

The South Korea-China Co-Production Film Report

Shuying You

College of Humanities and Communications, Yango University, China

Keywords: South Korea, China, Co-Production Film

Abstract: under the domination of the Hollywood film industry, international co-productions as well as remakes are normal practice for filmmakers in different countries. This paper analyse the south Korea-China co-production film industry, the history of the south Korea-China co-production film industry and the south Korea-China co-production treaty.

1. Introduction

International co-production is widely used in today's film industry. The history of south Korea-China co-production can be dated back to the 2000s. Since the signing of the co-production treaty by the two countries in 2014, more and more films have been co-produced in the period of 2015-2016.

2. The South Korea-China Co-Production Film Industry

In the early 1990s, the Young-Sam Kim government was endowed with the thorny task of revitalising the South Korean economy by enhancing its international combativeness, as well as with the mandate of democratic reforms. The ultimate response from the Kim administration was to pursue internationalism and globalisation armed with competitions as a survival strategy in the new world order. The zeal of South Korea's economic globalisation also included media and cultural sectors, which were not only facing severe foreign competition at home but also had burgeoning aspirations to the global media market. The globalisation of South Korean media sector was aroused by the huge profit of the culture industry. The film promotion law was created in 1995 to promote the local film industry. The film promotion fund aimed to make international co-production and export of South Korean films easier. It not only replaced the regulations for exporting films but also set up regulations about co-producing films with other countries (shin, 2005). The globalisation of the South Korean film industry got more advanced with the formation of the Busan international film festival in 1996, which was the first international film festival of South Korea. With strong support from the government of South Korea as well as the active participation of other Asian countries, Busan international film festival has become a leading film event in Asia. The slogan 'a window on Asian cinema' illustrates the aim of the Busan international film festival (Iordanova, 2011). By serving as a showcase for Asian films, the Busan international film festival has promoted South Korean film industry in a number of ways. Firstly, it presents the majority of South Korean contemporary films. Secondly, it acts as a gateway for the South Korean film industry's advancement abroad (Kim, 2000). To promote the globalisation of South Korean films, the Korean film commission (Kofic) funds pavilions at major international film festivals and markets (shin, 2005). South Korea became one of the largest commercial industries in the world after the United States and India in 2001. It has 45 to 50 percent overall ticket sales from local cinema, and some of its individual films are even outperforming the biggest Hollywood blockbusters (Paquet, 2005). Nevertheless, the domestic market is unable to meet the demand for further development in the South Korean film industry. It has been barely able to keep a 10 percent growth rate in the past few years (Jin, 2015). In order to guard against the domination of the Hollywood film industry as well as explore a large-scale overseas market, South Korea must strengthen the co-promotion strategies with other Asian countries. The Busan international film festival plays a key role in promoting co-producers and co-financiers between South Korea and other Asian countries. Through these

efforts, the South Korean film industry can gain access to international markets from within Asian countries (shin, 2005).

The policymakers in china also pay much attention to the development of the cultural industry. In the ideological concept of the 'three represents', the general secretary Zeming Jiang regards the cultural industries play a vital role in the development of political dialogue in 2000 (jiang, 2001). In 2001, the international concept of 'cultural industries' was adopted in china's political leadership. This measure conceded the equal treatment of private companies in several aspects, even the possibility of international co-productions (meyer-clement, 2015). In 2004, the new general secretary Jintao Hu also paid much attention to the cultural industries. His ideological concept of the 'socialist advanced culture' became an essential part of the mission of strengthening the governing capacity of the Chinese communist party (ccp) (ccp central committee, 2004). The first programme on cultural development was published in the eleventh five-year-plan (2006–2010) of china. The main themes of this plan are to boost china's cultural influence in the world (ccp central committee general office and state council general office, 2006). In 2007, Jintao Hu raised the concept of 'cultural soft power', which indicated that the cultural industries in china should serve as the soft power (Hu, 2007). From then on, many cultural policies have been established. The sixth plenum of the seventeenth party congress also set the concept of 'building of a socialist culturally powerful country' (ccp central committee, 2011). In order to increase china's soft power, the first film industry promotion law claims to change china from a 'big film country' into a 'powerful film country' (state council legal office, 2011). Jinping xi, who became the new the general secretary in 2012 also emphasized the concept of 'building a culturally powerful country' (anon, 2013). Some policies were also taken to encourage the co-productions between china other regions. In 2003, china signed the closer economic partnership agreement (cepa) with Hong Kong. This agreement not only increases the co-productions between Hong Kong and mainland china but also encourages more co-productions between china and other regions (Yecies; Keane and flew, 2016). The administrative provisions on internet audio-visual program services in 2007 also encouraged the co-productions (Zhao and Keane, 2013). This provision forced the primary online video companies in china such as tudou and youku to look for pan-asian and international partnerships to reduce the cost of outstanding scripts. Under these circumstances, some primary online video companies created in-house production services and worked with talented producers from other regions (Yecies; Keane and flew, 2016).

