

# KOREAN CINEMA TODAY : POPULAR GENRE DOMINATES

What kind of film do you want to be in next?' a young actress asks Kim Ok-bin, who has just finished shooting Park Chan-wook's vampire film *Thirst* 'A film in which a number of female actresses appear, or a film in which female actresses love one another...', replies Ok-bin vehemently. This conversation is featured in E J-yong's heart-warming and experimental **Actresses** (*Yeobaeudeul*), in which six leading actresses are cast as themselves. The film's self-referential statement may be considered a subtle yet critical comment on one of the predominant trends of South Korean cinema in 2010. For this is a year when action thrillers and crime films have prevailed as popular genres. Moreover, the majority of such films have starred top male actors as main characters, caught up in conflicts that are both cruel and extremely violent.

In contrast to previous years, no record-breaking Korean blockbusters ruled at the box office in 2010. Instead, the top ten domestic films all achieved relatively similar levels of commercial success. Lee Jeong-beom's **The Man from Nowhere** (*Ajeossi*) was the leading domestic hit. Described as the Korean *Leon*, it successfully re-presented Won Bin, one of Korea's young flower-beauty male stars, as a cool lone action man with divine muscles and a dark personal history. Korean blockbuster director Kang Woo-suk's

**Moss** (*Ikkk*) ranked fourth among domestic films at the box office. At a time when an abundance of violent and cruel male-body genre films are being made, it stands out as a mesmerising piece due to its enthralling theme and plot based on the original manga by Yun Tae-ho (which appeared serially at a web portal site) and powerful acting by the male cast (Jeong Jae-young, Yu Hae-jin, Kim Sang-ho, Kim Jun-bae and Park Hae-il).



**SECRET SUNSHINE** / Korea / Dir. Lee Chang-Dong

Ryu Seung-wan's action noir, **The Unjust** (*Budanggeorae*), was the eighth most commercially successful domestic film of the year. Like *Moss*, it also touches on the dark currents of Korean society; here, a dog-eat-dog chain is explored linking a prosecutor, policeman and criminal involved in creating a fake suspect for a serial murder case. **I Saw the Devil** (*Angmareul Boatda*) is Kim Ji-woon's ambitious engagement with the hard gore genre. Although one minute and thirty seconds had to be cut for its theatrical release, the film still repelled many audiences, not only because of its extreme violence, but also the lack of

entertainment value.

Choi Dong-hoon's **Jeon Woo Chi, The Taoist Wizard** (*Jeon U Chh*), the second-biggest domestic hit film, is a comically, action-packed, hybrid sci-fi period drama, which relies heavily upon wire action and CG I. It cleverly interweaves a number of key elements from current popular Korean cinema into a light, audience-pleasing entertainment. The ensemble of funny-talking and chatty male characters includes BaekYun-sik, Yu Hae-jin, Kim Sang-ho, Song Young-chang and Joo Jin-mo, while Kang Dong-won's performance as the main hero, Woochi, consolidates his reputation, not just as eye-candy, but also a credible actor.

Jang Hoon's **Secret Reunion** (*Uihyeongje*), the third-biggest domestic hit film, also features Kang Dong-won, this time as a North Korean spy who spars with Song Gang-ho's South Korean ex-security agent. Adopting a light, humourous tone, it deals with the unlikely friendship between the two men, both isolated from their family and government. Kim Dae-woo's **The Servant** (*Bangjajeon*) is another brilliant example of the fruitful trend for hybrid epic dramas. It does not deliver spectacular action but rather explicit sex scenes, beautiful scenery and revisionist storytelling in its take on *Chunghyang Jeon*, one of Korea's most famous folktales, which has been adapted for the big screen more than 15 times.

John H. Lee's **71-Into the Fire** (*Pohwa Sogeuero*) is a big-budget war film about a group of young South Korean volunteer soldiers during the Korean War. As a title commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of its outbreak, the film obviously aimed to recuperate the lineage of recent Korean War-related blockbusters, but fell short.

