



THE KOREAN WAVE AS VIEWED THROUGH THE PAGES OF THE NEW YORK TIMES IN 2006 THE KOREAN WAVE AS

*This booklet is a collection of 52 articles  
selected by Korean Cultural Service New York  
from articles on Korean culture  
by The New York Times in 2006.*

# THE KOREAN WAVE

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## *As Viewed Through the Pages of The New York Times in 2006*

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# FOREWORD

A war-torn country a mere half-century ago, South Korea today stands at the doorstep of the Group of 8 nations in economic terms. While its traditional strengths in shipbuilding and steel production continue to bloom, the likes of ultra-modern mobile phones and visually tantalizing flat-panel televisions have added greater fuel to the world's tenth largest economy. And, these electronic gadgets that are seen across the world from North America and Europe to the Middle East and Africa are proving instrumental in another area of tremendous growth: South Korea's pop culture.

Beamed through televisions, computers and mobile phones, South Korean music, TV shows and movies have attracted the hearts and minds of Asians, whether in Japan, China or South-East Asia. South Korean soap operas grab primetime slots across Asia, their ratings are high and viewers left thirsting for more reach out for DVD's that are exported throughout the region. South Korean pop music can be heard in trendy bars and night-clubs in Beijing, Tokyo and other major Asian cities. When South Korean pop stars head overseas for concert tours, stadiums are filled. Simply, South Korean heart-throbs, such as Rain and Se7en, have replaced Hollywood stars in the hearts of Asian teenagers, while those looking to enhance their beauty most often look toward South Korean performers and actors such as Song Hae-gyo and Chun Ji-hyeon.

More internationally, South Korean films have been the spotlight of international film awards. Hollywood films may bankroll large corporations, but South Korean films have impressed and moved movie-goers who have been exposed to works by the likes of Kim Ki-duk, an artist extraordinaire, and Park Chan-wook, an unrivalled story-

teller. As a result, the two directors, along with a number of actors, have won numerous awards in Europe and Asia, not to mention filling the shelves of DVD stores in major cultural centers of the world such as New York and London.

However, these artists and performers did not come out of nowhere. They carry on a tradition left by their ancestors who have filled Korea's 5,000-year history with much sophistication and creativity that are embodied in paintings, literature, architecture and music. Certainly, today's older generation of South Koreans grew up during some of the most painful periods of Korean history, when Koreans were prohibited from expressing themselves in their own language and a devastating war brought about abject poverty. Hence, the older generation grew up nostalgic of Korea's ancient and early modern achievements. In contrast, today's younger generation are growing up creating their own culture that is a mix of Korean and Western ideas, images and sounds. And, unlike the older generations, the younger artists are taking advantage of globalized communications to seduce those in distant parts of the globe to ride the "Korean wave."

In addition to creating their own, South Korean artists and performers are contributing to the growth of Western culture as well. Hailed by the New York Times as "pioneer of video art whose work broke cultural barriers," Nam June Paik is widely considered the inventor of video art, and thrived in the West. More recently, South Korean students have been flooding the world's most prestigious institutions for classical music and art throughout Europe and the United States. The result has been impressive. Already, younger performers have won prestigious international awards, while seasoned pianists, violinists and opera singers have led internationally successful solo ca-

reers. In 2006, the Metropolitan Opera made history by selecting an Asian tenor and an Asian soprano to lead "La Traviata." Both performers hail from South Korea.

Asia is home to two thirds of the world's population, and expected to constitute a large bulk of the world's wealth in several decades. Japan has certainly received much media coverage as Asia's largest economic power. In more recent years, China has certainly swept the headlines with its expected super power status in mind. However, when Asians need time off from fuelling their respective economies, they turn on their TV's, switch on their MP3 players or log onto the Internet. And, when they do, the Korean wave surely takes up much of the airwaves and bandwidth. As one New York Times correspondent noted, "From clothes to hairstyle, music to television, South Korea has been defining the tastes of many Chinese and other Asians for the past half decade."

Many words and pages would be required to explain the cultural boom that is emanating from the Korean peninsula. Fortunately for those of us in the English-speaking world, the New York Times has been exemplary in their coverage, whether by their correspondents dispatched to Asia or by critics of all sorts based in New York. This book contains a selection of these articles, carefully chosen for their lasting value. It is hoped this book will shed some light on the contemporary culture of South Korea that is now foraying into the West. While South Korea has been known as the "Hermit Kingdom," that label should surely come under serious challenge considering the outward expansion of South Korea's contemporary culture.

Peter Hyun  
March 2007

*Peter Hyun, a former senior editor at Doubleday and the author of "Koreana" and "Darkness at Dawn," contributes to The New York Times, the International Herald Tribune and other journals in Asia and Europe.*

# MOVIES

## IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

# MOVIES

## IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

The New York Times introduced many Korean films with deep insights prior to their theatrical releases in the U.S. For example, with “The Host” and “The King and the Clown”. The Times not only explained the films but also examined the Korean society.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, MAY 28, 2006

## FILM



The director Bong Joon-ho on location for his film "The Host."

## Horrors! He Likes Ideas and Metaphors

By MARK RUSSELL

THE South Korean director Bong Joon-ho has monsters on the brain: ready to snack on your loved ones, provoke screams and provide the kind of cinematic fun you might expect from a Hollywood picture. But in a very studied way, as with all of Mr. Bong's movies, which are laden with metaphors and ideas.

"There are a whole lot of prejudices about creature movies, that they are just childish or just sci-fi," Mr. Bong said, speaking of his film "The Host," which was screened on May 21 at the Cannes Film Festival. "Those prejudices poked me and intrigued me. I took it as a challenge."

Mr. Bong has never been interested in the "Asian extreme" label that is so popular these days. Unlike peers, he has avoided hammer sprees, fishhook fun and demented sex. His previous film, "Memories of Murder" — a dark comedy about police in a country town on the trail of a serial killer — was one of South Korea's biggest critical and commercial successes, winning awards from San Sebastián, Spain, to Tokyo. "Barking Dogs Never Bite" — the

Unlike his Korean peers, Bong Joon-ho avoids demented mayhem.



A scene from "The Host," about a monster that emerges from a river in Seoul to wreak havoc.

story of a university lecturer tormented by the barking of a neighbor's dog — similarly won acclaim all over the world for its wry observations on modern life. The "extreme" label, he said, speaking in a production office here, has been useful as a marketing tool; but "before long that tendency will die out."

"The Host," easily Mr. Bong's most ambitious work, is the story of a monster that emerges from the Han River in Seoul to wreak havoc and eat a few people, and of an ordinary man who gets pulled into the fray.

With a budget of just over \$10 million, the film pales in size next to the average Hollywood blockbuster. (It's not even that large for a Korean movie anymore; the biggest films push toward the \$20 million mark.) But careful planning meant Mr. Bong could afford hundreds of effects shots that bring the monster to life.

It was his first time dealing with international effects houses, like the Orphanage in the United States and

moved, squirmed and gesticulated continually, checking his cellphone's constant flow of messages. He had been working 14 hours or more a day for months, struggling against deadlines to finish his creature feature in time. "The Host" will not be released until July in South Korea, but he ramped up the pace even more to get it done in time for Cannes.

Born in 1969 in Daegu (when he calls it "Korea's most conservative city," he leaves no doubt it is not a compliment), Mr. Bong soon moved to Seoul. He watched movies more on television than in the theaters, often on the United States armed forces channel A/FKN. On the small screen he liked a diverse range, from "The Bicycle Thief" to Sam Peckinpah films.

"The Peckinpah movies had a lot of cuts," he said. "I used to notice the cuts and imagine what was missing." But even though his father was an artist and a professor of graphic design, Mr. Bong hesitated to study film. "I was afraid to freak out my parents. That generation did not think movies were art."

Instead he attended Yonsei University's department of sociology, which in the 1980's was a famous hotbed for the democracy movement. Another highly regarded and provocative director, Im Sang-soo ("The President's Last Bang"), graduated from the same department at the same time, although Mr. Bong said the two never knew each other in those days. Park Chan-wook ("Oldboy") attended Sogang University, just down the street, around the same time.

While still in school Mr. Bong made a short film, then, after gathering the courage to freak out his parents, he spent a year in film school. Entering the movie business in the mid-1990's, he worked as an assistant director on "Seven Reasons Beer Is Better Than a Girl" (which he calls "the worst movie ever in Korea"), then a couple more movies, before getting the chance to make his own film, "Barking Dogs Never Bite."

"In the mid 1990's the Korean film industry was really open-minded," Mr. Bong said. "Hong Sang-soo and Kim Ki-duk made their debut then. Kang Je-gyu was editing his movie right next door to where I was working."

Since then Mr. Bong and Mr. Kim have grown into art-house favorites abroad, but their followings at home have all but dried up. Mr. Kang has revolutionized the film industry in Korea with his overt commercialism, smashing box office records twice now, but outside of Korea his films do not travel so well. Mr. Bong, however, continues to walk the line, balancing between the two sides without falling into either. "The multilevel, the conscious and the unconscious, is natural when I write scripts, when I come up with ideas and stories," he explained.

This layering is also what draws some of Korea's top actors to Mr. Bong. "What I like about director Bong's work is that his films are not the kind you just watch once and then leave behind," said Song Gang-ho, the star of "The Host" and "Memories of Murder." "You find a different attraction every time you watch them. Whenever I work with director Bong, it's always delightful to share his way of looking at the world. It's quite extraordinary."

For Mr. Bong, the film world in South Korea has completely changed since he started more than a decade ago. "I think over the past five or six years I've felt a radical change from foreigners about Korean films," he

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Photographs from ChunggeorahmFilm

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It was his first time dealing with international effects houses, like the Orphanage in the United States and Weta Workshop in New Zealand, and his first experience with American actors. (The United States military figures heavily in the story, which can be seen in part as an allegory for American power in the post-9/11 world.)

During an afternoon interview, Mr. Bong was dressed in a black T-shirt that read "Mise-en-scènes: Genres film festival," his hair a wiry tangle of jet black. While talking, he moved, squirmed and gesticulated continually, checking his cellphone's constant flow of messages. He had been working 14 hours or more a day for months, struggling against deadlines to finish his creature feature in time. "The Host" will not be released until July in South Korea, but he ramped up the pace even more to get it done in time for Cannes.

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For Mr. Bong, the film world in South Korea has completely changed since he started more than a decade ago. "I think over the past five or six years I've felt a radical change from foreigners about Korean films," he said. "In 2000, when I was promoting 'Barking Dogs,' all the questions were really general. But nowadays the questions are more individualized, personal."

Next up, he said, will be a small film, about a "very destructive story between a mother and a son," followed by a return to the special effects in a story based of a French comic book, but probably nothing more extreme than that.

THE NEW YORK TIMES OP-ED FRIDAY, AUGUST 11, 2006

## Here There Be Monsters

By Aidan Foster-Carter

**K**NOWING what to be scared of is, sadly, a skill we all need. But South Koreans seem a bit confused about this, judging from what's making waves in Seoul right now.

First, the real world. Last week, the semiofficial Yonhap news agency raised the alarm about a new report on North Korea's missile threat compiled by a researcher at a foreign ministry think tank called the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security. According to the author, Yun Deok-min, the July 4 missile tests that caused an international furor were just part of a major expansion of Kim Jong-il's capacity to menace his neighbors. All along its

## For South Koreans, movies are scarier than missiles.

east coast, the report noted, North Korea is building underground missile bases and silos.

As the geography suggests, the main target is Japan, including American military bases there. Mr. Yun claimed that some 200 Rodong missiles (with a range of up to 1,300 miles, enough to reach anywhere in Japan) and 50 SSN-6 missiles (range of up to 2,500 miles) are already in place. Two new bases under construction in the northeastern part of the country are thought to be for the Taepodong-2, a long-range intercontinental ballistic missile, which in theory could reach Alaska (although the July 4 test was, fortunately, pretty much a flop).

Lest South Koreans feel left out, the Dear Leader has not forgotten them. The report indicated that about 600 short-range Scud missiles are based just 30 miles north of the paradoxically named demilitarized zone and aimed at all of South Korea's strategic targets and industrial complexes. That's on top of 11,200 artillery pieces, some apparently outfitted with chemical shells, ever ready to pulverize greater Seoul and its 20 million inhabitants.

So are South Koreans scared of the menace to the north? Nope. It's summer, and they are going to the movies in droves — to scare themselves about something quite different.

"Guimul" ("The Host") is a monster movie, and a monster hit, drawing a record audience of 6 million — equivalent to one in eight South Koreans — in its first 11 days. It's about a child-snatching mutant that rears up into Seoul out of the Han River, spawned by toxic fluid carelessly discharged from — guess where — an American military base.

Harmless fiction? Not quite. The director, Bong Joon-ho, says he based it on an incident in 2000 when a mortician with the United States military was arrested over a discharge of formaldehyde. Though the incident was regrettable, the uproar it created was out of proportion. There

Aidan Foster-Carter is an honorary senior research fellow on Korea at Leeds University.

was no lasting pollution, much less any monsters.

But the theme rumbles on. The United States is returning 59 military bases to South Korea, which has complained that many have unacceptable soil pollution (Washington says it's being held to an unfair standard). The allies have been wrangling for two years about who will clean up.

Now environmental groups and anti-American partisans are milking "Guimul" for political gain, and the minister of the environment, Lee Chi-beom, says he is worried that the sentiments spurred by the movie could make it harder to reach any agreement on the bases.

There are echoes here of a 2002 case in which a United States military truck killed two schoolgirls on a narrow country road. The driver's acquittal by a court-martial led to weeks of protests and were a major factor in the election of President Roh Moo-hyun, who let it be known that he would not "kowtow" to Washington.

While the accident was a tragedy, one had to wonder why it could incite so many South Koreans to take to the streets while the daily death toll of North Korean children from famine and conditions in Mr. Kim's gulags sparked no such protests.

To an outsider, South Koreans seem to have a double standard in terms of threat perceptions. Having been fed propaganda for years by military regimes that painted North Korea as an evil monster poised to devour them, they now seem to dismiss even factual claims as cold war scare stories.

Many of them see North Korea as a slightly delinquent brother who needs to be cajoled into better manners. China, too, is viewed more positively than it is by most of its other neighbors. By contrast, American motives tend to be suspect, and wicked Japan can do nothing right. (The Roh administration's first reaction to the North's missile tests was not to condemn Mr. Kim but to criticize Japan for making "such a fuss.")

It's not self-evident, to say the least, that this perceived hierarchy of threats is in South Korea's true national interest. Without reviving the

old knee-jerk demonization of North Korea, South Koreans might at least be given pause by the foreign ministry report that says the regime "has made all-out efforts to bolster asymmetrical strengths at a time when millions of its people have died of hunger."

I suppose we shouldn't begrudge either South Koreans' yearning for national reconciliation or their summer thrills. But maybe they could think a little more deeply about where the real monsters are.



## HERE THERE BE MONSTERS

BY AIDAN FOSTER-CARTER

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Aidan Foster-Carter is an honorary senior research fellow on Korea at Leeds University.

THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2006



The film "King and the Clown" tells of a love triangle involving a tyrant, right, and his two jesters, center and left, at sword point. The men's displays of affection are mild by Western standards but shatter Korean taboos.

## Seoul Journal

## Gay-Themed Film Gives Closet Door a Tug

By NORIMITSU ONISHI

SEOUL, South Korea — "King and the Clown" lacked a single top star from South Korea's booming film industry, or the other usual ingredients of a surefire blockbuster.

And in a country where homosexuality was removed from the Youth Protection Commission's list of "socially unacceptable" acts only in 2004, the film centered on a gay love triangle in a 16th-century royal court: a young male clown torn between his love for a fellow clown and an amorous king.

But to everyone's surprise, not least the director's, in mid-March the movie became the most popular ever in South Korea's history, seen by more than 12 million people, or one in four residents. In American terms, it would perhaps be the equivalent of "Brokeback Mountain" — to which this movie has been loosely compared — grossing as much as "Titanic."

As a cultural phenomenon, "King and the Clown" has led to sometimes confused, sometimes uncomfortable discussions here about the nature of homosexuality, something that was rarely discussed publicly until a few years ago.

At the core of the movie, which the producers hope to take to the United States, are two male clowns, a masculine one named Jang Saeng and a feminine, delicate-looking one named Gong Gil, who assumes the female part in skits. Itinerant performers who depend on handouts for their survival, they are condemned to death one day for a bawdy skit insulting Yonsan, a king remembered in Korean history for his tyranny. But after succeeding in making the king laugh, the clowns are pardoned and allowed to become court jesters.

The king becomes enamored of Gong Gil, and the ensuing relationship fuels Jang Saeng's jealousy. Physical displays of affection are subtle: the king kisses the sleeping clown in one brief scene; in another showing the two clowns sleeping next to each other, Jang Saeng gently tucks in his partner.

All tame perhaps, but many here consider the movie a taboo-breaker in its matter-of-fact portrayal of homosexuality. Popular culture had long ignored gays or, in more recent years, relegated them to caricatured roles.

"One or two films tried to describe gay relationships in a serious way, but were unsuccessful commercially," said Tcha Sung-Jai, one of the country's best-known producers and a professor of film at Dongguk University. "That's why everyone in the industry was so surprised when 'King and the Clown' became a hit."

"I cried when I saw the movie,"

Mr. Tcha added, "and I'm a very strong heterosexual."

In addition to homosexuality, other previously taboo subjects, like human rights violations during South Korea's military rule and North Korea-related themes, have been broached recently in film. Movies have mirrored, and sometimes tried to stay abreast of, a South Korean society that has been socially and politically transformed in the last decade.

Until a decade ago, when a tiny gay rights movement was started by Korean-Americans on a few college campuses here, most Koreans had been completely unaware even of the existence of gays. Even though Seoul has long had two neighborhoods with small clusters of gay bars, Itaewon and Chongno, they remained hidden,



Lee Jun Ik, the director, said he was focusing on traditions of behavior, not homosexuality.

and homosexuality went unmentioned.

Then, in 2000, the issue was tossed into the public area when a well-known television actor, Hong Suk Chon, became the first major figure to declare his homosexuality. Mr. Hong was immediately dropped from his show, and his career appeared over. But in 2003, in a sign of changing attitudes, the actor began a successful comeback.

"We feel that the last 10 years is the equivalent of a hundred years because so many changes occurred in such a short period," Oh Ga Ram, an official at the Korean Gay Men's Human Rights Group, said in an interview in the organization's office in Chongno.

No other public figure has come out of the closet, and most Korean gays remain hidden. But Mr. Oh said "King and the Clown" was a "positive

step" because "there is a discourse now that did not exist before."

The discourse, though, was often confused, Mr. Oh said. Because the love triangle hinges on a feminine male clown, some viewers say the relationship is not a gay one at all. "In the minds of many Koreans now, 'pretty males' equal gay," he said.

The movie's title in Korean is more direct about the nature of the relationship: "The King's Man." Still, its director, Lee Jun Ik, was hesitant to define his movie as a gay-themed one and played it down as breaking taboos.

"This is not homosexuality as defined by the West," Mr. Lee said in an interview. "It's very different from 'Brokeback Mountain.' In that movie, homosexuality is fate, not a preference. Here, it's a practice."

Mr. Lee said he had been more interested in evoking the world of itinerant clowns, many of whom were involved in same-sex relationships.

One person the director consulted was Kim Gi Bok, 77, who is considered the last surviving itinerant clown. Mr. Kim was amused at the attention he had gotten because of the film.

"Before, we were treated as beggars, but now we are considered traditional artists," he said in an interview in Anseong, a town two hours north of Seoul, where a center to keep alive his craft was established.

Intense relationships developed among itinerant clowns, Mr. Kim said, because they worked in all-male troupes and traveled together all the time.

"It was also difficult to get a wife," he said. "We were beggars. Who would marry a beggar?"

As in the movie, a masculine clown and a feminine clown often became a couple. The masculine clown showed his love by buying his partner, called biri, a watch, Mr. Kim said.

"They would stay together all the time, sleeping in the same room, helping each other out," he said. "The biri would go into people's kitchens and even beg for food for both of them."

"Some of the biris were extremely beautiful — they had hair down to here," Mr. Kim said, pointing to his waist, as his eyes lit up at the memory. He added that some clowns who did manage to marry would sometimes leave their wives for fellow clowns.

Mr. Kim himself married and had one son. He said he, too, had biris during his life, though he said the relations had not been sexual.

"Relations between men were very sincere and genuine," Mr. Kim said. "It was an amazing, remarkable relationship, much closer than anything between a husband and wife."

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By Seokyoung Lee for The New York Times

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THE NEW YORK TIMES **OBITUARIES** THURSDAY, APRIL 13, 2006

## Shin Sang Ok, 80, Korean Film Director Abducted by Dictator

By DOUGLAS MARTIN

Shin Sang Ok, a pioneering film director who said that his life was too unbelievable to be a movie plot, what with his introducing the kiss to North and South Korean cinema, being kidnapped by a movie-loving dictator and turning up in Hollywood to create the "3 Ninjas" movies, died Tuesday in Seoul. He was 80.

The cause was complications of a liver transplant that he received two years ago, his son-in-law, Suh Dong Yeop, told The Associated Press.

Two of Mr. Shin's films were shown at Cannes, where he was a judge in 1994. He gained some recognition in the United States through showings of his work at the Museum of Modern Art and art-house cinemas, as well as through a broader American release of a horror film modeled on the Japanese Godzilla movies.

In South Korea, however, he was a major figure of that nation's film industry in the 1950's and 60's, leading some to call him the Orson Welles of South Korea. He directed at least 60 movies in 20 years, introducing techniques like the zoom lens and themes like the plight of women in Korean history. The South Korean government eventually took away his license because he refused to toe its line.

"He was a true independent filmmaker who by dint of persistence and vision built up an entire industry influencing filmmaking in southeast Asia," Laurence Kardish, senior curator in the department of film and media at MoMA, said in an e-mail message. "It is said that the Shaw Brothers of Hong Kong began making their action-filled films as a positive response to Shin's work."

Mr. Shin's greatest fame in the West came when he and his wife, from whom he was estranged, were kidnapped in 1978 by North Korean agents. When Kim Jong Il, the North Korean dictator, demanded that he make propaganda movies, he refused. After eating grass and bark in prison for five years, he was suddenly released by Mr. Kim, who told him he could make any movies he liked.

Mr. Shin made seven films before escaping in 1986 during a stopover in



A scene from "Pulgasari" (1985), directed by Shin Sang Ok. Named for a Godzilla lookalike who eats iron, the film has become a cult favorite.



The film director Shin Sang Ok.

Vienna. He and his wife turned up in Reston, Va., where their insights into Mr. Kim's personality, backed up by recordings they had secretly made, were of considerable interest to United States intelligence officers.

Mr. Shin was born in Chungjin, at the northeastern part of the Korean

peninsula, during Japan's colonial rule. He graduated from what is now the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. He started his career as an assistant production designer on Choi In Kyu's "Viva Freedom!" the first Korean film made after the country achieved independence from Japan.

He quickly became a prolific director, completing an average of more than two films a year. He also worked as a cinematographer, and in the 1960's produced about 300 movies.

One of the most famous films he directed was "The Eunuch" (1968), which revolves around incarcerated concubines and enslaved castrated men and their excruciating passions. South Korea's first onscreen kiss was in the 1958 film "Jiokhwa."

In 1976 he experienced a very public, scandal-flecked divorce from the woman he married in 1953, the actress Choi Eun Hee. (They later remarried.) He soon ran afoul of the frequently repressive government of Gen. Park Chung Hee, and his studio was closed.

In 1978 Ms. Choi was abducted by North Korea, and, when Mr. Shin went looking for her, he was kidnapped too. Mr. Shin, who in addition to turning down Mr. Kim's initial invitation to make movies glorifying Communism, further angered the leader by trying to escape.

After five years in prison, the couple, neither of whom had known the other was alive, were released.

In an interview with The Seoul Times in 2002, Mr. Shin said there was less censorship than commonly believed. He said he introduced the word love and the first kiss to North Korean movies. He also said that he made the best movie of his career in the north, "Runaway," the tragic story of a wandering Korean family coping with Japanese oppression in 1920's Manchuria. His "Pulgasari," named for a Godzilla lookalike who likes to eat iron, has become a cult favorite.

In addition to enjoying relative artistic freedom in North Korea, the couple lived in a mansion and drove a Mercedes, but Mr. Shin said he could not live happily in a place where most people suffered. He denied North Korean charges that he stole \$3 million that he had been advanced to make a film on Genghis Khan.

Mr. Shin and his wife moved to Los Angeles in 1989 after living under the protection of the Central Intelligence Agency for three years. He said that he got the idea for his humorous "3 Ninjas" movies, done for Disney, by repeatedly watching "Home Alone" and trying to think of a way to do something similar that would involve the martial arts.

He produced, directed or wrote "3 Ninjas Knuckle Up," "3 Ninjas Kick Back" and "3 Ninjas: High Noon at Mega Mountain," all under the pseudonym Simon Sheen. He returned to South Korea in 1994 and continued to produce movies there.

Mr. Shin is survived by his wife, two sons and two daughters.

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, JUNE 2, 2006

## Film in Review



Paramount Classics

Lee Jung-jae, left, and Jang Dong-gun in Kwak Kyung-taek's "Typhoon."

## Typhoon

Opens today in New York and selected cities

Directed by Kwak Kyung-taek  
In Korean, with English subtitles  
103 minutes

"Typhoon" has the largest budget of a Korean movie to date, and it shows. Grandiose and bursting with macho energy, Kwak Kyung-taek's fierce yet formulaic action film, shot in Korea, Russia and Thailand, features elaborate set pieces aboard ships and on land, persistent machine-gun fire and a booming score that conveys villainy or heroism, depending on what the scene calls for.

The film pits Sin (Jang Dong-gun), a snarling exile from North Korea who is enraged at the world, against the South Korean Kang Se-jong (Lee Jung-jae), a strait-laced navy lieutenant assigned to foil Sin's plot to unleash lethal chemicals on both North and South Korea via balloons during a typhoon.

But despite his devilish — and undeniably outlandish — intentions, Sin bares his vulnerable side when reuniting with his long-lost sister, who is coerced into acting as bait to aid in her brother's capture. He thereby secures Kang's sympathy, and audiences, too, will be rooting for Sin, since much screen time is devoted to flashbacks that trace his tragic childhood, while very little is allotted to his wooden rival.

"Typhoon" aims high but misses the emotional mark in most instances, resulting in some awkward melodramatics. Even so, it flourishes during its well-executed action sequences and commands attention almost instantaneously, though, in the end, it will be forgotten just as quickly.

LAURA KERN

"Typhoon" is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian) for extreme violence and some harsh language.

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he introduced the word love and the kiss to North Korean films.*

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, MARCH 3, 2006



From left, Kim Taewoo, Sung Hyunah and Yoo Jitae in a reunion scene.

## FILM REVIEW

## Memory, Desire and More, From Director Rarely Seen

"Woman Is the Future of Man" was shown as part of the 2004 New York Film Festival. Following are excerpts from Manohla Dargis's review, which appeared in *The New York Times* on Oct. 8, 2004; the full text is online at [nytimes.com/movies](http://nytimes.com/movies). The unrated film, in Korean with English subtitles, opens today at the Cinema Village, 22 East 12th Street, Greenwich Village.

A sense of loss permeates the wonderfully titled South Korean film "Woman Is the Future of Man," where memory, desire and raw self-interest clash against one another with startling poignancy. A story about two men and the woman they separately possessed and then each abandoned, the film was directed by Hong Sang-soo, one of the most exciting and authentically individual filmmakers to emerge on the world stage recently. Wreathed in a profound melancholy, Mr. Hong's films lyrically explore the limits of subjectivity, both its pathos and its dangers, often through different viewpoints that don't so much cancel one another out as add another tile to the mosaic of existence.

Friends from college, the two men are Hunjoon (Kim Taewoo), a film director recently returned from a sojourn in the United States, and Munho (Yoo Jitae), a university art professor. One bright winter afternoon, Hunjoon visits Munho at his home, and the men head out for a meal at a local restaurant. Awkwardness and an undercurrent of belligerence color the meal, exaggerated no doubt by the beer bottles that begin cluttering their table. When each man spots an attractive woman standing outside the restaurant, each in turn thinks back to his relationship with Sunhwa (Sung Hyunah), a painter they knew in school. After the meal, Hunjoon suggests they visit Sunhwa, who is said to be working in a nearby town, and so they head off in a taxi and into a rude awakening.

Mr. Hong has a quiet, delicate touch and what happens between Sunhwa and the men happens quietly, delicately and with enormous

feeling. There are no dramatic flourishes or lofty speeches; like quite a few of Mr. Hong's film characters, the friends drink too much and flail into the night with poignant ineloquence. There is some clumsy sex (another of this filmmaker's signatures), but a melancholic lack of connection. At one point, Hunjoon shows Sunhwa photographs that he took of their old apartment. She asks why, and he says: "Because that's the place where I treated you so badly. I wanted to go back, confront the past." She doesn't really say anything in return. Unlike the men, she doesn't cling to the past, not only because it's painful, but also because she is fully in the present.

A little more happens, but not much more. (The film runs 88 minutes and has the flavor of a short story.) By the next morning, when the three wake up in a hangover fog, you at last grasp what the men's earlier memories of Sunhwa meant, in terms of how they see women in general, but also how they see themselves. Later, Munho will tell some students that his two friends "wanted to return to their past" and that, rather absurdly, he helped them get there. For Mr. Hong, whose gracefully fractured storytelling carries surprises at every turn, our memories carry little comfort. Sunhwa understands this and so finally does Hunjoon, who tries and fails to rewrite the past with those photographs he takes. And Munho? He will learn too late the folly of clinging to lies.

"Woman Is the Future of Man" is Mr. Hong in a minor key, but I urge you to see it. Some 40 years ago, when Michelangelo Antonioni was the subject of adult conversation and mainstream debate, a film like "Woman Is the Future of Man" would have slipped easily into a New York art house. Mr. Hong is not yet the equal of Mr. Antonioni, but it has become increasingly difficult to see intellectually stimulating, aesthetically bold films like this in American theaters. None of Mr. Hong's other films have secured a theatrical release here, which is yet one more reason for you to see this film.

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, JUNE 16, 2006



Ha Ji-won in "Duelist," a film by the South Korean director Lee Myung-Se being shown at the New York Asian Film Festival, which begins today.

## For Fans of Asian Films, Two Weeks of Brash Bliss

By MANOHLA DARGIS

"Hollywood is so over. And Subway Cinema is proud to do its part to spread the word." That was 2002, and the founders of the New York Asian Film Festival had thrown down the gauntlet. Calling themselves the Subway Cinema collective, five Asian-film freaks entered the festival scene that year on a mission from God or, more accurately, the gods of cinema: entertainment or die! Uninterested in the kind of auteurist fare slated for art houses and uptown festivals, they wanted to showcase the audience-pleasing films they loved, the kind with monsters, tears and belly laughs. Art wasn't anathema, but neither was it a fetish.

Now in its fifth year, the New York Asian Film Festival (today through July 1) has evolved from the little festival that could into one of the city's most valuable events. Last year an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 film aficionados trekked to the Anthology Film Archives in the East Village, which has served as the festival's base since the beginning, to watch films from the internationally acclaimed likes of Park Chanwook and Takashi Miike. Also on tap last year was the North American premiere of the Japanese master Seijun Suzuki's delirious "Princess Raccoon," which had screened at Cannes just the month before. It was a coup for the festival programmers and because, like so many foreign-language films, "Princess Raccoon" remains without an American distributor, it was a gift to local cinephiles.

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lective — Paul Kazee, Brian Naas, Goran Topalovic, Nat Olson and Grady Hendrix, later joined by Dan Craft — combined forces after the shuttering of the Music Palace movie theater. Located on the Bowery, that legendary Chinese-language cinema showcase had been a near high holy temple, the place where dedicated moviegoers could discover, amid curlicues of cigarette smoke and vapors from what sometimes seemed like an entire dim sum brunch, the joys of Hong Kong cinema.

It was where some New Yorkers saw their first John Woo movies and others discovered "Raped by an Angel 4." It was a place for epiphanies both majestic and sordid.

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point of obsessive concern for those who believe the movie of the moment isn't "The Break-Up" but the Romanian social satire "The Death of Mr. Lazarescu." Still, despite the grim tidings — the shrinking theatrical audience, the shuttered distributors — showcases like the New York Asian Film Festival suggest all may not be lost. And Mr. Hendrix, for one, remains uncharacteristically hopeful for someone in this business.

"Kids who read manga and watch anime," he said, "they're into movies with female protagonists, they're into romance and comedy. They make it a point to seek out animes with subtitles. And at some point someone in the U.S. is going to realize that is an audience that should be served."

Over the next two weeks the festival will play 29 films, including a short, "Hair," from the South Korean director Jang Jun-Hwan, whose "Save the Green Planet" received a limited American release last year. As usual, the selections encompass a range of genres, from hardcore horror to softhearted melodrama, and include multiple premieres. Some of the films arrive laden with accolades, like the epic-size Chinese family drama "Peacock" (2005), which won a significant prize at last year's Berlin Film Festival. Directed by Gu Changwei, a cinematographer who has shot films for Chen Kaige and Robert Altman, "Peacock" follows three adult children who, beginning in the 1970's, are trying to find their way in a country not yet in the grip of Louis Vuitton knockoffs and enma.

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glimmer of social commentary tucked between its throbbing musical-and-storybook beats, but what it mostly has to offer are slick surfaces, spinning wheels and a young cast who — whether hanging off one another curbside or bouncing in the local nightclub — unintentionally provide further evidence of pop culture's homogenizing effects.

Those looking to satisfy their craving for Asian extreme cinema will find relief in "Art of the Devil 2" (2005), a sporadically amusing, gore-soaked Thai horror flick that proves you should never eat anything you haven't cooked yourself. (Oops, is that a blue lacquered fingernail in my soup?)

Far more satisfying, aesthetically if not nutritionally, is the slick, fast-moving gangster film "Company" (2002), from the well-regarded Indian director and producer Ram Gopal Varma. A sweeping, self-consciously cynical crime story about a cartel that spreads its violent tentacles from Bollywood to Hong Kong ("Yes, it stinks, but it's business"), the film is playing as part of a four-title tribute to Mr. Varma titled "No Singing, No Dancing, No Mercy."

Given the festival's commitment to genre cinema it's instructive that two of best films I've seen from this year's lineup push the limits of form almost to the breaking point. In the diverting "Cromartie High School" (2005), the Japanese director Yūdai Yamaguchi, working with an economy of means and a bountiful imagination, tracks the supremely unhinged adventures of a group of very unusual high school students. Much like the swoon-worthy South Korean

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The collective began crossing borders shortly thereafter, screening 11 films from five different countries for its first festival. As in 2002, most of the films in this year's edition are from Japan, which has a robust and, in the United States, criminally neglected national cinema. Also showing are films from Korea (seven), India (five) and Thailand, Malaysia and China (one apiece).

