

CULTURE COURSE

K-Drama and Korean Film

11 Chapters

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Generated with Claude

K-DRAMA AND KOREAN FILM

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K-Drama and Korean Film

Course 1 · Chapter 1 · Why Korean Screen Culture? Scope & Sources

In a few years, films and television series made in South Korea went from the margins of the world's screens to the middle of them. This chapter sets out why that happened, what the course covers and leaves out, how to tell what is recorded from what is legend, and how to follow up what you read.

How this chapter was checked

The facts here come from Wikipedia's articles on the Korean Wave, *Parasite* (2019 film) and *Squid Game*, as I read them. In each case I read only the first part of a long article, and I say where an article hedges or disagrees with itself. I read no books, archives or industry reports.

Two Landmarks

Two titles show how far Korean screens have travelled.

Title	What the article says
Parasite (2019), directed by Bong Joon-ho	Premiered at Cannes on 21 May 2019 and became "the first Korean film to win the Palme d'Or." At the 92nd Academy Awards it won four awards, including Best Picture, and is described as the "first non-English language film in Academy Awards history to win Best Picture." Worldwide box office: $258.1 million against a budget of $11.4 million. In brief: a poor family gradually places its members in jobs in a wealthy household.
Squid Game (2021), created by Hwang Dong-hyuk for Netflix	Released worldwide on 17 September 2021, with nine episodes in the first season. The article says the first season received "six Primetime Emmy Awards and one Golden Globe", and that it "became Netflix's most-watched series" (with no number and no visible citation in what I read). In brief: indebted, desperate players take part in children's games for a cash prize, and losing means death.

Read the claim carefully

"First non-English language film to win Best Picture" is narrower than "first foreign film to win". A footnote in the *Parasite* article notes that *The Artist* (2012), which won earlier, was largely silent. "Most-watched" is a Netflix claim, and the *Squid Game* article gives no figure for it. Big claims about records are worth reading to the end of the sentence.

The Korean Wave

These titles are the visible peak of a longer story. The Wikipedia article on the Korean Wave (*hallyu*) defines it as "the rise in global interest in South Korean popular culture that has spread rapidly since the 1990s", led by K-pop, K-dramas, K-beauty, K-food and films.

- **The name.** The article says the *Beijing Youth Daily* published "the first known use of the term 'Korean Wave'" on 19 November 1999, to describe growing interest in South Korean TV and pop music.
- **Hallyu 1.0.** The article says "the first generation began in China during the late 1990s", mostly through TV dramas in nearby Asian countries. *Winter Sonata* had a cult following in Japan in 2003 to 2004, and *Jewel in the Palace* (2003) is credited with the greatest effect in Chinese-speaking countries.
- **Hallyu 2.0.** The article dates the "New Korean Wave" from 2008, driven by social media, YouTube and K-pop, with Psy's "Gangnam Style" as a turning point.
- **Spread.** The article says the wave reached Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe in the 2000s, and Europe, the Americas and Africa in the mid-2010s, helped by streaming services such as Netflix.
- **Government support.** "The South Korean government promoted hallyu to increase its cultural soft power."

Even the start date is argued

The article's own sections do not agree on when the wave began. It says 1997 is "generally considered the start", the Taiwan section says Korean dramas arrived in the early 1990s, and a note cites a drama shown on Chinese television in 1992. It also says the lifting of Japan's import ban happened "in four stages between 1998 and 2004" in one place and in 1998 in another. A date for "the start" depends on what you count: the first export, the first fan base, or the first name for it. The article's tourism section carries a notice that it appears to contain machine-written text, so I rely on nothing from that section.

What This Course Covers

- **Film and television together.** As in the French and Japanese courses, the two are one story, because the same directors, actors, money and censorship cross between them.
- **South Korea.** The focus is South Korea. Before the 1945 and 1948 division, the cinema of the whole peninsula is covered, because there was one film industry, under Japanese rule. Chapter 3 deals with North Korean film in a short, factual section based on openly available sources, and no more than that.
- **A road map.** Chapters 2 to 5 follow film from the silent era to the late 1990s. Chapters 6 and 7 turn to television drama and how a K-drama is built. Chapter 8 looks at five directors, Chapter 9 at festivals, streaming and the global audience, and Chapter 10 pulls the threads together.

What It Leaves Out

- **K-pop, webtoons and festivals.** These have their own planned courses. They come into this course only where a drama or film depends on them, such as soundtracks and adaptations of webcomics.
- **Politics as a subject.** The politics of Korea is covered in Korean Politics 1 and Korean Politics 2. This course covers state control only as it shaped films.
- **Plots in depth.** Films and series are named for reference. I explain a plot only as far as needed, and you do not need to have watched anything.

Record, Legend and Lost Films

Korean film history has an unusual problem: much of the early record is gone. Chapter 2 meets the 1919 kino-drama *Righteous Revenge* and the 1926 film *Arirang*, both lost. The Korean cinema article also says that of the films made during the Korean War, "all of the films from that era have since been lost". Three habits help when reading about this subject:

1. **Separate what survives from what is described.** A plot summary of a lost film is a description. It is not the film.
2. **Treat "first" with care.** Several "first" labels in this course are disputed, and each is marked as such when it comes up.

3. **Watch the hedges.** "Widely considered", "said to", "thought to" and "believed to" are the signs that a claim has not been confirmed. This course keeps them.

Where to Watch and Read

Which titles you can watch depends on your country and changes over time, so I give no list of services. Look titles up on a streaming-listings site for your own country or ask a local library, and for older films look for festival retrospectives and restored releases. For reading, Wikipedia is a starting point (this course relies on it for facts and flags where it hedges), and each article has references to follow up. You do not need to watch anything in advance; the chapters stand on their own.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

State two facts about *Parasite* and two about *Squid Game* from this chapter, and explain why "first non-English language film to win Best Picture" is narrower than "first foreign film to win".

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain what the Korean Wave (*hallyu*) is, who first used the term and when, and describe the difference between Hallyu 1.0 and 2.0. Then give one reason why the date of its "start" is argued.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Describe the scope of this course in four sentences: what it covers, what it leaves out, and how it treats North Korea. Then give three habits for reading about a subject where much of the record is lost.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- ***Parasite*:** Bong Joon-ho; Cannes premiere 21 May 2019; first Korean Palme d'Or; Best Picture at the 92nd Academy Awards; $258.1 million worldwide
- ***Squid Game*:** Hwang Dong-hyuk; Netflix; 17 September 2021; nine episodes in season 1
- **Korean Wave (*hallyu*):** term first used in the *Beijing Youth Daily*, 19 November 1999
- **Hallyu 1.0 / 2.0:** late 1990s dramas / from 2008, K-pop and social media
- **Scope:** South Korea, plus the whole peninsula before the division; North Korea in one short factual section
- **Habits:** separate surviving from described, treat "first" with care, watch the hedges
- **Check:** the viewing figures and the exact start of the Korean Wave

Next chapter: The Silent Era and Colonial Cinema, which follows Korean film from the first cinemas to *Arirang* and the wartime propaganda films.

K-Drama and Korean Film

Course 1 · Chapter 2 · The Silent Era and Colonial Cinema

Korean cinema began while Korea was ruled by Japan (1910 to 1945), and that shaped everything about it: who owned the studios, what could be shown, and what a Korean film could mean. This chapter follows the story from the first cinemas to the wartime propaganda films, and it leans on one film above all, Arirang (1926), which almost nobody alive has seen because it is lost.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> Dates and names here come from Wikipedia's articles on Korean cinema, *Righteous Revenge*, *Arirang* (1926 film), Na Woon-gyu and Dansungsa, as I read them. I read no books or archives, and where the articles disagree or hedge, I say so. The film titles are given in the English forms the articles use; the Korean spellings of names vary between sources.

Before Korean Films: Cinemas and Cameras

Films were shown in Korea before Koreans made them. The Korean-cinema article says the American traveller Burton Holmes was "the first to film in Korea" and showed his films to the Korean royal family in 1899, and that a Dongdaemun Motion Picture Studio opened in 1903. Cinemas followed.

Cinema	Claim	The hedge
Ae Kwan Theater (Incheon)	First opened in 1895 as Hyŏmnyulsa; a 2021 newspaper article claims it as the first cinema	Presented as a claim; the Dansungsa article calls it the "likely oldest"
Dansungsa (Seoul)	A single-screen, two-storey wooden building of 1907 (November 1907 in the Korean-cinema article)	Once "widely believed" to be the first; "several competing claims"

So the honest answer to "where was the first cinema?" is that it depends on what you count. What is not disputed is that Dansungsa became the best-known Korean cinema of the period,

because the first two famous Korean films premiered there.

Righteous Revenge, 1919

On 27 October 1919 Dansungsa showed *Righteous Revenge* (*Uirijeok Guto*), directed by Kim Do-san, who the article says also wrote the script and played the lead; Park Seong-pil produced it. It was not quite a film in the modern sense. It was a **kino-drama**, "a stageplay with a film backdrop": live actors on stage, with filmed scenes projected as part of the show.

- **The plot.** Song-san defends his father's inheritance from his stepmother and other relatives. The article says this "has been interpreted as symbolic of" the independence movement. That reading is an interpretation, and the film cannot now be checked.
- **The success.** The article says it sold "100,000 tickets," and that this success led Park to pay for more kino-dramas and films.
- **Lost.** "The film and its script are now considered lost."
- **Korean Film Day.** The anniversary of the premiere is now marked as Korean Film Day.

> **The "first Korean film" label**
>
> *Righteous Revenge* is "widely considered the first ever Korean movie," but the article adds that "this label is disputed", and the South Korean government treats it as the first film. A companion documentary, *Panoramic View of the Whole City of Gyeongseong*, is "sometimes considered the first," though it had no actors or plot. The Korean-cinema article also names *Chunhyang-jeon* (filmed 1921, released 1922) as "possibly the first Korean feature film", and says other sources name *Ulha ui Mengse* (April 1923). Which is "first" depends on whether you count kino-dramas, documentaries or features.

The Studios and the Narrators

The Korean-cinema article says the studios of the silent era were Japanese-operated, and gives the example of Choson Kinema Productions, whose founder's name is spelled differently in different articles. Silent films were accompanied by live narrators, called **byeonsa**, who the article says were imported from Japan. Because a narrator spoke the story aloud, the article says they could add satire under Japanese rule "where authorities were absent". That freedom ended with sound, as the next section shows.

Na Woon-gyu and Arirang

The central figure of the silent era is Na Woon-gyu. The article on him says he is "widely considered the most important filmmaker in early Korean cinema" and "possibly Korea's first true movie star." Three details of his life frame his work:

- He was jailed for his part in the 1 March 1919 protests, and held in Chongjin prison from 1921 to 1923.
- He started in films in 1925 as an extra and villain at the Choson Film Company.
- He is credited with 26 acting roles and 15 directing credits in about ten years (the article's figures). He often acted, wrote and directed on the same film.

His birth date is given as 26 November 1902 in the infobox and 27 October 1902 in the lead, and the article does not reconcile the two.

***Arirang* premiered on 1 October 1926 at Dansungsa.** Na directed, wrote and starred. The article gives the running time as about 135 minutes (nine reels) and the budget as 15,000 won. Its story, as the article summarises it:

- Yeong-jin, a student, is mentally ill after being imprisoned and tortured by the Japanese for his part in the 1919 protest.
- At home, he sees Gi-ho, who works with the Japanese police, try to rape his sister Yeong-hui. Hyeon-gu fights Gi-ho.
- In a vision, Yeong-jin stabs a man in his imagination, but the blow really kills Gi-ho. Police take Yeong-jin back to prison.

The article calls it "the first Korean nationalist film", hedged with "It is considered to be", and describes it as a critique of Japanese rule carried out through "metaphorical resistance". It also says Yeong-jin's arrest mirrors Na's own jailing. The film was, per the article, "a national sensation" and a commercial success.

