



# Free Chol Soo Lee

Directed by Julie Ha and Eugene Yi  
Produced by Su Kim, Jean Tsien, and Sona Jo

**\*\*WORLD PREMIERE - U.S. DOCUMENTARY COMPETITION - SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL 2022\*\***



USA, Korea | 2022 | 84 minutes

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## **Sundance Screenings**

**Online World Premiere - Fri, 1/21 at 9:30pm MST - 3-Hour Window Begins**

Online P&I - Sat, 1/22 at 8:00am MST - *72 hour Window Begins*

Online Screening - Sun, 1/23 at 8:00am MST - *24-Hour Window Begins*

## **SHORT SYNOPSIS**

In 1970s San Francisco, 20-year-old Korean immigrant Chol Soo Lee is racially profiled and convicted of a Chinatown gang murder. Sentenced to life, he spends years fighting to survive until investigative journalist K.W. Lee takes a special interest in his case, igniting an unprecedented social justice movement that would unite Asian Americans, and inspire a new generation of activists. Nearly five decades later, FREE CHOL SOO LEE excavates a largely unknown yet essential story, crafting an intimate portrait of the complex man at the center of the movement, serving as an urgent reminder that Lee's legacy is more relevant than ever.

## **SYNOPSIS**

In 1973, 20-year-old Korean immigrant Chol Soo Lee is racially profiled and arrested in a gang-related murder in San Francisco's Chinatown. After a trial hinging on questionable accounts from white tourists, Lee is convicted and sentenced to life in prison. He spends years fighting to survive until investigative journalist K.W. Lee takes a special interest in his case, igniting an unprecedented social justice movement that would unite Asian Americans and inspire a new generation of activists.

Filmmakers Julie Ha and Eugene Yi blend rich archival footage, firsthand interviews with activists, and poignant narration drawn from Lee's personal writings to create a riveting portrait of the movement, as well as the complex man at the center of it, who struggled not only with re-entry but the pressure of being a beacon for his community. Nearly five decades after Lee's wrongful imprisonment, this essential yet largely unknown story serves as an urgent reminder of the power of collective action, through a strikingly intimate lens.

## **BACKGROUND**

We almost titled this film, "Release." In a way, the process of making it has provided some kind of catharsis and closure for those who came to the aid of Chol Soo Lee 40 years ago. His life was so hard for so long, even after his triumphant release from prison. And it's been the source of a deep ache for many of them because they thought they had saved his life when they fought and won against the all-powerful criminal justice system in this David-vs.-Goliath struggle. As one of them said, it was like a fairytale at first, but then, their hero would suffer even more in "freedom." Having them reflect on Chol Soo Lee, the complicated man who carried emotional wounds from his very birth and who felt like he could not live up to the movement's expectations of him, has provided them some element of healing and release.

We'd like to believe it carries a sense of release for the spirit of Chol Soo Lee, too. Although he felt burdened by the weight that came from being the symbol of a movement, he also tried mightily in his final years to redeem himself and show his gratitude to his supporters. We believe he longed for the chance to tell his supporters his story, so they could better understand where he came from and why it was so hard for him to "succeed" after 10 years in prison, and from a lifetime of deep scars. Our film attempts to allow Chol Soo to tell his story, speak his truth, warts

and all – finally. His parting message at the end of our film will hopefully reach the journalist, the activists and his many supporters who perhaps felt conflicted about the legacy of this first-of-its-kind pan-Asian American movement. And we hope it will also reach all who watch this film, and that audiences will open their hearts and minds to his story.

### **Note from Sebastian Yoon (Narrator)**

When Su Kim reached out to me about the film, I recalled having read something brief about Chol Soo Lee while doing research for my senior thesis. I knew he had been wrongfully convicted, and that his case had sparked a pan-Asian movement—but nothing more. So, I googled him. I also spoke with a friend who warned there was a bit of controversy surrounding Chol Soo Lee, and that I should think carefully before agreeing to be his voice in the film. The so-called controversy was about how he had become addicted to drugs and had committed arson in 1991, almost a decade after his release from prison. Despite his past struggles for freedom and justice, and despite the support the Asian community had given him, he had made choices that could land him back inside prison. His story was therefore tainted, or so we assume.

In the U.S. today, [more than 50 percent of formerly incarcerated people return to prison within three years of their release](#). And ever since the inception of mass incarceration in this nation, recidivism rates have always remained high. To explain recidivism or the actions that lead or could lead to it, we often point to structural racism, to the lack of familial and societal support, or simply to the immorality of the culprit or the accused. Yet we seldom contemplate mental health, the trauma caused by incarceration. The hopelessness. The nightmares. The dehumanization. The tormenting tension between the desire for and fear of isolation. And I imagine all of this would have particularly affected the guiltless such as Chol Soo Lee.

