

**Directed by** Chan-wook Park  
**Story by** Garon Tsuchiya  
**Based on the comic by** Nobuaki Minegishi  
**Screenplay by** Jo-yun Hwang, Chun-hyeong Lim, Joon-hyung Lim and Chan-wook Park

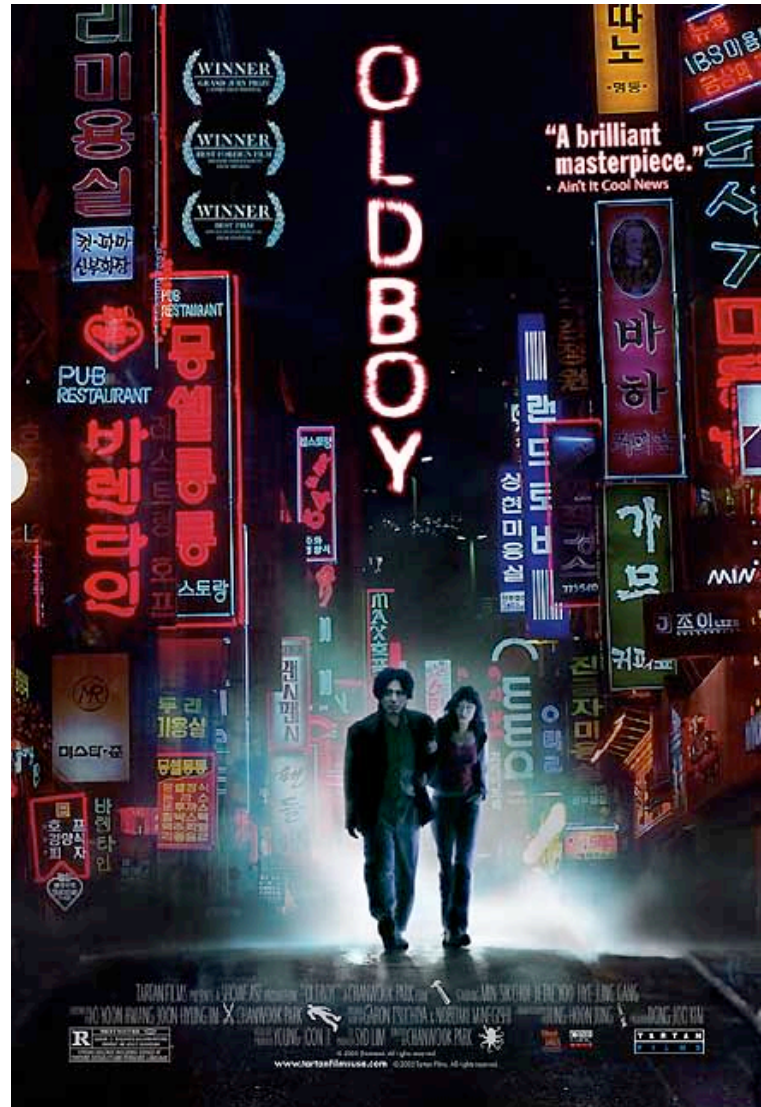
**Produced by** Seung-yong Lim  
**Original Music by** Hyun-jung Shim  
**Cinematography by** Chung-hoon Chung  
**Film Editing by** Sang-Beom Kim

Min-sik Choi...Dae-su Oh  
Ji-tae Yu...Woo-jin Lee  
Hye-jeong Kang...Mi-do  
Dae-han Ji...No Joo-hwan  
Dal-su Oh...Park Cheol-woong  
Byeong-ok Kim...Mr. Han  
Seung-Shin Lee...Yoo Hyung-ja  
Jin-seo Yun...Lee Soo-ah  
Dae-yeon Lee...Beggar  
Kwang-rok Oh...Suicidal Man  
Tae-kyung Oh...Young Dae-su  
Yeon-suk Ahn...Young Woo-jin  
Il-han Oo...Young Joo-hwan

#### Awards

Asia-Pacific Film Festival – Best Director, Best Actor  
Bangkok International Film Festival – Best Director  
British Independent Film Awards – Best Foreign Film  
Cannes Film Festival – Grand Prize of Jury  
Grand Bell Awards, South Korea – Best Director, Best Actor, Best Film Editing, Best Lighting, Best Music  
Hong Kong Film Awards – Best Asian Film

**CHAN-WOOK PARK** (23 August 1963, South Korea) has directed 12 films: *Thirst / Bakjwi* 2009, *Cinema16: World Short Films* 2008 (V), *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK / Saibogujiman kwenchana* 2006, *Lady Vengeance / Chinjeolhan geumjassi* 2005, *Three... Extremes / Sam gang yi* 2004 (segment "Cut"), *Oldboy / Oldeuboi* 2003, *If You Were Me / Yeoseot gae ui siseon* 2003 (segment "Never Ending Peace and Love"), *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance / Boksuneun nauieot* 2002, *J.S.A.: Joint Security Area / Gongdong gyeongbi guyeok JSA* 2000, *Judgment / Simpan* 1999, *Saminjo* 1997, and *Moon Is the Sun's Dream* 1992.



