



# The Diversity Principle Taken to Its Extreme: East Asian Propaganda on Finnish Television

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On 16 September 1971, Finnish television showed a Chinese revolution ballet, *The Red Detachment of Women* (*Hong se niang zi jun*) (Jie Fu & Wenzhan Pan, 1970), one of the approved revolutionary model dramas of the Cultural Revolution in China (1966–1976). The film had had its world premiere just a couple of weeks earlier at the Venice film festival in August 1971.<sup>1</sup> The ballet tells the story of female Red Army troops fighting against a despotic property owner during the Chinese Civil War (1927–1937).

*The Red Detachment of Women* was based on one of the eight *model operas* (*Yangbanxi*) that captured the premise of the Cultural Revolution by modernizing the thematic and musical features of traditional Chinese operas. At the level of the narrative, this meant replacing noble characters with peasants and highlighting China's recent revolutionary struggles against foreign and class enemies.<sup>2</sup> The ballet film builds on the director Xie Jin's 1961 film with the same title. Part of the novelty effect of the ballet film came from the combination of military jackets, caps and rifles with classical ballet choreography and slender ballerinas. In most Western

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European countries, the openly propagandist ballet film was a largely unknown genre.<sup>3</sup> In Finland, *The Red Detachment of Women* was televised as part of the late-night programming of the licence-fee funded public service broadcaster. A year later, it was followed by another Chinese ballet film, *The White Haired Girl* (*Bái Máo Nǚ*, directed by Hu Sang) in December 1972.<sup>4</sup> This raises the question: how did the Chinese ballet films propagating Mao's Cultural Revolution end up on Finnish television in the early 1970s, and why?

In the early 1970s, news of the violent waves of Mao's Cultural Revolution was fresh in viewers' minds. Diplomatic relations between China and the Western world were strained, as were China's relations with the Soviet Union and its allies. Hence, showing Maoist propaganda on Finnish television cannot be explained by Soviet-friendly foreign policy. A more probable explanation comes from the exceptionally ambitious film policy of the Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) which, in the 1970s and 1980s, took the Nordic public service principle of geo-cultural diversity to its extreme.

This chapter explores the journey of Chinese ballet films onto Finnish television and outlines the programming policy context for these broadcasts. The study centres on the YLE Film Service (Filmipalvelu), an independent unit responsible for rental of foreign films and series. The Film Service unit operated independently from 1967 to 1987. In its heyday, the Film Service unit, initially called the Film Rental Department (Filmivuokraamo), was a working unit for 30 television professionals, responsible for a 40–50% share of the television programming.<sup>5</sup> The core function of the YLE Film Service was to participate in international film festivals and screenings and to choose foreign films and programmes for broadcast. The annual screenings were arranged around Europe by the European Broadcasting Union, in West Germany by the Association of Public Broadcasting Corporations in the Federal Republic of Germany, and in Moscow by the Soviet Teleforum. In addition, there were annual film festivals such as the Venice, Cannes and London Film Festivals, and numerous national screenings based on bilateral contracts and communication. Through their choices of foreign films and series, the rental film professionals participated in shaping the national collective mindset and people's view of the world.

The share and significance of imported foreign films and programmes has gained relatively little attention in Nordic television history. This chapter concentrates on the rental film operations of the Finnish Broadcasting Company, YLE. However, there are many similarities between the YLE Film Service and the rental film units at other Nordic public service

television companies, and in this sense some of the findings of this study apply to other Nordic countries as well. This chapter primarily draws on archival material from the YLE company archive, including memos and papers on the resources and working practices of the Film Service unit, correspondence with the YLE management, and travel plans and reports from screenings and festivals. A limitation is that the archive primarily covers the years 1973–1984 and thus includes little information about the early years, 1967–1972, which are fundamental in tracing the journey of the aforementioned Chinese ballet films.<sup>6</sup> In order to shed light on the early years of the YLE Film Service, then, this study additionally makes use of the digital archive of *Helsingin Sanomat* and interviews with YLE professionals.<sup>7</sup>

The model work ballet films have been discussed as part of Chinese film history and artistic traditions of opera and ballet dancing,<sup>8</sup> but it is difficult to find information on their circulation in Europe. Previous research on Chinese cinema and its transnational circulation shows that international influences and exchange are of importance from the beginning of the twentieth century through to the 1940s—and then reappear in the 1980s—whereas the period 1949–1976 has been discussed in terms of retrenchment and isolation.<sup>9</sup> Film historian Tina Mai Chen has complicated the periodization by exploring the circulation of Chinese films in the Soviet Union and Eastern European socialist countries until 1957, after which relations with China and the USSR froze. The screening of *The Red Detachment of Women* at the Venice Film Festival in 1971 marked the beginning of a new phase in the People's Republic of China's cultural diplomacy towards the west.<sup>10</sup>

In this study, the broadcasts of Chinese ballet films are used to nuance the understanding of Finland as the compliant neighbour of the Soviet Union, and the Soviet ambassadors' interference in YLE programming policy as the dominant narrative of 1970s Finnish television.<sup>11</sup> From the perspective of YLE foreign film policy, operated by the Film Service unit, the Chinese ballet films were unquestionably part of an ambitious education drive concerning world film cultures.

