

Interview with Kim Dong-won, director of *The Six-Day Fight in Myong Dong Cathedral*

"Our situation requires us to make films dealing with social issues"

Stefan Steinberg
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I asked Kim Dong-won why there was such an abundance of films emerging from countries like South Korea and Taiwan dealing with ordinary people and social issues.

Kim replied: "Our social and political situation requires us to make such films. In the 80s the political situation forced us to join the big social movements. At that time I would say that 100 percent of the independent films of South Korea were dealing with political issues. In the 90s there is a new kind of independent film which is nearer to the American independent movement. There are more experimental films and films dealing with psychological issues. The situation is somewhat different in Japan. In South Korea today maybe two or three films from a total of five take up social issues. In Japan from a total of 50 or 500 independent films perhaps 10 or 20 directly raise social and political issues—but then often in this latter category there are very good films made, stronger than our own."

I asked Kim how the independents in Korea were financed.

He laughed: "Our tactic is not to spend money. I made my *Six-Day Fight in Myong Dong Cathedral* for less than 1,000 German marks. You have to bear in mind that there is still censorship in South Korea. My film company, for example, is illegal. The law says to make a legal film you have to deposit money with the state, you have to have a proper studio, and so on.

"Before I left for Berlin the police arrested Mr. Suh Joonsik [organizer of a human rights film festival that showed *Red Hunt*]. The police arrested him and

charged him with violating five different Korean laws. I myself was arrested. After Mr. Suh Joonsik was detained by the police we organized a campaign for his release. One hundred fifty showings of the film were organized ... in the streets, universities, etc. I was detained for three days and I am still under investigation by the state prosecutor. The police come often to our production facilities and ask me what I am planning. I always say—nothing, of course."

I said the situation for filmmakers today in South Korea sounded as bad as it was more than a decade ago under the military dictatorship.

Kim agreed: "Of course, of course. The political situation is undemocratic. The military dictatorship has continued since the old days. It has very deep roots in our society. Kim Dae Jung was elected as the new president in December of last year, but it is all a political game. Everybody knows he took money from [former president Kim Jung sam]. Maybe he will also go to jail. He has also done much wrong. We are critical of Kim Dae Jung, we have some hope—but the general mood is suspicion and worry."



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