YU, Hyun-mok/YU, Hyŏn-mok (July 2, 1925--June 28, 2009)

Yu Hyun-mok belonged to the first generation of post-liberation filmmakers in South Korea, and is known for films inspired by Italian neorealism that unsparingly depict postwar social problems. His 1961 film *Obalt’an* [*Aimless Bullet*] is regarded as one of the great Korean films of the era. The film was made during a brief relaxation of censorship following the April Revolution and the 1960 resignation of president Syngman Rhee. Allegorizing Korean society, *Aimless Bullet* portrays a frustrated patriarch whose meagre salary cannot support his dysfunctional family. It famously makes the protagonist’s decaying tooth a metaphor for festering social ills. After Park Chung-hee seized power in 1961, *Aimless Bullet* was suppressed. The regime instituted a film policy aimed at controlling film as propaganda in the service of its economic growth and national security agendas. When Yu later publicly objected to political censorship under an anti-communism law, obscenity charges were brought against his 1965 film *Ch’unmong* [*Empty Dream*], a remake of a controversial Japanese film from 1964. In 1968, Yu remade Na Woon-gyu’s legendary anti-colonialist allegory *Arirang*. Many of his films realistically portray social upheavals caused by industrialization and urbanization. Yu was also a professor at Dongguk University, where he taught a new generation of filmmakers.

**Selected works:**

*Aimless Bullet* (*Obalt’an*, 1961)

*The Empty Dream* (*Ch’unmong*, 1965)

*The Guests of the Last Train* (*Makch'a ro on sonnimdŭl*, 1967)

*Arirang* (1968)

*School Excursion* (*Suhak yŏhaeng*, 1969)

**Further reading:**

Cho, E. (2005) “*The Stray Bullet* and the Crisis of Korean Masculinity” in McHugh, Kathleen; Abelmann, Nancy (eds.) *South Korean Golden Age Melodrama: Gender, Genre, and National Cinema*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Kim, K. (2011) *Korean Film Directors: Yu Hyun-mok*. Seoul: Seoul Selection.

Lee, H. (2000) *Contemporary Korean Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lee, Y.; Lee, S. (eds.) (1999) *Yu Hyun-Mok: The Pathfinder of Korean Realism*. Pusan: Fourth Pusan International Film Festival.

Paratextual material:

Korean Film Archive You Tube Channel, *Obalt’an* (*Aimless Bullet*):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1S3srD7qx9c&list=PLC403C945BEE631E7&index=16

Ryan Cook

Harvard University