

AKANGA FILM ASIA, MM2 ENTERTAINMENT, FILMS DE FORCE MAJEURE & VOLYA FILMS

present

in association with 13 LITTLE PICTURES with the participation of SINGAPORE FILM COMMISSION
and L'AIDE AUX CINEMAS DU MONDE, CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINEMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMEE

MINISTERE DE L'EUROPE ET DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES, INSTITUT FRANCAIS and
HUBERT BALS FUND OF INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL ROTTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS FILM FUND

A LAND IMAGINED

a film by
YEO SIEW HUA



Locarno Festival
Concorso internazionale

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TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Written and Directed by YEO Siew Hua
Produced by Fran BORGIA
Co-Producers Gary GOH, Jean-Laurent CSINIDIS, Denis VASLIN
Executive Producers Melvin ANG, NG Say Yong
Associate Producer Dan KOH
Director of Photography Hideho URATA
Production Designer James PAGE
Costumer Designer Meredith LEE
Editor Daniel HUI
Sound Designer Damien GUILLAUME
Sound Mixer Gilles BENARDEAU
Music Composer TEO Wei Yong

Countries Singapore, France, The Netherlands
Duration 95 minutes
Language Mandarin, English, Bengali
Image Colour
Screening Format 2K DCP / 5.1 mix / 1:2,39 Scope
Shooting Format ARRI Alexa
Shooting Locations Singapore, Malaysia

CAST

Lok Peter YU
Wang LIU Xiaoyi
Mindy Luna KWOK
Jason Jack TAN
Ajit Ishtiaque ZICO
George Kelvin HO
Foreman Lee George LOW
Ming Ming Andie CHEN

LOGLINE

After forming a virtual friendship with a mysterious gamer, Wang, a lonely construction worker from China, goes missing at a Singapore land reclamation site. Lok, a police investigator, has to uncover the truth in order to find him.

SYNOPSIS

Set in industrial Singapore, police investigator Lok must find missing migrant worker Wang.

Wang suffers a worksite accident and is anxious about repatriation. Unable to sleep, Wang starts frequenting a dreamy cybercafé in the dead of the night. Hoping to look for some form of human connection in this foreign land he feels alienated from, Wang forms a virtual friendship with a mysterious gamer that takes a sinister turn.

When Wang suddenly disappears, Lok digs deep into the trail leading to a land reclamation site, in order to uncover the truth beneath all that sand.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Singapore has garnered itself a reputation as a modern economic miracle, turning itself from a fishing village to a thriving modern economy over the short period of only a few decades.

Such a feat is possible due to its ability to systematically engineer a land designed through land reclamation and endless construction projects. By perpetually reshaping itself, it negates natural geographical formations, rendering them into perfectly straight and angular shorelines – a land as though imagined up by some geometrical mind.

Even the people on this imaginary land are at the same time equally imagined. As a country of immigrants, its demography is wholly dependent on migration policies and economic considerations. New migrants are brought into the fold to reinvigorate the imagination of this economic miracle – a success story that is built upon the backs of low wage migrant labourers from the region who are hired to build a nation they can never become a part of.

The Cost of Imaginations

These indentured workers live in the outskirts of the restless city; existing in the blind spot of larger society; their exploitation remains unseen. They are the invisible and imaginary – they are the sleepless, the dreamless.

With no recourse for grievances, the migrant workers live in precarity. The constant fear of repatriation, with debt incurred from training and agency fees even before they start to work and earn, continue to entrap them in their wretched situation.

What should happen if they go missing? Who would look for them? Would anyone even care to know? The film is premised on these questions by an unwilling police investigator, looking for a missing worker whose migrant working-class reality is so far removed from his own that it seems a far cry to

reconcile. Yet that is exactly what he must do to find the missing worker and solve the case.

Transformation through Social Imaginaries

In developing this film, I too found it difficult to write about a group of people whose lives are so inextricably interwoven with mine, but yet so different from my own. It took me three years to research this topic from both the political and the human level – the migrant workers I interviewed, the company that employs them, the NGOs and activists who represent them and the government who must ultimately protect them.

But I found that approaching the topic from the outside was just not enough. I wanted to know their dreams and their fears, their joys and their jokes; I needed to know what keeps them up at night. So I spent my days with them over a long period of time and started to see them in a new light, not just as a function of society but every bit as human. I found myself transformed like the character of the police investigator in my film and hope to share this new light, through the projection of cinema, with my audience.

