

Minari (film)

Minari (Korean: 미나리; lit. 'water celery'; [minari]) is a 2020 American drama film written and directed by Lee Isaac Chung. It stars Steven Yeun, Han Ye-ri, Alan Kim, Noel Kate Cho, Youn Yuh-jung, and Will Patton. A semi-autobiographical take on Chung's upbringing, the plot follows a family of South Korean immigrants who move to rural Arkansas during the 1980s.^[6]

Minari had its world premiere at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival on January 26, 2020, winning both the U.S. Dramatic Grand Jury Prize and the U.S. Dramatic Audience Award.^[7] It began a one-week virtual release on December 11, 2020, and was released theatrically and via virtual cinema on February 12, 2021, by A24.

The film received critical acclaim, with praise for Chung's direction and screenplay, Yeun's and Youn's performances, and the score. Many named it one of the best films of 2020. It earned six nominations at the 93rd Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Score, Best Original Screenplay, Best Actor (Yeun), and Best Supporting Actress (Youn), with Youn winning for her performance, making her the first Korean to win an Academy Award for acting. It also won the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film, was nominated for the Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture, and earned six nominations at the 74th British Academy Film Awards, including Best Film Not in the English Language. It has since been cited as one of the best films of the 2020s and the 21st century.^{[8][9][10][11]}

Plot

In 1983, the Korean immigrant Yi family moves from California to a plot of land in Arkansas, where the father, Jacob, believes the soil is fertile and hopes to grow Korean produce to sell to vendors in Dallas. One of his first decisions is to decline the services of a water diviner; he digs a well in a spot he chooses himself. He enlists the help of Paul, an eccentric Korean War veteran. Jacob is optimistic, but his wife, Monica, is disappointed with the mobile home and the distance from urban amenities, especially a hospital for David. The

Minari



Official promotional poster

Directed by	Lee Isaac Chung
Written by	Lee Isaac Chung
Produced by	Dede Gardner <div></div> Jeremy Kleiner <div></div> Christina Oh
Starring	Steven Yeun <div></div> Han Ye-ri <div></div> Alan Kim <div></div> Noel Kate Cho <div></div> Youn Yuh-jung <div></div> Will Patton
Cinematography	Lachlan Milne
Edited by	Harry Yoon
Music by	Emile Mosseri
Production company	Plan B Entertainment
Distributed by	A24
Release dates	January 26, 2020 <div></div> (Sundance)

parents worry about their son David's heart condition, monitoring his heartbeat and frequently telling him not to run. The couple work sexing chicks at the nearby hatchery and argue constantly while David and his sister, Anne, eavesdrop.

To watch the children during the day, they arrange for Monica's mother, Soon-ja, to travel from South Korea. Forced to share a room with her, David avoids her because she does not fit his idea of a grandmother. Still, Soon-ja attempts to bond with the children and adjust to life in the United States. The well Jacob dug runs dry. He is reluctant to pay for county water, but eventually has to do so. He runs into additional difficulties, such as the vendor in Dallas canceling his order for their produce at the last minute, but perseveres despite Monica's desire to return to California. This brings their marriage closer to a breaking point.

Meanwhile, Soon-ja takes David to plant minari seeds by the creek. She tells him how resilient and useful the plant is, and predicts plentiful growth. David finally begins to warm to her after she teaches him hwatu, bandages his wounds, and soothes him to sleep. Soon-ja also encourages him to do more physical activity, something his parents discourage, but she says he is stronger than they think. Soon-ja then suffers a stroke overnight. She survives with treatment, but is left with impaired movement and speech.

The rest of the family head to Oklahoma City for David's heart appointment and to meet a vendor for Jacob's produce. They learn that his condition has dramatically improved and Jacob makes a deal to sell vegetables to a Korean grocer. But Jacob also indirectly admits to Monica that his crops' success is more important to him than their family's stability and, after an emotional argument, the two agree to separate.

During their absence, Soon-ja accidentally sets on fire the barn containing the produce. On arriving home, Jacob rushes in to save the crops, followed by Monica. The fire grows out of control, and they save each other, leaving the barn to burn. Distraught and confused, Soon-ja wanders off. Anne and David call for her to return. Seeing that she is not responding, David runs to her, blocking her path. Soon-ja seems to recognize David for a moment and reaches for his hand. Her grandchildren lead her back home. The family is asleep on the floor, collapsed from fatigue. Soon-ja watches them sleep with a subdued expression.

Some time later, the parents are with the water diviner, who finds another spot for a well. They mark it with a stone signifying their intention to stay. Jacob and David then head to the creek to harvest the minari, which has grown successfully, with Jacob noting how good a spot Soon-ja picked to plant it.

