

Korean Cultural Centre UK presents

# KOREAN FILM NIGHTS 2017

APRIL TO JUNE

ON FOREIGN GROUND

Visions of Migration

## KOREAN FILM NIGHTS 2017

Welcome to Korean Film Nights 2017, our year-round programme of film screenings and talks. Each year the programme is curated around a theme, and this year is no different. For 2017 Korean Film Nights has been divided into three distinct mini-seasons comprised of six films each. During each season, the screenings will take place weekly - every Thursday evening. Also, for 2017 we have invited guest programmers to offer their selections for each season. We had an exciting season of horror titles curated by Dr Colette Balmain in February and March. For the second season, we are very pleased to announce that the programme has been curated by the students from the *Film Studies Programming and Curation MA* at the National Film and Television School: Maria Bolocan, Mark Donaldson, Andrew Espe, Irene Silvera Frischknecht, Roberto González, Maureen Gueunet, David Perrin and Nicolas Raffin. This course, running in partnership with the British Film Institute, is designed for students interested in pursuing a career beyond film production, whether it be in curation, exhibition, archive or restoration.

### #2

#### ON FOREIGN GROUND: VISIONS OF MIGRATION

This second season of the 2017 Korean Film Nights runs from April until June and will focus on stories of immigration in South Korean cinema, a theme that was chosen for its relevance in the world today. South Korea is considered one of the 'Four Asian Tigers' - countries that have experienced an extended period of economic growth and rapid industrialisation in the decades before the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This has made it a common destination for economic migrants from neighbouring countries. This season wants to highlight such experiences through six films across a wide range of genres and styles.

These are the stories of a North Korean defector, migrant workers hailing from a variety of countries including Burma, Vietnam and Bangladesh as well as second-generation Korean emigrants returning to the country their parents left behind.

By exploring different facets of their everyday life, we are invited to understand their living and working conditions. We follow the characters in their humble homes or at work in factories. We feel their fear towards the authorities, their worries over sending money home; we also bear witness as they embark upon new personal relationships.

The variety of genres explored enables this season to offer a range of perspectives on a complicated international issue. From the romantic drama between an immigrant and a troublesome adolescent in *Bandhobi*, to the grim portrait of corruption and manipulation immigrants face in *The Journals of Musan*, and the community spirit borne out of shared circumstances in the comedy *He's on Duty*, we also hear from a number of migrant workers who share with us their hopes and dreams in the documentary *Scenery*.

The UK premiere of *Burmese on the Roof* will open this season. Taking a very human perspective, this observational documentary looks at how the benefits of economic wealth can, in turn, threaten physical and psychological well-being, whilst also examining the difficulties of returning home and struggling to maintain a national identity in the face of long term emigration. This is the theme also explored, in much lighter fashion, in *Seoul Searching*, in which foreign-born Korean teenagers from different nations visit the country for the first time. The film is a Korean pastiche of American teen comedies, and as such adds to the feeling of the vibrant and multicultural Korea we want to highlight in this programme.

Maureen Gueunet

## PROGRAMME NOTES

The immigrant experience has a long and multifaceted history on screen. Think *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (Rainer Werner Fassbinder: 1974), *Black Girl* (Ousmane Sembène: 1966), or the recent Golden Bear winning documentary *Fire at Sea* (Gianfranco Rossi: 2016).

Within the past decade, following the UN's declaration of South Korea as a receiving country in 2007, Korean cinema has begun to address the country's complicated relationship with its migrant population. The films chosen for this programme are therefore all recent titles, covering different genres and styles, which highlight the topicality of immigration in both the media and culture.

There is, perhaps, a surprising amount of comedy within the programme, the three films mine familiar comedy scenarios, a bickering will-they-won't-they couple in *Bandhobi* (Shin Dong-il: 2009), a false identity caper in *He's on Duty* (Yuk Sang-ho: 2010) and a group of teenagers out to party in *Seoul Searching* (Benson Lee: 2015).

Within these light-hearted stories, there are deeper discussions on subjects such as worker's rights, prostitution and the hidden life of the immigrant living in fear of being sent back home. These films are as much about the positive, enriching impact that immigration has on Korea through new friendships and relationships as they are about the exploitation of migrant workers.

Indeed, while *Bandhobi* is packaged and presented as a romantic comedy, it also subverts a lot of the clichés of the genre, and the relationship at the story's heart hints at something deeper and more profound.

*He's on Duty* also subverts expectations, it is a film about an unemployed Korean posing as a Bhutanese migrant in order to get a job. In the wrong hands, the film could be crushingly insensitive, but instead it rather sweetly portrays a man finding his place amongst similar outcasts. Whilst not overtly political films, they do, in their own small ways, rail against exploitation and champion a more multi-cultural way of life.