Yeo Siew Hua

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY



YEO Siew Hua (杨修华)

YEO Siew Hua studied philosophy at the National University of Singapore and is a member of the 13 Little Pictures film collective. He wrote and directed the experimental film, *IN THE HOUSE OF STRAW* (2009). He participated in the 2015 edition of Talents Tokyo and pitched at Autumn Meeting 2016, where he won the Grand Prix for his second fiction feature, *A LAND IMAGINED* (2018). The film also took part in the Asia Pacific Screen Lab 2017 and is a recipient of the Hubert Bals Fund and the Aide aux Cinema du Monde.

IN THE HOUSE OF STRAW (2009) 103 min - Writer/Director

Bangkok International Film Festival 2009
Singapore International Film Festival 2009
Sao Paulo International Film Festival 2010

WHITE DAYS (2009) 90 min - Writer

Singapore International Film Festival 2009
Hong Kong International Film Festival 2009
Bueno Aires International Festival of Independent Films 2010

Imagining a Land: The Sleepless, the Dreaming and the Fold
AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR YEO SIEW HUA BY PHILIP CHEAH

A LAND IMAGINED delves into land reclamation, migrant labour, dreams and sleeplessness—subjects that are not seen in relation to one another. What led you to conceive of this mix of themes?

The film is the culmination of my thoughts on the island-state where I live and work. This is a land that has been “reclaiming” itself since before its inception as a nation and has never stopped filling its seas with sand to expand its land mass. Much of this sand is imported from other countries, like the labour that is brought here to help reshape this land.

What I find problematic, is that most of the discourse I gather about the migrant workforce is concerned with social integration and rhetoric on being good “hosts” to the “guests”, without ever dealing with the root cause that divides us-and-them, all the while perpetuating the othering effect of the alien(ation). It is why this film seeks, not only to expose the structural exploitation at work but more importantly, humanize through understanding that they too have hopes and dreams.

Because to dream is to be able to transform and transformation is life. On the other hand, sleeplessness -or the inability to think beyond the confines of the self and imagine the other- is a form of death. This death is experienced by Lok, the police investigator who is stuck in his own privileged life of solitude until he is finally able to dream again and reunite in the revelry of life.

We see a mix of genres too, with elements of the investigative thriller, the police procedural, social realist drama, and a lingering sense of film noir. Why was it important for you to refer to these forms in A LAND IMAGINED?

Like all good mysteries, the police investigative format is able to draw an audience into participation in solving the case. The film seeks to make complicit the audience in the search of Wang, by placing themselves in the environment of the migrant worker and living out his experience, in the process creating an empathetic need to understand the character and his world.

As a film that tries to provoke a change in perspective, it is useful for me to employ genre conventions that come with their own set expectations. Shifting between an investigative thriller and a social realist drama, the film takes on a fluidity that subverts these expectations and questions the audience what they are watching, instead of being passive spectators to the events unfolding before them.

The use of film noir tropes was deliberate to set a mood and a way to enter the film. I want to signal to the audience that the problems our characters have to work through

are not merely skin-deep plot intrigue, but a complex labyrinth of the mind, like most noir films. Since a large part of the film is set in the night, creating the right noir ambience effectively brought out a certain quality of my sleepless characters as they drift through a city that is at once familiar yet strange. It was also an interesting experiment in creating a noir film in the tropics with the monsoon pouring down on us, resulting in a “wet noir” look that I found beautiful and uniquely refreshing.

There is a distinct structural shift of time, space and perspective in the middle of the film that seems to go beyond a flashback. Were there certain ideas of identity and the flux of time at play here? In a certain way, this is the magic realism of your film.

Employing a structure that plays with a certain folding of time beyond a mere flashback was my way of melding two seemingly disparate perspectives into a singularity. The transformation of these perspectives is strung together by their dreaming of each other; the one who finds and the one who wants to be found.

However, it is important that this dreaming is not reduced to a mere hallucination, so as not to trivialize the very real plight of those who are oppressed by their conditions. I wish to challenge my audience in constructing the film’s multiple perspectives, while retaining the veracity of the story I have created based on real-life experiences, told to me by those of the migrant communities I have spoken to.

This magic realism that I have been developing since my previous film *IN THE HOUSE OF STRAW*, de-familiarizes the everyday encounters and puts in question the so-called “facts” that I would like my audience to take a closer look and reflect upon. It is also akin to my own experience of living in a city like Singapore where I feel, at the same time, at home and an alien to.

What drew you to your multinational cast - including the veteran Singaporean actor Peter Yu, Liu Xiaoyi from China who lives and is based in Singapore, Jack Tan from Malaysia, Luna Kwok (Guo Yue) from China and Ishtiaque Zico from Bangladesh - for their roles?