## FILM EDUCATION THROUGH TELEVISION

Notwithstanding the distinctive characteristics of the different Nordic television companies, the Nordic countries share the BBC-driven public service television ideals of equality, high standards of news and current

affairs programming, and a strong focus on citizenship address and civil education.<sup>12</sup> A distinctive feature of Nordic public service television has been the substantially high number of internationally imported programmes and films.<sup>13</sup> Television, like cinema before it, introduced Nordic film viewers to different languages and modes of expression. Since Nordic television audiences were already accustomed to following subtitles at the cinema, the same approach became a somewhat self-evident way of watching television. The acceptance of subtitles perhaps had an effect on the way that Nordic television developed its international and multilingual repertoire of programmes. However, there was also a determined programme policy that aimed at developing television as an arena for culturally diverse programming. These aims were enforced through the international news and programme exchange networks.

At YLE, internationalism was one of the founding programming policy principles of the 1960s. As stated by Kaarle Stewen (1934–2019), the head of the YLE Film Service from 1967 to 1975, “showing films from various points of the compass is part of the ongoing cultural emergence we are presently living through”.<sup>14</sup> Internationalism characterized the decade more generally. YLE’s television department, at the time a dynamic organization for young television professionals, saw television as having an important ethical mission in increasing understanding between people, nation and races. “Our destiny is tied to what happens to other people or nations in other corners of the world. The task of television is to get people to realize this connection of destinies.”<sup>15</sup> These declamations reflect the shared sense of solidarity in the 1960s, driven by international flows of New Leftist thinking.

The Nordic ideas of internationalism were rooted in the transnational waves of neo-Marxist left-wing radicalism, but gained broad support from all political directions. Internationalism was the mindset of the 1960s generation that distanced itself from the nationalism of the 1940s and 1950s and, in the peripheral Nordic context, acted internationally to break free from the region’s geographical remoteness. In the sphere of politics, internationalism took the form of engaging in the UN and joining in the transnational flows of anti-colonial criticisms, strongly provoked by student movements and civic organizations. A central medium of internationalism was television, which brought the distant places of the globe into people’s living rooms. Another important forum for internationalism was the film club movement, which gathered young generations in screenings that

introduced second- and third-world filmmaking as well as Hollywood classics.

The film club movement played an important role in YLE Film Service's film policy in terms of film education, which could be fostered through television. In Finland, ideas of film education through television were introduced in the mid-1950s by Helge Miettunen, a PhD in film aesthetics in 1949, a Member of Parliament for the Finnish People's Party from 1951 to 1958 and an YLE executive from 1957 and onwards. According to Miettunen, television could mediate film art for the masses. "The more the masses see films, the more they learn to appreciate it. This would uplift people's overall cultural competence."<sup>16</sup> Miettunen presented his ideas in his book *Popular Audio-visual Education*, first published in 1954. Drawing on the international flows of mass culture critique and the post-war foreign political climate, art education was considered a vaccine against propaganda. "The great mission of people's free education is to educate audiences to recognize the difference between art and entertainment, recognize propaganda, and recognize the low value of shallow routine performances."<sup>17</sup>

Miettunen's theses did not receive unreserved support in the Finnish film industry or among film policy-makers. From the late 1950s onwards, their focus was rather on developing a sustainable level of finance and modern quality standards for national film production. Throughout the 1960s, the national film industry suffered a financial crisis and box office profits were declining. Television, which was becoming an ever more common leisure time activity, took much of the blame. The film industry and film critics insisted that the art of cinema belonged in film theatres and that the small television screen dismissed the essence of film art.<sup>18</sup>

Such reservations about television can be seen in Kaarle Stewen's careful formulations. In his book *This Is Television* (1968), Stewen admitted that television could not replace the cinema experience and that the screen size altered the art form. Nevertheless, television could have a lot to offer film culture. Firstly, television made it possible for new generations to become acquainted with classic works of film art. Secondly, television could show films from around the world that would not get any kind of theatrical distribution. This meant particularly films from socialist Eastern European and third-world countries. As formulated more precisely in a memo written by Kaarle Stewen in 1972, "television can complete the selection of films by showing films from many different countries, and mediate life abroad in less familiar living conditions and countries. In this

sense, showing foreign films on television is part of our mission as a public service.”<sup>19</sup>

Following these principles, Kaarle Stewen outlined television film policy that centred on film art education and geo-cultural diversity. Through programming that favoured second- and third-world filmmaking, Stewen aimed at balancing the influx of American material. During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the massive investments of the American film industry overshadowed smaller countries in the European markets. All notable American film companies had well-resourced representation in Europe, and the well-organized screenings and affordable prices spread material effectively around Europe.<sup>20</sup>

