

VISUALANTICS & BODA MEDIA GROUP PRESENT

REACH FOR THE
SKY
공부의나라



A FILM BY
STEVEN DHOEDT & WOORYOUNG CHOI

WWW.REACHFORTHE SKYDOC.COM





TWITCH FILM

"The last few BIFFs have each afforded us one great documentary (Non-Fiction Diary, Factory Complex), and 2015 proves to be no exception with the discovery of the timely Reach for the SKY, a compelling look at a common but disastrous problem at the root of modern Korean society - competitive education.

Constructed like a thriller and featuring a taut and ominous mise-en-scene, this joint production between Korea and Belgium is gripping from the start and builds to a devastating climax."

SCREEN DAILY

"One of the documentaries that is sure to resonate at this year's Busan International Film Festival, Reach For The SKY is as gripping as it is informative as it cleverly explores the Korean education system;

Reach for the SKY remains constantly engaging, even after the exam is over and results come out."



THE STORY

*“ We all have dreams, right?
I just wish we could have more time searching for what we really want to do,
instead of staying in school that late. “*

- Park Yo Han - 17 year old student -

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Every year, on the 2nd Thursday of November, the entire country of South-Korea is put to the test. That day, more than half a million senior high school students take part in the National University Exam, better known as Suneung.

‘Reach for the SKY’ tells the story of several South-Korean high school students, their families and teachers, as they prepare for the annual National Exam. The exam will not only determine where the high school seniors will attend university but ultimately also their status in the Korean hierarchical society.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Every year, on the 2nd Thursday of November, the entire country of South-Korea is put to the test. That day, more than half a million senior high school students take part in the National Exam, better known as *suneung siheom* in Korean.

On the morning of Suneung, companies – even the Korean stock market – open up for business an hour later than usual to reduce traffic jams. Those students who do get stuck in traffic can dial 112, a number normally reserved for emergencies, to get a special police escort to their school. In some parts of the country, military police vehicles, ambulances, and food delivery motorcycles have reportedly been deployed to accommodate the most desperate of students.

That day, few planes are allowed to land or take off, so students can fully concentrate on the listening tests of the examination. Parents flock to the exam centres where they spend most of the day praying while holding on to the closed school gates. Some can be found praying at Buddhist temples with their child’s photo and exam day identification form lain on the temple floor.

Months or even years before the exam takes place, Korean students often live a life of strict routine. On an average day they get up as early as 6am to go to school. When school is finished, they then attend a hagwon, a private academy, where they are primed for the big day for months in a row. Usually the school day comes to an end when they arrive home well after midnight.

Suneung isn’t a regular high school test. The test will not only determine where the high school seniors will attend university but ultimately also their status in the Korean hierarchical society. At the most prestigious universities, spaces for freshmen are very limited, with chances of acceptance being less than 1%.

Getting into a university with a good reputation is one of the most competitive experiences Korean students will ever experience in their life.

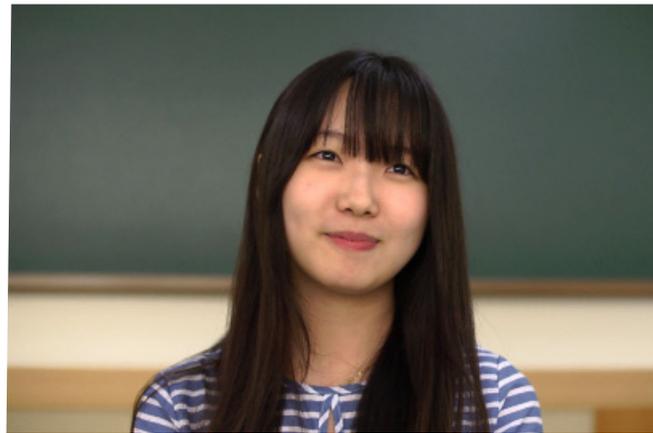


THE CHARACTERS

Hyunha is a 'repeater'. She took the Suneung exam in 2012 but her results were not satisfactory so she decided to take the exam again. Her parents are paying a lot for her tuition at the Eetos Private Academy, a school where she is being prepped intensively for the upcoming Suneung Exam. She spends most of her time in the school, from early morning till late at night. She wishes she could spend more time with her family.

Hyunha is very intelligent but also a dreamer. She doesn't like the Korean education system at all and wants to change it. Her dream is to become the Minister of Education so she can completely reform the system.

HYUNHA



MIN-JUN



Min-Jun is 19 years old, soft-spoken, and hails from Daejeon, a city about 150km from Seoul.

His results on the Suneung exam were mediocre, so he convinced his parents to send him to a secluded and remote private boarding school in Gyonggi Province. Away from his family and friends and disconnected from the outside world, he will spend 9 months following a spartan study schedule in order to prepare himself for the final exam once more.

Min-Jun's mother is a devout Buddhist. Every other week, she climbs the mountain to the local temple, together with his grandmother, to pray that her son would get a good score this time around. Min-Jun doesn't want his mother to be so worried about his school results but realises that his parents have high expectations of him.



