At actual film production sites, compliance with the contract content is a more important concern than writing the contract. In other words, when someone breaches the contract, it is more important to prepare actual compensations or remedial measures and confirm whether there are sanctions for violations.

“However, whether the contract is actually effective is out of the question. Considering the features of film production sites, it is impossible to make films while keeping all the contract details. The more involved staff, the more work (or variables) there will be.” shared by a Producer.

Even considering the difference in contract bargaining power, it is common to find unequal treaties, which cannot be explained by the general legal system through contracts between film production workers.

4.2 Wage

Wages of film production workers are a key condition generating instability. Leading lives based on economic compensation is the fundamental reason for labor. However, creative workers are characterized by higher life instability due to unstable employment and low wages. The same goes for film production workers.

According to the '2020 Survey on the Working Environment of Film Staff,' as a result of the request to specify 'total income through film-making for the past year,' the average total income from film-making for one year was KRW 30.01 million (the average wage excluding wages of director or technicians was KRW 25.93 million),

which increased from KRW 14.45 million in 2014, KRW 19.7 million in 2016, and KRW 19.48 million in 2017 [6]. However, considering that the average working day per week was 5.33 days, and the working hours per day were 12.3 hours at the filming stage, the income level of film production workers was not much different from the legal minimum wage level, or was often lower. The same survey revealed that even staff who have worked for film production without pay, still accounted for 17.9% out of the total. This is a significant improvement from 34% in 2016 and 23.1% in 2018.

This reality not only makes it embarrassing to even mention the adequacy of wages, but also shows the instability level of creative workers in the film industry.

“In the case of small-scale films/independent films or art films, there are many cases where there are no contracts, and wages are paid later or unpaid. There are many cases in which people consider such a period a probationary process before being involved in commercial films.” shared by a Producer.

“There were many cases where people worked without pay because they thought that involvement in an independent film would be helpful for their career, rather than just spending time without doing anything.” shared by the youngest staff of production management team.

There seemed to be no practical and effective measures to solve the wage-related problems at film production sites. According to 'Shinmungo for Movie-men' in which film production workers aim to solve labor-related issues, since 2004, it has received 719 cases of arrears in wages, and the total amount of confirmed arrears was KRW 12.56 billion.

There was no institution capable of managing the wage issues of film production workers and taking administrative measures. There were numerous cases in which the salary of film production workers was so realistically small, then there were limits to handling the problems through judicial litigation, and it required a lot of financial resources and time. Workers in the field were already fully aware of these realistic restrictions, regardless of job group and position. Since there are complicated relationships between seniors and juniors or former colleagues in film production sites, there was a strong tendency to be highly reluctant to resolve related disputes through legal means, as such situations can 'make their close relationships awkward.' Film production workers recognized this attempt as 'a half-forced departure from the film world.' This psychological burden made them hesitate to actively respond to the overall wage problem, unless they risk everything such as moving to other industries.

“The film world is quite small. In the end, you will meet those people, even if you move to other film production sites. It is hard to get the next job or opportunity if you tackle everything one by one. If you are really angry, you can leave the site, but then it is difficult to promise the next time.” shared by the youngest staff of production management team.

4.3 Working hours and work-life balance

Film production is based on detailed shooting plans established in the pre-production stage, but variables at actual film production sites were found to be unpredictably diverse and spontaneous. Among the unexpected variables that occurred during the participatory observation period, there was nothing that was predicted in advance. These variables contributed to continuous changes in shooting plans, accordingly influencing the working hours of film production workers. The issues were long hours of continuous work and night work. There were always variables such as weather conditions, or injuries, and problems regarding paid venues made staff forced to shoot films in a rush.

“The schedule was messed up. Because it was an action movie, a supporting actor got hurt in a fighting scene and went to the hospital. In this case, everything was stopped; it is difficult to keep the schedule as well as other problems like renting venues. Then, we have to make up for the wasted time at other times.” shared by a CEO of production company.

The reason film production workers suffer from such a high intensity of work is that films are produced as projects. As an investor, the only way to increase productivity is to produce films quickly. This is because the

longer it takes to produce a film, the higher the production unit cost, including labor costs. Companies with lots of regular/full-time workers provide them with appropriate working hours and days off, as workers' long hours of continuous work or night work can decrease productivity from a long-term perspective, but companies with non-regular/temporary employees are free from these restrictions. Working hours can also add to workers' instability. The government has attempted to protect the rights and interests of workers by introducing a 52-hour work system, but in reality, this work system is not properly applied to film production sites.