In trying to create a story about migrants, it was important for me to cast the right mix of voices in my film. We spent a long time picking the right actors and I am delighted by the wonderful chemistry between them that this diversity has brought to the film. Although not exhaustively so, but in a way, it is a microcosm of the melting pot of cultures from the context where I am from.

I would add that not just the cast but even the crew is of a multinational mix. My main collaborators, including producer Fran Borgia from Spain, cinematographer Hideho Urata from Japan and production designer James Page from the UK, have all contributed in bringing their own brand of sensibility to the film. Even when they have

all lived in Singapore for a long time, they were able to give an outsider's insight into the portrayal of the migrant experience represented in the film.

There is a note of the strange in your depiction of the seemingly mundane construction site and the cybercafé where they are also online much of the time. What is this land you are ultimately imagining for the film?

Set mostly in the industrial west of Singapore, the film explores a landscape that is not the familiar glitzy skyscraper, but the ugly machinery tucked away at the fringe that runs it. When I first visited the construction work site for my research, I remember my body was thrown into shock from the harsh conditions faced everyday by the workers. The merciless sand blowing incessantly at one's face and the brutal cacophony of noise generated from the machines was utterly unbearable.

Much of the visual and audio design of the film is based on my wanting to capture this reality and present it on screen. I don't believe such working conditions are something that one can ever get used to, so it was a conscious decision to heighten the experience of the work site to a certain intensity and not just a humdrum routine.

The dirt and grime is contrasted to the sordid cybercafé frequent by Wang. Operating twenty-four hours, these cybercafés become a haven for the sleepless and the lonely. It exists as a liminal space between night and day, real and virtual, connection and alienation. Since a large part of our lives are lived out virtually today, I think it is relevant to engage not just on the level of physical lonesome, but also the virtual disconnection when the film weaves its narration through computer gameplay, while playing on our desensitized attitudes towards violence, in all its forms.

Philip Cheah is a film critic and a member on the advisory board of NETPAC.

CAST



PETER YU

Peter Yu (俞宏荣) is a veteran Singaporean actor who was awarded the prestigious Star Award for broadcast TV. Having played in many award-winning television series since the early nineties, Peter has amassed an impressive body of work ranging all genres and is well-loved by his fans who have grown up watching him over the years. More recently, he has ventured into films and starred in the short film FOR WE ARE STRANGERS (2015), which premiered at the 20th Busan International Film Festival. A LAND IMAGINED (2018) is his debut role in a feature film.



LUNA KWOK

Luna Kwok (郭月) is a Chinese actress best known for her outstanding performance in the independent arthouse film, *KAILI BLUES* (2015) where it bagged multiple awards at film festivals around the world like the 68th Locarno International Film Festival, 52nd Taiwan Golden Horse Film Festival, and Nantes Three Continents Film Festival in 2015. Since then, she has starred in a number of films, including *FROM WHERE WE'VE FALLEN* (2017), which competed in the 65th San Sebastian International Film Festival.



LIU XIAOYI

Liu Xiaoyi (刘晓义) is the founder and Artistic Director of Emergency Stairs, experimental theatre company. A committed practitioner with a desire to push artistic boundaries, he is a promising figure at the forefront of the experimental theatre scene in Singapore. Xiaoyi was the recipient of the “Young Artist Award” by the National Arts Council of Singapore in 2016 and is considered one of the most acclaimed male actors from the Singapore theatre scene.



JACK TAN

Jack Tan (陈泽耀) is a Malaysian artiste who started out as a singer before establishing himself as a rising talent as an actor. He has since acted in many Asian films from Taiwan, China as well as Malaysia. In 2017, he acted alongside Golden Horse & Hong Kong Film Awards' Best Actress winner, Sylvia Chang, in the Malaysian film, SHUTTLE LIFE (2017), where he won numerous awards from various festivals, like the "New Talent Award" at the 20th Shanghai International Film Festival, "Best Actor Award" at the 12th Chinese Young Generation Film Forum Awards, and "Best Actor Award" at the 1st ASEAN China Film Festival.



ISHTIAQUE ZICO

Ishtiaque Zico is a filmmaker who runs the Biralpakhi Cine Club – an important initiative for independent film professionals, cine activists and critics in Bangladesh. His short film 720 DEGREES (2010), was the first Bangladeshi film presented at the Venice International Film Festival in 2010. As a Berlinale Talent alumnus, CINEMA, CITY AND CATS is his first feature film project that was pitched at Open Doors Hub of the Locarno Film Festival. A LAND IMAGINED (2018) is Ishtiaque Zico's debut acting role.