Multi-culturalism abounds in the teen comedy *Seoul Searching*, in which foreign-born Koreans identifying as (amongst others) German, Mexican and American visit Korea for the first time. Lee's film uses teenage angst

as a means to amplify the disconnectedness experienced by second-generation immigrants.

However, where there is comedy, there is also tragedy, and this next set of films reflect a grittier reality, one where a culture of exclusion and marginalisation lie at the heart of their day to day experience.

While many stories of North Korean defectors usually take the danger and process of escape as their narrative vantage point, it is rare for films to portray their fate after they have arrived in their perceived sanctuary.

The struggles and hardships of a North Korean defector trying to establish a new, albeit meagre, life in Seoul is explored with unflinching realism in the multi-award winning film *The Journals of Musan* (Park Jung-bum: 2010). The film's low-budget, neo-realist aesthetic coupled with its depiction of cramped interiors and deteriorating building sites provide a sharp contrast to the South Korea of the comedies, with director Park not pulling any punches in indicting his country's treatment of those fleeing the north.

The two documentaries in the programme focus on the lives of migrant workers, the first of which, *Scenery* (Zhang Lu: 2013) follows 14 immigrants as they travel, work and pray. Through talking head segments we learn of their dreams and what emerges is a universality of experience and a desire to return to the welcoming embrace of home.

*Burmese on the Roof* (Oh Hyun-jin, Ko Duhyun: 2016) explores the loneliness and isolation of three illegal migrant workers from Burma living on the rooftop of a factory in an industrial complex. Soe, Joe and Tommy spend a good part of their days confined to their rooftop apartment for fear of being arrested and deported. Their illegal status does not define who they are, nor does it shape our attitude towards them. It is because they are portrayed as people with the same set of aspirations, and flaws as everybody else that the film achieves empathy.

Mark Donaldson & David Perrin

27 APRIL, 7PM | KCCUK

# BURMESE ON THE ROOF

옥상 위에 버마



SOUTH KOREA, 2016

DIRECTORS: OH HYUN-JIN,  
KO DUHYIN

CAST: SOE, TOMMY, JOE

90 MIN / ENG SUBS

UK PREMIERE

In the industrial suburb of Masoek we find three foreign workers sharing a prefab hut built on their factory's rooftop. This documentary offers a gaze into their lives, shifting its focus away from issues often associated with immigrants, taking a look at their personalities and everyday existence instead. Through very concise interviews, their plans and the challenges they face are slowly unveiled. We learn about the sacrifices they make for their families and their longing to return to a country that offers an uncertain future. We also witness both the camaraderie and the frictions that arise from living with strangers in such a confined space.

These dignifying human portraits are crafted with an austere visual style, complemented with a strong sense of place through distinct urban landscapes. And whilst we never learn these men's full names, the film ensures they will not remain anonymous.

Roberto Gonzalez

4 MAY, 7PM | KCCUK

# BANDHOBI

반두비



SOUTH KOREA, 2009

DIRECTOR: SHIN DONG-IL

CAST: MAHBUB ALAM,  
BAEK JIN-HEE , CHOI IN-SOOK

107 MINS / 18 CERT. / ENG SUBS

*Bandhobi* is a story about the crossover between two different cultures and the friendship it can spark. As the title suggests, “female friend” in Bengali, the film follows the evolving relationship between Min-seo, a 17-year old rebellious Korean girl, and Karim, a 29-year old Muslim migrant worker from Bangladesh. This character-driven film subtly explores many areas of importance: racism, illegal immigration, family dynamics, the education system and working conditions with great sensitivity and realism. Both characters bring distinctive critical outlooks: Min struggles with a broken relationship with her mother and an absent father while Karim is desperately trying to retrieve the unpaid wages from his employer. Both are lost souls in a society they feel disenfranchised from. Their unique friendship helps them finally address and voice the questions so quietly hidden under social conventions and ignorance.

Maria Bolocan

11 MAY, 7PM | KCCUK

# SCENERY

풍경



SOUTH KOREA, 2013

DIRECTOR: ZHANG LU

95 MIN / ENG SUBS

ALSO SHOWN AT DEPTFORD  
ON 31 MAY AT 7PM

Chinese-Korean director Zhang Lu's eighth feature follows fourteen foreigners from nine different countries who have left their home to work in South Korea. In this documentary, Lu asks each of these men to reveal the most vivid dream that remains in their memory since arriving in Korea.

Bordering the surreal, Lu conjures an evocative reflection on South Korea's evolving social landscape. The dreams of all men seem to merge into one, as we learn about their longing to return to their hometowns, reunite with their lost families and embrace their mothers. In their dreams, their anxieties are juxtaposed with nostalgia for their childhood. By alternating these oniric recollections with images of the heavy machinery they operate in their work, Lu accentuates the striking contrast between the immensity of the equipment they employ and the fragility of the hopes they harbour.