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The crisis in foreign-language film distribution in the United States is a point of obsessive concern for those who believe the movie of the moment isn't "The Break-Up" but the Romanian social satire "The Death of Mr. Lazarescu." Still, despite the grim tidings – the shrinking theatrical audience, the shuttered distributors – showcases like the New York Asian Film Festival suggest all may not be lost. And Mr. Hendrix, for one, remains uncharacteristically hopeful for someone in this business.

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The hushed naturalism and unhurried rhythms of "Peacock" could not be more different from the go-go frenzy of a film like "Gangster" (2005), the festival's sole selection from Malaysia. Directed by Bade Haji Azmi, this cinematic pileup – think "Amores Perros" by way of "The Fast and the Furious" and every Roger Corman cheapie you can think of – is as irredeemably absurd as it is watchable. The film offers a glimmer of social com-

mentary tucked between its throbbing musical-and-storybook beats, but what it mostly has to offer are slick surfaces, spinning wheels and a young cast who – whether hanging off one another curbside or bouncing in the local nightclub – unintentionally provide further evidence of pop culture's homogenizing effects.

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*The New York Asian Film Festival runs from tonight through June 25 at the Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Avenue, at Second Street, East Village, (212) 505-5181; and from June 22 to July 1 at the ImaginAsian Theater, 239 East 59th Street, Manhattan. (212) 371-6682. Information: subwaycinema.com.*

# HOLIDAY MOVIES/DVDS; OLDBOY

BY CHARLES TAYLOR



Tartan Films

Park Chanwook's "Oldboy" may have lost the grand prize at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival to "Fahrenheit 9/11" (reportedly by one vote), but it won what you might call the annual shock award, a dubious distinction each year at Cannes for the movie that provokes the most how-can-they-go-any-further outrage. Released here in early 2005, "Oldboy" garnered some highly enthusiastic notices and some reviews that could probably have been written on the basis of the press reports from Cannes. Those were predictably offended – or, predictably, too hip to admit being offended. Reviewers disgusted by the violence scurried to blame it on the callousness of today's culture, the elevation of pulp to the level of serious art or, in the case of Rex Reed's slam in The New York Observer, on Korea itself.

"Oldboy" is one of those movies that makes critics warn, "It's not for everyone." But to dub it a nonstop gorefest ignores the fact that the violence (most of it suggested

by deft editing), outlandishness and inevitability of the plot are the ingredients of Jacobean revenge drama. The story is just as crazy as that of "The Duchess of Malfi." A businessman (Choi Min-Sik, who is superb in the role) is held hostage in a shabby hotel room for 15 years. One day he is abruptly released, given a wallet of cash and a cellphone on which a voice tells him that he has five days to discover why he was imprisoned and who his jailer is.

Adapted from a Japanese manga (included in translation in this three-disc edition), the film reaches a pitch that might be called Guignol baroque. But instead of distancing us, the extremity draws us in, intensifying the feeling that we are watching a man battling for his soul. "Oldboy" has both the horror and release of tragedy: the feeling of being plunged into blood, then washed clean in virgin snow. (Tartan, Nov. 14, \$39.95.)



# FOR ONE TEENAGE BOY, A MOTEL IS NO WAY STATION, IT'S HOME

BY STEPHEN HOLDEN

Oh, not to be 13 again! Michael Kang's small, perfectly observed portrait of Ernest Chin (Jeffrey Chyau), a Chinese-American boy who lives and works in a dingy downscale motel operated by his mother, captures the glum desperation of inhabiting the biological limbo of early adolescence. For anyone stranded there for even a month, that limbo can feel like an eternity.

Ernest, a chubby, egg-roll-noshing youth, could stand for every geeky pubescent outsider who ever yearned for some privacy and sophistication while squirming under the puritanical thumb of a stern, watchful parent. His unsmiling mother, Ahma (Jade Wu), who runs a motor inn largely patronized by couples who pay by the hour, is a grim taskmistress who expects her son to keep the place spotless and to mop up the messes left over from the quickies he hears through the walls.

With a running time of only 76 minutes, "The Motel" knows its modest place in the cinematic scheme of things. The drama, such as it is, stems not from any conventional plot, but in the accruing of small, telling details that sustain a feeling of lives in suspension. One held glance between the mother and the son can communicate more information than any number of speeches, for underneath their resentment lies a reservoir of mutual understanding and love that's too volatile to put into words.

Ahma, abandoned by her husband, is the head of a household that also includes Ernest's bratty younger sister, Katie (Alexis Kapp Chang), and his enfeebled grandfather, Gung Gung (Stephen Chen). He is regularly harassed by Roy (Conor J. White), a bully roughly his own age, who lives with his troubled family in the establishment and pelts Ernest with racial epithets. Ernest has a serious crush on Christine (Samantha Futerman), a slightly older girl who works as a waitress in her parents' nearby Chinese restaurant. She treats him kindly but has no romantic interest.

The latest bone of contention between Ernest and his mother involves a writing contest he has entered. When he receives the news that he has won honorable mention,

she reprimands him for not telling her he had entered. Instead of being proud and supportive, she sneers at him for not coming in first. To this bitter, suspicious woman, writing is suspect because it's tantamount to telling lies.

An ambiguous older-brother figure appears in the person of Sam Kim (Sung Kang), a cocky, heavy-drinking Korean rake, down on his luck, who lurches into the movie with a prostitute on his arm and becomes a temporary resident of the motel. Befriending Ernest, Sam gives the boy driving lessons and offers ridiculous advice on seducing women. Desperate for a male role model and emboldened by Sam, Ernest begins mounting small acts of defiance against his mother.

In his brashest move, he steals her car, takes Christine for a drive, makes a comical pass and, when she resists him, tosses the keys into the woods. This incident could have amplified into full-scale melodrama, replete with tears and recriminations. Instead it is treated as another small step in Ernest's inevitable self-assertion.

"The Motel," adapted from Ed Lin's novel "Waylaid," refuses to designate heroes and villains. Everyone, even the pathetic bully, against whom Ernest eventually lashes out viciously, is viewed with a measure of compassion. Ernest may not realize it, but this stagnant period of feeling betwixt and between will soon come to end.

## *The Motel*

*Opens today in Manhattan.*

*Directed by Michael Kang; written (in English, with some subtitled Cantonese) by Mr. Kang, based on the novel "Waylaid" by Ed Lin; director of photography, Lisa Leone; edited by Colleen Sharp and David Leonard; music by Nathan Larson; produced by Matthew Greenfield, Miguel Arteta, Gina Kwon and Karin Chien; released by Palm Pictures and ImaginAsian Pictures. At the Film Forum, 209 West Houston Street, west of Avenue of the Americas, South Village. Running time: 76 minutes. This film is not rated.*

*WITH: Jeffrey Chyau (Ernest), Sung Kang (Sam), Jade Wu (Ahma), Samantha Futerman (Christine), Stephen Chen (Gung Gung) Alexis Kapp Chang (Katie) and Conor J. White (Roy).*

# ONE-THIRD

BY LAURA KERN

A paper-thin wall within a grungy East Village apartment building separates good and evil, hope and despair and Eastern and Western practice in the slightly self-enamored yet generally affecting "1/3." On one side resides a solitary Buddhist monk, on the other a teenager who beneath her pure, Catholic-school-uniform exterior is a well of torment and degradation.

Inspired in part by Dante's "Inferno," this practically dialogue-free first feature by Yongman Kim relies heavily on sound and music to set the mood, which fluctuates from soothing to unnerving, and on interesting faces, which the film's leads fortunately possess.

Ivo Velon as Chris the monk, who spends each day drawing portraits in Washington Square Park, could have carried the movie on his own. And Diana Gitelman as Lotusia, the young girl who flees her home only to end up getting paid to engage in the same sort of sadistic acts she witnessed there, is convincing as both saint and sinner.

Chris's and Lotusia's paths constantly threaten to cross (beyond the casual hallway and sidewalk run-in, and spying on each other through a peephole in the wall). When it finally seems likely to happen, the film crashes to a sudden and unsatisfying conclusion. But this is the first part of a projected trilogy and, assuming these characters' lives – or deaths – will be further explored, it's really just the beginning.

1/3

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*Directed by Yongman Kim; written by Mr. Kim and Edward Moran; director of photography, Ian Dudley; edited by Andy Montlack; production designer, Mary Frederickson; produced by Marcia Mohiuddin; released by One Third Productions. At the Village East, Second Avenue at 12th Street, East Village. Running time: 89 minutes. This film is not rated.*

*WITH: Diana Gitelman (Lotusia), Ivo Velon (Monk), Nick Raio (Detective), Eric Richardson (Lawyer), Micheal J. Burg (Photographer) and Clay Drinko (Punk).*

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Comedy of manners: A scene from "Woman on the Beach," by the South Korean director Hong Sang-soo.

## The New York Film Festival Quietly Demands Attention

At the Kaplan Penthouse: "HBO Films Directors Dialogues," a three-part series, begins at 4 p.m. tomorrow with a discussion with Stephen Frears, director of "The Queen." Other directors to appear are Michael Apted ("49 Up") on Oct. 7 and Guillermo del Toro ("Pan's Labyrinth") on Oct. 14; \$16. Two restored films by Alejandro Jodorowsky will be shown: "El Topo" (1970) on Oct. 6 and "The Holy Mountain" (1973) on Oct. 7; tickets are \$16 and \$20. At the Walter Reade Theater, "50 Years of Janus Films" will offer screenings of more than 30 films, through Oct. 26. "Views From the Avant-Garde" will feature screenings of new and

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restored films through Oct. 15. Tickets are \$10, \$7 for students, \$6 for members and \$5 for 65 and older at weekday matinees. "Scenes From the City: 40 Years of Film-making in New York" will be shown Oct. 9. "Looking at Jazz," on Oct. 11, is an evening of rare jazz films and performances by Wycliffe Gordon and other musicians, with the scholar and pianist Lewis Porter as host; \$16. Tickets for the Oct. 15 screenings of Guy Maddin's "Brand Upon the Brain!" are \$25. The Walter Reade Theater and the Kaplan Penthouse are at 165 West 65th Street. Walter Reade tickets and information: (212) 875-5600; Kaplan Penthouse tickets and information: (212) 721-6500.

sensibility, at once cynical and warm-hearted, that is unusual in the cinema of his adopted home. Following a government minister (Severin Blanchet) into disgrace — he loses his job, his mistress and his mansion all at once — Mr. Iosseliani's camera wanders among alcoholics, immigrant squatters, Orthodox priests, prostitutes, pianists and petty bureaucrats, and finds that the pursuit of pleasure is in every way superior to the pursuit of power.

"The Go Master," from the Chinese director Tian Zhuangzhuang

also, in its way, honors the impulse to turn away from politics. A restrained, elegantly photographed biopic, it traces the life of Wu Qingyuan (Chang Chen), a renowned (and real) Chinese Go player who lived mainly in Japan during the middle decades of the 20th century. War, imperialism and religious persecution occasionally challenge his commitment to the game, but never for long. In one astonishing scene, an important match is interrupted by an explosion and a shock wave: the atomic bomb has just landed on Hiroshima. "Let's continue," says Wu's mentor as he dusts off the board, and the game resumes.

The festival's main program includes a restored print of "Mafioso," Alberto Lattuada's 1962 film about Antonio (Alberto Sordi), a supervisor in a Milan factory who leaves his middle-class, modern life for a vacation in the Sicilian village where he grew up, bringing his very blond, very Northern wife and daughters along.

A lost forerunner of Hollywood's endless obsession with Italian organized crime, "Mafioso" is a revealing portrait of Italian society and an utter blast, happily blending low comedy, high sentiment, neorealism and farce — almost a film festival unto itself, and evidence that the gap between popular entertainment and artistic accomplishment has not always been so wide. Surely the bridge can be rebuilt.

# NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL QUIETLY DEMANDS ATTENTION

BY A.O. SCOTT

The Walter Reade Theater, home of the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the primary screening site for the New York Film Festival, used to be connected to the rest of the Lincoln Center complex by a wide plaza that stretched across West 65th Street. Because of the elaborate reconstruction and expansion of Lincoln Center in progress, that familiar bridge is gone, and the broad stairway that rose from Broadway over Alice Tully Hall is closed. To reach the mezzanine where the Walter Reade sits, you now must climb a narrow stairway tucked into the middle of the block (an escalator and elevators are also available), and from the top of it you look across 65th at Avery Fisher Hall and the Metropolitan Opera House as though gazing from a lonely parapet over a moat full of taxicabs.

The physical separation of the theater from its Lincoln Center siblings is temporary of course, but it suggests a metaphor for the festival, which is an increasingly unusual outcropping on the cultural landscape. Film festivals crowd the calendar and circle the globe, but New York's is different. Instead of hundreds of films, it presents a few dozen, and it presents them, for the most part, one at a time, rather than in a frenzy of overscheduling. It is neither a hectic marketplace nor a pre-Oscar buzz factory, like Cannes or Toronto, or a film industry frat party, like Sundance. Its tone tends to be serious, sober, and perhaps sometimes a little sedate, even when the movies it shows are daring and provocative.

If I may trot out another metaphor, the New York Film Festival might be compared to an established, somewhat exclusive boutique holding its own in a world of big box superstores, oversize shopping malls and Internet retailers.

If you want quantity — racks and shelves full of stuff to sort through in the hope of finding something that might fit your taste — wait for Tribeca, with its grab-bag programs and crowd-pleasing extras. The New York Film Festival, in contrast, prides itself on quality, refinement and selectivity. It is not so much programmed as curated. This selection is a form of criticism — it involves applying

aesthetic standards and deciding that some films are better than others — and to understand this festival it helps to understand that its selection committee, led by Richard Peña, the festival's program director, is made up of film critics. This year's movies were chosen by Mr. Peña; Kent Jones, associate programmer at the Film Society and editor at large of Film Comment; Lisa Schwarzbaum of Entertainment Weekly; John Powers of Vogue; and Phillip Lopate, editor of the recently published Library of America anthology of American movie criticism and an all-around man of letters.

These critics, like others in their profession, incline toward material that is sometimes described as difficult or challenging, but that requires a disciplined, active attention. In previewing the movies that will be shown over the first week of the festival — and some that will come later — I have been struck by how few of them conform to the conventions of genre and narrative that dominate American commercial cinema. The split between the domestic mainstream and the world of international "art" films has rarely seemed so wide. As the big Hollywood studios, with their eyes on the global market, strive for maximum scale and minimal nuance, independent-minded filmmakers in other countries seem to be going in the other direction. Or, rather, in their own idiosyncratic directions, forging a decentralized, multifarious cinema of nuance, intimacy and formal experimentation.

Some of them veer toward abstraction, like Marc Recha's "August Days," in which the story is a faint shadow cast by the images, which consist mainly of views of the mountains and rivers of Catalonia. Other films mix their moods in ways that complicate traditional distinctions between comedy and drama, realism and artifice, or even present and past. All of them reward a first look — even if you don't like what you see, you will have seen something new — and some may even change the way you look at things.

The director Abderrahmane Sissako's "Bamako," the most politically urgent film in the festival and also the most formally audacious, combines a bracing indictment

of the world financial system with a subtle glimpse at daily life in Africa. At the center of this film from Mali is a mock trial, during which robed lawyers argue over whether the World Bank and International Monetary Fund are guilty of increasing Africa's misery. But around the edges, as passionate speeches are made, we witness a wedding, the breakup of a marriage and the routines of work and play. The juxtaposition of the abstract and concrete, of macrocosm and microcosm, makes "Bamako" much more than the sum of its arguments. It's a film that needs to be seen, argued over and seen again.

But after "Bamako" (and maybe also "The Queen," Stephen Frears's opening-night offering about Elizabeth II), there are not many overtly political films in the first third of the program: another difference between New York and other festivals, which frequently showcase angry, earnest denunciations of injustice and war. There are other things to think about, and other ways to feel. Complications of feeling are the subject of Hong Sang-soo's "Woman on the Beach." Mr. Hong, a wry, unsparing anatomist of the romantic discontent of South Korean twenty- and thirtysomethings (with special emphasis on the failings of South Korean men), has made his most coherent and emotionally accessible film yet. On the surface the story of a short, not-too-happy love affair, filmed in a clear, unassuming style, it turns out on closer examination to be full of subtle narrative symmetries and visual patterns. It's a wicked comedy of manners in a blue key of disappointment.

Manoel de Oliveira's "Belle Toujours" is a charming, small-scale movie that exists entirely in reference to a 40-year-old film, Luis Buñuel's "Belle de Jour." It's a sequel (with Bulle Ogier in the role created by Catherine Deneuve), a homage, a parody and also a lovely meditation (by a director well into his 90's) on the passage of time and the persistence of desire.

"Belle Toujours" is one of two films at the festival featuring the great French actor Michel Piccoli (who also appeared in "Belle de Jour"). The other is Otar Iosseliani's "Gardens in Autumn," a delightful shaggy-dog comedy in which Mr. Piccoli shows up in drag. The movie is surreal in a matter-of-fact, almost offhand way, its frames pleasingly cluttered with curious objects and odd-looking people. It's in French, but Mr. Iosseliani, who moved to France from his native Georgia in the 1990's, has a droll, bawdy, earthy sensibility, at once cynical and warm-hearted, that is unusual in the cinema of his adopted home. Following a government minister (Severin Blanchet) into disgrace — he loses his job, his mistress and his mansion all at once — Mr. Iosseliani's camera wanders among alcoholics, immigrant squatters, Orthodox priests, prostitutes, pianists and petty bureaucrats, and finds that the pursuit of pleasure is in every way superior to the pursuit of power.

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graphed biopic, it traces the life of Wu Qingyuan (Chang Chen), a renowned (and real) Chinese Go player who lived mainly in Japan during the middle decades of the 20th century. War, imperialism and religious persecution occasionally challenge his commitment to the game, but never for long. In one astonishing scene, an important match is interrupted by an explosion and a shock wave: the atomic bomb has just landed on Hiroshima. "Let's continue," says Wu's mentor as he dusts off the board, and the game resumes.

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#### Also Screening

The 44th New York Film Festival, presented by the Film Society of Lincoln Center, opens tonight at Lincoln Center and continues through Oct. 15. Most films are shown at Alice Tully Hall, except the late show tonight and the closing-night film, both at Avery Fisher Hall. Tickets range from \$16 to \$40 (\$10 student rush tickets may be available at the box office the day of the screening) and are available at film-linc.com or (212) 721-6500. Information: (212) 875-5050.

#### There are also special programs in conjunction with the festival.

At the Kaplan Penthouse: "HBO Films Directors Dialogues," a three-part series, begins at 4 p.m. tomorrow with a discussion with Stephen Frears, director of "The Queen." Other directors to appear are Michael Apted ("49 Up") on Oct. 7 and Guillermo del Toro ("Pan's Labyrinth") on Oct. 14; \$16. Two restored films by Alejandro Jodorowsky will be shown: "El Topo" (1970) on Oct. 6 and "The Holy Mountain" (1973) on Oct. 7; tickets are \$16 and \$20. At the Walter Reade Theater, "50 Years of Janus Films" will offer screenings of more than 30 films, through Oct. 26. "Views From the Avant-Garde" will feature screenings of new and restored films through Oct. 15. Tickets are \$10, \$7 for students, \$6 for members and \$5 for 65 and older at weekday matinees. "Scenes From the City: 40 Years of Filmmaking in New York" will be shown Oct. 9. "Looking at Jazz," on Oct. 11, is an evening of rare jazz films and performances by Wycliffe Gordon and other musicians, with the scholar and pianist Lewis Porter as host; \$16. Tickets for the Oct. 15 screenings of Guy Maddin's "Brand Upon the Brain!" are \$25. The Walter Reade Theater and the Kaplan Penthouse are at 165 West 65th Street. Walter Reade tickets and information: (212) 875-5600; Kaplan Penthouse tickets and information: (212) 721-6500.

# FILM IN REVIEW; CONVENTIONEERS

BY NATHAN LEE

*Opens today in Manhattan  
Directed by Mora Stephens  
Not rated; 95 minutes*

In the sly new indie "Conventioners," the spectacle of Republicans swarming Manhattan plays like a plot worthy of some dystopian science fiction, or perhaps a George Romero film. So it seems to left-wing activists like Lea Jones (Woodwyn Koons), aghast at the looming 2004 Republican National Convention and determined to thwart it with sarcastic T-shirts and street theater.

While preparing for a marathon schedule of protests, Lea receives a call from David Massey (Matthew Mabe), a hunky former classmate at Dartmouth in town for a few days. A lunch date turns to flirtation that morphs into rage on the revelation that David is an apocalyptic demon from hell, or, as he prefers to phrase it, "a delegate."

Later that night, over calmer nerves and numerous shots of Southern Comfort, these polarized ideologues reach agreement about one thing: anger makes a vicious aphrodisiac. After all, the surest path to centrism lies between the sheets.

"Conventioners" tells the story of Lea and David's volatile affair not so much against the backdrop of the convention as within the event itself. Directed by Mora Stephens and produced by Joel Viertel, the film was conceived before the convention and executed as it transpired. Confrontations are staged in the middle of live protest rallies. A remarkable subplot follows the ethical dilemma of a liberal sign-language interpreter (played by Alek Friedman), assigned to President Bush's acceptance speech, who is plotting to disrupt the event. It's fascinating to watch him sweat out the performance on the floor of Madison Square Garden.

Yet the achievement of the film has less to do with guerrilla tactics (Haskell Wexler pulled the same thing off in his 1969 landmark, "Medium Cool") than with its shrewd interface of the personal and political.

# MUSIC

## IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

# MUSIC

## IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

2006 is the year when The New York Times started to highlight Korean Popstars along with Korean Classical Musicians. Prior to 2006, The New York Times articles mainly focused on Classical Musicians of Korea.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JANUARY 29, 2006

MUSIC



The Korean pop star and actor Rain, left at an October concert in Hong Kong, is looking to make a name for himself in the United States. He will perform two shows this week at Madison Square Garden. "It is an incredible honor to perform there," he said.

### A New Stage for Asia's Pop Ambassador

Because of the "multicultural flow of cultural goods around the world," there is a "new pop cosmopolitanism," according to Henry Joo-Kim, professor of comparative media studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In an essay in "Globalization" (University of California Press, 2004), Professor Joo-Kim writes that "younger Americans are discovering themselves from their parents' culture through their consumption of Japanese anime and manga, Bollywood films and hip-hop, and Hong Kong action movies."

Indeed, Michael Hong, chief executive officer of IngaAsian Entertainment, said that 60 percent of those who watch his company's Asian channels are not of Asian ethnicity. Similarly, at his company's two-year-old East West Street movie channel in Manhattan, which shows only Asian films, 70 percent of the audience is non-Asian.

There is a great deal of interest in Asian content right now," said Mr. Hong, who helped set up and promote the Madison Square Garden concert. "Rain is just the tip of the iceberg."

Mr. Park — a 26-year-old immigrant who is Rain's former manager — said that Rain will be not be officially ready to cross over until approximately October. That, according to a reportedly revised business plan, is when he is expected to achieve basic fluency in English, to release an English-language album and to make the hearts of American young women.

The performances at the Theater at Madison Square Garden on Thursday and Friday are merely a prologue. "This is for the American non-industry," said Mr. Park, "basically introducing Rain, giving a taste, and everybody is coming."

Most of the 10,000 people seeing, however, will not be non-industry. Like Julie Cho, 26, vice president of the Young Korean American Network in New York, who considers Rain "a really good dancer" and "very beautiful," they are all ready fans.

Immigrants or children of immigrants, they live in an era when technology makes it easy to connect with their homeland. South Korean entrepreneurs have long catered to the immigrant appetite for culture from back home. But what used to happen on a neighborhood level — a Chinatown dance troupe or a Queens community center — is now taking place on a much larger scale. Like Rain, foreign artists are filling mainstream venues, their lives guided by the songs, videos, television shows and films that are ever more accessible through the Web, satellite television and new media outlets targeting hyper-

net users. "It is an incredible honor to perform there," he said. And yet he is preparing himself for failure. "In the case that you meet it not loved by the American people, I will work very hard to do things and hope to please them the next time."

Rain is a well-flourishing immigrant. "He speaks let's not good at all," Mr. Park, who speaks from Los Angeles, said in fluent English. "He's always worried. He thinks he's not liked or talented. He thinks people are laughing behind his back. He wants to catch up to his cousin."

Rain's family was living in a apartment house in Seoul when his Park and Kim first met. "There was something and about him, and there still is, something cool and glossy," Mr.

He went as he expected — he kept count — 10 times by artistic management companies, Japan and again, he was told that he would never be "hot," that he was too tall and "too ugly," getting "mostly because he lacked a 'double eyelid.' Without cosmetic surgery to create a fold above his eyes — a relatively common procedure, though one often viewed as a violation of Western beauty standards — he could forget about a show business career in Korea, he was told.

By the time he presented himself for an audition at Mr. Park's performing arts academy, Rain was in a state of desperation. His mother was quite ill, and he himself had not been eating regularly.

Rain, then 26, gave the biggest and most passionate audition he could muster, nearly four hours of singing and dancing. Mr. Park (who goes by the initials J.Y. or J.Y.P.) accepted him into the JYP Academy. "He had this hunger," Mr. Park said.

"That is true," Rain said. "I was literally hungry."

Mr. Park himself had made his debut in 1984 as a "crazy, hazy, hip-hop artist from the JYP League" of South Korea. He was a backup performer who wore neo-through vinyl costumes, but he got away with being inebriated because he had got himself from a prep school, university, he went.

After finding high-powered backers for an entertainment management and production company, Mr. Park opened the academy in 1996. He aimed to discover and make stars, and Rain clearly had potential to sell on home.

"He went as a signed Rain, he asked me to help him market and explained the situation," Mr. Park said. "I saw him. 'Go, get in the car.' We went to his house, and I saw his mom lying there on the sofa. 'We got a big surgery done on her. But then she passed on so many treatments. There was something and about her, and there still is, something cool and glossy.' Mr.



Rain's producer, Joo Young Park, said the key was to be unique, not just "another couple of Asian dudes trying to do black music." Below, a scene from a rereleased Rain concert in Beijing last October.

Mr. Park said that Rain was motivated by a sense of obligation to his late mother.

"He promised his mom that he was going to be the No. 1 singer in the whole world," he said. "That's why he never parties, never drinks, never goes out and practices hours every day."

It was Mr. Park, who, with 26 CD's in his backpocket, set their global journey into motion. He took off for Los Angeles and was there to hear "being nobody." After a year, he got his first call, from Bad Boy, J. Daddy's entertainment company, requesting interest in one of his songs for the

# THE AMBASSADOR

BY DEBORAH SONTAG

Rain, a Korean pop star, actor and pan-Asian heart-throb, is preparing for two concerts at Madison Square Garden this week by studying. Day and night, an English tutor trails him through Seoul, peppering him with conversational phrases as he labors to polish his singing, his martial arts-inflected dancing and, presumably, his chest baring.

You can never be too prepared to go global. At 23, Rain, who has been labeled the Korean Justin Timberlake and the Korean Usher, is a serious and driven performer (with washboard abs, winsome looks and a Gene Kelly-like ability to leap through puddles while performing his hit song, "It's Raining"). He wants nothing less than to break down barriers, build cultural bridges and become the first Asian pop star to succeed in America.

*Big in Japan, huge in China and a legend in Korea, Asia's biggest pop star is coming to America. His fans here are already screaming.*

"The United States is the dominant music market," he said through an interpreter in a recent phone interview from Seoul. "I would really like to see an Asian make it there. I would like that Asian to be me. That's why I'm studying the language, reading up on the culture and practicing every day to correct my weaknesses."

Since his debut in 2002, Rain, whose real name is Ji-Hoon Jung, has been riding what is known as the Korean Wave. As South Korean products, from cellphones to the music known as K-pop, have swept across Asia, Koreans have coined a new term, hallyu, to describe the phenomenon. Through his leading roles in soap operas and his music, Rain has become the personification of hallyu, which some see as a high-quality regional alternative to American cultural dominance.

Rain is inspired by American pop music, but his interpretations provide, at the least, an Asian face and filter. His producer, Jin-Young Park, describes Rain's music as more "sensitive and delicate" than American R & B and says that his choreography is crisper and more precise, influenced by classical dance and martial arts.

"In Rain, Asians might see the spirit of Usher or Timberlake or even Michael Jackson, but he makes the music theirs," said Nusrat Durrani, senior vice president and general manager of MTV World. "He is a huge star in the making, but, at the same time, he is a very indigent artist and a source of local pride."

Last year, Rain sold out arenas across Korea, China and Japan, playing to more than 40,000 in Beijing and 20,000 in the Budokan in Tokyo. America, with its growing interest in Asian popular culture, from Pokémon to Bollywood, was the obvious next frontier.

But Mr. Park – a 34-year-old impresario who is Rain's Henry Higgins – said that Rain will be not be officially ready to cross over until approximately October. That, according to a meticulously devised business plan, is when he is expected to achieve basic fluency in English, to release an English-language album and to smite the hearts of American young women.

The performances at the Theater at Madison Square Garden on Thursday and Friday are merely a prelude. "This is for the American music industry," said Mr. Park, "basically introducing Rain, giving a taste, and everybody is coming."

Most of the 10,000 people coming, however, will need no introduction. Like Julie Cho, 25, vice president of the Young Korean American Network in New York, who considers Rain "a really good dancer" and "very humble," they are already fans.

Immigrants or children of immigrants, they live in an era when technology makes it easy to connect with their homeland. Small-time entrepreneurs have long catered to the immigrant appetite for culture from back home. But what used to happen on a neighborhood level – a Colombian dance troupe at a Queens community center – is now

taking place on a much larger scale. Like Rain, foreign artists are filling mainstream venues, their fans primed by the songs, videos, television shows and films that are ever more accessible through the Web, satellite television and new media outlets targeting hyphenated Americans.

Thus, word spread very quickly through New York's Korean community that a Korean pop star was coming to town. "There is definitely a sense of Rain-mania washing across the 32nd Street land here in Manhattan," Minya Oh, a D.J. on New York's Hot 97 radio station, said, referring to the city's small Koreatown.

This is not Rain's first performance in the States. He played at a Korean festival at the Hollywood Bowl last year, and Susan Kim, a sociologist in Los Angeles, regrets that she missed the show. She and her American-born children discovered Rain, whom they refer to by his Korean name, Bi (pronounced Bee), on a Korean music Web site called Bugs. Then they sought out videos of a Korean mini-series, "Full House," in which Rain plays a pop star.

As of this month, "Full House" became available with English subtitles on New York cable, too, through ImaginAsian TV, which bills itself as America's first 24/7 Asian-American network.

And soon, Rain's music videos will find a platform on MTV-K, a channel catering to Korean-Americans that will begin later this year. MTV-K will feature a diverse array of Seoul music, including hip-hop artists like M.C. Mong, boy bands like HOT and melodic harmonizers like SG Wannabe (the SG stands for Simon and Garfunkel).

Inevitably, non-Asian-Americans are discovering such easily accessible foreign culture, too. Because of the "multidirectional flow of cultural goods around the world," there is a "new pop cosmopolitanism," according to Henry Jenkins, professor of comparative media studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In an essay in "Globalization" (University of California Press, 2004), Professor Jenkins writes that "younger Americans are distinguishing themselves from their parents' culture through their consumption of Japanese anime and manga, Bollywood films and bhangra, and Hong Kong action movies."

Indeed, Michael Hong, chief executive officer of ImaginAsian Entertainment, said that 60 percent of those who watch his company's Asian channels are not of Asian ethnicity. Similarly, at his company's two-year-old East 59th Street movie theater in Manhattan, which shows only Asian films, 70 percent of the audience is non-Asian.

"There is a great deal of interest in Asian content right now," said Mr. Hong, who helped set up and promote the Madison Square Garden concert. "Rain is just the tip of the iceberg."

In the recent interview, Rain said that he had been dreaming about Madison Square Garden since he was a child imitating Michael Jackson's moves. "It is an incredible honor to perform there," he said. And yet he is preparing himself for failure: "In the case that my music is not loved by the American people, I will work very hard to fix things and hope to please them the next time."

Rain is a self-flagellating superstar.

*'In Rain, Asians might see the spirit of Usher or Timberlake.'*

"He thinks he's not good at all," Mr. Park, who spoke from Los Angeles, said in flawless English. "He's always worried. He thinks he's not blessed or talented. He thinks people are being fooled, that it's an illusion. He wants to catch up to that illusion."

Rain's family was living in a one-room house in Seoul when Mr. Park and Rain first met. "There was something sad about him then, and there still is, something cool and gloomy," Mr. Park said.

That's how the stage name came about. "I was told that when I'm dancing I give off the feeling of a rainy day," Rain said, in a speaking voice that is deep and rich.

Rain said that he first discovered "the euphoria" of performing during a sixth-grade talent show, after which he tried to hang around some professional dancers in his neighborhood. But he said they treated him terribly, finally beating him up and stealing his winter jacket.

He went on to be rejected – he kept count – 18 times by artistic management companies. Again and again, he was told that he would never be “hot,” that he was too tall and “too ugly,” primarily because he lacked a “double eyelid.” Without cosmetic surgery to create a fold above his eyes – a relatively common procedure, though one often decried as a capitulation to Western beauty standards – he could forget about a show business career in Korea, he was told.

By the time he presented himself for an audition at Mr. Park’s performing arts academy, Rain was in a state of desperation. His mother was quite ill, and he himself had not been eating regularly.

Rain, then 19, gave the longest and most passionate audition he could muster, nearly four hours of singing and dancing. Mr. Park (who goes by the initials J.Y. or J.Y.P.) accepted him into the JYP Academy. “He had this hunger,” Mr. Park said.

“That is true,” Rain said. “I was literally hungry.”

Mr. Park himself had made his debut in 1994 as a “crazy, lunatic hip-hop artist from the Ivy League” of South Korea. He was a bad-boy performer who wore see-through vinyl costumes, but he got away with being outlandish because he had graduated from a prestigious university, he said.

After finding high-powered backers for an entertainment management and production company, Mr. Park opened the academy in 1998. He aimed to discover and make stars, and Rain clearly had potential as well as need.

“As soon as I signed Rain, he asked me to help his mother and explained the situation,” Mr. Park said. “I was like,

‘Yo, get in the car.’ We went to his house, and I saw his mom lying there on this cold floor. We got a big surgery done on her. But then she insisted on no more treatment. She wanted me to spend my money on her son. He would tell her, ‘Yo, Mom, J.Y.P. has enough money to support both of us.’ She passed away a year before he debuted.”

