

In the Name of the Family: The Family and Two Golden Ages of South Korean Cinema



Where are the places for the family in South Korean films? The Center for East Asian Studies is pleased to present ten South Korean films which have made statements on the family system and the ideology of the family in South Korean society. This film series connects two golden ages of South Korean cinema, the 1960s and the present, encouraging us to compare films made during the two separate periods that share similar concerns and interests of contemporary audiences. Organized with two films for each topic, it covers recurrent issues such as the popular imaginations of the (dys)functional family, a mother's place in the absence of a father, lost children, and the relationship between parents and their children. The ten films in this series allow us to trace the genealogy of the representation of the family in South Korean cinema.

This series is presented by Namhee Han, graduate student in the Committee on Cinema and Media Studies

Meet My (Dys)Functional Family!

April 4: Skeletons in the Closet (좋지아니한가)

CHUNG Yun-chul, 2006, 117 min. The Shim Chang-soo family has quite a few skeletons in their closet: Chang-soo, a high school teacher who gets no respect from his students; Hee-kyeong, Chang-soo's wife who is frustrated with the lack of attention from her family; Yong-tae, Chang-soo's son who has noticed the secret of his birth; and Yong-seon, Chang-soo's daughter to whom even her family is so "mysterious." Yong-seon asks herself, "Why do people live with someone they do not love? Why do I always go into my family's house, not the house next door?" Unfolding these unanswerable questions, *Skeletons in the Closet* persuasively shows how a dysfunctional family can function in its own way.

April 11: A Romantic Papa (로맨스 빠빠)

SHIN Sang-ok, 1960, 131 min. Shin Sang-ok (1926-2006) is a legendary filmmaker who led the golden age of South Korean cinema in the 1960s. He directed 75 films and produced 250 films in both South and North Korea, Hong Kong, and the United States from the early 1950s to the mid 1990s. *A Romantic Papa* was the first work produced by Shin's own production company, Shin Film, which established the studio and star system for the first time in South Korean film industry. Contemporary popular stars appear in the film, including Kim Seung-ho, who played numerous father roles in family melodramas; Choi Eun-hee, Shin's wife and lifetime co-worker; Um Aeng-ran, a rising female star at the time; and Shin Seong-il who made his debut with the film. Within an episodic narrative structure, *A Romantic Papa* tells of the relationship between a romantic papa and his wife and five children.

My Mom was...

April 18: Bravo, My Life (사랑해, 말순씨)

Park Heung-Sik, 2005, 92 min. *Bravo, My Life* can be compared with other nostalgic films, which remember the politically dark period of the 1970s, such as *The President's Barber* (2004) and *Once Upon a Time in High School* (2004). The film is set in the late 1970s when President Park Chung-hee was assassinated. It overlaps the political turmoil of South Korea with fourteen-year-old Gwang-ho's adolescent turmoil. The film follows his emotional tensions against his mother, an itinerant make-up saleswoman. Although the film ends with an expected sympathetic relationship between him and his mother, it avoids melodramatic sentimentality.

April 25: Mother and A Guest (사랑방 손님과 어머니)

SHIN Sang-ok, 1961, 103 min. Based on Joo Yo-seob's short story of the same title, *Mother and A Guest* is Shin Sang-ok's literary film, a popular genre of the 1960s. Choi Eun-hee, who plays the mother, shows a refined performance as a widow

struggling between practicing traditional ethical values and following her individual desires. The unfulfilled affection between Ok-hee's mother and Mr. Han is described from six-year-old Ok-hee's perspective. The film differentiates itself from the short story by adding a love story of Ok-hee's housemaid and an egg merchant, contrasting with that of the mother and Mr. Han.

The Family under Light and Shadow

May 2: Secret Sunshine (밀양) *Winner of Best Actress Award at Cannes International Film Festival in 2007*

Winner of Special Director's Prize at Asian Film Award in 2007

LEE Chang-dong, 2007, 142 min. Director Lee Chang-dong is one of the auteurs of contemporary South Korean art cinema, and *Secret Sunshine* is his fourth film. Based on Lee Chung-joon's novella, it tells the tragedy of a gentle young widow and her son. After losing her husband, she relocates to the husband's hometown called Miryang, which literally means "secret sunshine," hoping for a new start. The film is a story of faith: how it enters a life and how it vanishes. Lee asks audiences what could be a secret beneath sunshine and whether they can accept it or not.

May 9: Aimless Bullet (오발탄)

YOO Hyeon-mok, 1961, 106 min. Yoo Hyeon-mok is the most prominent filmmaker whose works have had social criticism on Korean society. The film depicts the impecunious conditions prevailing in postwar South Korea, focusing on the plight suffered by Yeong-ho's family living in a shanty town for North Korean refugees. The film was temporarily banned by the military regime that came to power after the May 16 coup d'état and finally re-released in 1963 when the film was submitted to the San Francisco International Film Festival. Yoo's cinematic language employed in *Aimless Bullet* such as modernist montage and the expressionistic use of light and shadow still makes it the greatest film in Korean film history.

How Boys and Girls Grow Up

May 16: Like A Virgin (천하장사 마돈나)

LEE Hae-joon, LEE Hae-yeong, 2006, 116 min. The film is about Oh Dong-gu, a high school boy who dreams of becoming a perfect woman like Madonna, whom he often imitates. To fulfill his dream and to get money for the operation, he decides to enter a traditional Korean wrestling competition. In the process, Dong-gu fights against prejudice of his father, who was a former boxing champion, while being supported by his mother, who ran away from home. Directors Lee Hae-joon and Lee Hae-yeong use comedy and fantasy to shed light on the controversial topic of transgender identity.

May 23: Mr. Park (박서방)

KANG Dae-jin, 1960, 138 min. Mr. Park can be compared with *A Romantic Papa*, another family melodrama in which Kim Seung-ho played a father. While *A Romantic Papa* tells the story of a middle class family, Mr. Park focuses on working class family life. Mr. Park supports his wife and three children, making a living fixing briquette stoves. Contrary to his expectations, his grown-up children often disappoint him and pursue their own lives. Kim Seung-ho won the Best Actor Award at the eighth Asia Pacific Film Festival for his performance in the film.

Short Stories of the Family in Short Films

May 30:

Seaside Flower (언니가 이해하셔야 돼요)

Park Kyung-hee, 2005, 22 min. The film follows the days of Eun-hye, an elementary-school-aged girl with Down Syndrome, and her single mother.

Smoke-flavored Life (흡연모녀)

Ryu Eun-jung, 2004, 20 min. A seven-year-old girl, Young-hee, smokes out of curiosity. Her thirty-seven-year-old mother smokes herself into composure. One day, Young-hee's father, who is cheating on his wife, beats Young-hee's mother, causing them to run away from home. Young-hee and her mother share something special to comfort each other.

ALL SCREENINGS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. SCREENINGS TAKE PLACE AT JUDD HALL 302, BEGINNING AT 12:40 PM. ALL FILMS ARE SUBTITLED IN ENGLISH.