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## **SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF FILM CRITICS IN SOUTH KOREA FROM 2000 TO 2020**

**Eunyoung WON, PhD Student**

Department of Arts and Languages,  
School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences  
(École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, EHESS),  
Paris, France  
[eunyoung.won@ehess.fr](mailto:eunyoung.won@ehess.fr)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4875-0946>

**Abstract:** This paper empirically analyzes the social status of film critics in the Korean film industry. Film critics contribute to the creation of films as producers of specific values in film art by producing cinematographic discourse. Then how does one become a film critic? How does the film critic space operate – which can be understood as structured based on the development of the market for film magazines in the 1990s? The result of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the social recruitment of film critics from 2000 to 2020 shows that those who attained the legitimate status of film critic by winning awards in contests possess a high level of academic capital. It was also found that the location of higher education among these laureates was mainly concentrated in Seoul. Although film critics are not fully institutionalized and have an artistic mission to some extent, to access the profession of film criticism, they need to be controlled by established film

critics who share similar cultural and symbolic capital each other. This suggests that symbolic power exists in the world of film criticism and that the structure can be reproduced through gatekeeping by the owners of symbolic power.

**Keywords:** film critic; film criticism; Korean film; field; subfield; cultural capital; academic capital.

## 2000년부터 2020년까지 한국 영화평론가의 사회적 조건

**초록:** 이 논문은 한국 영화계에서 영화평론가의 사회적 지위 획득을 경험적으로 분석한다. 영화평론가는 영화예술에 고유한 가치의 생산자로서 영화에 관한 담론을 생산함으로써 영화 창작에 기여한다. 그러면 어떻게 영화평론가가 되는가? 1990년대 본격화된 한국 영화잡지 시장의 발달을 바탕으로 구조화되었다고 이해할 수 있는 영화평론의 공간은 어떻게 작동하는가? 2000년부터 2020년까지 영화평론가의 사회적 채용을 양적, 질적으로 분석한 결과, 영화평론 공모를 통해 영화평론가라는 정당화된 지위를 획득한 자들이 높은 수준의 학력자본을 보유하고 있음을 확인했다. 또한 이들의 최종 학력에 관계된 고등 교육 지역이 서울에 집중된 것을 알 수 있었다. 영화평론가는 완전히 제도화되지 않았으며 어느 정도 예술적 사명을 바탕으로 하는 일임에도 불구하고, 이에 직업으로서 접근하기 위해서는 유사한 문화자본 및 상징자본을 지닌 기존의 영화평론가들에게 통제를 받아야 한다. 이는 곧 영화비평계에 상징권력이 존재하며, 이 권력의 소유자들의 게이트키퍼를 통해 구조의 재생산이 가능해진다는 점을 시사한다.

**주제어:** 영화평론가; 영화비평; 한국영화; 장; 하위장; 문화자본; 학력자본.

## SPÓŁCZNE UWARUNKOWANIA KRYTYKI FILMOWEJ W KOREI POŁUDNIOWEJ W LATACH 2000 – 2020

**Abstrakt:** Niniejszy artykuł stanowi empiryczną analizę społecznego statusu krytyki filmowej w południowokoreańskim przemyśle filmowym. Krytycy filmowi, będący jednocześnie kreatorami określonych wartości w sztuce filmowej, przyczyniają się do powstawania filmów tworząc dyskurs kinematograficzny. Zatem jak zostaje się krytykiem? Jak funkcjonuje przestrzeń działalności krytyków filmowych, którą pojmować można jako strukturę wyrosłą z rozwoju rynku prasy filmowej w latach 90. wieku XX? Wyniki z analizy jakościowej i ilościowej naboru społecznościowego krytyków w latach 2000-2020 pokazują, że ci, którzy wygrywając nagrody w konkursach osiągnęli formalnie status krytyka filmowego, posiadają tzw.

kapitał akademicki w wysokim stopniu. Ustalono również, że ci krytycy-laureaci wywodzili się głównie z seulskich uniwersytetów. Mimo, że zawód krytyka filmowego nie jest w pełni zinstytucjonalizowany i w pewnym stopniu pełnią oni misję artystyczną, to by stać się zawodowymi krytykami muszą oni podlegać kontroli już uznanych postaci, które dzielą podobny kulturowy i symboliczny kapitał. Sugeruje to, że w świecie krytyki filmowej istnieje symboliczna władza oraz, że struktura może być wykreowana przez tych, którzy ową władzę symboliczną posiadają.