The dominance of American content was a constant concern and matter of debate in the YLE TV Programme Council, which in the 1970s was scrupulous about following the foreign political spirit of friendliness towards the neighbouring Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup> This meant a careful balancing of Anglo-American content with a sufficient share of Soviet and Eastern European productions. According to YLE Film Service statistics, the biggest countries for film rental between 1973 and 1984 were, in order, the US (557 films), the Soviet Union (212 films), the UK (139 films), France (129 films) and Sweden (98 films).<sup>22</sup> Among the 212 Soviet films, there were several cinematic masterpieces as well as numerous more forgettable works. Among the self-evident representatives of film art were Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), which was shown for the first time on Finnish television in 1965, and again in 1978. YLE also broadcast Eisenstein’s films *Ivan the Terrible* (1944), *Aleksander Nevsky* (1938) and *October* (1927). Another canonical Soviet filmmaker whose work was well-represented on Finnish television was Andrei Tarkovsky, whose *Solaris* (1972) was shown for the first time in 1977 and again in 1979; *Mirror* (1975) was shown in September 1984, and *Andrei Rublev* (1966) in 1985. Soviet filmmakers were also familiar to Finnish film enthusiasts through Kosmos-film, a distribution company responsible for importing Soviet films to Finland. Originally established in the 1920s as a Finnish company, Kosmos-film was confiscated by the Soviet Union as part of the peace terms at the end of the Soviet-Finnish Continuation War in 1944 and run by Sovexportfilm from 1946 onwards. At the Helsinki Capitol film theatre, Kosmos screened films by Eisenstein, Heifitz, Donskoy, Raizman, Gerasimov, Pudovkin, Romm and Tsurai, and later Tarkovsky, the Mikhalkov brothers, and many other promising Soviet filmmakers.<sup>23</sup> Kosmos-film was the base that Sovexportfilm used to export films to the

Western European markets. Most of the Soviet films, for example the extremely desirable films by Andrei Tarkovsky, were distributed to Western European cinemas via Helsinki.<sup>24</sup>

### FROM HOLLYWOOD CLASSICS TO EUROPEAN ART HOUSE

The broadcasting of a substantial number of Soviet films highlights how YLE needed to balance the predominance of American films. Meanwhile, the broadcasting of American films also required careful curation. Alongside affordable contemporary films, YLE showcased Hollywood classics and films by the most notable directors of American film history. During the ten-year period 1975–1985 YLE Film Service broadcast films by D.W. Griffith, Otto Preminger, Orson Welles, Charlie Chaplin, Elia Kazan, George Cukor, Douglas Sirk, Howard Hawks, John Ford, John Huston, Alfred Hitchcock and Billy Wilder. More modernist American filmmaking was represented by films such as Don Siegel's *The Killers* (1964), Francis Ford Coppola's *You're a Big Boy* (1966), Robert Altman's *Brewster McCLOUD* (1970), John Cassavetes' *Husbands* (1970) and Sam Peckinpah's *The Getaway* (1972).

After the substantial representation of British films (139 films between 1973 and 1984), the second biggest Western European country for film imports to Finland was France. In the 1970s and 1980s, Finnish television viewers were spoiled with films by Resnais, Truffaut, Bresson, Godard, Melville, Chabrol and Malle. Similarly, plenty of space was given to representative works of modern Italian cinema: Rossellini, Visconti, de Sica, Fellini, Antonioni and Pasolini. Right after the bigger European film countries came neighbouring Sweden, and not surprisingly, all the notable films by Ingmar Bergman. In addition, YLE showed works by modern Swedish top-tier directors such as Alf Sjöberg, Gustav Molander, Jarl Kulle, Jan Troell and Bo Widerberg. Concerning the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, YLE followed the official foreign policy by balancing between both Germanys. Nevertheless, the superior production capacity of the West German film industry is apparent in the statistics. Between 1973 and 1984, YLE broadcast 55 West German and 36 East German feature films.<sup>25</sup> This made a total of 91 films in the German language, including classics from early German film history such as *Tartuffe* (1925) by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, as well as representative works of new German cinema from Fassbinder, Schlöndorff, Herzog and Kluge.

