

Film studies Sibling co-operation Clarence Tsui

Park Chan-kyung is among the most prominent South Korean artists today. Having graduated from first Seoul National University and then the California Institute of the Arts, the 46-year-old boasts of a Hermes Korea Missulsang award and two prizes from the Korean Culture and Arts Foundation. Meanwhile, his first feature-length film premiered at the International Film Festival Rotterdam in January and, two weeks ago, he won the best short film award at the Berlin International Film Festival.

For all his endeavours, Park remains best known for one thing beyond his visual-arts home turf – that he's the younger sibling of Park Chan-wook, South Korea's most celebrated working filmmaker of the day and a two-time award winner at Cannes with *Oldboy* (2005) and *Thirst* (2009). Indeed, even the Rotterdam festival's catalogue couldn't resist referring to this link in the brief blurb about Park Chan-kyung's *Anyang, Paradise City*, a film on which the elder Park played no part at all.

Park Chan-kyung laughs when I point out the catalogue's description of him during our meeting at the festival's press zone inside the downtown De Doelen cultural complex. "When I heard it the first time it was kind of awkward," he says. "I was thinking, I am an individual and an independent person, why do they always say I'm 'the brother of Park Chan-wook'?" But now I've pretty much got used to it – so now if someone doesn't ask me questions [about his brother], I'd be like, why didn't you ask me that?"

All that aside, Park's Berlin prize-winning film, *Night Fishing*, is actually a collaboration between him and Chan-wook.

Made as part of the Anyang Public Art Project – an annual programme sponsored by the Korean city's municipal authorities –



Park Chan-kyung poses with his Golden Bear award for best short film at the Berlin International Film Festival. Photo: Reuters

Anyang, Paradise City is a docu-drama in which a filmmaker is seen conducting research and making a film about the history of the city, with the film-within-a-film revolving around a real-life tragedy in 1988 in which 22 female workers died in a factory fire. While the director in the film is a man – Park himself plays the part – most of the screen-time is taken up by women, as female research assistants are seen travelling around the city looking for information. The stylishly-attired young women lead lives drastically different from the generation which went before them when Anyang was still a gritty industrial hub.

"I wanted to focus on women's daily lives in the city, partly because Korean films have been very macho, very masculine," Park says. "Korean film culture is becoming more and more like that, so I want to make a big contrast by having this idea of remembering these female workers from the 1970s and 80s."

But isn't his older sibling one of the architects of South Korea's testosterone-dripping cinematic output, with films such as *Joint Security Area*, *Sympathy for Mr*

Vengeance and *Oldboy*? "I'm not talking about my brother's films!" Park says, laughing.

Surprisingly, it was Chan-wook who was seen as the intellectual of the pair when they were growing up. "My brother was very good at mathematics and all his studies, so mostly he was seen as a future lawyer or professor," says Park. "My family always think of me as an artist as I'm good at painting and drawing – somehow our lives reversed."

While Chan-wook left behind his philosophy degree to dive headlong into the film industry, Park went on to become the more cerebral of the pair, making short videos and artistic installations reflecting on Korean history and politics.

Made with the cameras on 10 iPhones, *Night Fishing* marks the beginning of what the brothers hope will become a regular collaboration: in fact, the film is signed off as the work of the collective Parking Chance, a moniker inspired by their names.

"It's also about how when you find a place to park your car, you do that," Park says. "And when we have this chance again, we'll do it."

Virtual cinema Title conscious Clarence Tsui

Among all the things that come with the latest print issue of revered Canadian film journal *Cinemascope* (its online presence at www.cinemascope.com), one item in particular catches the eye: the titles to the articles are all rendered in "Jean-Luc" – a font that the Atelier Carvalho Bernau Design collective (carvalho-bernaudesign.com) invented based on the typeface French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard created for the titles and on-screen text in his films.

It's a move intended to celebrate the *cinéaste terrible's* 80th birthday – and they couldn't have chosen a better way to do it, given that style of lettering provides Godard's work with as much character as the films themselves.

It's fitting that Godard's work features prominently in the latest title-sequence showcase on the Amsterdam-based production company Submarine's moving-image portal (submarinechannel.com). With a slogan that reads, "Forget the film, watch the titles!" (watchthetitles.com), the project is designed to highlight the importance of title sequences – or,



as its mission statement says, how titles can "transcend their proper function and venture off into the realm of something far deeper and far greater. They are the signifiers of contemporary pop culture and an art form in their own right".

The latest addition to the Watch the Titles website is the introductory sequence (above) to Godard's *Une Femme est Une Femme*. It's one of Godard's earliest uses of a title sequence to highlight the artifice of the film medium, as he flashes across the screen names – of the cast and crew, technical aspects (Eastmancolour), his inspirations (Ernst Lubitsch) – and adjectives that one might use to describe certain tendencies in cinema ("Melodramatic", "Sentimental").