Kang Dae-gyu's **Harmony** (*Hamon*) is a touching story of female prisoners who form a choir. The film's success evidences the fact that it is middle-aged women who comprise an increasingly large segment of the the atregoing audience in South Korea. Other recent films designed to appeal to middle-aged women include Kang Hyo-jin's **Robbery** (*Yukhyeolpogangdodan*), a comedy drama about three bank-robbing grannies, and You Seong-yub's **A Long Visit** (*Chinjeong Eomma*), a tear-jerking melodrama about a mother's dedicated love.

This year's Korean competitors at the Cannes Film Festival were Lee Chang-dong's moral drama **Poetry** (*SI*), Im Sang-soo's **The Housemaid** (*Hanyeo*) and Hong Sang-soo's tenth feature, **Ha Ha Ha** (*Hahaha*). While *Poetry* won the Cannes award for Best Screenplay and *Ha Ha Ha* won the Un Certain Regard prize, Im's *The Housemaid*— a remake of Kim Ki-young's classic 1960 film — failed to win anything, but turned out to be the most talked-about film and went

on to end the top ten domestic hits of the year. The sex scenes between top stars Jeon Do-yeon and Lee Jeong-jae provided the focal point for marketing the film. But critical attention was also drawn to Im's contemporary take on class issues in Korean society. This year's opening film at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, Park Chan-ok's **Paju** (*Paju*) is a stunning cinematic achievement which subtly delineates the complex emotions and memories of one young girl against the backdrop of a barren border town. **Bedevilled** (*Gimbongnam Sarinsageonui Jeonmal*) is the well-made debut feature of Jang Cheol-soo, who previously worked as assistant to Kim Ki-duk. While highly praised by many Korean film critics, the film unfailingly exhibits the kind of 'extreme' elements with which many contemporary Korean films are internationally associated.

The new environment of digital filmmaking and internet distribution facilitated various ventures in low-budget independent filmmaking. There were a number of single-themed omnibus titles, such as **One Night Stand** (*Won Nait Seutaendeu*) and **Nice Shorts** (*Sasakkeonkkeon*) and **The Neighbour Zombie** (*lutjib Jombi*). Fresh new takes on staple genres were also noteworthy. Lee Eung-il's **The Uninvited** (*Bulcheonggaek*) turns a small, dark basement flat — the common habitat of young people preparing to sit exams to enter the professions — into a creepy set for a super, low-budget sci-fi fantasy.

—Nikki J. Y. Lee



MAYA BAZAR / India / Dir: Joydeep Ghosh

# RETROSPECTIVE

## JAN NEMEC (CZECH REPUBLIC)



**Jan Nemeč** (12 July 1936, Prague) is a Czech filmmaker whose most important work dates from the 1960s. Film historian Peter Hames has described him as the “enfant terrible of the Czech New Wave.”

Nemeč’s career as a filmmaker in the late 1950s when he attended FAMU, the most prestigious institution for film training in Czechoslovakia.

As a graduation film, Nemeč adapted a short story by Arnošt Lustig based on the author’s experience of the Holocaust: *A Loaf of Bread (Sousta)*. Nemeč would return to Lustig’s writing when he directed the influential film, *Diamonds of the Night (Démanty noci, 1964)*, which was also based on the Holocaust.

His best known work is *A Report on the Party and the Guests (O slavnosti a hostech, 1966)*. Its plot revolves around a group of friends on a picnic who are invited to a bizarre banquet by a charismatic sadist, played by Ivan Vyskočil, who eventually bullies most of them into blind conformity and brutality while those who resist are hunted down.

He got approved for one more feature: *Martyrs of Love (Muèedníci lásky, 1966)*. The film was completely apolitical with surrealist lyrical style. His later independent film *Mother and Son (Mutter und Sohn, 1967)*, won an award at the Oberhausen Film Festival.

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## HOU-HSIAO-HSIEN (TAIWAN)



Director **Hou Hsiao Hsien**, has become one of the most respected, influential directors of Taiwan. In spite of his international renown, his films have focused exclusively on his native Taiwan, offering finely textured human dramas that deal with the subtleties of family relationships against the backdrop of the island’s turbulent, often bloody history.

