

THE BAMBOO BRIDGE



MATADORA FILMS
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Every dry season a 1.5km bamboo bridge is built across the Mekong River, linking the rural island of Koh Paen to the major city of Kampong Cham. Every year the bridge is dismantled in the wake of the monsoon tides. In 2017 the bamboo bridge was built for the last time and replaced by a new concrete bridge built by the government with Chinese investment. THE BAMBOO BRIDGE, follows three generations of bridge builders who tell stories of this unique structure and the local community it sustains. It brings together observational and poetic genres to tell a story of social transformation during times of unstoppable environmental and social change.



Creative Team

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Cinematography
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As the longest bamboo bridge in the world is dismantled for the last time, three generations of Cambodian bridge-builders share its stories from the past and its lessons for the future.



Summary

The plot of the film is structured around the construction and dismantling of the Bamboo Bridge of Koh Paen, from the time of the harvesting of the bamboo to its dismantling as the waters of the Mekong River grow large. This narrative is interjected by stories of previous builders and community members who tell us about how the local ecosystem and livelihoods have been changing as a result of rapid urbanisation. It is a film that will resonate with a 20-30 year old demographic, who are environmentally conscious and acutely aware of the impacts of globalisation. It will also spark interest from philanthropists, social activists and academics.

The Last Bamboo Bridge captures the end of an era and acts as a warning not to disregard the lessons that traditional infrastructure might offer in times of ecological change. A reflective swansong to a monument in its final days.

Mr Oun and his wife are the most recent owners of the bridge. As he drives his boat across the river, Mr Oun describes how the bridge is constructed each year, with 100% local bamboo. We see a montage of drone shots as the bamboo is chopped by hand, then stacked in large bundles and floated across the Mekong. Later the bundles are joined together mid-stream to create the 1.5km stretch, in a massive engineering feat of manual labour and manpower. As a storm approaches, Mr Oun carefully guides his boat, back to shore. "I risked my life many times for this bridge," says Mr Oun sentimentally looking back at the structure.

In a bamboo field stands farmer Lin. A short looking woman with a pointed straw hat, chopping the bamboo with her machete. "Bamboo has sustained our ancestors for centuries," she says, slicing a thick stick with the knife. But Lin is worried that the art of Bamboo growing is dying. "Now kids are not interested in growing things, or working in the rice fields, instead they go off to the factories," she says. Koh Paen, a small island filled with horse drawn carriages, tobacco farms, and dusty huts will soon have a high speed connection to Kampong Cham's noisy streets. Lin is fearful that the ancient techniques of bamboo farming will be lost forever.



Coronel Xiung stands on the new concrete bridge. Over his shoulder, a throng of motorcycles hum by, unperturbed by the fact that the bridge is still missing its side railings. "This bridge is a great development for our city," he says. "Faster transport, running water, electricity- all these are great things for our community. Cambodia is moving into the next century and will soon be just like our western neighbours." He flashes a toothy grin at the camera.

Mrs Srim, an elegant and gentle old lady is sitting cross legged in her house. She was a former manager of the bridge just before the time of the Khmer Rouge. She talks about the old times. In the past the owners of the bridge shared all profits evenly and labour was exchanged for free passage.

As the sun rises over the Mekong, a procession of orange-robed monks perform their daily ritual, of walking across the creaking bridge. Meanwhile, under its awnings a fisherman and his disabled wife, sort through their fishing nets with despair. "As the fish diminish year by year, we are left starving," says the young man in Khmer. The unique ecosystem of river life is being disturbed by the effects of global warming. In recent seasons, the province experienced a drought also affecting the local farmers.





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