

CENTER FOR EAST ASIAN STUDIES
FRIDAY NOON FILM SERIES for SPRING 2005
PRESENTS

REVIVING THE PAST:
THE CINEMATIC IMAGINATION OF CONTEMPORARY KOREAN FILMS

This series shows nine recent South Korean films. These films were made between 2000-2004, when censorship was mitigated and liberal government came into power. They evoke a new cinematic imagination seldom expressed under the previous repressed political situation. These South Korean films create a contact zone that overlaps public and private memories of the past. The first five films of this series introduce collective memories of Korean modern history, such as Japanese colonial rule, the Korean War, and military dictatorships, using personal lives to speak that history. The last four deal with the recent past of individuals. These films reveal the tensions unconsciously lived between different classes, genders, and regions in contemporary South Korean society. Although the films in this series engage in different modes of production and belong to different genres, they allow for an encounter with the past that was once unspoken and maybe even unimaginable in South Korea.

This series will be presented by Namhee Han, a graduate student in Committee on Cinema and Media Studies.

ALL FILMS ARE SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH

April 1: Peppermint Candy 박하사탕
Lee Chang-dong, 2000, 127 min.

This is the second feature from acclaimed director Lee Chang-dong, who won the Special Director's Award for Oasis (2002) at the Venice International Film Festival in 2002. Peppermint Candy depicts the personal history of Kim Young-Ho, a crazed forty-year-old man, shown in reverse-chronological order from 1999 to 1979, in seven separate chapters. His troubled experiences mingle with the modern history of Korea, such as Kwangju Uprising, democratic reforms, and economic turbulence. The film offers an epic portrait of the dissolution of Young-Ho's past and the rebirth of a nation.

April 8: YMCA Baseball Team YMCA 야구단
Park Hyun-chul, 2003, 104 min.

Set in Korea in 1905, a country not yet divided into North and South but under the looming shadow of Japanese imperialism. YMCA Baseball Team is the true story of the first baseball team that held the pride, joy and hope of a nation in crisis, retold through laughter and a few tears. Led by Ho-chang, a late Chosun scholar, who turns into the best hitter on the team, and Jeong-rim, the modern New Woman, whose father kills himself because of the forced Eulsa Treaty with Japan. The baseball team wins again and again, capturing the support and adoration of the Korean people. And when the Japanese army team challenges them to a game, they realize that baseball is not just a game but a rallying cry for freedom.

April 15: Taegukgi 태극기 휘날리며
Kang Je-gyu, 2004, 148 min.

The number one grossing film in the history of the Korean film industry. Kang Je-gyu is a well-known director of Shiri (1999), the first Korean blockbuster. Its title named after the South Korean flag, Taegukgi tells the story of two brothers from Seoul who are forcibly conscripted into the army shortly after the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. The older brother, Jin-tae decides that he must try to win a Medal of Honor in order to secure the discharge of his bookish younger brother, Jin-seok. As the war progresses from the outskirts of Pusan to the northern reaches of the peninsula, however, Jin-tae grows distant and starts losing himself in the passions of war. Taegukgi is a commercial blockbuster, provoking the collective memory of the Korean War. It attracts

viewers with spectacle and melodrama.

April 22: The President's Barber 효자동 이발사

Im Chan-sang, 2004, 116 min.

This film is an allegory about military dictatorships in contemporary Korean history. Han-mo is the sole barber in Hyoja-dong, where the President lives. A rigged election by rounding off brings him a son because he gets married to Kyung-ja by forcing her that she has to give a birth to a baby over 5 months like rounding off. 4.19 revolution in 1960 restores his belief that a barber was originally the same as a doctor in the ancient times. After a military government is founded by 5.16 coup d'etat in 1961, the hair cut decree is announced, and Han-mo's barbershop is packed with customers. One day, an unidentified person appears at the shop, and Han-mo happens to catch a spy from North Korea. Because of this, he is appointed as the President's barber. Han-mo finally makes his way in life as the 'First' barber in Korea.

April 29: Low Life 하류인생

Im Kwon-taek, 2004, 106 min.

