



History and Development of Korean Cinema

An overview of its history and development from early beginnings to global success.

Introduction


Korean cinema's journey reflects the nation's historical, social, and political changes over the past century, culminating in its current global prominence.





01

Early Cinema

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Japanese colonial influence

During the Japanese occupation (1910-1945), Korean cinema faced restrictions that stifled creative expression. Despite censorship, filmmakers used subtle techniques to convey national identity and resistance, leading to a unique cinema style developed in secret.

First Korean silent film

The Korean film industry began with the release of 'Fight for Justice' in 1919, signifying the start of national cinema. This was followed by 'Arirang' in 1926, which became a poignant symbol of the Korean struggle against colonial rule and represented the burgeoning spirit of Korean identity in film.



1. "Arirang" (Song) – The Korean Folk Anthem

A **traditional Korean folk song**, often considered Korea's unofficial national anthem.

Originates from the **Joseon Dynasty** and has many regional versions.

Symbolizes **sorrow, resilience, and national identity**.

Recognized by UNESCO as **Intangible Cultural Heritage** in 2012.

Frequently used in films, sports events, and political contexts.

1. Core Meaning of "Arirang"

Some interpretations suggest *Arirang* could mean "a path of pain and hardship" or "crossing over a mountain pass" (as in the lyrics).

The word *Arirang* itself has no direct translation but is believed to express **longing, sorrow, and resilience**. Some theories suggest:

"Rang" (랑) may refer to a dear one, a companion, or simply function as a melodic ending.

"Ari" (아리) could mean "beautiful" or "sad."

2. Semantic Themes in the Song

Separation & Longing → "If you leave me, you will suffer." (*이별하면 고생한다*)

Sorrow & Hardship → "Crossing the Arirang pass" symbolizes struggle.

Resilience & Hope → Despite sadness, the song carries a sense of moving forward.

Universality → The flexible lyrics allow for different emotional interpretations (love, nationalism, personal hardship).



3. Pragmatic and Cultural Semantics

National Identity → Used in resistance movements, Olympic ceremonies, and unification efforts.

Personal Emotions → Can be sung in a **sad or celebratory** tone, depending on context.

Intergenerational Meaning → Different versions (Jeongseon, Jindo, Miryang) carry **regional** and **historical** variations in nuance.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67Tg7JwdepM&t=113s>

2. "Arirang" (Movies) – Different Film Versions

Arirang (1926) – A silent film by Na Un-gyu, symbolizing Korean resistance under Japanese rule.

Arirang (2011) – A documentary by Kim Ki-duk, reflecting on his struggles as a filmmaker.

Other films have also used *Arirang* as a title, referencing the folk song's deep emotional and cultural meaning.



How They Connect

The **1926 film** was named after the song, reinforcing its message of national struggle.

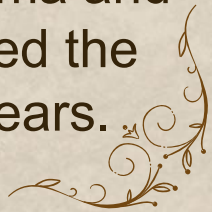


The song is often featured in Korean movies as a **symbol of nostalgia and identity**.



Censorship challenges




During the Japanese colonial period, strict regulations curtailed filmmakers' creativity, forcing them to work under tight restrictions. Censorship continued post-liberation, especially under authoritarian regimes, leading to a reliance on safe genres like melodrama and action films. This environment stifled innovation and limited the diversity of narratives in Korean cinema during critical years.



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02

Golden Age



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Post-liberation landscape

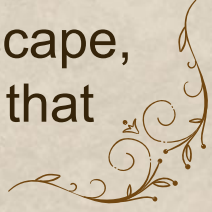
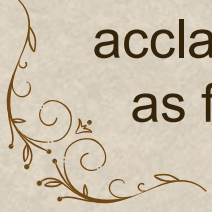
After Korea's liberation in 1945, the film industry faced challenges due to the Korean War. Despite this, the 1950s and 1960s marked a period of artistic awakening, where filmmakers started to explore deeper social themes and personal narratives. This era produced numerous classics that not only entertained but also reflected the turbulent social climate of the time.



