IM, Kwon-taek/IM, Kwŏn-t'aek (May 2, 1936-- )

Im Kwon-taek, one of the most prominent South Korean filmmakers, helped pave the way for the international success of the New Korean Cinema of the 1990s. He debuted in 1962 and worked at first in commercial genres, reliably filling production quotas. His early work included action and Korean War films produced under military government policies that promoted anti-communist propaganda. During the 1980s, Im transitioned to art films and gained international recognition. With his 1981 film *Mandala*, he became the first South Korean filmmaker to tour the international festival circuit. His 1993 *Sŏp'yŏnje* (*Sopyonje*), a film about singers practicing the traditional *pansori* musical form, broke box office records in Korea. Exploring themes in Korean history and aesthetics, Im became a representative of the national cinema and his suffering heroines have been interpreted as symbols of the Korean nation. Im revisited the art of *pansori* in his 2000 film *Ch'unhyangdyŏn* (*Chunhyang*), a retelling of a story about love across social classes derived from the seventeenth century *pansori* repertoire. A recurring subject in Korean film history, the story of Chunhyang had been adapted at least seventeen times. Im’s return to the subject echoed the ethnographic tendencies of China’s Fifth Generation filmmakers, whose work was similarly both national in inspiration and global in ambition.

**Selected works:**

*No Glory*, aka *The Bannerman without a Flag* (*Kitpal ŏmnŭn kisu*, 1979)

*Mandala* (1981)

*The General’s Son* (*Changgun ŭi adŭl*, 1990)

*Sopyonje* (*Sŏp'yŏnje*, 1993)

*The Taebaek Mountains* (*T'aebaek Sanmaek*,1994)

*The Festival* (*Ch'ukche*,1996)

*Chunhyang* (*Ch'unhyangdyŏn* 2000)

*Chihwaseon* (*Ch'wihwasŏn*, 2002)

**Further reading:**

Chung, S. (2007) *Korean Film Directors: Im Kwon-taek*. Seoul: Seoul Selection.

James, D. E.; Kim, K. H. (eds.) (2002) *Im Kwon-taek: The Making of a Korean National Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Lee, H. (2005) “*Chunhyang*: Marketing an Old Tradition in New Korean Cinema” in Shin and Stringer (eds.) *New Korean Cinema*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Paratextual material:

Korean Film Archive You Tube Channel, Im Kwon-taek Playlist:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL869F027150CACBFE

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