> **A famous film nobody can watch**
>
> *Arirang* is a lost film. The article says the nine reels are "believed to have been lost during the Korean War," and that a copy was "rumored" to be in the collection of a Japanese collector who died in 2005, with no news confirming it. So everything above is a description of a film that cannot be checked: the plot, its politics and its effect on audiences. Two more claims are hedged in the same way: audiences were "said to" sing

> the song "Arirang" at the end, and the variant Gyeongi Arirang is "thought to" come from a song Na made for the film.

The legacy is large all the same. Na made a silent sequel in 1930 and a sound sequel, *Arirang 3*, in 1936, and the article lists remakes in 1954, 1957, 1968 and 2003. A 1938 newspaper poll, it says, ranked the film first among the best silent Korean films, and the 2003 remake was "the first South Korean film to be publicly screened in North Korea" (the article's wording).

Na's own end was sad. He died of tuberculosis on 9 August 1937, aged 34 (36 by Korean counting). The article says his funeral procession was led by a band playing "Arirang". It also says his health was poor throughout life as a result of prison and torture, but it does not claim this caused his death.

Squeezed from Both Sides: Censorship and the 1930s

The Korean-cinema article says that more than seventy films were made in the boom of the late 1920s, then output fell to "only two or three per year" between 1930 and 1935, which it attributes to censorship and oppression. It also says a law described as "Korean General Law No. 40 of 1933" required foreign films to come in through Japan. I read only that single sentence, so I cannot say how the law worked in practice.

Na's 1929 film *Salangeul chajaseo* (with over a thousand extras) was banned at first and then released in a heavily edited form, and the failure of *Beongeoli Sam-ryong* the same year forced his studio to close. A 1932 film he starred in, *A Ferry Boat That Has No Owner* (director Lee Gyu-hwan), is called by "commentators" in the article "the last pre-liberation film" with a strong nationalist message. That is a hedged judgement.

Sound and Propaganda

- **The first sound film.** The article names Lee Myeong-woo's *Chunhyang-jeon* (1935) as "Korea's first sound film." Dansungsa's article lists it as the theatre's third famous premiere.
- **Harsher censorship.** The article says sound brought "much harsher censorship," because narrators could no longer slip messages in.
- **The propaganda films.** A Korean Colonial Cinema Unit was set up to promote Japanese culture (no date in the article). Two propaganda titles are named: *You and I* (1941), co-

produced with the Japanese company Shochiku and directed by Hae Yeong, which promoted Korean enlistment in the Japanese Army, and *Suicide Troops of the Watchtower* (1943), promoting *naisen ittai*, "Japan and Korea as one body".
- **Timing.** The article hedges that total mobilisation of the film industry "would not begin until after Japan's full-scale invasion of China in 1937."

Gaps in what I read

The Korean-cinema article I read does not mention the 1940 Korean Film Decree (I had listed it in my planning sketch), so I do not cover it here. I also did not find an article that sets out the colonial censorship rules in detail, so the account of censorship above is thin. Anyone who made films in this period worked within these limits, and the articles I read do not settle how individual filmmakers should be judged. The Na Woon-gyu article says allegations of working with the Japanese "do not seem to have harmed" his reputation, and that is all I can report.

Where the Story Leaves Off

When Japan surrendered in 1945, the Korean-cinema article says freedom became the main theme of films in the late 1940s. Dansungsa, where *Righteous Revenge* and *Arirang* opened, is a reminder of how long the story runs: it was rebuilt as a ten-screen multiplex in 2005, went bankrupt, was converted to a jewellery shop in 2010, and a film museum opened in the building in October 2019.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe *Righteous Revenge* (1919): what a kino-drama is, where and when it premiered, and why "first Korean film" is a disputed label.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Summarise *Arirang* (1926) and Na Woon-gyu in five sentences, and explain why every claim about the film's politics comes with a hedge.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain how the arrival of sound in the 1930s made censorship harsher, naming the narrators (*byeonsa*) and the first Korean sound film, and name two wartime propaganda films.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Burton Holmes:** first to film in Korea, 1899 (as the article states)
- **Dansungsa:** Seoul cinema of 1907; museum since 2019; the "first cinema" claim is disputed (Ae Kwan, 1895, is another claim)
- **Righteous Revenge:** kino-drama, 27 October 1919, Kim Do-san; lost; Korean Film Day
- **Arirang:** Na Woon-gyu, premiered 1 October 1926 at Dansungsa; lost
- **Na Woon-gyu:** 1902 to 9 August 1937; jailed after 1 March 1919
- **Byeonsa:** live narrators of silent films
- **First sound film:** *Chunhyang-jeon* (1935), Lee Myeong-woo
- **Propaganda:** *You and I* (1941), *Suicide Troops of the Watchtower* (1943)
- **Not covered:** the 1940 Film Decree and the detail of colonial censorship (not in the sources I read)

Next chapter: Division, War and the Golden Age, which follows Korean film from liberation and the Korean War to the boom of the 1950s and 1960s.

K-Drama and Korean Film

Course 1 · Chapter 3 · Division, War and the Golden Age

After 1945 Korea was free of Japanese rule and then divided, and within five years it was at war. Film output almost stopped, then in the mid-1950s it exploded. This chapter follows that arc, with a short, factual note on what happened to film in the North, and ends in the early 1960s, just as the state clamped down.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on the cinema of South Korea (the liberation and golden-age sections), the cinema of North Korea (the first part only), *The Housemaid* (1960 film) and *Madame Freedom*, as I read them. I read no books or archives. Where those articles disagree, I say so and do not choose between them.

Liberation: Viva Freedom!

The Korean-cinema article says freedom became the main theme of films in the late 1940s. Its best-known example is *Viva Freedom!* (1946), directed by Choi In-gyu, which depicts the independence movement and was "a major commercial success."

> **Two articles, one title**
>
> The North Korean cinema article also names *Viva Freedom!* (1946) as one of the first feature films made in the North, alongside *My Home Village* (1949). I did not find an article that sorts out whether these are the same film, a shared claim, or a title that appears in both lists. This is an open question in what I read, and I do not resolve it here.

A Short Note on the North

This course is about South Korea, so this is deliberately brief. Everything below is from the cinema-of-North-Korea article, which is openly available, and I did not read any North Korean sources.

- **Structure.** A Korean Documentary Film Studio was founded in 1946 and the state-run Korean Art Film Studio in 1947. The first North Korean film was the documentary *Our Construction* (July 1946).
- **Control.** "All film production is supervised by the Workers' Party of Korea," and the article says production generally concerns propaganda.
- **Kim Jong Il.** The article calls him "an avid film buff" and says he wrote *On the Art of the Cinema* in 1973.
- **The abduction.** The article states without hedging: "In 1978, the North Korean government abducted the South Korean filmmaker Shin Sang-ok and his ex-wife, the actress Choi Eun-hee." It says the two escaped in 1986. Shin returns in the next chapter as a South Korean director.
- **Output.** The number of films is "difficult to determine": the article cites estimates of about 80 a year (1992), about 60 a year (2001) and about five a year for 2000 to 2009, from three different sources.

The Korean War

The war began in 1950. The Korean-cinema article says only 14 films were produced between 1950 and 1953, and that "all of the films from that era have since been lost." After the 1953 armistice, President Syngman Rhee exempted the film industry from taxation, and foreign aid brought equipment and technology.

The Golden Age Begins

The article says South Korean film output rose from 15 films in 1954 to 111 in 1959, mostly melodramas. Four titles from the period stand out.

Film	Director	What the articles say
Chunhyangjeon (1955)	Lee Kyu-hwan	A "now lost remake" of the old tale. The article says it drew "10 percent of Seoul's population" to theatres, a figure with no source detail.
Madame Freedom (1956)	Han Hyung-mo	Released 9 June 1956. Described as a modern story about female sexuality and Western values. A professor's wife takes a shop job, and flirtations and nightlife strain her marriage; the husband expels

Film	Director	What the articles say
		her, and the film ends with her weeping at the gate. The film article is a stub and rests on one database synopsis.
The Housemaid (1960)	Kim Ki-young	Released 3 November 1960; Kim also wrote, produced and edited it. A household falls apart after a manipulative maid enters it. The article says the film was "discovered by the West" more than forty years later.
Obaltan	Yu Hyun-mok	With *The Housemaid*, "now considered among the best South Korean films ever made." The article gives the date as 1960 in one place and 1961 in another.

Two facts about *The Housemaid* link it to later chapters. The article says it began Kim's *Housemaid* trilogy, followed by *Woman of Fire* and *Woman of Fire '82*, and that Im Sang-soo directed a remake in 2010. It also reports Bong Joon-ho as saying that it inspired *Parasite*, the film of Chapter 1. Both are about an outsider from a poorer background who enters a wealthier household; that comparison is mine, and the article does not make it.

> **An award and a name**
>
> *The Coachman* (1961), directed by Kang Dae-jin, won a Silver Bear Jury Prize at the 1961 Berlin festival, which the Korean-cinema article calls the first Korean film to win an international festival award. The article's own awards table calls the prize the "Silver Bear Extraordinary Jury Prize", so the wording differs inside one article.

Then the State Stepped In

The article says filmmakers had "a brief freedom from censorship" in the gap between the Rhee and Park administrations. Park Chung Hee became acting president in 1962. The Motion Picture Law of that year brought "increasingly restrictive measures", including a quota on imports, and the article says it cut the number of domestic production companies "from 71 to 16 within a year." Censorship, it adds, targeted obscenity, communism and unpatriotic themes. A separate screen quota, limiting the days foreign films could be shown, was first enacted in 1967.

The 1960s were still a busy decade. Popular directors made six to eight films a year, and Kim Soo-yong made ten in 1967, including *Mist*, "considered to be his greatest work." The article also

notes the first South Korean animated feature, *Hong Kil-dong* (1967), and the first science-fiction animated film, *Golden Iron Man* (1968).

Gaps in what I read

The cinema articles I read give no start date for censorship in 1961 and name no studios for this period. They do not mention Lee Man-hee or Shin Sang-ok in the golden-age section, so I leave them for Chapter 4. The Housemaid article I read gives no information on the film's reception in Korea in 1960. The "10 percent of Seoul" figure for *Chunhyangjeon* is the article's own and unsourced in what I read.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe what happened to South Korean film production between 1945 and 1959, using the figures the articles give for the Korean War and for 1954 and 1959.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose two of *Madame Freedom*, *The Housemaid* and *Obaltan*, and say for each what the articles say about the film, naming the director and the year. Then point out one place where the articles disagree or hedge.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain what the Motion Picture Law of 1962 changed, and give two facts from the short note on North Korean film.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- ***Viva Freedom!*:** 1946, Choi In-gyu; also listed in the North Korean article
- **Korean War:** 14 films, 1950 to 1953, all lost
- **Output:** 15 films in 1954, 111 in 1959
- ***Madame Freedom*:** 1956, Han Hyung-mo
- ***The Housemaid*:** 3 November 1960, Kim Ki-young
- ***Obaltan*:** Yu Hyun-mok, 1960 or 1961 (the article varies)
- ***The Coachman*:** 1961, Kang Dae-jin, Silver Bear Jury Prize
- **Motion Picture Law:** 1962; companies cut from 71 to 16 in a year; import quota
- **North Korea:** state studios 1946 and 1947; party supervision; 1978 abduction of Shin Sang-ok and Choi Eun-hee, escape 1986
- **Check:** the *Viva Freedom!* overlap, the Obaltan date, and the Chunhyangjeon figure

Next chapter: Censorship and the Dark Years, which follows Korean film and the rise of television under the Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan governments.