I wanted to know his story and listen to him. When I watched the unfinished film for the first time, I was overcome with emotions and memories of my own incarceration. I felt a need to tell people to try and listen to Chol Soo Lee before they formed their opinions, to imagine or at least consider the trauma he likely experienced throughout his childhood and incarceration. I wanted to honor his memory and legacy. I wanted to remind society that we could be kinder and more empathetic if we truly took the time to learn about and listen to one another.

## **A CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTORS JULIE HA AND EUGENE YI**

### **Where did the idea for the film come from?**

**Julie Ha:** We have both known of the Chol Soo Lee story for some time. I first learned about the case when I was 18 years old, after meeting my mentor, K.W. Lee, the journalist whose stories are credited with helping to launch the Free Chol Soo Lee movement. But, when I really think about it, the idea for the film was born when I attended Chol Soo Lee's funeral in December 2014. I had flown to the Northern California service so I could write his obituary for a Korean American magazine, but I also wanted to be there to comfort K.W., who was devastated to have outlived the man he had helped save. Clutching the walking stick that Chol Soo had carved for him, he cried out angrily, "He died 100 deaths in that goddamned living hell known as the California prison system, and even in freedom, he suffered a thousand deaths!" And then he questioned why, after all these years, this landmark movement that coalesced around this Korean street kid remained "underground" and unknown. Although at one time this movement had attracted thousands of supporters, as the symbol of their cause was being laid to rest, there were less than 50 people present.

Many of the people there were the activists who had come to Chol Soo's aid 40 years earlier. And I felt a heaviness in that space that went beyond grief. I was struck by what they were saying: Even though they had devoted several years of their lives to freeing him, and some of them even helped him during his struggles after prison, they said that he did more for them than they ever did for him. That depth of humanity and that conflicted swirl of emotions moved me deeply.

When Eugene and I were talking about working together on a film in 2015, less than a year later, I mentioned this heavy feeling at the funeral because it stayed with me. I knew there was so much here that needed to be explored. As individuals who share a passion for telling complex, nuanced stories about Asian Americans, we decided to dig in. The Chol Soo Lee story beckoned to be told. Chol Soo Lee may be gone, but his story still has so much to teach us.

### **How did you come to meet journalist K.W. Lee?**

**JH:** Both of us have long relationships with K.W. Lee, who is not only an accomplished investigative reporter for mainstream newspapers, but is also known as the "godfather of Asian American journalism" – and if you ever meet him in person, you'll see he's just a real force of nature. He has been my journalism mentor for more than 30 years. I first met him when he was editing a Korean American newspaper in Los Angeles in 1990. I was a naive and shy 18-year-old intern with only a mild interest in my Korean American identity at the time, but after I met him, my whole world changed. K.W. was the first journalist I ever met, and hearing him speak so passionately about the ideals of print journalism – "to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable" – lit a fire inside of me. He also articulated the frustration I had felt much of my young life at the time as a marginalized Korean American and said in the strongest of terms that the media has an obligation to tell the stories of all people in our "full human context, warts and all." That became my life's work's mission. It's no accident that I spent half of my 20-plus-year

journalism career as an editor at a Korean American magazine and am now working on this film. K.W. likes to make fun of me and call me a “print journalist dinosaur” like himself, but ironically, it’s because of him that I found myself making a documentary film. I honestly think I just wanted to comfort my mentor, to whom I felt I owed so much, by making sure Eugene and I did all we could to make sure this story didn’t stay underground, but is told truthfully and shared far and wide.

**Eugene Yi:** I’ve known K.W. for about 20 years. He read an essay I’d written back then about my uncle’s life as a shopkeeper in Los Angeles. He liked the essay and invited me to a talk he was giving at a nearby Korean Students Association event. I’ve been in touch with him ever since. He really is a singular figure, and it was a treat to see him in his prime through the archival footage. His laser focus on sniffing out hypocrisy and extending compassion to the downtrodden have stayed with me.

**How did you come to collaborate with Sebastian Yoon? Can you talk about why his perspective was important for you to include?**

JH: One major challenge in making this film was how to center Chol Soo’s voice and allow him to tell his own story. To do that, we knew we had to lean into the words he left behind, including his memoirs. The next challenge was how to make those words come alive and feel authentically inhabited, with genuine emotion. At first, we thought we’d have a Korean American actor voice Chol Soo Lee, but then, our producer Su Kim shared another idea. She had attended an event for a documentary series called “College Behind Bars,” and was surprised to see a Korean American on a panel representing the film. That was Sebastian Yoon. He had participated in the Bard Prison Initiative, which gives incarcerated men and women the opportunity to attend college classes and earn their degrees. After hearing him speak, Su was so moved she intuitively felt like he could be the voice of Chol Soo Lee.

