

Korean Cultural Centre UK presents

KOREAN FILM NIGHTS 2018

MARCH TO JUNE

Korean
Novels on
Screen

KOREAN FILM NIGHTS

2018

The Korean Cultural Centre UK would like to welcome audiences once again to *Korean Film Nights*, our year-round programme of film screenings and talks. With the aim of fostering a deeper knowledge and appreciation of Korean cinema amongst London audiences through thematically curated strands, these screenings have presented everything from little-known classics to UK premieres of rare indie gems over the past 10-years.

After a successful 2017 that saw audiences pack into screenings across three distinct film seasons - horror, migration and essay films - 2018 continues in a similar vein, splitting the year into two strands. This first programme will run from the end of March to June and will focus on films adapted from Korean novels. This follows on from a 2014 programme that came about when the London Book Fair shone a spotlight on Korea as their featured country that year. Appreciation for Korean literature has continued to rise thanks to the success of Han Kang's International Man Booker Prize winning *The Vegetarian*, and the release last year of *Familiar Things*, a new work from famed novelist and political activist, Hwang Sok-yong, amongst others.

Returning to the topic of Korean literature and film, the *Korean Novels on Screen* season focuses on stories that cover the key historical events that have shaped modern Korea. Going back to the period of Japanese occupation and subsequent independence, through both the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and then onto the anti-authoritarian government and pro-democracy protests that have risen over the years, prominent writers have often focused their own perspectives and personal experiences onto the page. Korean film directors have similarly experienced these periods of social and political turmoil firsthand, creating both their own unique views on the novels they choose to adapt and an ideology through which to filter their work.

Books, and the stories they contain, have always provided a platform for filmmaking, and Korea has a particularly strong history of literary adaptations. Many of the most celebrated directors in Korean cinema history have produced such works, of which a small selection is included in this season. Both idiosyncratic auteur Kim Ki-young and highly respected filmmaker Yu Hyun-mok present the historic change that took place within rural communities in *Earth* (1978) and *The Descendants*

of Cain (1968). Korea's often-overlooked involvement in the Vietnam War is brought into sharp focus in the brutal drama *White Badge* (1992), as popular leading actor Ahn Sung-ki is thrown into the fray. Political protest provides the basis for *A Petal* (1996), centred on the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, while Im Sang-soo's romantic drama, *The Old Garden* (2007), looks at the personal cost of revolt. Slick modern thriller *The Unfair* (2015) also takes aim at social injustice and government corruption. Coinciding with author Kim Aeran's visit to London, the season will finish on a different note as we present moving drama *My Brilliant Life* (2014), the film adaptation of her hit novel. Kim will be in attendance to talk about her work.

The historic, and often tragic, events that have shaped modern Korea and its people are presented here in both film and novel form. (All books in the series - with the exception of *The Unfair* - are available in their English versions for anyone to read, or to borrow upon registration, from the KCCUK library). Join us as we present films based on some of Korea's greatest literary works from the 20th century.

KOREAN NOVELS ON SCREEN

Cinema is voracious. Korean film has been, since its very beginnings just about 100 years ago, as omnivorous as any other national tradition of film-making. Popular narratives, tales of personalities famous or infamous, historical events, scandals moral and/or political, doomed lovers, tragic families, etcetera and etcetera – all would eventually find expression in moving images given life by hundreds of actors in thousands of films. But in the early years Korea's would-be cineastes faced a double deficit: politically, they were operating in a society dominated by colonial masters, the Japanese; artistically, they were trying to create a form of cultural modernity without two major supports taken for granted by the first film-makers in North America and Europe. Korea had as yet no developed tradition of modern drama nor of a truly modern fiction upon which to build.

