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Abstract

To shed light on the important and growing trend in international filmmaking, this chapter investigates the increasing levels of co-operation in co-productions and post-production work between China and Korea since the mid-2000s, following a surge in personnel exchange and technological transfer. It explains how a range of international relationships and industry connections is contributing to a new ecology of expertise, which in turn is boosting the expansion of China's domestic market and synergistically transforming the shape and style of Chinese cinema.

Keywords

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17. Chinese transnational cinema and the collaborative tilt toward South Korea¹

Brian Yecies

Transnational exchange has long characterized the ‘internationalization’ of the global film industry. Collaboration takes place among production companies, practitioners and co-investors. Stories and locations are subject to change; they can be traded off in contractual negotiations. In the past most projects occurred in the US for the simple reason that ‘Hollywood’ spelled the dream destination for industry workers and aspiring actors alike. However, with the general decline of the working environment in the US film industry since the 1990s, and the global industry’s increasing adoption of digital production and post-production methods since the early-to-mid-2000s, there has been a sharp shift of production away from Hollywood toward new centres of transnational cultural production, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Mumbai and Seoul.

The focus on cultural and creative industries and the excitement about China’s media ‘going out’ (*zou chuqu*) is impacting not just on flows of content but on flows of expertise. China has become the new and largest media frontier where in spite of (or perhaps because of) the Communist Party’s control, one senses a dynamic ‘global experiment of modernity’ resulting from the ‘displacement and reappropriation of expertise’ (Giddens 1994: 59) from elsewhere. International film companies and practitioners are now heading to China in droves; together with the expansion of multiplex cinemas, the increase in local audience numbers, and investment in joint projects, this has enabled the Chinese film market to become the second largest in the world (in terms of box office revenues) after the US (Pulver 2013; Qin 2015). In turn, this transnational migration of human capital and know-how across all corners of the Chinese film industry is contributing to a new ‘ecology of expertise’ (Ong 2005), which operates according to a simple but ‘fluid logic of assemblage’ (Berry 2013); in other words, films are now made in multiple locations. The end result is a contribution to the professionalization of Chinese media and media produced in China.

With these developments in mind, this chapter introduces some recent examples of collaboration and technological transfer between the Chinese and Korean film industries; because much of this joint activity has

occurred behind the scenes, the sheer volume of these efforts has frequently gone unrecognized. More and more Chinese firms and filmmakers are opening new doors by looking beyond the limitations of the local market to the wider Asian region, especially to Korea, and are thus aspiring to internationalize Chinese cinema. The internationalization of the Chinese film industry – and the evolution of a ‘Chinese transnational cinema’ – is leading to new kinds of assemblage involving Korean colleagues and firms on an increasing scale, although not without teething problems.

To shed more light on this important and growing trend in international filmmaking, this chapter investigates the increasing levels of co-operation in co-productions and post-production work between China and Korea since the mid-2000s, following a surge in personnel exchange and technological transfer. It explains how a range of international relationships and industry connections is contributing to a new ecology of expertise, which in turn is boosting the expansion of China’s domestic market and synergistically transforming the shape and style of Chinese cinema.

SEEDING GUANXI AND BLAZING NEW TRAILS

Over the last five years a small number of Korean film companies have contributed to the making of nearly one-third of the top-performing films at the Chinese box office. At the centre of this development – at least initially – have been a handful of Korean nationals who studied directing, producing, editing, and theory at the Beijing Film Academy (hereafter BFA), beginning in the early 1990s. These students were part of the first wave of Koreans allowed by their government to study in China after bilateral relations began to thaw in the post-Cold War era. Among the earliest cohort of BFA graduates, who learned valuable language and cultural skills in China, are Yi Chi-yun (aka Edward Chi-yun Yi), director Kim Jeong-jung, Chloe Park (producer, CJ E&M China), Kim Pil-jeong (manager, Korean Film Council, China), film critic Do Seong-hi, and Peter Ahn (VFX producer, Dexter Digital), to name only a few.

In their own ways all these figures have been central to the creation of new personal and industry ‘networks’ (guanxi in Chinese) between the two countries. Throughout the 1990s, these Korean students studied alongside and developed close relationships with critically acclaimed Sixth Generation ‘enfants terrible’ of Chinese cinema filmmakers such as Jia Zhangke, Wang Xiaoshuai, and Zhang Yuan. These Chinese and Korean classmates, who are now at the helm of their respective industries, were taught by some of the most distinguished Fourth and Fifth

Generation Chinese filmmakers, including Xie Fie, Tian Zhuangzhuang, Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou.

These aspiring Korean filmmakers and BFA students grew up on a steady diet of landmark Fifth Generation Chinese films such as Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (*huang tudi*, 1984), *King of the Children* (*haizi wang*, 1987), *Life on a String* (1991), and *Farewell My Concubine* (*ba wang bieji*, 1993), and Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* (*hong gaoliang*, 1987), *Ju Dou* (1990), *Raise the Red Lantern* (*dahong denglong gaogao gua*, 1991), and *The Story of Qiu Ju* (*Qiu Ju da guansi*, 1992), which were shown on television and in cinemas, and also distributed more widely on videotape. (Xie Jin's *Hibiscus Town* (*furong zhen*, 1986) and *Red Sorghum* were among the first mainland Chinese films officially released in Korea in 1989, introducing this new wave of Chinese cinema to eager filmmakers and audiences alike.) Considering these films' popularity in Korea and the universal acknowledgement of their artistic merit, it is little wonder that aspiring Korean filmmakers were drawn to Beijing to study at the BFA, Asia's most prestigious film institute. After completing their studies, these Korean graduates returned home and applied their training to improve the quality and diversity of the local Korean industry, as well as the sheer quantity of domestic films produced. After proving themselves at home and becoming recognized for their craft, they began filtering back to China to assist the rise of the new wave of Chinese cinema through their established networks there.