Irene Silvera Frischknecht

1 JUNE, 7PM | KCCUK

# THE JOURNALS OF MUSAN

무산일기



SOUTH KOREA, 2011

DIRECTOR: PARK JUNG-BUM

CAST: PARK JUNG-BUM ,  
JIN YOUNGUK, KANG EUJIN,  
PARK YOUNGDEOK

127 MINS / 15 CERT. / ENG SUBS

ALSO SHOWN AT DEPTFORD  
ON 26 APRIL AT 7PM & SOAS  
ON 28 APRIL AT 5:15PM

*The Journals of Musan* stars (and is written/directed by) Park Jung-bum as Seung-chul, a North Korean refugee who has defected to South Korea. He attempts to adjust to Seoul with a shy and submissive attitude. When Seung-chul is harassed by the authorities, he takes a new job at a karaoke bar to gain stability, an appropriate income, and less prejudice for being a defector. Seung-chul attends Mass every week in the hope that his spirituality will help him embrace his new surroundings.

*The Journals of Musan* is a precise character study in its detailed portrayal of alienation. But Park Jung-bum's film also works as a broader exploration of the refugee experience; it illustrates the wide array of emotional adversity immigrants withstand: isolation, shame, hope, faith and even some humour. These are all on the spectrum of feelings that Seung-chul experiences and, we as an audience, experience with him.

Andrew Espe

8 JUNE, 7PM | KCCUK

# SEOUL SEARCHING



SOUTH KOREA, 2015

DIRECTOR: BENSON LEE

CAST: JUSTIN CHON, JESSIKA VAN,  
CHA IN-PYO

105 MINS / ENG SUBS

CONTAINS LANGUAGE SOME MAY  
FIND OFFENSIVE

Heavily influenced by the 1980s teen comedies of US director John Hughes, *Seoul Searching* follows a group of foreign-born Korean teenagers as they visit a summer camp near Seoul that aims to reconnect them with their lost cultural heritage, with varying degrees of success. As you'd expect from a teen comedy, the film has a catchy soundtrack and is full of memorable characters and outlandish comedy situations.

Benson Lee's film is as concerned with matters of love, sex, underage drinking and partying as any of the other films associated with the genre, but it is the treatment of identity which is most pertinent. All teen comedies are about coming to terms with who you are as you approach adulthood, what *Seoul Searching* does is amplify this well-worn theme to encompass an acceptance, as a second generation immigrant, of a lost cultural heritage and national identity.

Mark Donaldson

15 JUNE, 7PM | KCCUK

# HE'S ON DUTY

방가?방가!



SOUTH KOREA, 2010

CAST: KIM IN-KWON, KIM  
JUNG-TAE, SHIN HYUN-BIN

DIRECTOR: YOOK SANH-HYO

110 MINS / ENG SUBS

ALSO SHOWN AT SOAS  
ON 12 MAY AT 5:15PM

Bang Tae-sik is a perennially unemployed South Korean man who, based on his physical appearance, could pass for a foreigner. He is as a result often confused for an outsider and, having nothing much to do, he takes advantage of his own situation. Tae-sik adopts a fake foreign accent and pretends to come from Bhutan. Very clumsy, the newly named Bang-ga gains confidence little by little and becomes more and more influential among his friends and co-workers. He also starts romancing the lovely Jang-mi who works in the same factory as him.

With *He's on Duty*, Yook Sanh-Hyo presents a light-hearted and vigorous comedy that nonetheless delivers uncommonly powerful commentaries on immigration, discrimination and racism.

Nicolas Raffin

## ATTENDING KOREAN FILM NIGHTS

Admission is free, but booking is required for each screening. To reserve your place, please visit [www.kccuk.org.uk](http://www.kccuk.org.uk) Click on the *Korean Film Nights* section, select the 'Reserve' icon on the right side of the page. Type your name and email address first, and click 'Send Verification Code'. You will then receive a six-digit code in your inbox, which can be 'applied' to the same window. Now your booking is completed.

Selected titles from this programme will be shown again at various venues outside the KCCUK under *Korean Cinema Echoes*. Please check our facebook and twitter pages for the most up-to-date information. The programme and venue may be subject to change, please confirm at the time of booking.

Information on Deptford Cinema screenings:  
[www.deptfordcinema.org](http://www.deptfordcinema.org)

Information on SOAS screenings:  
[www.soas.ac.uk/koreanstudies/events/seminars](http://www.soas.ac.uk/koreanstudies/events/seminars)

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