In the heavily packaging industry of Korean idol star, Yoo Ah In is undoubtedly one of a kind. In addition to being an experienced actor, he’s still a literally youth. As the founder of Studio Concrete, he led the “Millennial” artists consisted of photographers and designers. The studio functions as a cultural complex and features a gallery, cafe and shop in Hannam-dong, and became the most popular fashion gathering in Seoul. However, his charm doesn’t stop here. Last year, his film BURNING, directed by director Lee Chang Dong, was well received by critics and media at the Cannes International Film Festival. His performance in the film earned him The New York Times “The Best Actors of 2018”, making him the only Asian to be on the list.

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When Yoo Ah In appeared on the *New York Times* [Best Actors of 2018](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/12/05/magazine/great-performers-best-actors-2018.html" \t "https://www.forbes.com/sites/joanmacdonald/2019/01/08/what-makes-yoo-ah-in-a-star-to-take-note-of/_blank) list, some of the paper’s readers may have wondered who he was or why the South Korean actor was listed alongside familiar celebrities such as Julia Roberts, Ethan Hawke and Glenn Close.

His inclusion on that list is due to his performance in the film *Burning*, which is on the short list for the Best Foreign Language Film at the [91st Academy Awards](https://www.oscars.org/news/tag/91st-oscars" \t "https://www.forbes.com/sites/joanmacdonald/2019/01/08/what-makes-yoo-ah-in-a-star-to-take-note-of/_blank) and likely to introduce the actor to an even wider American audience.

That performance managed not only to impress New York Times film critics, but landed Yoo in eighth place in *Esquire* Magazine’s [13 Great Movie Performances of 2018](https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/movies/g25446066/best-movie-performances-2018/" \t "https://www.forbes.com/sites/joanmacdonald/2019/01/08/what-makes-yoo-ah-in-a-star-to-take-note-of/_blank) and has already contributed to his film earning best foreign language honors at the LA Film Critics and Toronto Film Critics Association Awards.

“Burning” is based on a [Haruki Murakami](http://www.harukimurakami.com/author" \t "https://www.forbes.com/sites/joanmacdonald/2019/01/08/what-makes-yoo-ah-in-a-star-to-take-note-of/_blank) short story, “Barn Burning,” and directed by award-winning screenwriter and director [Lee Chang Dong](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0496969/" \t "https://www.forbes.com/sites/joanmacdonald/2019/01/08/what-makes-yoo-ah-in-a-star-to-take-note-of/_blank). Yoo plays Jong Soo, a poor loner who wants to be a writer rather than work his father’s farm. He is seduced by Hae Mi, a girl who claims to know him, played by Jeon Hong Seo. She eventually introduces him to Ben, a mysterious young man, whose wealth gives him the kind of power Jong Soo can never hope to achieve. Jong Soo is fascinated by Ben, played by Steven Yeun, but then ultimately, without concrete evidence, concludes he’s a killer.

There is some arson in *Burning* but what really burns white hot is Jong Soo’s  frustration and jealousy, hidden deftly beneath a seemingly passive exterior. Yoo lets viewers see Jong Soo as awkward, adrift, powerless, with only whispered hints of the resentment and fury that eventually emboldens him.

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The actor is well known in Korea for his film and drama work.  He recently received  his third nomination for Korea’s annual Blue Dragon Film Awards, thanks to his appearance in *Burning*.

He won Best Actor in 2015 for playing the doomed Crown Prince Sado in the historical tragedy *Sado*, also known as *The Throne*. He’s also the first actor to have two movies, *Veteran* and *The Throne*, make the Blue Dragon Film Awards'  final nominations in one year.

The cop caper *[Veteran](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBj0HOLVQt8" \t "https://www.forbes.com/sites/joanmacdonald/2019/01/08/what-makes-yoo-ah-in-a-star-to-take-note-of/_blank)*, one of the highest-grossing films in Korean cinema history, gave Yoo his first chance to play a hard-core villain. His character, Jo Tae Oh, is an entitled heir rampaging through life with no compunctions. Unlike Jong Soo, his position allows his rage to explode without consequences. Cartoonishly cruel, Jo is hardly a person to emulate, and yet Yoo played him with so much charisma that the character attracted his own fans.

Yoo is also known for playing the doomed Crown Prince Sado (1735 to 1762) in *[The Throne](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06pl59umDlw" \t "https://www.forbes.com/sites/joanmacdonald/2019/01/08/what-makes-yoo-ah-in-a-star-to-take-note-of/_blank)*, based on the true story of a crown prince that history has judged insane and dangerous, but who may have been maligned by a palace conspiracy. Ultimately the prince’s own father ordered him sealed in a box until he died. Yoo won praise for capturing the terror of a kind-hearted prince driven to the edge of insanity.

Fifteen years have passed since the actor first appeared in a television drama, *Sharp 1*. In the interim he’s had roles in more than a dozen films but also a dozen multi-episode television dramas, most recently the nostalgic *Chicago Typewriter*.

He earned praise for his role in the 2014 melodrama *[Secret Love Affair](https://www.viki.com/videos/1034503v-teaser" \t "https://www.forbes.com/sites/joanmacdonald/2019/01/08/what-makes-yoo-ah-in-a-star-to-take-note-of/_blank)*. His character was a poor piano prodigy in love with his married teacher and the world of music she symbolized.

From awkward loner to cartoon villain, to prince and prodigy, Yoo’s roles have been unusually diverse for so young an actor.

While *Burning* waits for its chance at the 91st Academy Awards, Yoo can already be seen playing a very different role in a new film, *Sovereign Default*, also known as *[Default](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=36&v=QGYG4vOLUy4" \t "https://www.forbes.com/sites/joanmacdonald/2019/01/08/what-makes-yoo-ah-in-a-star-to-take-note-of/_blank)*. In the financial thriller, which also stars Kim Hye Soo, he plays a financier during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, just before South Korea agreed to a rescue package from the International Monetary Fund. Betting on the crisis, while his country hovers on the brink of bankruptcy, Yoo’s financier character is a driven and complicated predator. The film premiered on Nov. 28 and within 24 hours hit first place in Korea’s advance booking sites.

In *Default*, Yoo’s character talks about moments that change your life forever. Taking the role in *Burning*, which introduced him to a wider American audience, may prove to be one of those moments.