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**INSIGHTS** > Asian Films in San Sebastian Film Festival

BY **KERRINE GOH**  
29 DEC 2007

## Asian Films in San Sebastian Film Festival

**SEA-images is delighted to publish a call from Roberto Cueto – film critic and member of the Selection Committee of San Sebastian International Film Festival.**

As one of the most important film encounters in Europe nowadays, the San Sebastian International Film Festival is well aware of the importance that Asian cinema has all over the world today. It's the reason why this "A" Festival (one of the twelve that holds the "category one" granted by FIAPF) had developed a growing interest in Asian productions for its different sections. During the last few years, Asian directors such as Hirokazu Kore-eda, Hur Jin-ho, Bong Joon-ho, Son Il-gong, Kei Kumai competed at the Official Section of the Festival and films by Kim Ki-duk, Ang Lee or Wong Kar-wai were screened at informative sections while the work of notorious filmmakers such as Hou Hsiao-hsien was the object of complete retrospectives.

For the Festival's 2007 edition, the Selection Committee considered films from China, Japan, South and North Korea, Thailand and Hong Kong. Most of these films were submitted by their own production companies and all of these were carefully viewed and discussed by the Committee. Recommendations from local delegates all over the world were also considered and attendance of Committee members to film markets organized by international festivals was also very important.

Besides, Asian films that the Selection Committee considered as of significant importance can be selected for programming in our parallel or informative sections. The conditions for their participation in the Festival were that the films had not been screened in another international film festival, so that they can be world premieres (in the case of Official Competitive Selection), or that they had not been programmed in another Spanish film festival to be Spanish premieres (in the case of the other sections). The Selection Committee had not given priority to any film for its genre, theme or nationality – the only criteria for selection was the cinematographic quality of the film itself.

This year, two Asian films were presented at the official selection: “*EXODUS*” (*CEOT OI KPA GEI*), an absorbing film by Hong Kong director, Pang Ho-Cheung and the South Korean “*SHADOWS IN THE PALACE*” (*GOONG NYEO*), the film debut of director Kim Mee-jeung. Both films were intriguing and very well made thrillers. Although San Sebastian has never been a specialized film festival devoted to specific film genres, the Selection Committee supported their screening in the official section due to their high quality narrative and visuals. The same situation happened with another South Korean film - the beautiful ghost story extravaganza, “*EPITAPH*” (*GIDAM*), a directorial debut of the Jung Brothers which was included in the New Directors section of the festival.

The prize for best film in this category was for another Asian film, the China-UK co-production - “*SOUL CARRIAGE*”, an unusual drama filmed in China by British filmmaker Conrad Clark who develops the Kafkaian odyssey of a building employee who must return the corpse of a dead colleague to his family. In Zabaltegi Special Screenings, Jean-Pierre Limosin’s terrific documentary, “*YOUNG YAKUZA*” was included. For the first time, a Japanese yakuza clan allowed a filmmaker to shoot their rituals and customs. The film is an extraordinary incursion into their secretive world with a nostalgic portrait of a kobun (the boss of a yakuza clan) and how he realizes that the traditional world in which he always lived, disappears in the modern Japanese society.

Two other Asian films were selected for the section “Pearls”, which tries to show to Spanish public the more notorious films presented during the year

in other international festivals. One was "*THE SHOW MUST GO ON*", a vigorous gangster film directed by one of the new promises of South Korean cinema, Han Jae-rim, with the bonus of one of the best performances that Korean star, Song Kang-ho, has achieved in his brilliant career. The second film was the hypnotic "*PLOY*", the last work of Thai filmmaker Pen-ek Ratanaruang. Whoever was moved by Pen-ek's previous films like "*LAST LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE*" or "*INVISIBLE WAVES*" shouldn't miss "*PLOY*" because once again Pen-ek developed a fascinating tale of desire, frustrated love, eroticism and black humour in aseptic settings with his inimitable directing style and stunning visuals.

Several of the Festival prizes were finally for Asian films. Hong Kong cinematographer, Charlie Lam, won the prize for best cinematography for "*EXODUS*" (*CEOT OI KPA GEI*) and Chinese actor, Henry O (Jiang Xi Ren), won the Best Actor Award for his performance in Wayne Wang's "*A THOUSAND YEARS OF GOOD PRAYERS*", a film which also obtained the great prize of the festival (Concha de Oro) for Best Film. In the Zabaltegi Special Screening sections, director Wang also presented his film, "*PRINCESS OF NEBRASKA*", an intimate portrait of a Chinese woman in the US. Although both Wang's films were produced and filmed in the US, they were centred on the problems of Chinese people who were living away from his homeland.