“The contract indicates that employees would work up to 300 hours per month, but most people think at first that it is simply indicated without any intention. However, there are actual cases where people actually work up to 300 hours. It is a workload beyond human limits.” shared by an Assistant director.

According to the 2020 Survey on the Working Environment of Film Staff, it was found that film production workers work long hours with an average of 11.6 hours per day. However, it is lower than the 2018 record (12.3 hours).

The rate of working for 9 - 12 hours a day accounted for 73.4%, and the case of working long hours (more than 13 hours a day) accounted for 18.5%. In particular, there was a case accounting for 5.0% in which workers did murderous work of more than 17 hours a day. Night workers did not have good working environments as well. Assuming an average night work day per week based on the working hours from 22:00 to 6:00 as defined by the Labor Standards Act, the average night work day per week reached 2.28 days. The rate of respondents who do night work for two days per week was 33.6%, which was the highest, followed by 23.2% for three days, 17.8% for one day, 10.6% for four days, 6.7% for five days, and 4% for six days. Among them, the average night work hours per day reached 4.6 hours. Even considering the feature of the short-term project-based industry, most film production workers suffered from heavy and intensive labor. Although the 52-hour work system per week was introduced due to the revision of the Labor Standards Act, the average monthly working hours increased from 318.7 hours in 2019 to 324.5 hours in 2020 [6].

4.4 Autonomy

In the field of cultural production, economic practices should not become the main purpose. However, the field aims to create cultural products and implement economic practices accordingly. Bourdieu paid attention to the relationship between art and market economy, and considered that the autonomy of the field of cultural production is related to the independence of the symbolic logic of art from economic practices [7]. The film production industry cannot be completely free from economic logic. The main purpose of film production is to make films with an invested budget and to create profits (economic practices) through it. However, after the investment is made, pursuing cultural symbols become the biggest goal in film production. In the field of cultural production where filming takes place, its fundamental purpose is far from economic practices. In the field of cultural production called cinematography, all participants focus on making good films that can be highly recognized (the pursuit of cultural symbols).

“Filming sites are not commercial spaces. The budget is already given, and we only focus on making the best film as much as possible within that budget. More visitors do not mean that all profits come to us. However, it is more important to us that many people watch our films, and we participate in making successful films.” shared by the youngest staff of cinematography.

Several constraints that they must abide by at film production sites are compliance with the budget and schedules that were promised to investors.

It seems that the pursuit of cultural symbols sought by film production workers can be ‘expressed through films with extreme originality’ by ‘filmmakers as artists,’ and then through ‘given value to the films.’ It was possible to confirm numerous points in which the interviewees considered their identities as artists.

“If one thinks about money, that one is not going to stay in the film industry. Based on the stories from seniors, there are so many people who could not go back home for a year and could not even earn a total of KRW 1 million. I consider myself an art worker. The work requires hard physical labor, but I do my work as a kind of a truth-seeker... more like an artist.” shared by an Assistant director.

Professional, independent, and isolated 'workspace of their own' is another mechanism for making artists disconnect from the outside world. Here, their own workspaces become film production sites. The sites examined through participatory observation were highly independent and autonomous workspaces separated from reality. They were the spaces where the tension of filming and the relaxation of non-filming intersect incalculably, and the spaces 'created' by people from various occupations who were focusing on filming at the same time. They were the spaces where people could perform their duties most perfectly and faithfully.

4.5 Creativity

Occupational identity of artists can be evenly found among film production workers, but it does not appear in the same pattern for everyone. Their artistic identities appeared in various manners according to the features of their labor and their position in the organization.

As a result of the interview, film production workers who considered themselves artists were found the most frequently in the directing team, which is also related to the features of the directing team's work. In particular, directors see their films as artworks, not mere cultural products. They regard films as products reflecting their identities as artists and the result of self-realization. Other directing team staff have similar levels of identities as there are many members who want to become directors.

"Directing is a work that creates an artwork by comprehensively composing actors, locations, lighting, cinematography, and voice/sound. The work is based on artistic value." shared by the Director.

A number of production management team members also mentioned their artistic identities. However, production management team members responded that, unusually, the higher the rank, the more the identity of a professional than an artist. In particular, producers, who are in the top position in the production management team, responded that they should work based on professionalism rather than artistic value.