Ultimately the depth of *guanxi* that Korean filmmakers had nurtured in China in the early-to-mid-1990s led to the flowering of relationships with both the state-controlled and budding commercial sectors of the Chinese film industry. As a result, when the Pusan International Film Festival (hereafter PIFF, but known today as BIFF) – the largest festival and market in the world for Asian cinema, and a key networking location for promoting Asian films to the global film industry – was launched in 1996, established linkages with the Chinese film industry proved invaluable. Festival programmers tapped into established personal networks, and also began building new networks of their own for the benefit of the industry as a whole.

During the 1990s, members of the inner circle of the Mainland Chinese film industry added new layers to the networks developing between Chinese and Korean filmmakers. Major directors including Xie Jin, Zhang Ming, Zhang Yimou, Jia Zhangke, Zhang Yuan, Wang Xiaoshuai and their entourages visited Korea under the auspices of PIFF, networking with Korean industry figures attending the festival. In 1996, Chinese film and television director and producer Zhang Yuan (a BFA graduate) was invited to be a jury member for the New Currents Award at the

inaugural PIFF. And in 1997, Shan Dongbing of China Film Export & Import Corporation – the single largest (state-run) company of its kind – sat on the jury for PIFF's NETPAC (Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema) Award, while Sixth Generation director Zhang Ming was a jury member for the New Currents Award, an award he had himself won the previous year for his contemporary social drama *In Expectation* (1995, aka *Rainclouds Over Wushan*). In addition to these three directors, the festival was attended by numerous guests from all sectors of Greater China's film and entertainment industries during the 1990s.

In the East Asian context, the development of these *guanxi* networks has provided the seedbed for the rapid growth of collaboration between Chinese and Korean filmmakers after 2001, and for the Chinese film industry's tilt toward Korea more generally.

Today, the world's major film industry players, whether from Hollywood, Korea, East Asia or China itself, are jockeying for a share in the rapidly unfolding economic and cultural dream that is the Chinese market: a privileged position that up until a few years ago was open only to filmmakers and firms from within Mainland China. Unquestionably, the 'opening up' of the burgeoning Chinese film market has played a significant part in writing the latest chapter of the Chinese film industry's own expansion into international markets. Since China joined the WTO in 2001, cooperation between the Chinese and Korean film industries has gradually generated a momentum that has drawn them increasingly closer together, enabling Korean filmmakers to become 'wider, deeper, more tightly [enmeshed] with China' (*Korean Cinema Today* 2012: 30). In recent years this relationship has blossomed in a number of areas, including a handful of formal co-productions overseen by Korean Film Council (hereafter KOFIC, a quasi-government organization charged with promoting and supporting Korean Films at home and abroad), and a much larger number of informal collaborations, including the use by Chinese companies of Korean post-production and visual effects firms, co-financing, the sharing of cast and crews, and the shooting of particular scenes or even entire films on location in one or both countries.

It is especially notable that the number and kinds of bilateral collaborations have multiplied steeply since 2009, following the establishment of a KOFIC branch office in Beijing. In 2011, ~~the newly appointed~~ KOFIC chairman, Kim Ui-seok, publicly underscored the necessity of pursuing globalization activities of this kind (Kim 2011). Although the bulk of Chinese–Korean collaborations were occurring outside of this official channel, nevertheless, under Kim's leadership, in 2011 KOFIC and KAFA (Korean Film Academy) launched a small and exclusive (but nevertheless high-profile) industry networking event known as KAFA

China Pre-biz. This event brought a select group of Chinese and Korean film people together in Beijing to forge new relationships, primarily with an eye to their own future projects, and to learn more about each other's markets. Partly as a result of the significant networks established at this event, as well as the continued hosting of Chinese industry delegates at BIFF, the value of China's official film imports from Korea has taken off: US\$731,000 in 2012; US\$1,757,000 in 2013; and a massive US\$8,206,000 in 2014.²

A sharp upturn for the Korean film industry, and film industries around the globe, occurred in early 2012 when the Chinese government increased the number of foreign feature films permitted to share in domestic box office profits from 20 to 34; as a result the market for Korean films in China expanded even further.³ At the same time the numbers of multiplex screens have continued to rise in China, reaching around 23,600 at the end of 2014: in 2014 alone 1,015 new cinemas and 5,397 new screens were added, revealing a truly remarkable acceleration in growth, up from an estimated 1,500 modern multiplex screens in 2008.⁴ According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, Mainland China's cinemas showed a 'tenfold increase' between 2002 and 2012: from 1,300 to 13,000 (Tsui 2012). This trend is bound to continue considering the size of China's population, which now is reaching 1.4 billion. The number of films exhibited in 3D has risen sharply too and new box office revenue-sharing records have been set in this area. Most importantly, the 2014 signing of the China–Korea co-production treaty has classified co-produced films as local films, thus further expanding Chinese–Korean international film encounters – and Korea's share of the massive Chinese box office. Bilateral collaborations can only increase following the signing of this landmark treaty. In short, a large slice of the contemporary Korean film industry has become part of the 'Chinese dream'. China has become a unique stepping stone for the further globalization – and perhaps continued survival – of major sectors of the Korean film industry.