There’s also another amazing story that connects Sebastian with us. I used to be the editor-in-chief of a Korean American magazine called *KoreAm Journal*. It turns out, a decade ago, Sebastian wrote a letter to our magazine from prison. In that letter, he shared that he was nearly five years into a 15-year sentence for manslaughter. A fellow Korean American had shared a copy of our magazine with him and so he started to subscribe. Reading the stories every month, he said, gave him some joy and pride. He also said that he hoped our magazine could help shed light on the problems of Korean American youth, with no direction or support, who get caught up in a self-destructive lifestyle, doing drugs and joining gangs, as he had. We are all not model minorities, he said. He lamented how, behind bars, he could not do this himself, but maybe our magazine could. I nearly wept when I learned he was the same person who had written this letter that had moved me so much that I published it almost in its entirety.

When Su first reached out to Sebastian, he revealed that our publishing of that letter was the highlight of his year. I still get pretty choked up just thinking about how we are all connected now by this film, and together, we get to fulfill the wish that he wrote about 10 years earlier. Sebastian joining our team has been a joy and an incredible gift, and there’s something almost magical

about how all of this happened. We can't help but believe that Chol Soo Lee himself would be so happy to know that Sebastian voiced him in our film. And Sebastian did an incredible job not only with the VO, but he also helped us develop the script, so that we could flesh out Chol Soo's prison experience even more. It was important to do that so that the audience could better understand why he struggled so much after his release.

**What were your intentions at the outset of making this film? What were some of the major obstacles you faced in making this film?**

JH: Simply put, we wanted people to learn about this powerful, singular story about a man and a movement – a story that could have easily remained buried and lost to history. We could not let that happen, especially because this story still has such resonance today.

But, of course, in excavating a story with events going back almost 40 years, there will be some challenges. Chol Soo Lee passed away in 2014 so we unfortunately never had a chance to interview him ourselves. We knew that, in order to be able to flesh out his story, we'd have to be reliant on not only our interviews with those who were close to him, but also primarily on archival material. Notably, we started with personal archives, not archival houses. We have to really credit K.W. for connecting us to so many of the individuals involved in this case – the activists, the lawyers, the private investigator, the journalists. Thankfully, many of them held on to old audiotapes, photo negatives, trial evidence boards, movement pamphlets, letters from Chol Soo, police and court documents – a real treasure trove.

EY: Through these activists and journalists, we found that there was actually a surprising amount of video footage of Chol Soo Lee, stored away in attics and basements. Also, we learned that K.W. had recorded a series of conversations with Chol Soo in the 2000s, while he was in witness protection. K.W. had become like a father figure to Chol Soo, but the reporter in him also kept "interviewing" him, wanting to understand his full story and what happened to him after his release from prison. Those recordings provided an important spine to the last part of our film. It is with the discovery of these materials that we saw the possibility for a film emerging.

JH: It's also important to mention that Chol Soo left behind his writings. Not just his published memoir, but also his unpublished biographical notes that he shared with K.W., and that K.W. shared with us. Also, his letters to K.W. and his supporters, from prison and long after his release. We realized, in order to try to capture the full scope of Chol Soo's experiences, including what he went through trying to survive in prison, we had to embrace his writing and incorporate those words into our film.

**Could you also talk about the archival footage that appears in the film?**

EY: Our film is about 80 percent archival. While searching for material, one lesson we learned was that the act of preservation is an intentional act. Someone has to make a decision to preserve a story, or a videotape, or a cassette. There would be no "Free Chol Soo Lee" film if not for the Asian American journalists, filmmakers, and documentarians working at the time: Sandra

Gin, Chris Chow, Serena Chen, Elaine Kim, Young Shin, Michael Chin, and not to mention K.W. Lee. They created an incredible record of our communities through their work. Yet that record might have disappeared if they had not become caretakers and archivists of their own work. They decided not to let these stories be forgotten, and their personal archives became something of an underground resource that we were able to tap into. It is through their acts of preservation that we even have a film to present today. In the case of Chol Soo Lee, the public work about him largely ended in the '80s, after his release. His story did not end there, of course.