"Art, that is really good. But producers should consider more realistic parts, than art. Art can be done by directors, and producers are responsible for practical problems/internal matters, so then, producers should become more like managerial experts. Producers should play a role in controlling the pace between directors seeking artistic perfection, and other staff." shared by the Producer.

There were also creativity-related factors contributing to staff leaving. Such leaving can be mostly found in the staff who just started their film career; they left the film industry/film production sites, because film production work was somewhat different from their expectations, and they had to do almost passive and repetitive manual labor. There was an answer that they wanted to contribute to creative parts, but there was no way to get involved.

Even in the third assistant or youngest staff position, there are numerous cases where they experienced the working conditions in film production sites and decided to leave the field early. Most low-level film production workers in interviews frequently mentioned the preparation of their own scenarios, and they wanted to retire early from filming sites. However, they also did not want to completely stay far from the film industry. They wanted to leave filming sites, but had a strong will to continue film-related work in any other form. Creativity was the most sought value in filmmaking by all interviewees.

"I am preparing my own scenario. In fact, it is hard for me to work on production sites, then I don't think I can do it forever. But I still like movies and consider it a vocation, so I think the day when my scenario is selected, will be the day I retire from film production sites." shared by the youngest staff of production management team.

4.6 Sociability

Many film production workers were being disconnected from family and friends. According to the 2020 Survey on the Working Environment of Film Staff, 84.2% of film production workers were unmarried, and 88.8% of them did not have any children. One of the film production workers answered that he/she went back home less than a month for a year [6].

The project-based film production industry provides only short-term contracts to workers. Such labor instability causes workers to experience a cycle of repetitive employment and unemployment, and this cycle can be interpreted as a level of addiction. The psychology of addiction to artistic identities is created for them through the contrast between the satisfactory psychological compensation from film production work and the difficulties due to unemployment. While they are employed, their artistic identity is satisfied, but during the period of unemployment, they lose the identity, which is continuously repeated. Such structure functions as a mechanism for film production workers to further pursue their artistic identity. Molbak(2010) argues that addicted people become more closely connected to the addicted object or activity, and gradually disconnected from other relationships or activities over time [8]. As a result, the addicted individual's experiences and plans, and relationships with other people and objects are increasingly formed by addiction, which eventually hugely contributes to strengthening identities.

Film production workers actually showed disconnected relationships with family and acquaintances. While putting a lot of time and energy into film work, other social networks became weakened. Most film production workers were unmarried. Even in the actual interviews, all interviewees except for the director level were unmarried. There was a majority of opinions that film production work and having a family is difficult to do at the same time. These causes include unstable working conditions and poor wages, but also the feature of the work that requires leaving home for a long period. Eventually, even at the risk of giving up on relationships with others, there was a tendency for them to perceive that focusing on filmmaking is the most rewarding and valuable, by being immersed in the value of being a filmmaker.

“When I first said I was doing film work, my family severely opposed it. As I get older and am still single, the conflict grew more and more. Right now, I’m not even saying I’m working in the film industry.” shared by a Cinematographer.

“I sometimes imagine what would happen if I got married and had children. I eventually come to think that film work, family, and childbirth are difficult to handle at the same time. It's not just about money. Because I don't have enough time to be with my family.” shared by an Assistant director.

This concept is reinforced in the way of 'family bonding' in Korean film production sites. This bond is very unique as it reflects Korean culture. Film production workers call each other, like brother or the youngest, or by their first name or nickname, rather than their job title, indicating the pattern of a family rather than co-workers. Top-level managers such as directors, part-directors, and producers use their titles, but other employees call each other casually like family. Such a pattern can be found in formal businesses such as filming and meetings, and non-work situations such as when having rest and meals. This can be interpreted that film production workers share a bond like family, rather than official work partners. And this bond functions as a culture that further solidifies disconnection from family and acquaintances, and immersion in filmmaking. It eventually becomes a mechanism strengthening the artist identities of film production workers.

“We see each other more than our families, and we eat and sleep together every day. So, we have a bond naturally. We will continue to meet in any field in the future, so in a way, we are closer than family.” shared by the third assistant of cinematography.

4.7 Self-esteem and self-realization

Filmmaker's film production sites is very independent workspaces separated from reality. They were the spaces where people could perform their duties most perfectly and faithfully. Many film production workers responded that they liked the unique feeling that they can have only in the field. Their own workspace is a space for filmmakers that cannot be invaded by others, and it becomes a space that is “given and allowed” only to them. Therefore, the fact that they were in their own workspaces, formed and solidified the consciousness in which they were participating in film production. Being a ‘filmmaker’ was the ultimate self-esteem of the workers, and this consciousness was found in all occupational groups.

