

Korean Cultural Centre UK presents

KOREAN FILM NIGHTS 2018

JULY TO AUGUST



**REBELS
WITH
A CAUSE**

KOREAN FILM NIGHTS 2018

The Korean Cultural Centre UK would like to welcome audiences to Korean Film Nights, our year-round programme of film screenings and talks. After a successful 2017 that saw audiences pack into screenings across three distinct film seasons, 2018 continues in a similar vein, splitting the year into two strands: *Korean Novels on Screen*, running from March to June, and *Rebels with a Cause*, running from July to August.

With this year's second season, *Rebels with a Cause*, we focus on determined individuals who have defied the cultural norms of their time, foreshadowing a new direction for Korean society. Rebels can come in all shapes and sizes - from persecuted persons fighting a battle for freedom against tyrannical oppressors, to ordinary people who summon the courage to depart from the norm. It is such individuals (whether they be students, blue-collar workers, teachers, monks or soldiers) who provide the focus for the current series.

Our 'rebels with a cause' have had different inspirations. Some fight against oppressive regimes imposed upon the Korean people. Others are moved, whether by worldwide trends, or simply by a stirring within themselves, to fight against the status-quo. The most notable of the former arose during the Japanese colonial period during the first half of the 20th century. Oppression was rife; when the forced conscription of Koreans into the Japanese army began, there were examples of overt and covert rebellion from within. It is this resistance against the brutality of the Japanese commanders that forms the focus of Kim Ki-young's epic, *The Sea Knows* (1961).

Liberation from the Japanese would not signal the end of oppression for the Korean people. Under a series of repressive and corrupt government regimes, the minjung movement began to grow in opposition. This movement - banding together ordinary workers, students and intellectuals - was a social and cultural reaction against government forces, political brutality, and American dominance. *Black Republic* (Park Kwang-su, 1990) boldly, yet subtly, tackles the inner tensions that bubbled beneath the surface as the anti-government movement brought together those from such starkly different social, economic and academic backgrounds.

It was not just repression from within that galvanized our rebels; others have taken inspiration from outside of Korea. The 1960s marked the start of monumental shifts in the status and liberation of women worldwide. The seeds of this struggle and its clashes with traditional expectations of women are boldly confronted by South Korea's second female director, Hong Eun-won, in *A Woman Judge* (1962). Hong, who endeavoured to make the 'female gaze' the epicentre of her work, was indeed a rebel in and of herself.

The 1960s were also ripe with youth rebellion throughout the world. The decade opened for Korea with tremendous political turmoil that widened both the economic gap between rich and poor, as well as the ideological gap between the older and younger generations. *The Barefooted Young* (Kim Ki-duk, 1964) infuses an even mix of optimism and pessimism, portraying the bold confidence at the time of young people's efforts to resist the established social structure, whilst not denying the entrenched economic and class inequalities.

In more recent decades, Korea has been influenced by worldwide movements exploring sexuality. In *Bungee Jumping of Their Own* (2001), Director Kim Dae-seung focuses on the possibility that a man could be attracted to both a woman and a man. This attempt to transcend traditional notions of gender speaks to a more open contemporary audience by anchoring a timeless love story in a quasi-fantastical tale of romantic obsession. The film's tapestry, rich in colours and breathtaking shots, gives meaning to our protagonist's quest to be accepted as, simply, a man who has fallen in love.

Still there remain other rebels whose inspiration for rebellion arose from within themselves. These internal conflicts form the crux of Im Kwon-taek's *Mandala* (1981), in which two unlikely-matched monks embarking on a journey across Korea confront these inner battles through conversations and reflections on existence, religion and individualism. *Mandala* deals with a subject-matter that transcends the long history of Buddhism in Korea, stimulating the audience to reflect upon the modern world and one's own position in it.

All in all, we hope that you are both intrigued and enlightened by the rebels we have chosen for this series. We also dare to aspire that you feel for, if not with them, for the bravery with which they pursue their causes.