All these films were the proof of San Sebastian Film Festival's interest in Asian cinematography. These films can be showed not only to Spanish spectator but also to buyers and Spanish distributors. From the Selection Committee, we invited all those producers, filmmakers and productions companies to submit their films for the next edition of the Festival, which will be held in September 2008. Anyone who is interested can check the participation rules and find the selection form in the Festival's website: [www.sansebastianfestival.com](http://www.sansebastianfestival.com)

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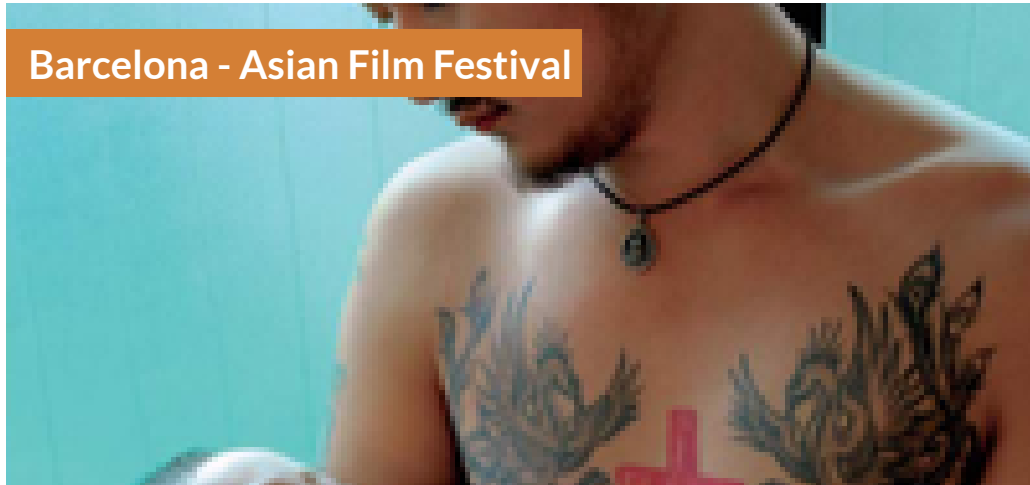
ROBERTO CUETO (Madrid, 1965) is an Associate Professor of History and Theory of Cinema in Universidad Carlos III of Madrid (Spain) and a film critic in the Spanish edition of *Cahiers du cinéma*. He is also the author of several books on film history and has contributed articles to several

publications devoted to Asian cinema. He is also a member of the Selection Committee of San Sebastian International Film Festival.

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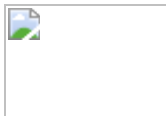
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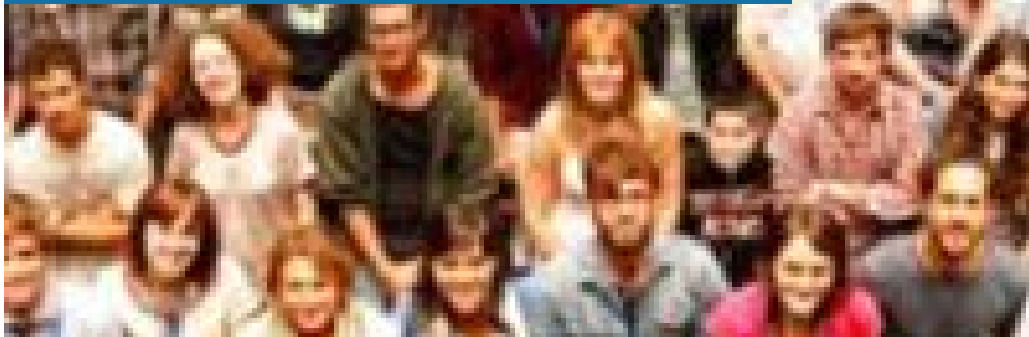
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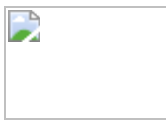
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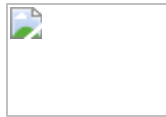
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## Pusan International Film Festival



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