K-Drama and Korean Film

Course 1 · Chapter 4 · Censorship and the Dark Years

From the early 1960s into the late 1980s, South Korean film and broadcasting were shaped by a government that used them to push its own message. This chapter follows the laws, the people who were punished or pushed out, the strange case of Shin Sang-ok, and the arrival of television, which began to draw audiences away from the cinema.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on the cinema of South Korea (the 1973 to 1996 sections), television in South Korea and Shin Sang-ok, as I read them. I read no books or archives. The television article carries a "needs more citations" banner and contradicts itself on several dates, which I note below. The chapter describes government policy as the articles report it and makes no judgment beyond them.

A Corporation for Control

The Korean-cinema article says that in 1973 a Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation was created, "ostensibly" to promote the industry, but that its primary purpose was control. It adds that the corporation promoted "politically correct" support for censorship and government ideals.

- **Who could release films.** Only filmmakers with "ideologically sound" films who were loyal to the government could release new ones.
- **Punishment.** Those who bypassed censorship were blacklisted and sometimes imprisoned.
- **A verdict from 1981.** The article quotes the *International Film Guide* as saying that "No country has a stricter code of film censorship than South Korea."
- **Propaganda films.** The article says the "policy films" this system produced were unpopular, and that attendance fell "over 60 percent" from 1969 to 1979, with television cited as a factor.

The broadcasting side had its own rules. The television article says that in 1972, under President Park Chung Hee, the government "imposed censorship upon media through the Martial Law Decree" and revised the Broadcasting Law to require "all television and radio stations to review

programming before and after transmission". The government said this answered public criticism, and the article notes that "many accused the government of wanting to establish a monopoly over television broadcasting."

> **What I could not find**
>
> The cinema article I read does not describe the 1973 revision of the Motion Picture Law itself, the quotas for 1973 to 1979, or any propaganda requirements in detail, and it does not name Chun Doo-hwan or the early 1980s government at all. It also names the 1973 body slightly differently from my planning sketch ("Promotion Corporation", not "Film Promotion Corporation"). So this chapter describes the effects of the system more than its rules.

The Case of Shin Sang-ok

One career runs through this whole period. Shin Sang-ok began as an assistant production designer on *Viva Freedom!* (1946) and became known as the "Prince of South Korean Cinema". His company, Shin Films, reportedly made "around 300 films during the 1960s", a figure the article takes from a film-database site. His 1961 film *The Houseguest and My Mother* was South Korea's first submission for an Academy Award in the foreign-language category.

- **Trouble with the government.** The Korean-cinema article says his licence was revoked in 1975. The article on Shin says only that "after Shin ran afoul of the repressive government in 1978, Park Chung Hee closed Shin's studio", and does not mention a 1975 revocation or say what the government action was. The two articles give different years, and I do not try to reconcile them.
- **North Korea.** The Shin article says that the actress Choi Eun-hee was kidnapped in Hong Kong in 1978, and that Shin, searching for her, was kidnapped too, on orders from Kim Jong Il. It then adds: "The North Korean authorities have denied the kidnapping accusations, claiming that Shin came to the country willingly." It says secret audio tapes made by Shin and Choi "supported their story", and that a UN Human Rights Council report cited in its notes supports the abduction account.
- **The North Korean years.** After two escape attempts he was imprisoned for over two years, then taken to Pyongyang in 1983, where he met Kim Jong Il. The couple remarried "shortly afterwards, as suggested by Kim Jong Il". Shin directed seven films for North Korea in 1984 and 1985; the best known is *Pulgasari*.

- **Escape and return.** In 1986 the couple fled to the United States embassy in Vienna during a film festival and asked for asylum. They lived in the United States, and Shin directed *3 Ninjas Knuckle Up* (1995). He returned to South Korea permanently in 1999 and died on 11 April 2006.

The article on Shin also lists conflicting birth dates (1925, and three dates in 1926) and two ages at death, so even basic facts about him are uncertain. His case is a reminder that, in this period, a film career in the South could be broken by the state and that the story of what happened next is contested.

The Hostess Films

Not everything was controlled the same way. The Korean-cinema article says Kim Ho-sun's *Yeong-ja's Heydays* (1975) and *Winter Woman* (1977) were box-office hits, and describes them as "hostess films": allowed despite overt sexual content, in a genre that was popular in the 1970s and 1980s. The article spells the second title *Winter Woman* in one place and *Winter Women* in another. Why such films were tolerated while political films were not is a question the article does not answer.

The Rise of Television

Television began small and then took over the living room. The television article says broadcasting started on 12 May 1956 with HLKZ-TV, "a commercially operated television station" set up by an American company. Its sentence on the first Korean TV drama gives the title *The Gates of Heaven* (1956), running "no longer than fifteen minutes".

Station	What the article says	The catch
HLKA-TV (now KBS 1TV)	"The first full-scale television station", established 1 October 1961 under the Ministry of Culture and Public Information	A network table gives 31 December 1961
TBC-TV	Launched 1964; "the first private television network in South Korea"; merged in 1980	HLKZ-TV is also called "commercially operated" in 1956
MBC-TV	Debuted 1969	Tables give 8 August and 1 August 1969, and the history text gives

Station	What the article says	The catch
		only the year

- **Growth.** The article says the number of sets grew from four million in 1979 to nearly six million "in the same period" (it appears to mean 1979 to 1989), and the number of stations from 12 to 78.
- **Colour.** "Color television was not officially introduced in the country until late 1980", although colour sets were made for export before that.
- **Consolidation.** The article says "during Chun Doo-hwan's regime, several newspapers, broadcasters and publications were forcibly closed, or were merged into a single organization", with TBC-TV the example, "awarded to KBS" and replaced by KBS 2TV.
- **Reform.** After the 1987 reforms, the National Assembly set up the Foundation for Broadcast Culture to insulate broadcasters from politics. The article's wording of what exactly it protected is ambiguous.

Film and television, one squeeze

Put the two accounts side by side and the pattern is clear: the same government that tightened film controls in 1973 had reviewed broadcasting in 1972, film attendance fell by more than 60 percent between 1969 and 1979 as television grew, and in 1980 the regime merged broadcasters. The articles do not claim that one caused the other, and attendance is a number the cinema article gives alongside television as only "a factor". The link between them is something to think about, and not a finding of these sources.

A Door Opens, Slowly

The Korean-cinema article says the Motion Picture Law of 1984 "allowed independent filmmakers to begin producing films" and a 1986 revision allowed more imports. It also says script censorship was "officially dismissed" in the late 1980s, though producers were "unofficially" expected to hand over two copies. The film industry, it says, was "still subject to censorship" until 1996. Chapter 5 picks the story up there.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the 1973 Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation: what it was said to be for, what the article says it was for, and what happened to filmmakers who bypassed censorship.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Summarise the career of Shin Sang-ok in five sentences, naming Shin Films, the two articles' different years for his trouble with the government, and the disputed account of his time in North Korea.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain how the growth of television and the film figures of 1969 to 1979 fit together, and say what the articles do and do not claim about cause.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **1972:** Martial Law Decree censorship of media; Broadcasting Law revised
- **1973:** Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation; "No country has a stricter code of film censorship" (1981 quote)
- **Attendance:** down over 60 percent, 1969 to 1979
- **Shin Sang-ok:** Shin Films; licence revoked 1975 (cinema article) or studio closed after 1978 (his article); kidnapped 1978 (disputed by the North); escaped 1986; returned 1999; died 11 April 2006
- **Hostess films:** *Yeong-ja's Heydays* (1975), *Winter Woman* (1977)

- **Television:** HLKZ-TV 1956; KBS 1 October 1961; TBC 1964; MBC 1969; colour late 1980; TBC merged into KBS 1980
- **1984:** law allowing independent producers; script censorship "officially dismissed" in the late 1980s
- **Check:** the launch dates for KBS, TBC and MBC, and the year of Shin's licence trouble

Next chapter: The Korean New Wave and the Chungmuro Revival, which follows the late-1980s opening, Im Kwon-taek and the 1990s business turn.

K-Drama and Korean Film

Course 1 · Chapter 5 · The Korean New Wave and the Chungmuro Revival

After the censorship years, South Korean film changed fast. Independent producers appeared, Hollywood arrived in person, a new international festival opened in Busan, and then a financial crisis pushed the big conglomerates out and left room for a different kind of film industry. By 2000, Korean blockbusters were beating Hollywood at home. This chapter follows that change and ends with a street in Seoul.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on the cinema of South Korea (the recovery and renaissance sections), Im Kwon-taek, *Seopyeonje*, *Shiri*, *Joint Security Area*, the Busan International Film Festival and Chungmuro, as I read them. I read no books or archives. Several of those articles carry maintenance tags, uncited figures or internal contradictions, which I point out. Box-office numbers in particular are the articles' own and I did not check them against other sources.

What to Call It

This period has no single agreed name. The cinema article's own lead uses "Korean New Wave" for "the late 1990s to the present", but its renaissance section says "New Korean Cinema", and says glossy blockbusters and genre films "began to emerge in the late 1990s and 2000s." I use "New Korean Cinema" for the period and keep "Korean New Wave" as the term the lead gives. It is worth knowing that a different book may use either, and for different years.

The Opening, 1984 to 1993

- **The law.** The Motion Picture Law of 1984 "allowed independent filmmakers to begin producing films", and a 1986 revision allowed more imports (Chapter 4).
- **Im Kwon-taek abroad.** The article says his film *Mandala* (1981) won the Grand Prix at the Hawaii Film Festival, and *Gilsoddeum* was shown at the 36th Berlin festival (1986). The article on Im gives *Gilsoddeum* as 1985 in its filmography and 1986 in two award entries,

and spells it differently in different places. Kang Soo-yeon won Best Actress at the Venice festival in 1987 for *The Surrogate Woman*.

- **Hollywood arrives.** A 1985 agreement lifted restrictions on foreign films, and by 1988 UIP and 20th Century Fox had offices in Korea. *Fatal Attraction* (September 1988) was the first film directly distributed by a United States company (UIP), and Korean filmmakers protested.
- **Holding the line.** The government re-enforced a screen quota of at least 146 days a year. Even so, domestic films held only 16 percent of the market in 1993.
- **Money from the big firms.** Samsung released Kim Ui-seok's *Marriage Story* (1992), the first film released by a *chaebol* (a family-run conglomerate).

Seopyeonje, 1993

Seopyeonje, directed by Im Kwon-taek and released on 10 April 1993, is about a family of *pansori* performers. Pansori is a traditional Korean narrative music form; the film is based on a novel by Yi Chong-jun. Its article says it was "the first South Korean film to draw over one million audiences", and its release section says "in Seoul alone", so the two sentences in one article say slightly different things. The article credits it with helping revive "popular interest in traditional Korean culture and pansori". It was shown at Cannes in 1993 and, per the article, won six Grand Bell Awards (dated 1993 in one table and 2002 in another place). Im used pansori again in *Chunhyang* (2000) and *Beyond the Years* (2007).

The article on Im Kwon-taek says he was born on 8 December 1934 and "as of spring 2015, he has directed 102 films". It calls *Mandala* "the turning point of his career". That article carries a banner saying it needs more citations, so its claims are unverified by the page itself.

Busan, 1996

The Busan International Film Festival article says: "The first festival, held from 13 to 21 September 1996, was also the first international film festival in Korea." It is held in Haeundae District, Busan, and the article calls it "one of the most significant film festivals in Asia" while its infobox says "the most prestigious film festival in Asia", citing *Time*. A promotion plan connecting new directors to funding followed in 1999. That article gives no reason for the festival's founding, and I do not guess one. The same year, the cinema article says a Film Promotion Law passed in 1996.

Crisis and Opportunity

The 1997 financial crisis (called the "IMF Crisis" in one place and the "Asian financial crisis" in another in the same article) hit the big firms. The cinema article says "many *chaebols* began to scale back their involvement in the film industry", but that they had already laid "the groundwork for a renaissance". It also notes that representation of women "drastically declined" after the crisis. Domestic films beat Hollywood at the box office in the late 1990s "largely due to screen quota laws", in the article's words.