After three years of training, Rain’s first stage experience came as a backup dancer for Mr. Park. Mr. Park, who still writes all his songs, created Rain’s first album, “Bad Guy,” in 2002. With the second album, “Running Away From the Sun,” Rain said that he began asserting himself in the realm of choreography. “By the time his third album came out in 2004, they stopped calling him little J.Y. and started calling me Rain’s producer,” Mr. Park said.

Soap operas are the engine of celebrity in Asia for Koreans, and so Rain’s move into television was a calculated one. “We saw Korean drama flowing all over Asia,” Mr. Park said. “I said to Rain, ‘Since you know how to act, we should use this to make you go overseas.’ As soon as his second TV drama, ‘Full House,’ exploded all over Asia, we went over to hit them with concerts.”

In Rain’s most recent soap opera, “A Love to Kill,” he plays a martial arts fighter. To alter his physique for the role, he told Korean journalists, he was jumping rope 2,000 times a day and eating only chicken breast and mackerel.

This kind of discipline defines him. In addition to his acting, recording and some modeling, he is finishing a university degree in postmodern music. Although unable to attend many classes, he does all the homework, he said, plus studies not only English but Chinese and Japanese, too.

MN Chan/Getty Images



Mr. Park said that Rain was motivated by a sense of obligation to his late mother.

“He promised his mom that he was going to be the No. 1 singer in the whole world,” he said. “That’s why he never parties, never drinks, never goes out and practices hours every day.”

It was Mr. Park who, with 20 CD’s in his backpack, set their global journey into motion. He took off for Los Angeles and went door to door “being nobody.” After a year, he got his first call, from Bad Boy, P. Diddy’s entertainment company, expressing interest in one of his songs for the rapper Mase. After that, the collaboration with Americans began.

Mr. Park said he believed that other Asian pop stars have failed in the United States by trying “to impersonate what was going on here.” He said that he and Rain wanted to avoid “being another couple of Asian dudes trying to do black music,” by embracing their inner delicacy and letting their Asian-ness show.

The moment is ripe, Mr. Park said. “Every market has been tapped except for the Asian market, and that’s 5 percent of America,” he said. “That’s our base. But I believe that we can move beyond that, and I believe that the American music industry needs to partner with us to make inroads into Asia, too.”

Mr. Park said that it has been easier for him, working as a songwriter in the United States, than it will be for Rain since “songs don’t have color.” But Rain is convinced that he has crossover appeal based on his own informal market research: he had women – “real American women” – climbing all over him at a bar in Los Angeles last year.

At the end of the interview, Rain was asked if he took some pride in defying those naysayers who once thought he would never be “hot.”

“Yeah, sure!” Rain answered in English, and then switched to Korean, leaving his female interpreter in a sputter of giggles.

“Um,” she said. “He say, um: ‘You have to come see me in my concert, and you have to be attracted to me!’”

*The Korean pop star and actor Rain, left at an October concert in Hong Kong, is looking to make a name for himself in the United States. He will perform two shows this week at Madison Square Garden. “It is an incredible honor to perform there,” he said.*

## CRITICS

## POP MUSIC REVIEW

*Korean Superstar*

By JON PARELES

Rain, a 23-year-old Korean pop singer who is a superstar in Asia, is out to conquer the United States next. It won't be easy.

His first step was two sold-out shows at the Theater at Madison Square Garden, last night and Thursday night. The audience on Thursday was about 95 percent Asian, at least 90 percent female and always ready to scream. Like Rain, they were following the drill of a Michael Jackson concert from the early 1990's: songs that switched between stark beats and sweet choruses, angular group dances and tough-guy preening that gave way to professions of love.

Slender and wiry, Rain, known in Korean as Bi (pronounced "bee"),

**Rain***Theater at Madison Square Garden*

also acts in soap operas. He's a product of the globalization that pumps American products through worldwide media channels. People who fear mass-market threats to local styles need look no further for an example. If there's anything beyond the lyrics that's particularly Korean about Rain's songs, it's not obvious.

On the three albums he has released since 2002, Rain and his songwriter, producer, promoter and mastermind, Jin-Young Park, have imported and digested pop-R&B from the English-speaking world, emulating it with Korean lyrics. Since Rain's voice is lower and huskier than Mr. Jackson's, he dabbles in other pop-R&B approaches: the acoustic-guitar ballads of Babyface, the light funk-pop of Justin Timberlake, the crooning of George Michael and the importunings of Usher. Seeing him onstage was like watching old MTV videos dubbed into Korean.

The moment Rain appeared onstage, he was mimicking Mr. Jackson's costumes and moves: a fitted leather jacket, a dark suit and slouch hat, the freeze-frame postures. He's a fine dancer and a passable singer.

*Who Smiles and Says, 'I'm Lonely'*

Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Rain singing the songs of his mastermind producer-promoter, Jin-Young Park, at Madison Square Garden.

At first, he tried Mr. Jackson's tense demeanor, but soon he was smiling. "I'm lonely," he announced, "I need a girlfriend," and he brought a young woman onstage from the audience, handing her a teddy bear and a bouquet of roses before giving her a chaste hug. (Perhaps with crossover in mind, the woman he chose was one of the few non-Asians in the audience.) By the end of the show Rain was dedicating a ballad to his late mother. Rain seems like a nice guy, but he doesn't have the tormented

charisma of Jackson, the relaxed sex appeal of Usher or the quick pop reflexes of Mr. Timberlake.

The show was a combination of slick video-era effects — at one point, Rain jumped, and the buildings in a video image behind him shook — and odd moments. Mr. Park took the stage repeatedly while Rain changed costumes. Speaking in hip-hop-style English, he reminded everyone that he wrote all the songs, he introduced Sean Combs (Diddy) and the teenage singer JoJo to praise Rain, and he

performed his own songs from the mid-1990's. Given his voice, he was wise to make Rain the vehicle for his newer material. The obstacle to Rain's intended United States career is that by the time Mr. Park has figured out how to imitate the latest English-speaking hit, American pop will have jumped ahead of him. Perhaps collaborators like Diddy could help Mr. Park keep Rain up to date. But for the moment, here in the United States, Rain sounded like a nostalgia act.

## MUSIC REVIEW

## An Opera Singer

By ANNE MIDGETTE

Call it enterprising. You're an opera singer who has had a notable career, and you're not being heard in New York as much as you once were. You're celebrating your 20th year onstage, and no one is rushing to acknowledge it. You didn't even get to sing at Joseph Volpe's farewell gala

### Sumi Jo

Carnegie Hall

at the Metropolitan Opera last month. What do you do? If you're the coloratura soprano Sumi Jo, you rent Carnegie Hall and give your own party.

Ms. Jo celebrated her career on Friday night with a kind of aggressive vivaciousness, a pair of leather lungs, a lot of high notes and three gowns, each more glittery than the last. Backing her up was the fine Orchestra of St. Luke's, conducted by Will Crutchfield, who led Ms. Jo's most recent New York-area appearance, in Bellini's "Sonnambula" at the Caramoor Festival in Katonah, N.Y., last summer and will conduct her there again in "I Puritani" in July.

For an opera singer, one reason to do this kind of solo appearance is to let the public see you as an individual, rather than as the character you're playing. And Ms. Jo left little doubt that the main purpose of the evening was to showcase herself. She threw out big arias with the same insouciance that she brought to her cadenzas, focusing more on entertainment than on style or musical detail. Pieces were oddly juxtaposed starting with the opening set, which put

## Gives a Party, in Celebration of Herself



Richard Termine for The New York Times

Sumi Jo performing with the Orchestra of St. Luke's at Carnegie Hall.

together a flashy Vivaldi aria with showy variations by a 19th-century composer, Heinrich Proch.

The Vivaldi aria served as an inadvertent reminder of why starting with a warm-up piece is a good idea:

Ms. Jo's pitch was approximate, and her lower register was drowned out by the orchestra. (Mr. Crutchfield, more power to him, did not let this happen in subsequent pieces.) But she got considerably better later in

*From a coloratura soprano, high notes, vivaciousness and three glittery gowns.*

the program: her intonation improved, her coloratura smoothed, and she held her concluding top notes, slightly frayed but secure, out to remarkable lengths.

But the persona that came across was that of a stereotypical diva, without any demonstration of truly compelling artistry to support it. Ms. Jo sang a host of tough pieces — "Ah vos jeux, mes amis" from Thomas's "Hamlet"; "O luce di quest' anima" from Donizetti's "Linda di Chamounix"; and, the audience's favorite, a hammed-up rendition of the aria of Olympia, the mechanical doll, from "Tales of Hoffmann." (That audience was medium-size, late arriving and generally enthusiastic.)

But emotionally, her most convincing performances were of a Korean song, "When Spring Approaches" by Lim Kungsu, and of her third encore, Puccini's "O mio babbino caro," which she performed after announcing to the audience that she was dedicating the evening to her father, who died two months ago. Here, there was a kind of connectedness and beauty that made one want to hear her sing again.

How stark was the contrast to Violetta's Act I scene from "La Traviata," badly phrased and unconvincing, which seemed, like so much of the rest, a lot of virtuosic notes. To get the opera world to pay attention may, alas, take more than an evening like this.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, MONDAY, JULY 10, 2006

CRITICS



Sumi Jo, left, as Elvira, and the bass-baritone Daniel Mobbs as Giorgio in Bellini's "Puritani" at the Caramoor International Music Festival.

## MUSIC REVIEW

**With Bel Canto's Possibilities, the Voice's Full Potential**

By ALLAN KOZINN

KATONAH, N.Y., July 8 — When Will Crutchfield began directing his Bel Canto at Caramoor series at the Caramoor International Music Festival here in 1992, he insisted on the flexibility offered in the series title. He mainly wanted to give new life to the bel canto repertoire, a distinct body of Italian opera defined historically by the careers of Rossini and Verdi, at either end, and stylistically by a focus on the beauty and the virtuosic potential of the voice, so the virtual exclusion of other theatrical and operatic values, like sensible librettos and deeply considered orchestral writing.

But Mr. Crutchfield also took the view, in common with other bel canto adherents, that comparatively few modern singers understood true bel canto singing. And while he expressed every confidence that he could persuade singers to adopt his ideas, and thereby rescue this repertoire from its reputation as a junkyard of vacuous, formulaic clatter, he also argued that his series should

The Caramoor International Music Festival runs through Aug. 22; (914) 232-1252. Will Crutchfield is to conduct a program of Mozart arias on July 16 and Rossini's "Tancredi" on July 22.

**Bel Canto at Caramoor**  
Caramoor International Music Festival

take its name literally — simply as “beautiful singing” — and periodically offer works by better composers from other eras, from Purcell and Gluck to Handel and Mozart.

Mr. Crutchfield has largely delivered on his promise to make his singers think carefully about the expressive possibilities of bel canto singing. If anyone needed evidence that he could turn a sow's ear into something closer to a silk purse, his account of Bellini's “Puritani,” which opened this year's series on Saturday night, was it.

The opera, first heard in 1835, was Bellini's last, and it has the usual bel canto maladies, starting with a libretto so poorly conceived that even Mr. Crutchfield, a former music critic for The New York Times, describes parts of it in his program notes as “absurd to the point of hilarity.” Opera fans summarily dismiss complaints about librettos as being beside the point. But if the point is the idealized exploration of emotion as magnified by music, it is a serious problem when this emotion arises from a laughable text. It becomes merely the facsimile of emotion, a guess at what characters might feel if they lived in the alternate universe

of the bel canto sensibility.

That's a questionable goal, but Bellini and his colleagues had a solution: the mad scene. For the central character in “I Puritani” — Elvira, the daughter of a Roundhead nobleman during the English civil war — virtually the entire opera is a mad scene. She is to be married to Arturo, a Stuart loyalist, but on their wedding day, he runs off to save the life of Enrichetta, the deposed queen.

**A minimalist approach to 'beautiful singing' in an opera filled with madness.**

This drives Elvira over the edge and lets Bellini move her from despair to flightiness and back through the three acts.

These moments, with Elvira's madness supplying the built-in suspension of disbelief, are the opera's best: except for Arturo's third-act music, everyone else has little more than dull boilerplate. The connecting tissue draws fully on the style's vulgarities — the insistent on-the-beat cymbal-crashing, chirpy wud writing and unimaginative harmonic

progressions — yet offsetting those are wonderful brass choir passages and even some subtlety in the aria accompaniments.

Judging from the consistent and tightly matched work of the estimable cast, Mr. Crutchfield's advice about bel canto singing is that a pianissimo packs more punch than a shout, and he's on to something. Sumi Jo, as Elvira, made her flightiness magical by keeping her sound on a tight leash, and if that made certain leaps sound more cautious than virtuosic, her caution helped her nail the role's high notes.

Barry Banks, as Arturo, began with a slightly constricted sound, and his range of color was never vast. Yet he brought considerable power and suppleness to Arturo's music, and he didn't shy away from the falsetto high F that caps his last act “Crudeli, crudeli.”

The performance also benefited from the solid, shapely contributions of Daniel Mobbs as Giorgio, Elvira's uncle; Eric Jordan as Gualtiero, her father; and Weston Hurt as Riccardo, her rejected suitor. Laura Vlasak Nolan and David Ekstrom sang the smaller roles of Enrichetta and Bruno, and Mr. Crutchfield drew an alert and generally well-polished performance from the Orchestra of St. Luke's, the Caramoor Bel Canto Soloists and the Concert Chorale of New York.

# WITH BEL CANTO'S POSSIBILITIES, THE VOICE'S FULL POTENTIAL

BY ALLAN KOZINN

KATONAH, N.Y., July 8

When Will Crutchfield began directing his Bel Canto at Caramoor series at the Caramoor International Music Festival here in 1992, he insisted on the flexibility offered in the series title. He mainly wanted to give new life to the bel canto repertoire, a distinct body of Italian opera defined historically by the careers of Rossini and Verdi, at either end, and stylistically by a focus on the beauty and the virtuosic potential of the voice, to the virtual exclusion of other theatrical and operatic values, like sensible librettos and deeply considered orchestral writing.

But Mr. Crutchfield also took the view, in common with other bel canto adherents, that comparatively few modern singers understood true bel canto singing. And while he expressed every confidence that he could persuade singers to adopt his ideas, and thereby rescue this repertoire from its reputation as a junkyard of vacuous, formulaic clatter, he also argued that his series should take its name literally — simply as “beautiful singing” — and periodically offer works by better composers from other eras, from Purcell and Gluck to Handel and Mozart.

Mr. Crutchfield has largely delivered on his promise to make his singers think carefully about the expressive possibilities of bel canto singing. If anyone needed evidence that he could turn a sow's ear into something closer to a silk purse, his account of Bellini's “Puritani,” which opened this year's series on Saturday night, was it.

The opera, first heard in 1835, was Bellini's last, and it has the usual bel canto maladies, starting with a libretto so poorly conceived that even Mr. Crutchfield, a former music critic for The New York Times, describes parts of it in his program notes as “absurd to the point of hilarity.” Opera fans summarily dismiss complaints about librettos as being beside the point. But if the point is the idealized exploration of emotion as magnified by music, it is a serious problem when this emotion arises from a laughable text. It becomes merely the facsimile of emotion, a guess at what characters might feel if they lived in the alternate universe of the bel canto sensibility.

That's a questionable goal, but Bellini and his colleagues had a solution: the mad scene. For the central character

in “I Puritani” — Elvira, the daughter of a Roundhead nobleman during the English civil war — virtually the entire opera is a mad scene. She is to be married to Arturo, a Stuart loyalist, but on their wedding day, he runs off to save the life of Enrichetta, the deposed queen. This drives Elvira over the edge and lets Bellini move her from despair to flightiness and back through the three acts.

These moments, with Elvira's madness supplying the built-in suspension of disbelief, are the opera's best: except for Arturo's third-act music, everyone else has little more than dull boilerplate. The connecting tissue draws fully on the style's vulgarities — the insistent on-the-beat cymbal-crashing, chirpy wind writing and unimaginative harmonic progressions — yet offsetting those are wonderful brass choir passages and even some subtlety in the aria accompaniments.

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The Caramoor International Music Festival runs through Aug. 22; (914) 232-1252. Will Crutchfield is to conduct a program of Mozart arias on July 16 and Rossini's “Tancredi” on July 22.

THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2006

THE SATURDAY PROFILE

## Korea's Godfather of Rock Makes a Comeback

By NORIMITSU ONISHI

TAEGU, South Korea  
"I'M worried," Shin Joong-hyun said in the dimness backstage, standing in front of a full-length mirror, in a white suit and white boots that lifted him a couple of inches above 5 feet. "My voice is terrible. It's cracked."

Known as the godfather of rock 'n' roll for popularizing the genre in South Korea, Mr. Shin, at age 68, was in the final months of a farewell tour. Early this year, he had already moved into an as-yet unfinished house in the countryside.

But before retreating there for good, he would add finality to a long career in which he emerged as "Jackie Shin" on American Army bases in a postwar South Korea ground down to dust, rose as a homegrown rock poet and then fell with his stubborn refusal to write a song glorifying the nation's military dictator. In a new South Korea that has left him bewildered, and a little embittered, Mr. Shin has recently been rediscovered.

So on a recent Sunday evening, Mr. Shin set about to thrill a middle-aged crowd in this southeastern city one last time. Backstage, he ensconced himself in a chair facing the mirror, leaned back and shut his eyes, until someone yelled out, "It's time!"

On stage, bothered by a poor sound system, Mr. Shin sang hesitatingly at first. Two giant television screens zoomed in on his face, his white hair shaved close to the scalp, as he strained to read the lyrics. "My memory is not so good anymore," he said, "and my eyes are not so good."

But he played on, an electric guitar strapped across his left shoulder, going through, with increasing confidence, the rock classics that would be his epitaph. As he neared the end of the first set, he sang two of his most famous songs, "Beauty" and "Beautiful Rivers and Mountains," and the television screens showed the pleasure on his face as the crowd clamored for more.

Five days after the concert, Mr. Shin was recovering at his new house in a rural area south of Seoul. Facing farmland, his two-story brick house was built around a small studio cluttered with computers, sound equipment and costumes.

"I was out of my mind for a few days," Mr. Shin said, explaining that the concert had exhausted him. Several concerts were left, though thankfully, they were spread out.

Mr. Shin was born in Seoul during the Japanese occupation, and spent his childhood listening to his father's 78 r.p.m. records and his mother's harmonica. After both parents died, he began working at age 11, delivering pharmaceutical goods and saving up money to pursue what he believed was a destiny in music.

As he entered his late teens in the years after the Korean War, resources were few in South Korea. He bought a violin — "because it was the only instrument in the music store" — but found it too difficult to learn and eventually turned it in for an acoustic guitar. A friend gave him the money to buy an electric guitar, which gave him entry into the only place Korean musicians could perform regularly: American military bases.

Mr. Shin played jazz in the officers' club, sang country for the sergeants and rock 'n' roll for the troops. He mimicked an American accent so well that the soldiers — who would shout, "We want Jackie!" — mistakenly believed he was fluent in English. At the base, he ate fried chicken and drank Dr. Pepper. He met his future wife, Myoung Joong-gang, who was Korea's first female rock 'n' roll drummer in a band called Blue Ribbons.

"The music we played shouldn't taste like kimchi," Mr. Shin said of the spicy pickled vegetable that is the Korean national dish, "but it should ooze butter."

Around the same time the Beatles scored



*"The music we played shouldn't taste like kimchi, but it should ooze butter."*

SHIN JOONG-HYUN

their first hits in the United States, Mr. Shin formed the first Korean rock band, "Add 4," in 1964. Influenced by the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix — he is often compared to both, the Beatles for his songwriting and Hendrix for his guitar playing and loose-wolf style — he wrote a series of classic hits and began the careers of other artists with his songs.

But at his peak, one morning in 1972, a fateful phone call would derail his career. A caller identifying himself as an official in the presidential

*A South Korean, who is a little bit the Beatles and a little bit Jimi Hendrix, takes a bow.*

Blue House asked Mr. Shin — in a "tone that was not unpleasant" — to write a song for Park Chung-hee, South Korea's military ruler from 1961 to 1979. Mr. Shin declined "in a nice way," he said. But 19 minutes later, another caller, this time from Mr. Park's political party, gave him an order. Again, he refused. Politics had never interested him, he said, and he simply hated the military dictatorship.

His refusal, he believed, eventually led to his imprisonment for drug possession: American hippies protesting South Korea's participation in the Vietnam War had introduced Mr. Shin to marijuana and LSD, which he said he took for a while, but quit because it interfered with his work. The hippies went back to the United States, Mr. Shin said, but left a huge quantity of marijuana at his home. South Korean musicians, interested in experimenting, came to him.

After four months in prison, Mr. Shin found

that the government had banned his songs, a ban that was lifted only after Mr. Park was assassinated in 1979. Clubs started offering him gigs again. But by then disco had supplanted his style of music, young waiters told him to play faster, and he was considered out of fashion.

It was only in recent years that his music was rediscovered, and young musicians recorded covers of his songs in "A Tribute to Shin Joong-hyun."

The last years, though, have added a bitter edge to Mr. Shin, who never raked in the big money that goes to Western rock stars. He makes about \$10,000 a month now, and complains that he is being cheated.

He describes current popular music as "documented." Like many in his generation, Mr. Shin remains fiercely pro-American and rails at the youth's misgivings and criticisms about America.

"Young people don't know anything," he said. "They're pathetic. It's because of the U.S. we have what we have." At the concert here, however, Mr. Shin basked in his fans' embrace. "We love you," said Chang Young-woo, 41, a restaurant manager, adding, "When I listen to his songs, I feel as if I'm a high school student again."

After the concert, Mr. Shin patiently signed autographs. But something, it seemed, was ruffling him. At a postconcert party, he was feeling "exhausted" and in no mood to drink or eat. His manager had booked a hotel here. "But I didn't feel that I could sleep," Mr. Shin said, "so I decided to go back to Seoul." He drove alone on the main highway to Seoul, but he soon started running out of gas.

"At that hour, there were no gas stations on the highway that were open," he said, "so I had to get off the highway and search for an open gas station. I was running out of gas."

It seemed to take ages before he found a station and was able to get back on the highway. Dawn was about to break when Mr. Shin at last made it home.

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*"The music we played shouldn't taste like kimchi, but it should ooze butter." Shin Joong-hyun*

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Shin said of the spicy pickled vegetable that is the Korean national dish, “but it should ooze butter.”

Around the same time the Beatles scored their first hits in the United States, Mr. Shin formed the first Korean rock band, “Add 4,” in 1964. Influenced by the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix – he is often compared to both, the Beatles for his songwriting and Hendrix for his guitar playing and lone-wolf style – he wrote a series of classic hits and began the careers of other artists with his songs.

But at his peak, one morning in 1972, a fateful phone call would derail his career. A caller identifying himself as an official in the presidential Blue House asked Mr. Shin – in a “tone that was not unpleasant” – to write a song for Park Chung-hee, South Korea’s military ruler from 1961 to 1979. Mr. Shin declined “in a nice way,” he said. But 10 minutes later, another caller, this time from Mr. Park’s political party, gave him an order. Again, he refused. Politics had never interested him, he said, and he simply hated the military dictatorship.

His refusal, he believed, eventually led to his imprisonment for drug possession. American hippies protesting South Korea’s participation in the Vietnam War had introduced Mr. Shin to marijuana and LSD, which he said he took for a while, but quit because it interfered with his work. The hippies went back to the United States, Mr. Shin said, but left a huge quantity of marijuana at his home. South Korean musicians, interested in experimenting, came to him.

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, SATURDAY, JULY 15, 2006

CRITICS



Xian Zhang, the conductor, and Jennifer Koh, violin soloist, performing under the stars in Queens.

## MUSIC REVIEW

*Precision and Spirit in a Fiery Pairing*

By VIVIEN SCHWEITZER

So, belatedly, there was music under the stars on Thursday evening, as the New York Philharmonic performed in Cunningham Park, Queens. There had been no stars and thus no music the night before, when torrential rain forced the cancellation of the Philharmonic's concert of the same program on the Great Lawn of Central Park, an event that will not be made up (though the Philharmonic is to play a second program in Central Park on Tuesday).

Sharing the stage in this program were the first two dynamic women in the Philharmonic's all-female parks lineup this summer: Jennifer Koh, the violinist, and Xian Zhang, the orchestra's associate conductor. (On Tuesday Marin Alsop conducts, and Leila Josefowicz is the violin soloist.)

Ms. Zhang opened the program on this calm and breezy evening with a jubilant, polished rendition of Tchaikovsky's "Festival Coronation March" and was joined by Ms. Koh in Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D

The program will be repeated tonight at Heckscher State Park in East Islip, N.Y., and on Monday night at Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx; [newyorkphilharmonic.org](http://newyorkphilharmonic.org).

Major (Op. 35).

Ms. Koh, a young graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, has excited new-music circles recently with her performances of contemporary works. Here she built on her equally strong track record in repertory staples with the concerto that won her a silver medal at the 1994 Tchaikovsky violin competition in Moscow.

Ms. Zhang, in her white jacket, and Ms. Koh, in a floor-length strapless

**New York Philharmonic**  
Cunningham Park, Queens

pink gown, made a visibly arresting duo, poised and elegant. But where Ms. Zhang's gestures were precise and controlled, Ms. Koh was more the flamboyant free spirit. Her fiery, rhapsodic playing was well balanced against Ms. Zhang's firm control and steady pulse.

Like all war horses, the Tchaikovsky concerto needs imagination and flair to revive it, and Ms. Koh provided both, from a leisurely, warmly lyrical first movement to a feisty and volatile finale.

Having conducted previous concerts in the parks, at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine and at Avery Fisher Hall, Ms. Zhang has

had ample experience with problematic acoustics. For the most part, she rose ably to the challenge of performing with amplification in a vast open space, although a few textures and phrase endings were muffled, perhaps inevitably, or swallowed by a low hum of multilingual chatter from the picnickers. (A police estimate put the crowd at 13,000.)

But Ms. Zhang was really conquered only by the loud whirring of a helicopter, which flew over the stage at an inopportune moment, during the concerto's quiet, poignant Canzonetta. It was in this movement that Ms. Koh, once she could be heard again, particularly shone. Her rich, burnished tone was so powerful that a listener could almost imagine it soaring above the crowded lawn, unaided by a microphone.

The Philharmonic was acutely attuned to Ms. Zhang after intermission as well, in a decisive performance of Dvorak's vivacious Eighth Symphony. Ms. Zhang evoked both the sunny, pastoral lyricism of the Czech folk tunes and the work's darker, stormier hues, coaxing warm, singing lines from the strings in the richly melodic and beautifully phrased opening and fine woodwind and brass playing throughout. The rousing conclusion touched off an enthusiastic ovation. How could it not?

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, AUGUST 24, 2006

## MUSIC REVIEW

## Moonlit Verdi, Loud Enough For Blankets In Back Row

By STEVE SMITH

Before the Metropolitan Opera's performance of Verdi's "Traviata" on the Great Lawn of Central Park on Tuesday night, Peter Gelb, the company's new general manager, welcomed the audience to the 40th season of free summer performances. He seized the opportunity to promote several new initiatives: a free dress rehearsal of Puccini's

### La Traviata

The Great Lawn, Central Park

"Madama Butterfly" on Sept. 22, television broadcasts and Internet downloads, and a family-friendly condensation of Mozart's "Magic Flute" during the Met's winter break.

This is the new face of populism, Metropolitan Opera style, but the evening's performance followed the model the company has favored for four decades: vocalists in evening wear planted in front of an orchestra, with everyone highly amplified. It's an unnatural mode for presenting —



Erin Baiaro for The New York Times

The tenor Wookyoung Kim sang Alfredo on Tuesday night in his company debut.

and listening to — opera, but it attracts large throngs. The police estimate, Met officials reported, was an unusually specific 30,760.

That's not to suggest the evening held no attraction for Met cognoscenti. The performance was the company debut of Wookyoung Kim, a promising young South Korean tenor who won first prize in Plácido Domingo's Operalia competition in 2004, as Alfredo. His Violetta was the soprano Hei-Kyung Hong, a Met regular who is, incidentally, also South Korean. The baritone Charles Taylor, impressive in Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor" last season, sang Germont.

These artists will reprise their roles on the Met stage in January, making this presentation something of a sneak preview. On the whole it was a satisfying peek. Ms. Hong handled her part with characteristic grace, despite some technical difficulties late in the first act, which were cruelly amplified. She was strongest in the most emotionally fraught arias, during the second and third acts.

Mr. Kim's voice was ardent and penetrating. Mr. Taylor's suitably gruff and authoritative. Characterization of the complex relationships

### Old-school opera in the park, with new ideas on the horizon.

between these principals was relatively slight, but there was ample reason to expect more from the forthcoming indoor performances; eminently clear was how good these singers sounded together. The conductor Derrick Inouye provided accompaniment that was stylish and sturdy, save for a few breathlessly wobbly passages in the final act.

Near the stage the sound was slightly strident, but some 200 yards away, on a dusty baseball diamond, voices seemed richer, the orchestra better blended. Of course from so far away the stage might have been an iPod screen. Perhaps Mr. Gelb could add a few Jumbotrons to his already bulging shopping list of inclusive devices.

"La Traviata" will be performed tomorrow night in Marine Park, Brooklyn; next Tuesday in Richmond County Bank Ball Park, Staten Island; and next Friday in Brookdale Park, Bloomfield, N.J.

# MOONLIT VERDI, LOUD ENOUGH FOR BLANKETS IN BACK ROW

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## Trying to Appeal to Youth With One of Their Own

Rear orchestra-section seats at Avery Fisher Hall on Friday night were awash with young people, presumably invited by a New York

**BERNARD  
HOLLAND**

**MUSIC  
REVIEW**

Philharmonic interested in updating its audience. For those willing to put Ludacris or My Chemical Romance aside for an evening and give classical music a chance, there were a number of apparent come-ons at work.

Joyce Yang, an enterprising competition warrior scarcely out of her teens, was there as role model, playing that whiz-bang favorite of all career-hungry young pianists: Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini. After intermission Lorin Maazel led the orchestra in Beethoven's equally famous (though maybe not to a lot of Friday's audience) "Eroica" Symphony.

The Rachmaninoff is a handful of touching and inventive moments surrounded by circus-act feats of pianism. Rachmaninoff may have been too good a pianist for his own

*The program repeats Tuesday night at 7:30 at Avery Fisher Hall, Lincoln Center; (212) 875-5656; sold out, but returns may be available.*

**New York Philharmonic**  
Avery Fisher Hall

good. Conventional virtuosity seems to have bored him; hence this piece's obstacle course of difficulty. Ms. Yang nailed all the hard parts and showed enough sentiment and good sense during the flashes of inspired weepiness to make one want to hear her in other repertory.

The worth of the Beethoven performance depended on who was listening. Veterans with literally thousands of "Eroicas" under their belts were probably depressed. A great orchestra sounded dutiful but not terribly involved. The vague togetherness in the string sections, uncharacteristic in an ensemble of this fineness, did not signal careful rehearsal.

The most arresting moments, unfortunately, were Mr. Maazel's willful slowness in the finale and his perverse hesitations and exaggerated accents in the Funeral March.

One hopes that some of the young people were oblivious to all that and simply taken by the music itself. When brought to life, it is quite a piece for any age group.



The pianist Joyce Yang performed Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini with the New York Philharmonic on Saturday.

Chung W. Lee/The New York Times



Photographs by Jennifer Taylor for The New York Times

Sarah Chang playing the Sibelius Violin Concerto.

## An Affectionate Homecoming for Masur

If psychologists ever made a study of post-departure syndrome, they might begin with Kurt Masur's return to New York with the London Philharmonic. In his time as music

### BERNARD HOLLAND

#### MUSIC REVIEW

director of the New York Philharmonic Mr. Masur was received as something of a drill sergeant in charge of a wayward platoon, a kind of bitter medicine designed to purge the orchestra of its loose ways.

But waves of friendship greeted him at Carnegie Hall on Monday and Tuesday nights, a genuine warmth like nothing he experienced during his years in New York. Were all those happy listeners remembering with a new perspective, or had they simply forgotten? Maybe affection grows as the sustained power to influence our musical lives goes away. I was always a fan, and it was good to have him back.

A year ago illness forced Mr. Masur to cancel a similar visit. At 79 he is erect but frail. The vigorous conducting technique is now withdrawn and minimal, but other means have been found. While the physically active conductor goes out and gets

### London Philharmonic Carnegie Hall

performances, Mr. Masur has learned to stand quietly and let performances come to him, the positive electric charge becomes a magnet. In two concerts of repertory standards, this appealing orchestra seemed to know what was on its conductor's mind and also to like him personally. Rough edges and inexact entrances on Monday were a small price to pay for music making of such good will.

"Les Préludes" by Liszt — big-boned and hearty — began Monday's program; the Brahms Second Symphony ended it. Mr. Masur likes to divide long phrases into shorter ones, producing semi-detachments that are not quite full breaths. Created is an austerity seemingly aimed at preventing passionately lyrical music from sinking into sentiment.

Between Liszt and Brahms came Prokofiev's Second Piano Concerto. Its soloist, Elisabeth Leonskaja, was

to be thanked for halfway humanizing music of such open hostility. She was in confident command of Prokofiev's florid, often vicious sieges of technical difficulty, and the nastiness lesser musicians bring to this music was softened to something almost moving, occupying a place somewhere between regret and resentment.

On Tuesday Sarah Chang played the Sibelius Violin Concerto. The purity of her tone and its broad, deep carrying power was fitting, indeed touching in exposed moments, as was the recklessness with which she attacked the difficult finale. At other times the throbbing vibrato and almost theatrical bowing sounded more like beautiful violin playing than Sibelius.

Tuesday also brought Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony, a piece that has also been occupying the New York Philharmonic a few blocks to the north this week. The mileage on this well-traveled masterpiece precludes anyone saying anything new about it, but the London players were involved down to their toes in an honest and deeply earnest performance.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, Sunday, August 27, 2006

VIRGINIA HEFFERNAN

## Web Guitar Wizard Revealed at Last

Funtwo's video captivated millions. Who was he?

**E**IGHT months ago a mysterious image showed up on YouTube, the video-sharing site that now shows more than 100 million videos a day. A sinewy figure in a swimming-pool-blue T-shirt, his eyes obscured by a beige baseball cap, was playing electric guitar. Sun poured through the window behind him; he played in a yellow haze. The video was called simply "guitar." A black-and-white title card gave the performer's name as funtwo.

The piece that funtwo played with mounting dexterity was an exceedingly difficult rock arrangement of Pachelbel's Canon, the composition from the turn of the 18th century known for its solemn chord progressions and its overexposure at weddings. But this arrangement, attributed on another title card to JerryC, was anything but plodding: it required high-level mastery of a singularly demanding maneuver called sweep-picking.