**CHUNG-HOON CHUNG** (15 June 1970, Seoul, Republic of Korea) has been cinematographer for 11 films: *Thirst / Bakjwi* 2009, *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK / Saibogujiman kwenchana* 2006, *Dasepo Naughty Girls / Dasepo sonyo* 2006, *Tainted Love* 2006, *Lady Vengeance / Chinjeolhan geumjassi* 2005, *Antarctic Journal / Namgeuk-ilgi* 2005, *Three... Extremes / Sam gang yi* 2004 (segment "Cut"), *Oldboy / Oldeuboi* 2003, and *Record / Zzikhimyeon jukneunda* 2000.

#### MIN-SIK CHOI (Dae-su Oh)

(27 April 1962, Seoul, South Korea) has appeared in 16 films: *I Saw the Devil / Akmareul boattda* 2010, *With a Girl of Himalaya / Himalayaeui sonyowa* 2008, *Lady Vengeance / Chinjeolhan geumjassi* 2005, *Crying Fist / Jumeogi unda* 2005, *Springtime / Ggotpineun bomi omyeong* 2004, *Tae Guk Gi: The Brotherhood of War / Taegukgi hwinalrimyeo* 2004, *Oldboy / Oldeuboi* 2003, *Painted Fire / Chihwaseon* 2002, *Happy End / Haepi-endeu* 1999, *Swiri / Shiri* 1999, *Choyonghan kajok / The Quiet Family* 1998, *No. 3* 1997, "Seoul ui dal" 1994, *Sara Is Guilty / Saraneun yujoi* 1993, and *Urideului ilgeuleojin yeongung* 1992

**JI-TAE YU (Woo-jin Lee)** (13 April 1976, Seoul, Korea) has appeared in 21 films: *Secret Love / Bimilae* 2010, *Hello, Schoolgirl*

/ *Sunjeong-manhwa* 2008, *Legendary Courtesan Hwang Jin Yi* / *Hwang Jin-yi* 2007, *Traces of Love* / *Gaewlo* 2006, *Bar Legend* / *Ddukbang* 2006, *Running Wild* / *Ya-soo* 2006, *Lady Vengeance* / *Chinjeolhan geumjassi* 2005, *Antarctic Journal* / *Namgeuk-ilgi* 2005, *Woman Is the Future of Man* / *YeoJaneun namjaui miraeda* 2004, *Oldboy Oldeuboi* 2003, *Natural City* 2003, *Into the Mirror* / *Geoul sokeuro* 2003, *Sky Blue* / *Wonderful Days* 2003, *One Fine Spring Day* / *Bomnaleun ganda* 2001, *MOB 2025* 2001, *Libera me* 2000, *Nightmare* / *Gawi* 2000, *Ditto* / *Donggam* 2000, *01412 pasasingeum* 2000, *Attack the Gas Station!* / *Juyuso seubgyuksageun* 1999, and *Bye June* / *Bai Jun* 1998

**HYE-JEONG KANG (Mi-do)** (4 January 1982, South Korea) has appeared in 15 films: *Wedding Palace* 2010, *Girlfriends* / *Gyeolpeurenjeu* 2009, *Kiss Me, Kill Me* / *Kilme* 2009, *Why Did You Come to My House* / *Woo-ri-jib-e wae-wass-ni* 2009, *Herb* / *Heobeu* 2007, *Love Phobia* / *Domabaem* 2006, *Invisible Waves* 2006, *Welcome to Dongmakgol* 2005, *Lady Vengeance* / *Chinjeolhan geumjassi* 2005, *Rules of Dating* / *Yeonae-ui mokjeok* 2005, *Antarctic Journal* / *Namgeuk-ilgi* 2005, *Hoodwinked!* 2005, *Three... Extremes* / *Sam gang yi* 2004 (segment "Cut"), *Oldboy* / *Oldeuboi* 2003, and *The Butterfly* / *Nabi* 2001.

**Dae-han Ji (No Joo-hwan)** (b. 1973) has appeared in 10 films: *Secret Love* / *Bimilae* 2010, *Open City Mubangbi-dosi* 2008, *Sunflower* / *Haebaregi* 2006, *Barefoot Kibong* / *Maenbal-ui Kibong-i* 2006, *Cracked Eggs and Noodles* / *Pasongsong gyerantak* 2005, *Two Guys* / *Tu gaijeu* 2004, *When I Turned Nine* / *Ahobsal insaeng* 2004, *Oldboy* / *Oldeuboi* 2003, *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring* / *Bom yeoreum gaeul gyeoul geurigo bom* 2003, and *Champion* 2002.

