

***Rebuild Resilience: Film Communication within East Asia in the Pre-pandemic, Pandemic, and Post-pandemic Era***

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**Abstract**

The increasing in-depth cooperation of the film industry among Japan China and South Korea has accelerated the integration of film cultures among the three countries. The global epidemic in 2020 not only has an impact on the film industry in every country, but also has a great impact on film exchanges among the countries. The development, recovery, revitalization and prosperity of East Asian film communication is closely linked to the development and destiny of the entire region's culture. This paper traces the communication of East Asian films in the 21st century, under the multidisciplinary perspective of cultural and communication studies. Within the framework of the film history, film theory and film criticism, the paper analyzes the structural inherent law and external factors, especially COVID-19 pandemic that formed and influenced the film communication among China, Japan and South Korea. And based on specific examples commonality and individuality, the paper aims to provide historical references and possible answers to the current problems encountered in film communication in East Asia. This paper also discusses several issues of East Asian films in the context of today's globalization, such as how to have an equal dialogue with the world's films, how to use our own advantages to develop cross-cultural exchanges with films from all over the world, how to expand the regional film market, how to protect the national film culture. The answers to these questions have enlightening significance for the development of film communications between East Asia and the world.

Keyword: Film Communication, East Asia, Pandemic, Asian Cinema

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## Introduction

Due to geographical, cultural, historical, economic and other factors, the film communication among China, Japan, and South Korea have a long history, and their mutual influences are also increasingly greater. As an effective media, film has enriched the spiritual and cultural world of people among the countries and promoted friendly communication among the people.

Film communication and collaboration is viewed as an essential business in cultural development for one country. Western world where the film originated has promoted film communication since long time ago. France has also been at the forefront of all European and pan- European audiovisual initiatives (MEDIA, EUREKA and Eurimages). (The French government contributed half the budget of the Council of Europe's Fund in its first year of operation.) In the past decade, France managed, despite strong opposition from several member States, to convince its European partners of the benefits of cooperation and the need to retain/or introduce film subsidies (Jäckel, 2000:131).

Basically, in my research, I divided the film communication into three layers which I present with this pyramid. At the top of the pyramid is the policy, which promotes transnational film cooperation and perhaps fundamental to all. At the bottom layer is the what we called "levers", by which I mean many of the routine activities and people-to people exchanges such as international film festivals, film forums, and most importantly education. These levers under undergird film communication in a long run. At the middle of the pyramid, we see co-production, which on the one hand, Is supported and guaranteed by governmental policies, and on the other hand, enhanced and promoted by levers.



Figure 1: Pyramid of Film Communication

### 1. Policy

To begin with, when it comes to film communication, the most essential policy is co-production agreement. In 2014, the "China-Korea Film Co-production Agreement" was

officially signed. In 2018, China and Japan formally signed the Film Co-production agreement. According to these two agreements, if a film is co-produced collectively with partner country, it will be regarded as a domestic film in each country, and will enjoy the benefit normally a domestically produced film would enjoy. According to the agreement signed, the two countries' co-productions will receive the same treatment as each other's local films, and co-productions in the two countries will no longer be restricted by the number of imported films. At the same time, the national government will provide guarantees for the film so that the reporting to the authorities, applying for visas for staff, and transporting equipment can proceed smoothly. The two agreements released a signal to filmmakers, that is the governments of the three countries are encouraging international cooperation. These two agreements have further promoted the development of the film co-production market between countries and the exchange and cooperation of film culture.

In addition to the signing of a co-production agreement between the two governments, the government's support also includes the formulation of corresponding laws and policies. The governments of the three countries have given certain inclination and support to co-production films in relation to the laws, regulations and policies. In particular, the specific department in charge of film has opened the door for film cooperation and has formulated a series of friendly policies.

Film is not a mere commodity but an oeuvre and as such, has the potential of being a work of art. Film is also a vehicle for social and cultural values. Along with film production and distribution, policy-making affects the specificity of film both as an art form and a cultural icon. Film policy remains one of the most sensitive issues at both national and international levels (Jäckel, 2000:133). It is the prerequisite of all forms of film communication. With the support and authorization of these agreement along with other policies, film communication is realized in the form of co-produced film.