Over and over the guitarist's left hand articulated strings with barely perceptible movements, sounding and muting notes almost simultaneously, and playing complete

arpeggios through a single stroke with his right hand. Funtwo's accuracy and velocity seemed record-breaking, but his mouth and jawline — to the extent that they were visible — looked impassive, with none of the exaggerated grimaces of heavy metal guitar heroes. The contrast between the soaring bravado of the undertaking and the reticence of the guitarist gave the 5-minute, 20-second video a gorgeous solemnity.

Like a celebrity sex tape or a Virgin Mary sighting, the video drew hordes of seekers with diverse interests and attitudes. Guitar sites, MySpace pages and a Polish video site called Smog linked to it, and viewers thundered to YouTube to watch it. If individual viewings were shipped records, "guitar" would have gone gold almost instantly. Now, with nearly 7.35 million views — and a spot in the site's 10 most-viewed videos of all time — funtwo's performance would be platinum many times over. From the perch it's occupied for months on YouTube's "most discussed" list, it generates a seemingly endless stream of praise (riveting, sick, bet-

*Continued on Page 28*

A still from the video "guitar" performed by funtwo on YouTube, a video-sharing Web site.



## WEB GUITAR WIZARD REVEALED AT LAST

BY VIRGINIA HEFFERNAN

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Top, Bredans Smialowski for The New York Times;  
above, Seokyoung Lee for The New York Times

*Top, Alfonso Candra claimed to be the mysterious funtwo,  
but Jeong-Hyun Lim, above is the real virtuoso.*

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The most basic comment is a question: Who is this guy?

If you follow the leads, this Everest of electric-guitar virtuosity, like so many other online artifacts, turns out to be a portal into a worldwide microculture, this one involving hundreds of highly stylized solo guitar videos, of which funtwo’s is but the most famous. And though they seem esoteric, they have surprising implications: for YouTube, the dissemination of culture, online masquerade and even the future of classical music.

Johann Pachelbel, the great one-hit wonder of the baroque period, originally composed his Canon in D Major for three violins, at least one chord-playing instrument (like a harpsichord or lute) and at least one bass instrument (like a cello or bassoon). With its steady walking rhythm, the piece is well suited to processions, and the bass line is extremely easy to play, a primer on simple chords: D, A, B minor, F-sharp minor, G. A sequence of eight chords repeats about 30 times.

The exacting part is the canon itself: a counterpoint played over the bass, originally by the three violins. The first violin plays variation A, then moves on to B, while the second violin comes in with A. By the time the first violin gets to C, the second starts in with B, and the third violin comes in with A: like three people singing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”

With 28 variations, the piece becomes supercharged with complexity only to revert to a simpler structure as it ends. If you hadn’t heard it a thousand times before – in the movie “Ordinary People,” in commercials, at all those weddings – it might blow you away.

Last year Jerry Chang, a Taiwanese guitarist who turns 25 on Thursday, set out to create a rock version of the song, which he had been listening to since childhood. It took him two weeks. Others, like Brian Eno, had done so before him, and some listeners say his arrangement is derivative of one composed for the video game “Pump It Up.” But one way or another, his version, “Canon Rock,” rocked.

Once he had his arrangement on paper – and in his fingers, since sweeping is above all a function of motor memory – Mr. Chang decided to publish his work. In the arena of high-speed guitar heroics, though, an audio recording is not enough; the manual virtuosity is almost like a magic trick, and people have to see it to believe it. So he sat on his bed in front of a video camera, fired up his recorded backing track and played his grand, devilish rendition of “Canon Rock.” He then uploaded the video to a Web site he had already set up for his band and waited for a response.

Before long he was inundated with praise, as well as requests for what are called the “tabs,” or written music, and the backing track, or digital bass line, which fans of his work downloaded and ran on their own computers. They then hoisted up their Fenders and Les Pauls to test their skills against JerryC’s. One of these guys was funtwo.

By following a series of clues on JerryC’s message board and various “Canon Rock” videos, I was able to trace funtwo’s video to Jeong-Hyun Lim, a 23-year-old Korean who taught himself guitar over the course of the last six years. Now living in Seoul, he listens avidly to Bach and Vivaldi, and in 2000 he took a month of guitar lessons. He plays an ESP, an Alfee Custom SEC-28OTC with gold-colored detailing.

A close analysis of his playing style and a comparison of his appearance in person with that of the figure in the video, left little doubt that Mr. Lim is the elusive funtwo.

Recently he e-mailed me an account of how he came to make his YouTube video. His English is excellent, from years spent at Auckland University in New Zealand, where he plans to return in March.

“First time when I saw JerryC’s ‘Canon’ video, it was so amazing, I thought I might play it,” he wrote. “So I practiced it by myself using tab and backing track from Jerry’s homepage.” On Oct. 23, 2005, he uploaded his video to a Korean music site called Mule. From there an unknown fan calling himself guitar90 copied it and posted it on YouTube with the elegant intro: “this guy iz great!!!”

Repeatedly newcomers to the comments section on YouTube suggest that the desktop computer visible on

the right side of the video is doing all the playing, and that funtwo is a fraud. They point out that there is a small gap in timing between the finger work and the sound of the video. These complaints invite derision from those in the know. (Funtwo's use of a backing track is no secret, and as for the gap, he says he recorded the audio and video independently and then matched them inexactly.)

Guitar fanatics are perplexed: "How the hell does he gets his harmonics to sound like that?" Some praise specific components of the performance, including the distortion, the power chords or the "sweet outro." Overall a consensus emerges: This guy iz great.

"I'm shocked at how much you rock," one fan said. "Funtwo just pure ownz the world," said another. "Somebody just beat JerryC at his own song," tinFold44 said. Carrie34 gushed, "funtwo's version makes me want to hold up my lighter and \*hug\* my inner child! :)"

Pachelbel's Canon, at its essence, dramatizes the pleasure of repetition and imitation. It should come as no surprise, then, that JerryC and funtwo have both attracted impersonators. Over the past year, as JerryC's and funtwo's videos have been broadly distributed on every major video-sharing site, hundreds of other guitarists have tried their hands at JerryC's "Canon Rock." Many copy the original mise-en-scène: they sit on beds in what look like the bedrooms of guys who still live with their parents. They make little effort to disguise their computers. And they look down, half-hiding behind hats or locks of hair.

Some imitators have gone further than that. A Malaysian guitarist claiming erroneously to be funtwo briefly set up a MySpace page, then shut it down. And this month, in Washington, a 12-year-old classical pianist named Alfonso Candra played "Canon Rock" for a small crowd at the Indonesian Embassy. He too claimed he was the guitarist in the "guitar" video. That was untrue, but Alfonso played his heart out.

This process of influence, imitation and inspiration may bedevil the those who despair at the future of copyright but is heartening to connoisseurs of classical music. Peter Robles, a composer who also manages classical musicians, points out that the process of online dissemination – players watching one another's videos, recording their own – multiplies the channels by which musical innovation has always circulated. Baroque music, after all, was meant to be performed and enjoyed in private rooms, at close range, where others could observe the musicians' technique. "That's how people learned how to play Bach," Mr. Robles said. "The music wasn't written down. You just picked it up from other musicians."

In this spirit, JerryC told fans on his Web site, "I don't plan to make tabs anymore. The major reason is that it takes lots of time, and I think the best way to learn music is to cover it by ear."

That educational imperative is a big part of the "Canon Rock" phenomenon. When guitarists upload their renditions, they often ask that viewers be blunt: What are they doing wrong? How can they improve? When I asked Mr. Lim the reason he didn't show his face on his video, he wrote, "Main purpose of my recording is to hear the other's suggestions about my playing." He added, "I think play is more significant than appearance. Therefore I want the others to focus on my fingering and sound. Furthermore I know I'm not that handsome."

Online guitar performances seem to carry a modesty clause, in the same way that hip-hop comes with a boast. Many of the guitarists, like Mr. Chang and Mr. Lim, exhibit a kind of anti-showmanship that seems distinctly Asian. They often praise other musicians, denigrate their own skills and talk about how much more they have to practice. Sometimes an element of flat-out abjection even enters into this act, as though the chief reason to play guitar is to be excoriated by others. As Mr. Lim said, "I am always thinking that I'm not that good player and must improve more than now."

Neoclassical guitar technique has fallen largely out of favor in American popular music. It's so demanding that many listeners conclude it has no heart and lacks the primitive charm of gut-driven punk and post-punk, which introduced minimalist sounds in a partial corrective to the bloated stylings of American heavy metal.

In the YouTube guitar videos, however, technical accomplishment itself carries a strong emotional component. Many of the new online guitarists began playing classical music – violin, piano, even clarinet – as children; they are accustomed to a highly uneven ratio of practice to praise. Mr. Lim's fans said they watch his "Canon Rock" video daily, as it inspires them to work hard. When I watch, I feel moved by Mr. Lim's virtuosity to do as he does: find beauty in the speed and accuracy that the new Internet world demands.

Even as they burst onto the scene as fully-formed guitar gods, they hang back from heavy self-promotion. Neither JerryC nor funtwo has a big recording contract.

At a moment in pop history when it seems to take a phalanx of staff – producers, stylists, promoters, handlers, agents – to make a music star, I asked Mr. Lim about the huge response to the video he had made in his bedroom. What did he make of the tens of thousands of YouTube commenters, most of whom treat him as though he's the second coming of Jimi Hendrix?

Mr. Lim wrote back quickly. "Some said my vibrato is quite sloppy," he replied. "And I agree that so these days I'm doing my best to improve my vibrato skill."

## THE JAZZ IS COOL, BUT KARAOKE REIGNS

BY SAKI KNAFO

On a recent Saturday night, an aging and shaggy-haired Korean rock legend named Hahn Dae Soo squeezed with his entourage into a couple of booths at a hotel bar on West 32nd Street, the heart of Manhattan's Koreatown. The boisterous crew included a smoky-voiced jazz balladeer and an intoxicated painter, who treated onlookers to an impromptu modern dance performance.

For the last five years, the bar, the Maxim Lounge, has served as a nerve center for a community of Korean-born New Yorkers best described as bohemian, a group that includes rock musicians of both the famous and aspiring varieties.

"The people who come here, they value beauty," Mr. Hahn, 57, said in a Tom Waits-like rasp. "Most Koreans are small-business owners – very success-driven, very money-oriented – but these people here, they are chasing after the rainbow."

The bar, perched on the second floor of the Hotel Stanford, owes its niche appeal to its manager, Jinho Jang, a part-time jazz singer who wears his thinning hair in a tight ponytail and who spent the evening flitting between his artsy friends and a clutch of South Korean businessmen in town for an eyewear convention.

"My goal is to get people together and create synergy," Mr. Jang said. After becoming the manager of Maxim five years ago, Mr. Jang began hiring jazz musicians at his own expense, establishing a classic hipster vibe. Now Maxim plays host to a Korean-led jazz group each week, but the main attraction remains a far more quotidian Korean pastime, karaoke.

About 10 p.m., after the jazz musicians had retired to the bar, Mr. Jang singled out a Filipino woman in the mostly Korean crowd and serenaded her with a karaoke ballad in her native Tagalog. (He speaks only three languages, he said, but sings karaoke in 10.) Then a scruffy rock bassist wearing a CBGB T-shirt shared the microphone with one of the eyewear conventioners, their harmonious voices trilling with emotion.

Practically the only reveler not chiming in that evening was the most accomplished singer in attendance. That would be Mr. Hahn, also known in Korea as the godfather of folk. Mr. Hahn eschews karaoke, saying he performs enough already as it is. "I did karaoke a couple of times," he admitted, "but I was pressured, and everyone was drunk."

Around midnight, the karaoke screen, with its loop of desultory images – Chinese pagoda, mountain range, chipmunk – was switched off, and someone produced an acoustic guitar. The CBGB guy played "To the Land of Happiness," a Korean folk-rock anthem written by none other than Mr. Hahn.

But Mr. Hahn hardly noticed; he was bantering with a friend over bottles of Rolling Rock. The song, as it turns out, is performed regularly in bars around the world, although usually in karaoke form.

# YOUNG PLAYERS FULFILL A CHRISTMAS TRADITION AT CARNEGIE HALL

BY ALLAN KOZINN

**T**he New York String Orchestra includes performers on woodwind, brass and percussion instruments, but why tamper with a name that has both cachet and tradition, however inaccurate it is nowadays. The group springs into being every December, when a few dozen young musicians (63 of them this year) come to New York from around the country for the New York String Orchestra Seminar. The program, 10 days of chamber and orchestra coaching for musicians between 15 and 22, is sponsored jointly by Carnegie Hall and the New School. It includes a pair of concerts at Carnegie Hall, the first always a relatively short, intermission-free program on Christmas Eve.

This year the Christmas Eve concert was devoted fully to Mozart, whose 250th anniversary year is quickly and, at long last, coming to a close; soon we'll resume hearing Mozart all the time without having to give a reason.

There is of course ample reason for young musicians to spend quality time with Mozart, and the orchestra's zesty, alert performances left a listener with the impression that these players were happy for the opportunity. Their performances, conducted by Jaime Laredo, were solidly unified, but flexible enough to provide the sudden, dramatic dynamic shifts that Mr. Laredo regularly demanded.

The concert was as much an opportunity to hear how Mr. Laredo's conducting has changed over the years as to eaves-

drop on the next generation of orchestral players. When he took over this orchestra in 1993, after the death of its founder, Alexander Schneider, Mr. Laredo adhered largely to his predecessor's warmly Romantic approach, with fluid tempos, elongated phrases and even, at times, a hint of portamento applied to Baroque and Classical era works.

Gradually Mr. Laredo has updated his interpretive approach, and the orchestra's sound. And on Sunday evening its Mozart was fully in the current style. The broadened chasm between piano and forte is part of it. So are relatively trim textures, and the breakneck tempos Mr. Laredo took, to the evident joy of the players, whose vigorous account of the "Impresario" Overture made it into something more than a curtain raiser.

In the Sinfonia Concertante, with Mr. Laredo conducting from the viola and Jennifer Koh as the violin soloist, the most notable moments were in the slow movement. There the violin, with its low-lying line, nearly matches the viola in tone, and Ms. Koh and Mr. Laredo played the serene dialogue with a meltingly beautiful sound.

The program ended with an appealingly rambunctious reading of the Symphony No. 36.

*Jaime Laredo conducts the New York String Orchestra, with the pianist Leon Fleisher as the soloist, at Carnegie Hall on Thursday; (212) 247-7800.*

# SCHUBERT'S FAREWELL LAMENT OF RUSTIC LOVE

BY BERNARD HOLLAND

**T**ucked among the piano sonatas, chamber pieces and song sequences of Schubert's last year is a curious yet compelling composition called "Der Hirt auf dem Felsen" or "The Shepherd on the Rock." Musically, it is a duet between a singer and a clarinet with piano accompaniment, or maybe it is a trio equally distributing importance among the participants.

Song recitalists rarely bring along a clarinetist to their concerts, and chamber ensembles rarely insert vocal music in the middle of theirs. The Musicians from Marlboro series at the Metropolitan Museum has, on the other hand, the fluidity of personnel to make performances like this happen. Marlboro is a place in Vermont where students, young professionals and well-established musicians mix and match for chamber music. Met Museum concerts like one on Friday are a kind of working winter vacation for a summer festival.

"Der Hirt auf dem Felsen," with texts mostly by Wilhelm Müller, is an elaborate rustic love lament. Musical ideas change from verse to verse, giving us a number of songs in one; the general impression is of an operatic "scena."

Hyunah Yu was the soprano here. She has a voice of nice personal quality and an enthusiasm for style, diction and inner motivation that works well. The eagerness can approach overkill but mostly avoids it. Alexander Fiterstein was the excellent clarinetist. For the piano part both here and in three other Schubert songs there was the wise hand of Gilbert Kalish.

Wind ensembles took up the rest of the evening. Elliott Carter's "Eight Études and a Fantasy" for four winds are from Mr. Carter's distant past (1950). The seven brief snippets have not yet arrived at the composer's later and more original style, but the Fantasy at the end, with its crowd scene of opposing meters, is a clue to what was to come. Carl Nielsen's Quintet, with its amiable lyricism and broad humor, wouldn't have hurt a fly. The Beethoven E flat Quintet was anchored by Mr. Kalish, whose musical intelligence and commitment led his younger colleagues by example.

Valérie Tessa Chermiset was the flutist, Rudolph Vrbsky the oboist and Paul S. LaFollette III the hornist: all fine players.

# FINE ART IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

## FINE ART IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

2006 was a milestone year for contemporary Korean artists, a couple of whom received remarkably positive attention from the American press for exhibitions held in New York.

## Nam June Paik, 73, Dies; Pioneer of Video Art Whose Work Broke Cultural Barriers

By ROBERTA SMITH

Nam June Paik, an avant-garde composer, performer and artist widely considered the inventor of video art, died Sunday at his winter home in Miami Beach. He was 73 and also lived in Manhattan.

Mr. Paik suffered a stroke in 1996 and had been in declining health for some time, said his nephew, Ken Paik Hakuta, who manages his uncle's studio in New York.

Mr. Paik's career spanned half a century, three continents and several art mediums, ranging through music, theater and found-object art. He once built his own robot. But his chief means of expression was television, which he approached with a winning combination of visionary wildness, technological savvy and high entertainment values. His work could be kitschy, visually dazzling and profound, sometimes all at once, and was often irresistibly funny and high-spirited.

At his best, Mr. Paik exaggerated and subverted accepted notions about both the culture and the technology of television while immersing viewers in its visual beauty and exposing something deeply irrational at its center. He presciently coined the term "electronic superhighway" in 1974, grasping the essence of global communications and seeing the possibilities of technologies that were barely born. He usually did this while managing to be both palatable and subversive. In recent years, Mr.

More obituaries appear on the preceding page.

Paik's enormous American flags, made from dozens of sleek monitors whose synchronized patterns mixed everything from pinups to apple pie at high, almost subliminal velocity, could be found in museums and corporate lobbies.

Mr. Paik was affiliated in the 1960's with the anti-art movement Fluxus, and also deserves to be seen as an aesthetic innovator on a par with the choreographer Merce Cunningham and the composer John Cage. Yet in many ways he was simply the most Pop of the Pop artists. His work borrowed directly from the culture at large, reworked its most pervasive medium and gave back something that was both familiar and otherworldly.

He was a shy yet fearless man who combined mass productivity and incessant tinkering with Zen-like equanimity. A lifelong Buddhist, Mr. Paik never smoked or drank and also never drove a car. He always seemed amused by himself and his surroundings, which could be overwhelming; a writer once compared his New York studio to a television repair shop three months behind schedule.

Mr. Paik is survived by his wife, the video artist Shigeo Kubota.

Mr. Paik got to television by way of avant-garde music. He was born in 1932 in Seoul, Korea, into a wealthy manufacturing family. Growing up, he studied classical piano and musical composition and was drawn to 20th-century music; he once said it took him three years to find an Arnold Schoenberg record in Korea. In 1949, with the Korean War threatening, the family fled to Hong Kong, and then settled in Tokyo. Mr. Paik attended the University of Tokyo,



Nam June Paik in 2004 with one of his installations at the Deutsche Guggenheim Museum in Berlin.

earning a degree in aesthetics and the history of music in 1954 with a thesis on Schoenberg's work.

He then studied music at the University of Munich and the Academy of Music in Freiburg and threw himself into the avant-garde music scene swirling around Cologne. He also met John Cage, whose emphasis on chance and randomness dovetailed with Mr. Paik's sensibility.

Over the next few years, Mr. Paik arrived at an early version of performance art, combining cryptic musical

elements — usually spliced audiotapes of music, screens, radio news and sound effects — with startling events. In an unusually oddball act during a 1960 performance in Cologne, Mr. Paik jumped from the stage and cut off Cage's necktie, an event that prompted George Maciunas, a founder of Fluxus, to invite Mr. Paik to join the movement. At the 1963 Fluxus International Festival for Very New Music in Wiesbaden, Germany, Mr. Paik performed "Zen for Head," which involved dipping

his head, hair and hands in a mixture of ink and tomato juice and dragging them over a scroll-like sheet of paper to create a dark, jagged streak.

In 1963, seeking a visual equivalent for electronic music and inspired by Cage's performances on prepared pianos, Mr. Paik bought 13 used television sets in Cologne and reworked them until their screens jumped with strong optical patterns. In 1963, he exhibited the first art known to involve television sets at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany.

In 1965 he made his New York debut at the New School for Social Research: Charlotte Moorman, a cellist who became his longtime collaborator, played his "Cello Sonata No. 1 for Adults Only," performing based in the wait. A similar work performed in 1967 at the Filmmakers Cinematheque in Manhattan resulted in the brief arrest of Ms. Moorman and Mr. Paik. Mr. Paik retained with his iconic "TV Bra for Living Sculpture," two tiny television screens that covered Ms. Moorman's breasts.

Mr. Paik bought one of the first portable video cameras on the market, in 1965, and the same year he exhibited the first installation involving a video recorder, at the Galeria Bizzini in New York. Although he continued to perform, his interests shifted increasingly to the sculptural, technological and environmental possibilities of video.

In 1966, Mr. Paik started showing pieces using multiple monitors. He created bulky wood robotlike figures using old monitors and retrofitted consoles, and constructed archways, spirals and towers, including one 60-foot tall that used 1,000 monitors. By the 1980's he was working with lasers, mixing colors and forms in space, without the silvery cathode-ray screen.

For his 2000 retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, Mr. Paik arranged monitors faceup on the restaurant's floor, creating a pondlike effect of light and images. Overhead, one of the artist's most opulent laser pieces cascaded from the dome in lightninglike zigzags — an apt metaphor for a career that never stopped surging forward.

# NAM JUNE PAIK, 73, DIES; PIONEER OF VIDEO ART WHOSE WORK BROKE CULTURAL BARRIERS

BY ROBERTA SMITH

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Mr. Paik suffered a stroke in 1996 and had been in declining health for some time, said his nephew, Ken Paik Hakuta, who manages his uncle's studio in New York.

Mr. Paik's career spanned half a century, three continents and several art mediums, ranging through music, theater and found-object art. He once built his own robot. But his chief means of expression was television, which he approached with a winning combination of visionary wildness, technological savvy and high entertainment values. His work could be kitschy, visually dazzling and profound, sometimes all at once, and was often irresistibly funny and high-spirited.

At his best, Mr. Paik exaggerated and subverted accepted notions about both the culture and the technology of television while immersing viewers in its visual beauty and exposing something deeply irrational at its center. He presciently coined the term "electronic superhighway" in 1974, grasping the essence of global communications and seeing the possibilities of technologies that were barely born. He usually did this while managing to be both palatable and subversive. In recent years, Mr. Paik's enormous American flags, made from dozens of sleek monitors whose synchronized patterns mixed everything from pinups to apple pie at high, almost subliminal velocity, could be found in museums and corporate lobbies.

Mr. Paik was affiliated in the 1960's with the anti-art movement Fluxus, and also deserves to be seen as an aesthetic innovator on a par with the choreographer Merce Cunningham and the composer John Cage. Yet in many ways he was simply the most Pop of the Pop artists. His work borrowed directly from the culture at large, reworked its most pervasive medium and gave back something that was both familiar and otherworldly.

He was a shy yet fearless man who combined manic productivity and incessant tinkering with Zen-like equanimity. A lifelong Buddhist, Mr. Paik never smoked or drank and also never drove a car. He always seemed amused by himself and his surroundings, which could be overwhelming: a writer once compared his New York studio to a television repair shop three months behind schedule.

Mr. Paik is survived by his wife, the video artist Shigeko Kubota.

Mr. Paik got to television by way of avant-garde music. He was born in 1932 in Seoul, Korea, into a wealthy manufacturing family. Growing up, he studied classical piano and musical composition and was drawn to 20th-century music; he once said it took him three years to find an Arnold Schoenberg record in Korea. In 1949, with the Korean War threatening, the family fled to Hong Kong, and then settled in Tokyo. Mr. Paik attended the University of Tokyo, earning a degree in aesthetics and the history of music in 1956 with a thesis on Schoenberg's work.

He then studied music at the University of Munich and the Academy of Music in Freiburg and threw himself into the avant-garde music scene swirling around Cologne. He also met John Cage, whose emphasis on chance and randomness dovetailed with Mr. Paik's sensibility.

Over the next few years, Mr. Paik arrived at an early version of performance art, combining cryptic musical elements – usually spliced audiotapes of music, screams, radio news and sound effects – with startling events. In an unusually Oedipal act during a 1960 performance in Cologne, Mr. Paik jumped from the stage and cut off Cage's necktie, an event that prompted George Maciunas, a founder of Fluxus, to invite Mr. Paik to join the movement. At the 1962 Fluxus International Festival for Very New Music in Wiesbaden, Germany, Mr. Paik

performed "Zen for Head," which involved dipping his head, hair and hands in a mixture of ink and tomato juice and dragging them over a scroll-like sheet of paper to create a dark, jagged streak.

In 1963, seeking a visual equivalent for electronic music and inspired by Cage's performances on prepared pianos, Mr. Paik bought 13 used television sets in Cologne and reworked them until their screens jumped with strong optical patterns. In 1963, he exhibited the first art known to involve television sets at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, Germany.

In 1965 he made his New York debut at the New School for Social Research: Charlotte Moorman, a cellist who became his longtime collaborator, played his "Cello Sonata No. 1 for Adults Only," performing bared to the waist. A similar work performed in 1967 at the Filmmakers Cinematheque in Manhattan resulted in the brief arrest of Ms. Moorman and Mr. Paik. Mr. Paik retaliated with his iconic "TV Bra for Living Sculpture," two tiny television screens that covered Ms. Moorman's breasts.

Mr. Paik bought one of the first portable video cameras on the market, in 1965, and the same year he exhibited the first installation involving a video recorder, at the Galeria Bonino in New York. Although he continued to perform, his interests shifted increasingly to the sculptural, technological and environmental possibilities of video.

In 1969, Mr. Paik started showing pieces using multiple monitors. He created bulky wood robotlike figures using old monitors and retrofitted consoles, and constructed archways, spirals and towers, including one 60-feet tall that used 1,003 monitors. By the 1980's he was working with lasers, mixing colors and forms in space, without the silvery cathode-ray screen.

For his 2000 retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum, Mr. Paik arranged monitors faceup on the rotunda's floor, creating a pondlike effect of light and images. Overhead, one of the artist's most opulent laser pieces cascaded from the dome in lightninglike zigzags – an apt metaphor for a career that never stopped surging forward.

*Correction: February 1, 2006, Wednesday An obituary yesterday about Nam June Paik, widely considered the inventor of video art, omitted a survivor. He is his brother, Ken Paik, of Kamakura, Japan.*

# NOW IN MOVING PICTURES: THE MULTITUDES OF NIKKI S. LEE

BY CAROL KINO

Even after a long face-to-face conversation, it's hard to say for certain what Nikki S. Lee is really like. That's partly because this South Korean-born artist has always trafficked in her unnerving talent for assuming different identities.

For "Projects," a series of photographs that won her notoriety soon after they were first shown in group shows and art fairs in 1998, Ms. Lee transformed herself through a blend of clothes, makeup, diets, hair extensions, tanning salons,

*She's been a stripper, a grandmother and countless other selves. Her new role: film star.*

colored contact lenses, dance lessons and sheer grit to infiltrate wildly different milieus – tourists, yuppies, strippers, rappers, schoolgirls and retirees, among others – and posed for casual snapshots with her new acquaintances.

For her "Parts" series (2002-4), she had herself photographed with one different man after another who was later sliced off the picture, leaving only a trace of his presence, like an arm or foot. While this put the focus squarely on Ms. Lee, it also implied that her identity mutated with each romantic entanglement.

As a result, said Ms. Lee, 35, who speaks English somewhat haltingly and with a heavy Korean accent, "When people meet me the first time, they are like, 'Oh, you are different than I thought.'"

In her latest project, an hourlong film that is to be shown this week at the Museum of Modern Art, she makes ample use of that confusion.

Titled “A K A Nikki S. Lee,” the film purports to be a documentary about the real Nikki, a rather plain, serious young woman who is in turn making her own documentary about her alter ego, Nikki Two, the effervescent exhibitionist who appears in the photographs. Yet as the true Ms. Lee explained in an interview in her East Village apartment, “Nikki One is supposed to be real Nikki, and Nikki Two is supposed to be fake Nikki. But they are both fake Nikki.”

The movie opens as Nikki One is being interviewed in a book-lined studio. “In this documentary,” she says solemnly, “I create Nikki Lee based on what people think her character is.” The scene then switches to the more fashion-conscious Nikki Two, lounging in a Venetian water taxi on her way to stay with wealthy collectors and visit the Venice Film Festival. She is soon seen shopping at Missoni, hobnobbing with movie folk (most notably Jeremy Irons) at a reception at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection on the Grand Canal and padding around the collectors’ apartment in her nightgown, wearing an eyeshade that reads “Princess.”

To make the film, which she began working on in early 2005, Ms. Lee frequently traveled with one of two cameramen who were assigned to document her “real” life. Most of the events did in fact take place – a trip to South Korea to act in a movie called “The Girl Who Has Many Selves” (her bit part was edited out); a stay in Paris, where she staged and modeled for a fashion shoot for *The New York Times*; and a noisy afternoon with a big Jewish family on Long Island, where she plays with a bevy of babies and tries on over-the-top wedding dresses, one of which she uses later in the film.



Copyright © Nikki S. Lee,  
Courtesy Leslie Tonkonow Artworks and Projects, NY

Other scenes, however, are pure fabrication, most notably those that present Nikki One in her book-lined studio, a fake set that Ms. Lee constructed in a rented Williamsburg loft with leased furniture and borrowed books. Here Nikki One earnestly explains the direction of her faux documentary to an unseen interviewer and discusses her work with two visitors: RoseLee Goldberg, the performance art curator, and Leslie Tonkonow, Ms. Lee’s real-life dealer who discovered her in art school.

Ms. Lee also played fast and loose with the dates, just as she did with the camera date-stamps on her “Projects” photos.

In making the film, “I kind of followed real events,” Ms. Lee said in the interview for this article. “But I kind of arrange them.” For instance, she asked the collectors, Tony and Heather Podesta, if she could stay with them in Venice; she also set up the film’s final scene: a long, almost mystical tracking shot in which, seen only from the back, she marches determinedly down a pier at Manhattan’s annual Armory Show on the Hudson to the music of Philip Glass and drops off an envelope at Ms. Tonkonow’s booth.

No intervention was needed for the film’s most disastrous event, when Ms. Lee arrived at a Frankfurt gallery for her first German solo show only to find that her “Parts” photographs had been ruined by the framer. (He had decided to tidy them up by trimming off their borders.)

On screen Nikki One is seen wailing, “This is not my work,” and then trudging miserably around the city. The show’s pre-opening dinner unfolds as it actually did, with a slide projection instead of real artwork. Yet Ms. Lee sounded perky as she recalled these setbacks. “It was awful for the opening,” she said, “but really good for the film.”

Friends and acquaintances who took part in her faux documentary were sometimes told what to say but were also encouraged to be natural, Ms. Lee said. She said she tended to follow the other person’s lead in each scene, “but of course I act.” During the Frankfurt sequence, for example, she eventually took the gallery’s owner, Anita Beckers, into another room and explained off camera that her morose mood was feigned.

Ms. Beckers, who still represents her in Germany, recalls the situation fondly. “We had so much fun together,” she said. “I think for Nikki it was the best part of the film.”

Certainly this interplay between fact and fiction adds a provocative layer of confusion to Ms. Lee’s work. But what really holds the viewer is trying to figure out how she achieved her transformations. (For this reason her work is often compared to that of Cindy Sherman.) Because Ms. Lee looks so completely at home in every setting – from a

hip-hop B-girl to a Jewish bride – her work reinforces the notion that America is the ultimate melting pot.

And though it may be perceived as exhibitionistic, her art has a spiritual, almost Buddhist, undercurrent: her ability to don and doff personalities at will implies a lack of concern with self. The audience eventually comes to sense that this capacity may not be hers alone, that perhaps we all contain multitudes.

Similarly, as the film progresses, the concept of fact versus fiction, or Nikki One versus Nikki Two, seems to melt away, as Ms. Lee demonstrates her unusual knack for finding common ground with strangers, even without the use of costumes and props.

In one scene, shot at an open-air street market in Mexico City, Ms. Lee, wearing what looks like her everyday attire, happens upon a woman packing up trinkets in newspaper behind a stall and ends up pitching in to help. The scene concludes with uproarious laughter, as the artist wraps up her new friend’s hands and feet, jokingly instructs her to stay like that all day, and kisses her goodbye.

Later, wearing a strapless sundress and flip-flops, Ms. Lee swiftly becomes the belle of the ball at a public dance event in a park, gliding to danzón music with a string of dapper elderly men who end up competing to partner her.

Of course Ms. Lee’s very identity as the artist Nikki S. Lee is also something of a performance. Raised in Seoul and in the town of Kye-Chang, where her father operated a wedding hall, her real legal name is Lee Seung Hee. She adopted the name Nikki after moving to New York in 1994 to attend the Fashion Institute of Technology.

Initially she was excited by the different types of cultures she encountered, which came as a dramatic contrast to South Korea’s more homogeneous society, she said. But while her “Projects” pieces have sometimes been interpreted as a commentary on racism and social minorities, Ms. Lee said that was never her intention. “I’m not Korean-American, which means I don’t have issues about race,” she said. “But I’m really happy that people talk a lot about different things from my work.”

Given her skill at role playing, it might be naïve to assume that Ms. Lee would bare her private universe in an interview. Yet she seemed quite candid in conversation, just as she was with the people she involved in “Projects”; she said she always introduced herself to them as an artist working on a piece. But she also showed herself to be more conventional – and more reserved – than one might expect. And she allowed that the adopted persona that came most naturally to her was the yuppie, because “a lot of my friends was like that.”

She said that her life is centered around her apartment. Like Nikki One’s fake studio, the loft-like space is filled with books, as well as a big flat-screen television.

Though she frequently broke into laughter, she was also intent on guarding her privacy. She lit up when talking about her boyfriend and eagerly showed off photos of him stored in her cellphone but asked that details of how they met not be revealed. Ms. Lee said she was unlikely to include him in an artwork. “I don’t want to explore my personal life in my work too much,” she said opaquely.

She spends a lot of time watching movies (“basically everything,” she said) and reading, with a heavy emphasis on postmodernist critique. When she began “Projects,” she was reading Jean Baudrillard’s “Simulacra and Simulation”; she loves Roland Barthes (they share the “same sensibility”) and is now reading two texts on philosophy by Kojin Karatani, Japan’s leading literary critic, as well as “A Natural History of the Senses” by Diane Ackerman (“just for fun”), all in Korean translation.