JH: Sandra Gin, a broadcast journalist who produced "Perceptions: A Question of Justice," the first documentary about Chol Soo Lee back in 1983, which ended with his release from prison, told us that she was happy to be passing on the baton to us, after she learned we wanted to make this film. She said she had long felt the epilogue to Chol Soo Lee's story had not been explored, that the full truth of what happened to him after his release from prison needed to be told. So in many ways, we feel like we're continuing her and other early storytellers' work. And now, with our film, we can bring the story of Chol Soo Lee to a new generation.

**What brought about the narrative structure? How much did you shoot and what was the process of editing?**

EY: We always wanted to create a story where we have a sense that Chol Soo Lee is looking back. It seemed a more appropriate vehicle than a traditional biopic approach. We started out by interviewing key figures. It's a 40-year-old case, so the activists who were young at the time were now mostly in their 60s. The older activists were in the 80s and older. So we wanted to make sure to get their stories on camera first.

We had originally intended to shoot more interviews and extensive recreations, but the pandemic struck. And it forced us to find a solution with the material we already had and to embrace our identity as an archival film even more. By working with talented editors like Aldo Velasco and Jean Tsien, and our co-editor Anita H.M. Yu, the film truly came to life in the edit. We found that the more we pared away our modern-day footage, the more immersive the film became. The archival seemed to gain more power. It really became a guiding principle, to let the archival speak to us, and guide us to a form that would best serve the story.

**Can you talk about the use of music in the film?**

EY: It's impossible to talk about the music in this film without talking about "The Ballad of Chol Soo Lee," the folk-funk fusion penned by Jeff Adachi, arranged and performed by Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo and a group of his collaborators. It captures much about the spirit of the movement: its youthfulness, its earnestness, and its connection to the music and political culture of the 1960s. It channels the famed Asian American folk singers Chris and Nobuko, further connecting the story of Chol Soo Lee to much of the activism that was happening in the years preceding our story. We couldn't imagine the film without the song.

Chol Soo Lee mentioned another song in his memoir: Tower of Power's "You're Still a Young Man," which played while he was on the bus to prison. The song evokes the era for many Asian Americans, who remember dances and parties often ending with the song. So we knew we wanted the film to include the song in some way. We decided to repeat the song several times in the film, each time at a different point in Chol Soo Lee's journey. We found that the lyrics intersect with the narrative in profound ways, and the repetition to be a fruitful one.

For the original score, we collaborated with composer Gretchen Jude, who brought wonderful insights and ideas to creating an aural landscape for the film. She really elevated the film and helped make it feel more cinematic. The portions in prison are scored with musique concrete soundscape—created from archival sounds of the prison themselves—that ride the line between sound design and score, giving an experience that feels for us more visceral and experiential than traditional score would. She also incorporated snippets of sounds and melodies that might be familiar to a Korean ear, from a drum sound or a measure of a lullaby, to imbue the other portions of the film with a sound that felt rooted in the Korean experience, but existing outside of it. That seemed to evoke Chol Soo's experience, in a way.

### **How does the film invite audiences to consider or confront the question of Asian American perspectives?**

JH: Funny enough, Hollywood early on recognized the inherent drama in this incredible story and made the 1989 film, *True Believer*, loosely based on the Chol Soo Lee case. But of course they did the usual whitewashing. The stars and heroes of the film were the white defense lawyers, played by James Woods and Robert Downey, Jr., and there was no Korean American journalist, no band of Asian American activists. But in our film, Asian Americans get to take their rightful and accurate places in the story. They are the victim of racial profiling who becomes the flawed hero of a movement, the tenacious journalist who uncovers the truth, and the activists who battle the criminal justice system and win.

There's really an almost mythical quality to this story. We're not accustomed to seeing the so-called model minority as both the victim of racism and the resistance fighters who challenge that racism. And that's why we often say that our film has the potential to change how American society at large sees Asian Americans, but also how we see ourselves.

EY: Our film also asks audiences to consider what being an Asian American now might mean. Who gets included in the term Asian American, who gets forgotten? What issues does one find Asian Americans embracing? Why does the issue of criminal justice reform intersect with Asian American politics less frequently than questions of, say, school admissions? Should that be the case? So we hope the film is a kind of provocation, in a way, to Asian American communities to reflect.

And of late, we have seen violence on the streets targeting Asian Americans, racial scapegoating surrounding the novel coronavirus, and a mass murder in Georgia. Violence against Asian



Americans is not new, but the awareness of it is higher. We hope the story of Chol Soo Lee will inspire audiences to connect current events to a longer history.