## **2. Co-production**

Whether it is a small-cost or a large-scale movie, the subtitles at the end of the subtitle bar will show a series of names of international staff. The current international film cooperation, especially co-production, has become a stable or common production method, which is also a litmus test to countries' economic, political, and cultural power. Co-produced film refers to a film jointly shot by production units in two or more countries, and is usually released in two or more languages. Co-production is a film production method in which two or more film production agencies jointly invest and share film copyright and film market revenue. The investment, distribution, ratios, rights and obligations of the both sides in the cooperation are all clearly noted in the contract. For the definition of co-production, there are several quantifiable standards, such as investment ratio, nationality composition of cast and crew, copyright holding, etc. Only after these conditions are met and approved and qualified can a film be regarded as a co-production film in the true sense and enjoy the treatment of a domestic film.

The table below shows the statistics of co-produced films produced by either two of the countries of East Asia from 2010 to the present.

Name	Year	Director	Nationality	Country(Area) Involved
My Ex-Wife's Wedding	2010	Li Legong	China	China, Hongkong, Korea
Hearty Paws 2	2010	Lee Jungchul	Korea	Korea, China
Tokyo Newcomer	2012	Jiang Xinmin	China	China, Japan
A Wedding Invitation	2013	Oh Seunghwan	Korea	Korea, China
Mr.GO	2013	Kim Yonghwa	Korea	Korea, China
Five Minutes To Tomorrow	2014	Isao Yukisada	Japan	Japan, China
Miss Granny	2015	Cheng Zhengda	China	China, Korea
So, I Married My Anti-fan	2016	Kim Jeyong	Korea	Korea, China
Sweet Sixteen	2016	Kim Jinkyu	Korea	Korea, China
Bounty Hunters	2016	Shin Taera	Korea	Korea, China
Tik Tok	2016	Li Jun	China	China, Korea
Scandal Maker	2016	An Byungki	Korea	Korea, China
My New Sassy Girl	2016	Cho Geunsik	Korea	Korea, China
Life Risking Romance	2016	Song Minkyu	Korea	Korea, China
Honeymoon Hotel	2016	Jang Chulsoo	Korea	Korea, China
Legend Of The Demon Cat	2017	Chen Kaige	China	China, Japan
DESTINY 鎌倉ものがたり	2017	Takashi Yamazaki	Japan	Japan, China
Last Letter	2018	Iwai Shun'ji	Japan	Japan, China
Memories Of A Dead End	2018	Choi Hyunyoun	Korea	Korea, Japan
キングダム	2019	Sato Shin'suke	Japan	Japan, China
Wings Over Everest	2019	Yu Fei	China	China, Japan

Table 1 Co-produced Films within East Asia from 2010

When we pay attention to China-Korea co-produced films, we can find that since the official launch of "China-Korea Film Co-production Agreement" in 2014, China-Korea film co-production reached a climax in 2016 with more than ten in one single year . One of the

most successful cases is “Miss Granny“ released in early 2016. The film set a box office record of 366 million RMB, which is an insurmountable peak for China-South Korea co-productions. However, in general, the word-of-mouth and box office of co-productions between China and South Korea are not satisfactory. Efforts need to be made to improve the quality of film production.

Although the number of China-Japan co-production films is relatively small, most of them are very successful. For instance, in 2017, "Legend of the Demon Cat" co-produced by China and Japan was formally released. Its box office reached 1.6 billion yen and the number of films viewers reached 1.3 million. This has become the highest box office of Chinese-language films in Japan in the past ten years and has achieved unprecedented success. This successful case of China-Japan co-production provides a new way for Chinese and Japanese filmmakers to seek cooperation.

Compared with the 00s when Seoul Cafe(2009) was a big success, however, Japan and Korea co-produced films were not so much produced during this period.