And increasingly Ms. Lee finds herself preoccupied by the differences between East and West, she said. “Identity in a Western society is more like, ‘I am myself,’ ” she said, “‘I think, therefore I exist.’ In Eastern cultures it is more ‘we think about group.’ ”

Emotional exchanges, like being in love or being close to a friend, also differ. In South Korea, for instance, were she to introduce one friend to another, and they became friends on their own, “that would be rude,” Ms. Lee said, while in the United States it might seem natural.

Thinking about such differences inspires her. After a while, she said, she begins to wonder, “‘How am I going to make a work with this kind of concept?’ That’s my way of working.”

For all her reputed mutability, Ms. Lee seems sure of herself. She said her favorite scene in her new film is the long tracking shot that shows her striding through the Armory Show, looking determinedly forward. “Artist Nikki going through a lot of art and not even looking at it,” she chuckled.

Yet when asked if she had learned anything from inhabiting her many roles, Ms. Lee seemed momentarily bemused. Finally, she said, “One thing I really learned is, ‘Yes, I’m right, I’m able to do that.’ So I have confidence in my confidence.”

**A K A NIKKI S. LEE**  
**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART**

*Screenings are scheduled for Thursday at 6:30 p.m., Friday at 8 p.m. and Saturday at 2 p.m.; (212) 708-9400; [www.moma.org](http://www.moma.org).*

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, JULY 12, 2006



In the Korean photographer Atta Kim's eight-hour photograph of the intersection of Fifth Avenue and 57th Street, the buildings are crisp and life is just a shadow.

## PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

## When Real Time Turns Out to Be the Most Surreal of All

By HOLLAND COTTER

Every day, hundreds of tourists snap photographs of a crowd- and car-jammed Times Square. The average picture takes — what? — 15 seconds to shoot? The same picture of the same place takes the Korean photographer Atta Kim eight hours. And his Times Square ends up with only an eerie trace of a human presence, like a deserted movie set.

Other pictures by Mr. Kim, who is making an outstanding New York solo debut in a show titled "Atta Kim: On-Air" at the International Center of Photography, have required less time. A photograph of a soccer game: two hours. Of a couple having sex: one hour. Still others go way beyond the eight-hour mark. "Monologue of Ice," with its mysterious lozenge of pollen-yellow light hovering in the dark, is the product of a marathon 25-hour shoot.

**Atta Kim**  
On-Air  
International Center of Photography

And what is that picture of? A block of ice melting. Mr. Kim put the ice in a room and left the lens of his camera open to record the process of physical change as a solid form returned to fluid. Naturally, the transformation

was slow. But who would have guessed that it would be so spectacularly photogenic — molten-looking and radiant?

Many of the large-format photographs in Mr. Kim's show were made over time. His is an art of duration and of simultaneity. When he leaves his lens open for an hour on a couple making love, every movement made in that hour is in the picture, though condensed into an explosive blur. His view of Times Square leaves all the stationary elements — buildings and such — in crisp focus, but reduces traffic to a shimmering haze, a ghost of motion. Other famous New York intersections get the same treatment.

Continued on Page 3

# WHEN REAL TIME TURNS OUT TO BE THE MOST SURREAL OF ALL

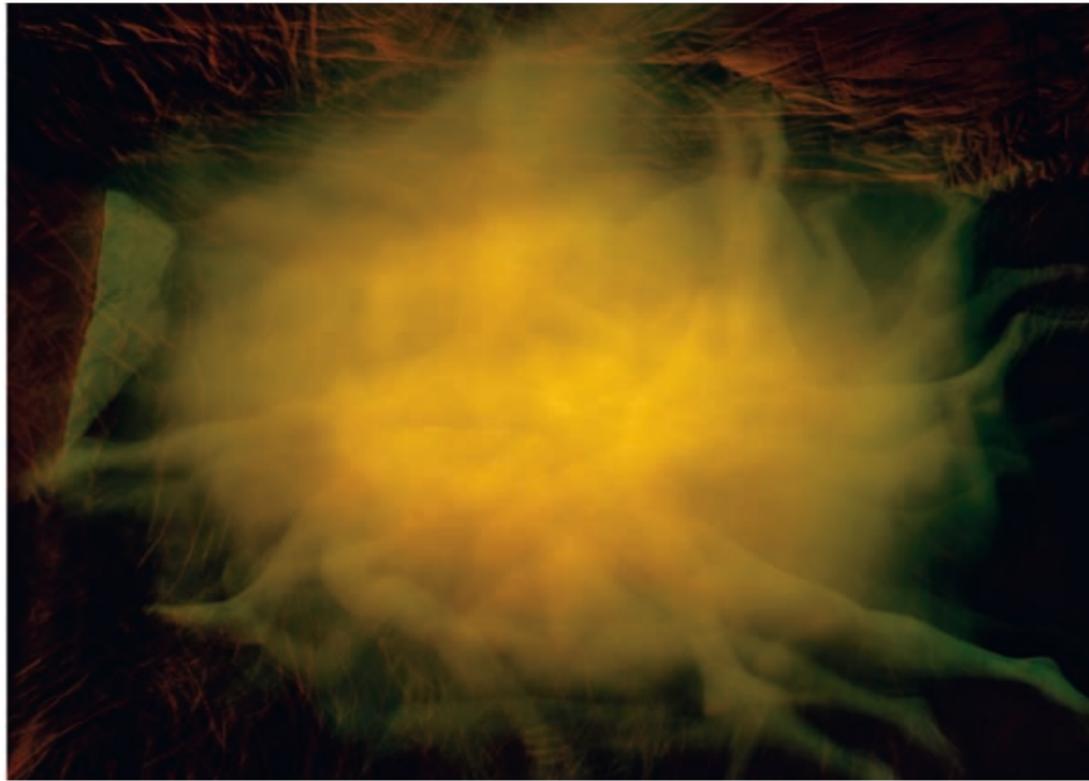
BY HOLLAND COTTER

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Photographs by Atta Kim

*In the "Sex Series" (2003), part of the "On-Air" exhibition, a couple making love was photographed for one hour.*

This technique is old. Early-19th-century pioneers of photography experimented with it. So do contemporary artists like Hiroshi Sugimoto, in his well-known shots of movie-house interiors taken while full-length films are in progress. What Mr. Kim brings to the tradition are new subjects – live-model Buddhist sculptures, for example – and dramatically extended temporal parameters, to create ever more complex compressions and layerings of time.

He has similarly pushed the boundaries in his extreme elaboration of a second traditional method of image-layering, one associated with double or multiple exposures. In several series of pictures Mr. Kim overlays different, semitransparent pictures of human figures, one on top of another, using digital editing. He piles up anywhere from a dozen to a hundred separate images to create a single composite picture, at once singular and multiple.

But while digitally savvy, Mr. Kim's work is more distinctive for its ideas than for its technology. Born in South Korea in 1956, he earned a degree in mechanical engineering, but his interests were, and still are, literature and philosophy. He considers Heidegger's speculations on time an important early influence, along with the teachings of the mystic G. I. Gurdjieff (which also shaped the work of the American photographer Minor

White). Most important of all is Zen Buddhist thinking, although this thread has been fully apparent only in the last few years.

Mr. Kim's earliest photographs were of patients in a Korean psychiatric hospital whom he shot during long, immersive, interactive sessions in the 1980's. In the early 1990's he created a series of cinematic performance-based pictures of nude models lying, as if asleep or dead, in desolate landscapes. The scenes looked like the aftermath of a catastrophe, but the bodies were meant to signify dormant new life.

His first New York appearance was in 2002 in the large group show "Translated Acts: Body and Performance Art From East Asia," at the Queens Museum of Art. There he showed selections from "The Museum Project" (1995-2002), which remains his best-known body of work. (Excerpts from it are on view at Yossi Milo Gallery, 525 West 25th Street, Chelsea, through Aug. 25.)

That series centered on a single visual motif: one or more figures encased, as if on display, within a museum-style plexiglass vitrine. In the earliest pictures the figures were nude, often crouched in fetal position. Some of the vitrines were actually placed and shot in museums, others in natural settings or on city streets and in public build-

*In overlaid images  
Jesus becomes his disciples, and they become him.*

ings at off hours. The pictures that resulted were effective: quiet, minimalist, mildly surreal. They placed bare bodies where they would not otherwise be found, but also made the bodies as untouchably inorganic as antique sculptures in a gallery or expensive machines in a showroom.

Mr. Kim varied his basic format in several subseries to create what he referred to as his own private museum of cultural and emotional subjects. One series offered a compendium of Korean "types": families, artists, workers and so on. Another was composed of erotic couples.

More interesting were a group of portraits of maimed and wounded Korean War veterans, and a "Holocaust Series" in which models lay in heaps or hung from racks like slaughtered animals. Then, in a radical shift in tone, came the "Nirvana Series," shot largely in Buddhist temples or in outdoor settings with nude models, including young priests and nuns, posed as bodhisattvas and tantric deities.

"The Museum Project" was an ambitious venture. Parts of it were strikingly successful, though certain images bordered, intentionally or otherwise, on kitsch. This was especially true of the "Jesus Series" (2002), which had punkish young models chained to plexiglass crosses and wired with intravenous drips. I surmised that AIDS was a possible subject but wondered where Mr. Kim's unsettled work might be heading.

As "On-Air" demonstrates, it was headed in a direction far less obviously theatrical. In the work in this New York solo show, organized by Christopher Phillips, narrative and overt symbolism are played down. Where "The Museum Project" often graphically illustrated ideas – of preservation and decay, corporality and spirituality – the new pictures subtly embody them.

And although Mr. Kim is careful to assert that he is not a practicing Buddhist, core Buddhist concepts shape the new work. One is the notion that change, or transience, is the only concrete reality, and that time as a quantifiable, linear entity is a mirage. All time and no time are the same. A couple making love for an hour is a cloud of luminosity.

Then there is the Buddhist belief in cosmic interconnection, that all things are linked to, are part of, all other things. In a series titled "Self-Portrait" Mr. Kim layers head shots of 100 Korean men to create one "Korean" face.

In a studio-made re-enactment of Leonardo's "Last Supper," the figures of 13 different models, each holding the appropriate pose, are combined to form the 13 figures in the scene. Thus, by implication, Jesus is also Judas.

Again, Mr. Kim's use of such photographic techniques is not in itself novel, but the philosophical shape of his work is. And it is clearest in his most straightforward pictures. His "Portrait of Mao" (2006) series involves no layering or time compression, but consists of a sequence of still shots. In the first we see a lifelike bust of the Chinese leader carved in ice. In the second the bust has grown abstract through melting. In the third it is as smooth, attenuated and abstract as a Brancusi sculpture.

And in a similar series, "Portrait of Atta," not in the New York show, the artist records his own features carved in ice undergoing a similar transformation. The sequence is a perfect, step-by-step Buddhist image of time passing and an ego disappearing, a process that some of Mr. Kim's other recent pictures turn into mandalas of layered light.

*"Atta Kim: On-Air" remains at the International Center of Photography, 1133 Avenue of the Americas, at 43rd Street, through Aug. 27; www.icp.org.*

## A Korean Turns Old Paper Into Quietly Abstract Art

By SONIA KOLESNIKOV-JESSOP

International Herald Tribune

SINGAPORE — For three years the South Korean artist Kwang-Young Chun has been buying discarded Korean books and storing them in air-conditioned warehouses. He has accumulated more than 20,000, spending, he said with a laugh, “a small fortune in the process.”

He doesn't buy the books for content but for the handmade mulberry paper they are printed on. These small pieces of paper, sometimes 100 years old, have been the cornerstone of his art for the last 20 years.

“I noticed some trendy restaurants and coffee shops in Seoul were decorating their walls with old mulberry paper, and I started to panic

Paper that ‘contains the soul of the people who touched it.’

that one day I wouldn't be able to find those books anymore,” he said in an interview here, where he recently completed a printmaking project at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute.

Works from this project will be on view here from Sept. 2 to 23. Mr. Chun may also show some of the prints when he exhibits his mulberry paper work in Manhattan this fall: sculptures at the Kim Foster Gallery on West 20th Street in Chelsea (Sept. 7 to Oct. 21) and wall pieces at the Michelle Rosenfeld Gallery on East 79th Street (Sept. 7 to Oct. 21).

Handmade mulberry paper was once found in every corner of a traditional Korean home, used to cover walls, doors and even windowpanes, or to dress up utensils and decorative objects. Mr. Chun closely associates

it with his childhood in a small village, he said. There he would watch his uncle, a doctor, hand patients small bundles of medicinal herbs wrapped in mulberry paper inscribed with wishes for good health.

“I can still remember all these bundles hanging in tight clusters from the ceiling of his house,” he said.

Mr. Chun, 62, has devoted two decades to his “Aggregation” series. He uses old mulberry paper to wrap thousands of thick plastic-foam triangles and ties them with twisted mulberry paper “threads.” He then glues the pieces onto panels or strings them together into free-standing installations. Art critics have described the work as having “a surface alive and bristling” and called it “a kind of painting that is not really a painting.”

Irene Lee, the print institute's director, said: “His flatter works look like trompe l'oeil, as they create the illusion of depth. It's a little like bas-relief in the contemporary manner. This is what makes his work so very different. The works can look like craters when seen close up, or like the Milky Way when viewed from a distance.”

Wrapping and assembling are integral parts of Korean culture. Bojagi, or square wrapping cloths, date to the 14th century and are used for carrying and storing objects. But the quiet abstraction and modernity of Mr. Chun's work also reflects his contact with Western culture. Beginning in the late 1960's he spent more than 10 years in the United States, first as an art student and then as a Color Field painter in Philadelphia. His work at the time was characterized by large, flat areas of color, on which he would layer variations of a hue.

“I'd worked in a factory making high-quality print fabrics when I was a young student,” he said. “It was all very colorful, and I was certainly influenced by the mix of oils and chem-



Singapore Tyler Print Institute

Kwang-Young Chun has two gallery shows in New York this fall.

icals.”

He returned to South Korea with his wife in 1977. “I wasn't satisfied with my work, and I wasn't sure what I was going to do next,” he recalled. He spent time traveling through rural Korea, visiting folk museums and heritage centers.

“I started to understand better where I came from,” he said, “and that's when I started using mulberry paper.”

Using old paper that has been touched by several generations, he said, adds spiritual meaning to his work. “I can't use new paper,” he said. “For me the old paper has a life, a history. It contains the soul of the people who touched it. In a way I'm wrapping the stories of people's lives.”

Mr. Chun, whose larger sculptures

have sold for as much as \$180,000, worked on a series of cast-paper sculptures and etchings during his three-week residency at the print institute here. The master papermaker, Richard Hungerford, called it one of the “most complicated projects” the institute had undertaken.

“There were a lot of steps involving plaster blocks and rubber molds,” he said. “There were certain things we had to avoid, like upward-pointed triangles, because casting paper on those is technically very difficult. Still, you can't set up parameters with artists. It's give and take.”

Mr. Chun said he enjoyed the printmaking, but found it less “exciting” than working with traditional paper. “For me what is important is not the final aesthetic result,” he said, “but the intangible aspect of the work.”

# DANCE & THEATER IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

## DANCE & THEATER IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

The New York Times covered various aspects of the graceful movements in traditional to contemporary Korean dance. Also The New York Times reviewed favorably the works of Korean female playwrights, whose works spotlight the life of Korean-Americans and their cultural deviations in the U.S.

## DANCE REVIEW

## A New York

By JOHN ROCKWELL

Kang Sun Young has been designated Korea's Intangible Cultural Asset No. 92. An active teacher and cultural politician in South Korea, she has "traveled the world," according to one of the several speakers who welcomed her from the stage of the New York State Theater on Tuesday night. But at 81, she had not yet made her New York debut.

Tuesday's performance before a large audience, mostly Korean, rectified that omission. An outsider hardly knew what to expect. This could have been a gaudy Korean revue intended to fill a too-large stage.

The theater was in fact too big for all the subtleties to register. (Ms. Kang's home hall seats 400, as opposed to the State Theater's 2,700.) But the yawning cavity had been cleverly modified with a false proscenium of hanging fabrics. The whole event turned out to be genuinely effective and, as far as one could tell, plausibly respectful of Korean dance tradition.

The two-and-a-half-hour program was a sampler, although not everything in Korean dance was sampled; masked dance drama was missing for instance. Still, the variety of the 11 excerpts was impressive.

Korean dance, like Korea, has been subjected to millenniums of invasion and foreign influence. As one religion succeeded another, with different cultural and social agendas, and as invaders swept down the peninsula, Korean dance mutated and evolved. The 20th century was particularly difficult, what with the collapse of the 500-year-old Confucian

## Debut at 81, Exploring Korea's Traditions



Nan Melville for The New York Times

Members of the Kang Sun Young Dance Company performing Tuesday night at the New York State Theater.

### Kang Sun Young

New York State Theater

Yi dynasty, Japanese occupation, World War II, the Korean War and the hardening division of the country.

Ms. Kang is a disciple of Han Seong Jun, who helped revive traditional dance in the 1930's. In Confucian times women were excluded from ceremonial performance. Ms. Kang's company on Tuesday consisted of 37 female dancers (including herself) and 2 men, along with 14 musicians, who made wonderfully pungent sounds from the pit.

One of the more admirable aspects of Asian dance is the room offered for performers of every age. Many in Ms. Kang's troupe were no longer

young — not 81, but up there — even if some of the more athletic maneuvers, like the gracefully posed mass onstage drumming, were turned over to the younger dancers.

Korean dance costumes consist of many-layered, multicolored skirts and tops, small hats and turned-up white booties. The dance itself is based on heel-to-toe steps, to sometimes trickily syncopated duple and triple meters. There is much use of the upper body, long scarves or Chinese-style "water sleeves" and handheld percussive props. There are also all manner of hand niceties and facial expressions, harder to perceive from afar. Everything is synchronized, often in elegantly choreographed patterns. Most of the dances, except for one comic dance drama, looked hieratic and solemn,

*There's nothing like an invasion to change the local choreography.*

but always beautiful. Even the potentially tacky projections looked good.

Advance publicity hinted coyly that Ms. Kang's Tuesday performance might be "possibly be her last time onstage." This was modified by a speaker to "might possibly be one of her last performances." Whatever. There she was at the end, hitching up her skirts to reveal some fancy footwork and having what looked like a high old time. The audience had a high old time too.

## Dreamlike Patterns, Delicate And Slow

There is a sense of tradition, but no traditional dance in Sin Cha Hong's "Pilgrimage," a work that gently alludes to life's journey through a succession of calm, minimalist scenes that sometimes evoke the stylized stage pictures of Robert Wilson or Butoh performers.

### DANCE REVIEW

**ROSLYN  
SULCAS** Ms. Hong, who spent 20 years in New York before returning to her native Korea in 1993, created "Pilgrimage" in 1988, and the piece, which was performed Monday night at La MaMa Annex, has mostly worn well. In the opening section, seven dancers in long robes and conical caps move in silence on small stilts, arms draped over bamboo sticks they carry on their shoulders. To the sounds of birds, water and then rhythmic percussion overlaid by a fluted melody, they form lines and semicircles with little bending movements and small, repetitive arm gestures.

After sudden, stiff falls to the

"Pilgrimage" will be performed again tonight at La MaMa Annex, 74A East Fourth Street, East Village; (212) 475-7710.



Erin Baiano for The New York Times

The opening section of Sin Cha Hong's "Pilgrimage," danced to the sounds of birds, water and percussion.

ground, the dancers writhe out of their outer robes as if emerging from cocoons, then move in near-slow motion, crouching and bringing their cupped hands to their mouths as if drinking. Ms. Hong fashions delicate patterns as the dancers circle an individual, or separate into small groups, but she retains a stylistic unity throughout these discrete events that gives "Pilgrimage" the illogical continuity of a dream.

### Pilgrimage La MaMa Annex

Only once does a single figure — in a voluminous white robe — hold the stage alone, and this minimal solo, in which just the arms and upper body move slightly, possesses a surprising dramatic resonance. Here, Ms. Hong is aided by a skillful (uncredited)

lighting design and the appealing score (put together by Masaru Soga and Myung-woo Na), which mixes nature sounds with traditional instrumentation and occasional song.

"Pilgrimage" can occasionally feel soporific — and interludes for two small dancers in white masks who seem to represent guiding spirits are jarringly twee — but it is mostly rewarding in its visual beauty and unforced tranquility of purpose.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, JUNE 9, 2006

# THE Listings

JUNE 9-JUNE 15



## MYUNG SOO KIM DANCE PROJECT

(Wednesday and Thursday)

Ms. Kim, who channels ancient Korean shamanistic rituals through modern dance, will perform six solos in costumes inspired by vivid Korean traditional dress. (Through June 18.) At 8 p.m., the Duke on 42nd Street, 229 West 42nd Street, (212) 239-6200 or telecharge.com; \$35, \$25 for students and 65+. (Dunning)

has been brought to American shores with a first-rate cast (Brian F. O'Byrne, Oliver Platt, Martha Plimpton and Peter Scanavino), directed by Robert Falls (1:45). Biltmore Theater, 261 West 47th Street, (212) 239-6200. (Brantley)

• **'SWEENEY TODD'** Sweet dreams, New York. This thrilling new revival of Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's musical, with Michael Cerveris and Patti LuPone leading a cast of 10 who double as their own musicians, burrows into your thoughts like a campfire storyteller who knows what really scares you. The inventive director John Doyle aims his pared-down interpretation at the squirming child in everyone who wants to have his worst fears both confirmed and dispelled (2:30). Eugene O'Neill Theater, 230 West 49th Street, (212) 239-6200. (Brantley)

• **'TARZAN'** This writhing green blob with music, adapted by Disney Theatrical Productions from the 1999 animated film, has the feeling of a super-deluxe day-care center, equipped with lots of bungee cords and karaoke synthesizers, where kids can swing when they get tired of singing, and vice versa. The soda-pop score is by Phil Collins (2:30). Richard Rodgers Theater, 226 West 46th Street, (212) 307-4747. (Brantley)

• **'THREE DAYS OF RAIN'** In this revival of Richard Greenberg's slender, elegant drama of family disconnectedness, Julia Roberts is stiff with self-consciousness, glancingly acquainted with the two characters she plays and deeply, disturbingly beautiful. Otherwise, it is almost impossible to discern the virtues of the play itself in this wooden and splintered production, directed by Joe Mantello and also starring Paul Rudd and Bradley Cooper, who have little chance of capturing the audience's attention (2:30). Bernard B. Jacobs Theater, 242 West 45th Street, (212) 239-6200. (Brantley)

• **'THE THREEPENNY OPERA'** Presented as a long, panssexual orgy, Scott Elliot's numbing revival of the Brecht-Weill classic feels like a party where the hangover

West 45th Street, (212) 239-6200. (Brantley)

• **'THE HISTORY BOYS'** Madly enjoyable Alan Bennett's play about a battle for the hearts and minds of a group of university-bound students, imported with

the original British cast from the National Theater, moves with a breezy narrative swagger that transcends cultural barriers. Directed by Nicholas Hytner, with a perfectly oiled ensemble led by the superb Richard Griffiths and Stephen Campbell Moore as schoolmasters with

opposing views of history and education (2:40). Broadhurst Theater, 235 West 44th Street, (212) 239-6200. (Brantley)

• **'HOT FEET'** A dancing encyclopedia of clichés set to the music of Earth, Wind and Fire. Numbing (2:30). Hilton Theater,

Lois Greenfield

THE NEW YORK TIMES, MONDAY, JULY 24, 2006

# Arts, Briefly

Compiled by Steven McElroy

## All Seats Are Cheap Seats

For the third consecutive year, City Center will present "Fall for Dance," bringing together 30 companies from around the world for a festival of six programs. This year's event, from Sept. 28 through Oct. 8, has expanded to 10 nights, from 6, to accommodate more people vying for the popular (and affordable) \$10 tickets. One of the festival's goals is to



build new audiences for dance, and it seems to be working: a survey of audience members last year found that 12 percent of attendees under age 30 had never seen a dance performance before. Among this year's participants are the New York-based Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company and Stephen Petronio Company as well as the Yi-Jo Lim Sun Dance Company, above, from Korea and Coleman Lamieux & Compagnie from Montreal, both appearing in New York for the first time. Full schedule: nycitycenter.org.

## Watch the Antics

Koosil-ja (she only uses her first name) — born in Japan of Korean parents and based in New York since 1981 — had a fascinating idea for her new “Dance Without Bodies,” seen

**JOHN  
ROCKWELL**

**DANCE  
REVIEW**

Wednesday night at the Kitchen. Several interesting ideas actually. The main one was for her and her dancing partner, Melissa Guerrero (Koosil-ja is the one with glasses), to dance in moment-to-moment emulation of the movements on three video monitors, groups of which were dotted about the space.

She has described this technique as falling between choreography and improvisation and was apparently led to it by her experience of working with the Wooster Group, several leading members of which are listed as donors for this production.

But she also divided the Kitchen into two symmetrical performing

*Koosil-ja's “Dance Without Bodies” will be performed tonight and tomorrow night at 8 at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, Chelsea, (212) 255-5793, Ext. 11 or [thekitchen.org](http://thekitchen.org).*

## on Either Stage, Then Go to the Videotapes



Julie Lemberger for The New York Times

Koosil-ja, foreground, with Melissa Guerrero projected in background.

areas, back to back. Each audience could see the other stage and audience projected live on its own rear wall. The two dancers dashed from side to side, sometimes leaving one stage empty (but that audience still saw them, projected).

The dancers also worked live with the bass guitarist Geoff Matters, who was the overall composer, except that sometimes the two women donned microphones and sang live duets to electronic accompaniment. Koosil-ja and Mr. Matters are credited for the video installation.

**Koosil-ja**  
*The Kitchen*

The dancing was vigorous and energetic, and fascinating to check against the three different video offerings. To my eye the women spent more time with the upper-left screen, depicting scenes from feature films, than with the one to its right, of rehearsal footage, or on the bottom, of animated films. But sometimes they would dip into one or the other two sources, and sometimes they managed to combine two or even three.

All of this was carried on in an atmosphere of lighthearted good cheer, reflected in Mr. Matters's mostly electro-pop music and above all in Koosil-ja's goofy costumes, 60s-style dresses adorned with doodads and split to reveal what looked like translucent plastic slips, all topped off by aviator caps that seemed to be made of some kind of sparkling Styrofoam-like fabric.

Profound? No. Fun? Yes. And at one hour, it never overstayed its welcome, like so much of downtown dance.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, MAY 19, 2006

## DANCE REVIEW

A Choreographer Showcases  
An Assortment of Personalities

By JENNIFER DUNNING

Ko-Ryo Dance Theater

Clemente Soto Vélaz Cultural Center

Sunhwa Chung has at least three personalities, to judge from the evening presented by her Ko-Ryo Dance Theater on Wednesday at the Flamboyant Theater at Clemente Soto Vélaz. The first is the adept modern-dance choreographer behind "Petals in the Wind," a duet on the program. The second is a delicately compelling performer of Korean traditional dance. And the third is something of a mystery.

"Petals in the Wind," a 1999 duet danced to turbulent music by Hans Zimmer, is a familiar portrait of a man and a woman who shift continuously between dependence and independence. Ms. Chung expresses those shifts chiefly through grappling partnering and by having one dancer turn away from the other. But there are some excitingly surprising devices, like Yoshinori Ito's fast travel toward Claire Malaquias, his foot scuffing as if to kick her.

The Ko-Ryo Dance Theater will perform through Sunday night at the Flamboyant Theater at the Clemente Soto Vélaz Cultural Center, 107 Suffolk Street between Delancey and Rivington Streets, Lower East Side; (212) 868-4444.

Ms. Chung is exquisitely fluid in the soft turns and bobs of Korean dance in "Of Love and Memories," a 1995 solo she also choreographed. Best of all are her long, lyrical arms and expressive hands, and her odd mix of reticence and lushness. She pulls out all the stops in "Il-haw II: Missing Episode," a dance for five (Maki Hatae, Mr. Ito, Ms. Malaquias, Akemi Nishi and Ryoji Sasamoto) that makes imaginative use of the magical Flamboyant stage space, enhanced, too, by Miriam Nilofa Crowe's lighting.

There are suggestions of urban street corners at night and the couples and solitary individuals who inhabit them. Once more, Mr. Ito stands out for his powerful presence and sophistication as a performer. But here, as in the opening dance, a premiere called "Life Is Every Day," Ms. Chung does not know when to stop. There, though, the similarities end. It was hard to imagine that the same artist choreographed this meandering, confusing new group dance, performed within lines formed by two long ropes and set to a collage of contemporary music.



Nan Melville for The New York Times

Sunhwa Chung performing "Of Love and Memories."

A CHOREOGRAPHER  
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THE NEW YORK TIMES, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2006

An Immigrant Family's Three Survivors, Traveling Together, Alone

Father in a funk? Brother grappling with a shameful secret? Barren silences casting a pall over the dinner table?

Forget family therapy. Gather the troops, hop in the S.U.V., fill the tank and head for the open highway. There's nothing like a road trip to knit back together those fraying family bonds.

As indie movies like "Little Miss Sunshine" and "Pieces of April" affirm, tight quarters, fast-food pit stops and kitschy motels form the postcard-perfect backdrop for the regeneration of domestic fellow feeling, always laced with a little bit of distancing attitude, of course.

This increasingly familiar genre — call it the dysfunctional family road-trip comedy-drama — is transposed to the stage in Julia Cho's tender-hearted "Durango," a new play about a Korean immigrant and his two sons squabbling, soul-baring and eventually healing, just a little, as they head toward the Southwest.

The play, which opened last night at the Public Theater as a sensitive production directed by Chay Yew, is cooked with mostly familiar ingredients. The generation gap that can yawn particularly wide in immigrant families is by no means fresh theatrical ground. The subterranean racism that confronts minorities in the heartland also strikes familiar chords, as does the mournful lament for the American dream shimmering feebly at the vanishing point on the horizon. Even the fantastic sequences in which the troubled high-schooler, Jimmy (Jon Norman Schneider), takes refuge in fantasies of fictional superheroes have a been-there feeling.

And yet Ms. Cho, a young playwright of clear promise, develops even the potentially hackneyed themes with a laconic, natural ease that earns respect and admiration. Nothing in "Durango" feels particularly new, but nothing in it feels contrived or dishonest, either. (Which is more than you can say for some of those indie movies.)

After a twangy musical prelude that sets a lonesome tone, the play opens with a particularly affecting, unadorned scene set in a bland-looking office. A man stands rigidly behind a desk, his eyes locked on its empty surface. In thickly accented English, he trades small talk about the family — one son, Isaac (James Yaegashi), is heading to med school; the other, Jimmy, is a star of the high school swim team — with the fellow awkwardly shifting in a chair beside him.

Only when Boo-Seng Lee (James Saito) stoops to retrieve a box of personal effects from the floor, an exhausted houseplant peeking over the cardboard rim, do we find a source for the sad tension quietly oozing from him. He's just been laid off and

ONLINE: DESSERT SCENES

Julia Cho explains how growing up in the American Southwest influenced her play "Durango": [nytimes.com/theater](http://nytimes.com/theater)



James Saito, right, as a Korean-American father taking his two sons, played by James Yaegashi, left, and Jon Norman Schneider, on a road trip.

is being ushered out of the office building immediately by Jerry (Ross Bickell), the friendly security guard, who's almost as embarrassed as he is.

As Boo-Seng strolls rigidly, unable to face the next moment, Jerry gently prods him: "Mr. Lee? I have to be at another office by 4. Let's go."

Pulled from his reverie, Boo-Seng mechanically replies: "Yes. Let's go."

That everyday phrase is used with resourceful cunning by Ms. Cho throughout "Durango," occurring now and then with each repetition. She has a gift for ambling heavily detailed with a just perceptible variety of poetic feeling. Someone in the play always impudently says "let's go" to someone else, but all three of the Lee men are revealed to be painfully aware of their own tendency to stand stock still, tentatively speaking. The road trip that provides the dramatic impetus of "Durango" may be a near cliché, but it is nevertheless an apt metaphor for a drama that gently contemplates how hard it can be to move forward in life, even when you can see the right road stretching out before you.

Returning home, Boo-Seng warps the silence over dinner in an unobtrusive graffiti that's a crime for a family vacation. "I have some time off," he explains. This excites Jimmy, who has experienced little family togetherness since the death of his mother some years ago. But basic, bevy and uncomfortable, would rather stay at home. He has to be blackmailed into going by Jimmy, who wins him over by giving him a peek at his secret notebook, where he

defeats his anxieties by proxy through the exploits of comic-strip superheroes.

Although he bores the boys with an enthusiastic pep talk about Korean history, Boo-Seng has never learned the language of real communication. When the family stops at a motel for the night, he must unload his grief on a stranger by the pool. (In one of the play's rare false notes, Boo-Seng moves a little too smoothly into a gift moment of self-reflection, wondering: "Why did I want so little? Where did I learn to want so little for myself?")

All three of the Lee men are struggling with a secret, and the play ultimately settles into predictable emotional and dramatic grooves. Both boys' lives have been shaped by their father's unspoken disappointment in his own, and his determination that they stick to the standard formula for achievement in America. Isaac confesses to his brother that he never really showed up for his med-school interview in Hawaii. Jimmy confides that he actually hates swimming. Listening ahead like an Applebee's on the roadside, familiar in the point of banality, is another dark secret, the big if: homosexuality.

Thankfully, the well-worn contours eventually give way to a few unexpected kinks and crises. And the tenderest performances are glowing, with Mr. Saito ending a quietly moving protest of a man quietly coming to terms with the knowledge that his sacrifices may never yield the satisfactions he had hoped for. Mr. Yew, a playwright himself, has a graceful sense of pacing, and the production is uncommonly well designed. Daniel Orling's sets, gently lit by Paul Whitaker, contrast the cramped spaces of the men's lives with the freedom of the road.

And despite the schematics flaws of her plot, Ms. Cho wisely resists the

kind of feel-good ending that would wrap up a meal on a heartwarming note. The voyage of the Lee men may take them through some unanticipated emotional territory, but they end where they began, retracing into comfortable isolation, the fragile shoots of new feeling between them abandoned, at least for now.