**There are moments in the film that make the audience feel so close to Chol Soo Lee, that we root for him being freed. How did you build that narrative tension?**

JH: There are two characters whom we thought could serve as trustworthy guides for us to get to know Chol Soo Lee, almost as proxies for the audience. The first is Ranko Yamada, a young woman who befriends Chol Soo before his wrongful arrest, and gives us the sense that, though Chol Soo has a criminal record, he's not someone to be feared. Her story about him watching her sister open oyster shells, we thought, was so pure and innocent, and gives you this immediate impression that this young man has this childlike wonderment, even though he's grown up on the streets. And on a much more serious note, later in the film, after Chol Soo is charged with killing the neo-Nazi inmate, we see that Ranko doesn't abandon him; in fact, she defends his actions passionately. She insists that, had he not been wrongly convicted of the first murder, he wouldn't have been in this position where he had to defend his life in one of California's most violent prisons. We thought it was important that Ranko serves as this rational, compassionate voice and lens through which we see Chol Soo.

EY: And, of course, it is Chol Soo's relationship with K.W. that helps the story really take off. Before they meet, Chol Soo is in many ways a victim of circumstance, a lone Korean with little support. Once he lands in prison, his lot seems hopeless. But once K.W. enters Chol Soo's life, a glimmer of possibility emerges. Perhaps, against all odds, a reporter can move enough people to work on his behalf. And as we see this come true, and see Chol Soo's reaction to the support, we see him grapple with his newfound role in the community. It changed what he thought of himself. Not only as a person garnering this support, but as he says, as a "Korean American whose rights have been so violated." This statement represents the emergence of both an ethnic and a political identity. Connecting with K.W. and the activists helped him regain a connection to his heritage. And to see himself as a victim of a larger system, he could see how his life and the injustices he experienced connected to those of so many others who share his circumstances.

**What happened to the activists who worked on Chol Soo's case?**

EY: Many of them went on to long careers working on behalf of the community, often in leadership positions, leading agencies and nonprofits, running for public office, and at least a dozen became lawyers. Some of the more high profile examples include Jeff Adachi, who served as San Francisco's elected public defender, until he passed away in 2019. Jay Kun Yoo became a major public figure in South Korea, hosting a political talk show and becoming a congressman. The injustice of the death penalty stayed with him long after Chol Soo was freed, and once in the South Korean congress, he proposed a law to abolish it. Activist David Kakishiba has been the executive director of the East Bay Asian Youth Center in Oakland for decades, and he told us he's trying to help the other Chol Soo Lees, to support them while they're still kids. Nearly everyone we spoke to who was involved in the movement was changed - winning a case like that,

especially when many of them were so young, gave them the courage to take on any adversary, no matter how daunting.

JH: Ranko Yamada became a lawyer, because, as she says in our film, she wanted to become the type of attorney that would take this kind of case. It's not in the film, but she told us that she approached about 10 different attorneys, trying to get them to take Chol Soo's case, but they turned her down because she didn't have enough money to pay them. Even the progressive ones who were "down with the cause" rejected her because they didn't think his case was "political enough" So she became that attorney and even worked on Chol Soo Lee's legal defense team. She wanted to make sure she could see the Chol Soo Lee case through to its end, with his acquittal and release from prison, but then after that was accomplished, she became a non-practicing attorney. She and others founded a legal outreach clinic for Japanese-speaking residents who needed free legal services, Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach, which is still helping people to this day. Eugene and I have gotten a chance to get to know Ranko really well over the six years we've worked on this film. It's been one of the great honors of our lives.

**Why is it important that we understand the life of Chol Soo Lee and the movement to free him?**

JH: Don't we tell stories to change the world? We also tell stories to remind us of our common humanity and connection to each other. And this film, this story has so much to teach us, to challenge us, to inspire us, to wrestle with, as we reflect on this man's life that was full of so much suffering and yet also was touched by some of the most compassionate, justice-seeking humans on the planet. Through this story, we see just how hard it is to undo the lasting damage of racism, which effectively destroyed a man's life. Chol Soo Lee had a whole movement of people working and fighting just for him, and yet, after six years of courthouse protests and raising money for his defense from 5 and 10 dollar donations, after all of that, it may have been enough to get him out of prison, but not necessarily to truly "free" him, to save him.