CREW

HIDEHO URATA (Director of Photography)

Originally from Japan, Hideho began his career in the United States. One of the feature films KAMATAKI won Best Director, Ecumenical Prize, International Film Critics' Award, Most Popular Canadian Film, and People's Choice Award at Montreal World Film Festival 2005, and Special Mention at Berlin International Film Festival 2006. He won Best Cinematography at Montreal Fantasia Film Festival 2009 and Best Visual Achievement at New York Asian Film Festival 2009 for his work on THE CLONE RETURNS HOME.

JAMES PAGE (Production Designer)

James Page is a UK-born production designer based in Singapore who has been heavily involved in film, television, theatre and commercial works for the past 10 years. He has designed for films such as Boo Junfeng's APPRENTICE (2016, Cannes – Un Certain Regard, Toronto International Film Festival), K. Rajagopal's A YELLOW BIRD (2016, Cannes Film Festival), Ho Tzu Nyen's EARTH (2009, Venice Film Festival) and CLOUD OF UNKNOWING (2011, Venice Biennale, Sundance Film Festival 2012), Boo Junfeng's SANDCASTLE (2010, Cannes Critics' Week), James Leong's CAMERA (2014).

DANIEL HUI (Editor)

Daniel Hui is a filmmaker and writer. A graduate of the film program in California Institute of the Arts, his films have been screened at various film festivals and museums around the world, such as Rotterdam, New York, Seoul, Marseille, and Yamagata. He is also one of the founding members of 13 Little Pictures, an independent film collective whose films have garnered critical acclaim all around the world. His most recent feature-length work, SNAKESKIN, has garnered many awards at international film festivals.

TEO WEI YONG (Music Composer)

Teo Wei Yong is a media composer and sound designer from Singapore. His audio works have landed at many prestigious festivals around the globe, including Cannes Film Festival, Taipei's Golden Horse Awards and the Venice Biennale. He continues to do what he loves best.

DAN KOH (Associate Producer)

Dan Koh is a producer and writer from Singapore. A NETPAC member, he produced Singapore's most successful crowd-funded music documentary, THE OBS: A SINGAPORE STORY and associate-produced Daniel Hui's DEMONS and Yeo Siew Hua's A LAND IMAGINED. He is currently working on Yeo's next film, STRANGER EYES and Lei Yuan Bin's ISLAND OF DREAMS.

PRODUCERS' BIOGRAPHIES

FRAN BORGIA

Fran Borgia was born in 1980 in southern Spain and is based in Singapore since 2004. He was the Producer and Editor for *HERE*, Ho Tzu Nyen's first feature film that was presented at the 41st Directors' Fortnight, Cannes Film Festival 2009; and for the medium-length film, *EARTH*, presented at the 66th Venice Film Festival 2009. Since then he has produced noteworthy feature films such as *SANDCASTLE*, Boo Junfeng's first feature film that premiered at the 49th Cannes Critics' Week in 2010; *DISAPPEARING LANDSCAPE* by Vladimir Todorovic, which premiered at the 42nd International Film Festival Rotterdam 2013, and *MISTER JOHN* by Christine Molloy & Joe Lawlor, an UK-Ireland-Singapore co-production, which premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival 2013. In 2016 he co-produced Lav Diaz's *A LULLABY TO THE SORROWFUL MYSTERY*, which premiered In-Competition at the Berlinale 2016 and it won the *Silver Bear Alfred Bauer Prize* for "a feature film that opens new perspectives"; and produced two films that premiered in Cannes Film Festival in 2016: Boo Junfeng's *APPRENTICE* (Un Certain Regard) and K. Rajagopal's *A YELLOW BIRD* (Cannes Critics' Week).

GARY GOH

Gary Goh started his career at MTV Asia & Nickelodeon in 2002. Gary joined Zhao Wei Films in 2005, where he started producing films and tv commercials for directors like Eric Khoo, Royston Tan, Brian Gothong Tan and Boo Junfeng. Under the genre label Gorylah Pictures, he also produced horror hits like *DARAH*, *2359* and *GHOST CHILD*. To date, he has produced 12 feature films with genres ranging from indie art-house to mainstream commercial films. Gary joined mm2 Entertainment in 2014, launching the New Business Department to drive the commercial short form content business. Presently, he is the General Manager of mm2 Entertainment where he continues to develop movie projects, new business partnerships and new market development.