In recent years, a rapid development has been seen in china's film industry (bbc news, 2013). China's gross box office has grown from less than 1 billion yuan to 10 billion Yuan from 2002 to 2010. The number of cinemas in china is also continually expanding. More important, china became the second-largest film market in the world in 2012 (bbc news, 2013). Despite the short history of china's film industry when compared with other countries, it instantly reached a 40 percent growth rate in 2009 and kept a 30 percent growth rate on average from then on (Jin, 2015). Taking advantage of co-productions, more and more films' box office has exceeded 100 million yuan in recent years. Co-productions have become an important type of film in china. In 2013, 55 film projects from co-production companies were approved by the regulators in china, involving France, the United States, United Kingdom, South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Among them, 41 co-productions passed censorship, 36 of which were co-produced with Hong Kong and Taiwan (china-international film co-production handbook, 2014). More importantly, china's government tends to create a friendly relationship with foreign film companies whether in production or consumption (wei, 2011). Chinese practitioners, companies and policymakers have increasingly sought to boost the international appeal of Chinese media and cultural content by integrating lessons learned from foreign competitors and collaborators (yecies, 2016). With the large-scale film market and an abundant human resource in the film industry, china is definitely an attractive opportunity for international film co-production (Wei, 2011).

3. The History of South Korea-China Co-Production Film Industry

The co-production film industry has grown considerably among East Asian countries starting

from the beginning of the 21st century. Since 2005, quite a lot of blockbuster films were co-produced by film companies from mainland china, Hong Kong, South Korea as well as japan. Examples involve the promise (2005), the myth (2005), seven swords (2005), and a battle of wits (2006). These films not only brought together the best skills of the regional film industries but also employed internationally known film producers as well as the a-list actors to target the Asian market. The leading industry skills and the popular actors also helped these films enter the international film market (wei, 2011).

The history of the south Korea-China co-production film industry can be dated back to 2000. *The anarchists* (2000) starring Dong-Gun Jang is one of the first generation of south Korea-China co-production films. This film was co-produced by the cine world of South Korea and china's shanghai film studio (Jin, 2015). *Sophie's revenge* (2009) is an actor-based co-production film. This film was invested in by China's Beijing perfect world and cj entertainment of South Korea. It starred actors from both china and South Korea (jin, 2015). It is also an ideal example of the public appeal of international stars. The success of this film was attributed to the celebrity effect of the Chinese actress Ziyi Zhang and the south Korean actor ji-sub so. Ziyi Zhang is a global superstar who plays an active role in Chinese films as well as in Hollywood. Ji-sub so is one of the top stars of South Korea and he is very popular in Asia. He rose to fame in his romance drama *i'm sorry, i love you* (2004). Since the huge influence of the two leading roles, *sophie's revenge* gained so much attention before it was released. The celebrity effect of them could be seen on the day of its launch meeting, there were so many fans of the actors in the leading roles that they caused a delay to the event taking place (Yoon and Ji, 2015).

In fact, the South Korean film industry specialises in technology services like special effects, visual effects and sound mixing. These have made a significant contribution to several action blockbusters in china. This kind of technology services co-production began with the release of the South Korean film *taegekgi: brotherhood of war* (2004). Since the Chinese company Huayi Brothers were very impressed by its technology services, they asked the South Korea demolition company to do the visual effects in their film *assembly* (2008). The *assembly* was a smash hit in china. Since then, South Korean companies have begun to provide technology services to Chinese films such as *after shock* (2010), *reign of assassins* (2010) as well as *the flying swords of dragon gate* (2011). With the increased demand for 3d films in china's film market, South Korean companies also provided the 3d technology for china's film industry in the 2010s. Both *journey to the west: conquering the demons* (2013) and *the monkey king* (2014) used the world-class 3d technology from South Korea which won huge success in china (kim, 2015).

