



FILM: **RETURN TO SEOUL**

FDG RATING: 2.7 ☹️😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

David Chou: *director/writer*
Ji-Min Park: *actress, Freddie*
Guka Han: *actress, Tena*

DATE: July 23, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **RETURN TO SEOUL**

Return to Seoul is a 2022 drama about a 25 year old girl, Freddie, who was born in South Korea, abandoned by her mother and father, and adopted by French parents. We meet Freddie as she arrives at a hotel in Seoul, supposedly because her flight to Tokyo was cancelled, so, on a whim, she flew to Seoul. But the first question the desk clerk asks is if she has returned to find her biological parents. Freddie initially denies this, but after she learns that she can only contact her biological parents through the Hammond Adoption Center which has strict procedures, she asks them to send a telegram to her parents.

We didn't think Freddie's situation and responses were an attempt to profile the typical; experiences of an adoptee seeking out biological parents because Freddie definitely has a unique, erratic personality. The story follows her emotional-psychological journey as she acts on her need to connect with her biological parents and the place where she was born.

For some discussion participants, the film was too long and convoluted. It became a bit tiresome because as Freddie's new friend and translator-in tow, Tena, says, "You are a very sad person." Freddie does not show emotions, often hiding behind her extroverted behavior, and even when speaking to her French mother, the conversation is strained, there isn't any sense of connection.

Freddie's biological mother does not respond to the telegrams sent by the Hammond Adoption Center but her father does so Freddie travels to his small town to visit him and his family which is understandably a rather uncomfortable situation. Her alcoholic father makes clumsy attempts to relate to Freddie, and continues to try to connect with her which she finds oppressive.

The story is fragmented jumping ahead two years where we see Freddie living a vampish life in the Seoul's glamorously seedy underground. We had a hint of her propensity for danger when she was so daring and forward on her arrival to Seoul, recklessly drinking and exhorting a group of guys in a restaurant to move to another table and mix with young females at that table. Or when she casually sleeps with an acquaintance she picks up on her way back to her hotel.

Another jump five years later and her propensity for danger has escalated. Her biological mother finally does respond to a telegram sent by the adoption center but this does not have a satisfying result.

One discussion participant loved the film appreciating the psychological aspects of abandonment that caused Freddie's dissociative personality. She was searching for her identity. Others criticized the lack of any backstory or details to understand Freddie's sadness. Along the same vein, another criticism was that it was sloppy film making, requiring the viewer fill in the gaps. But the acting was very good,

One observation was that the film begins superficially with Freddie as a seemingly happy extrovert and then her character gets more and more complex. It was interesting that she was inherently drawn to Seoul, her birth place, while the city seemed to exacerbate her self destructiveness. We had different opinions about the ending as we see her backpacking in the mountains in Europe and then returning to her hotel to casually sit at the piano in the lobby and tap at the keys playing a simple melody. Did she finally find herself? She was much more relaxed and hiking in the mountains is a far cry from her previous erratic life. Or was she still a lost soul?

A few of us thought Return to Seoul was engaging while others found it frustrating, tedious, and way too long, leaving a sad collective score of 2.8 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!
Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net
www.filmdiscussiongroup.com