



Peppermint Candy (Bakhasatang)

Director: Lee Chang-dong

Production Companies: East Film Company,
Nippon Hosō Kyōkai

Producers: Myeong Kye-nam, Makoto Ueda
Co-producers: Jeon Jae-yeong, Jay Jeon,
Keiko Iino

Screenplay: Lee Chang-dong

Director of Photography: Kim Hyeong-ku

Editor: Kim Hyun

Art Director: Park Il-hyeon

Music: Lee Jae-jin

Sound: Lee Seung-cheol

Cast:

Sol Kyung-gu

Kim Yeo-jin

Mun So-ri

Park Se-beom

Jung Suh

Ko Seo-hie

Park Ji-yeon

Lee Dae-yeon

South Korea 1999

131 mins

Digital 4K (remastered)

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk



BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop. We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

ECHOES IN TIME: KOREAN FILMS OF THE GOLDEN AGE AND NEW CINEMA

Peppermint Candy

A veritable emotional tsunami of a film, Lee Chang-dong's epic second feature boldly tells a man's life story starting with his suicide on a railway bridge, where he screams 'I want to go back!' as a speeding train approaches. The film then does just that, using reverse chronology to show what has brought Young-ho (Sol Kyung-gu) to this point. These episodes from key junctures in his life (1994, 1987, 1980 and 1979) also note the roots of many issues that have since spurred modern Korean cinema's interrogation of the national psyche.

Young-ho's actions are frequently unsympathetic, and Lee never seeks to excuse his unpleasantness towards others; he is brazenly hypocritical as a married businessman in the 1990s and irredeemably brutal as a police officer in the 1980s. Rather, this masterfully executed film explains the protagonist's dehumanisation within the context of a tumultuous history that ultimately allows for a measure of compassion towards an irreparably broken individual.

John Berra, bfi.org.uk

The opening scene of Lee Chang-dong's 1999 film, *Peppermint Candy*, begins with a picnic and ends with a suicide. A dishevelled, middle-aged *hwesawon*, or 'company employee', named Young-ho (played by Sol Kyung-gu) stumbles into a gathering of friends near a small river. The dozen or so happy picnickers, dancing and singing to a karaoke machine, seem at first not to notice the grey-suited, unkempt man, but they soon recognise him as an old friend from 20 years ago. Young-ho is offered *soju*, a Korean rice liquor, but he is not in a particularly celebratory mood. He volunteers to sing a song, but the sad melody the salary man belts out, with great anguish, only casts a sombre pall over the party. Silently returning the microphone, Young-ho wanders off into the shallow river toward a nearby railroad overpass.

While his friends resume their merriment, Young-ho somehow has managed to climb to the top of the bridge. He stands on the suspended tracks, looking grim and miserable. Soon a train rumbles toward him while repeatedly blowing its whistle. Tension builds with the nearing confrontation between Young-ho and the train, underscored by accelerated shot-reverse shots. A worried picnicker has left the party and stands beneath the tracks with a helpless look on his face. He frantically screams his suicidal friend's name above the loudening rumble: 'Kim Young-ho!' As the heavy train comes treacherously close, Young-ho turns to face it. The film quickly cuts to a perspective from the train and he yells out, with outspread arms and a wide-open mouth, 'I want to go back!' The camera-train relentlessly rails toward Young-ho, until it stops on a close-up of his anguished face, signalling the moment of impact. Over the freeze frame, the clanging of the train continues on the soundtrack.

Lee's film obeys Young-ho's desire to go back by narrating the course of his life backward, depicting significant scenes from his personal history: Spring 1999, Summer 1994, Spring 1987, Fall 1984, May 1980, and Fall of 1979. These moments provide snapshots of one South Korean man's life and allow the viewer to piece together how Young-ho's misery in the present is connected to a series of regrettable decisions made in the past. Each episode is flanked by a short interlude. Repeating the camera angle that captured the image of Young-ho's death, the interludes depict moving shots above railroad tracks, taken with a stationary camera placed on a moving train. The first two look as if they move forward on these tracks, but with the third, the spectator comes to realise that the camera is positioned on the last car of the train, and that the film itself is projected backwards. Cars and vans are shown driving in reverse, children run the wrong way, and smoke grows smaller and thickens rather than disappearing into the air. While these interludes pull the diegesis

ECHOES IN TIME: KOREAN FILMS OF THE GOLDEN AGE AND NEW CINEMA

New Korean Cinema

Memento Mori Yeogogoedam dubeonjjae iyagi
Wed 4 Dec 18:15 + intro by Yi Wang, Director and
Programmer of Queer East; Mon 23 Dec 20:45

Christmas in August 8wolui keuliseumaseu
Wed 4 Dec 20:55 + intro by Michael Leader and
Jake Cunningham; Wed 18 Dec 18:00

