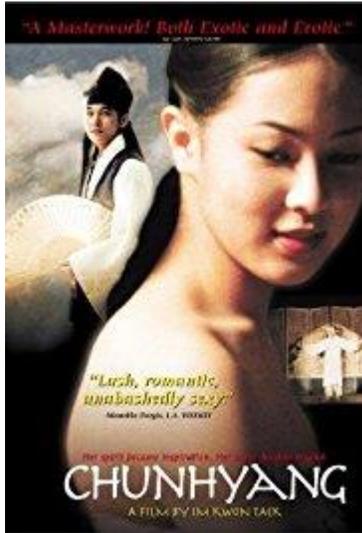


INFUSING KOREAN STUDIES INTO THE UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM

Film Series



Chunhyang (2000, 120 min)

Original Title: Chunhyangdyun

Director: Kwon-taek Im

Cast: Hyo-jeong Lee; Seung-woo Cho; Sung-nyu Kim

Storyline:

Mongryong marries the beautiful Chunhyang without telling his father, the Governor of Namwon. When his father is transferred to Seoul, Mongryong has to leave Chunhyang and finish his exams. Chunhyang, being the daughter of a courtesan, is also legally a courtesan. She is beaten and imprisoned when she refuses to obey the new Governor Byun, as she wishes to be faithful to her husband. After three years, Mongryong passes his exam and becomes an emissary to the King. He returns to Namwon, disguised as a beggar, just before Chunhyang is to be flogged to death at the governor's birthday celebration. *(Written by Will Gilbert, retrieved from IMDB)*

Parts of Im Kwon Taek's "Chunhyang" have the enormous and verdant sweep of a fairy tale, complete with the horrific turns of plot that pound at the heart of unexpurgated versions of folk stories. This master Korean director, who has made more than 90 films, uses the blush of ardor to warm the tale's familiarity.

When the picture shifts into a love story and Chunhyang (Lee Hyo Jung), the daughter of a prostitute, and the spoiled and doll-faced Mongryong (Cho Seung Woo), the son of the governor, lock eyes for the first time, he pays homage to the corniest of romances as well as the feelings that such stories can evoke. Im knows that we all want to believe, because it's clear that he does himself. He toys with the usual conventions of the eager ingenue finding true love by introducing the governor's son as if he were the heroine and focal point, lingering over Cho's unlined and untroubled face.

This year several filmmakers have used this form -- the fable -- as the basis of their movies, but "Chunhyang" isn't immersed in the kind of decorative smugness that lets movie audiences in on the joke. Instead the story is freshened through the use of a Korean singing storyteller, a pansori singer, to provide a narration, belting out the song from a stage in front of an audience. The pansori, or song, is performed under a proscenium arch to highlight the ritual elements of folk tales. Even though much of what the pansori tells us unfolds before the cameras at the same moment, the forcefulness of the performance lends another layer of feeling to the picture.

The device is a worthy addition, because Im makes the delivery of the song as integral to "Chunhyang" as the story itself, and it's a neat trick to involve the audience in such a way. Self-awareness here isn't a cheap gambit, a way for the director to have his tongue lounge in the hollows of his cheek. The extravagance of the sets and costumes increases the theatricality; "Chunhyang" is an almost childlike delight for the eyes. The picture is at its best when the lovers are playing with each other and intoxicated by the newness of their flesh.

The film is most effective in moments when Im lets his cast find the truth in the individual scenes, because the story's predictability won't be lost even on the very young. He also uses "Chunhyang" as a way to comment on the ubiquity of legend, paying homage to the West by showing a fleeting image of Judy Garland, her eyes as wide as hubcaps and silently pleading for the transformative magnificence of love. His attachment to pure emotion does a lot for the picture.

