



Bong Joon Ho: Power and Paradox

Okja

Okja

Directed by: Bong Joon Ho

©: Mirando Productions LLC

A Netflix original film

A Plan B Entertainment, Lewis Pictures,

Kate Street Picture Company *production*

In association with: Union Investment Partners

With the support of: KOFIC Location Incentive

Supported by: Seoul Metropolitan Government,
Seoul Film Commission

Seoul production cost support: Seoul Metropolitan
Government, Seoul Film Commission

With co-operation from: Gwangju Film Commission,

Gangwon Art & Culture Foundation, Incheon Film

Commission, Daejeon Information & Culture

Industry Promotion Agency

Presented by: Netflix

With the participation of:

British Columbia Production Services Tax Credit

Korea Production Services Provided by:

Woosang Films

Vancouver Production Services Provided by:

Okja Canada Productions Inc.

Executive Producers: Pauline Fischer, Collin

Creighton, Stan Wlodkowski, Kim Woosang,

Brad Pitt, Sarah Esberg, Christina Oh,

Lee Jea Woo, Samuel Yeunju Ha

Produced by: Ted Sarandos, Lewis Taewan Kim,

Doocho Choi, Woo Sik Seo, Bong Joon Ho,

Dede Gardner, Jeremy Kleiner

Co-producers: Tilda Swinton, Sandro Kopp

Associate Producers: Jon Ronson, Luca Borghese

Unit Production Manager: Stan Wlodkowski

Production Manager: Minchul Patrick Park

Location Managers: Sungryeol Moon, Joon Song

Post-production Supervisor: Luca Borghese

1st Assistant Directors: PJ Voeten, Yong Jin Cho

Script Supervisor: Youngbin Michelle Ha

Screenplay by: Bong Joon Ho, Jon Ronson

Story by: Bong Joon Ho

Director of Photography: Darius Khondji

A Camera/Steadicam Operator: Mark Goellnicht

Visual Effects Supervisors: Erik-Jan de Boer,

Lee Jeon Hyoung

Visual Effects by: Method Studios,

4th Creative Party

Special Effects Supervisor: Kyoung Soo Park

Creature Supervisor: Erik-Jan de Boer

Okja Concept Artist: Zodd

Okja Concept Artist/Alfonso Creature Design:

Sandro Kopp

Okja Creature Design: Hee Chul Jang

Edited by: Yang Jin-mo

Production Designers: Kevin Thompson,

Lee Ha-jun

Art Director: Jung Yoon Bae

Set Designers: Ga Ram Han, Ki Eun Yu, Hee Cho,

Mee Kyoung Yoon, So Ye Jo, Joo Young Lee

Costume Designers: Catherine George,

Choi Seyeon

Hair and Make-up Designers: Sharon Martin,

Hyunkyu Hwang

Key Special Effects Make-up Designers:

Tae Yong Kwak, Hyo Kyun Hwang

Main and End Titles Designed by:

Smith and Lee Film Design, Filmograph

Music: Jaeil Jung

Additional Music Composed by: Dzambo Agusev

Strings/Winds/Brasses/Girls' Choir:

Budapest Film Orchestra

Big Band/Boy Soloists/Female Choir:

Budapest Scoring Symphonic Orchestra and Choir,

Budapest Jazz Orchestra

Bong Joon Ho on 'Okja'

It was quite strange: three different ideas came together seamlessly. Some 16 or 17 years ago, when I'd finished my first feature, I had the idea for a story about a little girl in a mountain village. She finds a rare type of ginseng and travels to Seoul to sell it; various bad guys try to harm or exploit her. Then, in 2010 when I was preparing *Snowpiercer*, I happened to glimpse a huge animal on the street in Seoul while I was in my car. I'm not sure what it was – maybe a manatee? – but I got the strong impression from its face that it was shy and sad. And third, I have a cousin living in the US who is an animal rights activist. Her anecdotes about actions she and her group had taken also got me thinking.

One of the first things we see Mija do is catch a fish, and it's cooked for dinner that night. So she's not vegetarian – and you're not either, are you?

I'm not a big fan of steaks, but I still eat barbecues. Not as much as I used to, though. In the film the fundamental issue isn't factory farming or genetic modification but capitalism itself. Tilda plays twin sisters who present different faces to the world: one nice, cool and sophisticated, the other much more hard-nosed. They're like two faces of capitalism – one 'caring', the other purely profit-driven – but the point is that under the surface they're exactly the same.

Yes, the way you present her it's as if she's a human embodiment of the corporate HQ on Wall Street. I won't ask you if you had any real-life companies run by siblings in mind, but I was struck that family-run companies are more characteristic of Korea – the chaebol – than they are of the US.

That's true, but the Mirando Corporation in the film does have a real-life Western prototype – which the lawyers say I shouldn't mention. Anyhow, it's all capitalism!

This is your second film in a row with a relatively big budget and a lot of CGI. Do you plan to stay on this path?