Birkbeck University Film Programming & Curating 2018 MA Students

INTERVIEW WITH KIM DAE-SEUNG, DIRECTOR OF *BUNGEE JUMPING OF THEIR OWN*

Director Kim Dae-seung is currently working on his next film project, with preparation beginning in earnest when the 'Rebels With a Cause' season begins. While Kim cannot be here with us at this time, we took the opportunity to ask the acclaimed filmmaker a few questions on *Bungee Jumping of Their Own*, his directorial debut.

MICKEY LA ROSA: This is a striking debut feature. Can you tell us how the project came about - did the script come to you or did you have to pursue it?

KIM DAE-SEUNG: In this case, the originator of the project was the screenwriter - we planned the project together, having had the producer's support for the writer's idea. It was a production where the script had already been written when I received the request to direct it.

After I finished my work as Im Kwon-taek's assistant director for *Chunhyang*, I made efforts to direct my own script. However, just like with many other Korean directors, my plans were rejected by producers and I was hurt.

Then, to my good fortune, I was asked to direct *Bungee Jumping of Their Own*, for which film distribution was already in place. (It seems that there was an expectation that I would make a success of the project because, even though I was a newcomer, I had studied film under Im Kwon-taek.)

I must admit, when I first read the script, I was a little uneasy with the fact that it was not your standard sweet melodrama. Nevertheless, in the end it was this uneasiness that motivated me to accept the role as director for this film, because I was young back then and there was a side to me that somehow enjoyed taking risks.

MLR: I see this as a film of two halves, exploring both heterosexual and homosexual love, even though you can argue that - ultimately - love transcends gender. Was it a difficult proposition to make in South Korea back in 2001?

KD: There is a scene in which In-woo, having felt his attraction for a same-sex student to be strange, consults a psychiatrist who tells him: '[Your test results are] quite normal [... you're normally attracted

to women.]’ It was only after the film was released and I received a letter of protest from a gay viewer that I realised how big of a mistake I made. Is being gay abnormal? It was an instance where I, as someone who normally takes a lot of interest in the disadvantaged and who takes pride in being progressive, became aware of how ignorant I was with matters related to homosexuality, along with how insensitive I was to gay people’s isolation and pain.

The fact that I, as the director, am not homosexual and was largely ignorant of issues surrounding homosexuality did not turn out to raise any problems. This is because I did not consider it important that some people might have viewed the type of love the film depicted as homosexual love. No, rather, I must say that I was scared that someone would. In Korean society, there are many people who consider homosexuality as a ‘preference’, or view the existence of gay people as something that messes up the rules decided by the gods. Even though it has already been ten or so years since the film was made, during the period in which this film was being produced, there was much more abhorrence toward homosexuality than now. That is why I was worried that the film could become known solely for being the ‘gay box office hit’. I, of course, knew that the film’s subject of ‘despite everything, I still love you’ and its plot, which deals with reincarnation, would stimulate a debate on homosexuality. However, just like what Peter did on the dawn of Jesus’s crucifixion, in press interviews and in conversations with the audience, I said that it was not a film about homosexuality. I’m ashamed of that now.

MLR: I am interested in the dynamic among the three talented lead actors. Did you audition them separately or did you pair them up in search of the perfect chemistry? Did your budget allow for pre-shoot rehearsals?

KD: In Korea, the male lead usually gets cast first. This is because male lead actors are seen as having the most box office power. First, Lee Byung-hun was cast, then Lee Eun-ju, and afterwards Yeo Hyun-soo was chosen through an audition.

We experienced a lot of luck in casting, particularly in terms of how we were able to cast Lee Byung-hun, who had just finished filming director Park Chan-wook’s *JSA*, and Lee Eun-ju, who had just finished filming director Hong Sang-soo’s *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*. It was my great fortune to have met these two lead actors who came to me

after a turning point in their acting careers working with great directors. On the one hand, we had Lee Byung-hun, an actor who is meticulous in his analysis and interpretation of the script. On the other hand, we had Lee Eun-ju who, perhaps because of the influence of Hong Sang-soo, is more inclined to trust herself to the atmosphere of a scene and the flow of emotion. Maybe this was why the harmony between the two actors was so good on set.