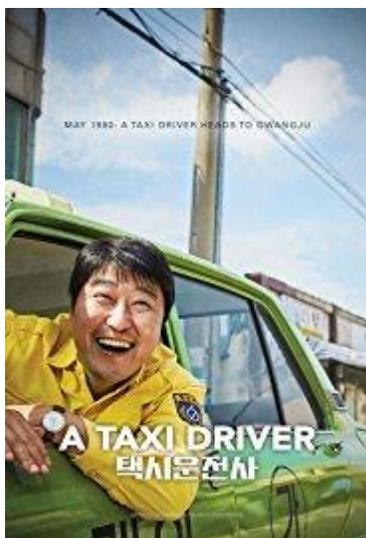
CHUNHYANG

Directed by Im Kwon Taek; written (in Korean, with English subtitles) by Kim Myoung Kon, based on "Chunyang," the pansori song by Cho Sang Hyun; director of photography, Jung Il Sung; edited by Park Soon Duk; music by Kim Jung Gil; art director, Min Un Ok; produced by Lee Tae Won; released by Lot 47 Films. Running time: 120 minutes. This film is not rated.

WITH: Lee Hae Eun (Hyangdan), Lee Hae Ryong (Lord of Soonchun), Kim Hak Yong (Pangja), Lee Hyo Jung (Chunhyang), Choi Jin Young (Governor Lee), Gok Jun Hwam (Lord of Okgwa), Lee Jung Hun (Governor Byun), Yoon Keun Mo (Lord of Goksung), Hong Kyung Yeun (Kisaeng Leader), Kim Sung Nyu (Wolmae) and Cho Seung Woo (Mongryong).

Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/09/23/movies/film-review-how-a-korean-folk-form-freshens-a-fairy-tale-love.html>

For more detailed discussion of Chunhyangjeon and various versions of it, visit Google Arts & Culture ["1923-2000 Korea's Classical 'Chunhyangjeon' \(The Story of chunhyang\) Made into Film"](#)



A Taxi Driver (2017, 137 min)

Director: Hun Jang

Cast: Kang-ho Song; Thomas Kretschmann; Hae-jin Yoo

Revisiting the 1980 Gwangju Massacre, a landmark historical event in South Korea's march towards democracy, director Jang Hoon brings a sappy, feel-good touch to a tragic subject by focusing on the bond between a German reporter (Thomas Kretschmann) and the taxi driver (Song Kang-ho) who helped him get the news out to the world.

Jang, who's established himself as a hit-maker with features like "Secret Reunion" (also starring Song) and "The Front Line," again worked B.O. miracles, earning the third highest domestic opening score of all time with "A Taxi Driver." While the film

clearly taps into the national zeitgeist, buoyed by a sweeping show of people's power that ousted the president, international audiences should also appreciate the actors' feisty turns. (It opened in the U.S. on Aug. 11.)

"A Taxi Driver" is the first major production to tackle the Gwangju Uprising head-on since the 2007 blockbuster "May 18." Having less pretensions to epic grandeur than that film, it instead gains credibility from being based on a true story, and closing footage of the German reporter returning to the democratized country in 2003 certainly adds historical heft.

The script by Uhm Yoo-na and Jo Seul-ye has drastically simplified the political context that triggered the uprising, but this in turn helps foreign viewers grasp the plot more easily than denser, more intellectual probings of the subject in such films as Im Sang-soo's "The Old Garden" or Lee Chang-dong's "Peppermint Candy." Opening titles explain how the 1979 assassination of dictator Park Chung-hee sparked hopes of democracy among the younger generation, though the power vacuum was soon filled by Gen. Chun Doo-hwan, who declared martial law in a 1980 coup. In Gwangju, protest quickly spilled out of universities and engulfed the southwestern city.

Despite the government's attempts at keeping foreign press in the dark, Juergen Hinspeter (Kretschmann), correspondent for a German broadcast channel, gets wind of the unrest brewing in South Korea. From his base in Tokyo, he flies to Seoul where his contact helps him book a taxi to drive him south to the beleaguered city. When the protagonist (Song) whose real name is never revealed in the film, overhears that a foreigner is forking out about \$900 for the fare, the cash-strapped single father cunningly steals the job from the intended driver.