Yi Kwang-su (1892-1950) would be the first writer to provide fictional narratives written in a colloquial language and featuring believably 20th-century Korean characters: the kind of material filmmakers could get to work with. His first novel, *The Heartless* (Mujeong 1917), wouldn't be adapted for the screen till the late 1930s, but others of his stories had been filmed as early as 1925. The most recent adaptation of one of Yi's novels - Bae Chang-ho's *The Dream* (Kkum 1990) - was screened last autumn as one of the London Korean Film Festival's 'Classics Revisited'. To date there have been some 25 film versions of Yi Kwang-su's works, including three adaptations of his masterpiece, *Earth* (Heuk 1931). Our programme begins with the latest of them; a powerful 1978 retelling filtered through the particular imaginary of director Kim Ki-young.

As South Korean cinema developed from the 1950s into the heydays of the 1960s, screenwriters and directors could count on a regular supply of fiction. A popular or critically-praised text could obviously bring some reflected glory and promotional push to the launch of the film. The originals were most often Korean, sometimes Japanese or less often Western works of fiction. But under the system of censorship and control over production erected by the regimes of Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan, there were other considerations. A literary work that had passed the scrutiny of one set of censors might more easily be recast into a screenplay and film acceptable to the film censors. Further, the government encouraged the production of films with anti-communist themes and/or others vaguely lumped into the category 'films of quality', the latter generally referring to films dealing with aspects of Korean

culture, often literary adaptations. Yu Hyun-mok's *The Descendants of Cain* (Kain-eui Huye 1968) could fit either category. A film of undeniable force, its ideological aims and need to reach a mass audience made it much less subtle than Hwang Sun-won's 1954 original novel.

In the decades following the 1960s, film-makers often looked to contemporary writers whose works were deemed more realistic - ones managing to reflect social changes and contradictions lying in the wake of the country's forced industrialisation. Literary censors were, after all, generally less strict than their film-chopping colleagues, reasoning that unlike cinema, the fiction they policed had a fairly limited reach.

Two successful novelists became intimately associated with film. Choi In-ho (1945-2013), both as fiction writer and screenwriter, was a close collaborator of three of the most significant directors of the 1970s and 1980s, Ha Gil-jung, Lee Jang-ho and Bae Chang-ho. He would eventually have almost as much success with television drama: Choi was the narrative genius behind series such as *The Merchant of Joseon* (2001) and *Emperor of the Sea* (2004). The LKFF 2017 featured his most significant joint work with Bae Chang-ho, the much loved road movie *Whale Hunting* (Korae Sanyang 1984).

Writer Yi Munyol (b.1948) has, like Choi, some 10 significant film credits. Between 1980 and 1992 his stories were brought to the screen by veteran directors Yu Hyun-mok and Im Kwon-taek, as well as the younger Park Jong-won. Yi's *Our Twisted Hero* (Urideul-ui Ilgeureojin Yeongung 1987), as well as Park's film version, are rare examples of achievements equally eloquent in both their respective art forms.

South Korea's long struggle for democratic reform in the face of Chun Doo-hwan's authoritarian regime was accompanied in the 1980s and 1990s by writers and filmmakers willing to confront injustice head on. Ahn Junghyo had been a Vietnam war correspondent, witness to the experiences of Korean soldiers essentially subcontracted to the US military during its disastrous campaigns in Vietnam. Director Chung Ji-young brought Ahn's *The White Badge* (Hayan Jeonjaeng 1983), an indictment of Korea's Vietnam War, to the screen in 1992. Jang Sun-woo made in *A Petal* (Kkotnip 1996), the first major film to deal with the Gwangju People's Movement and the massacre perpetrated in Gwangju by Chun and his generals. It has an altogether different feel to French scholar and short-story writer Choe Yun's original tale, while still

retaining much of her atmospherics: history as a nightmare. Hwang Sok-yong is probably Korea's (that is, both South and North) greatest living writer. Himself a Vietnam vet, long-time critic of dictatorship and prolific novelist, Hwang's *The Old Garden* (Oraedoen Jeongwon 2000) is for many his most accomplished novel. Director Im Sang-soo's 2006 film version reworks a central romantic relationship in this long, sprawling recreation of life in the political underground. His film presents some powerful sequences – the prison-experience as well as the atrocities of Gwangju – yet it did not please all critics.