Oldboy
Thu 5 Dec 20:40; Thu 19 Dec 18:10;
Sun 22 Dec 18:00; Mon 30 Dec 20:35

The Day a Pig Fell into the Well

Doejiga umule ppajin nal
Fri 6 Dec 20:40; Fri 20 Dec 18:00

The Quiet Family Joyonghan gajok
Sun 8 Dec 18:15; Sat 14 Dec 15:20

New Writings: Forever Girls
Mon 9 Dec 18:30 BFI Reuben Library

Die Bad Jukkeona hogeun nappeugeona
Tue 10 Dec 18:10; Fri 27 Dec 20:50

Barking Dogs Never Bite Peullandaseuui gae
Thu 19 Dec 20:50; Mon 30 Dec 18:00

Untold Scandal
Seukaendeul: Joseon-namnyeo-sangnyul-jisa
Fri 20 Dec 20:35; Sun 29 Dec 15:00

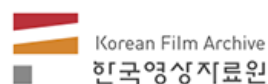
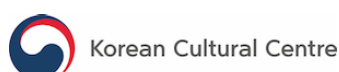
Peppermint Candy Bakhasatang
Sat 21 Dec 17:50; Sun 29 Dec 18:20

The Foul King Banchigwang
Sun 22 Dec 15:00; Sat 28 Dec 18:00

In partnership with

Korean Cultural Centre UK (KCCUK) and
Korean Film Council. Special thanks to Eunji Lee.

This landmark season was prepared in
collaboration with the Korean Film Archive (KOFA),
which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.
Featured in the programme are 12 digital
restorations and 5 digital remasters supervised by
KOFA, as well as unique 35mm prints from its
archival collection.



Join the BFI mailing list for regular programme
updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account
at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

backwards in time, they unfold in accordance with the spectator's inexorable, forward experience of the film. In lieu of a linear cause-effect relationship, Lee's film proceeds by an effect-cause movement, reiterated in the reverse movement of the train. By its end, *Peppermint Candy* will have spanned 20 years, taking the viewer back to the moment when Young-ho, singing songs with friends at a picnic near a small river in 1979, emerges into the sparkle of life and dreams about his future.

Travelling back in time, the film links moments from Young-ho's personal history to key moments from South Korea's democratisation process. As the spectator gradually comes to realise, the fictional world of *Peppermint Candy* cannot be separated from the historical events to which it constantly refers. Young-ho's third episode coincides with political uprisings that took place in early 1987, during the dictatorial presidency of Chun Doo-hwan. At this historical juncture, a 21-year-old student activist at Seoul National University, Park Jung-chul, was detained by authorities in January and died when he was tortured to disclose the names of fellow activists. His death inflamed the public and became the *cause célèbre* for the June Democracy Movement that took place later that year. In Fall 1984, when Young-ho is depicted joining the KNPA (Korean National Police Agency) in Lee's film, progressive groups became increasingly vocal in their demand for human rights and called for the end of Chun's authoritarian regime. In this year, college campuses saw a sharp rise in student activism while the Council of People's Democratisation Movement mobilised workers and peasants to become aware of their disenfranchisement. The primal scene, or the originating trauma, of Young-ho's misery in *Peppermint Candy*, however, is inextricably linked to one of the most dramatic political events in modern Korean history: the Gwangju Uprising in May of 1980. What began as a student demonstration protesting the closing of Chonnam National University, located in the South Jeolla city of Gwangju, quickly escalated over a ten-day period. Chun swiftly implemented martial law in response to the demonstrations. In solidarity, tens of thousands of student activists, workers, and citizens of the city rallied against his dictatorship while Korean army soldiers and paratroopers were dispatched to the city. They began beating and shooting the political dissenters. To this day, the number of civilian casualties remains in contention.

Young-ho's life may be read as a national allegory for these watershed historical events, as standing in for the South Korean nation in its struggle toward modern democracy. However, *Peppermint Candy* does not focus on the victims of the state's repressive power, but on Young-ho's violent exercise of this power. He is called up as a member of the national military to put down protesting students and workers in Gwangju. When Young-ho joins the KNPA, he is quickly indoctrinated into their inhumane methods of extortion. His violence causes a radical sympathiser to lose control of his bowels on Young-ho's hand during an aggressive interrogation session. He brutally extracts information from dissenting leftists by forcibly dunking their heads in water, techniques that were utilised to torture and presumably kill the progressive student, Park Jung-chul. In these events, Young-ho's originating trauma is equated to the South Korea's historical trauma that began in May of 1980: one act of violence is linked to the next, constituting a chain of brutality that links the progression of his life to the life of the nation. And with each repetition, Young-ho stubbornly disavows the possibility of reflecting and working through the past. His inability to mourn, as film scholar Kyung Hyun Kim suggests in his reading of Lee's film, cannot be separated from his idyllic romanticisation of innocence, of a time before May 1980, and the impossible hope of rekindling innocence lost. Young-ho acts out, exercising sovereign power over the people he tortures as well as sovereignty over his past.

Steve Choe, *Sovereign Violence: Ethics and South Korean Cinema in the New Millennium* (Amsterdam University Press, 2016)