The Chinese film industry's recent 'tilt' towards Korea is the product of a long sequence of developments. With the growing popularity of Korean cultural contents in Asia – the so-called Korean Wave – one of the most notable areas of film collaboration in the 2000s was the export of acting talent. Since 2003, an increasing number of Korean actors, including Kwon Sang-woo, Kim Hee-sun, Song Hye-gyo, Jung Woo-sung and So Ji-seup, have accepted invitations to appear in Chinese productions, eager to expand their profiles among new pan-Asian audiences.⁵ In turn, directors such as Jackie Chan have increased the potential commercial value of their films by casting these popular stars. *Seven Swords* (*qi jian*, 2003) and *The Myth* (*shenhua*, 2005) starred leading ladies Kim So-yeon and Kim Hee-

sun respectively, while popular singer and television actress Jang Na-ra appeared in *Girls' Revolution* (*maque yao geming*, 2007), directed by San Dao and co-starring Jaycee Chan (Jackie Chan's son). More recently, Choo Ja-hyun starred in the crime thriller film *The Boundary* (*quancheng tongji*, 2014), directed by Wang Tao.

A number of established Korean directors have also been able to reboot their careers in China. Director Hur Jin-ho (aka Heo Jin-ho), well known for *Christmas in August* (1998) and *One Fine Spring Day* (2001)), has directed two Chinese films, *A Good Rain Knows* (*haoyu shijie*, 2009, aka *Season of Good Rain*) and *Dangerous Liaisons* (*weixian guanxi*, 2012). Both films were produced by Beijing-based Zonbo Media, blending the commercial acumen of Zonbo's president Chen Weiming with the artistic vision of director Hur. Around the same time, Ahn Byung-ki, Korea's leading horror film director, best known for *A Nightmare* (2000), *Phone* (2002) and *Bunshinsaba* (2004), and also the producer of *Speed Scandal* (2008) and *Sunny* (2011), which were both box office hits in China, entered the Chinese market. He has directed a Chinese trilogy based on his 2004 hit film, *Bunshinsaba* (2012), *Bunshinsaba 2* (2013), and *Bunshinsaba 3* (2014) – one of the earliest domestic horror series released in China. Finally, in 2015, Korean director Chang Yoon-hyun, known for the thriller *Tell Me Something* (1998), is directing the transnational thriller *The Peaceful Island*, a co-production produced by CJ E&M, China's C2M and Huace Media and Hong Kong's Media Asia Group. Although these are all seasoned directors with strong track records, their reputations had faded in Korea after a cohort of younger, ambitious directors pushed them out of the spotlight. As a result, they struggled to find new projects at home and turned their attention to China where more than 600 films were produced in 2014, signalling a need for experienced directors to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the burgeoning Chinese film industry.

Over time and as Chinese cinema's local and global profile continued to expand, the nature and scope of joint Chinese–Korean projects became increasingly sophisticated. Productions featuring Chinese locations include: the historical action-swordplay epic *Musa* (*wushi* aka *The Warrior* 2001, aka *Musa, the Warrior*), written and directed by Kim Sung-soo and co-produced by Cha Sung-jae (Sidus) and Zhang Xia (deputy managing director of the Beijing Film Studio), with major support from CJ Entertainment and state-run China Film Group, and shot on location in the desert lake area of Zhongwei, the Liaoning highlands, and the ancient city of Xingcheng; CJ Entertainment's fantasy–action drama *The Legend of Evil Lake* (2003); the historical action-swordplay movie *Shadowless Sword* (2005), directed by Kim Young-jun and co-financed by Taewon Entertainment and US-based New Line Cinema (shot at Hengdian

World Studio); and the historical action-adventure drama *Demon Empire* (aka *The Restless*, 2006), produced by Nabi Pictures and directed by Kim Sung-soo, with visual effects by Seoul-based Macrograph. (*Demon Empire* was also shot at Hengdian World Studio.)

In short, the abovementioned films stand as watershed productions, films that have inspired further collaborative ventures between the Chinese and Korean film industries that have continued to grow in both strength and scope. Further collaboration between Chinese and Korean filmmakers followed these projects, including a growing number of Korean firms that have provided production and digital post-production services in China, at a fraction of the cost of similar work undertaken for most Hollywood blockbusters.

In 2007, a new watershed in international film collaboration was celebrated when BIFF (then known as PIFF) screened Feng Xiaogang's *Assembly* (*jijie hao*, 2007) as the festival's opening offering. The prominent position given to this action-war drama, a co-production between China, Hong Kong and Korea, at BIFF represented a new level of recognition for the collaborative efforts of the Greater Chinese and Korean film industries. Not only were Huayi Brothers and Media Asia Films, *Assembly*'s producers, the largest and most progressive film companies in China, but the festival screening showcased the close involvement of Korean action and post-production digital effects specialists in the film (coordinated by MK Pictures); such features would soon come to typify Korea's deepening contribution to Chinese cinema.

From this moment on the large scale sharing of technical staff and technological transfer between China and Korea signalled the birth of an advanced form of film collaboration. Replacing the patterns of the recent past, where one partner commonly maintained leadership of a co-production project, China and Korea were showing how it was possible for groups of international crew members to be brought together through personal and industry networks to complete creative projects as a team. This is not to claim that colleagues from both countries shared intimate details of every aspect of the film during the pre-production, production, and post-production stages of *Assembly*, rather that levels of collaboration, mutual respect and *guanxi* had reached unprecedented heights since members of both film industries had worked alongside each other on *Musa* in 2001.