In *The Unfair* (Sosu Uigyon) writer Son A-ram novelised the Yongsan Tragedy, the shocking cover-up of the death of five Korean citizens and one policeman which occurred in 2009. Novelists haven't lost their edge, thankfully. Filmmaker Kim Sung-je struggled for two full years to find a distributor for his screen adaptation; it was finally screened in 2015. His dramatic vision forms an interesting contrast with well-made documentary *Two Doors* (2012), based on the same 2009 scandal.

For the final film in our series, *My Brilliant Life* (2014), author of the original 2011 novel, Kim Ae-ran, will be hosting a special Q&A event for attendees. The session will provide a unique opportunity to discover the writer's personal thoughts on director E J-yong's more melodramatic take on her fiction.

Dr Mark Morris
(East Asian cinema expert)

THURS 29TH MARCH, 7PM | KCCUK

Earth

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ORIGINAL NOVEL BY YI KWANG-SU



YEAR: 1978

DIRECTOR: KIM KI-YOUNG

CAST: LEE HWA-SI
KIM JEONG-CHEOL
YEOM BOK-SOON
NAM SUNG-HOON

124 MINS / ENG SUBS

ALSO SHOWING AT DEPTFORD
CINEMA ON 16TH APRIL AT 7PM

Heo Sung, the son of a revered revolutionary leader, is rescued from a life of rural poverty in order to study Law in Seoul. Passing the bar exam, the young man rises to become head of the household he once served with his marriage to the homeowner's fickle daughter, Jeong-son. Typical of director Kim Ki-young's female protagonists, Jeong-son is presented as both stubborn and neurotic, yet also progressive with an attitude utterly unique in Korean cinema of the time. When Heo Sung returns to the village of his youth and finds the poor farmers suffering abuse at the hands of the Japanese occupiers, the ideological young lawyer commits to staying in the village to help. This neglect angers a wife already unhappy at being married to a 'yokel' and the increasingly bitter relationship threatens to destroy both their lives.

With *Earth*, idiosyncratic auteur Kim Ki-young (*The Housemaid*, 1960) tackles the adaptation of one of the works of Yi Kwang-su, who is celebrated as the author of the first Korean modern novel. Yi's works have frequently been the subject of film-adaptations, with this 1972 effort being the third version of the 1932 novel to be brought to screen.

*THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THE BOOK IS AVAILABLE IN THE KCCUK LIBRARY.

THURS 12TH APRIL, 7PM | KCCUK

The Descendants of Cain

카인의 후예

ORIGINAL NOVEL BY HWANG SUN-WON



YEAR: 1968

DIRECTOR: YU HYUN-MOK

CAST: KIM JIN-KYU
MOON HEE
PARK NO-SIK
JANG DONG-HWI

113 MINS / ENG SUBS

The Descendants of Cain opens on a village celebration of Korea's recent liberation from Japanese rule. Amidst the drinking and dancing, petty rivalries simmer, when the party is suddenly interrupted by the threatening presence of returning husband, Cheo. Now an officer of the Workers' Party, Cheo is back to implement land reform, removing property from the hands of wealthy landowners and redistributing it amongst the peasant farmers. One such landowner is Park Han, a respected local figure and founder of the school that the newly appointed Workers' Party have taken as their base. Cheo's wife Ojaknyeo works for Park; a real admiration exists between the two, even if Park's deep sense of propriety means it cannot be expressed. While this socially impossible relationship plays out, Ojaknyeo's father Do-seop falls in with the brutal communist party and its efforts to turn the villagers against the landowners with promises of property and power.

A striking piece of anti-communist propaganda, *The Descendants of Cain* is one of many such films in the canon of revered film activist, educator, and director Yu Hyun-mok. Adapted from Hwang Sun-won's autobiographical novel, both author and director shared similar experiences with those depicted in the film.

*THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THE BOOK IS AVAILABLE IN THE KCCUK LIBRARY.

THURS 26TH APRIL, 7PM | KCCUK

White Badge

하얀전장

ORIGINAL NOVEL BY AHN JUNGHYO



YEAR: 1992

DIRECTOR: CHUNG JI-YOUNG

CAST: AHN SUNG-KI
LEE GYOUNG-YOUNG
SHIM HYE-JIN
DOKO YOUNG-JAE

124 MINS / ENG SUBS

Writer Han Ki-jo exists in a kind of daze, floating between his cramped apartment, his editor's office and into and out of the lives of his various friends and acquaintances. A Vietnam veteran, Han earns money by publishing articles on his experiences while carrying ambition to someday write a novel on the subject, if he can ever bring himself to put the traumatic tale down on the page. When an old comrade from his Vietnam War days comes back into his life, Han is forced to recount the terrible war-time experiences that have left the lives of both men in ruins. With a career stretching back to the 1950s, Ahn Sung-ki is considered one of Korea's finest actors; he carries the film here as Han, while ably supported by a standout turn from fellow acting veteran Lee Kyeong-yeong as the damaged Pyon.

Between 1964 and 1973 South Korea, second only to the United States itself, dispatched the most troops of any nation to the Vietnam War. Renowned writer and translator Ahn Junghyo's first novel *White Badge* recounts a soldier's view of the war as drawn from the novelist's own personal experience as a war correspondent during the conflict.

*THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THE BOOK IS AVAILABLE IN THE KCCUK LIBRARY.

THURS 10TH MAY, 7PM | KCCUK

A Petal

꽃잎

ORIGINAL NOVEL BY CHOE YUN



YEAR: 1996

DIRECTOR: JANG SUN-WOO

CAST: MOON SUNG-KEUN
LEE JUNG-HYUN
LEE YOUNG-RAN
YOO SOON-CHUL

101 MINS / ENG SUBS

ALSO SHOWING AT DEPTFORD CINEMA ON 22ND MAY AT 7PM

*THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THE BOOK IS AVAILABLE IN THE KCCUK LIBRARY.

Stumbling along rivers and roads in tattered, ill-fitting clothes, an unnamed girl trails a vulgar and violent man. Refusing to leave his side no matter how much the man beats, berates, and sexually assaults her, the girl follows him home. The question of what led to the mental collapse and subsequent ruination of this once happy child provides the framework for a film that attempts to address the trauma of the Gwangju Uprising on the psyche of the Korean people. Director Jang Sun-woo (*Lies*, 1999) uses impressionistic flashbacks, sometimes monochrome, sometimes in startling, child-like animation, to bring a dark memory of recent history onto the screen.

Last year's *A Taxi Driver* (Jang Hoon) gave the blockbuster treatment to the same historic event, but its tragedy is arguably more powerful when viewed through the eyes of Jang Sun-woo's broken protagonist, as taken from the pages of Ch'oe Yun's short story, *There a Petal Falls*.

THURS 24TH MAY, 7PM | KCCUK

The Old Garden

오래된 정원

ORIGINAL NOVEL BY HWANG SOK-YONG



YEAR: 2007

DIRECTOR: IM SANG-SOO

CAST: JI JIN-HI

YUM JUNG-AH

KIM EUNG-SOO

KIM HYUN-AH

112 MINS / 12 CERT. / ENG SUBS

Anti-government protests provide the stimulus for Im Sang-soo's romantic drama that charts a love affair across the years. In *The Old Garden*, we first meet activist Hyun-woo as he's released from prison after a 17-year stint. Years of cramped, often solitary, confinement have seemingly taken their toll on Hyun-woo, who appears to find difficulty communicating with his family, but in actuality the man's mind is in another place. Journeying back to the village where he spent some time as a fugitive, he recalls the time spent with Yoon-hee, a woman who gave him shelter and companionship. While the time spent together was curtailed by Hyun-woo's commitment to his political ideology, it seems Yoon-hee never forgot him, and amongst the letters and diaries that recount the time following his arrest, an even greater gift is waiting to be found.