EY: The one moment that encapsulates the story for me is K.W.'s letter to Chol Soo during the '90s, when Chol Soo was at his lowest. K.W. asks what went wrong, and he talks about how connected they all will remain, through better or worse, "if our fleeting existence on earth has any meeting at all." It's an existential moment. It asks Chol Soo to make sense of it all, and it invites the audience to grapple with that idea, too. What is important to remember, through it all? The answer, for Chol Soo, was the "pure and unconditional" nature of the activists' work to free him. They decided that this person, despite his flaws, was worth saving. And the fact that they were still there, to stand by his side in public, toward the end of his life, showed their commitment to him and to what he inspired in them. For a guy who had burned bridges, who had faltered and failed in so many ways. That kind of compassion is rare, and I remain in awe of everything the activists did over the years.

JH: And even though in many ways Chol Soo's life was quite tragic, maybe how it all "ends" is really up to those of us who are still living. After learning about this story, this history, how will we

respond? Will we allow it to change us, move us, inspire us to be more compassionate, to do our part in creating a more just society? For myself, learning about this history first at age 18 changed how I saw the world and my role in it. I was inspired to become a journalist with a special calling to work on Korean and Asian American stories, so we could be humanized and understood. K.W. Lee has often said that people without a history are hollow. Armed with knowledge of this incredible history, of this unlikely movement that formed around a street kid, new generations can keep carving out a meaningful and lasting legacy for Chol Soo Lee.

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

### **Julie Ha - Director, Producer**

Julie Ha's storytelling career spans more than two decades, in both ethnic and mainstream media, with a specialized focus on Asian American stories. She worked as an editor for 10 years at KoreAm Journal, a national Korean American magazine, and served as its editor-in-chief from 2011 to 2014, during which time she led award-winning coverage of the 20-year anniversary of the Los Angeles riots. She has written for the Hartford Courant in Connecticut, the Rafu Shimpo, a Los Angeles-based Japanese American newspaper, and the Los Angeles Times. Her feature stories have earned her awards from New American Media and the Society of Professional Journalists. In 2018 the Korea Economic Institute of America honored her for her contributions to journalism. A graduate of UCLA, where she studied English-American Studies and worked as a student editor, she is a past board secretary of the Asian American Journalists Association, Los Angeles Chapter, and a founding board member of the late '90s reboot of Gidra, a progressive Asian American magazine that originated in 1969. Free Chol Soo Lee marks her first documentary film project.

### **Eugene Yi - Director, Producer**

Eugene Yi is a filmmaker, editor, and journalist. His film editing work has premiered at the Berlin International Film Festival, the Sundance Film Festival, the TriBeCa Film Festival, and others. Selected titles include the News and Documentary Emmy-nominated Farewell Ferris Wheel, a documentary about guest workers in the carnival industry, and Out of My Hand, a fiction-documentary hybrid that was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award, and won the Grand Jury Prize at the 2015 Los Angeles Film Festival. His web video work has been in The New York Times, CNN, Frontline, the Washington Post, BuzzFeed News, Al Jazeera, and Deadspin. He served as assistant editor on Inside Job (2010), which won the Academy Award for Best Documentary. He was named one of the 2017 National MediaMaker Fellows with the Bay Area Video Coalition, for Free Chol Soo Lee. He taught at the Edit Center, a school for film editing formerly based in Brooklyn. Yi's print journalism has been honored with numerous awards, including the LA Press Club Award for his oral history of the 1992 Los Angeles unrest from the Korean American perspective for KoreAm Journal. He is a native of Los Angeles and a graduate of Brown University, where he studied neuroscience.

### **Sebastian Yoon - Narrator**

Sebastian Yoon earned a Bard College bachelor's degree in Social Studies through the Bard Prison Initiative in 2017. His story is featured in Ken Burns and Lynn Novick's documentary, *College Behind Bars*. Now an Acting Program Officer at the Open Society Foundations, Sebastian is a member of the Democracy Team, working toward building an inclusive, multiracial democracy and leading a portfolio to politically and civically empower Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPIs). Sebastian is also pursuing an MPA at Baruch College.

### **Su Kim - Producer**

Su Kim is an Academy Award nominated and Emmy® and Peabody Award-winning producer based in New York. She is entrepreneurial, creative and committed to crafting compelling stories and supporting independent filmmakers. Her films in release include *BITTERBRUSH*, the OSCAR® and Primetime Emmy®-nominated *HALE COUNTY THIS MORNING, THIS EVENING* and *MIDNIGHT TRAVELER*. As a producer, she was awarded the 2015 Women at Sundance fellowship and CPB/PBS Producers Workshop Fellowship. She was the New York producer for *LEARNING TO SKATEBOARD IN A WAR ZONE (IF YOU'RE A GIRL)* which won the OSCAR® and BAFTA. She has served as a mentor at the UnionDocs Summer Documentary Labs, the Korean Film Council (KOFIC) S#1 Documentary Lab and as an advisor at the Sundance Institute Documentary Creative Producing Lab. She is currently producing *ONE BULLET* (director Carol Dysinger), *SANSÓN AND ME* (director Rodrigo Reyes), *HIDDEN LETTERS* (director Violet du Feng), *BASELINE: Part 1* (director John D. Sutter), *SARAH* (director Tracy Droz Tragos), and *LINES* (director Emelie Mahdavian). Su is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences and the Producers Guild of America. Free Chol Soo Lee is her first collaboration with directors Julie Ha and Eugene Yi.