Two Films That Changed the Market

Film	What the article says	The catch
Shiri (13 February 1999), Kang Je-gyu	A North Korean sniper lives in the South as a sleeper agent, and a plot to bomb a soccer match with leaders from both Koreas must be stopped. Budget estimated at US$8.5 million, "at the time the single biggest budget allocated to a South Korean film". Called "the first Hollywood-style big-budget blockbuster to be produced in the new Korean film industry"; Samsung helped fund it.	The article says 6.9 million people saw it, beating *Titanic* at 4.3 million. Neither figure has a citation in the text. The cinema article gives only "more than two million tickets in Seoul alone".
Joint Security Area (9 September 2000), Park Chan-wook	Based on the novel *DMZ* by Park Sang-yeon. Two North Korean soldiers are killed at a guard house, and an investigation shows the soldiers had secretly become friends. The article says it became the highest-grossing film in Korean film history by early 2001, with an estimated 5.8 million nationwide.	Later passed by *Friend*, *Silmido* and *Taegukgi*. The lead and body give different counts of award nominations. The article says Park prefers it to be regarded as his directorial debut, though it is his third film.

The cinema article lists other blockbusters of the period: *My Sassy Girl* (2001), *Friend* (2001), *Silmido* (2003) and *Taegukgi* (2004). It says *Silmido* and *Taegukgi* were each "seen by 10 million people domestically", about "one-quarter of South Korea's entire population". The wording is the article's own rounding. Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy* (2003) won the Grand Prix at the 2004

Cannes festival, and the cinema article reports 52 percent of the 217.3 million admissions of 2015 as going to Korean films, up from 16 percent in 1993.

The quota argument

The screen quota was first enacted in 1967, and the article says it was cut "from 146 days to 73" as "a prerequisite for negotiations" with the United States for a free-trade agreement. It gives no year for the cut or the agreement, and the only date in that passage is February 2006, when movie workers held "mass rallies in protest". Whether the quota made Korean films succeed or merely sheltered them is exactly what the two sides argued. The article's own wording is that success was "largely due to" the quota, a hedge that is not a proof.

Chungmuro

Chungmuro is a real avenue of 1.75 km in Seoul's Jung District. The Chungmuro article, a stub, says that since the 1960s it has been known as a street of culture, artists and film, and that although many studios have moved to Gangnam or elsewhere, it "still symbolizes the South Korean film industry" and "continues to be used as a metonym" for it, which it supports with a 2005 magazine review. It adds that Dansungsa, the cinema of Chapter 2, was established in 1907 in the area, known under Japanese rule as Honmachi. So the word that film people use for the whole industry is a street name, and the cinema where the first Korean films opened stood in it. Several of the article's own references are dead links.

Gaps in what I read

The cinema article I read does not use the name "Chungmuro" in its renaissance section, does not name the Korean Film Council by its common acronym, and gives no year for the quota cut. It does not mention *Memories of Murder* outside a festival table. I did not find a source saying why the "revival" happened, and the explanations above (the end of censorship, the chaebol retreat, the quota) are what the articles report, not a tested account.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe three changes between 1984 and 1996 that opened the South Korean film industry (laws, foreign distributors, a festival), with dates, and one figure showing how much of the domestic market Korean films held in 1993.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Compare *Shiri* (1999) and *Joint Security Area* (2000): director, release, what each is about, and one claim about each that the articles leave uncited or contradictory.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain the screen quota debate: what the quota was, what changed, and why the article's phrase "largely due to" is a hedge. Then say what Chungmuro is and why it is called a metonym.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **1984 / 1986:** law letting independent producers in / more imports allowed
- **1985 to 1988:** foreign-film restrictions lifted; *Fatal Attraction* (Sept 1988) the first film directly distributed by a US company
- **Quota:** first enacted 1967; 146 days re-enforced; cut to 73 (undated in the article); protests February 2006
- **1993:** domestic share 16 percent; *Seopyeonje* (10 April 1993, Im Kwon-taek) the first to draw over a million viewers in Seoul
- **Busan International Film Festival:** 13 to 21 September 1996
- ***Shiri*:** 13 February 1999, Kang Je-gyu; 6.9 million viewers (uncited)

- ***Joint Security Area*:** 9 September 2000, Park Chan-wook; est. 5.8 million
- ***Oldboy*:** Grand Prix, Cannes 2004
- **Chungmuro:** 1.75 km avenue in Seoul; metonym for the film industry
- **Check:** the attendance figures, the quota year and the *Gilsoddeum* date

Next chapter: Television Drama: From Tabletop Sets to the Wave, which turns from film to the small screen and the first Korean dramas to travel abroad.

K-Drama and Korean Film

Course 1 · Chapter 6 · Television Drama: From the First Broadcast to the Wave

Chapters 2 to 5 followed film. This chapter turns to the small screen, where the K-drama as we know it was built. It follows television drama from a fifteen-minute programme in 1956 to the two series that carried the Korean Wave across Asia, and it explains the most common historical genre, the sageuk.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on Korean drama (the first part of a long article), *Winter Sonata*, *Jewel in the Palace*, *Sageuk* and the Seoul Broadcasting System, as I read them, plus the Korean Wave and television articles used in earlier chapters. I read no books or archives. The Korean-drama article says several "first" claims in different ways, and some of its entries carry source-quality tags, which I note. Ratings and viewing figures are the articles' own.

The Beginnings, 1927 to 1980s

- **Radio first.** The Korean-drama article says radio broadcasting began in 1927 under Japanese rule, with radio dramas, and that about 30 percent of programming was in Korean.
- **The first television drama.** The experimental station HLKZ-TV launched in 1956, and its first TV film, *The Gate of Heaven*, ran for fifteen minutes. The article says the station "was shut down a few years later due to a fire". The title appears as "The Gates of Heaven" in the television article.
- **KBS and the first series.** After KBS launched in late 1961, the article says "television dramas began to gain momentum", and that KBS aired the first TV series in 1962. A competitor, TBC, aired "more controversial dramas".
- **The 1960s.** Single-act dramas came first, then daily soaps. *Sajikgol Old West Room* (1967) was the most popular drama, and *Snowfall* (1968) was the first daily soap.
- **The 1970s.** Sets spread widely, and because channels could not afford action or science-fiction dramas, the article says American and other foreign series were imported.
- **The 1980s.** Colour television arrived. *Love and Ambition* (MBC, 1987) "reportedly" recorded a 78 percent viewership. *500 Years of Joseon* ran for eight years across 11 series and over

800 episodes, according to the sageuk article.

> **Which was the "first"?**
>
> The Korean-drama article calls *Death Row* "Korea's first drama", *The Gate of Heaven* the first Korean television film, and a KBS series of 1962 the first TV series. These are different kinds of "first", and the article does not set them in order. Chapter 2 met the same problem with film.

Three Networks and the Miniseries

KBS and MBC were joined by a third terrestrial network, the Seoul Broadcasting System. Its article says SBS was founded on 14 November 1990 and that its TV launch was 1 December 1991, though two of the article's own references point to 9 December. The article says that after the 1987 democratic reform the government created a second commercial broadcaster after MBC, and that the private licensing reopened in June 1990. It names *Sandglass* (1995) as the network's breakout drama.

The Korean-drama article marks the 1990s as the decade the form took shape:

- *Eyes of Dawn* (MBC, 1991) is called "the first real commercial success".
- *Jealousy* (1992) "is considered" the first "trendy drama". The article tags the source as unreliable, and the Korean Wave article says a drama of that name aired on Chinese television in 1992.
- The 12 to 24 episode miniseries became common.
- "Hallyu" was coined in the late 1990s after the drama *Star in My Heart*, and the article says this era "marked the start of export". Chapter 1 gave 19 November 1999 as the first known use of the term.

Winter Sonata, 2002

Winter Sonata aired on KBS2 from 14 January to 19 March 2002, on Mondays and Tuesdays, in 20 episodes of 60 minutes each. Yoon Seok-ho directed, and Bae Yong-joon and Choi Ji-woo starred. As the article summarises it, a gifted teenager, Joon-sang, falls for a classmate, Yoo-jin; after a car accident he loses his memory and moves abroad under a new name, and ten years later he returns to Korea and they meet again.

- **At home.** The nationwide average rating was 23.1 percent, with episode 14 the highest at 28.8 percent and episode 1 the lowest at 16.3 percent.
- **In Japan.** The article says it first aired on NHK in 2004, with the final episode on 23 August 2004, and was shown again unedited from 20 December 2004. It credits the series with having "improved the image of South Korea among the Japanese" and having "set fashion trends throughout East Asia". The 2003 date I had in mind appears in the article only for a broadcast in the Philippines.
- **Tourism.** Visitors to Namiseom (the island where it was filmed) "reportedly" rose from 250,000 to over 650,000. The article also says the series yielded "more than US$27 billion" counting tourism profit, without explaining how that figure was reached, so I do not rely on it.

The article says the actor Bae Yong-joon's nickname appears only in the titles of its references, and it never explains it, so I leave it out. It also contains a slip: it calls the 2026 re-release a "1400-minute" series, though 20 episodes of 60 minutes make 1,200 minutes.

Jewel in the Palace (Dae Jang Geum), 2003

The Korean Wave article names *Jewel in the Palace* (2003) as the drama credited with the greatest effect in Chinese-speaking countries. Its own article gives the Korean title as *Dae Jang Geum* (the transliteration is written *Daejanggeum* there), which settles the question Chapter 1 left open: they are the same drama.

Fact	What the article says
Broadcast	MBC, 15 September 2003 to 23 March 2004; 54 episodes of 60 minutes
Team	Director Lee Byung-hoon; writer Kim Young-hyun; Lee Young-ae in the title role
Budget	US$15 million
Story	An orphaned palace kitchen cook becomes the first female royal physician under the Joseon king, through palace rivalries and exile
Ratings	"An average viewership rating of 45.8% and a peak of 57.1%"
Abroad	Exported to 91 countries; US$103.4 million worldwide; in China, Hunan TV paid US$10,000 an episode and ratings "peaked at 180 million viewers"

"True story"?

The article says the drama "is based on the true story of Janggeum, the first female royal physician of the Joseon period", but its plot summary includes invented elements, such as a hermit's prophecy, and the article does not reconcile the two. Most of what is dramatised here is not something the article lets me check.

The Sageuk

Dae Jang Geum is a *sageuk*. The Wikipedia article says the term "denotes historical dramas, including traditional drama plays, films or television series", and that in English it "usually refers to historical films and television series (of South Korea)".

- **Early days.** The first historical television series, *Gukto malli*, aired on KBS in 1962, set in the Goguryeo era. In the 1950s, the article says, "actual historical backgrounds were irrelevant".
- **Accuracy moves back and forth.** In the 1960s viewers became "more interested in actual historical events", in the 1970s legend and reality were mixed because legends were "easier to be dramatized", and in the 1980s series referred to official records "albeit liberally to some extent". The article reads as a back-and-forth, not a steady trend.
- **Fusion sageuk.** The article says this genre was "born" in the 2000s, with *Hur Jun* its key example, concentrating on "emotions and relationships" instead of "dry historical facts and distant wars". *Damo* (2003) was described as the first HDTV Korean series, with "Hong Kong style wire-fu action scenes". *Dae Jang Geum* is on the same list.