The share of films from the socialist Eastern European countries broadcast on Finnish television was also remarkable: 50 films from Czechoslovakia, 47 from Hungary and 36 from Poland from 1973 to 1984. The strikingly balanced number of films from each East European country reflects the YLE Film Service's even-handed principle in covering the Eastern European film market. Newspaper reviews supported this ideal by underlining Eastern European films as part of the transnational cinema culture. For example, the film *Mrs Dery Where Are You?* (*Dèryné, Hol van?*, 1975) by Hungarian Guyla Maar was compared to *Opening Night* (1977) by American indie-filmmaker John Cassavetes.<sup>26</sup> Polish Krzysztof Zanussi, again, was introduced as the most interesting filmmaker in Poland, "alongside the more broadly known Andrej Wajda"; as one reviewer commented, "while waiting for Wajda's new work, Cannes award-winning *Man of Iron*, it is good to watch Zanussi's masterpiece *Camouflage*" (*Barwy ochronne*, 1977).<sup>27</sup>

### THE WORLDS OF WORLD CINEMA

Alongside covering Western and Eastern European countries even-handedly, the YLE Film Service was ambitious about world cinema, generally referring to national film industries in Africa, South America, Asia, the Middle and Far East, and Oceania.<sup>28</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, the YLE Film Service put together broad film programmes from Japan and India. From Japan, YLE showed series of films by Yasujiro Ozu, Kenji Mizoguchi and Akira Kurosawa. From India, YLE showed series of films by Rajindar Singh Bedi, Shivendra Sindha, Mrinal Sen and Satyajit Ray. Moreover, the Cuban film *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968) by Tomas Gutierrez Alea, and political underground films from Chile and Argentina, served TV viewers' engagement with the societal struggles in South America. Additionally, transnational identity struggles were represented in films by Iranian Shorab Shahid Salessi, in Mauritanian Sidney Sokhona's film *Nationality: Immigrant* (*Nationalité: Immigré*, 1975) and Turkish director Serif Gören's film *The Way* (*Yol*, 1982).

The world films were seen and selected one by one through participating in screenings and negotiating with the copyright owners.<sup>29</sup> The process might take months, consisting of travelling, negotiating contractual terms, preparing and signing contracts, and waiting for the material to arrive via international air cargo.<sup>30</sup> Foreign films were usually rental films—films were sent away after broadcasting, either to the production country



or directly to the next country. Notably, the further the films came from, the more likely it was that the same copy would travel through the neighbouring Nordic countries.<sup>31</sup> Storage and courier services were hence key functions of the Film Service. Another was the technical operation of preparing the materials for broadcast by running the film projectors and making copies in a suitable format.<sup>32</sup> One of the seldom mentioned, yet crucially necessary, set of skills related to translations and writing subtitles for broadcasts. This was a demanding task bearing in mind the range of languages that were represented in the film programming. This necessitated large networks of trained freelancers alongside permanent translation and subtitling staff.<sup>33</sup>

### NEW FILMS FROM CHINA

In the first phase, second- and third-world filmmaking was displayed by student associations and friendship societies aimed at advancing diplomatic relations between states. In the 1950s, Chinese films were showcased in Helsinki during the Chinese film week, organized by the Finnish-China friendship society. Finland, like Sweden, established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China as early as 1950 and bilateral trade relations in 1953.<sup>34</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, the Cultural Revolution silenced these relations.

Screening *The Red Detachment of Women* for an international film festival audience in Venice in 1971 marked a new foreign political phase for the People's Republic of China. Mao's regime strived to strengthen its international status and communication with the West. The famous landmark in this process was Richard Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1972. Notably, *The Red Detachment of Women* was performed for Nixon and his delegates as a stage production by the Beijing Opera.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, the ballet was a source of pride and used to attract international attention. However, it is not easy to find reliable data about the number of copies or their travels in Europe after the Venice festival premiere. While the film may have been screened in some other Western European countries, Finland was probably among the few where it was broadcast immediately on television.

Wherever the Chinese ballet films circulated, the distribution most certainly operated via Chinese embassies.<sup>36</sup> Countries like the People's Republic of China did not take part in international film distribution networks, but rather their cultural diplomacy was centrally administrated and the embassies took on a central role.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, communication with

foreign embassies was included in the duties of the YLE management. As head of the Film Service unit, Kaarle Stewen could have been contacted directly about the ballet films, or through YLE executives. In any case, scheduling *The Red Detachment* just a little more than a week after the Venice festival premiere indicates that a copy was perhaps already in Helsinki at the time of the festival.

Although I have not been able to find data on Chinese ballet films being televised elsewhere at the time, the copies might have travelled onwards to other Western European countries where the People's Republic of China had diplomatic representation. Finland happened to have both established diplomatic relations—and a particularly keen interest in showing films from countries like the People's Republic of China. This interest was strictly a matter of programming policy, here pointing to Kaarle Stewen's aspiration to show films from as many foreign countries as possible. For example, the *YLE Yearbook 1971–1972* proudly reported that the selection of feature films was again “as international as possible” and that there was “plenty of room for new or unreasonably invisible film countries”. “In 1972, YLE showed films from 27 different countries, including the People's Republic of China, India, Japan, Chile, Mexico, Romania, Spain, Denmark, Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands.”<sup>38</sup> In the same year, in a memo addressed to the YLE Programme Council, Stewen reminded them that the Finnish Broadcasting Company was internationally in a “leading position” when it came to the number of foreign films broadcast. The memo was a response to an ongoing debate on the number of Soviet films vis-à-vis American films on television. Hence, the diversity principle was used to move away from the overemphasis on the US-Soviet juxtaposition and clear the way for the autonomy of the YLE Film Service unit.