	December 11, 2020 (United States)
Running time	115 minutes ^[1]
Country	United States
Languages	Korean English
Budget	\$2 million ^{[2][3]}
Box office	\$15.5 million ^{[4][5]}

Cast

- Steven Yeun as Jacob Yi
- Han Ye-ri as Monica Yi
- Alan Kim as David Yi
- Noel Kate Cho as Anne Yi (Ji-young,^[12] 지영)
- Youn Yuh-jung as Soon-ja (순자)
- Will Patton as Paul
- Scott Haze as Billy
- Jacob Wade as Johnnie

- Skip Schwink as Doctor

Production

Development

Chung had initially hoped to make an adaptation of *My Ántonia* by Willa Cather but found out that Cather did not want film adaptations of her works to be made. He was inspired to make a film about his upbringing.^[13] Chung went to a library and wrote down some personal memories that he used as a basis for the story.^[14]

Chung wrote the screenplay for *Minari* in 2018 shortly before taking on an instructor position at the Asia Campus of the University of Utah at Songdo, Incheon, South Korea.^[15] He drew from his childhood growing up on a farm in Arkansas. He cited Cather and Fyodor Dostoevsky as inspirations during the writing process, recalling the former's saying "that her life really began when she stopped admiring and started remembering" as a motivation to draw on his own experiences.^[15] In an interview with *The Los Angeles Times*, Chung spoke about the challenges of drawing on his family's experiences: "It was very difficult in the sense that I know that my parents are private people. And I didn't even tell them that I was making this film until I was in the editing room with it after I had shot it, because I was just so scared about what they would say."^[16]

Chung wrote the script in English. Some dialogue was translated into colloquial Korean^[17] by Hong Yeoul, in consultation with Chung and the actors.^[18] Han and Youn assisted in the translation efforts.^[12]

In early 2019, Christina Oh and Plan B Entertainment signed on as producers on the film. Oh later brought on A24 to distribute the film.^{[15][19]}

Casting

In July 2019, it was announced that Steven Yeun, Han Ye-ri, Youn Yuh-jung, Will Patton and Scott Haze had joined the film's cast.^[19]

Han initially felt she could not participate because she needed to film *Nokdu Flower*, and suggested Chun Woo-hee as an alternate as she felt it was important that a Korean-born woman portray Monica.^[20] Han said that, of the main characters, Monica "seemed to be the most Korean" due to her difficulties with living in the U.S., and she felt it was important an actress born in South Korea, natively speaking Korean, take the role.^[20]

Filming

Principal photography began in July 2019 in Tulsa, Oklahoma.^{[21][22]} Filming lasted 25 days. In order to make a deadline for Sundance, editor Harry Yoon edited the film as production took place.^[23]

During filming Han and Youn Yuh-jung lived in the same Airbnb.^[20] As Youn was unknown in the U.S., unlike in South Korea, where she was a celebrity and given a lot of deference, she felt she needed to show her acting skills to a new audience.^[17]

Youn previously lived in the U.S. and drew on that experience in her performance. Chung told her not to play Soon-ja like Chung's grandmother, a direction Youn welcomed.^[24] Chung also took Youn's suggestions, including one where her character takes back money her daughter had just put into a church collection plate, even though Chung's religious background made him hesitant about that idea.^[25] According to Youn, Chung intended for Soon-ja to be alive at the end of the story.^[26] Han used her own mother's life as inspiration for her portrayal of Monica.^[27]

Music

Release

The film had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival on January 26, 2020.^[28] It screened at several film festivals including Deauville,^[29] Valladolid,^[30] Hamptons,^[31] Heartland^[32] and Montclair.^[33]

Initially, the film was set for release in a limited release on December 11, 2020, before slowly expanding to a wide release on February 12, 2021.^[34] But the theatrical release was curtailed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was released in select theaters and virtual cinemas for one week on December 11, 2020.^[35] It opened theatrically on February 12, along with virtual cinema screenings through A24's website.^[36] It was released on video-on-demand on February 26, 2021.^[37]

It was screened at the 28th Busan International Film Festival as part of 'Korean American Special Exhibition: Korean Diaspora' on 5 October 2023.^[38]

Reception

Box office and VOD

As of May 27, 2021, *Minari* has grossed \$3.1 million in the United States and Canada, and \$12.5 million in other territories, for a worldwide of \$15.5 million.^{[5][4]}