They arrive on May 19, a day after the uprising broke out, to find the city completely sealed off by the army, although the two still manage to bluff their way pass blockades. Initially, they come across a group of students whose youthful innocence is expressed by the way they sing and dance like revelers at a Woodstock concert, but eventually wind up at a hospital where the casualties provide raw evidence of the bloody crackdown.

The protagonist becomes embroiled in a squabble with local taxi drivers, who scoff at his mercenary attitude. Jang makes good-humored fun of biases between Seoul citizens and natives of the Jeolla district, where the film takes place, but later demonstrates how humanist values transcend regional differences. Although the driver initially displays cowardice in the face of conflict, his personal struggle is rendered agonizing enough by Song to give full force to a climactic U-turn.

Apart from re-creating one incident in which paratroopers tried to wipe out a whole crowd in front of a broadcast station, the film eschews the kind of bombastic, effects-heavy setpieces that characterized "May 18." Instead, it depicts the regime's brutal repression implicitly through its blatant attack on press freedom and shameless distortion of the truth. This in turn accentuates Hinzpeter's role in raising international awareness for their crimes.

According to historical records, on May 20, hundreds of taxis mobilized themselves in a parade to support marching citizens and rescue the injured. Hailed as "drivers of democracy," many lost their lives. Since only a few taxis are deployed in any given scene, the film hasn't re-created an adequate sense of the scope of their heroism. However, the power of solidarity is conveyed in a late car-chase sequence that's choreographed to rousing effect. (The film looks polished overall, its mood buoyed by a playful, jazzy score.)

Although the film's portrayal of its main characters has recognizable precedents, the two lead actors calibrate their mutual respect and co-dependency to engaging effect, as the escalating violence and peril heighten their sense of personal mission. Echoing the role of American correspondent Sydney Schanberg in "The Killing Fields," Hinzpeter arrives in Korea as an opportunistic newshound rather than a champion of justice. Kretschmann plays him initially with an unlikable cold efficiency, treating his driver and other Koreans as mere tools or fodder for his article. Impressively, there are no overnight changes in his persona. Rather, the actor maintains a certain stiff composure even as his passion and affection for the democracy fighters visibly grows. The final parting is genuinely touching as the two men now relate to each other as equals.

Audiences familiar with Korean cinema will instantly recognize a resemblance between the character of the taxi driver and Song's role in "The Attorney," in which he transforms from a mercenary tax solicitor to an altruistic human-rights lawyer. And yet Song makes a subtle distinction between the two characters, as his comic charm betrays the tough-talking character's soft heart, as when he keeps letting passengers in need short-change him.

Film Review: 'A Taxi Driver'

Reviewed at Korean Film Council screening room, Aug. 4, 2017. Running time: 137 MIN.
(Original title: "Taeksi Woonjeonsa")

PRODUCTION: (S. Korea) A Showbox Mediaplex (in South Korea), Well Go USA (in U.S.) release of The Lamp production in association with Ace Investment & Finance, Leo Partners Investment, Signature Film, Interpark, Huayi Investment, Huayi Brothers Korea, Korea Broadcast Advertising Corp. (International sales: Showbox) Producer: Park Un-kyoung. Executive producer: You Jeong-hun. Co-executive producers: Hwang Young-won, Kim Song-

soo, Han Suk-woo, Park Jin-young, Oh Seung-wook, Ji Seung-bum, Kwak Sung-moon. Co-producer: Choi Ki-sua.

CREW: Director: Jang Hoon. Screenplay: Ho Kei-ping. Camera (color, widescreen): Ko Nak-sun. Editors: Kim Sang-bum, Kim Jae-bum. Music: Cho Young-wook.

WITH: Song Kang-ho, Thomas Kretschmann, Ryoo Yun-ryul, Oh Dal-su. (Korean, English, German dialogue)

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