THE CHARACTERS

HYE-IN



Hye-In is a 17 year old girl from a middle-class family. She is a '*gosam*', a senior high school student who will take the Suneung exam for the first time. Her father and mother run a funeral parlour. Hye-In is interested in teaching Korean to foreigners and would like to study at the Hankuk University of Foreign Language.

Her parents nor her teachers in high school know enough about the complexity of the university application process, so Hye-In feels lost. In an attempt to make sense of it all, she seeks consultance at several private institutions, but even there she doesn't seem to find the right answer. She often feels that she spends more time gathering information about the right application procedures than focusing on studying itself. More so, the whole ordeal drains her energy and generally leaves her confused.

Kim Ki-Hoon is the living proof that education is a serious business in South-Korea. Sometimes labeled as a 'celebrity teacher', he teaches English at Megastudy, one of the biggest private education institutions, and runs his own textbook publishing company.

Over 1.5 million students have bought his online lectures. In 2012, he made over 9.5 million US dollars, which is in stark contrast to the wages of his colleagues in government schools. Every year he writes his own song and makes a music video to support and encourage his students who have to sit for the Suneung exam. He was recently interviewed by the Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times.

However, even teachers like Kim Ki-Hoon are struggling. Now that the government has started their own online tutoring (for free), private teachers and academies have to become even more inventive to keep their business up and running.

KIM KI-HOON





DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

[...] the Committee reiterates its concern that the highly competitive nature of the education system risks hampering the development of the child to his or her fullest potential.

Concluding observations: Republic of Korea, 2003
- *United Nations Committee On The Rights Of The Child*

The above decision of the UN Committee reflects a core theme of our documentary: No matter how important education might be, it should never be at the cost of the self-development of a child. By taking away a child's right to play, its creativity is stifled. Ultimately, academic education should benefit and complement the development of a child, not restrict it.

Statistically it is clear that the pressure Korean students have to deal with is more than problematic. South-Korea has the highest suicide rate among the OECD countries. Between 2007 and 2009 suicide was the leading cause of death among students aged 15 to 24. Every month 2 students take their own life. 75% of students committing suicide are in high school.

The Ministry of Education is aware of the problems this overemphasis on credentials has created and has undertaken many attempts to reform its system but to little avail. The underlying cause of this is not to be found within a failing educational system, but in society as a whole. As long as a degree from a prestigious university is considered a status symbol by parents and a decisive requirement for employment little will change. A fundamental shift in mentality is needed, but it's quite clear this will not happen overnight.

'Reach for the SKY' is a documentary about a society where education has become a multi-billion industry because of its obsessions with achievement and status; about a culture where education has become as important as the type of car you drive or the size of your apartment; where mothers have become the educational agents of their children, micro-managing every hour that could be spent on studying.

But at its core, it's a film about the right of every child to play and self-develop. After many years of intense studying, many teenagers are emotionally spent. One day they wake up, happy to learn they have been accepted to the university they wanted to get in to so badly. They are confronted with the realization that they didn't really know what they were studying for. For these students, reaching for the sky wasn't so much a future dream, but merely a test score on a university application letter.

TEAM

1. 국어 문학 영화 시지
2. 영어 영화 한국 영화
3. 한지 한지 문학 영화
4. 경제 작문 경제 문학 이적
5. 영어 영어 문학 영화 진로
6. 시지 이적 문학 문학
7. 이적 동아 동아

Still alive

STEVEN DHOEDT WRITER/DIRECTOR



Steven Dhoedt (°1980, Gent) is a Belgian filmmaker, producer and cinematographer. He studied film at the RITCS School of Arts in Brussels and graduated as a Master in Audiovisual Arts.

After his studies he moved to Hong Kong, where he lived and worked for several years, gaining experience as a freelance producer and director. In 2003 he founded VISUALANTICS, a Brussels based independent production house, focusing on creative documentaries, fiction films and new media projects.

His films have screened on numerous film festivals all over the world and have been broadcasted on TV in over 30 countries.

His work often deals with contemporary issues and subcultures, such as 'INSIDE THE METAVERSE' (2009), a journey through online virtual worlds or 'STATE OF PLAY' (2013), an intimate portrait of several South-Korean professional video gamers.

CHOI WOORYOUNG DIRECTOR



Wooyoung Choi is a freelancer director and a member of Indie PD in Korea. He has worked on more than 15 major television productions in Korea made for, sold to, Korean major broadcasters including KBS, MBC, EBS and TVN.

He directed his first 60-minute documentary, 'Soul performance Gut', supported by KBI in 2007. In the process, he is named one of the prolific directors in television documentary. Recent highlights include the documentary series, 'Report in Samdong Elementary School for one hundred-eighty days (EBS)', which suggest the interactive learning and observe students' attitude for six months.

With Crossing Borders in 2010, he directs his first international documentary, 'Here Comes Uncle Joe'.

TEAM

PRODUCER HA SINAE

With a B.A specialized in Television production and journalism and a M.S in a Graduate School of Culture Technology, KAIST, she worked on Television production as a director and a producer.