IndieWire reported the film likely made \$150–200,000 from about 245 theaters.^[39] It ended making \$193,000 on its first weekend. It made an estimated \$63,000 in its second weekend and \$53,000 in its third, for a running total of \$251,000.^{[40][41]} The same weekend, the film placed fifth on Apple TV's PVOD rental charts, sixth on FandangoNow, and eighth on Google Play.^[42] It made \$68,000 in its fourth weekend in the U.S., as well as \$2.2 million in South Korea and \$1 million in Australia and New Zealand, then \$56,000 in its fifth weekend.^{[43][44]} The weekend following its six Oscar nominations, the film made \$306,000 from 786 theaters.^[45]

Critical response

On Rotten Tomatoes, 98% of 318 reviews were positive, with an average rating of 8.7/10. The site's critics consensus reads: "Led by arresting performances from Steven Yeun and Yeri Han, *Minari* offers an intimate and heart-wrenching portrait of family and assimilation in 1980s America."^[46] Metacritic assigned the film a weighted average score 89 out of 100, based on 49 critics, indicating "universal acclaim".^[47]



The performances of [Steven Yeun](#) and [Youn Yuh-jung](#) received critical acclaim, earning them [Academy Award](#) nominations for [Best Actor](#) and [Best Supporting Actress](#) respectively, with Youn winning her category.

[A. O. Scott](#) of [The New York Times](#) gave the film a positive review, writing: "*Minari* is modest, specific and thrifty, like the lives it surveys. There's nothing small about it, though, because it operates at the true scale of life."^[48] [Nicholas Barber](#) at the [BBC](#) rated the film 5/5, writing, "Sensitively written and acted, beautifully shot, and with a charming, sparingly used score, *Minari* is so engaging that it's easy to forget how radical it is."^[49] Reviewing the film for the [Associated Press](#), [Lindsey Bahr](#) gave the film 4/4 stars, reporting, "One of the great triumphs of *Minari* is its presentation of authentic childhood. These kids are not saints or stand-ins or mouthpieces. They are their own persons."^[50]

[Robbie Collin](#) of [The Telegraph](#) rated the film 4/5, writing, "Lee Isaac Chung's tender story is a finely-observed portrait of family relations and rural American values". [Benjamin Lee](#) at [The Guardian](#) also rated the film 4/5, writing, "The autobiographical story of a Korean American family trying to sustain a farm in rural Arkansas has deservedly become the festival's most universally loved film".^[51]

Minari appeared on 68 critics' year-end top-10 lists, including first place on five year-end lists and second place on nine.^[52] In 2021, [Forbes](#) included it on its list of "The Top 150 Greatest Films of the 21st Century."^[8] In 2023, it ranked 9th on [Collider](#)'s list of "The 20 Best Drama Movies of the 2020s So Far," saying that "Chung shows that the strongest families are defined by the hardship they overcame" and does so without "sensationalizing the story."^[53] [Marie Claire](#) also included it on its list of "The 100 Best Movies of All Time."^[54]

Accolades

Minari premiered at the 2020 [Sundance Film Festival](#) where it received the [U.S. Dramatic Grand Jury Prize](#) and the [U.S. Dramatic Audience Award](#). It was named one of the ten best films of 2020 by the [American Film Institute](#)^[55] and the [National Board of Review](#), and received six [Academy Award](#) nominations.^[56] It also received three [Screen Actors Guild Award](#) nominations, 10 [Critics' Choice Movie Awards](#) nominations, and six [Independent Spirit Award](#) nominations.

At the [78th Golden Globe Awards](#) (given by the [Hollywood Foreign Press Association](#)), the film won the [Best Foreign Language Film](#).^[57] The determination that the film would be eligible for this category rather than [Best Motion Picture – Drama](#), based on the Globes' rule that any film with over 50% of its dialogue not in English would be considered a Foreign Language Film, invited controversy.^{[58][59][60][61]} [Lulu Wang](#), whose film *The Farewell* was subject to the same rule the previous year, wrote: "I have not seen a more American film than #Minari this year. It's a story about an immigrant family, IN America, pursuing the American dream. We really need to change these antiquated rules that characterize American as only

English-speaking."^[58] Author Viet Thanh Nguyen wrote that the "decision speaks powerfully to the issue of what makes something—a language or a person or a culture—foreign."^[62] Many other filmmakers, actors, and authors, including Daniel Dae Kim, Simu Liu, Harry Shum Jr., Franklin Leonard, Phil Lord, Nia DaCosta, Celeste Ng, Min Jin Lee, and Phillipa Soo criticized the decision on similar grounds.^[63]

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External links

- Official website (<https://a24films.com/films/minari>)
- *Minari* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10633456/>) at *IMDb*
- *Minari* (<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/minari/reviews>) at *Rotten Tomatoes*
- *Minari* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQIJ4iC1u_s) on *YouTube* (restricted in some regions)
- Original screenplay (<https://deadline.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Minari-Screenplay.pdf>) via *Deadline Hollywood*

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