**Durango**  
By Julia Cho, directed by Chay Yew, opens this week at the Public Theater, 410 Lafayette Street, until Nov. 26. Tickets: \$25 to \$45. [www.thpublictheater.org](http://www.thpublictheater.org)

**Writer:** Ross Bickell (Ross Bickell), James Saito (James Saito), Jon Norman Schneider (Jon Norman Schneider) and James Yaegashi (James Yaegashi)

**Director:** Chay Yew

**Producers:** Peter Dulles and Nancy Bickell

**Music:** Dan Chavich

# AN IMMIGRANT FAMILY'S THREE SURVIVORS, TRAVELING TOGETHER, ALONE

BY CHARLES ISHERWOOD

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Forget family therapy. Gather the troops, hop in the S.U.V., fill the tank and head for the open highway. There's nothing like a road trip to knit back together those fraying family bonds. As indie movies like "Little Miss Sunshine" and "Pieces of April" affirm, tight quarters, fast-food pit stops and kitschy motels form the postcard-perfect backdrop for the regeneration of domestic fellow feeling, always laced with a little bit of distancing attitude, of course.

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Returning home, Boo-Seng interrupts the silence over dinner to announce gruffly that it's time for a family vacation. "I have some time off," he explains. This excites Jimmy, who has experienced little family togetherness since the death of his mother some years ago. But Isaac, broody and uncomfortable, would rather stay at home. He has to be blackmailed into going by Jimmy, who wins him over by giving him a peek at his secret notebook, where he defeats his anxieties by proxy through the exploits of comic strip superheroes.

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#### DURANGO

By Julia Cho; directed by Chay Yew; sets by Dan Ostling; costumes by Linda Cho; lighting by Paul Whitaker; original songs by Julia Cho; sound and additional music by Fabian Obispo; production stage manager, Buzz Cohen; interim general manager, Seth Shepsle; associate artistic director, John Dias; associate producers, Peter DuBois and Mandy Hackett; director of production, Ruth E. Sternberg. Presented by the Public Theater, Oskar Eustis, artistic director; Mara Manus, executive director; in association with the Long Wharf Theater, Gordon Edelstein, artistic director; Joan Channick, managing director. At the Public Theater, 425 Lafayette Street, at Astor Place, East Village; (212) 967-7555. Through Dec. 10. Running time: 1 hour 3 minutes.

WITH: Ross Bickell (Ned/Jerry), James Saito (Boo-Seng Lee), Jon Norman Schneider (Jimmy Lee), Jay Sullivan (Red Angel/Bob) and James Yaegashi (Isaac Lee).

# LAUGH NOW. YOU MAY NOT WHEN THESE WOMEN RULE THE WORLD.

BY ANITA GATES

The best parodies start with great titles. So Young Jean Lee's hysterically funny "Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven," now at the Here Arts Center, is perfect, because the show is actually about minority rage, mudfish in tofu, femininity's inner viciousness and a secret Korean plot to rule the world.

"You may laugh now, but remember my words when you and your offspring are writhing under our yoke," says Becky Yamamoto as the young woman known only as Korean-American.

Ms. Yamamoto is priceless, having already set the politically incorrect tone with the opening line, "Have you ever noticed how most Asian-Americans are slightly brain-damaged from having grown up with Asian parents?" After a few more shockingly racist comments, she points out that some American men "like that retarded quality."

Ms. Yamamoto's contemporary outspokenness is nearly equaled by the behavior of the three pretty, giggling Korean dancers in brightly colored traditional dresses. They speak in Korean much of the time, but audiences will notice that the word "sex" comes up quite often.

In English, one of the women perkily suggests to the others, "Shall we play 'hookers and johns'?" More than once, a particularly young dancer announces with a demure smile that being a prostitute is fun. Later the three women (Jun Sky Kim, Haerry Kim and Jennifer Lim) take turns, with the potent gruesome humor of a Quentin Tarantino movie, miming horrible ways to commit suicide.

Now and then a white American couple (Juliana Francis and Brian Bickerstaff) appear, arguing about sex, alcoholism, petty theft and their relationship in general. In the middle of this Mr. Bickerstaff's character announces: "You know what's awesome? Being white."

But Ms. Lee's play, which she also directed brilliantly, is not only about that sort of supposedly ingenuous extreme. Just when the largely Caucasian audience thought it had caught up to Ms. Lee's off-and-on ironic point of view, she called our bluff again. Whites are bigoted, Asians are bigoted, everybody's bigoted, and isn't it great that it's all out in the open now, and we can laugh about it? But not really.

"Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven" continues through Oct. 14 at Here Arts Center, 145 Avenue of the Americas, at Dominick Street, South Village; (212) 352-3101 or [www.here.org](http://www.here.org).

# FOOD

IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

The New York Times has focused on the rising popularity of Korean food, reviewing numerous Korean cuisines, from traditional styles of seasonal dishes to modern foods that can be tasted in New York.

# FOOD

IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25, 2006

# Traditional Flavors of the Lunar New Year

By DANA BOWEN

**T**WO sisters sat at an ingredient-strewn table at Vietcafe, gossiping as they prepared the sticky rice cakes that are adored across Vietnam at this time of year. Lan Tran Cao, the younger of the two and the owner of Vietcafe, a TriBeCa restaurant, spoke of a relative's recipe.

"The way she seasons it is different," she said to her sister, Nga Thi Tran. Clearly, "different" meant not as good.

A cook, Mai Nguyen, walked in and spotted the women mashing dried mung bean balls into banana leaves with great force. "Ah, banh chung!" she sang, and smiled. For her, the bundles contained distant memories of New Year's celebrations in Hanoi.

Lunar New Year begins on Sunday, and in many traditional Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese households in New York, the cooking is under way. Chefs like Ms. Cao find themselves in a peculiar spot at the beginning of the Year of the Dog, poised between a public hungry to learn about the world's cuisine and a community where many rely on traditional recipes.

"Nowadays, everybody buys these," she said of the banh chung, a requisite dish for



FOR A FELICITOUS START: Korean rice cake soup with dumplings, above, at Do Hwa in Greenwich Village, and banh chung, below, being prepared at Vietcafe in TriBeCa.



Jan. 1 and the Lunar New Year, treating the later date with more reverence. Ms. Kwak recalled eating the rice cake soup for breakfast as a child in North Korea, before preparing a solemn bowing ritual to honor her elders.

Jennifer Maeng, who owns Korean Temple Cuisine in the East Village, remembers her family spending a week preparing for the holiday, and having fresh duck made here, she uses frozen duck, just as everyone else does. But her mom in a good soup and they again with the success of a Southern grandma's chicken and dumplings.

Sticky New Year's made any adaptations across Asia. While many Koreans say the

### VIETNAMESE CARAMELIZED PORK (THIT KHO TO)

Adapted from Michael and Thon Huynh  
Time: About 45 minutes

- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 2 1/2 pounds pork belly or ham, sliced into thin, inch-long strips
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup fish sauce
- 1 heaping teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 dash sesame oil
- 1 medium Vidalia onion, sliced
- 1 scallion, sliced, green part only
- Rice for serving

1. Cover bottom of a large, heavy skillet with one cup sugar and place over medium-low heat. As soon as it melts and turns golden,

add pork, raise heat to medium, and stir until coated. (Sugar will become sticky and may harden, but it will re-melt as it cooks, forming a sauce.)

2. Stir in remaining sugar, salt, pepper and fish sauce. Cover and cook 2 minutes. Uncover, stir in garlic and oil and lower to simmer to reduce sauce for about 20 minutes.

3. Stir in Vidalia onion and cook until translucent, 5 to 7 minutes. Pork should be caramelized; if not, raise heat and sauté white sauce further reduces. Transfer to serving bowl, and sprinkle with scallion greens.

Yield: 4 servings.

### KOREAN RICE CAKE SOUP WITH DUMPLINGS (DUK MANDU GOOK)

Adapted from Myung Ja Kwak  
Time: About two hours

- For the dumplings:
- 1/2 cup dried onion
  - 1/2 onion kimchi, strained and chopped
  - 1/2 onion in ribs, minced
  - 1/2 pound ground pork
  - 1/2 teaspoon sesame oil
  - 1/2 teaspoon garlic, minced
  - 1/2 teaspoon salt
  - 1 package dumpling wrappers, thawed
  - 1 egg, beaten
- For the soup:
- 1 cup beef broth, preferably Korean (see note)
  - 1 bunch scallions
  - 1/2 pound bone beef, in thin slices
  - 1 pound frozen Korean rice cakes, sliced (see note)
  - 2 eggs, lightly beaten
  - 1/2 black pepper, to taste
  - 2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds
  - Toasted seaweed (optional), julienned

1. Make dumplings: Place a large pot of water over high heat. When it boils, add greens and onion and cook until onions are soft, about five minutes. Drain in colander and rinse under cold water.

2. In a large mixing bowl, combine onions and onion with kimchi. Working in batches, transfer a handful to cutting board and mince. Return vegetables to colander to drain. Add salt, sesame oil and pepper. Press down on vegetables with your hands, draining as much liquid as possible.

3. Working in batches, place a handful of vegetable-soaked mixture on a large piece of wrapper and clean, porous cloth, fold up

edges and twist, squeezing out liquid. Empty bowl into mixing bowl. When done, transfer to colander, top with parchment paper and weigh down with a heavy, water-filled pot. Drain for at least a half-hour.

4. In a large mixing bowl, combine pork, oil, garlic and salt. Add drained vegetables and mix well with your fingers.

5. Place a spoonful of filling in center of a wrapper, brush wrapper rim with egg, and fold, forming a half moon. Pinch closed with your fingers and squeeze out air. Bring ends together and seal, dab with egg and pinch together: it will look like a tortellini. Transfer to a parchment-lined plate and repeat until you have about 30 dumplings.

6. Make soup: Place a large pot filled with broth over high heat. Prepare scallions: slice into rounds and slice remainder lengthwise. When broth boils, add beef and 1 to 4 dumplings a person (freeze uncooked dumplings), reduce heat to medium and cook 10 to 15 minutes.

7. Add frozen rice cakes and scallion slices and cook until cakes are soft, another two minutes. Add eggs and gently stir. Shut off heat and season with black pepper. Ladle into bowls and garnish with scallion rounds, sesame seeds and seaweed, if using.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings.

Note: For beef broth, substitute powder in sold in bags at Korean markets. Substitute one teaspoon per cup of boiling water. Korean rice cakes, called dduk, are sold in the frozen sections of Korean markets; the white slices are the most traditional.

not," he said.

Stephen Wong, the chef and owner of Café Joazeiro in Greenwich Village, serves you sheng, a somewhat salad of raw fish, crunchy noodles and peanuts that Chinese Malaysians have turned into a sport. Mr. Wong encourages his customers to participate. "The higher you toss, the more money you're going to make next year," he said.

Not all dishes travel. The manager at

Café Amici, Octaviano Baudini, used to eat sushibiki, a cousin of carp. In Jakarta every lunch, as Chinese New Year is called in Indonesia, but he said he had never seen that here. He misses it, though, and other traditions a world away.

"When I grow stronger, and if they were interested, they would make a movie," he said, laughing. "Maybe I should start that up again here."

#### Welcoming the Year of the Dog

Here are some Asian restaurants in New York that will have Lunar New Year dishes on the menu:

- BAHANA LEAF** 461 E. Fourth Avenue (4th Street), Manhattan, (718) 224-8822.
- BUNYUN** 100 Avenue B (1st Street), Manhattan, (212) 474-2224.
- KOREAN TEMPLE CUISINE** 11 W. Market Place (11th Street), (212) 675-9900.
- MAN** 101 South Street (1st Street), (212) 333-2222.
- OMI** 111 South Street (1st Street), (212) 452-9999.
- OKENUSA** 36-07 Prince Street (36th Street), Queens, (718) 886-6200.
- VIETCAFE** 146 Greenwich Street (Greenwich Street), (212) 675-9900.

Eating your way to good luck and longevity.

# TRADITIONAL FLAVORS OF THE LUNAR NEW YEAR

BY DANA BOWEN

**T**wo sisters sat at an ingredient-strewn table at Vietcafe, gossiping as they prepared the sticky rice cakes that are adored across Vietnam at this time of year. Lan Tran Cao, the younger of the two and the owner of Vietcafe, a TriBeCa restaurant, spoke of a relative's recipe.

"The way she seasons it is different," she said to her sister, Nga Thi Tran. Clearly, "different" meant not as good.

A cook, Mai Nguyen, walked in and spotted the women mashing dried mung bean balls into banana leaves with great force. "Ah, banh chung!" she sang, and smiled. For her, the bundles contained distant memories of New Year's celebrations in Hanoi.

Lunar New Year begins on Sunday, and in many traditional Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese households in New York, the cooking is under way. Chefs like Ms. Cao find themselves in a peculiar spot at the beginning of the Year of the Dog, poised between a public hungry to learn about the world's cuisine and a community where many culinary traditions are slipping.

"Nowadays, everybody buys these," she said of the banh chung, a requisite dish for Tet Nguyen Dan, Vietnam's New Year and its most important holiday. Buying them in Chinatown is certainly easier than soaking the rice overnight, stuffing it in banana leaves with pork belly and beans, wrapping the cakes in foil, simmering them for 12 hours and draining them for another few hours. But to Ms. Cao, the effort is worth it. On Saturday she will serve them at Gallery Vietnam (attached to her restaurant) for her annual Tet party. Last year more than 40 families attended, many of them American with adoptive children born in Vietnam. She'll describe the significance of the altar table, where departed relatives' favorite foods are set out. Her niece will direct a play about the rice cakes' fabled origins.

As she worked, Ms. Cao and her sister recalled the New Year's of their childhood in Saigon, when their faces turned red from eating dyed watermelon seeds. Ms. Cao

remembered how her father, a Hanoi native, made blunt squares of banh chung (as compared to the south's round version) without the wooden molds she now relies on. Their family would make 70 cakes before the holiday to snack on with pickled greens during the week, when stores were closed.

Michael Huynh, the Saigon-born chef of Bao Noodles and Bao 111 in the East Village, was well aware of this practice. "Anything made with fish sauce lasts," said Mr. Huynh, who serves thit kho to — a sticky-sweet pork dish with funky undertones of nuoc mam — on his Tet menus. The candied bites of the pork, he said, are typical of the holiday's practical yet satisfying recipes.

*Eating your way to good luck and longevity*

Korean New Year, Solnal, is greeted with steaming bowls of rice cake soup called duk gook — "comfort food," said Moon Sun Kwak, who serves it at Dok Suni and Do Hwa, her family's restaurants in Manhattan. Her mother, Myung Ja Kwak, who is the chef, slowly simmers beef bones into a marrow-rich broth as the base for the soup.

"It's so healthy," the elder Ms. Kwak said as she dropped homemade dumplings into the soup in Do Hwa's kitchen. Not all versions of the soup have dumplings; it's the duk, or rice cake slivers, that matter. "You eat it so you can turn a year older."

Many Korean Americans observe both Jan. 1 and the Lunar New Year, treating the later date with more reverence. Ms. Kwak recalled eating the rice cake soup for breakfast as a child in North Korea, before performing a solemn bowing ritual to honor her elders.

Jennifer Maeng, who owns Korean Temple Cuisine in the East Village, remembers her family spending a week pre-



Joe Pornabaio for The New York Times

FOR A FELICITOUS START *Korean rice cake soup with dumplings at Do Hwa in Greenwich Village*

paring for Solnal in Seoul, and having fresh duk made. Here, she uses frozen duk, just as everyone else does. But boil them in a good soup and they squish with the succor of a Southern grandma's chicken and dumplings.

Sticky New Year's foods are ubiquitous across Asia. While many Koreans say the foods make good luck stick, it is a Chinese custom to serve gummy neen gow cakes to keep the family together. And in the Philippines, sticky tikoy is thought to seal the kitchen gods' mouths, so they can't report the family's misdeeds to higher deities.

Longevity noodles and whole chicken are the common denominators on Chinese New Year tables, with regional variations. Chris Cheung, the chef at Little Bistro in Brooklyn who grew up in Chinatown in Manhattan, said the holidays of his childhood were dominated by the steamed dishes of his mother's southern Toisan region. He was surprised to find so much seafood at his wife's Shanghainese spread. "There's always shark fin soup out," he said.

Simpson Wong, the chef and owner of Café Asean in Greenwich Village, serves yu sheng, a communal salad of raw fish, crunchy noodles and pomelo that Chinese Malaysians have turned into a sport. Mr. Wong encourages his customers to participate. "The higher you toss, the more money you're going to make next year," he said.

Not all dishes travel. The manager at Café Asean, Octovianus Sundhi, used to eat milkfish, a cousin of carp, in Jakarta every Imlek, as Chinese New Year is called in Indonesia, but he said he had never seen that here. He misses it, though, and other traditions a world away.

"Women throw oranges at men, and if they were interested, they would make a move," he said, laughing. "Maybe I should start that up again here."

### *Korean Rice Cake Soup with Dumplings (Duk Mandu Gook)*

Adapted from Myung Ja Kwak

Time: About two hours

For the dumplings:

- 12 ounces mung bean sprouts, chopped
- 1 cup diced onion
- 12 ounces kimchi, strained and chopped
- 4 ounces firm tofu, crumbled
- 1/4 pound ground pork
- 1 1/2 teaspoons sesame oil
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic, minced
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 package dumpling wrappers, thawed as much liquid as possible.
- 1 egg, beaten

For the soup:

- 8 cups beef broth, preferably Korean(see note)
- 1 bunch scallions
- 1/3 pound lean beef, in thin slivers
- 1 pound frozen Korean rice cakes, sliced (see note)
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- Black pepper, to taste
- 2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds
- Toasted seaweed (optional), julienned.

1. Make dumplings: Place a large pot of water over high heat. When it boils, add sprouts and onions and cook until sprouts are soft, about five minutes. Drain in colander and rinse under cold water.

2. In a large mixing bowl, combinesprouts and onions with kimchi. Working in batches, transfer a handful to cutting board and mince. Return vegetables to colander in sink. Add tofu, tossing to combine. Press down on vegetables with your hands, draining as much liquid as possible.

3. Working in batches, place a handful of vegetable-tofu mixture on a large piece of cheesecloth or clean, porous cloth, fold up edges and twist, squeezing out liquid. Empty back into mixing bowl. When done, transfer to colander, top with parchment paper and weigh down with a heavy, water-filled pot. Drain for at least a half-hour.

4. In a large mixing bowl, combine pork, oil, garlic and salt. Add drained vegetables and mix well with your fingers.

5. Place a scant tablespoon of filling in center of a wrapper, brush wrapper rim with egg, and fold, forming a half moon. Pinch closed with your fingers and squeeze out air. Wrap end tips around until they touch, dab with egg and pinch together: it will look like a tortelloni. Transfer to a parchment-lined plate and repeat until you have about 20 dumplings.

6. Make soup: Place a large pot filled with broth over high heat. Prepare scallions: discard white parts, chop a few inches of green parts into rounds and slice remainder lengthwise. When broth boils, add beef and 3 to 4 dumplings a person (freeze unused dumplings), reduce heat to medium and cook 5 to 7 minutes.

7. Add frozen rice cakes and scallion slices and cook until cakes are soft, another two minutes. Add eggs and gently stir. Shut off heat and season with black pepper. Ladle into bowls and garnish with scallion rounds, sesame seeds and seaweed, if using.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings.

*Note: For beef broth, dashida powder is sold in bags at Korean markets. Dissolve one teaspoon per cup of boiling water. Korean rice cakes, called duk, are sold in the freezer section of Korean markets; the wide slices are the most traditional.*

### *Vietnamese Caramelized Pork (Thit kho to)*

Adapted from Michael and Thao Huynh

Time: About 45 minutes

- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 2 1/2 pounds pork belly or butt, sliced into thin, inch-long strips
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup fish sauce
- 2 heaping teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 dash sesame oil
- 1 medium Vidalia onion, sliced
- 4 scallions, sliced, green part only Rice for serving.

1. Cover bottom of a large, heavy skillet with one cup sugar and place over medium low heat. As soon as it melts and turns golden, add pork, raise heat to medium, and stir until coated. (Sugar will become sticky and may harden, but it will re-melt as it cooks, forming a sauce.)

2. Stir in remaining sugar, salt, pepper and fish sauce. Cover and cook 2 minutes. Uncover, stir in garlic and oil and lower to simmer to reduce sauce for about 20 minutes.

3. Stir in Vidalia onions and cook until translucent, 5 to 7 minutes. Pork should be caramelized; if not, raise heat and sauté while sauce further reduces. Transfer to serving bowl, and sprinkle with scallion greens.

Yield: 4 servings.

### *Welcoming the Year of the Dog*

Here are some Asian restaurants in New York that will have Lunar New Year dishes on the menu:

#### **BANANA LEAF**

6814 Fourth Avenue (69th Street), Brooklyn; (718) 238-5531.

#### **DO HWA**

55 Carmine Street (Bedford Street); (212) 414-1224.

#### **KOREAN TEMPLE CUISINE**

81 St. Marks Place (First Avenue); (212) 979-9300.

#### **NAM**

110 Reade Street (West Broadway); (212) 267-1777.

#### **O MAI**

158 Ninth Avenue (19th Street); (212) 633-0550.

#### **SENTOSA**

39-07 Prince Street (39th Street), Queens; (718) 886-6331.

#### **VIETCAFE**

345 Greenwich Street (Harrison Street); (212) 431-5888.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, JULY 19, 2006



## Korea's Taste of Summer Is a Long, Cool Slurp

By ELAINE LOUIE

JUNG-HYUN KIM was 3 years old when his mother fed him a dish that changed his life.

It was a bowl of homemade buckwheat noodles — naeng myun — that she made in their home in Pyongyang, now North Korea. The noodles nestled in cold, mild beef broth topped with slices of tender beef brisket, sweet Asian pear, lightly pickled white radish, cucumber and half a hard-boiled egg. Eating it was as close to an epiphany as a little boy can get.

"There's a little bit of sweetness, and a little bit of sourness," said Mr. Kim, 73, through an interpreter, a daughter, Jenny Kim. "It's very refreshing and very cool. If you ask me why I love it, I love it. Does there have to be a reason?"

In 1961, after settling in Seoul, South Korea, he opened a restaurant named Dae Dong specializing in naeng myun, the first of five of those restaurants he would open in Korea, Paraguay and New York before retiring. "If I want to eat it, I have to spend a lot of money," he said recently over a bowl at Dae Dong in Flushing. "But if I do a naeng myun business, I can eat it whenever I want, and as often as I want." He ate it daily, three times a day, until he retired in 1999.

He is not alone in his love for the cold noodles, one of Korea's most popular dishes, especially in the summer. The noodles, some-

times called Pyongyang naeng myun, are a light, one-dish meal with bursts of flavor — a crunch of mildly vinegared radish, a spurt of crisp, juicy pear and, of course, the savory noodles.

A spicy, brothy version called Hamhung naeng myun, which originated in the city of that name in North Korea, is made with slightly chewier sweet potato noodles and a sauce of minced fresh red chilies, fresh red hot peppers, garlic, ginger, onions, sugar or honey, ground sesame seeds

**Buckwheat noodles are joined by brisket, pear, pickled radish and an egg.**

and sesame oil. It's topped with the same garnish of brisket, pear, radish, cucumber and egg.

At Kang Suk, at 1288 Broadway (22nd Street) in Manhattan, and also at the Yonkers branch, the dish is served with a ladle of cold beef broth added to the noodles. A variation is topped with very chewy, raw slices rather than brisket.

The best naeng myun are freshly made. At Dae Dong at 17 West 32nd Street in Manhattan, Sang Sup Seo, the chef, mixed the

dough from buckwheat flour, regular wheat flour, hot water and a splash of carbonated water mixed with rice vinegar, "to hold the dough together," he said. With his fingers, he mixed it in the bowl of a machine that kneaded it and then extruded it in a cylinder 14 inches long by 3/4 inches across, enough for 6 servings.

The chef placed some dough into the steel cylinder of an automated noodle-making machine. He pressed a lever, pushed a button, and a cylinder pressed the dough through a perforated cap in 294 strokes in 10 seconds. The fragile pale beige noodles, each 2 feet long and a scant one millimeter in diameter, dropped out of the machine directly into a pot of boiling water.

Mr. Seo twisted the noodles around for a minute and a half, removed them to a sink of cold water to stop the cooking, and then to a sink of ice water to make them firm.

He mixed the noodles in a serving bowl with an icy slush of broth from a refrigerated steel tub and then seasoned it with the pear, ketchup and beef.

When the noodles were presented to Mr. Kim, he added a tablespoon of rice vinegar and a teaspoon of mustard, and gently tossed the noodles. (Restrooms offer to cut the noodles in half with scissors, since a dozen of one-foot-long noodles is easier to eat than one of two-foot-long noodles.)

Mr. Kim of Dae Dong recalled using a wooden noodle-making machine when he was growing up. The apparatus weighed



REFRESHING Jung-Hyun Kim cuts naeng myun, a popular Korean summer dish of noodles in a chilled broth that combines a touch of sweetness with a subtle sour note.

about 30 pounds, and was communally used by three or four families. When his family wanted to use it, a family member went to the neighbor's house, dismantled the machine, and carried the parts home.

Chang Lee Ahn, the chef at Kim Gang San at 49 West 23rd Street, who has been making naeng myun for 40 years, had to push the dough through the old-fashioned machine using "brute force," he said through an interpreter.

"Naeng myun is best eaten at restaurants, where it costs around \$13. The noodles are not good for takeout. They will stick to each other," said Joe Lee, the manager of Kim Gang San. "They will become one chunk in 15 minutes."

"If you love sweet food, and you take this

out," Mr. Lee said, "you will take the noodles separate from the rest of the ingredients, and you can cook the noodles in ice water to separate them. But you would have to be next door."

But at Dae Dong, Mr. Lee's son-in-law, Charles Cho, who manages the restaurant with his wife, Jenny, said naeng myun can last for 30 to 40 minutes.

He has a secret. "We wash the noodles differently when it's for takeout," he said. "We wash them in ice water, and then add a half teaspoon of soy or canola oil to trap the moisture." Dae Dong does not cook the noodles until the takeout customer arrives at the restaurant. Then the customer has to race home.

The clock is ticking.

# KOREA'S TASTE OF SUMMER IS A LONG, COOL SLURP

BY ELAINE LOUIE

JUNG-HYUN KIM was 3 years old when his mother fed him a dish that changed his life.

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He is not alone in his love for the cold noodles, one of Korea's most popular dishes, especially in the summer. The noodles, sometimes called Pyongyang naeng myun, are a light, one-dish meal with bursts of flavor — a crunch of mildly vinegared radish, a spurt of crisp, juicy pear and, of course, the savory noodles.

A spicy, brothless version called Hamhung naeng myun, which originated in the city of that name in North Korea, is made with slightly chewier sweet-potato noodles and a sauce of minced fresh red chilies, fresh red bell peppers, garlic, ginger, onions, sugar or honey, ground sesame seeds and sesame oil. It's topped with the same pyramid of brisket, pear, radish, cucumber and egg.

At Kang Suh, at 1250 Broadway (32nd Street) in Manhattan, and also at the Yonkers branch, the dish is served with a ladle of cold beef broth added to the noodles. A variation is topped with very chewy, raw skate rather than brisket.

The best naeng myun are freshly made. At Dae Dong at 17 West 32nd Street in Manhattan, Sang Sup Seo, the chef, mixed the dough from buckwheat flour, regular wheat flour, hot water and a splash of carbonated water mixed with rice vinegar, "to hold the dough together," he said. With his fingers, he mixed it in the bowl of a machine that kneaded it and then extruded it in a cylinder 14 inches long by 3 1/2 inches across, enough for 6 servings.

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Mr. Kim of Dae Dong recalled using a wooden noodle-making machine when he was growing up. The apparatus weighed about 30 pounds, and was communally owned by three or four families. When his family wanted to use it, a family member went to the neighbor's house, dismantled the machine, and carried the parts home.

Chang Lai Ahn, the chef at Kum Gang San at 49 West 32nd Street, who has been making naeng myun for 40 years, had to push the dough through the old-fashioned machines using "brute force," he said through an interpreter.

Naeng myun is best eaten at restaurants, where it costs around \$12. The noodles are not good for takeout. They will stick to each other, said Soo Lee, the manager of Kum Gang San. "They will become one chunk in 15 minutes."

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The clock is ticking.



Mark Veltman for The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7, 2006

## CALENDAR

### Swords and Champagne

Classes about Champagne and wine will be given in French at the Bubble Lounge, 228 West Broadway (White Street). The first, about Champagne and chocolate, is tonight. On June 14 wines from the Langue-doc will be paired with French and Spanish cheeses. On June 21 a class on rosé Champagne will include a demonstration of "sabering," opening a bottle with a sword. And on June 28 the class will cover wine etiquette and how to organize a wine tasting at home. The classes are from 6:30 to 8 p.m.; \$60 each from (212) 431-3433 or bullejour@bubblelounge.com.

### For Washington Square

A Taste of the Village to benefit Washington Square Park will be held in the park tomorrow, rain or shine, from 6 to 8 p.m. Tickets, \$40, are available in advance from (212) 777-2173 and will be sold at the event.

### And Madison Square

The Big Apple Barbecue in Madison Square Park, to be held on Saturday and Sunday from noon to 6 p.m., from 23rd to 26th Street. Plates of food are \$7 each, by cash or credit card at each booth; \$125 and \$200 debit cards are available for faster service from (212) 228-3585, extension 25. The event, sponsored by the Union Square Hospitality Group, will benefit the park.

### Egg Rolls and Egg Creams

A cross-cultural event showcasing

egg rolls and egg creams, will be held on Eldridge Street between Canal and Division Streets on Sunday from noon to 4 p.m. There will be Jewish and Chinese foods and entertainment sponsored by the Eldridge Street Project. Admission is free; \$1 buys both a vegetarian egg roll and an egg cream: (212) 219-0888, extension 201.

### Sampling Restaurant Row

On Monday the Taste of Times Square, with more than 40 restaurants serving tastes from 5 to 8:30 p.m., will be held on 46th Street between Broadway and Ninth Avenue. There is no admission charge; \$1 tickets for tastes will be sold at the event.

### Citymeals Chefs' Tribute

The annual chefs' tribute in Rockefeller Center to benefit Citymeals-on-Wheels will be held on Monday at 7:30 p.m. This year's theme is Italian, and chefs and restaurateurs from around the country and Italy will participate. Tickets are \$500: (212) 687-1290.

### Korean Foods at the U.N.

A festival of Korean foods will be held through June 16, weekdays only, in the Delegates' Dining Room of the United Nations, 46th Street and First Avenue. A buffet lunch with more than 80 dishes prepared by chefs from Korea will be \$25 a person, not including beverages, tax or tip. Reservations are required and there is a security check at the entrance: (212) 963-7625.

### Seminars on Spirits

There will be a series of seminars on spirits, with tastings, on Tuesday evenings from 6:30 to 8:30 through July 25 (except for July 4) at the Brandy Library, 25 North Moore Street (Varick Street). Next week's topic will be an introduction to Scotch. The seminars are \$80 each, except for the one on July 25 about rare single malt Scotches, which will be \$120: (212) 226-5545.

### World Cup Wines and Spirits

In honor of the World Cup, Appellation Wine & Spirits, 156 10th Avenue (19th Street), will offer a 5 percent discount on wines from a winning country the day following the match. The offer runs from Friday through June 23.

September Wine & Spirits, 100 Stanton Street (Ludlow Street), will hold its own World Cup of wines today through July 9. Among 32 wines from around the world, the ones that sell the most during a free tasting period weekly will make it to the next round, with the finals on July 9: (212) 388-0770.

### Tastes of Brooklyn

Brooklyn's Taste of the Nation event to benefit Share Our Strength will be held on Tuesday from 7 to 10 p.m. at the Tobacco Warehouse in Empire-Fulton Ferry State Park in Dumbo. There will be samples of dishes from Brooklyn restaurants. Tickets are \$75 in advance, (877) 268-2783 or brooklyntaste.org. At the door, tickets will be \$90.

FLORENCE FABRICANT

## \$25 AND UNDER

Peter Meehan

## Korean Fried Chicken

“HEY why you wanna go and do that?” T. I. asks over and over in “Why You Wanna,” one of the many hip-hop hits to guzzle beer by at Restaurant Forte Baden Baden. It echoes a question from a friend when I tried to lure him to this Koreatown restaurant with the promise of deep-fried rotisserie chicken. He couldn’t fathom why they would want to go and do that.

One answer explains why humans deep-fry just about anything: because they can. Another is evident as soon as a platter of the chicken hits the table. The rotisserie keeps the flesh moist (even the cottony breast meat common to all lesser chickens) and the deep-fryer ensures crackling crisp skin. Why other cultures have not picked up on this Korean innovation is a question I can’t answer.

Piles of the twice-cooked chicken, available in large portions (\$14.95) or mammoth ones (\$18.95), are accompanied by a little heap of deep-

fried garlic cloves, a bowl of pickled daikon radish and French fries or onion rings (choose the fries). A red squirt bottle of ketchup is ready for the fries; a clear squirt bottle of a vinegary hot sauce for the bird.

The restaurant has hovered above the Koreatown fray in a boxy second-story space for more than a decade. A spate of uncoordinated signage identifies it: the awning says BBNY, a flag flies the colors of Restaurant Forte, and a mailbox in the grungy first-floor hallway (from which you alight on an elevator or a flight of stairs) identifies it as Baden Baden, the name everyone calls it.

Baden Baden is one of New York City’s few hofs, Korean restaurants where beer is the drink of choice, instead of soju or sake, and fried chicken is a specialty of the house. The provenance of the term hof seems uncertain; an acquaintance said it was derived from a Korean mispronunciation of hops, the ingredient that adds bitterness to beer.

At this and other hofs, the interior is meant to evoke a Germanic pub or beer hall, and here they’ve succeeded at least halfway (the pitchers of beer on nearly every table help.) The significance of the faux military costumes the waiters wear was lost on me, and Su Keun Kim, the manager of the Manhattan location (there are outposts of the restaurant in Palisades Park, N.J., and Atlanta), couldn’t do better than to say they made it easier to know who worked there and who didn’t. Fair enough.

Beyond the uniforms, the fried chicken and the hip-hop is a menu torn in two directions: industrial-grade fried food (mozzarella sticks, onion rings and their ilk) and Korean dishes not usually seen at street-level Koreatown restaurants.

Restaurant Forte  
Baden Baden

28 West 32nd Street, second floor; Koreatown; (212) 714-2266.

**BEST DISHES** Fried chicken with French fries, sautéed sea snails, pig’s feet with vegetables.

**PRICE RANGE** Small dishes, \$4.95 to \$13.95; main dishes, \$12.95 to \$18.95.

**CREDIT CARDS** All major cards.

**HOURS** 4:30 p.m. to 3 a.m. Monday through Thursday; to 4 a.m. Friday and Saturday; to 1 a.m. on Sunday.

**WHEELCHAIR ACCESS** Accessible.

## With Beer and a Beat



Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

**PUBFARE** Baden Baden offers a Korean take on a German beer hall.

A simple noodle soup in a kimchi-stained broth, kimchi somyun (\$12.95), would be the perfect way to wrap up a long night on the town. The best dishes are corralled under the heading Chef’s Specialties. All are doled out in massive portions and might be loosely called stir-fries.