In planning team, she launched a 50-min weekly documentary program, 'Top Secret (KBS 1)' and developed documentary series, 'Searching for Buddhism' and 'The Last Paradise' in 2006. From 2007 to 2008, she directed her first television program, 'Top Secret (KBS1)', and a daily magazine program 'Issue Unlimited (KBS 2)'.

In 2009, she made a short narrative film, 'Faceless', produced in New York Film Academy. She produced the first international documentary, 'Here comes Uncle Joe', with ITVS, NHK, and SBS(Korea) from 2010 to 2013.

With that experience, she has produced diverse documentaries, Mr.Election, REACH FOR THE SKY, ASHES TO ASHES, God BLISS Our Home, and BLACK MONUMENT.



PRODUCER / EDITOR GERT VAN BERCKELAER

Gert Van Berckelaer (°1973, Antwerpen) lived in Colorado, USA after his high school where he got his degree in Liberal Arts. Back in Belgium he studied social and political sciences with a specialization in communication at the KULeuven and audiovisual arts at Sint Lukas in Brussels.

After his studies he settled in Brussels and started working as a freelance editor and director for commercials and tv programs in close collaboration with the major production houses of Belgium. At the same time he started creating original content, music videos and trailers for various international artists. Till today he is at the same time producer, director, cameraman and editor for plenty of commercial and artistic projects.

As a producer for Visualantics, he currently has several feature documentaries in development and production.





PRODUCTION INFO

English Title **REACH FOR THE SKY**
Korean Title **공부의 나라**
Year of Production **2015**
Country of Production **BELGIUM/SOUTH-KOREA**

Length **90' / 56'**
Language **Korean**
Subtitles **English / Dutch / French**
Colour **BW / Colour**
Shooting Format **HD 1080p25**
Screening Format **DCP / BluRay / Digital**
Sound **5.1 Surround / Stereo**

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TRAILER
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WORLD PREMIERE
Busan International Film Festival 2015

INTERNATIONAL PREMIERE
Dok Leipzig 2015

CREDITS



A film by

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스티븐 두트

Choi Wooyoung
최우영

Producers

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게르 반 버클레어

Ha Sinae
하시내

Steven Dhoedt
스티븐 두트

Original Music

Regina Lok Yan To
레지나 얀 투

Written By

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Editing

Gert Van Berckelaer 게르 반 버클레어

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Nam Hyejeong 남혜정

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Ho-Yeon Won 원호연
Smukalla Daniel 다니엘 스무칼라
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Um Taesoo 엄태수
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Lee Sammul 이샘물
Kim Taehoon 김태훈
Kim Youngtae 김영태
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Raf Enckels

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DI

Arnout Deurinck

Online supervisor

Wim De Rick

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Robin Sinnaeve
Wim De Rick

Title design and animation

Tim Trenson

Online Facilities

Mikros

Foley Artist

Pierre Van Caloen

Post production manager

Gert Van Berckelaer

Audio facilities

Hercules Lab



PRODUCTION COMPANIES

VISUALANTICS

VISUALANTICS, founded in 2003 and based in Brussels, specializes in independent projects for an international market and is involved in the field of new media, fiction and creative documentary. The company enjoys a growing reputation with contemporary documentaries; State of Play (on professional gaming in South-Korea), the Brussels Business (on lobbying in Brussels), The Sound of Belgium (on the history of Belgian dance music) and with award winning shorts such as 'The Extraordinary Life Of Rocky'.

Today the company has had collaborations with national and international broadcasting companies such as ARTE, ZDF, NRK, SVT, YLE, VRT, RTBF, LICHTPUNT etc.

VISUALANTICS is a founding member of FlandersDoc, the Belgian-Flemish association of documentary producers.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2015 REACH FOR THE SKY / documentary / 90' & 52' / in HD
- 2014 BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP / documentary / 100' & 52' / in HD
- 2014 SHIP OF FOOLS / documentary / 85' & 52' / in HD
- 2014 THE HORSEMAN / short fiction / HD
- 2013 STATE OF PLAY / documentary / 85' & 52' / in HD
- 2013 THE SOUND OF BELGIUM / documentary / 85' / in HD
- 2012 THE BRUSSELS BUSINESS / documentary / 90' & 52' / in HD
- 2010 INSIDE THE METAVERSE / documentary / 52' / in HD
- 2010 THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF ROCKY / short fiction / 15' / S16mm
- 2009 NIGHTHAWKS / short fiction / 13'50" / 35mm
- 2008 VERBRANDMAN / short fiction / 14'



BODA Media Group

We believe in documentary film's ability to entertain, and to change the world.

Our mission is to focus the human element and to reflect our society throughout a personal history. Sinae and Wooyoung opened this production house in December 2010 and have looked for co-producing opportunities between Korea and the other worlds.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2015 REACH FOR THE SKY / documentary, Social Issue, 90 / in HD
- 2015 ASHES TO ASHES / documentary, Human Interest, 75' / in HD
- 2014 MR.ELECTION / documentary, Human Interest / 56' & 45' / in HD
- 2013 HERE COMES UNCLE JOE / documentary, Human Interest / 70' & 52' / in HD

CONTACT

CONTACT

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