And then, of course, there's the

soundtrack, on which composer Michel Legrand is heard ordering his orchestra to get ready for some work and actress Anna Karina hollers "lights", "camera" and "action", a further distancing device.

This is one of more than 140 title sequences available for viewing at the Watch the Titles portal. Godard's is part of the French Friday showcase, alongside crime novelist/designer Tito Topin's animated sequence for the 1972 film *Tout le monde il est beau tout le monde il est gentil* ("Everyone is beautiful, everyone is nice") which features imagery satirising war (the US involvement in Indochina) and the transformation of the hippie movement into pseudo-religious babble (as illustrated by a snippet of *Jesus Christ Superstar*). Then, like Godard's, it has a self-reflective moment about cinema as a skull pops up with the words *Le film il est beau, le film il est fini* ("The film is good, the film is ended") scrawled on it.

Such title sequences provide a sign of what times were like then, maybe as good as the films.

Postcard Richard James Havis

New York

Film distribution is more often driven by profit than a love of movies, but that's not true of Karin Chien's dGenerate Films. The New York-based distribution company sources independent films directly from China and makes them available in various ways over the internet. "When I choose a film, it's because I believe in it – I think it should be seen everywhere," Los Angeles-born Chien explains in an interview in a charmingly downbeat New York diner. "I think that everybody should be watching it. I love the films that I distribute and want everyone to see them."

Chien founded dGenerate Films – the "d" stands for digital, the preferred platform of Chinese independent filmmakers – just over two years ago. The idea behind the company is to make the independent films of the mainland's post-Sixth Generation filmmakers available to a US and international audience. The advent of cheap digital movie cameras has resulted in a boom in independent filmmaking in China, but the films rarely get seen at home or abroad. dGenerate sells the films on DVD, splitting the profits with the filmmakers, and streams them on sites such as Amazon and Mubi.

Although dGenerate's films are sometimes chosen from film festivals, Chien's business is remarkably hands-on. Most of the films are sourced directly from the filmmakers themselves during visits to the mainland, then brought out of the country by hand.

"I go to China and meet with anyone who wants to meet with me," says Chien, who doubles as a successful film producer – she won an Independent Spirit Award last week for *The Exploding Girl*. "I spend a lot of time with the filmmakers, hearing about what they are doing. Then I bring DVDs back to the US and watch them with my programming team. I'll usually come back with about 50 DVDs. Every time I go, something new seems to be happening – the scene changes very quickly."

Refreshingly, Chien is not interested in films which have obvious commercial potential in the West. She prefers experimental works and documentaries. The 45-minute *San Yuan Li*, an experimental documentary by visual artists Ou Ning and Cao Fei, was the first film she distributed. It's still a favourite, she says. The filmmakers used six cameramen to produce a panoramic view of a

village that has literally become trapped by the sprawling expansion of Guangzhou.

"When I saw *San Yuan Li* I was completely taken by surprise," Chien says. "I was blown away. It's like the Russian classic *Man With a Movie Camera*. They had six cinematographers take footage all around the city. They made everything black-and-white, stitched it together, speeded it up, slowed it down, and set it to a minimalist score. I asked Ou, one of the directors, if there were other films like this in China, or whether it was a one-off. He sent me 50 DVDs in reply. So I realised it was actually part of some kind of film phenomenon," she says.

Chien is similarly enthusiastic about *Disorder*, a 2009 documentary by Huang Weikai, a painter. "It's an hour-long abstract documentary. It's essentially about the absurdities of daily life in China – a pig on a highway, people trying to fix a burst water main – the absurdities that are now happening on a massive scale in the country. He took 100 hours of footage and edited it down."

Oxhide and *Oxhide II* (which was shown at last year's Hong Kong International Film Festival) are films by female director Liu Jiayin, now a professor at the Beijing Film Academy. "She's become a celebrity in these circles," says Chien. "*Oxhide II* take place at a dining table and it's composed of just nine shots. The camera never moves, and the frame remains static except when it cuts to the next shot. You watch a family preparing a dinner of dumplings. You see an intimate portrait of family dynamics. It's very powerful."

Most of the films that Chien watches and distributes are small-scale affairs, she says. "They are made with digital cameras and whatever cast and crew the director can get access to – they are often family members. The directors work on a small scale, so there's a lot of flexibility in the way they cover their chosen subjects. I discovered a beautiful sense of freedom in their films. Because they operate completely outside of the system, and have no desire to court the system, they are free to do what they want. The flip side is that there are no commercial prospects for their films in China. They cannot distribute them there at all."

China is currently off the map for dGenerate – it does not make its films available there. But as long as interesting independent films are produced, dGenerate will be there to ensure that foreign audiences are able to see them: "We love these films," Chien says.



Director Liu Jiayin (centre) made *Oxhide II* with her parents