In the case of Yeo Hyun-soo, there were some critics who asked why a boy with prettier features was not cast, but my sentiments differed. I didn’t want to cast someone with the typical ‘pretty-boy’ looks, given that it [the film] is a story about loving ‘despite everything’.

[Regarding your second question], even though I was a new director, there were very few opportunities to rehearse before the shoot.

MLR: The film brims with symbolism, in particular the spoon reflecting an image as it is or upside down depending on the side you are looking at - clearly addressing the sexuality issue. Is symbolism important in your films?

KD: If you are going to talk about symbolism, shouldn’t it be recognised universally? Although you can see different images in the spoon’s reflection depending on the angle, I think it is a little difficult to symbolise the diversity of love with that. (Wouldn’t it be a little odd to carry around a spoon with the intention to show support for LGBTQ+ people?)

Rather, I focused on the fact of two people sharing curiosity about the same thing. For instance, I can see how the school that Seo In-woo worked at as a teacher, the train and the station, etc., can be viewed as having been used symbolically. I hoped for the reaction of the children in In-woo and Hyun-bin’s class and others at the school to be seen as a single aspect of the then exclusive and conservative Korean society. I thought that it would be good to symbolise that reality [of Korean society] with things like the students’ reaction and their behaviour when rumours spread that In-woo was treating Hyun-bin strangely. There were people who were fiercely opposed [to the way In-woo treated Hyun-bin] and there were people who were yet to pick a side, but I tried to bring out things like herd mentality by directing in a way to show that even those who had not chosen sides got swept up in the end by those who strongly asserted their views.

Also, since this is a film that deals with the past and the present, I wanted a neutral space where the two time periods overlapped, this being the station and the train. I repeatedly used the train and the station to mark the passage of time. Both locations were used to symbolise the place where In-woo's memories had come to a standstill and later brought back to life through reincarnation.

MLR: In terms of LGBTQ+ rights and acceptance, how have things changed in your country over the last twenty years?

KD: I do not know if this is a question I can answer, because I am not the party concerned, nor do I really know how the respective parties feel. As I told you, around about the time *Bungee Jumping of Their Own* was released, the people in the production and marketing teams were extremely nervous about this film becoming known for dealing with LGBTQ+ issues. Furthermore, there were some people who pleaded with me not to attend the San Francisco LGBT Film Festival, to which I was officially invited. Don't you think this sort of attitude reflects the atmosphere of society?

Korea is a country where the Pride Festival puts on a grand display every year, whereas, on the other side, there are conservative Christians who pour out unspeakable profanities in response to the parade. Nevertheless, recently there was a TV debate where this issue was discussed by presidential candidates. Although the conversation didn't go too deep, the fact that a discussion around this subject took place shows us a lot has changed.

Recently there was an incident where the Film Studies students of the university I worked at put up a poster about this issue. It pointed out the mistake of a certain professor who expressed an opinion on homosexuality which could have been easily misunderstood during a lesson. Similarly, even though it is only one part [of a wider issue], I think it's clear that the number of people who are promoting diversity and freedom of choice is increasing.

At any rate, it's certain that things are moving forward slowly, but surely.