Newspaper critics shared the YLE Film Service's ideals of geo-cultural diversity and appreciated the broadcasting of international films from these starting points. In the Finnish national daily newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, *The Red Detachment of Women* was praised for taking a step away from conventional forms of classical ballet in order to seek “new expression to portray the proletarian heroes”.<sup>39</sup> The style of the anonymous review seems a bit fervent for liberal *Helsingin Sanomat*. It is possible that the film was not available for preview and that the text was based on press material and images provided by the embassy of the People's Republic of China.

China's foreign political regeneration intensified after the death of Mao in 1975. Trade relations with the Nordic countries were improved through state visits of the Vice Premier of the State Council Geng Biao in the spring of 1979. Biao was China's former ambassador to Sweden and hence was familiar with the Nordic countries.<sup>40</sup> A Chinese animation film *Monkey King: Havoc in Heaven* (Wan Laiming, 1963) shown on Finnish television in March 1979 was perhaps scheduled for Biao's upcoming visit.<sup>41</sup> In 1980, *Monkey King* was also shown on Swedish television (SVT).<sup>42</sup> In January 1984, Finland's Foreign Secretary Paavo Väyrynen visited China with the ambition of signing a culture exchange contract between Finland and the People's Republic of China.<sup>43</sup> It was perhaps the cultural exchange contract that enabled the YLE Film Service to gain access to the East Asian film markets in the following September 1984, when a tour to China and Japan was arranged.<sup>44</sup> From this tour, the YLE Film Service imported a selection of contemporary Chinese films for television. As *Helsingin Sanomat* noted in the foreign news section: "The wave of political liberation has entered Chinese film production. This will be witnessed by Finnish television viewers next year when the new films and documentaries from China will be broadcast."<sup>45</sup> In an interview with Nils Ljungdell, the head of the YLE Film Service after Kaarle Stewen, it was attested that the propagandist tone that used to characterize earlier films from the People's Republic of China had now been replaced with more humane themes, and that in China, it was now possible to reflect the nation's past critically. Read from a historic distance, it seems like the YLE Film Service film buyers were cast as cultural diplomatic ambassadors to testify to the opening of China—and Chinese markets. YLE began broadcasting the new films from China at the beginning of 1985. The critical response was polite and appreciative.<sup>46</sup> People's appetite for modern Chinese films was not necessarily great. In a newspaper caricature published in *Helsingin Sanomat*, a rental video shop owner cheers up while reading from the paper about the upcoming new TV films from the People's Republic of China and Hungary (Fig. 1).

### ECONOMICALLY MOTIVATED NORTH KOREA

A programming policy that emphasized geo-cultural diversity might also explain the two films from the People's Republic of Korea (PRK) on Finnish television in the early 1980s. The first of them, *An Jung Gun Shoots Ito Hirobumi* (Kil-son Om, 1979), was a historical drama based on



**Fig. 1** A rental video shop owner notes, “YLE has bought films for television from China and Hungary. Great!” *Helsingin Sanomat*, 5 October 1984. Copyright courtesy of the estate of Kari Suomalainen

the original manuscript by President Kim Il-Sung, the founder and life-time ruler of the People’s Republic of Korea.<sup>47</sup> The second Korean film, *Tale of Chung Hyang* (Yong-Gyu Yoon & Won Jun Yu, 1980),<sup>48</sup> was a romantic fairy tale similarly situated in a nationalistic historical setting. The first mentioned film, *An Jung Gun Shoots*, was introduced to a European audience at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival in Czechoslovakia in June–July 1980, again indicating that another copy was perhaps in Helsinki already at the time of the festival.<sup>49</sup> There is little evidence of *An Jung Gun Shoots* being screened or broadcast on television elsewhere in Western Europe. Rather, it seems that Eastern Europe was the primary area for North Korean culture diplomacy, and *Tale of Chung Hyang* had its TV premiere in Poland in March 1983 and a theatrical premiere in several Eastern European countries.<sup>50</sup>

Another area of interest was the militarily neutral Nordic countries Finland and Sweden. Trade relations between Finland and the People’s Republic of Korea had been established in the early 1970s through deals

on paper-making machines.<sup>51</sup> At the time, the Finnish-Korea friendship society (est. 1968) used cultural diplomacy to enhance the official relations. One of the contributions of the friendship society was a Korean film week, organized in Helsinki in October 1972. The opening film *A Flower Girl* (Ik-gyu Choe & Hak Pak, 1972), a nationalistic romance also based on an original manuscript by Kim Il-Sung, was, according to *Helsingin Sanomat*, screened to a full house of enthusiastic film-goers.<sup>52</sup> Diplomatic relations between Finland and the People's Republic of Korea were established in the following year 1973, and the North Korean embassy was opened in Helsinki in 1978. The paper machine deals turned out to be unsuccessful because of North Korea's financial crisis and inability to pay.<sup>53</sup> Swedish companies such as Volvo and Atlas Copco also faced heavy losses in North Korea in the 1970s.<sup>54</sup>