“I like the feeling when the production site is tense as we start shooting. At that moment, I feel like I completely focus on the shooting site, and I cannot think of anything else. At the moment the director shouts

Cut, I return to reality, and I enjoy talking to my colleagues while preparing.” shared by the youngest staff of directing team.

Such consciousness leads to the reward of ‘participation in film production.’ This leads to the idea that people have pleasure and are rewarded through the labor involved in film production. This becomes the reward given by the occupational identity as an artist. Such a tendency was found in all workers, but particularly, it was found higher in the lower ranks of each occupational group.

The contradiction as an artist is revealed by the inner desires of film production workers. In-depth interviews showed that many film production workers revealed their desire to have both social honor and financial gain through the success of their films. Although they endure harsh working conditions or hunger for the work they want, there was a contradictory aspect in which they were dreaming of honor and fortune at the same time.

“The dream of a filmmaker is not only to have fame through successful films, but also to achieve financial success in reality. Since they have had a hard and hungry life, they think that if they succeed in one thing, everything can be compensated. In a way, it seems that they were dreaming of making a fortune.” shared by the Producer.

In today's film industry, making a fortune through box office success is not really easy. The positions in which the ‘net profit incentive’ is specified in the contract are only limited to a few top-level positions, such as directors and producers. The positions, such as the second, third, and youngest staff, are excluded from these rewards. Nevertheless, desires and contradictions can be confirmed regardless of job group and position. Even if it is not right now, they want to go up in rank, and they want to have both fortune and honor through movies in some future.

“It's really hard to make a lot of money through movies. Still, they dream of it, because there are other colleagues who are definitely successful.” shared by the Producer.

This identity can be also confirmed through the theory of self-precarization. Ross argued that artists showed contradictory patterns; they self-disciplined voluntarily with the extreme labor intensity in the creative industry [9]. If applied to the theory of self-precarization derived from this phenomenon, the identity as a filmmaker is likely to function as a motivation to force instability on oneself and pursue only extreme artistic value. As a worker, it is fair to have compensation for the price of labor, but the false consciousness, which is uniquely found in the creative industry where the social status declines when they accept their identity as a worker rather than an artist, functions.

This consciousness has permeated the entire film production industry. There have been attempts confusing labor, creativity, and the future by saying the following: “Are you an artist or a worker?” “You are now in the process of learning film work,” “You have to work hard now to debut as a director.” Film production companies also tend to utilize these artistic identities to exploit high-intensity labor at low wages.

Numerous film production workers in the in-depth interviews mostly admitted the self-precarization that occurs in the pursuit of job identities as artists. As filmmakers, they endure unstable working conditions to realize their artistic identities.

“Seniors put a lot of emphasis on the learning aspect (to me). The work is hard and the pay is low, but it is not easy for the youngest staff to complain about that. Because the seniors keep patiently working in silence. They actually showed how they work - (filmmakers)should work like this -, then it is really hard for me to complain, and naturally, I think that I have to work like this.” shared by the third assistant of Cinematography.

“At most commercial film production sites, standard employment contracts are applied. As there are external audits, it is rare to find a violation of contract terms like in the past. However, it is true that the reward is less, compared to the labor intensity. I agree that filmmakers should not say that they are going to make money.” shared by the second assistant of production management team.

In addition, as for the reason for remaining in the industry of film production, the consciousness in which they remain in the industry due to their own choices rather than an employment contract or economic reasons, is strengthened, eventually showing patterns in which, they compromise with exploitative practices.

"It is my choice because I wanted it. Although I am the youngest staff, I have a dream, and even though it is difficult, I chose this path as I love it." shared by the youngest staff of production management team.

However, these mindsets differently appear depending on the position. This is because working conditions have been improved over time compared to the past, and the perception of young film production workers has been also changing.

"I heard a lot from my seniors that filmmaker should pursue their identities as filmmakers, rather than in pursuit of financial gain, and I agree that to some extent. But this might be an old concept. When we were young, the work was difficult, and we worked almost like volunteers without pay, but now, the world has changed..." shared by the Producer.