Gaps in what I read

I read the first 100,000 characters of the long Korean-drama article and not the rest. The articles disagree about a few things I leave alone: the number of weekly episodes (one section says dramas air "on two days every week", another says weekday daily dramas run every night), and the viewing figures for *Squid Game*. They do not mention the typical hour-length of an episode beyond the examples above. The chapter says nothing about *My Love from the Star* (2014), the cable era or streaming drama, which Chapter 9 picks up.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Trace the beginnings of Korean television drama from 1956 to the 1980s, naming at least four dated points, and explain why the article's "first" claims do not give one clear origin.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Compare *Winter Sonata* (2002) and *Jewel in the Palace* (2003): network, dates, episodes, what each is about, and one figure for each from the articles, with a caution about one of them.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Explain what a sageuk is and what a "fusion sageuk" is, with one example of each, and describe how the article says historical accuracy changed between the 1950s and the 2000s.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **1956:** HLKZ-TV; *The Gate of Heaven*, 15 minutes
- **1962:** first TV series on KBS; *Gukto malli*, first historical series
- **1967 to 1968:** *Sajikgol Old West Room*; *Snowfall*, first daily soap
- **SBS:** founded 14 November 1990; TV launch 1 December 1991 (references say 9 December)
- **1990s:** *Eyes of Dawn* (1991); *Jealousy* (1992, "trendy drama"); miniseries of 12 to 24 episodes
- ***Winter Sonata*:** KBS2, 14 January to 19 March 2002; 20 episodes; average 23.1 percent

- ***Jewel in the Palace* (*Dae Jang Geum*):** MBC, 15 September 2003 to 23 March 2004; 54 episodes; average 45.8 percent
- **Sageuk:** Korean historical drama; fusion sageuk from the 2000s (*Hur Jun*, *Damo*)
- **Check:** the Namiseom and US$27 billion figures, the SBS date and the "true story" claim

Next chapter: The Anatomy of a K-Drama, which looks at how the form works: the episode count, the way a series is shot while it airs, the genres and the second lead.

K-Drama and Korean Film

Course 1 · Chapter 7 · The Anatomy of a K-Drama

Chapter 6 told the history. This chapter takes a K-drama apart: who makes it, how long it runs, how often it airs, how it is shot, which channel carries it and how its audience is counted. Three dramas, Extraordinary Attorney Woo, The Uncanny Counter and Start-Up, serve as examples throughout, because they are the kind many viewers meet first, through streaming.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on Korean drama (the first 200,000 characters of a very long article), *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*, *The Uncanny Counter* and *Start-Up*, as I read them. I read no books, interviews or industry reports. The Korean-drama article has contradictions in places, which I note. Two topics from my planning sketch, soundtracks and the "second lead", are not in the parts I read, so I leave them out and say so below.

The Team: One Writer, One Director

The Korean-drama article says that "a single director usually leads a drama, which is often written by a single screenwriter." *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* fits: its article credits director Yoo In-shik and writer Moon Ji-won. I did not read the crew credits of the other two examples.

The Run: Sixteen Episodes, Two Nights a Week

- **Miniseries.** The article says the 12 to 24 episode miniseries became common in the 1990s (Chapter 6). A source for Indian streaming adds that a "16 to 20 episodes format" is easier for binge-watching.
- **Two nights a week.** The article says dramas "usually air on two days every week", which fits all three examples. It also says weekday daily dramas run "every night from Monday through Friday". The article does not reconcile the two statements: the second refers to the evening slots for daily dramas.
- **Daily dramas.** The 19:00 to 21:00 slots have usually held daily dramas in the style of telenovelas, "rarely running over 150 episodes".

Drama	Channel and dates	Length and slot
Extraordinary Attorney Woo (2022)	ENA, 29 June to 18 August 2022	16 episodes; Wednesdays and Thursdays at 21:00
Start-Up (2020)	tvN, 17 October to 6 December 2020	16 episodes of 72 to 85 minutes; Saturdays and Sundays at 21:00
The Uncanny Counter	Season 1: OCN, 28 November 2020 to 24 January 2021. Season 2: tvN, 29 July to 3 September 2023	16 episodes, then 12; Saturdays and Sundays

Shot While It Airs

The article describes the **live-shoot model**: "The first four episodes... are usually shot in advance, but the rest are shot continuously as the series is being aired." It says the model "remains widely used", that productions use "three camera crews", and that some dramas in 2016 were fully pre-produced. The article gives no reason for the system, and does not say how it affects the writing, so I do not guess. I did not find which of my three examples used it.

Channels: Terrestrial and Cable

The article names KBS, MBC and SBS as terrestrial networks (EBS appears in a related list), and tvN as a cable channel. Cable channels "normally have a relatively smaller audience", it says. The three examples show how cable and streaming change that picture:

- **ENA.** *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* began with a nationwide rating of 0.948 percent for episode 1, reached 4.032 percent for episode 3, which the article says set the record for the highest rating in ENA's history, and ended at 17.534 percent (19.210 percent in Seoul). The "ENA record" claim is repeated in the article but cited to a single source.
- **OCN and tvN.** *The Uncanny Counter* began on OCN, where the article calls it the "highest-rated OCN series so far", and its second season moved to tvN. The first season's finale is given as 10.999 percent in a table, "11%" in the text and 11.9 percent in a cited headline; the article does not reconcile them.

- **Cable's high-water marks.** The article's cable list is headed by *The World of the Married* (JTBC) at 28.371 percent, yet puts *Crash Landing on You* (tvN) at number 5 with 29.683 percent, which is higher. It is a contradiction in the article, so I treat both figures as unverified.

> **Who counts the audience?**
>
> The article says that from 1 January 2024 ratings come solely from Nielsen Korea; earlier, Media Service Korea gave ratings from 1992 but only for the Seoul area, TNS Media Korea began in 1999 and was bought by AC Nielsen in August 1999, and TNmS stopped operating on 1 January 2024. The all-time terrestrial household record it lists is *You and I* (MBC), 66.9 percent, on 26 April 1998. Because the measuring bodies changed, a rating from 1998 and one from 2022 are not strictly comparable, which is my caution and not a claim in the article.

Genres and Where Stories Come From

The article lists "action, historical, school, medical, legal, and horror comedy" among the genres. The examples show the range:

- **Legal.** *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* follows a rookie attorney at a large Seoul law firm. The article describes the lead, played by Park Eun-bin, as "the first attorney with ASD in Korea", and says her colleagues at first see her communication as "odd and awkward".
- **Fantasy and action.** *The Uncanny Counter* is set in the fictional city of Jungjin, where four demon hunters called the Counters fight evil spirits that escaped the afterlife. The article lists its genres as fantasy, mystery, thriller and action. It is "based on the Kakao Webtoon *Amazing Rumor* by Jang Yi", so it is also an example of a webcomic turned into a drama. Season 2 is set three years later.
- **Romance in a business world.** *Start-Up* is set in a fictional Silicon Valley called Sandbox and follows people in startup companies. The lead is credited as Bae Suzy.

A note on the title: you may know the second show as *Uncanny Counters*. The English article is titled *The Uncanny Counter* (singular), and "Counters" is the name the article gives to the demon-hunting group. I use the article's title and mention the other so that you can recognise it.

Streaming

The articles give a hedge about streaming for all three. *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* is on Netflix "in selected regions", and *The Uncanny Counter* is "available for streaming" on Netflix, "in selected regions". The *Start-Up* article says "available for streaming on Netflix", but the line rests on a 2020 announcement and may be out of date. Where a drama is available therefore depends on your country and the date, which is why I give no list of services. On Netflix, the article says *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* was "the most viewed non-English show globally" in two weeks of July 2022, with 348.15 million viewing hours after the finale. Chapter 9 returns to streaming.

Continuing a Story

Whether a drama gets a second season depends on its channel and its ratings. *The Uncanny Counter* had a second season of 12 episodes in 2023. For *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*, the article says a renewal was confirmed on 17 August 2022 and a season "expected to premiere in 2024", and it does not say whether that season aired; it also lists remakes planned or released elsewhere. I treat season 2 as unconfirmed.

> **Gaps in what I read**
>
> The parts of the Korean-drama article I read do not cover soundtracks, product placement, the "second lead" idea or story tropes in any depth, and the article on the second lead does not exist under the name I tried. So this chapter does not describe those parts of the K-drama experience, and I did not fill them in from memory. They could be added in a later pass if I find a source. I also did not read the last 74,000 characters of the Korean-drama article.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe a typical K-drama's team, length and weekly schedule using the three example dramas, and explain the apparent conflict in the article about airing "two days a week" and "every night".

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Explain the live-shoot model in two sentences, say what the article does not tell us about it, and describe the ratings history of *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* from episode 1 to the finale.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Compare terrestrial and cable channels using the article's statements and one contradiction in its figures, and explain why ratings from different years are not strictly comparable.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Team:** usually one director and often one screenwriter
- **Run:** miniseries of 12 to 24 episodes; the three examples have 16 (and 12 for season 2 of *The Uncanny Counter*)
- **Slot:** usually two days a week; daily dramas rarely over 150 episodes
- **Live shoot:** first four episodes shot in advance, rest shot while airing; three camera crews
- ***Extraordinary Attorney Woo*:** ENA, 29 June to 18 August 2022; finale 17.534 percent; Netflix "in selected regions"
- ***The Uncanny Counter*:** OCN then tvN; from the Kakao webtoon *Amazing Rumor*
- ***Start-Up*:** tvN, 17 October to 6 December 2020; 16 episodes
- **Ratings:** Nielsen Korea alone from 1 January 2024; *You and I* (MBC) 66.9 percent, 26 April 1998

- **Check:** the Netflix availability by region, the cable ratings list and whether season 2 of *Attorney Woo* aired

Next chapter: The Auteurs, which returns to film and looks at Bong Joon-ho, Park Chan-wook, Lee Chang-dong, Hong Sang-soo and Kim Ki-duk.

K-Drama and Korean Film

Course 1 · Chapter 8 · The Auteurs

An auteur is a director whose films are recognised as their own, with a style and set of themes that carry from film to film. After Chapter 5's boom, a handful of Korean directors became known by name at the festivals of Cannes, Venice and Berlin. This chapter introduces five of them: Bong Joon-ho, Park Chan-wook, Lee Chang-dong, Hong Sang-soo and Kim Ki-duk.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from the English Wikipedia articles on each director, as I read them. Each is long, and I read only its first 100,000 characters, so later sections are unread. I read no books, reviews or interviews. Where an article hedges or contradicts itself, I say so. The five directors are the ones in my planning sketch and are not a ranking; other directors could equally have been chosen. The "styles" below are what the articles say, not my own critical judgments except where I mark them as mine.

The Five at a Glance

Director	Born	Debut feature	Best-known film or award named by the article
Bong Joon-ho	14 September 1969, Daegu	*Barking Dogs Never Bite* (2000)	*Parasite* (2019): Palme d'Or and four Academy Awards for the film
Park Chan-wook	23 August 1963, Seoul	*The Moon Is... the Sun's Dream* (1992), though he prefers *Joint Security Area* (2000)	*Oldboy* (2003): Grand Prix, Cannes 2004; Best Director for *Decision to Leave* (2022)
Lee Chang-dong	4 July 1954, Daegu	*Green Fish* (1997)	*Secret Sunshine* (2007): Best Actress, Cannes; *Poetry* (2010): Best Screenplay, Cannes
Hong Sang-soo	25 October 1960, Seoul	*The Day a Pig Fell into the Well* (1996)	*The Woman Who Ran* (2020): Silver Bear for Best Director,

Director	Born	Debut feature	Best-known film or award named by the article
			Berlin
Kim Ki-duk	20 December 1960; died 11 December 2020	*Crocodile* (1996)	*Pietà* (2012): Golden Lion, Venice

Bong Joon-ho

The article spells his name "Bong Joon Ho"; I use the hyphenated form as in earlier chapters. It says he studied sociology at Yonsei University (entering in 1988, graduating in 1995) and then at the two-year Korean Academy of Film Arts.

- **Films.** *Barking Dogs Never Bite* (2000, a dark comedy that gained a "cult following" but little commercial interest), *Memories of Murder* (2003, a crime thriller based on a stage play about a real serial killer), *The Host* (2006, a monster film), *Mother* (2009), *Snowpiercer* (2013, science fiction and his English-language debut), *Okja* (2017, a Netflix-produced co-production), *Parasite* (2019) and *Mickey 17* (2025).
- **Style and themes.** The article names social and class themes, genre-mixing, dark comedy and sudden tone shifts, sometimes within a scene, filming on real locations or built sets, and giving actors freedom, including improvisation.
- **Awards.** The lead says three Academy Awards, while the body attributes *Parasite*'s four Oscars (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay and Best International Feature Film) to the film. It also names two BAFTAs and a place on the 2020 *Time* 100 list. The article describes *Parasite* as the first South Korean film to receive an Academy Award nomination in any category, a claim I did not check.