In early 2006, when Feng Xiaogang was conceiving the *Assembly*, he and his core production and planning team looked to Kang Je-gyu's Korean War blockbuster hit *Taegukgi* (2004, aka *The Brotherhood of War*) as a model to emulate. Not only did *Taegukgi* look, sound, and feel like the Hollywood blockbuster *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), which

was made on a budget of around US\$70 million, but it was produced for around 18 per cent of that figure. To help bring *Taegukgi* to China, Feng and his team collaborated with Korea's MK Pictures, which was exploring ways of capitalizing on the momentum generated by the production of *Musa* in China five years earlier.

MK Pictures assisted the project by offering Feng producer Edward Chi-yun Yi, a BFA graduate who coordinated the work of specialized teams from Korea. Yi had extensive networks in both the Korean and Chinese film industries and had developed an intimate knowledge of their inner workings. In addition to speaking Chinese and understanding Chinese culture, he knew the right people for this project – namely, the key executives and crewmembers who had worked on *Taegukgi*. In 1996, on returning to Korea after completing his studies at BFA, Yi was appointed production manager on director Kang Je-gyu's *The Ginko Bed*. Then in 1999, he was involved in the pre-production of *The Anarchists*, scouting locations in Shanghai. He was also a line producer during its production at Shanghai Film Studio's newly built 62-acre film production and theme park complex, with heavy assistance from local art director Zheng Changfu and producers Zhong Zheng (of *Purple Butterfly*, *zi hudie*, 2003) fame) and Fu Wenxia. As one of the active producers on *Assembly*, Yi was responsible for bringing together a Korean team of action and stunt coordinators, as well as technical experts in special effects, make-up, sound effects and sound editing – teams which had worked together previously on *Taegukgi*. Given that this was the first time such a large number of Korean technicians and other specialists had worked on a Chinese blockbuster, there was much for both sides to learn from each other. As a result the Korean film industry was made aware of the burgeoning need in the Chinese industry for the type of expertise and advanced technical skills and training that Korean practitioners had amassed since *Shiri* had splashed across the big screen in 1999.

Listing the numerous films made in China with input from Korean practitioners following the release of *Assembly* is a near-impossible task. Although, what the list does show is that Koreans have left their mark on a plethora of genres including *wuxia* (martial arts), comedies and fantasies, contemporary and period dramas, romantic and black comedies, thrillers and horror films and war films. In reality the number of Chinese–Korean film encounters of all varieties far exceeds the list of co-productions offered by KOFIC and other studies of Chinese and Korean cinema in international markets.⁶

Having said this, since *Assembly*, Yi has continued to work as a producer with some of China's leading commercial directors and has introduced an increasing number of fellow Korean film practitioners to Chinese film

projects. In 2008 and 2009, Korean special effects and make-up company MAGE, in concert with special effects company Demolition and the Seoul-based Dolby film sound-mixing studio Bluecap Soundworks worked extensively on John Woo's *Red Cliff I* (*chibi*, 2008) and *Red Cliff II* (2009), helping to realize the director's full creative vision for the series. In 2010, these same three firms, along with other Korean action consultants and stunt coordinators, helped to re-create the striking disaster sequences and soundscapes in Feng Xiaogang's *Aftershock* (*Tangshan da dizhen*, 2010), a film about the 1976 Tangshan earthquake and its devastating aftermath. In addition, Busan-based AZ Works, headed by Lee Yong-gi, 'grandfather of colour grading' in Korea, received the visual effects award at the Hong Kong Film Awards for its contribution to Tsui Hark's *Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame* (*Di Renjie zhi tongtian diguo*, 2010). While working on these and additional projects, Yi (and others following in his footsteps) came to appreciate that Korea was far ahead of China in terms of advanced digital production and post-production technology and techniques. As a result, Korean companies and practitioners began concentrating their activities in this lucrative frontier territory.

Between 2009 and 2015, Korean practitioners working in China continued to consolidate their skills while gaining valuable experience in the rapidly expanding Chinese film industry. During this period, Seoul-based Digital Idea and Beijing-based Lollol Media worked on the visual effects and digital intermediary (aka DI or colour grading) work for Tsui Hark's top-performing 3D film *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* (*gui lunmei*, 2011) as well as *CZ12* (aka *Chinese Zodiac*, *shi'er sheng xiao*, directed by Jackie Chan, 2012) and *The Chef, The Actor, The Scoundrel*, *chuzi xizi pizi*.⁷ In addition, Korea's CJ Powercast, Next Visual Studio, and Lollol Media (along with Chinese firm Phenom Film) played major roles in the VFX and 2D/3D digital intermediary work on director Wuershan's supernatural fantasy-action romance *Painted Skin 2: The Resurrection* (*huapi er*, 2012), inspired by the classic Liao Zhai Zhi Yi collection of supernatural tales.⁸

Thus far, the biggest box office sensation resulting from Chinese-Korean collaboration is Stephen Chow's *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* (*xiyou xiangmo pian*, 2013), an action-comedy directed by Stephen Chow and Derek Kwok Chi-Kin, which returned a gross profit of US\$192 million. For this action-packed 3D production, Korean companies Macrograph and Moneff, in concert with the Korean VFX farm run by Los Angeles-based Venture 3D, completed the spectacular visual effects; Seoul-based Locus Corp. was responsible for key CGI scenes as well as the film's ancillary character-licensing products. The next big collaborative hit was *The Monkey King* (*da nao tian gong*, 2014), which

conquered the box office with US\$168 million. A total of 11 Korean companies worked on this film, including CG firms Dexter Digital, Digital Studio 2L, Digital Idea and Macrograph, helping *The Monkey King* to become the second runner-up at the box office in 2014, behind *Transformers: Age of Extinction* and the Chinese romantic comedy/road movie *Breakup Buddies* (*xinhua nufang*) directed by Ning Hao.⁹ In their respective credits, *Journey to the West* and *The Monkey King* boast the longest list of Korean companies and practitioners of any films produced in China, demonstrating the increasing scope of the ongoing internationalization of Chinese cinema.