Notwithstanding the unfortunate paper machine deals, North Korea was diplomatically active in Northern Europe again in the early 1980s, desperately looking for means to improve the economic viability of the state. This was seen as being possible, again, through the militarily neutral northern countries of Finland, Sweden and Austria.<sup>55</sup> The screening of the North Korean films on Finnish television in 1980 and 1983 most likely resulted from the economically motivated cultural diplomacy practised through the North Korean embassy. A North Korean film shown on Swedish television in 1981 supports the theory of North Korea's tendentious cultural diplomacy towards Finland and Sweden. The film in question was *A Flower Girl*, a revolution romance based on an original manuscript by Kim Il-Sung. The film was shown on Swedish television (SVT) as part of a summer Saturday evening series, introducing films from rare film countries.<sup>56</sup> According to Swedish film historian Per Vesterlund, some Swedish reviewers objected to the showing of a film that openly praised the North Korean dictatorship. Others were more tolerant, admitting that the film was openly propagandist, but worth watching anyway because of its exceptional East Asian origin.<sup>57</sup>

In Finland, the propagandist tone of the North Korean films attracted no attention. In the newspaper reviews, the films were described in aesthetic terms only. The ideological underpinnings of the North Korean films were not discussed, nor their televising questioned. Perhaps the rental film practices were not transparent enough for public scrutiny. Or perhaps focusing on aesthetics was a way of maintaining professional integrity during the dichotomous political order of the Cold War.

## CONCLUSION

In April 1983, a couple of months before *Tale of Chung Hyang* was shown on Finnish television, the ambassador of the People's Republic of Korea had been expelled from Finland because of an attempt to bribe the Speaker of the Finnish Parliament. North Korean diplomats had also been expelled in the mid-1970s because of alcohol, tobacco and drug trafficking.<sup>58</sup> The misbehaviour of the Korean diplomats did not make a mark on the consistent programming policy of the YLE Film Service. Nor did these political incidents affect planned programming, which continued to embrace a wide range of films from around the world, including films from politically dubious autocracies such as the People's Republic of China and the People's Republic of Korea. As a consequence of various foreign and trade policy interests, such films occasionally became available for television.

In the early 1980s, the autonomy of the Film Service became more and more of a problem for the YLE management. The YLE channel managers felt that they were not informed well enough about upcoming films and did not feel included in the decision-making. The discussions eventually led to the winding down of the YLE Film Service as an independent unit. The closure took place in 1987 as part of a broader re-organization of YLE's functions. The autonomy of the YLE Film Service unit certainly made it difficult for outsiders to evaluate the rental film policy. Nonetheless, it could be argued that in the 1970s and 1980s Cold War climate, the ambitious rental film programming of the YLE Film Service was possible precisely because of the autonomy of the unit. The decision-making was centralized among a small group of people who shared the programming policy principles and worked consistently to uphold them through the decades. Consequently, this occasionally led to the broadcasting of some politically biased, propagandist foreign films such as the aforementioned Chinese and North Korean examples. Meanwhile, the critical response was tolerant towards the political propaganda in evidence among the broad selection of foreign films from around the world. The public interest in Chinese and North Korean films was modest, and the films did not attract public attention beyond scant newspaper reviews. Nevertheless, it is evident that during the Film Service years, Finnish television viewers had the opportunity to enjoy a film programme that would impress any university film studies department today.

## NOTES

1. Venice Film Festival 1971 took place from 25 August to 6 September 1971. <https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/1971-venice-international-film-festival/m0wsvsyy?hl=en> (accessed 22 February 2022).
2. Rosemary Roberts, “Performing Gender in Maoist Ballet: Mutual Subversions of Genre and Ideology in *The Red Detachment of Women*”, *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2008).
3. *The Red Detachment of Women* was a cover story of *Cahiers du Cinema* March–April 1972 issue. The piece, “La Révolution culturelle dans les studios en Chine”, written by Joris Ivens and Marceline Loridan confirms that the film was broadly known and discussed in Western Europe in the early 1970s. However, there are no references to theatrical distribution or screenings of the film in France or elsewhere in Europe in the article.
4. YLE TV1, 20 December 1972.
5. The share of domestic television production in the Finnish YLE in the mid-1970s was around 56–58%. The three countries that provided the largest share of imported programmes were the US and the UK at 40%, plus neighbouring Sweden at 14%. Feature films accounted for around 10% of the programming as a whole. Seija Nurmi and Raija Parkkonen, “Televisio-ohjelmiston rakenne ohjelmatyypeittäin ja alkuperäimittain vuosina 1977–1979 sekä toimintavuonna 1979/80”, Oy Yleisradio Ab Sarja B 1/1982; Juha Kytömäki, “Televisio-ohjelmiston rakenne 1975 ohjelmatyypin ja alkuperämaan mukaan”. Yleisradio, PTS-tutkimuksia B 17/1976.
6. Kaarle Stewen’s archive at the National Archives of Finland (Hereafter KS:NAF) includes some papers about the early years but nothing about the communication with foreign embassies. Kaarle Stewen passed away soon after the interview in October 2019. The interview focused on the rental film operations more generally and did not touch on the specific question of the Chinese films.
7. Interview with Kaarle Stewen (1934–2019), 22 October 2019; phone interviews with Timoteus Tuovinen, 20 May 2021; Harri Lumme, 25 May 2021; Juhani Törnroos, 26 April 2021; Harry Isakson, 27 May 2021; Juha Kindberg, 31 May 2021.
8. Paul Pickowicz, *China on Film: A Century of Exploration, Confrontation, and Controversy* (Lanham: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2012); Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Christine Harris, “Re-Makes/Re-Models: The Red Detachment of Women between Stage and Screen”, *The Opera Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 2–3 (2010), 316–342;