Meanwhile, the directors of South Korea also seeking opportunities in china's film industry and a number of their films were quite well-received in china (limb, 2014). For example, the smash hit film *my sassy girl* (2001)'s director jae-yong kwak, finished his co-production film *meet miss anxiety* in 2014. comparably, director jin-kyu jo who is famous for his film *my wife is a gangster* (2001), also made his film *sweet sixteen* (2016). Among them, the most successful one is ki-hwan oh's *a wedding invitation* (2013) which achieved 192 million yuan in gross box office (yoon and ji, 2015). Although this film employed an all-Chinese cast, the production team were almost all South Korean. The screenplay of *a wedding invitation* was based on ki-hwan oh's film *last present* (2001), and it was rewritten to localization in china (yecies, 2016).

The box office record for *a wedding invitation* was broken by *20 once again* in 2015 (au, 2015). *20 once again* achieved \$56.25 million (350 million yuan) in gross box office from 5,500 theatres in china (english.cj.net, n.d.). *20 once again* (2015) was co-produced by China's Beijing century media culture and South Korean media company cj e&m and jointly invested by c2m and huace film & tv (yoon and ji, 2015). This film was a remake of South Korea's hit film *miss granny* (2014). It is a story about a woman in her 70s who returns to her 20s by accident after taking a photo at a magical photo studio (dm, 2015). Although *20 once again* used the same screenplay as *miss granny* (2014), it hired local directors, actors and actresses in order to meet the demand of local audiences.

As both *a wedding invitation* and *20 once again* are the remake of South Korean films, they offer an ideal model for the south Korea-China co-production film industry. The producer's brief is a

simple one: find a good story (one that has already proven itself with Korean audiences), and then revise it with assistance from a Chinese screenwriter who understands Chinese culture and society. Remove all specifically Korean content from the original film, and then employ experienced filmmakers (who may or may not be Korean nationals) to make the film for a Chinese audience. This formula has become the key to success for Korean filmmakers wanting to break into the Chinese market, as well as for Chinese filmmakers and companies aiming to leverage the creativity and technical know-how for which south Korean film industry is highly regarded around the world (Yecies, 2016).

4. The South Korea-China Co-Production Treaty

South Korea and china signed a co-production treaty in 2014 (frater, 2014). The Hollywood reporter and screen daily hailed the treaty as a 'landmark agreement'. After china's president xi Jinping visited South Korea, china's representative Fuchao Cai signed the south Korea-China co-production treaty with South Korean culture minister Jin-Ryong Yoo in 2014 (coonan, 2014).

The general aims and benefits for the two countries were explained by the south korea-china co-production treaty. For example, the removal of the local market and import barriers; the improved approval processes; the creative contributions from a film's cast and crew; sharing of computer graphics, technology services like virtual reality and digital cinema skills; the sharing of production budgets and all kinds of cost; and guidelines for contributions made by third parties. Under the agreement, a film qualifies as an official co-production after meeting specific requirements from each partner. Official co-productions are considered to be 'domestic' films in both countries, thus enabling them to circumvent existing film quotas that restrict the number of annual screenings of imported foreign films (Yecies, 2016).

Since South Korea and china have signed the co-production treaty in 2014, a number of films have been co-produced from 2014 to 2016. And some successful South Korean films were also chosen to be remade by the two countries, including *dancing princess* (2005), *Cyrano agency* (2010), *architecture 101* (2012), *marriage blue* (2013), and *blind* (2014).

5. Conclusion

To conclude, as South Korea and China have signed the co-production treaty in 2014, many films have been co-produced from 2014 to 2016. This paper has analyzed the South Korea-China co-production film industry as well as the the history of South Korea-China Co-production Film Industry. Then it associates with why the co-productions is the emergency for both South Korea and China's film industry and the development of the South Korea-China co-production treaty.