Actually, I've already started preparing two much smaller films. One is Korean, the other English-language. The Korean one is called *Parasite*, but it's not sci-fi. It'll be much the same scale of project as *Mother* [2009] was. I'll make it with Song Kang-ho. *Okja* cost in the region of \$50 million, which is not so expensive these days. My producer kept stressing to me that our resources were limited. We shot around 60 per cent of it in Korea, using various locations in the countryside and streets in Daejeon and Gwangju as 'Seoul'. The motel room sequence with the Animal Liberation Front people is set in the US, but was actually shot in Korea. Filming in New York was too expensive for us, so we did all the American interiors in Vancouver; it's much cheaper, and there are Canadian tax incentives. But I insisted on shooting the pig-carnival scene on the streets of Manhattan, so we did have a brief New York shoot. I wanted to see this little girl at the very heart of capitalism, so that sequence had to be shot in New York.

I remember you telling me that you'd had to modify some of the storyboards for The Host [2006] because the CGI would have been too expensive for some of the shots you'd planned. That doesn't seem to have been a problem here: your 'strange pig' Okja is incredibly realistic.

Conductors: Peter Pejtsik, Márton Tóth
Production Sound Mixer: Jong Kun Park
Re-recording Mixer: Taeyoung Choi
Supervising Sound Editors: Taeyoung Choi, Dave Whitehead
Sound Designer: Dave Whitehead
Stunt Co-ordinators: Myeong Haeng Heo, Jin Keun Jeong
New York Stunt Co-ordinator: Victor Paguia
Vancouver Stunt Co-ordinators: Marny Eng, Duane Dickinson
The director would like to thank: Jonathan Demme
Cast:
 Tilda Swinton (*Lucy Mirando/Nancy Mirando*)
 Paul Dano (*Jay*)
 An Seo Hyun (*Mija*)
 Byun Heebong (*Hee Bong*)
 Steven Yeun (*K*)
 Lily Collins (*Red*)
 Yoon Je Moon (*Mundo Park*)
 Shirley Henderson (*Jennifer*)
 Daniel Henshall (*Blond*)
 Devon Bostick (*Silver*)
 Woo Shik Choi (*Kim*)
 Giancarlo Esposito (*Frank Dawson*)
 Jake Gyllenhaal (*Dr Johnny Wilcox*)
 USA-South Korea 2017©
 120 mins
 Digital 4K

The screening on Fri 25 Apr will be introduced by production designer Lee Ha-jun

With thanks to



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I worked on the design for *Okja* with Hee Chul Jang, who also designed the monster for *The Host*. He's an excellent concept artist; he also did designs for the front part of the train in *Snowpiercer*. The actual execution of *Okja* was in the hands of Erik-Jan de Boer, who's famous for the tiger in *Life of Pi* [2012]. He is completely obsessed with animals, watches them in zoos, thinks about them round the clock. There's no one more alert to the ways that animals look and behave. Making *Okja* believable was obviously crucial to the film's success. Whether or not we could create a convincing creature was the question that most worried me before we started making the film.

You've worked with Tilda Swinton and some members of the crew before, but many other collaborators are new for you. How did you pick the key people this time?

I contacted Jon Ronson after seeing – and very much liking – *Frank* [2014], which he scripted. I read some of his books first and liked them too, especially the one about psychopathology. I had my Korean script translated into English and gave that to him in New York, where he lives. He was enthusiastic, and we began collaborating; I asked him to focus on developing the English-speaking characters while I focused on the Koreans. Jon, Tilda and I spent quite a bit of time on Skype, sharing ideas and suggestions. In my script I had the character of the has-been zoologist who fronts the corporation's professed concern for nature and animal welfare [Johnny Wilcox, played by Jake Gyllenhaal], but it was Jon who suggested modelling him on a presenter he remembered from British TV years ago, a guy called Johnny Morris.

I was introduced to Darius Khondji by a great colourist who'd worked on *Snowpiercer*. He knew Darius from the Jeunet films [*Delicatessen*, 1991; *The City of Lost Children*, 1995; *Alien: Resurrection*, 1997], and maybe from *Se7en* [1995]. We got on well from our first meeting. He'd never been to Korea before, and found that he really enjoyed Korean food.

The UK press is already reporting clashes between French cinema owners and the Cannes festival management over the issue of screening films that will mostly be seen via streaming. [This conversation took place before the Netflix logo was booed at Cannes screenings of Okja and The Meyerowitz Stories.] Has this controversy reached Korea?

Yes, the conflicts between Netflix and Cannes are a big thing in the Korean media. When Netflix first became involved with *Okja*, we expressed our hope that the film would have a theatrical life before appearing online, and Netflix seemed very comfortable with that. As far as I know, theatrical runs are planned for the film in some countries, including the UK and Korea. Darius and I agreed that the film should be shot in the Scope format, and it was obviously in our minds that this would mean letterboxing it for the various home-viewing formats. Personally, I'd like as many people as possible to see it on a big screen, and I'm glad that's how you saw it. Aside from that, I have to say that the working relationship with Netflix was ideal. They didn't quibble about giving me the right to the final cut, and they didn't mind at all that the film would be 'R'-rated. This was nothing like my experience with the Weinstein Company on *Snowpiercer*. Nobody suggested any recutting, nobody made any demands. I wish it was always this way.

Interview by Tony Rayns, *Sight and Sound*, July 2017