Co-production is a process of constant compromise and negotiation. It is a brave experimental adventure. Many challenges and obstacles will hinder joint production. In addition to policy constraints and the unequal relationship of discourse power, it also includes technical issues such as script creation and contracts. Terms, actors, languages, income sharing, copyright, etc., but different cultures can always find common ground for cooperation and success. Co-productions should start cooperation from the creative source and distribution end, realize the organic integration of cultures of various countries, and achieve the resonance of values (He 2021).

### **3. Levers**

As I mentioned above, levers in this section include routine activities and people-to people exchanges such as international film festivals, film forums, and most importantly education.

First, there have been many film forums between countries. In order to promote the in-depth exchange and cooperation of Chinese and Japanese films, the Beijing Film Delegation and Beijing Film Bureau hosted the “China-Japan Film Cooperation and Exchange Beijing Roundtable” on October 29, 2019 in Tokyo. The organizer specially invited the CEOs of China's leading domestic production companies, distribution companies, famous producers and directors and other industry professionals to attend the forum. The forum takes the form of speeches by Chinese guests and questions from Japanese attendees to discuss the co-production strategy of Chinese and Japanese films.

The 2016 China-Korea Film Forum was held in Beijing, China as scheduled. The forum not only released the news of China-Korea co-production projects, but signed a China-Korea cultural strategic cooperation agreement. In the future, China and Korea will carry out in-depth cooperation in cultural investment funds, film and television drama property rights,

film and television production. Also, 2018 China-Korea Film Script Forum, jointly organized by the China-Korea Cultural Center and the Busan International Film Festival was held.

Japan-Korea Co-Production Forum, the first event held by the Film Promotion Committee since the relocation of Busan, the Korea-Japan Co-Production Forum 2013, has been successfully held at Novotel Ambassador Busan. This event was held by some great representatives of co-productions between Korea and Japan like Roh Jong-yoon , Kim Seong-soo ,ans Lee Chang-dong. A large number of domestic and foreign personnels related to the co-production film came to celebrate. The forum was expected to strengthen the network of film cooperation between Japan and Korea, and to lay the foundation for the production of competitive joint films in the global market.

International film festivals are an important way to promote cultural exchanges between countries. In recent years, China's Shanghai International Film Festival, Beijing International Film Festival, and Tokyo International Film Festival have played an increasingly important role in the international film going out and promoting foreign cultural exchanges. To a large extent, it has promoted the exchange and development of Asian films. Therefore, in terms of film festivals, China, Japan and South Korea can jointly hold an inter-regional "East Asian Film Festival" to build a new ecosystem and new system for the film market, find new film cooperation mechanisms from economic, trade, and cultural exchanges, and build new rules for the world film market .

In terms of film education, the exchanges between universities allowed the future film main forces in the two countries to run in advance in academic seminars and creative cooperation. It also acts as a glue for the cooperation and development of the film industry of the two countries and promotes film cooperation between the two countries. For example, China and Japan have a deep history of exchanges in film education. Beijing Film University and the Japan Academy of Cinematography signed a strategic cooperation agreement in 2014, and new progress has been made in cooperation in running schools, film conference, competition, etc.

The sudden pandemic has not only brought an impact on the film industry of various countries in general, but also brought new challenges to film communication among countries. Specifically, the epidemic blocked the movement of people. The annual international film forums and film festivals have been affected. Second, multinational co-production films have received the constraints of the epidemic management system, leading to blocking of the possibility of transnational filming and planning, especially for many co-production films which have transnational narratives. This has brought some enlightenment to our talent training in the post-pandemic era. We should increase the training of personnel who are familiar with the characteristics of co-production film production and remote collaboration. These personnel must be very familiar with film production and have a considerable understanding of the East Asian culture, language and national conditions of both the countries. At the same time, they should be able to collaborate efficiently through online

devices, reducing the cost of communication.