**Słowa kluczowe:** krytyk filmowy; krytyka filmowa; kapitał akademicki; kapitał kulturowy; film koreański; dziedzina; specjalizacja.

## 1. Professional development of film critics in South Korea

In the 1990s, Korean cinema flourished both industrially and artistically. With the political democratization in South Korea in the late 1980s, consecutive revisions to the 영화법 (*Yeonghwa beob*, Motion Picture Act) contributed to a relative autonomization of the field of cinema<sup>1</sup> from the political field. These revisions<sup>2</sup> liberalized the market for film leading to an increase in the production of films and intensifying competition in the market. Film critics have played a crucial role in the social consecration and cultural legitimization of cinema. Cinematographic work, as a symbolic good, requires the production of symbolic values. It is therefore film critics who have produced and emphasized the specific value of cinema and who have

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<sup>1</sup> The notion 'field' refers to the concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu. Regarding cinema as field of cultural production, Julien Duval (2016) conducted an empirical study on the world of cinema in adopting the concept of field, demonstrating the validity of this notion in the analysis of cinematographic world.

<sup>2</sup> The fifth revision of the Motion Picture Act in 1984 introduced a registration system for film production replacing an authorization system, resulting in an increase in the number of film production companies. The sixth revision of the Motion Picture Act in 1986 opened up the market further: according to the Film Agreements between South Korea and the United States in 1985, Hollywood studios were permitted to distribute films through their branch offices, instead of indirect distributing through Korean companies.

contributed to making films worthy of being created and viewed as art (Bourdieu 2014: 422–425).

This paper aims to empirically analyze the social status of film critics in the field of cinema in South Korea. How does one become a film critic? Who are the *legitimate* film critics? If a film critic is regarded as an occupation, it is, like that of an artist, a complicated object to treat in terms of the sociology of occupations (Freidson 1986; Moulin 1983). While the profession of a film critic is recognized as an “economic activity that an individual carries out for income” according to the Korean Standard Classification of Occupations by 통계청 (*Tonggyecheong*, Statistics Korea), a public central organization under the Ministry of Economy and Finance, only a handful of renowned critics can subsist on their incomes from criticism. Many film critics carry out related activities, such as teaching at universities or private institutes or programming at film festivals. Some also do additional work that is not related to their profession as a film critic, but which provides them with a stable income. Like the profession of a writer (Sapiro 2007), there is no mandatory academic degree or official license which can ensure a film critic’s competence in the world of film criticism. Despite this, to publish texts that can be read by others, film critics must compete with other critics in the film critics’ space where each occupies a different position from the others. In this situation, the concept of “professionalization” used by American sociologists of professions, which considers a profession as a “sequence of development” generating a “career” pattern, is not an appropriate tool for understanding a profession or an occupation of heterogeneous groups, with little or no codification (Abbott 1988).

## **2. Conceptual tools and methodology**

Considering the heterogeneity arising from different conditions of the performance of vocational activities, it is necessary to understand the status of a film critic through a configuration of objective relations between positions and social conditions: that is, the concept of field (Bourdieu 2015 [1992]: 351–384; Denord 2020: 731). In addition, the concept of subfield allows us to understand the intermediaries whose

activities are related to the field of cinematographic production. As a microcosm, subfields have their own logics that do not necessarily conform to those of the encompassing field, while they share oppositional principles with the latter. The the notions of symbolic power and symbolic violence forged by Pierre Bourdieu are further mobilized in the analysis because the definition of the field, or the frontier of the field, which acts on the social recruitment of film critics, is closely linked to these two concepts.

In order to examine the “entrance fee” to the subfield of film criticism in South Korea, the social characteristics of contest winners, which is the main modality of access, will be analyzed (Mauger 2006). For this purpose, data on all the laureates of three contests between 2010 and 2020 were collected (N=38): the Film Critic Contest of 씨네 21 (*Cine 21*), a movie magazine; the annual spring literary contest of 동아일보 (*Donga-ilbo*), a national daily newspaper; and the annual spring literary contest of 부산일보 (*Busan-ilbo*), a regional newspaper.