Meat eaters may want to opt for the sliced pigs’ feet and vegetables (\$18.95), one of the more compelling and unusual presentations of pigs’ feet I’ve seen. It appears they have been cooked, boned and compressed into a sliceable form. Those marbled slices, which in texture fall somewhere between gelatinous and chewy, are then cooked with root vegetables in a stunning amount of dark sesame oil, the flavor of which permeates the whole of the dish.

Those inclined to order seafood should try the sea snails (\$18.95), which resemble baby conchs after

they have been liberated from their shells. (They may be exactly that; Mr. Kim couldn’t help me determine an English translation for the dish.) The sea beasts in question are cooked with sesame oil and a spicy sauce, then tossed with cold, crisp slices of cucumbers and apples just before the dish heads to the dining room.

My friends and I were trying to figure out who was going to take home the leftover pigs’ feet at the end of my final visit to Baden Baden when another T. I. song, “What You Know,” came on. “What you know about that?” he demanded repeatedly.

As far as hofs go, more than I did before I stumbled upon Baden Baden. And as far as the sometime obscure world of Korean food beyond bulgogi, I know I want to know, as T. I. would have it, all about that.

## \$25 AND UNDER

Dana Bowen

## Korean Simplicity

IT sounded like a fine idea: Momofuku Noodle Bar spawns a grab-and-go satellite peddling its addictive pork buns and giving its chef-owners, David Chang and Joaquin Baca — hyper-creative expatriates from formal kitchens — a chance to experiment with fast food.

But that was only part of the plan.

The first clue is that Momofuku Ssam Bar, which opened this summer, is bigger and better looking than its brother nearby. Wrapped in dark wood with mod bar stools, low-slung tables and a life-size John McEnroe poster (which a friend of Mr. Chang's swiped from a bus stop circa 1985) it feels too cool for a menu revolving around ssam — a Korean term for wrapped and handheld foods.

Here, you have your pick of three, built to order behind a cafeteria line.

The burrito look-alikes (\$9) are as big as my forearm, stuffed with rice, caramelized onions, and creamy slaw with Japanese Kewpie mayo.

## Momofuku Ssam Bar

207 Second Avenue (13th Street), East Village; (212) 254-3500.

**BEST DISHES** Berkshire pork rice bowl; pickles; country hams, grilled rice cakes.

**PRICE RANGE** Ssam \$8 to \$13, Late-night menu, \$8 to \$16.

**CREDIT CARDS** All major cards.

**HOURS** Ssam bar menu served 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily; late-night menu, 10:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday.

**WHEELCHAIR ACCESS** Accessible.

Three fillings are offered: deeply flavored Berkshire pork butt (with smoky black beans and funky homemade red kimchi paste), milder organic chicken (with adzuki beans and white kimchi paste), or braised tofu (with edamame and whipped tofu, the consistency of sour cream).

Early on, there were distracting pockets of hot and cold. By my next visit, ssam mechanics had improved, making for a more flavorful and melded meal.

There's something more familiar about encountering these flavors in the rice bowl (\$13), where the same ingredients are generously piled on with a potent mix of nutty soybean paste and chili-garlic sauce. Nip at it with chopsticks or make ssams with the accompanying lettuce leaves.

Lastly, there are hoisin-slicked steamed buns (\$8), which aren't tucked with pork belly, as at the original Momofuku, but with the same shredded meats and slaw in the ssams.

That's it. Three things. No salads, soups or sides to round out a meal. It was enjoyable enough, but it all seemed a little too pared down for a Momofuku production, where there's complexity even at a lunch counter.

Then, a few weeks ago, they introduced a late-night menu and it all made sense. Five nights a week, after the ssam bar closes, a spirited cast of chefs — Mr. Chang, Mr. Baca, Tien Ho, formerly of Cafe Boulud, and Joshua McFadden, late of Lupa — run a restaurant in a restaurant that goes far to explain the venture.

Most chefs working the witching hour offer abbreviated menus. Here, that equation is flipped with diverse, carefully crafted dishes, from fried

## Morphs Into Lavishness



Marilynn K. Yee/The New York Times

**SNACKS BY DAYLIGHT** Momofuku Ssam Bar is in the East Village.

cauliflower chat (\$9) to spicy tripe stew (\$11), emerging late. The restaurant's transformation, which includes table service, a thumping kitchen and some well-paired beer and sparkling wine options, is as intriguing as watching a strait-laced wallflower reveal an inner wild child.

You can't help but wonder which chef realized that, say, Korean rice cakes (\$11) were dead ringers for gnocchi, especially when sliced and tossed with a rich, kimchi-tinged pork sauce. (It was Mr. McFadden.) The house-made charcuterie — warm veal-head terrine (\$13), as luscious as melted bone marrow, and a sandwich stuffed with chunky chicken liver pâté, ham, headcheese and slaw (\$8) — are the work of Mr. Ho.

Under a cheeky section of the menu labeled "Pork" (as if the meat

wasn't pervasive) four wonderful long-aged country hams (\$9) are offered, sliced paper-thin with chunky apple butter and toasted bread.

The only disappointments were soggy spring rolls (\$10), the news that the hand-made corn-dogs were already off the menu, and the fact that the only way to get a ssam — which would hit the spot after a movie or bar binge — is to splurge on the bo ssam feast (\$165) for eight. That includes an entire, slow-roasted pork butt, a dozen oysters, and a table full of sides and condiments.

Mr. Chang said the daytime menu will soon offer more options. Last week, there was a new brisket ssam, and gingery glass noodles.

Someday, he hinted, items from the late-night menu may even see the light of day.



**\$25 AND UNDER**

*Peter Meehan*

**A Korean-**

**I**T was a particularly disappointing rendition of jjajangmyun that set my friend off.

A restaurant in Manhattan had sparked but not sated her craving for this Korean-Chinese dish of noodles in an oniony black bean sauce. So with a list of Korean restaurants in northeastern Queens and her nice car, we set out to slurp our way along Northern Boulevard and look for a place that would satisfy.

Jjajangmyun has roots in China, but Korean cooks have adopted it and made it their own. At Korean-Chinese restaurants in New York, just about every table has a bowl of jjajangmyun on it, along with two other dishes that make up the triumvirate that groups of diners always seem to order: a seafood noodle soup in a bright red broth called jjam ppong and a plate of crispy deep-fried pork or chicken served in a sticky sweet sauce that is almost stiff with cornstarch.

On our noodle tour, two dowdy but brightly lighted places snagged our attention — and filled our appetites.

**Guh Song**

4727 Bell Boulevard (48th Avenue), Oakland Gardens, Queens; (718) 281-1810.

**BEST DISH** Jjajangmyun.

**PRICE RANGE** \$4.95 to \$10.95 for most dishes.

**CREDIT CARDS** All major cards.

**HOURS** 11:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. daily.

**WHEELCHAIR ACCESS** All on one level.

**Chinese Hybrid With an Oniony Bite**



Photographs by Hiroko Masulke for The New York Times

**BLACK BEANS BECKON** Guh Song in Queens serves jjajangmyun, below.

Sam Won Gahk in Flushing won points for the fresh-tasting, tender noodles in its jjajangmyun. But Guh Song, a 25-year-old place in Oakland Gardens, bested all comers with its deeply flavored sauce.

Regardless of where you go, a course of panchan will precede the main courses: plates of kimchi, electric-yellow daikon pickles and the not so date friendly combination of raw white onion slices that are meant to be dipped into a dense and pungent fermented black bean sauce. They help to stoke a thirst for a cold lager or simple and strong Korean soju, two natural tablemates to jjajangmyun.

A quick aside here for those who, like me, have trouble getting their mouths around all those js: the first syllable, jja, is the tough one, something between a "jah" and a "tcha."



It is followed by an easy "jang" (rhymes with Chang) and "myun," a slurring of "mee-un," for the noodles. All together the word is pronounced JJA-jang-myun. With a little practice, saying it is easy as pie, if pie were two syllables longer and crammed with consonants.

Guh Song offers a couple variations on the dish, including noodles with bean sauce and noodles with special bean sauce.

The difference between the two isn't so much the sauce but the presentation. The first dish (\$4.95) comes with the noodles and sauce mixed together; the one with special sauce (\$5.95) doesn't.

A waiter at Sam Won Gahk told me that when the noodles and sauce come separately, the noodles were most likely to have been just cooked; when they come mixed, the dish might have been put together in advance. For the \$1 to \$1.50 more that the special renditions run, I figure the security is worth it.

You'll be brought a bowl of plain noodles tucked into a tidy nest, a pair of scissors and a second bowl holding the sauce. At Guh Song, this is a thick, rich, inky black bean sauce loaded with tender bits of beef or pork and minced raw onions that add a kind of cumulative gentle spiciness. Sauce the noodles, snip at them a couple of times to make eating them more manageable, and go to town.

Though a good, densely flavored sauce needs little reinforcement from the ground chili flakes or soy sauce proffered with the dish, there's no shame in ratcheting the salt or spice up to your taste.

Afterward, you can push back from the table, mouth tingling and belly full. And if you're anything like me, you will be eager for the next time a friend comes along with a craving for a dish you can't pronounce, a black Mercedes and crumpled printouts from the Internet.

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IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

Since January of 2006, The New York Times has published numerous in-depth articles focusing on the influence and diversity of Korean culture and “Hallyu” or “Korean Wave” in Asia.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2006

**POSSESSED****Keeping  
At Least  
One Slate  
Blank**

By DAVID COLMAN

**W**ILL success spoil Doo-Ri Chung? Over the last few years, as her fashion line, Doo.Ri, has become that rare thing in fashion, a quiet and reliable smash, Ms. Chung has learned that running a good business is like looking after a child — a hungry one.

Her weekly volleyball game: a thing of the past. Ditto cooking dinner. “We never see our apartment,” Ms. Chung said. Her husband, Jeffrey Green, has joined her as a business partner, so at least she gets to see him.

Ms. Chung’s fine-tuned creations resonated with enough serenity and glamour for her to have received the 2006 CFDA/Vogue Fashion Fund award last month, but those luxuriant qualities are in shorter supply in her life, certainly more so than when she was merely dreaming and planning her solo act while working in Geoffrey Beene’s design studio.

“There’s so much about fashion that’s not about design,” she said with a patient smile.

In her clever way, she does what she can for a little diversion. For one, she is growing an herb garden in the south window of her studio in the notions district off Fifth Avenue as a nod to her erstwhile domestic life. And watching over the enterprise is a ghostly little presence that, like Ms. Chung herself, is caught between being and becoming.

A gift from her husband last year, it is a Munny doll, a \$25 white vinyl toddler from Kidrobot. It was designed by the store’s owner, Paul Budnitz, in 2005 as a do-it-yourself version of the myriad cartoonish Kidrobot figures. Munny is meant to be



Mark Votman for The New York Times



Hiroko Masaike for The New York Times

**DRESSING DOWN** Doo-Ri Chung and her unadorned Munny doll, a gift from her husband. It is meant to be personalized as the owner sees fit. Or not.

personalized in whatever manner its owner chooses: Magic Marker, crayon, decal, paint, blowtorch. But as devoted a problem-solver as Ms. Chung is, she has not even put on her thinking cap.

“I love it all white,” she said. That is not, as one might think, because of some Beene-ian adoration of abstraction, purity and form, but rather because of the wealth of possibility the little dough boy offers.

“I love its potential,” she said. “It’s so great that someone came up with the idea of this, something that everyone can have their different visions of.”

The doll brings to mind her brief foray running a retail store, during which she

learned two valuable lessons: one, that a simply constructed dress changes enormously depending on how those wearing it project themselves. “It’s really more about personality than size,” she said. “There’s a real alchemy to it.” (The second lesson: “I didn’t like retail.”)

But inasmuch as the doll hints at the limitless possibilities the future may hold, it is also a charming token of the irony-rich, retro-mad pop-culture world that, as a hot fashion designer, she is regularly called on to interact with, an obligation she views with suspicion bordering on alarm.

“This really contradicts what I do,” she said of the Munny. “It’s very whimsical, and my clothes aren’t whimsical. They’re analytical. I don’t do retro. I don’t believe in it.”

Indeed, the Munny doll, quiet and need-free, is just about the only figure of the modern pop landscape that she can deal with, and she can’t even figure out a way to dress it. So don’t ask her if there is some star she is dying to design for; she will only draw a blank.

But she draws them so beautifully, can you blame her?

**KEEPING AT LEAST  
ONE SLATE BLANK**

BY DAVID COLMAN

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, Sunday, October 8, 2006

## Arts &amp; LEISURE



## The Land of the Video Geek

Are online gaming champions the rock stars of the 21st century? Fifty million Koreans can't be wrong.

By SETH SCHIESEL

**A**t first glance, the sprawling COEX mall here seems like any other urban shopping destination. On a late-summer Thursday, there were the bustling stores and lively restaurants, couples on dates and colleagues mingling after work.

But then there were the screams. Frantic, piercing, the shrieks echoed down

the corridors from one corner of the vast underground complex. There hundreds of young people, mostly women and girls, waved signs and sang slogans as they swirled in the glare of klieg lights. It was the kind of fan frenzy that anywhere else would be reserved for rockers or movie legends.

Or sports stars. In fact the objects of the throng's adoration were a dozen of the nation's most famous athletes, South Korea's Derek Jeters and Peyton Mannings. But their sport is something almost unimaginable in the

United States. These were professional video gamers, idolized for their mastery of the science-fiction strategy game StarCraft.

With a panel of commentators at their side, protected from the throbbing crowd by a glass wall, players like Lim Yo-Hwan, Lee Yoon Yeol and Suh Ji Hoon lounged in logo-spangled track suits and oozed the laconic bravado of athletes the world over.

And they were not even competing. They were gathered for the bracket selection for a coming tournament season on MBC Game,

one of the country's two full-time video game television networks. And while audiences watched eagerly at home, fans lucky enough to be there in person waved hand-lettered signs like "Go for it, Kang Min" and "The winner will be Yo-Hwan ♡."

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Continued on Page 32

# THE LAND OF THE VIDEO GEEK

BY SETH SCHIESEL

SEOUL, South Korea

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All in all it was a typical night in South Korea, a country of almost 50 million people and home to the world's most advanced video game culture: Where more than 20,000 public PC gaming rooms, or "bangs," attract more than a million people a day. Where competitive gaming is one of the top televised sports. Where some parents actually encourage their children to play as a release from unrelenting academic pressure. Where the federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism has established a game development institute, and where not having heard of StarCraft is like not having heard of the Dallas Cowboys. The finals of top StarCraft tournaments are held in stadiums, with tens of thousands of fans in attendance.

Noh Yun Ji, a cheerful 25-year-old student in a denim skirt, had come to the COEX with 10 other members of one of the many Park Yong Wook fan clubs. "I like his style," she said of Mr. Park, who plays the advanced alien species called Protoss in StarCraft. "I watch basketball sometimes, but StarCraft is more fun. It's more thrilling, more exciting."

South Korea's roughly \$5 billion annual game market comes to about \$100 per resident, more than three times what Americans spend. As video games become more popular and sophisticated, Korea may provide a glimpse of where the rest of the world's popular culture is headed.

"Too often I hear people say 'South Korea' and 'emerging market' in the same sentence," said Rich Wickham, the global head of Microsoft's Windows games business. "When it comes to gaming, Korea is the developed market, and it's the rest of the world that's playing catch-up. When you look at gaming around the world, Korea is the leader in many ways. It just occupies a different place in the culture there than anywhere else."

Just after 1 one Friday night, Nam Hwa-Jung, 22, and Kim Myung-Ki, 25, were on a date in Seoul's hip Sinchon neighborhood. At a fourth-floor gaming room above a bar and beneath a restaurant specializing in beef, the couple sat side by side on a love seat by the soda machines, each tapping away at a personal computer. Ms. Nam was trying to master the rhythm of a dance game called Audition, while Mr. Kim was locked in a fierce battle in StarCraft.

"Of course we come to PC bangs, like everyone else," Mr. Kim said, barely looking up. "Here we can play together and with friends. Why would I want to play alone at home?"

A few yards away, amid a faint haze of cigarette smoke, five buddies raced in a driving game called Kart Rider while two young men nearby killed winged demons in the fantasy game Lineage. Another couple lounged in a love seat across the room, the young man playing World of Warcraft while his date tried her skills at online basketball.

Ms. Nam glanced up from her screen. "In Korea, going and playing games at the PC bang together is like going to a bar or going to the movies," she said.

South Korea is one of the most wired societies in the world. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Korea had 25.4 broadband subscriptions per 100 residents at the end of last year. Only Iceland, with 26.7, ranked higher; the United States had only 16.8.

Yet despite the near-ubiquity of broadband at home, Koreans still flock to PC bangs to get their game on. There is a saying in Seoul that most Koreans would rather skip a meal than eat by themselves. When it comes to games it seems that many Koreans would rather put down the mouse and keyboard than play alone.

Woo Jong-Sik is president of the Korea Game Development and Promotion Institute. Speaking in his office far above Seoul, in the towering Technomart office and shopping complex, he explained the phenomenon simply: "For us, playing with and against other people is much more interesting than just playing alone against a computer."

It started out that way in the United States too. But as game arcades with their big, clunky machines started disappearing in the 1980's, gamers retreated from the public arena and into their homes and offices. In the West gaming is now often considered antisocial.

There are certainly concerns about gaming in South Korea. The government runs small treatment programs for gaming addicts, and there are reports every few years of young men keeling over and dying after playing for days on end. But on the whole, gaming is regarded as good, clean fun.

In Seoul's dense Shinlim district, Huh Hyeong Chan, a 42-year-old math tutor, seemed to be the respected senior citizen at the Intercool PC bang, which covers two floors, smoking and nonsmoking.

"Among people in their 20's and 30's I think there is no one who hasn't been to a PC bang because it's become a main trend in our society," he said from his prime seat at the head of a row of computers. "Most people think it's good for your mental health and it's a good way to get rid of stress. If you exercise your brain and your mind in addition to your body, that's healthy."

And cheap. At most PC bangs an ergonomic chair, powerful computer and fast Internet link cost no more than \$1.50 an hour.

*Are online gaming champions the rock stars of the 21st century?  
Fifty million Koreans can't be wrong.*

Lee Chung Gi, owner of the Intercool bang, said: "It's impossible for students in any country to study all the time, so they are looking for interesting things to do together. In America they have lots of fields and grass and outdoor space. They have lots of room to play soccer and baseball and other sports. We don't have that here. Here, there are very few places for young people to go and very little for them to do, so they found PC games, and it's their way to spend time together and relax."

Top pro gamers in South Korea don't get much chance to relax. Just ask Lim Yo-Hwan. Mr. Lim, 27, is the nation's most famous gamer, which makes him one of the nation's most famous people.

"Normally our wake-up hours are 10 a.m., but these days we can sleep in until around 11:30 or noon," he said at the SK Telecom StarCraft team's well-guarded training house in Seoul. "After we wake up we have our breakfast, and then we play matches from 1 p.m. until 5. At 5 p.m. we have our lunch, and then at 5:30 for an hour

and a half I go to my gym, where I work out. Then I come home and play until 1 a.m. After 1 I can play more matches or I can go to sleep if I want.”

He smiled. “But not many players sleep at 1.”

Mr. Lim sat in what might be called the players’ lounge: a spacious parlor of plush couches and flat-screen televisions. In an adjoining apartment, the focus was on work. More than a half-dozen other members of the team sat at rows of PCs demolishing one another at StarCraft, made by Blizzard Entertainment of Irvine, Calif. Outside, guards for the apartment complex kept an eye out for overzealous fans.

“Without covering myself up in disguise it’s really difficult to go out in public,” Mr. Lim said. “Because of the Internet penetration and with so many cameras around, I don’t have privacy in my personal life. Anything I do will be on camera and will be spread throughout the Internet, and anything I say will be exaggerated and posted on many sites.”

“It’s hard because I can’t maintain my relationships with friends,” he added. “In terms of dating, the relationships just don’t work out. So personally there are losses, but I don’t regret it because it was my choice to become a pro gamer.”

Hoon Ju, 33, the team’s coach and a former graduate student in sports psychology, added: “Actually when he goes out we know exactly where he is at all times. That’s because the fans are constantly taking pictures with their cellphones and posting them to the Internet in real time.”

Mr. Woo of the federal game institute estimated that 10 million South Koreans regularly follow eSports, as they are known here, and said that some fan clubs of top gamers have 700,000 members or more. “These fan clubs are actually bigger in size than the fan clubs of actors and singers in Korea,” he said. “The total number of people who go spectate pro basketball, baseball and soccer put together is the same as the number of people who go watch pro game leagues.”

The celebrity of South Korea’s top gamers is carefully managed by game-TV pioneers like Hyong Jun Hwang, general manager of Ongamenet, one of the country’s full-time game networks. “We realized that one of the things that keeps people coming back to television are

the characters, the recurring personalities that the viewer gets to know and identify with, or maybe they begin to dislike,” he said. “In other words, television needs stars. So we set out to make the top players into stars, promoting them and so on. And we also do a lot of education with the players, explaining that they have to try to look good, that they have to be ready for interviews.”

For his part Mr. Lim cultivates a relatively low-key image. He knows that at 27 he is nearing the end of his window as an elite player. There are 11 pro teams in the country, he said, and they are full of young guns looking to take him down. But he said experience could make up for a few milliseconds of lost reflexes.

“The faster you think, the faster you can move,” he said. “And the faster you move, the more time you have to think. It does matter in that your finger movements can slow down as you age. But that’s why I try harder and I work on the flexibility of my fingers more than other players.”

Despite the stardom of pro gamers, in most Korean families it’s all about school. That is a big reason the game market in South Korea is dominated by personal computers rather than by game consoles like Sony’s PlayStation and Microsoft’s Xbox that are so popular in the United States and Europe. (The deep historical animosity Koreans feel toward Japan, home of Sony and Nintendo, is another reason.)

“In Korea it’s all study, study, study, learn, learn, learn,” said Park Youngmok, Blizzard’s Korean communications director. “That’s the whole culture here. And so you can’t go buy a game console because all it is is an expensive toy; all it does is play games. But a PC is seen here as a dream machine, a learning machine. You can use it to study, do research. And if someone in the household ends up playing games on it” – he paused, shrugged and grinned – “that’s life.”

Cho Nam Hyun, a high school senior in a middle-class suburb south of Seoul, knows all about it. During his summer “vacation” he was in school from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. (During the school year he doesn’t finish classes until 10 p.m.) On his desk in his family’s impeccable apartment sits a flip chart showing the number of days until his all-important university entrance exams.

But no matter how hard he studies, Mr. Cho tries to get in just a little gaming, and with his parents’ encouragement. “They are at school all the time, and then they have additional study classes,” said his mother, Kim Eun Kyung, “so games are the best way to get rid of their stress.”

His father, Cho Duck Koo, a photographer, added: “Certainly the games can be a distraction, and now that he is studying for the university exam he plays much less, but in general gaming helps the children with strategic thinking and to learn to multitask. We’ve told him if he goes to university we will get him the best PC possible.”

It’s all part of a dynamic that has taken technologies first developed in the West – personal computers, the Internet, online games like StarCraft – and melded them into a culture as different from the United States as Korean pajeon are from American pancakes.

### *Is South Korea, where gaming is encouraged and viewed as a communal activity, leading a trend?*

Sitting outside another packed soundstage at another cavernous mall, where around 1,000 eSports fans were screaming for their favorite StarCraft players over the Quiet Riot hard-rock anthem “Cum On Feel the Noize,” a pinstriped banker illustrated how South Korea has become the paragon of gaming culture.

“We’re not just the sponsors of this league,” Kim Byung Kyu, a senior manager at Shinhan Bank, one of the country’s largest, said proudly. “We’re the hosts of this league. So we have a bank account called Star League Mania, and you can get V.I.P. seating at the league finals if you’ve opened an account.”

“When I’m in the U.S., I don’t see games in public,” he added. “The U.S. doesn’t have PC bangs. They don’t have game television channels. What you see here with hundreds of people cheering is just a small part of what is going on with games in Korea. At this very moment hundreds of thousands of people are playing games at PC bangs. It’s become a mainstream, public part of our culture, and I don’t see that yet in the U.S. In this regard, perhaps the United States will follow and Korea will be the model.”

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JUNE 18, 2006

MIDTOWN

## Beer for Breakfast

The South Korean national team makes its 2006 World Cup debut, a perfect time for a party, even if it's 9 a.m.



By SAKI KNAFO

WHEN it comes to soccer madness, South Korea is generally not regarded as the equal of countries in Latin America or Europe. But it had a sort of conversion experience in 2002, when South Korea and Japan jointly played host to the World Cup. The South Korean team went on an unexpected winning streak, ultimately beating Spain to earn a berth in the quarterfinals.

In anticipation of this year's World Cup, large groups of immigrants from soccer-mad countries like Mexico and Senegal have been rallying around the teams of their native countries in ethnic enclaves around the city. On Tuesday, it was the South Koreans' turn to go crazy, as their national squad made its debut in the World Cup.

The country's late-blooming soccer fanaticism was proudly displayed in the mostly commercial blocks huddled around the base of the Empire State Building, where the reverberations of that famous 2002 victory could be felt and heard.

Early on Tuesday, hundreds of Koreans converged on a tree-dotted plaza on West 32nd Street near Broadway — the heart of a cluster of bars, restaurants and other businesses collectively known as Koreatown. Dressed in the

signature red of Team Korea's uniforms, they had come to watch their national soccer team square off against the team fielded by the West African nation of Togo. The match was displayed on an enormous outdoor television screen that is permanently affixed to the wall of an office building on 32nd Street.

By the time the game began at 9 a.m., a sea of red jerseys and thrumming inflatable noisemakers had spilled across the street, with the crowd chanting "Dae Han Min Guk!" ("Republic of Korea!") in a thunderous voice.

Kang Seok Lee, 22, a spiky-haired student at Borough of Manhattan Community College, wore a red shirt emblazoned with the yellow words "Again, Korea!" He stood beside Jay Shin, 29, proprietor of a clothing boutique on 32nd Street near Fifth Avenue, who had closed his shop for the morning. Mr. Shin wore a red cowboy hat, a shredded red T-shirt and red sunglasses. His girlfriend, Yunni Choi, 30, was ablaze in outsized sunglasses, cowboy boots, elbow-length gloves, a bow tie and plastic devil horns — all red, of course.

"I don't know about soccer," said Ms. Choi, who immigrated to Woodside, Queens, from South Korea in 2002. Neither did many others in the crowd, who were drawn to 32nd Street less by an appreciation for the beauty of a perfect penalty kick than by straightforward ethnic pride.

That pride burst the confines of the plaza at 32nd Street. Korean restaurants and bars from 32nd to 36th Streets, and from the Avenue of the Americas to Park Avenue, seemed to be full of Koreans glued to television sets showing the match.

Outside Shilla, a sleek restaurant on 32nd Street near Broadway, fans lined up in front of a wide-screen television set mounted in the foyer. A few doors down the street, at the Players Lounge and Sports Bar, a packed house watched the match on multiple screens while guzzling breakfasts of Hite beer — a Korean brand — and free shots of vodka mixed with lemonade.

"I could die right now!" shouted an exultant 34-year-old actress named Mi Sun Choi, moments after South Korea put the finishing touches on a tense 2-1 victory.

The frenzied atmosphere had swept up even some of her non-Korean friends. "You put on the red," Michael Horan said. "And it makes you part of the action."



**RED FOR BAH, KAH**  
Fans wearing their team's color watched South Korea defeat Togo on an outdoor screen, above and top-left, and at a restaurant, left, near the Empire State Building.

Photographs by Angel Proctor/The New York Times

## BEER FOR BREAKFAST

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*Correction: June 25, 2006, Sunday. A story last week about Korean soccer fans misstated the South Korean team's results in the 2002 World Cup tournament. South Korea defeated Spain to earn a place in the semifinals, not the quarterfinals.*

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, JULY 6, 2006

GOLF

## South Korea Becomes New Face of L.P.G.A.

Continued From First Sports Page

en, all of them under 30. "That's pretty good, isn't it?" said Pak, who was a dominating rookie in 1998, a year after there were no South Koreans on tour. Now there are 32, and another 36 playing on the Futures Tour.

In late 2003, Stephenson, an Australian who won three L.P.G.A. majors, expressed concern that many Asian players were unwilling to accclimate themselves to the Tour's culture, to speak English, to smile for the fans and schmooze sponsors.

Her views fueled debate — much of it a one-sided wrath toward Stephenson, who later apologized. But the controversy awakened the

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L.P.G.A., which had seemed to consider the various nationalities on its Tour to be more of a happenstance than an issue or an opportunity.

Kyumin Shim, hired by the L.P.G.A. in early 2004, serves as a sort of liaison between the Tour and its growing South Korean contingent. A Korean-born 26-year-old, Shim moved with his family to Florida when he was 13. That his job title is "player-sponsor relations coordinator" seems increasingly appropriate: during Wednesday's pro-am event, which was delayed and moved to Hamilton Farm's par-3 course because of heavy morning rains, about one-third of the players partnered with amateurs were South Korean.

Some joked on the tee boxes and greens with their playing partners. A few spoke a little, offering shy smiles or "nice shots" and walking down the middle of the fairways as their partners and caddies — most of them

American — drove down the cart paths to the green.

Shim spends many of his hours off the course with the South Korean players, going to dinner and talking with them in hotel rooms. He is a sort of big brother, helping them adapt to American culture and expectations.

He said players are increasingly receptive to making themselves more accessible for the American news media and fans, and have learned some of the nuances and traditions of the Tour, such as visiting the volunteer tent for autographs and pictures after a victory.

"Everybody at the beginning, they were afraid of talking, they were afraid of what to do," Shim said. "Now they know. It's kind of loosening up. Now, because they're doing so well, the next step is, 'I have to learn English to move a step ahead.'"

In the past couple of years, the tour has hired a language consultant, who comes to nearly every tournament to teach the South Korean players English, often putting them through mock news interviews. Shim said that 10 to 15 of the South Koreans on Tour require an interpreter, a duty he sometimes performs, but the number is decreasing.

"They want us to speak more English," said the 20-year-old Seon Hwa Lee, who won the ShopRite L.P.G.A. Classic last month and gets tutored in English every week. "Like in the pro-am — how do you say? — be more comfortable with the amateurs, and with interviews."

Many of the South Koreans take their lead from the 28-year-old Pak, who won the first two majors she played in 1998 and won the McDonald's L.P.G.A. Championship last month, bumping South Korea's journey in the World Cup from the top of the sports news there.

"Se Ri winning a major and coming back and doing interviews and everything by herself, that looked really good on her," Shim said of Pak's victory last month. "Now, these young girls are noticing that stuff. 'Hey, if I'm able to speak, they'll love me more.' They're finally realizing that."

Pak harbors no resentment that the South Koreans seem to get far



Se Ri Pak teeing off during last week's United States Women's Open.

### South Koreans Show Depth While Dominating

Eight of the 17 tournaments played this season have been won by eight different South Korean women, all of them under the age of 30. South Korean winners in bold.

| TOURNAMENT                                  | WINNER              |
|---|---------------------|
| 1. Women's World Cup of Golf                | Sweden              |
| 2. SBS Open                                 | <b>Joo Mi Kim</b>   |
| 3. Fields Open                              | <b>Meena Lee</b>    |
| 4. MasterCard Classic                       | Annika Sorenstam    |
| 5. Safeway International                    | Juli Inkster        |
| 6. Kraft Nabisco Championship               | Karrie Webb         |
| 7. L.P.G.A. Taketuji Classic                | Lorena Ochoa        |
| 8. Florida's Natural Championship           | <b>Sung Ah Yim</b>  |
| 9. Ginn Clubs & Resorts Open                | <b>Mi Hyun Kim</b>  |
| 10. Franklin American Mortgage Championship | Cristie Kerr        |
| 11. Michelob Ultra Open                     | Karrie Webb         |
| 12. Sybase Classic                          | Lorena Ochoa        |
| 13. L.P.G.A. Corning Classic                | <b>Hee-Won Han</b>  |
| 14. ShopRite L.P.G.A. Classic               | <b>Seon Hwa Lee</b> |
| 15. McDonald's L.P.G.A. Championship        | <b>Se Ri Pak</b>    |
| 16. Wegmans L.P.G.A.                        | <b>Jeong Jang</b>   |
| 17. United States Women's Open              | Annika Sorenstam    |

less attention in this country than similarly young American women with little more than potential on their résumés.

"This is America," Pak said. "And it's a culture thing. You want to see America do better than a different country."

For now, on the L.P.G.A. Tour, that is not happening. But the South Korean players are adjusting to the L.P.G.A., while the L.P.G.A. adjusts to the South Koreans. And the fans have a wide world of options to cheer.

# SOUTH KOREA BECOMES NEW FACE OF L.P.G.A.

BY JOHN BRANCH

GLADSTONE, N.J., July 5

Less than three years ago, when the veteran L.P.G.A. player Jan Stephenson said that "Asians are killing the tour," even she probably could not imagine the impending dominance of South Koreans in women's golf.

It has been a swift overtaking, one that has been somewhat rocky for both the Tour and the parade of women who seemingly came from nowhere to win events. But as the L.P.G.A. busily sells the largely American faces of youth — Michelle Wie, Paula Creamer, Natalie Gulbis and others, a mostly ponytailed gang in designer pastels — the expanding array of South Koreans is taking over.

"It's going to be the Korean Tour pretty soon," the Korean pioneer Se Ri Pak said with a tongue-in-cheek grin. "Hopefully, everybody loves us."

Entering Thursday's start of the Women's World Match Play Championship at Hamilton Farm Golf Club, South Koreans held the Nos. 4, 5, 6 and 8 spots on the Tour's money list. Eleven players from South Korea — a country of about 48 million, one-sixth the size of the United States — are ranked in the top 30 of the Rolex world rankings, more than the United States (eight), Japan (five) or any other country.

South Koreans have won 8 of this season's 17 L.P.G.A. events. Most remarkable is the depth of the talent; the eight events were won by eight different women, all of them under 30.

"That's pretty good, isn't it?" said Pak, who was a dominating rookie in 1998, a year after there were no South Koreans on tour. Now there are 32, and another 36 playing on the Futures Tour.

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# HOT FOR THE HOLIDAYS: THE LURE OF A KOREAN SAUNA

BY SHERIDAN PRASSO

On the hot mat floor of the one of various saunas at the King Spa Sauna in Palisades Park, N.J., a dozen people are seated cross-legged in a circle under a low dome graced with a six-pointed star of mosaic stones and crystals. In the center are mineral rocks, which "radiate strong energy" left over from volcanic explosions, according to a sign that also promises "anti-aging as sweat sprouts and fresh energy comes out."