As seen in the aforementioned expressions such as "Seniors put a lot of emphasis on the learning aspect (to me) ...", "At most commercial film production sites..." and "It is my choice because I wanted it...", exploitation can be particularly and commonly found among film production workers at low levels. Such a voluntary self-discipline mindset was found among the workers with less working experience, which paradoxically indicates how deeply such consciousness penetrates the entire industry, and how well it has been passed on. The top-class film worker stating that "...rather than in pursuit of financial gain..." indicated that the logic behind the industry has "changed," but this seems to be relative changes in individuals, rather than absolute changes in working environments.

The film production workers, who were examined by the self-precarization theory also justified their working environments through their identities as artists. This is because the artistic value is deeply rooted in the workers who seek cultural symbols.

4.8 Labor security

The flexibility of the labor process made it difficult to find a stable work schedule in any film. Film production workers always face tight schedules, and have blurred boundaries between work and leisure. The working conditions of those workers are highly likely to be sacrificed for compliance with the schedule. This is because the delay in the set schedule is directly related to the budget. The resultant damage is directly related to film production workers. In fact, according to the contracts of those workers, there were cases in which they were forced to work 300 hours per month. Such a high labor intensity is illegal, as it far exceeds the 52-hour working system per week of ordinary workers.

These working conditions eventually lead to flexible sociality. As film production workers always assume the risk of losing jobs, they are always harsh and strict themselves, and abuse themselves to remain as filmmakers; they take this situation for granted. As networking is important for film production workers, compared to workers in any other occupational category because they continuously face job searches and losses, it is fundamental for them to show how they work hard to others. In many cases, as they basically stay together, there is no clear boundary between workplaces and rest areas, and they always have to show an attitude of working hard for something even during breaks.

Due to the feature of project-based film production, they repeat job loss and search, resulting in repeated fatigue. The reality of film production workers who have to continuously find work, is a very flexible condition in terms of job security. Even though it is relatively easy for newcomers to find a job, they found it difficult to continuously adapt to new colleagues and unique production systems in new production sites. As a result, there were answers that they left film production sites to find more stable working environments. The same pattern was found among experienced employees who were skeptical about the repeated job search and loss system. However, unlike newcomers, the experienced had the experience of being half-forced to leave the film industry because it was difficult to find a job. As for the composition of film production staff, the higher the career positions, the fewer the job openings are. Therefore, there were many cases in which experienced workers could not find film production-related jobs for several years, even if they continuously searched for jobs. These are the cases of leaving film production sites against their will to remain in the sites.

4.9 Products and the common good

The Korean film industry has developed rapidly and has become the world's fifth-largest market after the United States and China. In other words, Korean film workers have been creating excellent products. Korean films accounted for 4% of the global movie theater market share in 2018, surpassing France and India, which are considered film powerhouses (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2019); it ranks fifth in the world while accounting for 50.9% of the Korean market share, following the U.S. (92.9%) and India (89%), China (62.2%), and Japan (54.8%) [10]. The following Korean films, which were shown in Korea, mobilized '10 million viewers,' and ranked from 1st to 4th in the box office rankings [11]: <The Admiral: Roaring Currents>(Kim Han-min, 2014), <Extreme Job>(Lee Byeong-heon, 2019), <Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds>(Kim Yong-hwa, 2017), and <Ode to My Father>(Yoon Je-kyoon, 2014). In 2021, the Korean movie box office performance was remarkable: 17.61 million viewers for <The Admiral: Roaring Currents>, 16.26 million viewers for <Extreme Job>, 14.41 million viewers for < Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds>, and 14.26 million viewers for <Ode to My Father> 14.26 million. <Avengers: Endgame>, <Frozen 2>, and <Avatar> ranked in the 5th, 6th and 7th places.

Along with these commercial achievements, the artistic achievement of 'winning an overseas film festival' is also noticeable. <Parasite> (Bong Joon-ho, 2019) brought the four wins at the 92nd Academy Awards in 2020: Best Picture as the first non-English language film, as well as Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, and Best International Feature Film; it won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes film festival, and won more than 200 awards at other film festivals. Now, the investment from foreign investors in Korean films, which are considered a successful 'cultural industry,' has also increased significantly. For example, 20th Century Studios partially invested in <The Yellow Sea> (Na Hong-jin) in 2010 and fully invested in <Running Man> (Jo Dong-Oh) in 2013, actively jumping into Korean film production for investment: <Slow Video> (Kim Young-tak, 2014), and <Intimate Enemies> (Im Sang-soo, 2015), <The Wailing> (Na Hong-jin, 2016), and <Warriors of the Dawn> (Jung Yoon-cheol, 2017). Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. also invested in and distributed the following movies: <The Age of Shadows> (Kim Jee-woon, 2016), <A Single Rider> (Lee Joo-young, 2017), <The Witch> (Park Hoon-jung, 2018), <Illang> (Kim Jee-woon, 2018), <Bad Police> (Lee Jeong-beom, 2018), <Jesters: The Game Changers> (Kim Joo-ho, 2019), <The Battle of Jangsari: Forgotten Heroes> (Kwak Kyung-taek and Tae-hoon Kim, 2019).