Moreover, the social characteristics of the members of 한국영화평론가협회 (*Hanguk Yeonghwa Pyeonnonga Hyeobhoe*, Film Critic Association in Korea, a.k.a. FCA) (N=59) and the juries of these three contests (N=23) will be examined to understand the conditions of the dominant players in the subfield, those endowed with symbolic capital. A qualitative analysis of interviews with the winners and their acceptance speeches published in the press as well as the juries’ comments enables an understanding of the required values for the participation in the critics’ symbolic struggles.

### **3. Control of legitimate access to the subfield of film criticism by peers**

The Film Critic Association (FCA) in South Korea has played an important role in the professional development of film critics. Founded in 1960 by six members through the initiative of two young critics, 이영일 (Lee Young-il) and 김종원 (Kim Jong-won), the association was dissolved by the regime of Park Chung-hee in 1961 and re-established in 1965. Although there were a few active members until the mid-1970s, the creation of the FCA Awards in 1978

contributed to the public promotion of the FCA in the film industry. Under the auspices of 영화진흥공사 (*Yeonghwa Jinheung Gongsa*, Korean Film Corporation), the first FCA Awards Ceremony was held in 1980 in the screening room of the Korean Film Corporation. Eleven awards were presented, including the Best Film Award, the Jury Award, the Best Director Award, the Best Actress Award and the Best Actor Award. The FCA's activities have since gained legitimacy through the government support allowing the FCA to cumulate symbolic capital through the recognition of film creators. Furthermore, it launched the FCA Film Critics Contest in 1997 serving as a breeding ground for professional critics while other contests were also held by film magazines and newspapers (Kim, 2010).

If the FCA consolidated the legitimacy of film critics as a body of recognition, the development of the market for film magazines led to a structuration of a film critics' space. The film magazine market began to develop in the mid-1980s with two magazines, 스크린 (*Screen*) published in 1984 and 로드쇼 (*Road Show*) created in 1989. In 1995, the publication of three specialized film magazines - *Cine 21*, 키노 (*Kino*) and 프리미어 (*Premiere*) – contributed to the formation of different discourses between the two extreme poles, the popular, commercial pole and the erudite, artistic pole. The competition among critics gave rise to belief in the specific values of the critics' game, the *illusio* (Bourdieu 1971: 52–53; Bourdieu 1996 [1994]: 149–167).

It was at that time that control over access to the critic's space was introduced. In 1996, the weekly magazine *Cine 21* and the monthly magazine *Kino* respectively launched the *Cine 21 / Kino* Film Critics Contest. In 1997, the FCA also launched the FCA Film Critics Contest. Although *Kino* stopped organizing its contest in 1998 and the FCA relaunched its contest in 2009 after the first competition, the *Cine 21* contest has established itself as an institution in the reproduction of professional critics by giving awards to one or two young critics each year.

This modality of access to the work of criticism is part of an entry system into the literary field for writers, or 등단 (*Deungdan*, 登壇), which refers to the beginning of a career as a writer. This system is represented by the annual spring literary contest launched by daily newspapers and literary magazines. Among the newspapers, the national daily *Donga-ilbo* has been giving awards for the film

criticism in its annual literary contest since 1998. In addition, *Busan-ilbo*, a regional daily, give awards in the category of criticism which includes literary criticism, but it mainly awards film critics: among the nine winners from 2010 to 2020, there was only one literary critic. Overall, among the four institutions that sustain contests for film criticism – *Cine 21*, *FCA*, *Donga-ilbo*, and *Busan-ilbo* – *Cine 21* is the oldest as well as the only film magazine capable of continuously providing editorial content dedicated to film criticism, which reinforces its symbolic power.

Winning contests brings economic benefits to aspiring critics, and also guarantees symbolic and professional recognition to aspiring film critics. Indeed, the selection of the laureates is made by judges composed of established professional critics. The judgments of established critics form the *nomos* of the subfield, that is, “the principle of vision and division that defines the artistic field as such” (Bourdieu 2015 [1992]: 366). These dominant critics evaluate the critical writings of aspiring critics from their perspective. The principle of division, which is shared by the dominant critics in this subfield, applies to the criteria for defining what is *good criticism*. The aspirants need to understand the rules and interests of the film criticism space to be able to produce good criticism that corresponds to the specific values of the film critics’ world. An aspiring critic must share a vision of the world more or less in line with that of dominant critics or one must be willing to invest in the game of criticism based on a belief in these specific values. The judge with symbolic power grants laureates permission to call themselves film critics. Then, they obtain the professional title that facilitates the publication of critical texts. Moreover, the fact that certain figures participate as judges for successive years, and that the members of the panel of judges are those who have previously competed in the contest, allows us to observe the reproduction effect of the structure.