Park Chan-wook

He enrolled in Sogang University's philosophy department hoping to become an art critic, and joined the film and photography clubs because the university had no formal arts programme. Chapter 5 met his *Joint Security Area* (2000).

- **The first films.** *The Moon Is... the Sun's Dream* (1992), which the article says he has "largely disowned", and *Trio* (1997); neither did well.

- **The "vengeance trilogy".** An unofficial grouping, which the article says was not originally planned as a set: *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002, a financial failure that divided critics), *Oldboy* (2003, which won the Grand Prix at Cannes) and *Lady Vengeance* (2005). The article says the trilogy explores "the futility of revenge and the havoc it causes".
- **Later films.** *Thirst* (2009, a vampire film with Song Kang-ho, which shared the Cannes Jury Prize with *Fish Tank*), *The Handmaiden* (2016, a BAFTA for Best Film Not in the English Language), *Decision to Leave* (2022, Best Director at Cannes) and *No Other Choice* (2025, a Golden Globe nomination and an Academy Award shortlist).
- **Style.** The article credits "cinematography, framing, black humor, and often brutal subject matter", blending crime and mystery with other genres. The claim that *Oldboy* is "regarded as one of the greatest films ever made" appears in the article without a named source in what I read.

Lee Chang-dong

He began as a novelist, with a first novel, *Chonri*, in 1983, and had no formal filmmaking training. He worked on *To the Starry Island* (1993) and wrote *A Single Spark* (1995) before directing *Green Fish* (1997).

- **Films and prizes.** *Peppermint Candy*, *Oasis* (a Silver Lion for Best Direction at Venice), *Secret Sunshine* (2007, Best Actress at Cannes for Jeon Do-yeon), *Poetry* (2010, Best Screenplay at Cannes) and *Burning* (2018).
- **A minister.** He served as Minister of Culture and Tourism from 2003 to 2004. The article says he proposed a screen quota for independent film and cut it in half after opposition.
- **Style.** His films are, in the article's words, "dark stories of innocence lost, suffering and alienation", with psychological trauma and memory as recurring themes, a naturalist style and an approach in which actors are encouraged to become their characters. The article's remark that "he seems to justify" his anti-heroes is its own interpretation.
- **Date conflicts.** The article dates *Peppermint Candy* as 1999 in the filmography and 2000 in the text, and the *Oasis* Silver Lion as 2002 in one place and 2003 in two others.

Hong Sang-soo

He studied theatre at Chung-Ang University and then in the United States. His debut, *The Day a Pig Fell into the Well* (1996), premiered at the Berlin festival in 1997.

- **Style.** The article says his films "often deal in love affairs and everyday dilemmas in contemporary South Korea", in a "domestic realism" of residential streets, cafes, hotels and stairwells. Scenes "typically consist of a single shot, often beginning and ending with a camera zoom", characters drink and main characters are often directors or actors, and budgets "average about $100,000". He writes the day's dialogue from 4 a.m. and often shoots while actors are intoxicated. The article's comparisons to Rohmer and Ozu are framed as arguments by "some" writers, and one is tagged as unsupported.
- **Prizes.** *Woman Is the Future of Man* (2004) was his first film in the main competition at Cannes. *Right Now, Wrong Then* (2015) won the Golden Leopard at Locarno. At Berlin he won Silver Bears for *The Woman Who Ran* (Best Director, 2020), *Introduction* (Best Screenplay, 2021), *The Novelist's Film* (Grand Jury Prize, 2022) and *A Traveler's Needs* (Grand Jury Prize, 2024).
- **Scale.** The article gives no total of films. It does carry inconsistencies in the personal details (the number of children and the date of a separation), which I do not use.

Kim Ki-duk

Kim went to Paris in 1990 to study fine arts and spent two years there as a street portrait painter, after five years in the South Korean marine corps. The article does not say he was self-taught in film. It describes a screenwriting career, with a 1995 Korean Film Council screenplay prize.

- **Films and prizes.** *Crocodile* (1996, his directing debut, on a low budget), *The Isle* (his international breakthrough, shown at Toronto), *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring* (2003, praised by critics and included in Roger Ebert's *Great Movies*), *Samaritan Girl* (2004, Silver Bear for Best Director at the 54th Berlin), *3-Iron* (2004, Silver Lion for Best Director at the 61st Venice), *Arirang* (2011, a documentary about himself, which won the Un Certain Regard prize at Cannes) and *Pietà* (2012, the Golden Lion at the 69th Venice).
- **Style.** The lead calls his work "idiosyncratic" and "art-house" and names no specific themes. The British film board delayed the UK release of *The Isle* over scenes of animal cruelty; the article quotes Kim as saying "I've done a lot of cruelty on animals in my films."
- **Death.** He died on 11 December 2020 in Riga, Latvia, aged 59, which the article attributes to complications from COVID-19.

The allegations, as the article reports them

The article reports accusations against Kim from several women in the industry, and I give only what it says, with its attributions. In August 2017 an actress filed a complaint alleging that he slapped her and forced an unscripted sex scene on the set of *Moebius*; in December 2017 prosecutors fined him 5 million won for physical assault and did not otherwise charge him, citing lack of physical evidence. In 2018 the broadcaster MBC aired accusations from that actress and others of harassment and rape, which the article says were directed at Kim and an actor; police reportedly could not indict because the statute of limitations had expired. Kim denied the accusations and sued; the article says prosecutors dropped his criminal complaints in January 2019, and that in a civil suit the court ruled for the defendants on 28 October 2020. The article reports these as accusations and does not state a finding that they were true. I make no judgment beyond that.

What Unites and Divides Them

The following paragraph is my own reading of the above, not a claim from the articles. All five are known abroad through festivals, and the articles name a Cannes prize or entry for each (for Kim, the Un Certain Regard prize for *Arirang*). They differ in method. Bong and Park work in genre and on larger budgets; Hong shoots quickly for around $100,000; Lee came to film from the novel and works in a naturalist manner; Kim made low-budget films that divided audiences. What they share is that each article describes a recognisable style.

Gaps in what I read

Each article is much longer than the part I read (Bong's runs to about 305,000 characters), so later sections on his later films and reception are unread. I did not read articles on women directors, such as those from earlier decades, or on other directors who are well known abroad, so this list is not a full picture of Korean cinema. Several date conflicts are in the articles themselves and are shown above. Kim Ki-duk's article does not give an account of his film training, so I removed the idea that he was self-taught.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

For Bong Joon-ho and Park Chan-wook, name their debut feature, two other films, one prize the article gives for each, and one point where the article is unclear or contradictory.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Describe Lee Chang-dong's route into film and Hong Sang-soo's working method, using the details the articles give, and name one prize for each.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Summarise Kim Ki-duk's career and prizes in four sentences, then explain in two sentences how this course treats the allegations against him and why.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Bong Joon-ho:** *Barking Dogs Never Bite* (2000), *Memories of Murder* (2003), *The Host* (2006), *Parasite* (2019)
- **Park Chan-wook:** *Joint Security Area* (2000), vengeance trilogy (2002 to 2005), *Oldboy* Grand Prix 2004, *Decision to Leave* Best Director 2022
- **Lee Chang-dong:** novelist first; *Green Fish* (1997); *Secret Sunshine* (2007); *Poetry* (2010); minister 2003 to 2004
- **Hong Sang-soo:** *The Day a Pig Fell into the Well* (1996); budgets about $100,000; Silver Bears 2020 to 2024
- **Kim Ki-duk:** *Crocodile* (1996); *3-Iron* (2004); *Pietà* (2012); died 11 December 2020
- **Check:** the *Oasis* and *Peppermint Candy* dates, and the claim of the first Oscar nomination

Next chapter: Festivals, Streaming and the Global Audience, which looks at how Korean screen work travelled, from Cannes and the Oscars to Netflix.

K-Drama and Korean Film

Course 1 · Chapter 9 · Festivals, Streaming and the Global Audience

Korean screen work reached the world by two routes. Films went through the festivals and the Oscars, which this course has followed since Chapter 5. Television went through the internet, first on small subtitling sites and then through Netflix. This chapter follows both routes to the present and looks at the money, the numbers and the criticism.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from Wikipedia's articles on the Korean Wave (two stretches of a long article), Korean drama, *Squid Game* (the first part, and the stretch from 100,000 to 200,000 characters), *Crash Landing on You* and *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*, plus the director articles of Chapter 8. I read no books, trade reports or Netflix statements. The viewing figures are Netflix's own as the articles report them, and they use different units, so I do not compare them. The article on the Korean Wave carries a neutrality tag on its criticism section.

The Festival Route

Earlier chapters met the films. In short:

- **Cannes.** *Oldboy* won the Grand Prix in 2004 (Chapter 5). *Parasite* was "the first Korean film to win the Palme d'Or" in 2019 (Chapter 1). In 2022, the cinema article says Park Chan-wook's *Decision to Leave* and Kore-eda's *Broker* each won an award, and Song Kang-ho became the first South Korean actor to win Best Actor at Cannes.
- **The Oscars.** At the 92nd Academy Awards *Parasite* won four awards, including Best Picture. The cinema article lists *Parasite*'s four wins (Chapter 8 noted the lead's different count).
- **At home.** The Busan festival, first held in 1996 (Chapter 5), is described as "one of the most significant film festivals in Asia" and is where, in the Hong Sang-soo article, several of his films won prizes.

The Streaming Route Begins

The Korean-drama article gives some dated steps on the way to streaming, though not an account of why they mattered:

- **2008.** "Netflix began offering several Korean dramas in November 2008."
- **2009 to 2018.** DramaFever offered free, ad-supported streaming in the United States from August 2009; the article's table caption gives its years as 2009 to 2018.
- **Viki.** It streams with subtitles "in 70 languages".
- **Fans abroad.** The article lists examples of fan activity from many countries: a "Drama Party" in Paris in 2013, a yearly meeting of a Facebook group in Bangladesh, and "over 400 phone calls and love letters" after the broadcast of *Autumn in My Heart* in Egypt. These are the article's reports, and I did not check them.

Crash Landing on You, 2019 to 2020

The clearest example of a drama built for both audiences is *Crash Landing on You*. The article says it aired on tvN from 14 December 2019 to 16 February 2020, in 16 episodes. In South Korea it was livestreamed first on TVING, and internationally Netflix acquired "exclusive distribution rights in over 190 countries."

- **The story.** A South Korean heiress is blown into North Korea while paragliding, and a captain in the Korean People's Army hides and protects her. The two fall in love across the border. The stars are Hyun Bin and Son Ye-jin.
- **The release pattern.** In Asia, English-speaking regions and Latin America, episodes appeared on Netflix right after each Korean broadcast; in Japan and Europe, the full series was released on 16 February 2020.
- **The money and places.** The article gives a budget of "approximately US$20 million", attributed to a business newspaper. It was filmed in Switzerland, in Mongolia (standing in for Pyongyang) and in South Korea. The lead says the series increased tourism to its Swiss locations, without figures.
- **Ratings.** The lead gives the finale at 21.7 percent nationwide, and says it was the highest-rated drama in tvN's history "at the time". The episode table instead lists viewers in millions (1.508 million for episode 1 and 6.337 million for episode 16). The two are different measures, and the page does not convert between them.
- **The North.** The article says it also circulated in North Korea through the black market. I report that as the article's statement and add nothing to it.