**JIN-SEO UN (Lee Soo-ah)** 5 August 1983, South Korea has appeared in 13 films: *Secret Love/Bimilae* 2010, *Iri* 2008, *Beastie Boys/Biseuti boijeu* 2008, *Voices/Du saram-yida* 2007, *A Day for an Affair/Baram-pigi joheun nal* 2007, *Bravo, My Life!/Saranghae malsoonssi* 2005, *All for Love/Naesaeengae gajang areumdawun iljuil* 2005, *Lady Vengeance/Chinjeolhan geumjassi* 2005, *Nai sae namjachingu* 2004, *Mr. Gam's Victory/Superstar Gam Sa-Yong* 2004, *Oldboy/Oldeuboi* 2003, *Painted Fire/ Chihwaseon* 2002, and *Bus Stop/Bus, jeong ryu-jang*.

**Dal-su Oh (Park Cheol-woong)** (15 June 1968, Taegu, South Korea) has appeared in 24 films: *Thirst* / *Bakjwi* 2009, *Private Eye* / *Geu-rim-ja sal-in* 2009, *The Good, the Bad, the Weird* / *Joheunnom nabbeunnom isanghannom* 2008, *A Tale of Legendary Libido* / *Garoojigi* 2008, *The Show Must Go On* / *Uahan segye* 2007, *Go Go Sister* / *Eonni-ga ganda* 2007, *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK* / *Saibogujiman kwenchana* 2006, *Once in a Summer* / *Geuhae yeoreum* 2006, *Driving with My Wife's Lover* / *Ane-eui aein-eul mannada* 2006, *Bar Legend* / *Ddukbang* 2006, *Between Love and Hate* / *Yeonae, geu chameulsu-eomneun gabyeoum* 2006, *A Bloody Aria* / *Guta-yubalja-deul* 2006, *The Host* / *Gwoemul* 2006, *Forbidden Quest* / *Eumranseosaeng* 2006, *Lady Vengeance* / *Chinjeolhan geumjassi* 2005, *A Bittersweet Life* / *Dalkomhan insaeng* 2005, *Crying Fist* / *Jumeogi unda* 2005, *Mapado* 2005, *Woman Is the Future of Man* / *YeoJaneun namjaui miraeda* 2004, *The President's Barber* / *Hyojadong ibalsa* 2004, *The Last Wolf* / *Majimak neukdae* 2004, *Oldboy* / *Oldeuboi* 2003, *If You Were Me* / *Yeoseot gae ui siseon* 2003, and *Bet on My Disco* / *Hae-jeok, discowang doeda* 2002.

**Byeong-ok Kim (Mr. Han)** has appeared in 12 films: *Insadong Scandal* / *Insadong seukaendeul* 2009, *Dachimawa Lee* 2008, *Open City* / *Mubangbi-dosi* 2008, *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK* / *Saibogujiman kwenchana* 2006, *Sunflower* / *Haebaregi* 2006, *A Cruel Attendance* / *Janhokhan chulgeun* 2006, *No Mercy for the Rude* / *Yeui-eomneun geotdeul* 2006, *The City of Violence* / *Jjakpae* 2006, *Lady Vengeance* / *Chinjeolhan geumjassi* 2005, *Crying Fist* / *Jumeogi unda* 2005, *Oldboy* / *Oldeuboi* 2003, and *Classic* / *Keulraesik* 2003.



(from Wikipedia): Park Chan-wook (Hangul: 박찬욱; born August 23, 1963) is a South Korean film director, screenwriter, producer, and former film critic. One of the most acclaimed and popular filmmakers in his native country, Park is most known for his films *Joint Security Area*, *Thirst* and what has become known as The Vengeance Trilogy, consisting of 2002's *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, *Oldboy* in 2003 and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance* in 2005. His films are noted for their immaculate framing and often brutal subject matter.

In a May 2004 interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, Park listed Sophocles, Shakespeare, Kafka, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Kurt Vonnegut and others as being influences on his career. In a later interview for *Lady Vengeance*, Park listed Alfred Hitchcock, Robert Aldrich, Ingmar Bergman, Sam Fuller, Roman Polanski and Kim Ki-young as cinematic influences.

Park was born and raised in Seoul, and studied philosophy at Sogang University, where he started a cinema-club called the "Sogang Film Community" and published a number of articles on contemporary cinema. Originally intending to be an art critic, upon seeing *Vertigo* he resolved to try to become a filmmaker. After graduation, he wrote articles on film for journals, and soon became an assistant director of films like *Kkamdong*, directed by Yu Yeong-jin, and *Watercolor painting in a Rainy Day*, directed by Kwak Jae-yong (*My Sassy Girl*).

His debut feature film was *The Moon Is... the Sun's Dream* (1992), and after five years, he made his second film *Trio*. Park's early films were not successful, and he pursued a career as a film critic to make a living.

In 2000, Park directed *Joint Security Area*, which was a great success both commercially and critically, even surpassing Kang Je-gyu's *Shiri* as the most-watched film ever made in South Korea. This success made it possible for him to make his next film more independently - *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* is the result of this creative freedom.