#### **4. Objective conditions for the profession of film critic**

Our analysis shows that education capital is a crucial resource for entry into the subfield of film criticism. Firstly, the very high level of education required is confirmed by the educational capital of the

laureates (N=38)<sup>3</sup> : most laureates hold an undergraduate degree, with the exception of three students who were studying for a bachelor's degree when they participated in the contest. Approximately 40% of the laureates were graduate students and/or doctoral candidates at the time of the contest (see Table 1). This shows that among competition entrants, a higher proportion has completed tertiary education compared to the national average<sup>4</sup>. Secondly, the academic disciplines of laureates are concentrated in film and audiovisual studies as well as literature. In our population, 28 laureates had studied the aforementioned majors. Specifically, 11 laureates learned film studies for their final academic degree, while 11 others studied literature, such as Korean literature (n=9), English literature (n=1) and creative writing (n=1). The majors in the audiovisual and media field (communication studies, visual cultural studies) account for about 21% of the laureates. In addition, disciplines requiring critical thinking and logical writing skills such as law and philosophy are evident (see Figure 1).

Table 1. The level of education of laureates of *Cine 21*, *Donga-ilbo*, *Busan-ilbo* between 2010 and 2020.

Degree <sup>5</sup>	Total		Female	Male
		%		
High school graduate	3	7.9	1	2
BA	15	39.5	7	8
MA, MFA	15	39.5	8	7
JD	2	5.3	1	1

<sup>3</sup> I was unable to collect data of one laureate among the sample of 38 laureates, other than the sex (male) and profession (broadcasting journalist).

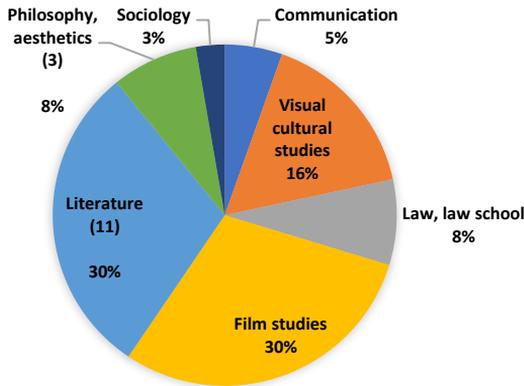
<sup>4</sup> According to OECD data, 69.80% of 25–34-year-old South Koreans had a tertiary degree in 2019. See OECD, 2021, Population with tertiary Education (indicator). <https://data.oecd.org/eduatt/population-with-tertiary-education.htm> (accessed December 1, 2021)

<sup>5</sup> For the variable of degree, the English designations are used since the university systems in South Korea are comparable to those in the United States. The “JD (Juris Doctor)” degree has been isolated because of its elitist property in the social field, which is awarded by a law school for the legal professions. In terms of academic fields, Korean and English literature, as well as creative writing, are listed under “literature”. “Visual culture” includes visual cultural studies and visual arts. “Philosophy” and “aesthetics” are categorized together, taking into account their common philosophical root.

PhD	2	5.3	2	0
N/R	1	2.5	0	1
Total	38	100	19	19

Source: Author’s own compilation.

Figure 1. The majors of the laureates (N=37)<sup>6</sup>



Source: Author’s own compilation

Higher education is linked to another social condition: the geographical factor of university education. While the laureates’ places of birth are relatively scattered over the South Korean territory—there is nevertheless a concentration in the Korean capital—the majority studied for their higher education degrees in Seoul (see Table 2). First, this attests to the academic profile of film critics as quality cultural capital. Higher education institutions exist in a geographical hierarchy, between Seoul and the provinces, at the top of which are institutes in Seoul in most subject areas, except for a few specialized institutes for science and technology and a small number of national universities in the major provincial cities. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that those who study in Seoul are in closer proximity to a milieu of intellectual elites. Second, given the cultural centralization in Seoul, it is likely that those studying in Seoul have access to a greater range of cultural offerings, particularly in film, art,

<sup>6</sup> This figure excludes the non-response (n=1).

and the performing arts, compared to the provinces. Thus, the geographical constraint affects the accumulation of cultural capital in these two ways.