Squid Game: the Numbers

Chapter 1 gave the setup. Now the numbers, as the article reports them from Netflix:

- Season 1 was the first Korean drama to top Netflix's weekly global TV chart, and it reached number one in 94 countries.
- Netflix estimated "over 111 million member households" after 17 days and "over 142 million" after 28 days. A "viewer" here is a subscriber who watched more than two minutes.
- After Netflix changed its measures in November 2021, the series had "over 1.65 billion hours" in 28 days, against 625 million for *Bridgerton*.
- The article flags its own mix of units: a cited headline says "111M Views In First Month", while the text says 17 days, and the source uses households, views and hours together.
- In awards, the article says *Squid Game* was the first non-English series to win at the Screen Actors Guild Awards (Lee Jung-jae and HoYeon Jung each won) and received 14 Primetime Emmy nominations, the first non-English show nominated for Best Drama.

It is a reminder of money and scale. The article says the series' creator Hwang cut the number of participants from about 1,000 "due to budget issues". It reports merchandise (a vinyl figure of Young-hee in January 2022, Funko Pop! figures in May 2022), a reality show, *Squid Game: The Challenge* (456 players and a US$4.56 million prize), a video game and a third season. Several spin-off projects are described as in development and one was reported as no longer in the works.

Extraordinary Attorney Woo and the Quiet Hit

Not every global hit is an event. *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* (Chapter 7) began at 0.948 percent in Korea on a cable channel. Its article says it was "the most viewed non-English show globally" on Netflix for two weeks in July 2022, reached 348.15 million viewing hours after its finale, and is "the sixth most popular non-English show of all time" on the service. Its article also records the Baeksang Arts Awards Grand Prize in 2023 and an International Emmy nomination for Best Drama Series. The article says it is on Netflix "in selected regions", and a webtoon, a musical and several remakes were announced or planned; I do not report their status because the article lists plans, not results.

Looking Closely at the Boom

What the Korean Wave article says against itself

The article's criticism section (tagged in June 2025 as possibly compromising neutrality) records several objections. Abroad, it says the wave "has frequently been described as a 'cultural invasion'" in China, where restrictions "have limited the number of Korean TV dramas shown", and it describes protests in Japan against Korean imports and hostile treatment of K-pop fans in several countries. At home, it says historical-accuracy criticism led to boycotts and cancellations of *Snowdrop* and *Joseon Exorcist*, which links to the question of accuracy in Chapter 6's sageuk. On the industry itself it states: "A series of high-profile suicides by Korean actors and idols highlighted the industry's harsh working conditions." I report this as the article's statement and add no detail, since it gives none in the part I read.

The government also appears as a promoter: the article says "the South Korean government promoted hallyu to increase its cultural soft power" and, from the earlier reading, describes the 1999 Basic Law for Promoting Cultural Industries. The funding itself is not described in the parts I read. Putting these together is my own observation: the boom was helped by the government, by streaming companies and by fans, and it has been criticised from several directions.

Gaps in what I read

The *Squid Game* stretch I read says nothing about its budget, the Netflix deal, dubbing or the subtitle dispute (a reference title mentions "English subtitle translations" and gives no detail). There was no Wikipedia article on Netflix in South Korea under the name I tried. I did not read the unread parts of the articles on the Korean Wave (the last 62,000 characters) and on *Squid Game* (the last 89,000). I give no account of Disney+, Tving's own growth or other platforms, because the parts I read do not cover them. I have not written about *The Uncanny Counter* here beyond Chapter 7.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe the two routes by which Korean screen work reached the world, naming two festival or award milestones and two early streaming steps with their dates.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Using *Crash Landing on You*, explain how a drama can be released on a Korean channel and on Netflix at once, and give the budget, the filming places and the two different ratings figures, with a note on why they differ.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Give three Netflix numbers for *Squid Game* or *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*, explain why they cannot be compared directly, and describe two criticisms of the Korean Wave from the article.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Festivals:** *Oldboy* Grand Prix 2004; *Parasite* Palme d'Or 2019 and four Oscars; Song Kang-ho Best Actor, Cannes 2022
- **Streaming steps:** Netflix offered Korean dramas from November 2008; DramaFever 2009 to 2018; Viki in 70 languages
- ***Crash Landing on You*:** tvN, 14 December 2019 to 16 February 2020; 16 episodes; Netflix in over 190 countries; about US$20 million; finale 21.7 percent
- ***Squid Game*:** first Korean drama to top Netflix's weekly global chart; number one in 94 countries; 111 million households in 17 days; 142 million in 28 days; first non-English series to win at the SAG Awards
- ***Extraordinary Attorney Woo*:** 348.15 million viewing hours; "most viewed non-English show globally" for two weeks of July 2022
- **Criticism:** "cultural invasion" in China; protests in Japan; accuracy boycotts at home; harsh working conditions

- **Check:** Netflix's own figures, the units and the status of the announced sequels

Next chapter: Park Eun-bin: A Career in Dramas, which follows one actress through the shows named in this course and others.

K-Drama and Korean Film

Course 1 · Chapter 10 · Park Eun-bin: A Career in Dramas

The last chapters of this course were about the system: the channels, the streaming services, the directors. This chapter follows one working actress through it. Park Eun-bin's career runs through nearly everything the course has described: child roles on the big networks, a cable hit, a terrestrial drama about baseball, a historical drama on Netflix, a legal drama that became a global streaming success, and a musical fantasy. It was added to the course at a reader's request, and it stays with her screen work as the sources list it.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> The facts come from the English Wikipedia articles on Park Eun-bin (the first 100,000 characters of about 104,000), *Hello, My Twenties!*, *Hot Stove League*, *The King's Affection*, *Castaway Diva* and *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* (Chapter 7). I read no interviews, reviews or books. Several of the articles contain inconsistencies and source tags, which I note. The chapter covers her screen career only; it does not describe her private life, and it does not judge her performances, since the articles' praise is opinion.

Titles You May Know Two Ways

Korean dramas often travel under more than one English title, and two of this chapter's shows do. A reader told me the Netflix names, and I checked them against the articles:

- ***Hello, My Twenties!*** is the title of the English article, which was reached from "Age of Youth". Its infobox lists *Age of Youth* too, and gives the Korean title as *Cheongchun sidae*, which it translates literally as "Age of Youth". So the two titles are the same show. The article does not mention Netflix.
- ***Hot Stove League*** is the English article's title, with *Stove League* given as the translation of the Korean *Seutobeu rigeu* and used in its awards tables. The article does not mention a Netflix title, so I can report only that both forms appear.

Child and Supporting Roles, 1996 to 2016

The Wikipedia article says she "began her career as a child model in 1996", started acting at age five, and made her television debut as a child actress in *White Nights 3.98* (1998). Her early television work was mostly younger versions of adult characters, including *Empress Myeongseong* (2001), *Queen Seondeok* (2009), *Dream High* (2011, a cameo) and *Secret Door* (2014). Her first leading role was *Operation Proposal* (2012). On film, the article lists *Death Bell 2: Bloody Camp* (2010) and a cameo in *Secretly, Greatly* (2013).

Hello, My Twenties! (Age of Youth), 2016 to 2017

The article on her says the cable drama *Hello, My Twenties!* (2016 to 2017) gained her recognition. Its own article describes a "slice-of-life story about five girls who live together in a sharehouse" called "Belle Epoque", reflecting issues younger people in South Korea face.

- **Channel and run.** JTBC, 22 July 2016 to 7 October 2017: season 1 of 12 episodes and season 2 of 14, so 26 in all.
- **Her role.** Song Ji-won, in both seasons: "a quirky adventurous roommate who claims to have the ability to see ghosts", listed as a 22-year-old journalism major.
- **Ratings.** Season 1 averaged 1.6 percent nationwide; season 2 averaged 3.1 percent, with its highest episode at 4.069 percent (a different measure). The article reminds the reader that cable channels typically draw smaller audiences than free-to-air ones, which links back to Chapter 7. The ratings tables in the article are hard to read, since the columns do not match the values.

The Rise: 2017 to 2021

The article's heading for the next period is "Career rise and breakthrough", though it never says one title was the breakthrough. It lists *Judge vs. Judge* (2017 to 2018), *The Ghost Detective* (2018), *Hot Stove League* (2019 to 2020), *Do You Like Brahms?* (2020) and *The King's Affection* (2021), and says the last, together with *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*, brought her international recognition.

Hot Stove League, 2019 to 2020

- **Channel and run.** SBS, a terrestrial network, 13 December 2019 to 14 February 2020; 16 episodes of 59 to 63 minutes.

- **The story.** A baseball team called the Dreams, "placed last in the league for the past four seasons", hires Baek Seung-soo as general manager despite "zero experience managing a baseball team".
- **Her role.** Lee Se-young, the Dreams' operations manager, "the only female manager in the league".
- **Ratings.** The article's table gives an average of 12.5 percent nationwide, though it says the exact average is unknown because some ratings were not recorded. The finale reached 19.1 percent nationwide (20.8 percent in Seoul). It also gives an average of 2.747 million viewers, a different measure.
- **Awards listed.** Best Drama at the Baeksang Arts Awards, and at the 33rd Grimae Awards Best Picture (Drama) and Best Actress for Park Eun-bin, with Namkoong Min named Best Actor. Some award rows in the article are formatted ambiguously.

The King's Affection, 2021

- **Channel and run.** KBS2, a terrestrial network, 11 October to 14 December 2021, Mondays and Tuesdays at 21:30; 20 episodes of about 70 minutes. It "premiered worldwide on Netflix on the same day".
- **The story.** It is based on the manhwa *Yeonmo* by Lee So-young. A twin girl is raised in secret and takes the identity of her brother, the crown prince, after he is killed by mistake, and she has to hide her sex while handling court politics.
- **Her role.** The article credits her with the single adult role "Crown Prince Lee Hwi / Dam-yi / Yeon-seon". The child versions of both twins are played by Choi Myung-bin.
- **Ratings and reach.** It debuted at 6.2 percent nationally and peaked at 12.1 percent for episode 20 (Nielsen Korea). The article says it reached Netflix's global Top 10 and was fourth on the non-English list on 23 November.
- **Awards.** It won the International Emmy for Best Telenovela in 2022, and the article calls it "the first South Korean television series to win an International Emmy Award". Park Eun-bin's own article lists KBS Drama Awards, including a 2021 Top Excellence Actress award.

Extraordinary Attorney Woo, 2022

Chapter 7 gave the facts of the series: ENA, 29 June to 18 August 2022, 16 episodes, and a first-episode rating of 0.948 percent that grew to 17.534 percent for the finale. She plays the title role, Woo Young-woo, and her article says she "reportedly declined" the part at first, a hedged claim. Chapter 9 gave the streaming figures: 348.15 million viewing hours after the finale, and

"the most viewed non-English show globally" for two weeks in July 2022. Her article adds that it ranked in Netflix's top 10 non-English series for 21 weeks.

Two awards in the series' own article name her: the Popularity Star Award at the APAN Star Awards 2022 and Best Actress at the Asia Contents Awards (Busan International Film Festival). The articles disagree on APAN: her article's list of awards does not include it, while the series article does. The series won the Baeksang Arts Awards Grand Prize for Television in 2023, and her article lists a Baeksang television Grand Prize at the 59th ceremony. I cannot tell from either whether those two entries are the same honour.

Castaway Diva, 2023

- **Channel and run.** tvN, a cable channel, 28 October to 3 December 2023, Saturdays and Sundays at 21:20; 12 episodes of about 80 minutes.
- **The story.** The article calls it a coming-of-age, musical and romantic comedy. Seo Mok-ha, played by Park Eun-bin, dreams of becoming a diva or K-pop idol, is stranded on an uninhabited island after an accident, and returns after 15 years to become manager to her former idol, Yoon Ran-joo (Kim Hyo-jin). A secondary theme is domestic violence and escaping it.
- **Ratings.** A nationwide average of 6.794 percent, from 3.172 percent for episode 1 to 9.002 percent for the finale.
- **Streaming.** The article says it is "available for streaming on Netflix in selected regions", but the claim rests on a July 2023 tweet that used a "working title", so current availability is unconfirmed.
- **Awards.** The drama won a TVING award and a MAMA "tvN of the Year" award; the article lists no award for Park Eun-bin.

