

SPRING 2006
CENTER FOR EAST ASIAN STUDIES
FRIDAY NOON FILM SERIES

ROMANCE with/against CRUELTY in SOUTH KOREAN CINEMA

Since the late 1990s, South Korean cinema has revealed great potential as new entertainment for global audiences. This series presents nine South Korean films produced between 2002-2005, questioning violence and cruelty often assumed as one of the main characters of contemporary South Korean cinema. Beyond blood and tears, these films show multi-layered cruelty embedded in national history, personal lives, and daily lives. These nine films challenge the monolithic understanding of modern Korean history such as Japanese colonial rule, national division, and military regimes often entangled with the issues of social status and gender. A broad range of film genres such as comedy, action, and melodrama in this film series examine the theme of violence and cruelty with the stunning beauty and playfulness of various visual styles. ALL FILMS ARE SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH.

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

March 31: Sympathy for Lady Vengeance

Park Chan-wook, 2005, 115 min.

The final film of Park Chan-wook's "revenge" trilogy that began with Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance (2002) and continued on to Old Boy (2003). At the age of 19, Kŭm-cha is imprisoned for kidnapping and murdering a five-year-old boy. For thirteen and a half years, called "Kind Kŭm-cha," she wastes no time in winning over her cellmates' sympathies. From the very moment she walks away from prison, "kind" Kŭm-cha embarks on a complicated plot against the real murderer, Mr. Paek. "From now on, expect Park's work to keep grabbing headlines at festivals and to keep cropping up in magazines' Best Films Ever polls."-The Independent, "Iconic, ultra-stylish, and utterly gorgeous."-Times.

April 7: Blood Rain

Winner of Grand Prize at Yubari Fantastic Film Festival in 2006

Kim Dae-seung, 2005, 119 min.

Historical thriller sets in the 19th century Chosŏn dynasty. Blood Rain is a stunning film with lush cinematography, a picturesque setting, and an intricate set and costume design. Tonghwado, a remote island, prospers from making paper. As a transport ship carrying paper to the palace burns into ashes, imperial detective Wŏn-kyu is sent to investigate. Tragic murders keep taking place, and the island villagers start to be convinced that the accident is the result of a curse placed upon them by the ghost of an islander named Merchant Kang.

April 14: YMCA Baseball Team

Park Hyun-chul, 2003, 104 min.

Set in 1905 when Korea was 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-ch'ang, a late Chosŏn scholar, who turns into the best hitter on the team, and Chŏng-nim, the modern New Woman, whose father kills himself because of the forced Ŭlsa Treaty with Japan, the baseball team wins again and again, capturing the support and adoration of the Korean people. 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 21: Blue Swallow

Yoon Jong-chan, 2005, 133 min.

"The happiest and the sweetest moment of my life was when I was soaring up the sky!"-Park Kyŏng-wŏn. Based loosely on the true story of Park Kyŏng-wŏn, Korea's first female aircraft pilot, Blue Swallow shows her continuous struggle to pursue her dream during the colonial period. The film, as a big-budget production, shows spectacular scenes shot in several foreign backdrops including El Mirage, Los Angeles, and China.

April 28: The Spirit of Jeet Kune Do, Once Upon a Time in High School

Yoo Ha, 2004, 115 min.

A delightfully bittersweet tale of unrequited love and violent adolescent awakening. Set in the late 1970s, against the

backdrop of a repressive military regime and an authoritarian school system, the film delves into issues of remembering and re-thinking the recent past of South Korea. A love triangle between the painfully shy Hyōn-su, the charismatic Wu-sik, and Olivia Hussey look alike Ŭn-chu is played out amidst cruel classroom politics, severe corporal punishment, and extreme hegemony. Writer-turned-director Yoo Ha succeeds in the difficult task of creating an entertaining film, which serves both as a social commentary and as a violent high school romance.

May 5: The President's Last Bang

Im Sang-soo, 2005, 102 min.

Political satire on the authoritarian military government. Based loosely on facts surrounding the 1979 assassination of Park Chung Hee, the film describes the last days of President Park, the authoritarian leader who ruled South Korea for 18 years. As part of a lawsuit brought forward by President Park's son, who tried to stop the film from being screened altogether, a court ruled that two documentary scenes 3 minutes and 50 seconds in length had to be cut from the film. "A virtuoso slice of sustained black humor."-Variety.

May 12: Repatriation Winner of Freedom of Expression Award at Sundance Film Festival in 2004!

Kim Dong-won, 2003, 148 min.

A remarkable documentary film about a once-taboo topic, the "unconverted long-term North Korean political prisoners." Director Kim Dong-won had taped his interaction with unconverted prisoners from 1992 until the majority of them were finally repatriated to North Korea in 2000. Graced with low-key, plain-talk narration by the director himself, the documentary focuses on a few individuals, in particular Cho Ch'ang-sōn, a lean, gentle former sailor for the North Korean spy boat.

May 19: Crying Fist

Ryoo Seung-wan, 2005, 134 min.

This boxing film revolves around two main characters, both of who are heavily flawed and pathetic individuals. T'ae-sik, once a famous boxer and silver medalist in Asian games, is bankrupt and becomes a street boxer who is professionally beaten by people and paid for it. Sang-hwan starts to learn boxing while imprisoned for juvenile delinquency. The 39-year-old street boxer T'ae-sik and 19-year-old young prisoner Sang-hwan fight for their lives in the fatal ring. Instead of making a clichéd underdog story prevalent in boxing movies, Ryoo pits the two protagonists, both having won the audience's sympathy and both deserving of a victory against each other in the ring.

May 26: Oasis

Winner of Special Director's Award at Venice Film Festival in 2002

Lee Chang-dong, 2002, 132 min.

Oasis portrays a surprising romance between a man convicted of vehicular homicide and a woman with cerebral palsy. A novelist turned filmmaker, Lee Chang-dong's instinctive narrative clarity and astute observation of social reality is understatedly reflected through mundane events and marginalized characters, articulating an innate humanism that seeks to encapsulate the ennobling beauty and quiet tragedy of human imperfection.

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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