Table 2. Geographic concentration of aspiring critics in large cities during their university education<sup>7</sup>.

Geographical distribution	Place of birth	Place of higher education
Seoul	6	24
Busan	3	5
Province	9	1
NR	19	8
Total	38	38

Source: Author's own compilation.

Meanwhile, a parity between women and men is observed in the social recruitment of film critics between 2010 and 2020 (Table 3). In terms of age, more than half of the laureates whose ages were released (n=26) are in their thirties. There are also three awardees in their forties. Those with a master's degree or a doctorate account for half of the total number of laureates; thus, it cannot be said that the relatively late age of beginning their career is unrelated to the accumulation of cultural capital.

Table 3. The age and gender of the laureates of the Film Critics Contest of *Cine 21*, *Donga-ilbo*, and *Busan-ilbo* between 2010 and 2020.

Age	Total	Female	Male
20s	9	4	5
30s	14	6	8
40s	3	3	0
NR	12	6	6
Total	38	19	19

Source: Author's own compilation.

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<sup>7</sup> This information is not systematically provided in award acceptance speeches and interviews. For the grouping, I separated 'Busan' from 'Province' because of its representativeness as a city of film. Indeed, it is in this city, the second largest in terms of population in South Korea, that the Busan International Film Festival has been held every year since 1996. Public institutions concerning the cinema have been concentrated there since the 2010s in order to develop a national balance.

The affinity among the laureates as to the possession of cultural capital is not arbitrary. The need for this capital can be seen in the juries' comments. First, juries value "knowledge" of history of cinema and film theory.

To do film criticism, one must have the knowledge of film theories and aesthetics first of all. One must also have knowledge of the humanities. One must have objective and reasonable judgment. Given that the critic communicates through a text, the skill of writing is essential<sup>8</sup> (*Donga-ilbo*, 2018)

This critic points out in detail the cinematic context of the work *Roma* in the face of the changing media environment, as well as deeply analyzes the aesthetic significance of its own (film) text.<sup>9</sup> (*Donga-ilbo*, 2020)

His/her intellectual journey into the nature of film as a medium is a bit rough, but very fascinating. The fact that this text is rich in film history also drew attention.<sup>10</sup> (*Busan-ilbo*, 2020)

In addition, one must clearly understand the specific values of film: new entrants to the subfield of film criticism should be able to perceive film as a unique art form that is distinct from other arts.

The award-winning work shows that the laureate has a good understanding of cinema as a composite art of camera, light, editing, and breathing<sup>11</sup> (*Donga-ilbo*, 2014).

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<sup>8</sup> “영화평론을 하기 위해서는 우선 영화이론 및 미학에 대한 지식이 선행되어야 한다. 인문학적 지식도 겸비해야 한다. 객관적이고 합리적 판단력도 있어야 한다. 평론가는 글로 말하는 사람이기 때문에 문장력은 기본이다.” (*동아일보*, 2018). All translations from Korean into English are by Author, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>9</sup> “평자는 매체 환경의 변화에 직면하여 ‘로마’라는 작품이 갖는 영화사적 맥락을 상세하게 지적하는 한편으로 텍스트 자체의 미학적 의미까지 심도 깊게 분석하고 있다” (*동아일보*, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> “[...] 영화라는 매체 자체의 본성에까지 이르는 지적 여정이 다소 거칠긴 하지만 무척 매혹적이었기 때문이다. 영화사적 교양이 풍부한 글이라는 점도 마음을 끌었다” (*부산일보*, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> “당선작은 영화가 카메라와 빛, 편집과 호흡으로 이루어진 종합적 예술임을 이해하고 있었다.” (*동아일보*, 2014).

(This awardee) is very aware that his/her object of analysis is not a novel, but a film<sup>12</sup> (*Busan-ilbo*, 2017)

It is a pity that he/she only went into the details of the narrative and interpretation, never mentioning the sound and visual that are the signifiants of cinema<sup>13</sup> (*Donga-ilbo*, 2013)

Third, one must already be able to “write well”: “writing ability is an indispensable element”<sup>14</sup> (*Donga-ilbo*, 2017); “the winner’s writing style is certainly incomparable”<sup>15</sup> (*Cine 21*, 2011); “the strength of this critic lies in his/her stable writing in addition to his/her solid theoretical foundation”<sup>16</sup> (*Busan-ilbo*, 2011); “his/her critical text has neat sentences and precise terms, and it is well structured”<sup>17</sup> (*Busan-ilbo*, 2010).