Clearly the list of Korean companies and individuals contributing to Asian blockbusters that exemplify Chinese cinema's upward technological trajectory is burgeoning. In particular, Yi and other producers, who have stayed and worked in China as long-termers, are now setting their sails to catch the winds of change blowing across China – gradual changes that have come about as a result of government regulations that have opened up the film industry and that may or may not continue in the same direction in the future. I call these post-production pioneers 'effects inbetweeners' – a play on the name of the visual effects clean-up artists in the animation industry's pre-digital (traditional) era.

EFFECTS INBETWEENERS

Since 2002, China's annual film production figures have soared, with an average annual growth rate of 20 per cent; in 2010, with 526 productions to its credit, China became the third largest producer of films in the world (Entgroup 2012). In 2014 this figure had reached 618. The rapidly expanding number of films being produced on an annual basis in China (Frater 2015) is ensuring that there is no shortage of DI and visual effects work for both domestic and international practitioners and firms.

Between 2013 and 2014, Forestt Studios, a full-service post-production company based in the Qikeshu Innovation Park area of Chaoyang District in Beijing, and run by experienced Korean DI expert Ethan Park, completed a series of films of its own. Forestt specializes in colour grading for feature films (to which it has recently added full-scale sound post-production), and is one of the few Chinese companies that can meet the highest international standards for 2D and 3D high-resolution (4K real-time) digital intermediate service. The firm's lengthy filmography includes the romance *My Lucky Star* (2013), a prequel to the 2009 official Chinese–Korean co-production *Sophie's Revenge, feichang wanmei* (produced by Beijing Perfect World Co. and CJ Entertainment), directed by

US-born Dennie Gordon and starring Zhang Ziyi and Leehom Wang; and the Chinese–Hong Kong action crime thriller *A Chilling Cosplay* (2013, aka *-197°C Murder*), by director Wang Guangli and producer Wong Jing. With Park at the controls, Forestt also made major contributions to Wang Xiaoshuai's *Red Amnesia* (*chuangru zhe*, 2014). In all, Forestt Studios completed around 20 films in 2014 and another 15 in the first quarter of 2015, and there are another 10 films in the pipeline for completion before the end of 2015.¹⁰

As one might expect, Chinese directors and producers inspire Korean DI and visual effects technicians in different ways from their Korean counterparts, pushing them to satisfy a different set of aesthetic values and production needs. Simply put, China's landscape colour palette is unlike that found in Korea; in particular, the colours of land and sky, the shapes of mountains and rivers, as well as people's reaction to the natural world all differ in significant respects from their Korean equivalents, further challenging Korean professionals to explore alternative artistic and creative terrain.

This trend has been strengthened by the relaxation of official censorship regulations. In July 2013, China's State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (aka SAPPRFT, formerly known as the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television or SARFT) announced that it would confine its scrutiny to inspecting a story summary prior to granting a filming permit, thereby eliminating 20 distinct components requiring government approval, including the thorough assessment of film scripts (Xinhua 2013).¹¹ With this changing policy landscape in mind, the somewhat surprising censorship approval granted to the psychological mystery thriller-drama *Double Exposure* (*erci baoguang*, 2012) offers a timely opportunity to assess the potential for technical and artistic creativity in the Chinese film industry under a relaxed censorship regime. A case study of its post-production context offers insights into how and where Korean practitioners are making a mark on Chinese cinema in a potentially volatile policy environment.

Double Exposure (2012), director Li Yu's fifth and most aesthetically ambitious feature film to date, is a quintessential example of an evolving transnational cinema – one that is being created through an assemblage of international collaborators drawn from across China's new ecology of expertise. Her exploration of thriller and road movie conventions, which marks a departure from her earlier documentary and realist style, makes the film a significant new addition to 'China's genre revolution' (Elley 2015). In this visually stunning film, Li uses the flashbacks, illusions and hallucinations involving sex, adultery, violence and murder experienced by the protagonist Song Qi (played by Fan Bingbing) to disorientate

the audience. Song Qi, an ambitious cosmetic surgeon, experiences emotional turmoil after learning that her closest friend is having an affair with her boyfriend. Her life becomes more disjointed when she discovers that she has a psychological disorder. Song embarks on a road trip in search of her past and as a means of uncovering her deeply repressed thoughts. The second half of the film in particular is marked by a sense of ambiguity, detracting from the overall cohesion of the story. Despite its provocative content, or perhaps *because* the film's controversial scenes are presented as the protagonist's paranoid delusions, *Double Xposure* managed to satisfy government censorship (after several rounds of negotiations).¹²