After winning the Grand Prix at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival for the film *Oldboy*, a journalist asked, "in your film, why is the vengeance repeating?" According to Park, he decided to make three consecutive films with revenge as the central theme. Park said his films are about the utter futility of vengeance and how it wreaks havoc on the lives of everyone involved.

### The Vengeance Trilogy

His so-called Vengeance Trilogy consists of *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, *Oldboy* and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*. It was not originally intended to be a trilogy. *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*, shortened to *Lady Vengeance*, was distributed by Tartan Films for American theatrical release in April 2006.

Despite extreme violence in his films, Park is regarded as one of the most popular film directors in Korea, with three of his last five feature films (*Joint Security Area*, *Oldboy* and *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*) all drawing audiences of over 3 million. This makes Park the director of three films in the thirty all-time highest grossing films in South Korea. (9th, 29th, 26th respectively as of January 2007).

In addition to being a film director and screenwriter, Park is also a film critic with several published editions to his name. None have been translated into English as yet.

Famed American director Quentin Tarantino is an avowed fan of Park. As the head judge in the 2004 Cannes Film Festival, he personally pushed for Park's *Oldboy* to be awarded the Palme d'Or (the honor eventually went to Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*). *Oldboy* garnered the Grand Jury Prize, the second-highest honor in the competition. Tarantino also regards Park's *Joint Security Area* to be one of "the top twenty films made since 1992."

He was offered the chance to remake *The Evil Dead* but he turned it down.

In 2006, he was the member of official section jury at the 63rd Venice International Film Festival.

In February 2007, Park won the Alfred Bauer prize at the 57th Berlin International Film Festival. The award, named after the festival's founder and in praise of movies opening up new perspectives, went to Park for his film, *I'm a Cyborg, But That's OK*.



**Kyu Hyun Kim, *Old Boy*:**

...It is a rare thing these days that a motion picture transports me back to the times that turned me into a lifelong film fan, when I felt in my bones the pleasures of discovering a new work, that spoke new languages and showed the things I had never seen before, yet did so in the manner that was also deeply familiar, because it was so solidly grounded in the idioms and conventions of the cinematic works that had come before it. A film that gives me the same sense of shock and pleasure that I felt when I saw Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) or Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) for the first time in my life. *Old Boy* is one such film, sometimes thought to have become extinct in this age of mobile phones and video games.

The diabolically talented writer-director of *Joint Security Area* (2000) and *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002), Pak Chan-wook, determined not to repeat the commercial failure of *Sympathy*, has carefully plotted his counterattack, recruiting Choi Min-shik (*Chihwaseon*, *Failan*, *Shiri*) and Yu Ji-tae (*One Fine Spring Day*, *Ditto*, *Nightmare*), organizing the movie around their star personalities, and devising a mystery plot that revolves not around the question of "whodunit" but that of "whydunit."

Oh Dae-su (Choi Min-shik), a grumpy businessman with a wife and a toddler daughter, is kidnapped by a group of gangsters. It turns out that they operate a private prison, and someone has paid them an astronomical amount of money to incarcerate him indefinitely. Compelled to rusticate for years and years inside a dingy, dark cell, with fried dumplings his only choice of menu, Oh is overcome with the desire for revenge. However, just when he is about to break free from his prison, he is dumped into the street. He hooks up with a young female sushi chef Mido (Kang Hye-jeong, the teenage guide from *Nabi: The Butterfly*), to locate the man responsible for robbing him fifteen years of his life.

The basic setup and title of the movie are derived from Tsuchiya Garon and Minegishi Nobuaki's Japanese comic, but the plot, characters and everything else have been completely re-worked. The movie blows away the *ijime*-obsessed faux-existentialist machismo of the original and instead plunges into the themes far more universally resonant, as ancient as the scarred bones interred in our ancestral tombs: the unrequited (and unrequitable) love and the Biblical suffering that such a love brings to the hapless, hypocritical animals that we are.

Choi Min-shik, looking like a mangled lion with a hyena-chomped black mane, gives the most electrifying performance of his career. His role runs the gamut from the Lee Marvin-like taciturn heroics of a seventies crime thriller to the spectacular implosion of a broken man, pitifully wailing and literally licking the shoes of his enemy, and everything in between. The film's final image, Choi's vacantly joyful, yet infinitely sad smile, will etch itself into your retinas and refuse to fade for a long, long time. Yu Ji-tae uses his lean, equine physique and contemptuously bland voice to illustrate an almost surrealistic character, part a villain in a James Bond movie, part a Greek God fallen from Mount Olympus and releasing his pale furies against the mortals. The movie's real acting revelation, however, may well be Kang Hye-jeong, at turns dangerously sexy and achingly vulnerable. There is little doubt that this role will launch her into stardom.