If these three qualifications are articulated with social conditions in terms of academic capital, the emphasis on both subjective characters in relation to ethos and creativity is observed in the judges’ comments. First, the stress on sincerity and consistency is most noticeable among the comments in *Cine 21*: “we chose him/her thinking that his/her pertinaciousness would be the foundation of creativity”<sup>18</sup> (*Cine 21*, 2010); “we can trust his/her text that shows meticulousness and sincerity in structuring his/her thought and, above all, his/her text shows his/her laborious reflection on film criticism”<sup>19</sup> (*Cine 21*, 2012); “we discovered his/her potentiality in his/her

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<sup>12</sup> “첫째, 자신의 분석 대상이 소설이 아닌 영화라는 점을 가장 깊이 의식하고 있다” (*부산일보*, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> “영화의 기표인 비주얼과 사운드에 대해서는 일절 언급하지 않으면서 ‘피에타’의 내러티브 및 의미 속으로만 파고든 것도 유감이다” (*동아일보*, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> “문장력은 좋은 평론가의 필수 요소다” (*동아일보*, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> “[익명] 씨는 눈과 마음을 사로잡는 유려한 문장력이 단연 발군이였다” (*씨네 21*, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> “이 글이 가지는 강점은 탄탄한 이론적 내공에 더한 안정적인 글쓰기에 있다” (*부산일보*, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> “[익명]의 [제목]은 문장이 단정하고 용어가 정교하며 전체적인 짜임새에서 안정감을 주었다” (*부산일보*, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> “[익명]씨의 치열함을 창의성의 밑거름이라 믿고 선택했다” (*씨네 21*, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> “[익명]씨의 글은 자신의 사유를 조직하는 과정의 꼼꼼함과 성실함이 믿음직스러웠고, 다른 무엇보다도 영화적인 글쓰기에 대한 고심의 흔적이 돋보였다” (*씨네 21*, 2012).

particular sincerity and accuracy”<sup>20</sup> (*Cine 21*, 2014); “his/her text secured the support of all the jury members in the sense that he/she deepens the question thrown at the beginning in a sincere and dense way until the end”<sup>21</sup> (*Cine 21*, 2020).

Creativity or originality is also valued, especially by *Cine 21* juries: “while it is unfortunate that his text has a logical discontinuity, the essay topic is remarkably well established”<sup>22</sup> (*Cine 21*, 2020); “while it is an adventurous endeavor not to be based on any theory, his/her eye mediating the film and the audience is original and clear”<sup>23</sup> (*Cine 21*, 2015); “we noted logical discontinuity that appears here and there, but we value his future more than his present given his originality and insight”<sup>24</sup> (*Cine 21*, 2011).

## 5. Gatekeepers: reproduction of the game, reproduction of conditions of access<sup>25</sup>

It is worth noting the composition of the judges for the three contests. The judges, composed of film critics and the chief editors of the film magazine, contribute to the reproduction of the social conditions of

<sup>20</sup> “특유의 성실함과 명징함에서 가능성을 발견하기로 했다” (씨네 21, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> “서두에 던진 질문을 마지막 순간까지 성실하고 밀도 있게 탐구해나간다는 점에서 심사위원 모두의 지지를 얻었다” (씨네 21, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> “독특한 문체와 분석틀을 갖췄으나 다른 후보작들과 비교했을 때 글의 완결성이 떨어지고 다소 산만하다는 명확한 결점이 있었기 때문이다” (씨네 21, 2020).

<sup>23</sup> “특정한 이론에 기대지 않고 서 있다는 것이 상당한 모험적 시도였으나, 영화와 관객을 매개하는 그 시선이 명쾌하고 독창적이었다” (씨네 21, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> “간간이 보이는 논리의 비약이 단점으로 지적됐지만 독창성과 직관력이 돋보여 현재보다는 미래가 더 기대된다는 평가를 얻었다” (씨네 21, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> This formula is borrowed from Bourdieu (1998: 51): « (Re)produire le jeu et les enjeux, c'est (re)produire les conditions d'accès à la reproduction sociale qui est assurée par un échange agonistique visant à accumuler des statuts généalogiques, des noms de lignées ou d'ancêtres, c'est-à-dire du capital symbolique, donc des pouvoirs et des droits durables sur des personnes (“(Re)producing the game and the stakes is (re)producing the conditions of access to social reproduction, which is ensured by an agonistic exchange aiming to accumulate genealogical status, the names of lineages or ancestors, that is to say, symbolic capital, and therefore lasting powers and rights over people”) ». Translated from French by Author.