(Translation: Britcent)

THURSDAY, 19TH JULY, 7PM | KCCUK

BUNGEE JUMPING OF THEIR OWN

번지점프를 하다



YEAR: 2001

DIRECTOR: KIM DAE-SEUNG

CAST: LEE BYUNG-HUN
LEE EUN-JU
YE0 HYEON-SOO
HONG SOO-HYUN

101 MINS / ENG SUBS

INTRODUCTION BY
MICKEY LA ROSA

In 1983, college freshman In-woo falls for fellow student Tae-hee. His relentless pursuit pays off when, during a hike, they declare their mutual love and decide to seal it with a bungee jump in New Zealand. At the moment of leaving Seoul, In-woo waits in vain at the station for Tae-hee, who never shows up. Seventeen years later, In-woo - now a high school teacher with a family of his own - starts seeing idiosyncrasies of his former lover in a male student, and slowly becomes obsessed with him. As the mystery of who this boy might be unfolds, In-woo must deal with gay jibes and his own memories of Tae-hee to try and make sense of it all.

A powerful romantic drama that tries to answer the question: can love endure forever? Using a cyclical structure, Director Kim Dae-seung opens and closes his film following the course of a river, which suggests that love is never-ending, just as the current that never stops. He elevates love above and beyond classifications such as sexuality, boldly challenging notions of heterosexism and what constitutes the 'norm'.

Mickey La Rosa

THURSDAY 26TH JULY, 7PM | KCCUK

THE SEA KNOWS

현해탄은 알고 있다



YEAR: 1961

DIRECTOR: KIM KI-YOUNG

CAST: KIM WUN-HA
GONG MIDORI
LEE SANG-SA
LEE YE-CHUN

119 MINS / ENG SUBS

CONVERSATION BETWEEN
DANIELLE CAPRETTI AND
DR MARK MORRIS

In 1944, Japan is conscripting Koreans into the Imperial Army. Students Arowoon and Inoue are forced to journey across the sea to Nagoya, where they face gross mistreatment from their sadistic Japanese superior, Mori. Nevertheless, they retain their defiant spirit in both word and deed. When Arowoon ventures outside the barracks, he encounters another side to Japan through a young woman called Hideko. Although she is Japanese, he defies convention, yet again, by falling in love with her. He finds solace in her tenderness and resolute devotion, despite the fierce opposition to their union. However, their 'Romeo and Juliet' story takes a terrifying turn when the war threatens not only their lives, but also that of their unborn child. Will fate grant this unconventional pair a happier ending than Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers?

Kim Ki-young, originator of the grotesque in Korean film, explores the full horrors of World War II in this epic. At the same time, he rails against racial prejudice, providing hope for a more egalitarian future with his defiant lovers. Kim considered *The Sea Knows* amongst his best works in his maverick career as a 'cineaste who went ahead of the times' (*KoFA*).

Danielle Capretti

THURSDAY 2ND AUGUST, 7PM | KCCUK

A WOMAN JUDGE

여판사



YEAR: 1962

DIRECTOR: HONG EUN-WON

CAST: SEUNG-HO KIM
JUNG-SUK MOON
YU GYE-SEON
KIM SEOK-HUN

87 MINS / ENG SUBS

INTRODUCTION BY
JOHAN HALLSTROM

A young, determined woman, Jin-suk, has her mind set on becoming a judge. Encouraged by her father who sends her off to a monastery to focus on her studies, and despite her mother's fervent efforts to marry her off to a wealthy suitor, Jin-suk defiantly follows her own path. With those around her doing nothing but oppose and obstruct, should she relent and follow the route society expects of her, or can she go against all odds and fulfil her dream?

Hong Eun-won, the second woman in Korea to direct a film, said that she was "...interested in making films that depicted the lives of women, but seen through a woman's eyes rather than imagined by male writers and directors." In taking this approach, Hong boldly challenged both the melodramatic portrayals of women in Korean cinema of the time, and the directorial world that remains to this date monopolised by men not just in Korea, but across the rest of the world.