JEAN-LAURENT CSINIDIS

Jean-Laurent Csinidis is the founder, producer and CEO of Films de Force Majeure (Marseille, France), a production company which focuses mostly on art-house cinema, with a keen interest in international collaborations. Since then, he has produced over 20 films, with substantial festival success, such as: *GAME GIRLS* (2018) by Alina Skrzyszewska (Producer – Berlinale Panorama, Sheffield Doc/Fest), *MITRA* (2018) by Jorge León (Co-producer – FID Marseille), *A LAND IMAGINED* (2018) by Yeo Siew Hua (Co-producer – Locarno Main Competition), *SONGS NEXT DOOR* (2017) by Flavie Pinatel (Producer – «Étoile de la Scam» Award), *A BIOGRAPHY* (2017) by Alexander Schellow (Producer – FID Marseille), *UNCANNY VALLEY* (2015) by Paul Wenninger (Producer – Official Selection César 2017). Jean-Laurent Csinidis is part of several networks such as EAVE, Eurodoc, Emerging Producers, and he is member of the board of the SPI (French Independent Producers Guild) and president of the PACA Region producers association (LPA).

DENIS VASLIN

Denis Vaslin started Volya Films in 2004 to produce and co-produce author fiction films and creative documentaries. Since then he has produced many notable films, mostly as international co-productions. In parallel, he runs Mandra Films in Paris. In 1994, he graduated from the department of Slavic Culture & Languages of the Institute of Oriental Languages in Paris, after which he first worked as a distributor and producer in France before moving to The Netherlands. He is a graduate of the Binger Lab, EAVE, EURODOC and ACE, a member of the European Film Academy as well as a member of the pedagogical team of the Festival des 3 Continents.

COMPANY PROFILES

AKANGA FILM ASIA (Singapore)

Akanga Film Asia is an independent production company created in 2005 in Singapore to produce quality films by the new generation of Asian filmmakers. Titles produced by Akanga include Ho Tzu Nyen's *HERE* (Cannes Directors' Fortnight 2009), Boo Junfeng's *SANDCASTLE* (Cannes Critics' Week 2010), Vladimir Todorovic's *DISAPPEARING LANDSCAPE* (Rotterdam 2013), Christine Molloy & Joe Lawlor's *MISTER JOHN* (Edinburgh 2013), Lav Diaz's *A LULLABY TO THE SORROWFUL MYSTERY* (Berlin Competition 2016 – *Silver Bear Alfred Bauer Prize*), Boo Junfeng's *APPRENTICE* (Cannes Un Certain Regard 2016) and K. Rajagopal's *A YELLOW BIRD* (Cannes Critics' Week 2016).

mm2 ENTERTAINMENT (Singapore)

mm2 Entertainment (a wholly owned subsidiary of mm2 Asia Ltd) is Singapore's leading media entertainment and content company with regional offices in Kuala Lumpur, Taipei, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing and the United States. In 2017, mm2 Asia Ltd became the first local film production company to be listed on SGX-ST Mainboard. mm2 Entertainment produces content for a multitude of platforms: movies, TV and web series, telemovies, commercial short films and formats. We offer comprehensive film-making services, ranging from the inception of an idea, to financing, sponsorship, production, marketing and distribution.

Films de Force Majeure (France)

Films de Force Majeure is a production company based in Marseille, France. Since its creation in 2010, our goal is to make the existence of unusual films possible and ensure their visibility. We are keen on strong commitments and projects which transcend boundaries. Films de Force Majeure is part of several European networks such as EAVE and EURODOC. On the national level, we are involved in the SPI and are part of UniFrance. In addition to our main activity as producer and co-producer, we regularly provide production services for shooting in the South of France.

Volya Films (The Netherlands)

VOLYA FILMS is a Rotterdam based company producing author fiction films and creative documentaries. Our films tell unexpected stories, sometimes from parts of the world not covered by the media with an original style and approach. Recent films are I KNOW YOU ARE THERE by Thom M. Vanderbeken (Visions du Réel 2017, Special Mention) CENTAUR by Aktan Arym Kubat (Berlinale Panorama 2017, winner CICAIE award and CANVAS Award for Best Film MOOOV 2017), WAITING FOR GIRAFFES by Marco de Stefanis (IDFA Dutch Competition 2016), THE GROWN UPS by Maite Alberdi (IDFA Intl Competition 2016, Best Feature Documentary; It's all true 2017 and Festival Intn'l de Films de Femmes 2017, Best Feature Documentary), PROBLEMSKI HOTEL by Manu Riche based on the book by Dimitri Verhulst (Gent FF 2015), and BIG FATHER, SMALL FATHER & OTHER STORIES by Di Phan Dang (Berlinale Official Competition 2015).

COMPANY CREDITS / FUNDERS AND SUPPORT

Production Companies Akanga Film Asia

mm2 Entertainment

Films de Force Majeure

Volya Films

In association with 13 Little Pictures

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L'Aide Aux Cinemas du Monde

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