film critics through the contests. The jury for the contest of *Cine 21* is composed of three or four members each year, including a chief editor and a film critic who was also a laureate of a previous contest<sup>26</sup>. For the contest of *Donga-ilbo*, the submitted texts are judged by the single member of the panel. The *Busan-ilbo* contest also has only one judge although in 2010 and 2011 there were two members. The difference in the number of judges on each panel is related to the differences in the number of texts submitted. For example, the number of critiques submitted to the contest of *Cine 21* in 2019 was 82, and 110 in 2018, while the contest of *Donga-ilbo* in 2019 featured only 33 critiques, and that of *Busan-ilbo* in the same year, 22 critiques.

This gatekeeping power, to control access to film critic profession, is granted to some critics or journalists for a longer period of time. Four out of ten (9 out of 23) jury members in all three contests between 2010 and 2020 were a member of a jury panel more than twice. In particular, three examiners of the *Cine 21* contest played this role more than five times. Moreover, this power of professional and symbolic recognition is concentrated in men: one out of four members is female. While the social recruitment of film critics is not gender-biased, the structure of male dominance in the subfield of criticism is confirmed by this analysis.

### **Box 1. Social Characteristics of members of FCA**

The analysis of the social characteristics of FCA members provides an indirect understanding of the resources and dispositions of active agents in the subfield of film criticism, rather than those necessary for entering this subfield.

Data were collected from 59 profiles among 82 members on the website of FCA in January 2021, supplemented by other sources such as journals and university websites. Not all profiles are available, and the types of data available to the public are different: for some, their gender, education, and professional careers are all listed, while others display only their academic degree or professional experience. Therefore, it is possible that data biased in favor of the highest level of education have been collected.

Despite this, the quantitative analysis clearly shows that film critics who have joined FCA hold higher educational capital. Of 59 individuals, 47 hold a doctorate, at least 57% of the total membership. Nearly half of the sample majored in film studies (n=31). This result provides evidence of the

<sup>26</sup> There is missing data regarding the *Cine 21* juries for 2010, 2011 and 2013.

importance of legitimate scholastic capital not only for accessing the profession of film critic but also for maintaining one's position in the subfield of film criticism.

Table 4. Educational level and gender of FCA members.

Degree	Total	Female	Male
BA	7	1	6
MA/MFA	5	2	3
PhD	47	25	22
Total	59	28	31

Source: compiled by the Author, raw data obtained from FCA website

Table 5. The majors of FCA members.

Major	Number
Film studies	31
Literature	14
Theatre studies	3
(Visual) cultural studies	3
Political sciences	2
History	2
Business	1
Psychology	1
Sociology	1
Theology	1
Total	59

Source: compiled by the Author, raw data obtained from FCA website

## 6. Conclusion

This study has examined the social conditions of film critics in South Korea by analyzing the objective and subjective characteristics of the laureates who participated in contests for film criticism from 2000 to 2020. Those who dream of becoming a film critic accumulate cultural capital through their higher education and use it as a critical resource in the field of cinema and in the film criticism subfield of film criticism. They also learn the specific rules for the world of cinema. Normative dispositions as a critic and originality make access to the space more probable and more legitimate. Yet these values are not defined. The definition of good criticism is itself an issue related to symbolic power in the game of film criticism. Although the lack of data makes it difficult to generalize the analysis, age does not appear

to be a decisive factor in accessing the profession, knowing that the laureates in their forties demonstrate their belief in film criticism. Indeed, some of them have participated in contests from two to four times, and already held high social status positions such as university professor or journalist. One had changed her career to become a film critic after 21 years of professional experience in another domain. These people attest to the existence of *illusio*, or the initial formation of vocation as a film critic.

For a better understanding of the operation of this (sub)field, an additional analysis of the socio-cultural characteristics of the gatekeepers–judges of contests could be conducted. The analysis of critics’ texts, both laureates and established critics, will help further elucidate how their aesthetic judgments are shared, reproduced, or contradicted<sup>27</sup>.

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