Johan Hallstrom

THURSDAY 9TH AUGUST, 7PM | KCCUK

THE BAREFOOTED YOUNG

맨발의 청춘



YEAR: 1964

DIRECTOR: KIM KI-DUK

CAST: SHIN SEONG-IL
UM AENG-RAN
YOON IL-BONG
LEE YEA-CHUN

115 MINS / ENG SUBS

INTRODUCTION BY
EMILY STEELE

Adolescent films first gained widespread popularity in Korea during the 1960s; of these, *The Barefooted Young* (or *Barefooted Youth*, as it is sometimes translated) is the best-known example. In the film, Doo-soo - a lower class gangster - stumbles across a group of thugs harassing two young women. He intervenes, saving the women but getting himself injured in the process. When one of the women, a diplomat's daughter named Johanna, comes to thank him in person, the two begin a relationship. Whilst highlighting the vast socio-economic gap between Doo-soo's underworld and the upper class existence of Johanna, the film reflects the rise of youth culture in the 1960s. Moreover, it portrays the rebellion and force for change bubbling beneath a rigid class structure, as well as its repercussions.

Kim Ki-duk (1934–2017), whilst best known outside of Korea for his 1967 monster film *Yongary*, was one of the leading young directors of the Korean cinematic wave of the 1960s and made distinctive and successful melodramas. *The Barefooted Young* is Kim Ki-duk's rallying cry against social inequality and class barriers with its effective use of melodrama and romance.

Emily Steele

THURSDAY 16TH AUGUST, 7PM | KCCUK

MANDALA

만다라



YEAR: 1981

DIRECTOR: IM KWON-TAEK

CAST: AHN SUNG-KI
JEON MOO-SONG
BANG HEE
GI JEONG-SU

112 MINS / ENG SUBS

INTRODUCTION BY
VLADIMIR SEPUT

Set in contemporary Korea, *Mandala* follows two rather different characters: Pob-un, a young Buddhist monk who has decided to quit his university studies and leave his doting girlfriend, instead embarking upon a search for answers regarding the futility of human existence, and Ji-san, an elderly, rather unconventional monk who indulges all life's earthly pleasures, particularly alcohol. The two meet by chance on the road in rural Korea and together they start a journey of self-discovery, reflecting upon the issues of freedom of choice, religious devotion and enlightenment.

Based on an eponymous bestselling book by Kim Seong-dong, *Mandala* was regarded as the breakthrough film of Im's career, and was one of the rare Korean films of its time to also be screened internationally. A contemplative work that avoids clichés about religion and meditation, *Mandala* is one of Im's two main works dealing with Buddhism (the other being *Come Come Come Upward*, 1989) and a truly poetic film, with its symbolism and imagery perfectly complemented by its ethereal soundtrack and cinematography.

Vladimir Seput

THURSDAY 23RD AUGUST, 7PM | KCCUK

BLACK REPUBLIC

그들도 우리처럼



YEAR: 1990

DIRECTOR: PARK KWANG-SU

CAST: MOON SUNG-KEUN
PARK JOONG-HOON
SHIM HYE-JIN
HWANG HAE

102 MINS / ENG SUBS

INTRODUCTION BY
RAQUEL MORAIS

Opening on a pitch black screen, we begin to hear a voice: it is the words of the mother of the protagonist, Han Tae-hoon, a student who becomes involved in the Korean democratisation movement of the 1980s. The woman's voice stands for both mother and country, a land then plunged into darkness. Tae-hoon flees from the authorities using a fake identity and seeks refuge in a mining village, but the state-repressive forces are not the only ghost he is trying to escape - the lingering thought of the possible failure of the democratisation movement never ceases to haunt him. Tae-hoon does not belong in his chosen hideout; his presence starkly reveals the undeniable tensions between intellectuals and blue-collar workers, a division permeating through the minjung movement.

Ten years after the Gwangju Uprising, Park Kwangu-su revisited that traumatic period in the history of contemporary Korea. Park's early filmography echoes the same social tensions and Tae-hoon, like his other male protagonists (see *Chilsu and Mansu*, 1988; *To the Starry Island*, 1993), poignantly embodies the opposition between the individual and the masses.

Raquel Morais

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ATTENDING KOREAN FILM NIGHTS

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