- Rosemary Roberts, “Performing Gender in Maoist Ballet: Mutual Subversions of Genre and Ideology in *The Red Detachment of Women*”, *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2008).
9. Tina Mai Chen, “International Film Circuits and Global Imaginaries in the People’s Republic of China, 1949–57”, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2009), 149.
  10. Tina Mai Chen, “Gendered Globality as a Cold War Framework: International Dimensions of Chinese Female Bodies in the 1960s”, *Positions: Asia Critique*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2020), 603–630.
  11. See, for example, Raimo Salokangas, “The Shadow of the Bear: Finnish Broadcasting, National Interest and Self-censorship during the Cold War”, *The Nordic Media and the Cold War*, eds. Henrik G. Bastiansen and Rolf Werenskjöld (Gothenburg: Nordicom, 2015), 67–100; Laura Saarenmaa, “Travelling with the President: State Visits, Television Diplomacy and the Promise of the Backstage”, *Remapping Cold War Media: Institutions, Infrastructures, Networks, Exchanges*, eds. Alice Lovejoy and Mari Pajala (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022).
  12. On the educational aims of European public service, see Bernie Grummel, “The Educational Character of Public Service Broadcasting from Cultural Enrichment to Knowledge Society”, *European Journal of Communication*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2009), 267–285; Espen Ytreberg, “Ideal Types in Public Service Television: Paternalists and Bureaucrats, Charismatics and Avant-Gardists”, *Media Culture and Society*, vol. 24, no. 6 (2002), 759–774.
  13. On the Nordic Public Service, see, for example, Karina Horsti and Gunilla Hultén, “Directing Diversity: Managing Cultural Diversity Media Policies in Finnish and Swedish Public Service Broadcasting”, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2011), 209–227.
  14. Kaarle Stewen, *Tämä on televisio: Opas suomalaisen tv:n maailmaan* (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 1968), 139.
  15. Ville Zilliacus and Nils-Börje Stormbom, “Ohjelmatoiminnan tavoitteet”, *Tämä on televisio*, ed. Kaarle Stewen (Helsinki: Weilin + Göös, 1968), 86–87.
  16. Helge Miettunen, *Audio-visuaalinen kansansivistystyo* (Kuopio, 1954), 17–18.
  17. Miettunen, *Audio-visuaalinen*, 17.
  18. On the film political debates, see, for example, Essi Viitanen, *Refracting Space: Navigating the Suburban Milieu in Finnish Film 1960–1980* (University College London, 2015), <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1461231> (accessed 23 February 2022).
  19. Kaarle Stewen, “tv-ohjelmaneuvoston työryhmälle”, 11 December 1972, KS:NAF.
  20. Kaarle Stewen, interview, 22 October 2019. On US dominance of film imports in Sweden, see Ulf Jonas Björk, “‘Have Gun, Will Travel’: Swedish