And come out it does. Beads of sweat pool on patrons' foreheads and trickle from their temples; damp spots spread slowly across their T-shirts. When they have sat as long as they can stand it, they leave through a low door and rest for a while outside before moving on. Next is the Gold Pyramid Sauna. Lined with gold leaf, it is said, among many other things, to affect "nerve stability, poison counteraction and neurosis."

On any given winter weekend day, the King Spa Sauna is mobbed. Open 365 days a year, the Korean bathhouse is particularly crowded at holiday time, when purification and restoration make their way onto many a New Year's resolution list. A \$35 admission fee permits use of the facilities. For those who work up an appetite as well as a sweat, there is a restaurant serving inexpensive spicy Korean dishes and fresh-squeezed juice drinks.

Call it holiday detox, Korean-style. "When you come out, you feel 100 pounds lifted off you," said Michelle Hong, 18, a freshman at University of California, San Diego, who was visiting her parents in Hackensack, N.J., for the holidays and fresh out of the Rock Salt Sauna. "You feel lighter. You feel so free. My aunt comes every day. She says it's supposed to cleanse bad stuff out of you."



Tina Fineberg for The New York Times

Her aunt isn't just glomming onto a new fad. The Korean jjimjilbang, a tradition of thermotherapy, purification and skin rejuvenation, dates back many centuries. Claims for the curative effects of some of these treatments can be found in the Dongeuibogam, an herbal medicine book written for a Korean king around 1600.

"Korean people like to sweat a lot," said Ms. Hong's mother, Helen Hong, who emigrated to the United States from Korea. "They enjoy hot sauce, spicy food, hot tubs, hot saunas. During the holidays they come here a lot. They want to get sober."

Young B. Cho, the manager of the three-year-old facility, said he knows of no other sauna of its kind in the United States. The clientele is predominantly Korean, drawn mostly from the sizable community in nearby Fort Lee, N.J. But patrons come from Manhattan (it's a 20-minute bus ride, with directions at [www.kingsaunausea.com](http://www.kingsaunausea.com)) and points as far away as Toronto.

Esther Kwon, 27, of Centreville, Va., for example, recently met up at the spa with her friend Erica Hung, 28, of Boston.

Many of the patrons are Japanese, who have a similar tradition of hot-springs bathing. "I like Japanese onsens better, but there are no onsens in New Jersey, so I have been coming here for two years," said Tadao Kitanaka, 61, who works for a fresh fish wholesaler in Elizabeth, N.J.

Russians, also a spa-loving people, come, too. Maria Panaev, 43, and her husband drove all the way from Providence, R.I. "In the Russian bathhouses in Brooklyn,

they serve alcohol," she said. "Here it's about sauna. We can consume alcohol later."

The Panaevs' friend, Leo Skabichevski, 46, who lives in Ashford, Conn., has been a spa regular for three years. "Here it is a very meditative atmosphere," he said. "There's no such thing as people checking out each other. All of us need time to relax, and this is an incredible way to do it. There's no time limit here, so you can spend hours and hours going from one room to another."

And that's just what they do. The spa's most popular sauna room, for women only, is the Bul Hanzung Mok, constructed of imported yellow loess soil, jade, ceramic, salt and granite. "These materials are known to emit plenty of long wavelengths of infrared rays that deeply penetrate into the skin," a sign informs patrons.

Devotees are handed a jute potato sack to protect them from the extremely hot floor, which is heated by a fire of oak logs. Essentially the room is a kiln, offering a preview of eternal damnation while also creating an internal warming sensation that is like nothing this reporter has ever experienced. Eggs baked inside it every morning are for sale in the spa restaurant.

In addition to four coed saunas, women may indulge in the Mugwort Room, which, with its earthy mushroom odor and ceiling of dangling deer antlers, promises to increase white blood cells. Herbal steam saunas for both men and women, designed to combat muscle ache and fatigue, offer pebbles for walking on as a form of auto-reflexology.

For \$70 more, there is traditional Korean massage, which includes deep pressing to reach the inner organs. Patrons first lie on the heated floor of the coed Bulgama sauna to loosen muscles. The Bulgama's central feature is a ceramic brick oven heated to 800 degrees to emit infrared rays. Mr. Cho said that sitting in the Bulgama for 20 minutes a day cured his back pain within a week. "Before that I used to do acupuncture twice a year, but after I did this, it's gone," he said.

Several patrons, including a man who drives 30 miles to arrive promptly at 6:15 a.m., come to the Bulgama daily to rid themselves of body aches, he said.

After all that sweating, it is essential to get rid of the toxins that have been secreted onto the skin. That's where the whirlpool baths – with temperatures ranging from scalding to chilly – come in. In the separate men's and women's facilities, everyone is naked, and the sight of dozens of women of all ages and sizes scrubbing one another's soapy backs is a Bacchanalian scene right out of a classical painting. Typically, self-appointed matrons, ever-vigilant from long years of attendance, make sure uninitiated newcomers do it right.

Finally, the ultimate treatment after a day of sweating out impurities and soaking to soften the skin is a Korean body scrub (\$65), a thorough exfoliation of virtually every body part. Middle-aged Korean women called ajuma, wearing black bras and panties (just as they do in Korea), wield Brillo-like scrub pads over the naked, who are as vulnerable as a chicken filet on a deli slab. Skin comes off in rolled sheets, leaving a softer, lighter complexion over the whole body. It is not for the sensitive.

*Open 365 days a year, and dedicated to a good sweat.*

Kyung-heui Piscopo, 40, a graphic designer in New Haven, comes for a body scrub at King Sauna several times a year, along with her husband, Armand Piscopo. He quickly became accustomed to this aspect of Korean culture. "She didn't know how I'd react being naked in the spa, but I went to boarding school, so it's the same as a locker room," said Mr. Piscopo, 36, a heavy equipment salesman. "I like it."

Ellen Lee, 21, drives over from her home in Little Neck, N.Y., every weekend with five members of her family. "If I miss a week, I feel very stressed," she said. "When I come out of the sauna, I feel like all my stresses are gone. I feel so fresh. And then when I take a shower, I feel like all our impurities are gone, too."

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2006

JOURNEYS SOUTH KOREA



Guests at one of the temples participating in Templestay Korea, rest long after the early-morning wakeup sound of the moktak.

## Immersion in Buddhist Austerity

By CATHERINE PRICE

**A**t 3:30 a.m. in a temple in South Korea the sound of the moktak — a wooden percussion instrument that Buddhist monks play every morning to start the temple's day — jolted me awake. I pulled myself up from my floor mat, straightened my itchy gray uniform and stumbled through the pre-dawn darkness to the temple, where pink lotus lanterns illuminated a small group of people waiting to begin their evening prostrations.

I was at the Lotus Lantern International Meditation Center on an overnight trip run by an organization called Templestay Korea. Created by the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism — the largest Buddhist order in Korea — the program aims to allow visitors to “sample ordained lifestyle and experience the mental training and cultural experience of Korea’s ancient Buddhist tradition,” according to its Web site. Although the program only began in 2002 on the occasion of the World Cup soccer tournament held in Korea and Japan, it has grown swiftly over the last four years from 14 temples to 50, with 52,549 participants in 2005.

The meditation center on Ganghwa Island, about two hours from Seoul by public transportation, certainly seems like the sort of place that could inspire calm. The grounds are nestled between rice paddies and a leafy forest, and the center’s brightly painted temple sits several stone steps up from a gentle brook and a small pond stocked with koi fish and lotus flowers. Monks wander silently, occasionally gathering at an outdoor wooden table and offering tea and small snacks to guests.

But be forewarned — the point of the temple stay is not, as the pictures on its Web site

might make it seem, to lounge next to a brook nibbling crackers as you consider what it means to reach nirvana. The point is to live like a monk. And monks, it turns out, keep strict schedules, are vegetarian and spend a lot of time silently meditating in positions that can become, quickly and without much warning, incredibly uncomfortable for those unused to them.

I got my first hint of this austere lifestyle when I arrived and was greeted by Cho Hyun-soon-seo, who introduced herself in fluent English. In the guesthouse, she showed me the communal bathroom and the small room my friend and I would stay in, which was furnished except for sleeping pads, blankets and small pillows. Then, after we’d dropped off our bags, Ms. Cho handed us our clothes for the weekend: two identical extra-large sets of baggy gray pants and vests, along with sun hats and blue plastic slippers. We looked like we’d stepped out of a propaganda poster for Maoist China.

On this particular temple stay, the first activity was community work time. Clad in our Mao suits, we followed Ms. Cho to the garden, where eight or so other guests squatted between raised rows of dirt, piles of potatoes scattered around them. Our job was to sort the potatoes into piles of small, medium and large, as monks walked by, examining our efforts. We worked in silence,

*A revelation from living like a monk: It’s really hard to live like a monk.*

Modest and prostrated, both essential parts of monks’ lives, are included in every overnight temple stay program, as are meals or tea ceremonies, lectures on Buddhism and occasionally early wakeup calls. Beyond that, though, programs differ. Most average about 30,000 South Korean won (approximately \$31, or 972 won to the U.S. dollar) a night, but temple stays can range anywhere from a few hours to a few months, depending on your budget and enthusiasm.

They also offer different activities. Lotus Lantern’s program included walking meditation through the temple grounds, calligraphy practice, a traditional Buddhist meal ceremony and a discussion about Buddhism led by the temple’s head monk. But other temples offer Buddhist martial arts, stone rubbing, hiking and painting. And the buildings themselves can also vary, from newly built meditation centers to temples that are more than a thousand years old.

Golpoiso Temple, for example, about five hours from Seoul on public transportation, was built by an Indian monk in the sixth century and is surrounded by ancient stone caves. Its program is more physically active than the other temples’, offering training in a Korean Buddhist martial art called *suinmu-do* that incorporates traditional martial arts with yugak-like poses, weapons training and breathing exercises.

Munsang Temple, about two hours from Seoul, caters to people who don’t want to lend a wee-hours wakeup call to just one morning — it has extended temple-stay programs during the summer and winter seasons that can last for up to three months (new participants can join on Saturdays, pending approval from the temple’s abbot). The retreats at Munsang are silent, so if you think rising before dawn and perform-

ing is better now,” she said, “and people are busier and more stressed. They want to see aside time for a more cultural experience.” (Dhan Tao-byo, another coordinator, said North Korea’s recent nuclear tests have had no effect on interest in the program.)

**O**n my particular temple stay, I was fascinated by the variety of people the program had attracted. I was the only American; my fellow participants came from Australia, Canada, Venezuela and France. What made us all want to spend a Saturday night sleeping on the floor?

For Katie Loweri Prichard, a 24-year-old from North Wales who came to Korea as an English teacher, the temple stay offered activities and a community she found lacking in her normal life. “I came again and again every weekend, quickly preferring the temple and *suinmu-do* training to the usual Saturday night activities, which involved drinking a lot of alcohol and feeling awful all day on Sunday,” she told me in an e-mail. Today, she helps run Golpoiso’s program. “It’s like having a big extended family,” she said. “Everyone is so caring and kind.”

Of course, doing a weekend temple-stay program won’t immediately turn you into a Buddhist. As Ms. Cho put it, talking about Buddhism without proper, consistent, mindful practice is “like looking at a finger pointing at the moon, instead of looking at the moon itself.” But spending two days at a temple certainly does give a sense of what a monk’s schedule is like — an experience that, despite its accompanying fatigue, is not easily forgotten.

After our final group meeting, my friend

# IMMERSION IN BUDDHIST AUSTERITY

BY CATHERINE PRICE

**A**t 3:30 a.m. in a temple in South Korea the sound of the moktak — a wooden percussion instrument that Buddhist monks play every morning to start the temple’s day — jolted me awake. I pulled myself up from my floor mat, straightened my itchy gray uniform and stumbled through the pre-dawn darkness to the temple, where pink lotus lanterns illuminated a small group of people waiting to begin their morning prostrations.

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On this particular temple stay, the first activity was community work time. Clad in our Mao suits, we followed Ms. Cho to the garden, where eight or so other guests squatted between raised rows of dirt, piles of potatoes scattered around them. Our job was to sort the potatoes into piles of small, medium and large, as monks walked by, examining our efforts. We worked in silence, sweating under the afternoon sun, and were rewarded when we'd finished with small, freshly boiled potatoes, lightly salted and offered to us by a grinning Vietnamese monk.

After our snack, we wiped the dirt off our pants and gathered in the temple, where Ms. Cho showed us how to arrange our slippers neatly at the door, and taught us to prostrate according to the Korean Buddhist tradition: kneel down, touch your forehead to the floor and rest your hands, palms up, on the ground. We then meditated silently for half an hour, a slight breeze blowing through the open doors at our backs as we sat cross-legged on our prayer mats, trying to clear our minds.

Meditation and prostration, both essential parts of monks' lives, are included in every overnight temple stay program, as are meal or tea ceremonies, lectures on Buddhism and exceptionally early wakeup calls. Beyond that, though, programs differ. Most average about 30,000 South Korean won (approximately \$33, at 972 won to the U.S. dollar) a night, but temple stays can range anywhere from a few hours to a few months, depending on your budget and enthusiasm.

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An easier option is Jogyesa Temple, right in Seoul, at 27-11 Gyunji-dong, which offers half-day visits on the last Saturday of every month that include a tea and meal ceremony, meditation practice and a temple tour. If you won't be around on the last Saturday and can scrape together a group of five or more people, you can also organize your own day at the temple, even on weekdays – just make sure to e-mail five days in advance for reservations. The e-mail address is 10mirror@ijogyesa.net.

Jun Jong-young, a temple-stay coordinator, said she wasn't sure what exactly had caused the explosion in the program's popularity, which saw an increase of 15,647 participants between 2004 and 2005 alone – but she did have some theories. "Korea's economy is better now," she said, "and people are busier and more stressed. They want to set aside time for a more cultural experience." (Min Tae-hye, another coordinator, said North Korea's recent nuclear tests have had no effect on interest in the program.)

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American; my fellow participants came from Australia, Canada, Venezuela and France. What made us all want to spend a Saturday night sleeping on the floor?

For Kayte Lowri Pritchard, a 24-year-old from North Wales who came to Korea as an English teacher, the temple stay offered activities and a community she found lacking in her normal life. "I came again and again every weekend, quickly preferring the temple and sunmudo training to the usual Saturday night activities, which involved drinking a lot of alcohol and feeling awful all day on Sunday," she told me in an e-mail. Today, she helps run Gulgulsa's program. "It's like having a big extended family," she said. "Everyone is so caring and kind."

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spending two days at a temple certainly does give a sense of what a monk's schedule is like – an experience that, despite its accompanying fatigue, is not easily forgotten.

After our final group meeting, my friend and I cleaned our room and handed our itchy suits to Ms. Cho, happily changing into our normal clothes and fantasizing about the dinner we would have when we returned to Seoul. Several days later, Ms. Cho e-mailed the weekend's participants and invited us to a workshop to perform 3,000 prostrations to "inspire yourself into practice." It sounded horrifying, and after a moment's thought, I realized why: the temple stay had demonstrated how difficult it would be for me, with my anxieties and preoccupations, to live like a monk. Which, when I think about it, may have been the point.

*Reservations can be made through the Templestay program's English Web site: [www.templestaykorea.com](http://www.templestaykorea.com). It includes links and contact information for all the temples listed above, plus information for other temples that don't offer English translations.*

# LOST SEOUL

BY PETER HYUN



Traces of old Korea are impossible to find in the posh Cheongdam-dong district of Seoul. The streets here are lined with spacious Prada and Louis Vuitton stores and with fusion restaurants whose menus and decor are hyped by the Korean-language editions of Vogue and Cosmopolitan. Trendy wine bars have sprung up everywhere so that sophisticated Seoulites can now sip New World vintages at tables overlooking a skyline bejeweled with shimmering skyscrapers.

For a city decimated by war 50 years ago, Seoul is certainly in amazing shape. But many of the spectacular changes that have occurred in South Korea over the last few decades are viewed by the Korean filmmaker Kim Ki-duk with skepticism and disapproval.

The winner of several international awards, this 45-year-old writer and director is perhaps best known in the West for "Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter ... and Spring" and "3-iron." A quiet, lyrical film, "Spring, Summer" chronicles five seasons in the lives of a Korean Buddhist monk and his young protege, who live in a small wooden house on a raft in the middle of a mountain lake. Each vignette is filmed in a way that makes the viewer experience the passing of time as well as the changes of season. "3-iron," on the other hand, concerns a young man who roams the streets of Seoul on his motorcycle, breaking into and inhabiting the houses of their vacationing owners. It depicts a modern, middle-class South Korea, similar in some ways to the United States. With their contrasting visions – ancient versus modern, pastoral versus urban, philosophic versus pragmatic – the films point to a duality at the heart of contemporary South Korea, and also in their director.

Kim Ki-duk has had no training in the arts or film. His formal education ended with elementary school. As a teenager, he worked in factories, manufacturing buttons and electronic gadgets, a microscopic cog in South Korea's "miracle economy." He began making films more than a decade ago, and many of their magical, idyllic images and oddball characters are drawn from his life. Despite fame and some fortune overseas, Kim has yet to be embraced at home, and he does not have the same

cult following in Korea that he does in Europe and the United States. Yet Kim insists he couldn't be happier, living on the outskirts of Seoul, eating Korean food and enjoying all things traditionally Korean. He does not, however, wear a Korean flag pin on his lapel, nor does he suggest that his country and its culture are superior to others. He simply feels more comfortable in familiar surroundings.

Kim questions the foreign values that have challenged Korea's millenniums-old culture, altering what had been to hard-working South Koreans "our way of life." But he readily admits that not all South Koreans share his pejorative view of Westernization and rapid change, certainly not those in the entertainment industry of which he is a part. Today, Seoul is Asia's pop-culture capital, with teenagers and hip adults emulating stylish South Korean singers and movie stars throughout Asia, whether at nightclubs, karaoke bars or plastic surgeons' offices. Kim describes a current generation gap in which parents lead traditional, family-oriented lives starkly different from those of their children – adoring fans of "Friends" and "Sex and the City" who pursue cash-rich careers and live alone in brand-new studio apartments, eating pizza and sandwiches, which require far fewer utensils and are less of a hassle to prepare.

Yet, in Seoul, traditional single-story Korean houses still stand next to chic glass-panel buildings whose interiors smell of paint. Sales clerks – whether in a European couture shop in Cheongdam-dong or a McDonald's in some suburb – bow courteously to every customer. And you can get a cup of espresso or spiked coffee in the Paris-style cafes, but you can also find green-tea milkshakes and sweet-potato pastries, long a staple of the old Korean snacking culture, sold on the streets by elderly vendors.

So contemporary South Korea isn't entirely modern, nor is it a country whose economy depends on foreigners visiting ancient tourist attractions. It is, as Kim knows, a country of juxtapositions, at times extreme, often exciting. "Understanding black leads to understanding of white," he says. "They are reciprocal. Therefore, I think they are the same."

THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL MONDAY, JANUARY 2, 2006

## China's Youth Now Looking To South Korea for Inspiration

Continued From Page A1

enced by other cultures, especially China but also Japan and America. South Korea finds itself at a turning point in its new role as an exporter.

The transformation began with South Korea's democratization in the late 1980's, which unleashed sweeping domestic changes. As its democracy and economy have matured, its influence on the rest of Asia, negligible until a decade ago, has grown accordingly. Its cultural exports have even caused complaints about cultural invasion in China and Vietnam.

Historically, Christianity made its headway in East Asia, except in South Korea, whose population is now about 30 percent Christian and whose overseas missionary movement is the world's second largest after the United States.

Today, in China, South Korean missionaries are bringing Christianity with an Asian face. South Korean movies and dramas about urban professionals in Seoul, though not overtly political, present images of modern lives centering on individual happiness and sophisticated consumerism.

They also show enduring Confucian-rooted values in their emphasis on family relations, offering to Chinese both a reminder of what was lost during the Cultural Revolution and an example of an Asian country that has modernized and retained its traditions.

"Three Guys and Three Girls" and "Three Friends" are South Korea's homegrown versions of the American TV show "Friends." As for "Sex and the City," its South Korean twin, "The Marrying Type," a sitcom about three single professional women in their 30's looking for love in Seoul, was so popular in China that episodes were illegally downloaded or sold on pirated DVD's.

"We feel that we can see a modern lifestyle in these shows," said Qiu

Yuan, 23, a student at Tsinghua University here. "American dramas also show the same kind of lifestyle. We know that South Korea and America have similar political systems and economies. But it's easier to accept that lifestyle from South Koreans because they are culturally closer to us. We feel we can live like them in a few years."

"They seem to have similar lifestyles," Ms. Qiu said. "They have friends and go to bars. They have good mobile phones and good cars and lead comfortable lives."

Her classmate, Huo Kan, 22, said, "American dramas are too modern."

Ms. Qiu said, "They're postmodern."

Ms. Huo added, "Something like 'Sex and the City' is too alien to us."

Jin Yao, 23, a graduate student at Beijing University, said, "We like American culture, but we can't accept it directly."

"And there is no obstacle to our accepting South Korean culture, unlike Japanese culture," said Ms. Jin, who has studied both Korean and Japanese. "Because of the history between China and Japan, if a young person here likes Japanese culture, the parents will get angry."

Politics also seems to underlie the Chinese preference for South Korean-filtered American hip-hop culture. Messages about rebelliousness, teenage angst and freedom appear more palatable to Chinese in their Koreanized versions.

Kwon Ki Joon, 22, a South Korean who attends Beijing University and graduated from a Chinese high school here, said his male Chinese friends were fans of South Korea hip-hop bands, like H.O.T., and its song "We Are the Future." A sample of the song's lyrics translate roughly as:

"We are still under the shadows of adults/still not Free To go through the day with all sorts of interferences is tiring."

To Mr. Kwon, there is no mystery about the band's appeal. "It's about



Shoppers stroll through the new Korea City.

wanting a more open world, about rebelliousness," he said. "Korean hip-hop is basically trying to adapt American hip-hop."

Like many South Koreans, Oh Dong Suk, 40, an investor in online games here, said he believed that South Korea's pop culture was a fruit of the country's democratization. "If you watch South Korean movies from the 1970's or 1980's, you could feel that it was a controlled society," Mr. Oh said.

Hwang In Choul, 35, a South Korean missionary here, also sees a direct link between South Korea's democratization and its influence in China. After restrictions on travel outside South Korea were lifted in the late 1980's, South Korea's missionary movement grew from several hundred to its current size of 14,000 missionaries.

Mr. Hwang, who since 2000 has trained 30 Chinese pastors to proselytize, is among the 1,200 South Korean missionaries evangelizing in China, usually secretly.

"Under military rule, it was impos-

sible to come out of South Korea, and even our activities inside the country were monitored," Mr. Hwang said. "We had the potential to be missionaries out in the world, but we were constrained. We had the passion, but we couldn't express our passion."

Until South Korea and China, enemies during the Korean War, normalized relations in 1992, North Korea had a stronger presence here, with its embassy, restaurants and shops. Back then, South Korea remained unknown to most Chinese, or suffered from a poor image.

"If a Japanese television set stopped working, the Chinese would say something's wrong with the power lines," said Ohn Dae Sung, the manager of a Korean restaurant, Subokkung, who has been here since 1993. "If a South Korean television set stopped working, they'd say it was the fault of the set."

The Korean Wave has been gathering for some time, with its roots traceable to several developments, including the Seoul Olympics in 1988.

The first civilian president was elected in 1992, ending nearly 32 years of military rule and ushering in tumultuous change.

A newly confident South Korea has pursued an increasingly independent foreign policy, often to Washington's displeasure, warming up to China and to North Korea. Social changes that took decades elsewhere were compressed into a few years, as new freedoms yielded a rich civil society, but also caused strains between generations and the sexes, leading to one of the world's highest divorce rates and lowest birth rates.

As South Korea quickly became the world's most wired nation, new online news sites challenged the conservative mainstream media's monopoly; press clubs, a Japanese colonial legacy that controlled the flow of news, were weakened or eliminated. Unlike other Asian nations, South Korea has tackled head-on taboo subjects in its society, including the legacy of military rule and collaboration during Japanese colonial rule.

Here, at a computer center on a re-

# CHINA'S YOUTH LOOK TO SEOUL FOR INSPIRATION

BY NORIMITSU ONISHI

BEIJING

At Korea City, on the top floor of the Xidan Shopping Center, a warren of tiny shops sell hip-hop clothes, movies, music, cosmetics and other offerings in the South Korean style.

To young Chinese shoppers, it seemed not to matter that some of the products, like New York Yankees caps or Japan's Astro Boy dolls, clearly have little to do with South Korea. Or that most items originated, in fact, in Chinese factories.

"We know that the products at Korea City are made in China," said Wang Ying, 28, who works for the local branch of an American company. "But to many young people, 'Korea' stands for fashionable or stylish. So they copy the Korean style."

From clothes to hairstyle, music to television dramas, South Korea has been defining the tastes of many Chinese and other Asians for the past half decade. As part of what the Chinese call the Korean Wave of pop culture, a television drama about a royal cook, "The Jewel in the Palace," is garnering record ratings throughout Asia, and Rain, a 23-year-old singer from Seoul, drew more than 40,000 fans to a sold-out concert at a sports stadium here in October.

But South Korea's "soft power" also extends to the material and spiritual spheres. Samsung's cellphones and televisions are symbols of a coveted consumerism for many Chinese. Christianity, in the evangelical form championed by Korean missionaries deployed throughout China, is finding Chinese converts despite Beijing's efforts to rein in the spread of the religion. South Korea acts as a filter for Western values, experts say, making them more palatable to Chinese and other Asians.

For a country that has been influenced by other cultures, especially China but also Japan and America, South Korea finds itself at a turning point in its new role as exporter.

The transformation began with South Korea's democratization in the late 1980's, which unleashed sweeping domestic changes. As its democracy and economy have matured, its influence on the rest of Asia, negligible until a decade ago, has grown accordingly. Its cultural exports have even caused complaints about cultural invasion in China and Vietnam.

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litical systems and economies. But it's easier to accept that lifestyle from South Koreans because they are culturally closer to us. We feel we can live like them in a few years."

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Here, at a computer center on a recent evening, young Chinese could be seen playing South Korean online games. Cyworld, the largest online community service in South Korea, is announcing its arrival in China by plastering ads on city buses.

Thanks to the Korean Wave and South Korea's new image, being Korean helps business.

"I'm sure there is a connection, though we don't have exact figures," Jim Sohn, the chief executive of LG Electronics China, said in an interview inside the company's brand new \$400 million headquarters here.

Another company that has benefited from the Korean Wave's "positive effect" is Hyundai, said Um Kwang Heum, president of its Chinese division. Though a late-comer to China, Hyundai signed a joint venture agreement with Beijing Automotive Industry Holdings in 2002 and has already become No. 2 in sales among automakers in China.

Thanks to its local partner, Hyundai's cars have been chosen by the Beijing government to replace the city's aging taxis before the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Hyundai Elantras will make up most of the city's taxi fleet in time for the Olympics, which are expected to be a turning point for China, just as they signaled South Korea's entry onto the world stage in 1988 and postwar Japan's in 1964.

For all of South Korea's influence in China, though, few Chinese expect the Olympics and democratization to dovetail as they did in Seoul.

A local television production company, Beijing Modern English Film and TV Culture, proposed a Korean-language program for adults in 2004 but was rejected 10 times by the Chinese authorities for unexplained reasons. Eventually, it successfully pitched a cartoon, "Happy Imitation of Korean Sentences."

"As long as it was a kids' show, it was O.K.," said Sun Hogan, a producer at the company.

"The government," he added, "is definitely a little nervous about the popularity of the Korean Wave."

THE NEW YORK TIMES INTERNATIONAL FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2006



Photographs by Seokyoung Lee for The New York Times



Ban Ki-moon, the new secretary general of the United Nations, was born in Sangdong, South Korea, where the tombs of his ancestors lie, left. A third of the village's residents share the Ban family name. Some say a prophecy foretold of his rise to prominence.

SANGDONG JOURNAL

On His Ancestors' Wings, a Korean Soars to the U.N.

By MARTIN FACKLER

**SANGDONG NO. 1 VILLAGE, South Korea, Dec. 19** — Standing amid snow-covered fields and squat white farmhouses, with fingers chapped from years of planting red peppers and ginseng, Ban Ki-jong proudly traced his village's destiny in the shape of a nearby mountain. "See how it looks like a crane," he pointed, "with its wings spread open, ready to fly?"

"Feng shui tells us this is a perfect shape for funneling natural forces into the village," Mr. Ban continued, referring to an ancient belief that some sites are blessed by geography. "So we've known for three centuries that a great man would emerge here. Now, he's finally come."

That man is Mr. Ban's cousin, Ban Ki-moon, who will take the reins of the United Nations as secretary general on Jan. 1. He was born 62 years ago in this tiny village of about 100 residents in South Korea's rustic center. (The village is called No. 1 to distinguish it from another nearby village, Sangdong No. 2.) As the villagers celebrate their native son, they are not alone in turning to traditional ideas to explain so august a birth in such humble surroundings. Since Mr. Ban's selection by the



Generations etched in stone. Ban Ki-moon's name is third from the left.

United Nations in October, almost 2,000 practitioners of feng shui, or pungsu in Korean, as well as a few Buddhists, have descended on the village, trying to divine the source of its good fortune, local officials said. So a host of stories and accounts of Mr. Ban's birth and childhood have emerged, many that make him sound like a sagacious Confucian scholar out of Korea's dynastic past. Geomancy and divination may seem out of place in a nation leading the charge into the information age with the world's highest Internet penetration rates. But like many countries that have experienced rapid economic growth in recent decades, South Korea has been grappling with how much of its traditional culture to give up in the name of modernity and higher living standards. At the same time that Mr. Ban's appointment marks South Korea's emergence as an economic powerhouse and robust democracy, the reaction here attests to the tenacity of many old beliefs. To many local residents, his success stands as an affirmation of those ways.

"We now live in a global era, but we are still Koreans," said Han Sang-youn, principal of Chungju High School, Mr. Ban's alma mater. "Mr. Ban shows our values should be kept for future generations."

The school, in the nearby city of Chungju, where Mr. Ban and his family moved when he was 3, has begun incorporating stories of Mr. Ban's life into its curriculum, Mr. Han said. One recounts how, in the aftermath of the Korean War, Mr.

Ban learned English by walking six miles to a fertilizer factory to converse with its American advisers. In another, he is a young diplomat turning down a prized posting in Washington in favor of cheaper India so he can send money back to his parents. Many stories mention that he spent evenings and weekends studying, and that he was always at the top of his class.

"Mr. Ban is a role model, like an old-style Confucian scholar," Mr. Han said. "We exhort our students to produce a second Mr. Ban."

But in a reminder of how hard it is to build legends about the living, friends and relatives question some claims. Joeng Mu-dong, 66, a former classmate, said Mr. Ban was only an average student, at least until sixth grade. Mr. Ban's mother, Shin Hyeon-sun, 86, said he walked only three and a half miles to the fertilizer factory. Chungju officials say they are struggling to balance modern tributes with ancient precedent in honoring Mr. Ban. In October, 50,000 people gathered in a soccer stadium for a celebration. City officials also want to name a street, a park and even a restaurant after Mr. Ban, but some fret that notables of yore were honored only after retirement, or death.

"In old times, we used to put up stone tablets in front of city gates to honor great men," said Kwon O-dong, the city's planning director. "Should we do the same now?"

Cho Jun-hyung, a retired television station manager who is now a feng shui master, said Mr. Ban's appearance fulfilled a 2,500-year-old Chi-

nese prophecy, first uttered by Confucius himself, that a "world dominator" would emerge from the northeast, meaning neighboring Korea. Sangdong, the village where Mr. Ban was born, now gets so many visitors — regular tourists as well as feng shui masters — that it plans to install a parking lot and rebuild Mr. Ban's birthplace, a farmhouse that collapsed 30 years ago.

Mr. Cho says Sangdong has exceptionally good feng shui because it sits at the navel of the Korean Peninsula, and a nearby row of three mountains channel in natural forces. "This is very rare geography," he said. "In America, Massachusetts and Ohio have similar alignments, which is why they produce so many presidents."

Another feng shui master, Choi Young-ju, offers a different explanation: a mountain near Chungju is shaped like Mr. Ban's face, a sure sign of good fortune. A Chungju city official, Jeon Dong-cheol, said Mr. Ban should have appeared 1,000 years ago but was thwarted when a rival kingdom built a stone pagoda-like tower that blocked natural forces from reaching Chungju. Mr. Ban's mother, Ms. Shin, a Buddhist, said her son succeeded because of hard work and good karma built up by a lifetime of generosity. She said her son gave her money to buy meals for the elderly and even for the security guard in her apartment complex. "Good fortune has come back to him," she said.

In Sangdong, where a third of the residents share the Ban family name, Mr. Ban is seen as the fulfillment of a prophecy uttered by the family ancestors who settled the village around 1700. On a stone wall in the village's center are etched the names of 22 generations of Bans, including the new secretary general. Overlooking the village are rows of small earthen mounds, the Ban family tombs.

It is here every October that the Ban family gathers to worship their ancestors and retell stories of their deeds. Until now, the most revered ancestor was an 18th-century government official praised by a king. "One day, Ban Ki-moon's story will be the most honored one," said Ban Ki-jong, the ginseng farmer. "He has brought honor and good fortune to his village."

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THE KOREAN WAVE AS VIEWED THROUGH THE PAGES OF THE NEW YORK TIMES IN 2006 THE KOREAN WAVE AS

## MOVIES

The New York Times introduced many Korean films with deep insights prior to their theatrical releases in the U.S. For example, with “The Host” and “The King and the Clown”. The Times not only explained the films but also examined the Korean society.

## MUSIC

2006 is the year when The New York Times started to highlight Korean Popstars along with Korean Classical Musicians. Prior to 2006, The New York Times articles mainly focused on Classical Musicians of Korea.

## FINE ART

2006 was a milestone year for contemporary Korean artists, a couple of whom received remarkably positive attention from the American press for exhibitions held in New York.

## DANCE & THEATER

The New York Times covered various aspects of the graceful movements in traditional to contemporary Korean dance. Also The New York Times reviewed favorably the works of Korean female playwrights, whose works spotlight the life of Korean-Americans and their cultural deviations in the U.S.

## FOOD

The New York Times has focused on the rising popularity of Korean food, reviewing numerous Korean cuisines, from traditional styles of seasonal dishes to modern foods that can be tasted in New York.

## & MORE

Since January of 2006, The New York Times has published numerous in-depth articles focusing on the influence and diversity of Korean culture and “Hallyu” or “Korean Wave” in Asia.