

CENTER FOR EAST ASIAN STUDIES
FRIDAY NOON FILM SERIES

PRESENTS

A DECADE OF SOUTH KOREAN FILMS: 1993 – 2003

The past decade has seen increasing success in the South Korean film industry, with the rising popularity and importance of the Pusan Film Festival and the growing visibility of South Korean movies at international film festivals. The first part of this series highlights Im Kwon-taek, one of South Korea's most prolific and popular directors, and one of the main forces behind the recent resurgence in South Korean film-making. Im painstakingly recreates both positive and painful moments in Korean history, drawing upon literary, artistic, and historical source material to create moving portrayals of a nation in transition. Other films in this series range from highly personal, introspective responses to the Korean War, to the negotiation of romantic relationships in contemporary Korean life, to a recent science-fiction, shoot-'em-up blockbuster hit.

This film series will be presented by Suzy Kim, Department of History and Christine Hahn, Department of Art History.

(All films in Korean with English subtitles)

April 2: Chunhyang
Im Kwon-taek, 2000.

The first Korean movie ever to be shown at the Cannes Film Festival, this movie uses an unusual narrative format to tell the tale of Chunhyang, a revered woman in Korea's folk history who is caught in a Romeo and Juliet-esque conflict between the desires of a dissolute Governor and a wife's resolve to remain faithful to her secret husband. In this retelling of a beloved Korean folk tale, Im Kwon-taek draws upon famous genre paintings of the Choson period to recreate the era and its royal culture in splendid period detail.

April 9: Sopyonje
Im Kwon-taek, 1993.

Set in the 1960s, Dong-Ho, a man in his thirties recollects the past while searching for his stepsister Song-Hwa. Both of them had been adopted and trained to be artists of pansori (a form of traditional folk opera) by an expert practitioner of this musical form. The three travel throughout the countryside, enduring the hardships of poverty and the public's increasing indifference to their art. This small art-house film, a meditation on the Korean aesthetic and the destructive effects of modernization and Westernization, set the highest box office record among Korean films when it was first released.

April 16: The Taebaek Mountains
Im Kwon-taek, 1994.

This movie highlights the tumultuous period of Liberation just prior to the Korean War as it plays out on a village torn between differing ideologies. The story follows four protagonists: a nationalist, a leftist, a rightist, and a female shaman, highlighting the stories of individuals caught in a whirlpool of ideological fighting. Im Kwon-taek has said he made this film to give a "bird's-eye-view" of modern Korean history, representing the tensions of this period as each protagonist tries to find the essential qualities of humanism amidst the conflict.

April 23: Spring in my Hometown
Lee Kwangmo, 1998.

This feature, by first-time director and screenwriter Lee Kwangmo, was the most critically acclaimed film of the year. An incomplete version of the film was screened in the Directors' Fortnight section of the Cannes Film

Festival, and later in the year it won the Gold Prize for new directors at the Tokyo Film Festival. It generated much praise upon its release, and at the end of the year was placed at the top of most film critics' lists of the year's best features. Based on the diaries of the director's father, the movie portrays life in a small village during the Korean War. Rather than concentrate on the war itself, the director examines the life of the village as it is affected by the close proximity of an American military base and the increasing worry and hardships brought on by the distant fighting. We see much of the film through the perspective of two young boys. Stylistically, the film is constructed with a great deal of care and restraint. Shot with fixed camera angles and extensive use of the long take, the cinematography compositions are perhaps the most amazing aspect of this film, conveying with feeling and power the heartbreaking changes that took place during the war.

April 30: Address Unknown

Kim Di-duk, 2001.

The central message of Kim Di-duk's film Address Unknown is how war has no winners, but only casualties: emotional, physical and social. Everybody in this film suffers, from nostalgia of the past; from the treatment they get by the government; from their condition in Korean society; and from the pain of being away from home in a new land, brought there for something they don't understand. Bang Eun-jin won a Best Supporting Actress Award in 2001 for her portrayal in this film at the South Korean Grand Bell Awards.

May 7: The Song of Redemption

directed by Lee Jung-kook, 1990.

A controversial account of the 1980 Kwangju Uprising, this movie was subjected to severe censorship in South Korea.

May 14: 2009: Lost Memories

Lee Si-myung, 2002.

2009 Lost Memories unfolds from an intriguing premise: what if An Jung-geun had failed to assassinate Ito Hirobumi in Harbin, 1909, and this single incident opened an alternative historical path -- in which Japan had never lost the Second World War, Korea had never gained independence, and still remains Japan's colony as of 2009? Based on a novel by Bok Geo-il (who sued the production companies to have his name removed from the credits), the film proved a hit with moviegoers, although it was roundly denounced by many film critics.

May 21: Oasis

Lee Chang-dong, 2002.

Oasis begins in mid-winter when a man named Jong-du (Sol Kyung-gu) is released from prison wearing summer clothes. He served time for a drunk-driving accident in which another man is killed, but his decreased mental capacities seem to leave him unable to understand how the incident has impacted others. After a half-hearted reunion with his family, he takes a visit to the home of the man he killed. There he meets a woman named Gong-ju (Moon So-ri), whose name means "princess" in Korean. Afflicted with a severe case of cerebral palsy, Gong-ju is more or less confined to her room, talked at occasionally but otherwise ignored. Jong-du takes an interest in her immediately, and despite being thrown out, resolves to return later when he knows she will be alone. Winner of the Best Director and Best New Actress Awards at the Venice Film Festival in 2002.

May 28: One Fine Spring Day

Hur Jin-ho, 2001.

For his second film, Hur chose a universal and somewhat ordinary subject: a man and a woman who fall in love, and then break up. He says that while his first film was structured around the beginnings of love, One Fine Spring Day is more concerned with how it ends. As with his previous film, the idea of family also plays a big role: the man, Sang-woo, lives with his father, aunt, and grandmother, relying at times on their support; Eun-su, the woman, lives alone. The characters themselves are drawn together by sounds (Sang-woo is a recording engineer, Eun-su is a radio producer), but everyday sounds, both man-made and natural, make up a crucial aspect

of the film's style. When combined with precise and at times striking camerawork, the film is able to create moments that are both solemn and beautiful.

June 4: North Korea: Beyond the DMZ

J.T. Takagi and Hye Jung Park, 2003.

A documentary follows the reunion of a young Brooklyn woman with her Korean family in this perceptive and balanced account of North Korean/U.S. relations.

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ALL SCREENINGS ARE FREE AND TAKE PLACE AT JUDD 302, BEGINNING AT 12:40 PM. FEEL FREE TO BRING YOUR OWN LUNCH TO EAT WHILE WATCHING THE FILMS!

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