Korean Cinema: History and Cultural Identity in the Global Age

* Director Ryoo Seung-wan and Martial Arts Coordinator Jeong Doo-hong, at the City of Violence press screening.

Time and Place: Olson 109, Tuesday 5:10-7:00 pm
(In some weeks, we meet 5:10-6:00 pm)

Film Showing: Art 204, Tuesday 7:00-9:00 pm
(A short discussion will follow the film presentation)

Instructor: Kyu Hyun Kim
Associate Professor of Japanese History, UC Davis

Office Hours: Tuesday 2:00-2:50 pm, Thursday 12:40-2:50 pm

Description: This seminar examines contemporary Korean cinema in the global context. Korean cinema has been widely recognized in the global cultural market as one of the most surprising and baffling “success stories,” not only resisting the global hegemony of the Hollywood films in the domestic market, but also generating a transnational network of fans, collaborators and consumers in East Asia as well as in Europe and North America. This is a drastic turnaround from only fifteen years ago, when Korean cinema were regarded by Koreans themselves as low-rent, insignificant and unworthy of scholarly
attention. It has now become one of the most important cultural media through which Korea is recognized globally.

The seminar will introduce the freshmen/sophomore participants to a select number of award-winning and artistically praised Korean films and explore modern Korean history and cultural identities as reflected in these works of art. It will be an appropriate course for any student with an interest in East Asian history, East Asian culture, film studies, international relations and media studies.

The content of the course and the films to be shown are flexible and are subject to revision according to the student’s interests.

All reading materials will be available as a sourcebook to be purchased at Copyland (231 G St., 530-753-8727) after April 4. There is no textbook to be purchased.

Requirements: The students will write two five-page reflection papers and will also contribute an essay on webpage, www.koreanfilm.org (recommended to be registered as a member), to be made in arrangement with Mr. Darcy Paquet. They will attend film screenings and read assigned texts and discuss these works during class sessions. Both reflection papers will be based on topics/questions to be handed out during the class. The first reflection paper is due on May 8, during class. The second reflection paper is due on June 1, Friday, 5:00 pm, at the History Department Office.

Grade breakdown is as follows:

- Reflection papers: 50 points each x 2= 100
- Discussion evaluation: 50 points
- Online essay: 50 points
- Field trip reflection: 20 points each (Optional)

Total: 200 points

Students also must attend bi-weekly screenings of the select Korean films, and class discussions. Failure to do so will reflect negatively on their final grades.

Course Schedule:

Part 1: Why is Korean Cinema So Popular?

Week 1: Introduction—April 3

* Possible Field Trip: The Host (Berkeley California Theater)

Week 2: Industrial Aspects & Creative Forces—April 10

Part 2: Classics of Korean Cinema

Week 3: ‘Golden Age’ Melodrama—April 17


Film to be shown: Obaltan/Stray Bullet

Week 4: Im Kwon-t’aek and “National Cinema”—April 24


Film to be shown: Sopyonje

Part 3: History and National Identity

Week 5: Nationalism & Colonial Experience—May 1


Film to be shown: Blue Swallow

Week 6: Field Trip to San Francisco International Film Festival—May 8

Film to be shown: TBA

Part 4: Fear and Anxiety

Week 7: Why Violence and Gruesome Deaths?—May 15

Week 8: Horror, the Horror!—May 22


Film to be shown: *Tale of Two Sisters*

Part 5: Melodrama

Week 9: Mothers Are Not Appreciated, or “We Just Live Because We Cannot Die.”—May 29


Film to be shown: *My Mother, the Mermaid*

Week 10: Recap and Further Discussion—June 5

Film to be shown: TBA