References

- [1] Anon. (2013). Xi Jinping: ideological work is an extremely important work of the party. Xinhua [online], 20 August. Available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-08/20/c_117021464.htm [Accessed 27 June. 2017].
- [2] BBC News. (2013). China becomes world's second-biggest movie market - BBC News. [online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-21891631> [Accessed 3 Aug. 2017].
- [3] CCP Central Committee General Office and State Council General Office. (2006). Outline of the cultural development programme in the period of the state's eleventh five-year-plan.
- [4] CCP Central Committee. (2004). Decision on strengthening the party's governing capacity.
- [5] CCP Central Committee. (2011). Decision concerning several major problems with deepening cultural system reform and promoting the great development and prosperity of socialist culture.
- [6] China-International Film Co-Production Handbook. (2014). Motion Picture Association, China Film Co-Production Corporation.

- [7] Coonan, C. (2014). South Korea, China Sign Landmark Co-Production Pact. [online] The Hollywood Reporter. Available at: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/south-korea-china-sign-landmark-716743> [Accessed 23 July. 2017].
- [8] Dm, F. (2015). 6 more remakes for Korean's 'Miss Granny'. [online] Insing.com. Available at: <http://www.insing.com/feature/6-more-remakes-for-korean-s-miss-granny/id-a87a3101/> [Accessed 3 Aug. 2017].
- [9] Frater, P. (2014). China and South Korea Sign Co-Production and Import Deal. [online] Variety. Available at: <http://variety.com/2014/biz/asia/china-and-south-korea-sign-co-production-and-import-deal-1201258316/> [Accessed 3 Aug. 2017].
- [10] Hu, J. (2007). Hold high the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics and strive for new victories in overall building a moderately prosperous society. Report at the seventeenth CCP national congress. Xinhua [online]. Available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2007-10/24/content_6938568.htm [Accessed 13 Aug. 2017].
- [11] Jin, E. (2015). Korean-Chinese films pose new opportunities. [online] Korea JoongAng Daily. Available at: <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3012040> [Accessed 23 July. 2017].
- [12] Kim, D. (2000). 'Busan International Film Festival: Catalyst for Asian Cinema', *Koreana*, p.14.
- [13] Kim, K. (2015). *The World's Spotlight on Korean Film*. 2nd ed. Korean Culture and Information Service, p.32-37.
- [14] Lordanova, D. (2011). *East Asia Film Festivals: Transnational Creativity and Commerce*. In: D. Lordanova and R. Cheung, ed., *Film Festivals and East Asia*, 1st ed. St Andrews: St. Andrews film studies.
- [15] Meyer-Clement, E. (2015). *Party hegemony and entrepreneurial power in China. Institutional change in the film and music industries*. London: Routledge.
- [16] Paquet, D. (2005). *The Korean Film Industry: 1992 to Present*. In: C. Shin and J. Stringer, ed., *New Korean Cinema*, 1st ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p.33.
- [17] Shin, J. (2005). *Globalisation and New Korean Cinema*. In: C. Shin and J. Stringer, ed., *New Korean Cinema*, 1st ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p.51-56.
- [18] Wei, T. (2011). In the Name of "Asia": Practices and Consequences of Recent International Film Co-Production in East Asia. In: v. Lee, ed., *East Asian Cinemas*, 1st ed. London: Palgrave Macmillan, p.189-196.
- [19] Yecies, B., Keane, M. and Flew, T. (2016). East Asian audio-visual collaboration and the global expansion of Chinese media. *Media International Australia*, 159(1), p.7-12.
- [20] Yecies, B., Yang, J., Shim, A., Soh, K. and Berryman, M. (2016). The Douban online social media barometer and the Chinese reception of Korean popular culture flows. *Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 13(1).
- [21] Yoon, I. and Ji, Y. (2015). Anatomy of Success in Korea -China Co-Productions with Focus on Top 4 Films. [online] Korean film.or.kr. Available at: http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/jsp/news/features.jsp?blbdComCd=601013&seq=217&mode=FEATUR_RES_VIEW [Accessed 23 July. 2017].
- [22] Zhao, J., and Keane, M. (2013). Between formal and informal: the shakeout in China's online video industry. *Media, Culture & Society*, 35(6): 724-741.