Influential directors



Directors like Shin Sang-ok and Kim Ki-young became pivotal during the Golden Age, crafting films that resonated with public sentiment. Their works integrated innovative storytelling techniques, challenging societal norms while gaining critical acclaim. This period also saw a growth in the artistic landscape, as filmmakers experimented with new styles and genres that would define Korean cinema's identity.



Social anxieties in film

Films from this era often reflected the social anxieties of Korean society, addressing themes such as poverty, moral decay, and familial issues. Cinematic narratives highlighted the struggles of ordinary people during rapid social changes, effectively using cinema as a mirror to society. The emotional depth and artistic exploration in these films allowed them to resonate with audiences on a personal level.



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03

Modern Korean Cinema

The New Wave (1990s–2000s)

- **Democratization:** The **1980s-1990s democratization of South Korea** had a profound impact on cinema, leading to more **freedom of expression**.
- **The Korean New Wave:** A movement marked by a focus on **realism** and **artistic expression**, with films that were more **bold** in tackling social issues.
 - **Popular Films:**
 - **"Peppermint Candy" (1999)** by Lee Chang-dong, addressing the effects of Korea's political turmoil.
 - **"Oasis" (2002)** also by Lee Chang-dong, dealing with themes of love and societal prejudice.
- **Emerging Genres:** The 2000s saw an explosion in popular genres like **action, horror, and romantic comedies**.

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04

Global Recognition

Korean Wave (Hallyu) (2000s–Present)

- **Korean Wave (Hallyu):** Korean films began gaining international recognition with **global audiences** and **critics**. This period also coincides with the rise of **K-pop** and Korean TV dramas.
- **Bong Joon-ho's "Parasite" (2019)** made history by becoming the first **non-English language film** to win the **Academy Award for Best Picture**.
- Other international hits include *"Train to Busan"* (2016), a **zombie horror film** that also explored social issues.
- **Themes of Social Issues:** Modern Korean cinema often explores themes of **class disparity, societal pressures, and the complexities of identity**.
- **Film Festivals:** Korean cinema continues to dominate at major international film festivals, with directors like **Lee Chang-dong** and **Hong Sang-soo** maintaining critical acclaim.

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05

Modern History

타짜

최정호 감독의 걸작

큰거 한판에 인생은 예술이 된다!

조승우 김해수 백윤식 유해진 www.tazza2011.co.kr 추적대거림



Tazza: The High Rollers (2006) – It's about a man who enters the world of high-stakes gambling and poker, facing tough opponents and trying to rise to the top.

Tazza: The Hidden Card (2014) – The sequel follows the next generation of characters involved in risky gambling games, seeking money and respect.

Historical Context of "Tazza"

•Hwatu Gambling:

- Korean card game *Hwatu* has historical roots from Japan.
- Widely popular in 20th-century Korea, it became central to illegal gambling rings.

•Underground Culture:

- Reflects the reality of illegal gambling and **organized crime** in post-war Korea.
- Gambling was common in Korea despite being illegal, linked to **poverty** and survival.

Card Set-1



January-Pine



February- Plum



March- Cherry



April- Wisteria



May- Iris



June- Peony

Cultural Significance of "Tazza"

•Class Struggle and Greed:

- The film highlights **economic disparity**, **social mobility**, and **betrayal**, common in post-war and industrialized Korea.

•Modernity vs. Tradition:

- Depicts the tension between **traditional gambling** and **modern Korean law**.
- Showcases the clash between **old cultural practices** and **contemporary society**.





<https://youtu.be/IVudO9x8fbQ?si=9kZXT7OD9Fxi5B5S&t=145>

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Conclusions

Korean cinema's evolution from its early struggles through the Golden Age reflects a resilient culture. The blending of artistic creativity and social commentary has enabled the industry to flourish, captivating global audiences and shaping contemporary narratives.