### **Jean Tsien - Producer, Editor**

Born in Taiwan and based in New York, Jean Tsien has been working in documentary film for over 35 years, first as an editor, and then over time, as a story consultant, producer and as an executive producer. Tsien's feature editing debut, *Something Within Me*, won three awards at the 1993 Sundance Film Festival. Her notable editing credits include: the 2001 Academy Award® nominee, *Scottsboro: An American Tragedy*; the Peabody award winning films *Malcolm X: Make It Plain*, *Travis and Solar Mamas*; the Academy Award® shortlisted films *Dixie Chicks: Shut Up & Sing*; *Miss Sharon Jones!*; and *The Apollo*, which won a 2020 Primetime Emmy® for Outstanding Documentary. Tsien was the executive producer and editor for *Plastic China*, a feature documentary that won the 54th Golden Horse Award for Best Editing (the "Chinese Oscars"), and helped change China's recycling policy; *Please Remember Me*, winner of the 2019 Doc Impact Award for shifting people's understanding of Alzheimer's across China. Other executive producer credits include *People's Republic of Desire*, which won the Grand Jury Award at the 2018 SXSW Film Festival; *Our Time Machine*, nominated for the 2020 Gotham Award; and *Try Harder!* which premiered at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival. In 2021, Tsien received two Peabody Awards, one for the landmark five-part PBS series *Asian Americans*, which she executive produced; and the other for her role as producer on *76 Days*, a film capturing the earliest day of the COVID-19 crisis in Wuhan. *76 Days* was also shortlisted for the 2021 Academy Awards®, nominated for the 2020

Gotham Awards, and won the 2021 Primetime Emmy® for Exceptional Merit in Documentary Filmmaking. A true believer in nurturing emerging talent, Tsien has served as an advisor at the Sundance Institute Edit and Story Lab, Camden/TFI Retreat, Catapult/True False Rough Cut Retreat, Chicken & Egg Pictures (Egg)celerator Lab, CNEX Chinese Documentary Forum, Dare to Dream Asia, Hot Docs Blue Ice and Cross Currents Labs, IDFAcademy, and IFP Lab. Tsien's artistry as a visionary editor, mentor and field builder has been recognized by a 2018 Art of Editing Mentorship Award presented by Sundance Institute, and a Lifetime Achievement Award presented at DOC NYC's 2020 Visionaries Tribute.

### **Sona Jo - Producer**

Sona Jo's career in film production began with a Korea-Belgium co-production documentary Reach for the SKY (2015 Dok Leipzig), for which she was a production manager. She produces feature documentaries dealing with Asian subjects through the eyes of Asian filmmakers. Smog Town, which she co-produced with China and the Netherlands, premiered at the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam 2019. Her recent films are 206: Unearthed, which won the Mecenat Award (Best Documentary) at the 2021 Busan International Film Festival, and Coming To You, which won the Best Documentary Award and Jury's Special Mention at the 2021 Jeonju International Film Festival.

**MAIN CREDITS**

**Directed and Produced by**

Eugene Yi and Julie Ha

**Produced by**

Su Kim

**Produced by**

Jean Tsien Sona Jo

**Executive Producers**

Sally Jo Fifer Stephen Gong Lois Vossen

**Executive Producers**

Kathryn Everett

Andy Hsieh

Bryn Mooser

**Edited by**

Jean Tsien, ACE Aldo Velasco

**Original Music by**

Gretchen Jude

**Co-Editor**

Anita H.M. Yu

**Story Consultant**

Carol Dysinger

**Story Advisors**

Keiko Deguchi, ACE Geeta Gandbhir Stephen Maing Renee Tajima-Peña David Teague

**Humanities Advisors**

Johnna Christian, Ph.D. Cheryl Higashida, Ph.D. Richard Kim, Ph.D. Sojin Kim, Ph.D.

Glenn Omatsu David Yoo, Ph.D.