Hou was born in April 8, 1947 to a member of the Hakka ethnic minority in southern Guangdong province in mainland China, but his parents emigrated to Kaohsiung, Taiwan. After serving in the military, Hou entered the film program at the National Taiwan College of the Arts. He graduated in 1972 and worked as a salesman until he landed a job as an assistant director and a screenwriter. In 1980, he made his directorial debut with *Cute Girl*, but he did not attract critical attention until *The Son’s Big Doll* appeared as an episode of the omnibus film *Sandwich Man (1983)*. This film, along with another portmanteau movie, *In Our Time (1982)*, is considered one of the first films of the New Taiwan Cinema movement, which injected a new level of sophistication and vitality into a moribund film industry.

Hou’s work centers on two recurring themes, the social upheaval and erosion of traditional family ties

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IFNC 2011 □ **PROGRAMME** □ VENUE : METRO CINEMA

	<b>Morning 10.00 a.m.</b>	<b>Matinee 2.00 p.m.</b>	<b>Evening 6.00 p.m.</b>
<b>WEDNESDAY</b> November 16, 2011	<b>MADE IN POLAND</b> Poland / 2010 Dir. Przemyslaw Wojcieszek <i>Interval</i> <b>THE THREE WAY WEDDING</b> France / 2010 Dir. Jacques Doillon	<b>WIN / WIN</b> Netherlands / 2010 Dir: Jaap van Heusden <i>Interval</i> <b>BLACK OCEAN</b> Belgium / 2010 Dir: Marion Hansel	<b>MAYA BAZAR</b> India Dir: Joydeep Ghosh <i>Interval</i> <b>TRANQUILITY</b> Hungary / 2010 Dir. Robert Alföldi
<b>THURSDAY</b> November 17, 2011	<b>SCONFINATA GIOVINEZZA, UNA</b> Italy / 2010 Dir.: Pupi Avati <i>Interval</i> <b>HADEWIJCH</b> France / 2009 Dir.: Bruno Dumont	<b>OLD BOY</b> Korea / 2010 Dir: Park Chen-Wook <i>Interval</i> <b>AMOR, DOLOR Y VICE VERSA</b> Mexico / 2008 Dir: Alfonso Pineda Ulloa	<b>Closing Ceremony</b> <b>SEBBE</b> Sweden / 2010 Dir: Babak Najafi <i>Interval</i> <b>TITLE TO BE ANNOUNCED</b>

*Contd. Jan Nemeč*

His next important feature was a documentary, *Oratorio for Prague*, of the Soviet-led invasion of Prague in 1968, which ended the liberal Prague Spring.

After 1968, he left Czechoslovakia although he did return but was not allowed to make films and eventually allowed to leave in 1974. He then went on to Germany before moving to the United States. Unable to work in traditional cinema, he was a pioneer in using video cameras to record weddings, including documenting the nuptials of the Swedish royal family.

After the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia in 1989, he returned to his native country, where he has made several films, including *Late Night Talks with Mother (Noèni hovory s matkou, 2000)*, which won the Golden Leopard at Locarno.

**FUNCTIONS & CEREMONIES**

Director Joydeep Ghosh will present his debut feature film

**MAYA BAZAR**

(Cast: Dhritiman Chatterji, Roopa Ganguly, Pradip Mukherjee, Badshah Moitra, et al)

on 16th November, 2011 at 6.00 P.M.

The cast & crew will be present.

*Contd. Hou-Hsiao-Hsien*

For example, *Dust in the Wind* (1986) follows the lives of two country innocents who move to Taipei, and *Daughter of the Nile* (1987) tells of a displaced family torn apart by the pressures of the city. His autobiographical *A Time to Live, a Time to Die* (1985) and in *City of Sadness* (1989).

In 1989, Hou overcame government censors to create his masterpiece, *City of Sadness*, the first film to confront the so-called Incident of February 28, 1947, a Tianamen Square-style massacre of native Taiwanese committed by government troops. Well-received domestically, the film was acclaimed by international critics and won the first Golden Lion awarded to a Chinese film at the Venice Film Festival. For his next film, the second in his Taiwan trilogy, Hou continued to investigate Taiwanese history in the semi-documentary *Puppet Master* (1993), which focused on Japan's occupation of Taiwan as seen through the eyes of puppet artist Li Tien-Lu. The final film in the trilogy, *Good Men, Good Women* (1995), about a political prisoner. Such subsequent films as *Goodbye, South, Goodbye* (1996) and *Flowers of Shanghai* (1998) have also been critically lauded but have failed to find an audience at home.