The film comes courtesy of a novel by Hwang Sok-yong, one of Korea's most celebrated novelists and a political activist in his own right who, like Hyun-woo, spent time in prison for violating the National Security Law.

*THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THE BOOK IS AVAILABLE IN THE KCCUK LIBRARY.

THURS 7TH JUNE, 7PM | KCCUK

The Unfair

소수의견

ORIGINAL NOVEL BY SON ARAM



YEAR: 2015

DIRECTOR: KIM SUNG-JE

CAST: YOON KYE-SANG

YOO HAE-JIN

KIM OK-VIN

LEE GYOUNGYOUNG

JANG KWANG

127 MINS / 15 CERT. / ENG SUBS

ALSO SHOWING AT DEPTFORD CINEMA ON 19TH JUNE AT 7PM

*THE KOREAN VERSION OF THE BOOK IS AVAILABLE IN THE KCCUK LIBRARY.

Amidst a messy construction site skirmish at which police officers and hired thugs are attempting to oust a group of protesters, a young cop is killed along with the even younger son of an activist. While the boy's father admits to killing the officer, he claims it was in an attempt to protect his son from the dead officer's fatal beating. Into this sticky and charged situation arrives inexperienced public defender Jin-won (played by Yoon Kyung-sang), his kind-hearted yet trouble-avoiding senior Dae-sok, and a reporter desperate to break the story, Soo-kyung. Reluctant to take on the case at first, Jin-won eventually sympathises with the plight of the father, and takes it to trial. As the case escalates, political corruption and illicit deals are uncovered that lead to the very top of the social ladder.

In *The Unfair*, an all-star cast brings Son Aram's courtroom novel to life in producer-turned-director Kim Sung-je's debut directorial feature. The story echoes the events of the Yongsan Tragedy, when residents protesting the redevelopment of a neighbourhood were forcibly evicted leading to several deaths, including that of a police officer.

THURS 28TH JUNE, 7PM | KCCUK

My Brilliant Life

두근두근 내 인생

+ Q&A WITH AUTHOR OF ORIGINAL NOVEL KIM AE-RAN



YEAR: 2014

DIRECTOR: E J-YONG

CAST: SONG HYE-KYO
KIM SEUNG-WOOK
GANG DONG-WON
BAEK IL-SEOB

117 MINS / 12 CERT. / ENG SUBS

My Brilliant Life presents an idyllic image of youth and innocence as it recounts the first dream-like encounter of Mira and Dae-su at the tender age of 17. Falling in love, pregnancy and giving up on their future in order to raise their child may seem like an abrupt entry into the adult world, but it's nothing compared to the experience that lies ahead for their son, Ahreum. While the parents (played by stars Song Hye-kyo and Gang Dong-won) are the very image of youth, Ahreum has Progeria Syndrome, a condition that results in rapid aging and a variety of medical ailments. Ahreum fights for life with the aid of his loving parents, elderly best friend and neighbour Mr. Jang and the crew of a fundraising TV show documenting his life. Gentle humour underscores the drama throughout the film as the poetic words of the exceptional Ahreum narrate a message of life and love in the face of extreme difficulty.

Kim Ae-ran's literary debut *No Knocking in This House* won the first Daesan Literary Award in 2002; the author has subsequently picked up many others including the Hankook Ilbo Literary Award and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism's Today's Young Artist Award. Kim's 2011 novel *The Youngest Parents with the Oldest Child* was adapted to the screen in 2014 by E J-yong as *My Brilliant Life*.

*THE ENGLISH VERSION OF THE BOOK IS AVAILABLE IN THE KCCUK LIBRARY.

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ATTENDING KOREAN FILM NIGHTS

Admission is free, but booking is required for each screening. To reserve your place, please visit www.kccuk.org.uk

Selected titles from this programme will be shown again at various venues outside the KCCUK. 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:
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