Since Then

Her article also lists films, *The Witch: Part 2. The Other One* (2022) and a special appearance in *Road to Boston* (2023), and later series: *Hyper Knife* (2025), *The Wonderfools* (2026, a Netflix series) and *Spooky in Love* (2026). It gives me no details on these beyond the titles, and its description of *Hyper Knife* carries a source-quality tag, so I say no more.

> **A career as a map of the system**

This section is my own reading, and not from the articles. Her roles in this chapter fall into every kind of outlet Chapter 7 described: a cable channel with a small audience (JTBC and tvN, and ENA for the one that broke records), two terrestrial networks (SBS and KBS2), and, for *The King's Affection* and *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*, Netflix release alongside or after the Korean broadcast. The ratings are not comparable, because the measures differ and the bodies that count them changed over the years (Chapter 7), but the shape is clear in the articles' own numbers: the most-watched figures belong to the terrestrial drama (19.1 percent for the *Hot Stove League* finale), while the widest reach belongs to the streaming release.

Gaps and problems in what I read

Her article contains problems I could not resolve. The cited source for a 2009 award for *The Iron Empress* is about someone else's wins. The film *The Witch: Part 2* is listed as 2022 but its cited casting announcement is dated December 2020. I did not read the last 4,650 characters of her article, and the articles on *The King's Affection* and *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* were read only in their first 100,000 characters. I did not read her articles on *Judge vs. Judge*, *The Ghost Detective* or *Do You Like Brahms?*, so I describe those only by title. The articles do not say which of her works the Netflix titles you know were applied to, other than as given above.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Describe Park Eun-bin's early career, from 1996 to 2016, naming her television debut, her first leading role and the cable drama that the article says gained her recognition, with its channel and dates.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Compare *Hot Stove League* and *The King's Affection*: channel, dates, episode count, her role, one rating figure and one award each, and say which is a terrestrial network and

how Netflix figured in only one of them.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Summarise *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* and *Castaway Diva* in two sentences each, naming the channel, the dates and one number from each. Then explain two ways in which the articles disagree or leave a point unconfirmed.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Early career:** child model 1996; debut *White Nights 3.98* (1998); first lead *Operation Proposal* (2012)
- ***Hello, My Twenties! / Age of Youth*:** JTBC, 22 July 2016 to 7 October 2017; 26 episodes; role Song Ji-won
- ***Hot Stove League*:** SBS, 13 December 2019 to 14 February 2020; 16 episodes; role Lee Se-young; finale 19.1 percent
- ***The King's Affection*:** KBS2, 11 October to 14 December 2021; 20 episodes; Netflix the same day; International Emmy 2022
- ***Extraordinary Attorney Woo*:** ENA and Netflix, 2022; 16 episodes; role Woo Young-woo; 21 weeks in Netflix's non-English top 10
- ***Castaway Diva*:** tvN, 28 October to 3 December 2023; 12 episodes; role Seo Mok-ha; average 6.794 percent
- **Check:** the APAN and Baeksang entries, and the Netflix titles for *Hot Stove League*

Next chapter: Capstone: A Screen Industry Argues With Its Own History, which looks back across all ten chapters at the questions that kept returning.

K-Drama and Korean Film

Course 1 · Chapter 11 · Capstone: A Screen Industry Argues With Its Own History

Ten chapters, a century of screens. This chapter does not add new facts. It follows four questions that came up again and again, in different forms and in different decades, and shows how the chapters answer them. The title is a suggestion for a way of reading, and not a claim from any source: the screen industry keeps going back to the same problems.

> **How this chapter was checked**
>
> Every fact below was drawn from the earlier chapters of this course, which took them from the Wikipedia articles named there. I read no new sources for this chapter. The grouping into four threads, and the sentences marked as my reading, are mine and unverified. Where a chapter noted that its source hedged or disagreed with itself, that caution comes with the fact.

The Threads, Chapter by Chapter

Chapter	Control	War and division	Class and money	The record
2 Silent and colonial	Japanese-run studios; censorship; propaganda films	1919 protest in the plot of *Arirang*	Cinemas and studios as business	*Righteous Revenge* and *Arirang* lost; "first" disputed
3 Golden age	1962 Motion Picture Law	Korean War; North Korean film	*The Housemaid*, *Madame Freedom*	14 war-era films all lost
4 Censorship years	1972 and 1973 controls; Shin Sang-ok	1978 abduction story	Television as rival	Conflicting launch dates
5 New Korean Cinema	1984 and 1986 laws; the quota	*Shiri*, *Joint Security Area*	Chaebol in, chaebol out	Uncited attendance figures

Chapter	Control	War and division	Class and money	The record
6 to 7 Television	Broadcast review; consolidation	Historical dramas	Cable versus terrestrial	Rating bodies changed
8 to 10 Directors, streaming, one actress	Kim Ki-duk's career and the law	*Crash Landing on You*	*Parasite*, *Squid Game*, budgets	Netflix's own figures

Thread One: Who Controls the Screen?

From the first films, the state is in the story. Under Japanese rule, K-Drama and Korean Film 2 showed Japanese-run studios, live narrators who could add satire until sound ended it, and propaganda films such as *You and I* (1941). After liberation, K-Drama and Korean Film 3 reported tax exemption and foreign aid for the industry in 1953, and then the 1962 Motion Picture Law, which cut domestic production companies from 71 to 16 within a year. K-Drama and Korean Film 4 reported the 1972 review of broadcasts under the Martial Law Decree and the 1973 Korean Motion Picture Promotion Corporation, whose purpose the article called control, and a 1981 verdict that "No country has a stricter code of film censorship than South Korea." K-Drama and Korean Film 5 reported the 1984 law that allowed independent producers and the late-1980s end of script censorship, "officially", with producers "unofficially" expected to hand over copies.

One instrument turns up on both sides. The screen quota, first enacted in 1967, was the rule that protected domestic film from foreign competition, and K-Drama and Korean Film 5 reported the argument that success in the late 1990s was "largely due to" it. The government cut it from 146 days to 73 as part of trade negotiations, and film workers protested in 2006. And Lee Chang-dong, the director of K-Drama and Korean Film 8, was a minister who proposed a quota for independent film and then halved it. That the same device could shield an industry and be given up in a trade deal is the sort of argument the title of this chapter refers to.

Thread Two: War and Division

The division of the peninsula runs through the course as a subject and as a loss. As a loss, K-Drama and Korean Film 3 reported that only 14 films were made during the Korean War and that "all of the films from that era have since been lost". As a story, the 1990s and 2000s turned to it: *Shiri* (1999) has a North Korean sniper in Seoul, and *Joint Security Area* (2000) investigates a shooting at a guard house between the two sides, as K-Drama and Korean Film 5 described. The same subject is in K-Drama and Korean Film 9's *Crash Landing on You*, a love story across the border that Netflix distributed in over 190 countries, and K-Drama and Korean Film 4's story of Shin Sang-ok and Choi Eun-hee, whose 1978 abduction and 1986 escape the articles give with North Korea's denial.

My reading is that the division is both a theme and a limit on what could be said. The sources do not state this, and what they do state is narrower: the articles record the films, the dates and the plots, and nowhere do they say that the subject was safe or unsafe at any time.

Thread Three: Class and Money

Several of the best-known works are about class. *The Housemaid* (1960, K-Drama and Korean Film 3) is about a household broken by someone from outside it; the article on Bong Joon-ho (K-Drama and Korean Film 8) lists "social and class themes" first in his style, and reports him as saying that *The Housemaid* inspired *Parasite*. *Squid Game* (K-Drama and Korean Film 1 and 9) is about indebted people playing for a prize, and its article says the creator Hwang Dong-hyuk drew on observed capitalism and class struggle in South Korea. I make the link between the three; the articles state only the facts.

Money shapes the screens in other ways the chapters recorded. Samsung released the first chaebol-made film in 1992 and helped fund *Shiri*; after the 1997 crisis "many chaebols began to scale back" (K-Drama and Korean Film 5). A cable drama can cost about US$20 million, as *Crash Landing on You* did, and *Parasite*'s budget was listed at US$11.4 million. The creator of *Squid Game* cut his player count from about 1,000 for budget reasons (K-Drama and Korean Film 9). And K-Drama and Korean Film 7 showed that the channel matters: the cable channels that "normally have a relatively smaller audience" produced the records of *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* and *The Uncanny Counter*, which K-Drama and Korean Film 10 follows through one actress's career.

Thread Four: How Much of the Record Survives?

This is the thread under all the others. *Righteous Revenge* (1919) and *Arirang* (1926) are lost, so claims about them are descriptions of films nobody can check (K-Drama and Korean Film 2). The "first Korean film" label is disputed and the claims for the first cinema compete (K-Drama and Korean Film 2). Even recent figures disagree: the Korean drama article contradicts itself on cable ratings, the television article on launch dates, and the *Squid Game* article mixes households, views and hours (K-Drama and Korean Film 4, 7 and 9). The rating bodies themselves changed over the years, so a 1998 and a 2022 rating are not strictly comparable (K-Drama and Korean Film 7).

The habit the first chapter proposed (separate what survives from what is described, treat "first" with care, watch the hedges) turned out to be the main method of the course.

Open Questions

- **What caused the 1990s revival?** K-Drama and Korean Film 5 gave the end of censorship, the chaebol, the festivals and the quota. The sources do not weigh them against each other, and I cannot.
- **How should a career be judged?** Na Woon-gyu worked under Japanese rule and his article says allegations of working with the Japanese "do not seem to have harmed" his reputation; Shin Sang-ok's story is contested; Kim Ki-duk's case is reported as accusations and legal outcomes. The course reported each without a verdict.
- **How far can a streaming company's figures be trusted?** They are the company's own and in units that are hard to compare.
- **What is a "Korean" film?** Studios in the silent era were Japanese-operated, and some of Bong Joon-ho's films were co-productions, though his article says all were South Korean productions. The sources raise the question and do not answer it.

What This Course Left Out

It left out K-pop, webtoons and festivals as subjects, the politics of Korea, and most of North Korean cinema beyond a short factual note. Animation appears only as two first-of-their-kind titles (K-Drama and Korean Film 3). Women directors are not covered, nor are documentaries or the independent scene. The "second lead", soundtracks, product placement and tropes of K-dramas were not in the sources I read, and the rest of the long articles on Korean drama, *Squid*

Game and the directors were unread. A reader could take any of these as the start of a second course.

Exercises

EXERCISE 1

Trace the question "Who controls the screen?" through four moments in the course, with dates, and explain how the screen quota was used both to protect and to bargain.

→ Solution

EXERCISE 2

Choose class or division as a theme and name three works from the course that deal with it, saying for each what the chapter reported (and what is my reading and not a claim from a source).

→ Solution

EXERCISE 3

Give four examples from the course of a source being lost, disputed, contradicted or measured in different units, and say what habit from Chapter 1 each one calls for.

→ Solution

Quick Reference

- **Control:** Japanese rule; 1962 law (71 to 16 companies); 1972 and 1973 controls; 1984 and 1986 laws; quota 1967, 146 to 73 days
- **War and division:** 14 war-era films all lost; *Shiri* (1999); *Joint Security Area* (2000); *Crash Landing on You* (2019)

- **Class and money:** *The Housemaid* (1960); *Parasite* (2019); *Squid Game* (2021); chaebol and budgets
- **The record:** lost films, disputed firsts, conflicting figures, Netflix's own numbers
- **Method:** separate surviving from described; treat "first" with care; watch the hedges

Where next: this completes *K-Drama and Korean Film*. The planned Korea courses on K-pop, history, cookery, literature, webtoons, taekwondo and festivals can build on the same method.