Secondly, due to the pandemic, all countries have adopted social distancing policies. Traditional theater movies have got a serious impact. The emergence of the pandemic has made video websites an important means of entertainment for people isolated at home, accelerated the increase and popularization of users and stimulated the rapid development of streaming video platforms. This impact may be normalized. People are more inclined or accustomed to avoid social interactions and adopt an online mode of watching movies. Therefore, in the post-pandemic era, the co-production of China-Japan-Korea films can broaden the traditional cinematic film production ideas and shift to online films which boast greater circulation, wider audiences, and lower production and distribution costs for cooperation.

Third, affected by the outbreak of the pandemic, the film industry of various countries has been severely hit. In the post-pandemic era, countries will surely give priority to incubating local film projects in order to revive their own film industry. In the wave of film nationalism, how co-production films can gain the favor of the government and national audiences will become an important subject.

## **Conclusion**

There will also be various obstacles to film co-production within East Asian countries. First of all, they are manifested in the coherence obstacles of East Asian media identity and space. For example, film festivals and cooperative production markets in China, Japan, South Korea have different structural conditions. Unlike European film market, contemporary East Asia cannot have a closer culture and structure to pave the way for international cooperation. Secondly, there are some geopolitical obstacles, such as intra-regional political conflicts and their various effects due to post-colonial tensions; the most prominent is still Cultural barriers, because of different places, the tastes and cultures of the audience are also very different. In Japan and South Korea, the working culture of the film industry is incompatible with each other, and there is a lack of understanding of how to work together to produce meaningful films.

The rise of Asian film industry has ushered in a new era of multi-polar influence. What they bring is cross-cultural and even cross-image dignified thinking, with obvious cultural history, film history significance. New Asian films are not only self-positioning relative to Western discourse, but they also present complex features due to the diversification of social realities such as geographic, ethnic, and cultural cognition.

Films do not only have commercial functions, but also have their own cultural mission. After the epidemic, the three countries of East Asia must reflect on the cultural importance of films and strive ways to offset the negative impact from pandemic. We have to think about new accesses such as online films. In the post-pandemic era, the boom in the online film and television industry has greatly promoted the digital transformation of the entire film industry.

As an important turning year in 2020, China, Japan and South Korea have promoted the maturity of the new mechanism of online theater, the new distribution model of and online film festival exhibitions. It also provides new opportunities for young filmmakers and art films (Cheng 2019).

We also have to be cautious of nationalism in the film industry. From a historical perspective, films are viewed as a national culture, expected to remain its independence and “purity”. For example, in the 1990s, Korean activist filmmakers are the proponent of Korean national culture and use filmmaking as a cultural practice to fight against authoritarianism and cultural imperialism. Korean culture is argued for an instrumentalist purpose by the people in power in the Korean film industry represented by independent filmmakers. As an extension of the 1970's People's cultural movement, independent film movements shrewdly exploit cultural discourses such as "national culture" and "cultural identity" and reify them into films made by Korean people. "Korean culture is the culture adopted by Korean people." By claiming their films share common national sentiments and their Korean identity, these filmmakers obtained legitimacy of their claims: "(protecting national films)...is deeply connected to the issue of expressing and preserving our culture. "(Emergency Committee pamphlet, n.d., emphasis mine). Thus, when the nationalist discourses again emerge in every countries especially after the pandemic, the film communication could be seen as a renegade to the discourses in the social milieu.

In order to revive the mutual cooperation, we have to go back and think about every layers in communication pyramid, and consider what is at stake for each fields. For China, Japan and South Korea, film co-production and various forms of exchange are a process of cultural exchange. The film co-production agreement and practical film production have a very beneficial effect on strengthening cultural exchanges between countries, providing a bridge for cultural exchanges between countries. Regardless of race, culture and geography, we are relatively close. These conditions are beneficial to the co-production of films, and to be able to produce “images of our own” (Hancock, 1996) with the erosion of the national borders and the emergence of a new world order. Compared with the period of the pandemic and the earlier that time, I would like to optimistically look forward to the bright future of East Asian film communication, and hopefully a broader picture of an open and non-exclusive "New Asian Film" that has Asian cultural and aesthetic characteristics.



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