One could easily compile a book analyzing shot by shot the techniques used in *Old Boy*, its multiple parallels, extravagant leaps and surgically precise abbreviations. There is something ingenious, interesting or at the very least eye-catching in practically every shot of the film. The dialogue is also amazing, the previously unheard-of Korean that somehow combines the rhythm of Bond-film one-liners, the tone of lyrical poetry and the dry wit of the

narrations in a hard-boiled crime novel, arch and fluid one minute, pitiless and cutting to the bone the next.

*Old Boy* is definitely not the kind of film that can win the endorsement of every viewer. A sizable number of the audience will no doubt find the film's resolution or even thematic material repulsive. Others may be turned off by its excesses that occasionally slip into plain weirdness (Do we really have to see Choi Min-shik chowing down a squirming, live octopus headfirst?). Its violence, while not as unblinkingly brutal as in *Sympathy*, is still disturbing enough to generate an NC-17 rating if turned over to the MPAA.

In the end, though, even its excesses and manic quirkiness are part of *Old Boy's* design. Unwatchably ugly and breathtakingly beautiful, gut-wrenching and delicate, heartbreakingly emotional and coldly manipulative, mind-bogglingly entertaining and almost arrogantly artistic, *Old Boy* is a mass of contradictions that nonetheless coheres as a whole. It is unclear at this point whether the movie can eventually claim the position of a world-class masterpiece, but one thing is certain for me: *Old Boy* is without doubt the most purely cinematic (both in form and content) piece of work, the truest motion picture, released in South Korea this year.



**From 1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die. Ed. Stephen Jay Schneiderman. Oldboy entry by Karen Krizanovich**

A superbly crafted tale of mysticism, poetry, school days, and a futuristic bedroom are only some of the wonders found in *Oldboy*. A thriller that hinges on Oedipal taboos and blind destiny, hypnotism and fate, this breakthrough film—part action, part drama, part psychological thriller—opened Korean cinema to more viewers than any other film. The story is more direct and compelling than the director's popular previous film, *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*. A man is imprisoned for 15 years without an explanation. Upon escape, he must find his kidnapper in only five days.

Such is the explosive beginning of *Oldboy*, Korean director Chan-Wook Park's violent, elegiac masterpiece, itself based on a Japanese manga cartoon by Garon Tsuchiya. Actor Choi Min-sik, who performed his own stunts, trained rigorously for his role as hapless kidnap victim Dae-su, a man who escapes his windowless prison by ingeniously digging through a skyscraper wall into thin air. Once free, he vows revenge, Monte Cristo-style, against his kidnapper who has effectively robbed him of his daughter, his wife, and his life. Now a ragged fighting machine who resembles a Korean Charles Bronson in a fright wig, Dae-su is befriended by a beautiful sushi chef (Gang Hye-jung), whom he engages by eating a live squid then passing out, face down, on the counter. Such is the knockdown, drag-out style of *Oldboy*. However complex the tale, it is underpinned by a logic that unfolds clearly, easily incorporating the film's various flashbacks. Made in a pace that sometimes leaves one breathless but also which leaves room for

thought, *Oldboy's* choreographed fight scenes are both innovative and surprising and all of the evidence serves the plot. Despite its brutality, it is, ultimately, a black comedy that deftly rolls elements of mob thriller and vengeance mystery all in one. After winning the Grand Prix du jury at Cannes in 2004, the director stunned the audience by thanking the cast and crew, then thanking the four squid who gave up their lives for the vivid sushi bar scene.

**Darcy Paquet: A Short History of Korean Film (**  
**<http://www.koreanfilm.org/history.html>):**

- 1903 — First public screening of a film in Korea (the exact year is debated).
- 1910 — Korea is formally annexed by Japan, after several years of effective colonization.
- 1919 — First Korean film, a kinodrama (play with motion picture inserts) named *The Righteous Revenge*(*Uirjeok Gutu*).
- 1923 — First silent film, *Plighted Love Under the Moon* (*Wolha-ui maengseo*) directed by Yun Baek-nam.
- 1926 — *Arirang* by Na Un-kyu.
- 1935 — First sound film, *Chunhyang-jeon* directed by Lee Myung-woo.
- 1937 — Japan invades China; censorship of film industry increases.
- 1945 — Japan surrenders; Korea regains independence, but is soon divided in two.
- 1949 — Korea's first color film, *The Women's Diary* by Hong Seong-gi.
- 1950 — War starts on the Korean Peninsula.
- 1953 — Cease-fire agreement signed at Panmunjeom.
- 1956 — Box office smash *Madame Freedom* inaugurates industry revival.
- 1960 — *The Housemaid*, directed by Kim Ki-young.
- 1961 — *Obaltan*, (pictured right) directed by Yu Hyun-mok.
- 1961 — Military coup leads to consolidation and heavy regulation of film industry.
- 1973 — Establishment of Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation (KMPPC).
- 1974 — Establishment of Korean Film Archive.
- 1979 — President Park Chung Hee is assassinated.
- 1980 — Gwangju Uprising.
- 1981 — *Mandala*, directed by Im Kwon-taek.
- 1988 — Hollywood studios open first branch offices in Korea, led by UIP.
- 1992 — *Marriage Story* is first film financed by a member of the chaebol (Samsung).
- 1993 — Democratization spreads in Korea under new president Kim Young Sam.
- 1993 — *Sopyonje*, directed by Im Kwon-taek, sets new local box office record.
- 1997 — Opening of Namyangju Cinema Complex outside of Seoul.
- 1999 — *Shiri*, directed by Kang Jae-gyu, kicks off commercial boom.
- 2001 — Local market share tops 50%, boom in overseas sales.
- 2004 — *Silmido* and *Tae Guk Gi* become the first films to sell 10 million tickets.
- 2004 — *Oldboy* wins Grand Prix (second prize) at the Cannes Film Festival.
- 2006 — *The Host* breaks box office record and helps local market share reach 64%.