Double Xposure is an excellent example of the ways in which, in contemporary Chinese cinema, film genres are being expanded with the aid of the sophisticated technical support and creative input offered by Korean practitioners. The film was shot on five different formats (which were tested in advance along with an iPhone 4 camera): primarily with the Alexa digital film camera, but with flashback, helicopter, and underwater sequences shot on a combination of 35mm (for aerial photography) and Super 16mm analogue, and Canon 5D, GoPro (for CCTV footage), and RED MX (for high-speed shots) digital film cameras. The crisp, clean, cold look that these filming techniques created for the scenes set in the present day reflected the sterile atmosphere of the cosmetic surgeons' operating theatre, to give one example. This aesthetic forms an effective contrast to the aged, analogue-style appearance of the flashbacks and historical sequences, initially replicated through digital film noise, but eventually given a more authentic 'grainy' look through the use of Super 16mm film stock. Specifically, the DI was used to enhance the 'cold' feeling of the appropriate sequences by increasing the blue and green tints, and then to create a desaturated and low-contrast colour effect near the end of the film when Song Qi emerges from her delusions and into a more natural but still ethereal setting on a beach. Even for a veteran colourist like Park, with seven years' experience in the industry – which he has shared with me in multiple interviews, the DI process involved made *Double Xposure* the most challenging and interesting film he had worked on to date.

Once the footage had been digitized using state-of-the-art equipment, DI specialist Park, working on the project exclusively in Beijing, created artificial scratches and dust spots on the film, removed grain from other shots, and applied motion and edge blur for the dream sequences as well to simulate camera shake and add 'highlight glow' to close ups of Song Qi. Park's attempts to differentiate sequential shots, while also using particular colours to signal emotions displayed by the characters, provided additional challenges. The shared vision that marked the pair's relationship, along with Li Yu's confidence in Park's talent and ability, as seen in his

work on her previous film *Buddha Mountain* (*guanyin shan*, 2010), enabled Park to experiment freely with colour grading and correction techniques, processes that were new not only to him as one of Korea's most experienced DI experts, but also to Chinese cinema. Park dedicated 20 days to completing the DI for *Double Exposure* over a three-month period, taking breaks between processing each quarter of the film in order to maintain a fresh perspective on the work and to push his, and cinematographer Florian Zinke's ideas even further, achieving just the kind of creative response to the material that producer Li Fang had hoped for.¹³

For *Double Exposure*, Park – who had also worked closely with Li Fang on *Buddha Mountain*, which required three months' worth of DI, resulting in a wholly unconventional visual style, and German-born cinematographer Florian Zinke, a graduate of the Beijing Film Academy – pushed their joint creative endeavors in a new direction. Building on their combined track record, the team developed a unique visual style that veered away from the direction taken by recent unconventional Korean thrillers such as the horror-thriller *H* (2002, about an urban serial killer), Kim Jee-woon's *A Tale of Two Sisters* (2003), and Park Chan-wook's *Thirst* (2009).

More recently, Forestt Studios under Park's creative direction completed the post-production and digital effects for Sixth Generation non-conforming *enfant terrible* Chinese arthouse auteur director Lou Ye's Chinese–French co-production *Blind Massage* (*tui na*, 2014), a drama told from the perspective of blind masseurs and masseuses. *Blind Massage*, which received script approval from SAPPRT before production began, is director (and BFA graduate) Lou Ye's eighth feature film but only the third that censors have approved for release in China.¹⁴ It won Asia Pacific Screen Awards' Jury Grand Prize and the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival Award for best feature film, best adapted screenplay, new performer (Zhang Lei), cinematography, film editing, and sound effects, as well as the Silver Berlin Bear for Jian Zeng's outstanding artistic contribution to cinematography at the 2014 Berlin International Film Festival. Truth be told, and without providing a disservice to the ways that Jian Zeng shot the film, whilst the Silver Bear explicitly celebrates individual achievement, the film and its filmmakers owe a debt of gratitude to Park, who is uncredited on *Blind Massage* in IMDB, for his skillful and ingenious treatment of the film during post-production. Hence, it is no wonder there is a small picture of Park holding the Silver Bear hanging on the wall in Forestt Studios.

In order to create an innovative look for the film, and also to manage the multiple grading applied to nearly every single shot, Park and his team of junior assistants required 60 days, about six times as long as a film with more conventional DI, to colour it, guided in each scene by the

tempo of the background music and the natural sound layer. This was a novel approach for Park and for DI more generally (certainly in China and Korea, but also internationally), given that conventional DI involves a single consistent grading for each shot. Furthermore, many colourists turn off the audio while working to avoid the soundtrack influencing their colouring style. As a result, in *Blind Massage* the soundtrack and the colour palette flow in unison as if they were two halves of a single breathing rhythm, raising provocative questions about what blind people 'see' in their imaginative world. To gain further understanding of this synesthetic rhythm in a real-life setting, Park visited numerous 'blind massage' parlors in an attempt to experience this world for himself. Limited space here prevents further analysis of how Park fully implemented his own visions into the DI and how it impacted the cinematography, however, suffice it to say that with or without Jian Zeng and Lou Ye's tacit knowledge, Park propelled the film's visual aesthetics (and cinematography) way beyond the conspicuous frame.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This chapter has attempted to show how a new ecology of expertise involving Korean firms and practitioners working with Chinese colleagues is enabling China to 'catch up' to Hollywood by drawing technological expertise and knowledge through selective collaborative ventures. In many ways this fluid assemblage of human capital, which typifies the global playing field, is presently enabling the Chinese and Korean film industries gradually to challenge global markets that were once dominated by US firms and practitioners.