**Supervising Producer for ITVS**

Michael Kinomoto

**Associate Producers**

Tammy Chu Yoonsoo Her Quyên Nguyen-Le

**Production Coordinator**

Audrey Fok

**Camera**

Michael Chin Jerry Henry

**Additional Camera**

Colin Archdeacon Akira Boch Vanessa Carr Tijana Petrovic Courtney Quirin Mike Shum  
John Wakayama Carey

**Assistant Camera**

Abraham Chan Audrey Fok Joel Juarez Lou Nakasako Adam Uyemura

**Sound Recordists**

Bryan Baeta Marc Stewart Stephen Thorpe

**Archival Producer**

Brian Becker

**Licensing and Clearances**

Brittan Dunham

**Archival Researcher**

Gyeong Yeon Kim

**Archival Research Assistant**

Sabrina Lee

**Additional Music**

Mike Puretz Dohee Lee

**Music Clearance**

Nancy Meyer, Bates Meyer, Inc.

**Animation Director**

Mihye Choi

**GFX**

Suki Oh

**Assistant Editors**

Hannah Beaton

Harry Jackson JiYe Kim

Kate McLane Dennis Mendez

**Sound Supervision and Design**

Eunha Ko

**Foley Artist**

Jaehong Moon

**Foley Mixer**

Hyojin Noh

**Dialogue Editor**

Juhyun Kim

**Sound Effects Editor**

Youngjae Lee

**Mix Studio**

SONAGI SoundWorks

**Remote ADR**

Mobile Mikes

Digital Intermediate by 2L COMPANY

**Colorist**



Mina Choi

**Digital Image Mastering**

Junjae Im

**Digital Image Mastering Assistant**

Jin Park

**Production Supervisor**

Jaeho Kim

**Transcription**

Lynette Adams Steve Han Reera Yoo

**Translator**

Sunghye (Holly) Kim

**Translation**

FURMO-DT

**Subtitles**

Mistral Artist-New York

**Production Assistants**

Anna-Mae Chin Skyler Glover Erica Marquez Benjamin Wright

**Interns**

Wesley Ahn Eva Ahn

**Pitch Deck Designer**

Yejoon Joung

**Promotional Goods & Poster Design**

relay

**Conversions**

GRS Systems Inc.

**Film and Video Digitization Services**

BAVC Media Broadcaststore.com Custom Video Productions Dijifi  
Preservation Technologies

**Legal Counsel**

The Law Office of Laverne Berry UCLA Documentary Film Legal Clinic

**Insurance**

Momentous Insurance Brokerage, Inc.

**Accountant**

Brent Meyer, CPA & Associates

**Bookkeeper**

Bruce Wrigley

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Submarine Entertainment

**The scripted portions of Chol Soo Lee's voiceover were based on his words, spoken and written, including from:**

*Freedom Without Justice: The Prison Memoirs of Chol Soo Lee*

By Chol Soo Lee

Edited by Richard S. Kim

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**Scripted portions adapted by**

Julie Ha Eugene Yi Sebastian Yoon

**Songs**

"YOU'RE STILL A YOUNG MAN"

Written by Stephen Kupka, Emilio Castillo

Published by Stephen Kupka Songs [ASCAP], Arikat Music [ASCAP]  
administered by Kobalt Songs Music Publishing [ASCAP] Performed by Tower of Power  
Courtesy of Warner Records  
By arrangement with Warner Music Group Film & TV Licensing

“THE BALLAD OF CHOL SOO LEE”

Produced by the Chol Soo Lee Defense Committee

© 1978 by Anderson, Adachi, Kikuchi-Yngojo

Performed by Siu Wai Anderson, Sam Takimoto, Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo, Peter Yoshiro Horikoshi,  
Duke Santos, Jeff Adachi  
Courtesy of Jeff Adachi

“FROM THE ROOFTOPS” Performed by The Funk Ark Written By Robert William Rast Courtesy of  
Marmoset Music

“HORCHATA”

Performed by The Funk Ark Written By Robert William Rast Courtesy of Marmoset Music

“MONGUMPO”

Composed and Performed by Dohee Lee Inspired by Mongumpo Korean folk song Recorded by  
Flytrap studio  
Courtesy of Dohee Lee

“HALLUCINATIONS” Courtesy of APM Music

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Courtesy of Special Collections, UC Davis Library [Inventory of the K.W. (Kyung Won) Lee Papers]

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The CONUS Archive Grant Din eFootage.com Footage File, LLC Sandra Gin

Moo Song Goh

Grace Yoo Archival Collection, San Francisco State University, Asian American Studies

Huntley Film Archives LTD  
Inside Chinatown, Urban Educational Films, Michael Chin  
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Alice Kim  
Elaine Kim  
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