1903-1945: Korea Under Japanese Rule



Only fragments remain of Korea's early film history. The vast majority of Korea's early film footage was lost due to neglect or the destruction brought about by the Korean War, and not a single feature produced before 1934 survives in complete form today. Nonetheless, historical records paint a picture of a lively and creative industry that produced over 160 features from the early twenties until Japan's surrender to Allied forces in 1945.

From 1909 to 1920, a series of theaters were built in Seoul and in regional cities such as Pusan and Pyongyang. Most of these theaters were owned by Japanese businessmen, but a few Korean theater owners built up a significant amount of capital screening European and American imports. This capital would eventually be used to help finance the first domestic productions. Korea's first "film" (*The Righteous Revenge*), a kinodrama in which actors performed against the backdrop of a projected feature, debuted at Seoul's Danseongsa Theater in 1919. The public reportedly loved the show, but the long-term prospects of this and other kinodramas were hampered by intellectuals who criticized the mixed-media format as an insult to both theatre and film.

Korea's first silent feature was produced in 1923, and over the next few years, seven Korean film companies would appear. The masterpiece of this era is considered to be Na Un-kyu's *Arirang* (1926). Na, only 25 years old at the time, produced, directed and starred in this film about a mentally unstable man who kills a wealthy landowner's son who is linked to the Japanese police. The title is taken from a popular folk song, which in its newly re-arranged form would become an anthem of sorts for the Korean independence movement. The film, admired for its aesthetic qualities as well as for its hidden political messages, became an inspiration for a wave of young filmmakers who hoped to make films based on principles of realism and resistance to Japanese power.

Despite the increasing popularity of local cinema, however, Japanese censorship played a large role in limiting its growth. The colonial government required all foreign and domestic features to be submitted to a government censorship board for approval before being screened, and police were present at theaters for screenings. Although a few works extolling Korean nationalism reached audiences in the late 1920s, from 1930 censorship became much more strict, such that melodramas, costume dramas, and pro-Japanese films became more prominent. Several features were banned outright and subsequently destroyed.

By 1935 the first sound feature *Chunhyang-jeon* (based on Korea's most famous folk tale, which has been filmed over a dozen times) was directed by Lee Myung-woo, with the assistance of pioneering sound technician Lee Pil-woo. Nonetheless, local filmmakers found it difficult to raise enough money to produce sound features, and Korean talkies faced much harsher criticism than the silent films which preceded them. It was only two years

later, with the runaway commercial success of Lee Gyu-hwan's *Drifter* (1937) that sound films were established as the norm. In the same year, however, Japan invaded China, and the Korean filmmakers would come under increasing pressure to shoot films that supported the Japanese military and the war effort. By 1942, Korean-language films were banned outright by the government.

#### 1945-1955

Only five films have survived from the period between the U.S. occupation of Korea and the end of the Korean War. Of them, the most famous is Choi Un-gyu's *Chayu Manse!* ("Hoorah! Freedom!"), released in 1946. An ode to patriotism with strong anti-Japanese sentiments, the film proved to be a hit with audiences.



During the Korean War, much of the country's film infrastructure was destroyed and the center of the industry temporarily moved to Busan. Many filmmakers became involved in shooting newsreels and war documentaries. Following the armistice agreement in 1953, President Rhee Syngman declared cinema to be exempt from all tax, in hopes of reviving the industry. Foreign aid programs provided South Korea with film technology and equipment, setting the stage for

the rebirth of Korean cinema in the late-fifties and sixties.

#### 1955-1969: A Golden Age for Korean Cinema

The latter half of the 1950s can be considered a period of revival for the Korean film industry, as the number of domestic productions increased from 8 in 1954 to 108 in 1959. The public also returned to the theaters, embracing such features as the now-lost 1955 version of *Chunhyang-jeon*, which drew 200,000 viewers in Seoul (over a tenth of the city's population), and *Madame Freedom* (1956), based on a scandalous novel that had been published the year before in a local newspaper.