The opportunity for Korean film practitioners to work on the abbreviated list of Chinese films discussed here has grown from tiny seedlings – the contacts and friendships (aka *guanxi*) that a handful of aspiring Korean filmmakers made while studying at the Beijing Film Academy during the early-to-mid-1990s. The professional inroads made by these now major Korean industry players have enabled themselves and others throughout the Korean film industry to become some of the most active practitioners and companies in China today. In this way Korean cinema is continuing to expand its boundaries, leveraging off talent and expertise deployed outside of Korea's national borders.

Working behind the scenes, Ethan Park (aka Park Sang-soo, not to be confused with the colourist Ethan Park working in the US industry) is one of the key figures in understanding the nature of the collaborative relationship between the Chinese and Korean film industries, and the

ways in which the institution of Korean cinema is being absorbed by the Chinese film industry, at least in part, and often without acknowledgement. Park studied film editing at Dongguk University (Seoul) and in 2006 joined post-production company HFR where he specialized in colour grading and DI, skills that were in high demand as a result of the ongoing transition to digital workflow practices. Park's English-language skills landed him a key role as a DI producer on CJ E&M's first China-Korea co-production, *Sophie's Revenge* (2009). In the same year he urged HFR to open a Beijing branch, and Park moved to China to apply the skills that he had mastered while working on several dozen top-grossing Korean films.¹⁵ After leaving HFR, he teamed up with Yi Chi-yun at rival post-production firm Lollol Media in Beijing, thus gaining further experience in the local market and expanding his industry and personal networks. Park is currently CEO of Forestt Studios, known for both its commercial work and highly creative arthouse genre-bending films.

Post-production practitioners like Park are pioneer digital colourists: that is, they manipulate the colours of a film during the post-production and final printing processes, which are now completely digitized (and known as digital intermediary or DI). DI, which has become an essential medium for filmmaking across the globe, enables filmmakers to manipulate a film and prepare it for digital projection before it is distributed to cinemas or processed for other screen formats. Park is one of the select few practitioners who has 'coloured' and, following the industry's transition from analog to digital equipment, digitized the bulk of Korean feature films, both commercial and independent, made by the leading producers, including such leading directors as Bong Joon-ho, Park Chan wook, Kim Jee-woon and Lee Myung-se. This remarkable achievement has come hard on the heels of his role in pioneering Korean cinema's transition to digital equipment and workflow processes between 2002 and 2005.

While working in China, Park has explored numerous opportunities offered by new types of film projects that have enabled him to enhance his skills. The pathway that he has taken and the timing of his entry into the Chinese market has coincided with the large-scale expansion and transformation of the Korean film industry. At the same time a wave of change is sweeping through the Chinese film industry, although some practitioners are yet to appreciate the rapidly changing policy environment in which they are now operating. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that this transformation of the Chinese film scene is being driven by commercial imperatives and achieved in large part by the leveraging of creativity from outside China, notably from Korea, one of the country's most significant trading partners. In this way new avenues are being created for alternative

production and distribution ventures within China's independent cinema as well as the mainstream commercial environment.

Against this background of large-scale collaboration, and bearing in mind that international film co-productions have become commonplace around the globe (and that visual effects experts rarely receive full credit for their post-production artistry), fine-tuning the working relationships between international partners still presents a challenge for Chinese cinema. In the cases of *Double Exposure* and *Blind Massage* a pinch of Korean technical skill and ingenuity has proven to be a key ingredient in producing a successful dish, especially where the creation of original and dynamic colourscapes and intriguing accents to cinematography has been a critical factor. Just as a new breed of Korean films produced after the success of *Shiri* achieved a high level of production values and narrative diversity, contemporary Chinese films are becoming known for their innovative visual styles and growing diversity of genres and stories. The increasing collaboration between the two countries, especially co-operation in post-production work, is raising the bar in terms of technical quality, leading to increased value in the marketplace.

Whilst industrial and technological change is always the product of multiple factors and variables, as well as teams of creative practitioners, it is undeniable that a handful of Korean technicians have created new pathways that have smoothed the Chinese film industry's transition to digital workflow practices to advanced international standards. In the recent past, DI was a cost-prohibitive luxury offered by a small number of US, Canadian and Australian firms working with a select group of leading Chinese directors and their big-budget films. However, the arrival of Park and other Korean practitioners (working for Korea-based companies such as CJ Powercast, Dexter Digital, Digital Idea, Digital Studio 2L, Macrograph, Moneff, and SK Independence, etc.), coupled with lower costs and a high level of technical capability, has enabled both established and emerging Chinese filmmakers to utilize this key process. These technical specialists have provided a set of readily transferable and economical resources in the form of core skills, knowledge, and technological expertise that are a match for the high-end infrastructure and capabilities generally associated with Hollywood productions while complementing and strengthening the existing capabilities of Chinese filmmakers and technicians.

In sum, the collaborative ventures that Korean producers and directors pursued in tandem with their Chinese colleagues throughout the 2000s have entered a new stage with the advent of a host of new opportunities in the post-production arena. In 2015 China is still the new wild frontier, a stimulating environment that nevertheless presents Korean practitioners

with many challenges, including opportunity costs – the sharing of trade secrets and intellectual property, among other things. If industry headlines are anything to go by, however, this is a small price to pay given that there seems to be ‘No End in Sight for China Film Sector’s Rapid Expansion’ (Coonan 2013). In these ways, both Chinese and Korean national cinemas are undergoing a major makeover as Chinese filmmakers and firms leverage the fresh aesthetic qualities and export-oriented expertise for which Korean cinema has become celebrated around the globe since the censorship of domestic films was ended by the Korean government in 1996 (Yecies 2008; Yecies and Shim 2011). In this new cultural and commercial arena, Korea’s global experience and success with its own brand of soft power has been instrumental in developing its collaborative relationship with China.