Im Kwon-taek is the world's most recognizable Korean director, who won the Best Director Award for Chih-waseon (2002) at the Cannes International Film Festival in 2003. Low Life is his most recent and 99th(!) film, taking place between 1957-1972 and features the personal life of Choi Tae-woong, a member of a political gang. While avenging his friend, Tae-woong gets stabbed by Seung-moon. Out of this situation, Tae-woong meets and falls in love with Hye-ok, Seung-moon's sister. He gets involved with a political gang as he helps Hye-ok's father, who is a politician. After their marriage, Tae-woong and Hye-ok face the strong gales of political change. Now their life becomes as risky as a leaf in the storm.

May 6: Memories of Murder 살인의 추억

Bong Joon-ho, 2003, 128 min.

This film is based on the actual case of the first serial killer in South Korea, occurring in Hwaseong between the years of 1986 and 1991. The serial killer, who is still wanted, raped and murdered ten women all in the same grotesque and brutal manner. Korea had never before experienced serial murders of this kind, and an intense media frenzy and police investigation followed. Bong Joon-ho took the stage play and, consulting historical documents, wrote a screenplay focusing on two of the police investigators, a local policeman and a detective, who comes from Seoul to assist in the case. Bong reshapes poignant memories into a box office hit, highlighting the era in which the murders took place, a time in which the Korean populace was struggling to shake off its authoritarian and militaristic past. The film is at turns blackly humorous, thought-provoking, and horrifying.

May 13: Old Boy 올드보이

Winner of Grand Prix at Cannes International Film Festival in 2004

Park Chan-wook, 2003, 120 min.

The second part of Pak's "revenge trilogy." It follows the life of Oh Dae-soo, who is forced to remember his forgotten past. In 1998, Dae-soo is drugged and kidnapped in front of his own house. Dae-soo realizes he has been thrown into a private prison. The people who imprison him supply him with food, water and a television. Dae-soo watches the news and learns that his beloved wife was brutally murdered and the police suspects Dae-soo as the murderer. He vows to survive his ordeal and take revenge on the men who destroyed his happy life. Dae-soo habituates himself to the darkness in the cell, training his mind and body. He covers himself with tattoos, evidence of the time that he has spent in the cell. One day, Dae-soo is given sleeping gas again. He comes to and finds he has been released, 15 years after he was kidnapped. He tries to find out who is behind all of this and why.

May 20: Uninvited 4인용 식탁

Lee Su-yeon, 2003, 125 min.

The movie tells the story of Jung-won, a newly-engaged interior decorator, who suffers from feelings of anxiety and has no childhood memories. After seeing a creepy vision in his kitchen one night, Jung-won begins to doubt his own sanity, until he comes across a mysterious woman named Yeon, who can see the same things that he can. Drawn to her, he discovers that she can tell him things about the past that he never even dreamed of. In the film, the identical living space of a modern apartment embodies a pervasive symbol of middle-class wealth and also carries a sense of claustrophobia, and perhaps a pressure to conform. Placing Yeon, who will never fit into mainstream society because of the visions she sees, into the space of the apartment building makes for a bitter-sweet juxtaposition.

May 27: Save the Green Planet 지구를 지켜라

Jang Jun-hwan, 2002, 117 min.

Jang Jun-hwan is the most distinctive and talented new director in Korea. His screenplay is quite daring, showing little regard for either Hollywood narrative conventions or for playing it safe commercially. The hero of Save the Green Planet is a mentally unbalanced young man on medication who believes that aliens are plotting an imminent assault on the planet Earth. After much research, mostly through viewing B-grade science fiction films and reading some very non-mainstream books, he determines that the head alien in charge of leading the invasion is already on earth, masquerading as the successful CEO of a large conglomerate. With the survival of humanity on the line, he and a sympathetic young tightrope walker from the circus take it on themselves to kidnap the man/alien in hopes of averting the invasion. The narrative thrust of the film centers around the confinement of the man/alien in the basement of a rural home, which is a dark, nightmarish sort of place and the efforts of rival groups of detectives to track down the kidnapper.

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!