

MAGAZINE > Loneliness from West to East | 'Han', the Korean loneliness emotion and its meaning for the European audiences

BY [KERRINE GOH](#)
14 SEP 2012

COUNTRIES
[EUROPE](#) [KOREA](#)

DISCIPLINE
[FILM](#)

Loneliness from West to East | 'Han', the Korean loneliness emotion and its meaning for the European audiences



Contributed by Florentina Heroiu

"We - *the Koreans* - were born from the womb of *Han* and brought up in the womb of *Han*."

Poet Ko Eun

After the year 2000, when we stepped into the new millennium, many of us dreamed of living the renewal. In fact, it has been, but in a different way. Everyone expected more, but we lived *less & less* each day: less affection, less amity, less ardour, less attachment, less delight, less devotion, less emotion, less enchantment, less enjoyment, less faith, less fervour, less fidelity, less flame, less friendship, less love, less passion, less piety, less pride, less respect, less tenderness & less emotion. But if you haven't taken into notice Korean Cinema, you're hardly alone. The power of feelings and the approach way of thinking emotions with meticulous images in Korean films comes from the way they enwrap the viewer with their mood. These films are windows to **a world in which silence and endurance govern time**, where we co-exist through living in each other's dreams with a marvellous vision that transcends freedom, time and space.

Why is Korean Cinema so popular amongst the Western audiences? Perhaps the answer lies in its distinct vibration and use of a universal language that is understood worldwide. The Korean filmmakers discern that the film should become a unifying "universal language" where memory (emotions and feelings) is a mythical place of reconciliation. Korean Cinema has an inimitable style in strict relation with its own historical and cultural traditions: identity, authenticity, candour, responsibility, affiliation, metamorphoses, poetry, nostalgia, passion, and fury. The Korean film is not merely a distinguishing genre, but it has faith, voice and soul in each photograph: the description of human being's emotional relationship with his people, nature and his own wonder.

Since always, every culture had a bestiary, Korean culture has two essential leitmotiv emotions: *Han* and *Jeong*.

Jeong means "Korean connection feeling" of friendliness or connection with everything that interacts with us; is a feeling of deep association with somebody or something to the point that it is a part of you and it is inseparable. We can feel *Jeong* for other people, nature, animals, birds, insects and things.

Han emotion is deeply rooted in the history and consciousness of Korean people. Loneliness, solitude, deep regret, pride, verticality, dignity, loyalty, pride, passion, revolt, despair, powerlessness, unfulfilled broken dreams, resentment, waiting or in one word, a "torch" in the deep night of the soul. Roughly similarities can be found in Romanian with "dor si jale" or in French with the *mélancolie* (spleen) of Beaudelaire. For Korean people these are not lost causes. Self-pity is not an excuse to do nothing. To urge for sympathy for pity's sake is to seek affirmation of the choice to do nothing. They are empowered by the spirit and the thought of a meaningful experience and so they, bit by bit, transform their life with a deep silent resilience.

Korean cinema has remarkable directors, scriptwriters and composers, nonconformists alternating *loneliness* and *solitude*, who have a definite attitude of swimming against the commercial Western stream such as Jo Chang-Ho with "폭풍전야" - "Lovers Vanished" (2010), an unusual film about love, grief, remorse and hope without an upcoming tomorrow. Exploration of guilt and identity, Song Il-Gon with "오직그대만" - "Always" (2011), a sad romance between an ex-boxer who has closed his heart to the world and a blind telemarketer.

The Korean composers re-define the role of music in cinema. Most films reach the top because their OST/music quickly turns into hits. At same time, music becomes a key and an equal partner to the actor, with its own role/main character on the spectator. From "expressive" value, film music becomes a "representative" value. Some popular Korean soundtracks has come from composer Bang Jun Seok though films such as Always (2011), Go go 70 (2008), Nowhere to turn (2008), Eye for an eye (2008), Sunny (2008), Like father, like son (2008), Paradise Murdered (2007), Who are you ? (2002) and Yiruma who composed Doggy Poo (2004), Oasis (2002), Winter Sonata (2002)

Thousand Faces”, a young actor that still has the joy of playing, with a pure innocence, like a child within his heart, but who is also a restless temperamental artist, having a strong and a rebellious personality, with still a fresh look upon his artistic gift.

Open-minded people can be taught by *Han*. **By understanding the humanness of *Han***, the “civilized” Westerners can learn more about respect, the first step towards the big globalisation. Even with the gloomy, sad, depressing, painful, or distressing atmosphere and the main characters that are almost constantly disappearing or dying, the Western spectator is thankful for Korean movies, in part because he found again what had been lost: authentic solidarity & distinctiveness, the respect for ancestors and their history, silent dignity and solemnity. Through the *Han* emotion, the Korean cinema brought on a new passion and mentality about loneliness & solitude, a distinctive approach of the creative relation between the past, present and future. For all that, we feel tenderness for Asian cinema and we live along with *Han*. We care for the equilibrium and the balanced attitude from the Korean cinema.

Han teaches us about how to respond to suffering & sorrow without vengeance. The *Han* emotion can train us how to wisely break the violent behaviour, aggression, hostility, brutality, and cruelty. Day after day, the New Korean Cinema refines also through his interconnections with other important milestone films from all over the world: the same thoughts of singular filmmakers (*Wong Kar-wai*, Kiju Yoshida, *Raúl Ruiz*, Gregory Colbert, Edgar Reitz, *Éric Valli*, Alain Resnais, Joseph Losey, Stanley Kubrick, Mona Achache etc.), their personal artistic universe being revealed to have the same credo, faith & path. Through *Jeong* and *Han*, **Korean films incite to a new reading overlooked in History.**

Formerly the historic movie did not have many fans. Today, thanks to Korean cinema, the taste and the understanding of the public has changed, a bright **new vision and assignment of the historical movie genre has taken in**: moral values, respect, archetype, benchmark for the future generations. Far away from Western countries, a little country with unique realms stubbornly resists defending her cultural identity. Along with India, France and Germany, South Korea is one of the few countries in the world that managed to resist - truly & strongly - to the Hollywood's hegemony. **And now, over the rainbow the booming South Korea is the lucky shining star of the new cinema industry.**

Florentina Heroiu Ph.D. is currently full time a screenwriting professor at the National University of Film and Theatrical Arts “I.L. Caragiale”- Romania and a part-time Creative consultant & Script Advisor- Story Analyst, Film critic and Head Writer.

Similar content

POSTED ON
11 MAY 2016

FEFF Campus | A
conversation between
French and Japanese
Cinephiles



POSTED ON
26 AUG 2014

Lê Cát Trọng Lý, a
unique voice in Viet
Nam

POSTED ON
25 JUN 2011

Akademie Schloss
Solitude



POSTED ON
03 SEP 2010

Foundation for the
Advancement of
Western Classical

POSTED ON
15 FEB 2011

Search in Progress...
Keywords: Hungary,
Films, Exceptional –
Time interval: 2008-
2010



POSTED ON
08 AUG 2007

The Sound Of The
Drummer



ABOUT ASEF CULTURE360

culture360.asef.org brings Asia and Europe closer by providing information, facilitating dialogue and stimulating reflection on the arts and culture of the two regions.

[MORE ABOUT ASEF CULTURE360](#) |
[FAQ](#)



This website was created and maintained with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.



ASEMUS

Asia - Europe
Museum Network

[Browse our Network of
museums in Asia and Europe](#)