NOTES

1. This chapter draws on research currently being conducted in an Australian Research Council Discovery project *Willing Collaborators: Negotiating Change in East Asian Media Production* DP 140101643. The author thanks producer Yi Chi Yun, and post-production practitioners Ethan Park, Lee Yong-gi, Kim Hyeong-seok, Peter Ahn, and Choi Young, as well as Chinese industry representatives Shan Dongbing (former International General Manager, Le Vision Pictures), Michelle Yeh (Producer, East Light Film), Mia Zhang (Creative Producer, Walt Disney China and formerly with Yunnan Film Group), and April Fang (April Harvest Productions) for sharing their insights on this topic.
2. According to a major KOFIC report, film exports to Hong Kong are listed separately from those to the PRC; the value of exports to Hong Kong also increased from US\$832,700 in 2012 to US\$2,755,624 in 2014. Taken together, these figures show an unprecedented increase in total exports to Greater China. See KOFIC 2015, 48.
3. The government also allows a small number of flat-fee foreign films on China’s big screens. Between 2012 and 2014, over 100 additional films were approved for import – each recouping a one-off payment without taking a cut of the box office revenue. One advantage of the flat-fee system is that the film’s original foreign producer/distributor receives the fees up-front and is not dependent on a local partner to report box office income accurately – a besetting problem for parts of the global film industry today.
4. Jibu, Bian (2015), ‘China Passes US at Movie Box Office’, *China Daily* 3 March, accessed 3 March 2015. at http://m.chinadaily.com.cn/en/2015-03/03/content_19709880.htm.
5. Other recent cases of Korean actors working in China include Jung Woo-sung starring alongside Michelle Yeoh in *Reign of Assassins* (2010), Kim Hee-sun in *The Warring States* (2011), Kwon Sang-woo in *Chinese Zodiac* (2012), Song Hye-kyo in *The Grandmaster* (2013), *The Crossing* (2014), and *The Crossing 2* (2015), as well as K-pop boy band Super Junior singer and actor Choi Si Won, in *Dragon Blade* (2015).
6. On the Kobiz (Korean Film Business Zone) website run by KOFIC, a total of 28 films are listed in the Korea–China co-production category, beginning with *Seven Swords* in 2005. The co-production area listed include co-producing, co-financing, location, production services and talent exchanges: accessed 20 September 2015 at www.kobiz.or.kr/jsp/production/productionCaseList.jsp.
7. The total gross profit earned by *The Flying Swords of Dragon Gate* was US\$100 million. See Marsh, James (2012), ‘China Beat: Tsui Hark & Bona Exploring 3D Together’,

- Twitchfilm* 12 May, accessed 31 March 2015 at <http://twitchfilm.com/2012/05/china-beat-tsui-hark-bona-3d-projects.html>.
8. *Painted Skin 2*'s box office takings exceeded US\$108 million, overtaking Jiang Wen's *Let the Bullets Fly* (US\$106 million) and Feng Xiaogang's *Aftershock* (US\$106 million) and becoming the highest-grossing Chinese film of 2012. See Anonymous, 'Painted Skin 2 Becomes Highest-Grossing Chinese Film Ever' *Screendaily* (28 July 2012), accessed 31 March 2015 at <http://www.screendaily.com/territories/asia-pacific/painted-skin-2-becomes-highest-grossing-chinese-film-ever/5044809.article>.
 9. See www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/.
 10. Prior to establishing Forestt, Park also worked on Wang's *Chongqing Blues* (2010), as well as Zhang Yuan's celebrated *Beijing Flickers* (2012).
 11. The easing of restrictions only applies to films dealing with 'ordinary' subjects – those avoiding matters connected with 'diplomacy, ethnic topics, religion, military, judiciary, historical figures, and cultural celebrities'.
 12. Earlier, the cuts to Li's *Lost in Beijing* demanded by the censors had fundamentally altered the story written by Li and her co-writer and producer Li Fang. (The film was later banned outright.)
 13. In the digital environment, the DI process normally takes around seven days to complete, or five days for a rush job. Not only did Park's work on *Double Exposure* amount to more than double the number of working days usually spent on the DI for a film (which usually involves around 80% grading and 20% adjusting the work according to feedback received from the director and/or producer), but it also marked an innovative approach to the workflow process.
 14. Lou Ye's notable filmography includes *Suzhou River* (2000, initially banned by SARFT), *Purple Butterfly* (2003, approved), *Summer Palace* (2006, banned), *Spring Fever* (2009, banned), and *Mystery* (2012, approved).
 15. For HFR's China branch, Ethan Park and Lee Yong-gi purchased and installed state-of-the-art digital post-production equipment, costing upwards of US\$500,000 (depending on the film scanner, recorder and digital projector chosen, as well as upgrades and options, but not including the cost of building a suitable studio space – a project which they also oversaw). The pair have transferred state-of-the-art technology in China, thus contributing more than creative ideas to the local ecology of expertise. Park and Lee relocated to Beijing in 2009 and 2011 respectively, and in 2015 they and a growing number of Korean colleagues are among the most sought-after DI and visual effects experts in China.

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