Netflix also directly invested in <Okja> (Bong Joon-ho, 2017) and announced in 2021 that it would invest \$500 million in the production of Korean Wave content, including movies. Considering that Netflix's total investment in Korea from 2015 to 2020 was only \$700 million, it is an impressive size that has increased rapidly [12]. This expanded investment proves that Korean films have steadily developed and reached a global level, and have been recognized as a culture and product by consumers not only in Korea but also in the world.

The impressive path of the Korean film industry makes many people pursue their dream of becoming a filmmaker. There are many people who want to be involved in making films in person as actors or directors. This means that films contribute greatly to the common good that pleases people. According to the Ministry of Education's 'Elementary and Secondary Career Education Survey in 2020' which was announced in 2021, 1.5% of high school students responded that they wanted to become directors or producers [13]. The occupation (i.e., directors or producers) ranked 18th in terms of high school students' preferred occupations. When it comes to a comprehensive meaning while broadening the scope to creative media industries, they also showed preferences for the following occupations: beauty designers (2.7%), computer graphic designers/illustrators (2.0%), and experts in advertising or marketing (1.8%). Middle school students indicated their preferences as follows: computer graphic designers/illustrators (2.4%), creators (2.1%), and cartoonists (webcomic artists) (1.6%). Elementary school students showed their preferences as follows: creators (6.3%), professional gamers (4.3%), cartoonists (webcomic artists) (2.5%), computer graphic designers/illustrators (2.2%), actors/models (2.0%), and writers (1.6%). It indicates that students in lower grades showed higher interest in a wider range of creative media industries.

In other words, it can be interpreted that they focus on the positive images of ‘creative industries: having fun through work, satisfying the desire for self-realization, that is, the expression of creativity, and enjoying a sense of achievement and economic gains.

5. Analysis of results

Interview responses were analyzed by identifying to which criteria of good or bad work suggested by Hesmondhalgh and Baker the Korean film production sites belong. The sites are based on creative autonomy, but this usually applies to those who are in a high-level position, and low-level film production workers experienced a somewhat controlled film production site. Therefore, in order to increase their autonomy, they aspired to go to higher positions by building up careers and dreaming of making their own films one day. It was also observed that even though the staff was in a low position, they were satisfied with autonomy by creating their scenarios. Regarding the work content, they were experiencing interesting and spontaneous environments, and in particular, they were fulfilling their self-esteem as filmmakers, and achieving the goal of self-realization, which is what they really wanted to achieve. Although there have been recent improvements in the stability of wages and working hours in terms of working conditions, they were still experiencing bad work conditions. In conclusion, the question of whether Korean film production is good work or bad work can be determined by the final products. The level of Korean movies continues to improve, and many outstanding products with global recognition are appearing. In particular, there are a great number of excellent works that can help and inspire the good life of others and the common good. Therefore, despite some working conditions, it seems that the Korean film production sites have satisfied numerous good work conditions, when considered as a whole. Unlike in the past, since working conditions in the entire film industry have headed toward a positive direction along with a more mature Korean labor market, it can be concluded that it will be closer to good work eventually, despite the existence of parts to be overcome.

6. Conclusion

A poor working environment in which most film production workers are temporary employees, rigid organizational culture, extremely high work intensity, and irregular working hours cause instability in film production workers. Nonetheless, they are creating great work that can serve the common good. Occupational identity as an artist, which increases self-esteem as a filmmaker, can help them overcome the instability of film production workers and serve as a catalyst for the promotion and revitalization of the current Korean film industry.

This study is significant in that it provided the foundation for a more objective and detailed understanding of film production workers, a part of Korean media producers, by studying the instability issue and occupational identity of film production workers. Furthermore, as this study suggests the vivid voices/opinions of field workers, it can be used as basic data for future research on concrete and practical discussions to improve working environments and the treatment of film production workers.

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