The late 1950s and early 1960s saw the emergence of some of Korea's most talented directors. These filmmakers worked during a time when the domestic film industry enjoyed an unprecedented surge in box office receipts. However in 1962, military dictator Park Chung Hee instituted a highly constrictive Motion Picture Law which

caused a severe consolidation in the number of film companies, and which strengthened government control over all aspects of the industry. Although accomplished films continued to be made up until the end of the decade, such restrictive policies would ultimately have a severe effect on the industry's creativity.

Without question, Korea's most shockingly original director is the late Kim Ki-young. Kim, renowned for his gritty domestic dramas, released his most famous feature, *The Housemaid*, in 1960. This film — the tale of a manipulative housemaid who seduces her master — transgresses the laws of contemporary cinema to the same extent that its heroine tears apart the Confucian order of her household. As in many of Kim's features, the women in this film possess a great deal of power and

become a direct, menacing threat to their male counterparts. Although Kim's work remained largely forgotten for many years, he was "re-discovered" in the 1990s and afforded his rightful place in Korean film history.

Another significant talent to emerge from this era is Yu Hyun-mok, who captured widespread attention with his 1961 feature *Obaltan* (translated as "Aimless Bullet"). This film, which combines the social concerns and themes of Italian Neorealism with more expressionist sound design and visuals, expresses the pain and despair brought on by the destruction of the war and Korea's industrial development. Yu's work, which focuses on marginalized members of society, is highly stylized and the most obviously intellectual of the period.

Lastly, Shin Sang-ok established himself as a major figure with early works such as *A Flower in Hell* (1958) and his best-known film *The Houseguest and My Mother* (1961). The latter work, told through the perspective of a young girl, portrays the struggles of a young widow who falls in love with her tenant, but cannot express her feelings due to a restrictive social code. Later in the decade, Shin would turn to color and a more sensual tone in works such as *The Dream* (1967), based on an ancient tale about a libidinous Buddhist monk, and a masterful work set in the medieval Chosun Dynasty: *Eunuch* (1968). In 1978, after having made some 80 films in his home country, he and his wife were mysteriously "kidnapped" and taken to North Korea. After working in the film industry there for eight years he moved to Hollywood, where he would produce *The Three Ninjas* and its sequels under the name Simon Sheen.

### The 1970s

In the seventies, the film industry entered a long period of declining admissions and increased levels of government censorship. In 1973 the Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation (the precursor to the Korean Film Council) was formed in an effort to revive the industry, and in the following year the Korean Film Archive was founded, but as an industry Korean cinema would not reverse its commercial slide until the mid-1990s.

Nonetheless a number of interesting works from this period display a high degree of originality in their exploration of personal (and, often on a symbolic level, political) themes. Highlights include some of the most distinctive works by Kim Ki-young (*Insect Woman*, *Iodo*, *Woman Chasing Killer Butterfly*, and more); the debut work by gifted director Lee Jang-ho, *The Hometown of Stars*; and *Road to Sampo*, the last film by celebrated filmmaker Lee Man-hee, who died in 1975 in his mid-forties. The seventies also saw witness to the short but dazzling career of Ha Kil-jong, described by many as one of the most talented directors ever to work in Korea. Ha directed seven features including his best-known work *March of Fools* (1975) before his early death in 1979 at the age of 38.

1980-1996

An infusion of new directorial talent in the early eighties would bring about a modest revival in the film industry. Although attendance remained at low levels, the eighties witnessed a slight relaxation in censorship and an increasing recognition from the international film community, culminating perhaps in Kang Su-yeon's Best Actress award at the 1987 Venice Film Festival for her role in *Surrogate Mother*.

Many critics would argue that the most significant name of the decade is Im Kwon-taek. Although Im had already directed over 70 features by 1980, it was with *Mandala* (1981) that he emerged as Korea's best-known filmmaker. Moving away from his earlier, commercially-oriented style, *Mandala* focuses on two monks in

order to explore the meaning and place of Buddhism in Korean society. Im has become known for his efforts to capture and enshrine the older, forgotten elements of Korean traditional culture. His most popular and acclaimed feature, *Sopyonje* (1993, pictured left), brought about a revival in the Korean vocal art known as *pansori*. To date, Im has directed 100 features and he remains a central figure in Korean film.

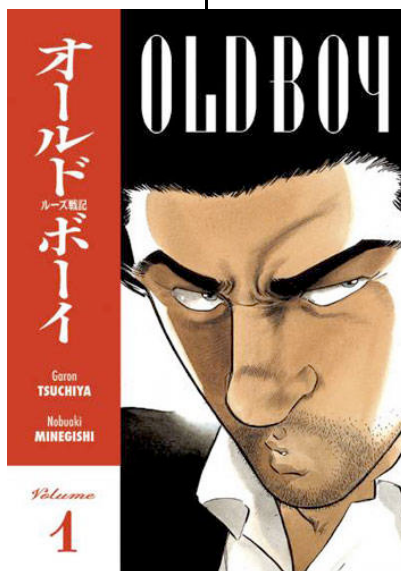
In the 1980s, the Korean film industry undertook the first steps of a

major transformation with several important developments. Firstly, military leader Roh Tae-woo enacted a new constitution in 1988 which led to the gradual easing of political censorship. One early film to take advantage of this was Park Kwang-soo's *Chilsu and Mansu* (1988), which cleverly invokes images of a street demonstration in its memorable final scene. Park would go on to direct more acclaimed films, such as *Black Republic* (1990), *To the Starry Island* (1993) and *A Single Spark* (1995).

