



See You at Jackson's Cinema House!

MAEBASHI CITY COORDINATOR FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (CIR)
JACKSON BANNISTER'S ACTIVITY REPORT

JULY 2026

Maebashi Cinema House, a mini-theater in Maebashi City. Jackson, a film-loving CIR, watches one hand-picked recommendation from the theater manager and brings you a review.
Movies transcend borders! See you at the cinema!



MAY'S MOVIE

Trophy

2026 JAPAN



Jackson Bannister

I work as a Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) in Maebashi City, Gunma Prefecture, engaging in activities to deepen mutual cultural understanding between Japanese and non-Japanese residents.



Films are another family

~Discover new cinema in Maebashi—connecting films, people, and the community.~



In order to foster bonds within the local community through film, we decided to open Maebashi Cinema House.

Although small, our theater shares a wide variety of films from the heart of Maebashi. Our program spans a wide range of genres, including high-quality independent and mini-theater films that rarely receive screenings, hit titles that have completed their runs at multiplex cinemas, family-friendly films that parents and children can enjoy together, and classic masterpieces from the past. Through this selection, we hope audiences will discover new films.

This is the kind of "Cinema House" we aspire to build.

MISSION

3F, Maebashi Plaza Genki 21 Annex, 1-16 Chiyoda-machi 5-chome, Maebashi City

Trophy

A sensitive and heartfelt coming-of-age drama told through the eyes of a Zainichi Korean.

For this month's movie review, I had the chance to see *Trophy*, which is currently playing at Maebashi Cinema House!

Coming from emerging director Son Myung-ah, *Trophy* follows Sohee, a Zainichi Korean teenager living in Japan who attends a North Korean school and practices traditional Korean dance. One day, she befriends a Japanese girl named Mirai, and the two quickly bond over their shared love of K-pop. Their friendship sets the story in motion when Sohee steals one of her father's North Korean medals—a "trophy" of the title—and sells it online to buy tickets to a concert they both want to attend.

At first glance, *Trophy* appears to be a fairly conventional coming-of-age story about growing up and learning the value of the things we inherit from our parents. However, it gradually reveals itself to be something much more nuanced: an exploration of identity through the lens of one of Japan's most underrepresented communities

Sohee is a Zainichi Korean, a Japanese resident of Korean heritage whose family traces its roots to North Korea. As a result, she attends one of Japan's North Korean schools, institutions that still exist today and have historically received support from North Korea. This background gives the film a unique perspective and raises questions of belonging, heritage, and identity that are rarely explored in Japanese cinema.

These themes are closely tied to Sohee's passion for traditional Korean dance. Although she has spent her entire life in Japan,

she struggles to take pride in her Korean heritage, particularly because her family is connected to North Korea, a country viewed with fear and hostility in Japan due to its political tensions and history. This internal conflict affects not only her dancing, but also the way she interacts with the people around her.

One of the film's greatest strengths is the relationship between Sohee and Mirai, which, rather than being reduced to a simple lesson about acceptance, is an honest portrayal of two teenagers from completely different backgrounds discovering common ground. The two's relationship feels warm, believable, and easily became one of my favorite aspects of the film.

Technically, *Trophy* adopts a restrained, almost documentary-like style. The camera avoids flashy movements or dramatic angles, instead quietly observing its characters.

Combined with its muted color palette, this approach creates a naturalistic atmosphere that often makes the film feel less like a scripted drama and more like a brief window into real people's lives.

It's especially impressive when you consider that this is Son Myung-ah's feature directorial debut. A former student of Hirokazu Kore-eda and Miwa Nishikawa, she demonstrates a level of confidence and restraint that feels remarkably polished.

The performances are similarly solid. I wasn't expecting much from Hanna, who, at a mere 15 years old, makes her debut in a leading role here, but she delivers a strong, natural performance. Whether due to her acting ability or the similarities between Sohee's experiences and her own, she brings an authenticity to the character that anchors the film. She's supported by an experienced cast,

including Arata Iura (who starred in *After Life*, 1998) as Sohee's father and Miwako Ichikawa (who starred in *All About Lily Chou-Chou*, 2001). While some of the dialogue occasionally feels a little too direct in communicating the film's themes, it never becomes distracting enough to undermine the emotional impact.

Overall, *Trophy* is a thoughtful coming-of-age drama about reconciling multiple identities. Through Sohee's journey, the film explores what it means to be both ethnically Korean and culturally Japanese, and how embracing those seemingly conflicting identities can become a source of strength rather than division. It's a quiet, empathetic film that shines a light on a community rarely represented on screen, making it far more memorable than its simple premise initially suggests.