- Television and American Westerns, 1959–1969,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 21, no. 3 (2001), 309–321; Tove Thorslund, “Do You Have a TV?": Negotiating Swedish Public Service through 1950s Programming, ‘Americanization’, and Domesticity (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2018).
21. The Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) was regulated (from 1948) by an Administrative Council that consisted of Members of Parliament in proportion to their parliamentary strength. The Administrative Council nominated a Programme Council to examine and approve the programming plans and review the broadcast programmes in retrospect. The 1970s was a politically particularly intensive period for the Programme Council. The Programme Councils were disbanded in 1992.
  22. “The Division of the Foreign Feature Films by Countries 1973–1984”, YLE Film Service, 19 November 1984, YLE Film Service Archive (YFSA).
  23. Kaarle Stewen, “Elokuvahistorian unohdettu luku: Miten Suomesta tuli Neuvostoelokuvan näyteikkuna”, *Kanava*, vol. 3 (1999); Öhman, Mia, “Peili-elokuvan vastaanotto Suomessa: Andrei Tarkovski neuvostoelokuvan keulakuvana”, *Läbikuva*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2019), 27–45.
  24. Phone interview with Juha Kindberg, 31 May 2021.
  25. “The Division of the Foreign Feature Films by Countries 1973–1984”, YLE Film Service, 19 November 1984, YFSA.
  26. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 11 May 1979.
  27. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 14 August 1981.
  28. On the concept of world cinemas, see, for example, Natasa Durovicova and Kathleen Newman, eds., *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2010).
  29. Kaarle Stewen, interview, 22 October 2019.
  30. Kaarle Stewen, “tv-ohjelmaneuvoston työryhmälle”, 11 December 1972, KS:NAF.
  31. Phone interview with Harry Isakson, 27 May 2021.
  32. Phone interview with Juhani Törnroos, 25 June 2021.
  33. Phone interview with Juhani Törnroos, 25 June 2021.
  34. Laura Mäkkylä, “Punainen viiva kartalla? Suomen diplomaattisuhteiden synty ja kehitys Etelä-Korean kanssa vuosina 1953–1989”, The Department of History and Ethnology, University of Jyväskylä, 2014.
  35. For example, Harris, “Re-Makes/Re-Models”, 316.
  36. Harri Lumme worked at the YLE Film Service storage facility from 1975 onwards. Lumme recalls that some films were collected from the Chinese and North Korean embassies. It is possible that this had happened even before his time in office. Phone interview with Harri Lumme, 25 May 2021.
  37. Phone interview with Juha Kindberg, 31 May 2021.
  38. *YLE Yearbook 1971–1972*, 117.

39. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 16 September 1971.
40. Arto Mansala, *Asemapaikkana Peking* (Helsinki: Siltala, 2020).
41. According to *Helsingin Sanomat*, head of the Film Service Nils Ljungdell visited China for film screenings for the first time back in 1978. *Monkey King* was perhaps booked during that trip. Juhani Lompola, “Kiinalaisia laatufilmejä televisioon”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 25 September 1984, 20.
42. “Apkungen”, *Dagens Nyheter*, 3 January 1980.
43. Foreign Secretary Väyrynen’s visit was followed by Prime Minister Kalevi Sorsa’s visit in 1986 and President Mauno Kovisto’s visit in 1988. <https://finlandabroad.fi/web/chn/kahdenvaliset-suhteet> (accessed 22 February 2022).
44. The Beijing-Tokyo tour by the head of Film Service Nils Ljungdell on 9–27 September 1984 included visits to China Film in Beijing, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) and Nippon TV in Japan. “The international screenings and buying trips in autumn season 1984”, YFSA.
45. Juhani Lompola, “Kiinalaisia laatufilmejä televisioon”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 25 September 1984, 20.
46. In *Helsingin Sanomat*, a dance film *Along the Silk Road* (*Si lu hua yu*, 1982) (TV1, 1 January 1985) was characterized as “interesting”, and the episodic film *Memories from Beijing* (*Chen na tiu shi*, 1982) (TV1, 25 January 1985) was suggested to “fascinate friends of the exotic”. The youth film *The Candidate* (*Hou bu dui Yuan* 1983) (TV1, 3 July 1985) was seen to highlight the joint responsibility of home and school “rather formally”, but cinematically the film was “beautiful and fresh in comparison to many scruffy western films”. A historical biography about *Qiu Jin*, an eighteenth-century feminist revolutionary (*Qiu Jin*, 1984) (TV1, 3 May 1986) was also considered “interesting”.
47. YLE TV1, 31 July 1980.
48. YLE TV1, 22 May 1983.
49. The screening of *An Jung Gun Shoots* at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival is mentioned in Johannes Schönherr, *North Korean Cinema: A History* (London: McFarland, 2012), 50–51.
50. IMDB, [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2199671/releaseinfo?ref\\_=ttfc\\_ql\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2199671/releaseinfo?ref_=ttfc_ql_2) (accessed 22 February 2022).
51. Mäkkylä, “Punainen viiva kartalla?”, 57.
52. “Vuorossa korealaisen elokuvan viikko”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 27 October 1972, 12.
53. Mäkkylä, “Punainen viiva kartalla”, 57.
54. Mäkkylä, “Punainen viiva kartalla”, 60.
55. Mäkkylä “Punainen viiva kartalla”, 55.
56. In Finland, *A Flower Girl* had been shown on television already in 1975 (TV1, 31 January 1975).

57. Per Vesterlund, “Det televiserade cinemateket: Några nedslag i svensk TV:s visningar av biografilm”, *Mediala hierarkier*, ed. Per Vesterlund (Gävle: Högskolan i Gävle, 2007a), 1–32.
58. “Riita IPU:n kokouspaikasta johti lähettilään karkoitukseen”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 15 April 1983, 16.

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