Meanwhile back in 1984, a revision to the Motion Picture Law loosened some of the regulatory restrictions on Korean filmmakers. Independent production, which had formerly been illegal, was permitted under certain circumstances, and the government also repealed laws which had kept the film industry consolidated under a few large companies. The end result of this is that by the late 1980s a new generation of young producers had entered the film industry, and their new approaches to filmmaking would eventually have a major effect on Korean cinema.

However the news was not all positive for local filmmakers. In 1988, a change in policy lifted import restrictions on foreign films, and allowed Hollywood companies to set up branch offices on Korean soil. Up until this time, the screening of movies from Hollywood or Hong Kong had always been strictly controlled and

limited by the government in various ways. These new laws would mean that for the first time, Korean films would have to compete directly with Hollywood product. Over the next few years, domestic films would gradually lose their market share, reaching a low point in 1993 when Korean cinema made up only 16% of overall attendance figures. The Screen Quota System, whereby theaters were obliged to screen Korean features for 106-146 days out of the year, remained the only protection against foreign competition at this time.





However in 1992, *Marriage Story* by first-time director Kim Ui-seok opened to rave critical and popular reviews, heralding not only the introduction of a new popular genre (the sex-war comedy), but also a new era. With this film, Samsung, one of South Korea's five major conglomerates, would become the first of the so-called chaebol to enter the film industry. In time these conglomerates would transform the structure of the business, introducing a vertically integrated system whereby the financing, production, exhibition, distribution, and video release of films were all controlled by a single company. Although many chaebol including Samsung dropped out of the industry after the 1997 ("IMF") financial crisis, major conglomerates such as CJ, the Orion Group (Showbox), and Lotte remain the industry's most powerful players in the present day.

Several directors who debuted in the 1980s continued to produce interesting work in the 90s. Notably, Jang Sun-woo, who shot his first feature *Seoul Jesus* in 1986, presented audiences with a series of challenging and controversial films ranging from *Road to the Racetrack* (1993), a dark and meandering portrait of two Korean intellectuals having an affair, to *A Petal* (1996), about the lasting effects of the Kwangju Massacre in 1980.

#### 1996-present

However beginning in 1996, a new generation of directors began to take over the industry. Arthouse master Hong Sang-soo made his debut with the award-winning *The Day a Pig Fell Into the Well* (1996), which weaves the experience of four characters into a single story. In this and his subsequent films, Hong built a reputation for his honest depiction of the cruelty and baseness of human relations. The year 1996 also saw the debut of controversial filmmaker Kim Ki-duk, known for his rough but visually striking film style (largely self-taught) and his tendency to shoot films very quickly on a shoestring budget. Unlike most other

leading Korean directors, internationally, rather than by local critics. Then in 1997, Lee Chang-dong made his debut with *Green Fish*. A former novelist, Lee would eventually win a Best Director award at Venice for *Oasis* (2002), and also served as Korea's Minister of Culture and Tourism from 2003-2004.

At the same time, a group of younger, more commercially minded filmmakers were also making their debut. In 1997, the release of the hit film *The Contact* by Chang Yoon-hyun marked a resurgence of box-office popularity for domestic features, leading up to the unprecedented success of Kang Je-gyu's 1999 film *Shiri*. Since then, Korea has entered a boom period that ranks as one of the most sudden and notable developments in recent world cinema. Local audiences have rushed to embrace local films, so that by 2001 the 60-70 Korean films made each year sold significantly more tickets than the 200-300 Hollywood and foreign titles that were released. In the international arena as well, festival screenings and international sales expanded at breathtaking speed, as more and more directors began to make a name for themselves.

One could argue, however, that the current boom being enjoyed by Korean cinema is less of an extraordinary circumstance, than a case of the industry finally reaching its natural state. Since its earliest beginnings, Korean cinema has been hampered by Japanese colonization, national division, civil war, authoritative military governments, strict censorship, and highly restrictive, distorting film regulations. Only in the 1990s did Korean cinema finally enjoy a supportive government, a stable economic environment and a sensible film policy. Although the amazing commercial boom that has powered the film industry in recent years may well fade to more modest levels, one hopes that Korean cinema will never again face such extreme disruptions as it did in the 20th century.



## JUST ONE MORE IN THE FALL 2010 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS

December 7 Deepa Mehta *Water* 2005

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\*PAPER: (HORSE RACING RESULTS)



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\*FX: KSHH KSHH