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최후의 증인

Choehuui jeung-in

The Last Witness

Lee Doo-yong

Producer Kim Hwa-sik. **Production company** Sekyeong Films (Seoul, Republic of Korea). **Director** Lee Doo-yong. **Screenplay** Yoon Sam-yook. **Director of photography** Jung Il-sung. **Editor** Ree Kyoung-ja. **Music** Kim Hee-kap. **Sound** Sohn In-ho. **Production design** Kim Yu-jun.

With Hah Myung-joong (Byeong-ho), Jeong Yun-hui (Ji-hye), Choi Bool-am (Ba-woo), Hyun Kil-soo (Man-ho), Han Hye-sook (Hye-ok).

1980, colour. 155 min. Korean.

Premiere November 15, 1980, Myeongbo Theater, Seoul; restored version: October 8, 2016, Busan International Film Festival

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A police inspector is investigating the murder of a brewery owner. His search leads him 25 years into the past, back to the Korean War, to the final stand made by a group of Communist partisans. In his 36th feature film in just ten years, director Lee Doo-yong violates all conventions: a non-conformist, melancholy loner of a detective, who identifies with the tragic fate of a former North-Korean fighter to the point of self-destruction; a corrupt justice system and an incompetent police force; rapes and sexual assaults – the censors lopped nearly an hour off the epic running time of Lee's most daring film. *Choehuui jeung-in* was made in the winter of 1979–80, between the assassination of autocratic president Park Chung-hee and the subsequent dictatorship of Chun Doo-hwan, at an all-too-brief moment of hope that better days might come. It is a tough-minded odyssey through provincial South Korea, through rain and cold, filth and mud and bitter poverty; through the collective bad conscience of a society in which some strive greedily for power while others stay silent and thus complicit.

Christoph Terhechte

“My film was maliciously accused and destroyed”

Released in 1980, Choehuui jeung-in was the biggest hit of the year. Especially the scale of narrative was overwhelming.

After I had left Hapdong Film, I worked with several production houses. One day I got a call from Sekyeong Film Company, which was run by a woman producer, Kim Wha-sik. Her son, Kim Dong-jin, was in charge of planning film projects and was very enthusiastic. He said he wanted to make ‘films that are worth making’. He had many ideas and one of them was *The Last Witness* (1974) written by Kim Seong-jong. I didn’t like the thought of adapting a novel. But I always wanted to make a film about the Korean War, not as a war film. And Kim Seong-jong’s novel had what I was looking for. I wanted to criticise people with power such as the prosecutors and show the wound of war. I cranked in before the script was completed and shot for ten months. I did work hard and travelled across the country to shoot the film.

I suppose you had many ideas about the ending.

Indeed. At first I thought about making a happy ending. The bad are punished, and Hwang Ba-woo manages to make a family with Ji-hye (Jeong Yun-hui) and her son. But then I came to doubt if this was a really happy ending. I felt like I was ruining the film. I thought it would be better to alert people with death. Besides, the story itself was too tragic to end in happiness. I always knew how to end my films before I started shooting. But in the case of this film, I had to give a deep thought about how to end until the last minute.

But in the course of censorship, it lost more than 30 minutes of running time.

People took it for granted that *Choehuui jeung-in* would win the Best Picture from Daejong Film Award. [...] But then someone reported to government accusing the film of being ideologically driven. That time, in many cases, censorship meant you had to take out an entire scene in order not to ruin the story flow. And once you started taking out, sometimes you ended up removing more than thirty minutes, which was what happened to *Choehuui jeung-in*. I went to see the censored version on the first day of the release, but stopped watching halfway because I got too angry. I checked the running time and it was only about 100 minutes. Maybe the theatre did more cutting. I really couldn’t stand watching it anyway.¹

Was the censorship unexpected?

Yes. When I submitted the script for pre-censorship, I had almost nothing to revise.² There was no war scene in the film, so I wasn’t worried about being accused ideologically. It was a mystery revenge story after all.

It must have been a real embarrassment for you.

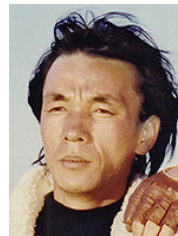
I thought I should quit filmmaking for the first time in my life. I realised films could be destroyed by outside forces. My film was maliciously accused and destroyed. My producer and my writer, Yoon Sam-yook, were arrested... I learned this kind of thing could happen in the film industry. I once thought of killing myself because I was so sorry to Sekyeong Film, which invested a huge amount of money and provided quite a number of staff for ten months. But then Sekyeong Film suggested we

should make one more film together. I was very impressed. I thought I really had to make a good film in order to thank them for their support. And I made *The Hut*.

¹ The four scenes eliminated by censorship are: Ji-hye being raped by a group of communist guerrillas; a prosecutor being bribed with a bundle of cash put on a table; a prosecutor sexually harassing the victim’s family (Ji-hye); a court employee bribing an investigator who tries to see the trial record. The final running time of the film was shortened to 120 minutes from the original 158 minutes after these scenes, 38 minutes long, were deleted.

² According to the preliminary censorship report, the film was ordered to revise seven parts. Most of them were simply about the use of particular words or expressions, and the rest was about the description of police or prosecutors that could cause controversy.

Interview by Kim Hyung-seok, July 2016; from: ‘Lee Doo Yong: The Pathfinder of Korean Genre Films’, Busan International Film Festival, Busan 2016



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Lee Doo-yong was born in 1942 in Seoul, Korea. After graduating from Yong-san High School in that city, he worked as an assistant director for the South Korean directors Kim Soo-dong and Jeong So-young. He made his directing debut in 1970 with *The Lost Wedding Veil*. Lee Doo-yong has directed more than sixty films in various genres. He initially made a name for himself

with melodramas such as *I Will Give it All*, but he is also known for action films such as *Disarmament*, *The Trouble-Solving Broker*, and *Manchurian Tiger*. In the early 1980s, he had international success with the historical films *The Hut* and *Spinning Tales of Cruelty Towards Women*, which made him the first Korean director to be invited to the film festivals in Venice and Cannes. In works such as *Choehuui jeung-in / The Last Witness*, *Jangnam / The Oldest Son* and *Road to Cheongsong Prison*, Lee addressed socio-political issues facing Korea at the time. In addition to directing films, he also works as a screenwriter and producer.

Films

1970: *The Lost Wedding Veil*. 1971: *My Older Brother*. 1972: *I Will Give It All*. 1974: *Manchurian Tiger, Returned Single-Legged Man 2*. 1975: *Disarmament*. 1980: *Choehuui jeung-in / The Last Witness, Pimag / The Hut*. 1982: *The Trouble-Solving Broker*. 1983: *Yeo-in-jan-hok-sa Mul-re-ya Mul-re-ya / Spinning The Tales Of Cruelty Towards Women*. 1984: *Jangnam / The Oldest Son*. 1986: *Mulberry, Naesi / Eunuch*. 1989: *Mulberry 2*. 1990: *Road to Cheongsong Prison*. 1992: *Mulberry 3*. 2003: *A-ri-rang / Arirang*. 2013: *A Journey with Korean Masters*.