
BRIDGING TRANSNATIONAL VIDEO PRODUCTION AND SOFT POWER: THE CASE OF KOREA AND CHINA

Interview with *Ruiting Dong*

Ruiting Dong is the Project Manager at Ranfilms, a start-up specialising in music video production and commercial shoots. She graduated with a Masters of Korean Studies from Yonsei University's Graduate School of International Studies in 2018. Under her role at Ranfilms, she helps pitch Korean directors to Chinese clients, as well as assists in video editing and post-production.

Ranfilms is a start-up specialising in music video production and commercial shoots. They freelance as interpreters and organisers for Chinese clients seeking Korean directors and producers. Ranfilms also assists in video directing, editing, and post production. They are currently based in Seoul and have in-house directing and production teams in Los Angeles.

The Journal's editor Simone Liew sat down with Ruiting Dong to discuss her role as an employee of Ranfilms.

**All thoughts and opinions presented by Ruiting Dong in this interview are her own and do not reflect the views of Ranfilms.*

Y: Please introduce Ranfilms and its role in the industry.

RD: Ranfilms is a film production house based in Korea. We offer services for Chinese clients who want to produce music videos and commercials overseas. We help them to pitch directors and to complete the project. The role of the company is to act as a bridge between Chinese clients and Korean suppliers that facilitate interactions with Korean directors, producers, gaffers, and production teams. We help them with communication problems and help connect both parties together for industry growth.

Y: Could you introduce your background and your position in the company?

RD: I am from Nanjing, China and graduated with a Masters of Korean Studies from Yonsei University's Graduate School of International Studies in 2018. Previously, I was a marketing manager and coordinator for Ppeum Clinic in Seoul. Currently I work as the Project Manager for Ranfilms and do some additional personal assistant

work throughout the process of video production.

Y: The South Korean entertainment industry is currently dominating East Asia and also gaining mainstream traction internationally. What is the relationship between Chinese clients and Korean production teams? What can they learn from each other?

RD: First, K-pop is growing a lot. So, on the music video side, Korean videos have a particular feeling [to them]. They are colourful, have a lot of different visual elements, backdrop, and set design – everything is very “cool.” Lately, there have been some Chinese idols debuting but before that, Chinese singers were almost all ballad singers. The music videos that they made were quite narrative and had a mundane daily living-esque narrative structure. The idol industry in China is beginning to develop, so they want to learn something from Korea. K-pop is very popular in China. As such, the mindset is “why not produce something similar so we can be popular like K-pop?”

Y: In collaborating with Korea and the US for video production, is China trying to increase the spread of its cultural influence, and do you think it can compete with Korea?

RD: China is trying to influence the globe with music, but video production wise, maybe it is not [considered] urgent, at least not now. The Chinese idol industry is not a mature industry, but they want to expand quickly. They are very business-oriented, but currently they do not have highly professional skills and it seems like some companies have not trained their employees to their fullest capacity. Since the industry is not mature yet, most of them just want to make money from new idols. Idols are popular and they have this kind of fandom economy growth; the fandom will buy a product produced by an idol even if they do not produce good music or shoot a good music video. Fans [only] like the idol and everything related to the idol based around their “cool” factor. As such, I do not think the Chinese music video industry can compete with South Korea [as they are], and even if they wanted to expand their influence, they do not really think about [how to do so] step by step. It is about business. Maybe they want to do something but the way they do it and by their skills, you can tell that [the Chinese industry] is not there yet.

For now, what China is producing is kind of an imitation of Korea. For example, [they are trying to replicate] the Produce 101 survival program and some variety shows. I think the good thing is that they are trying to make some breakthrough, but will need more time. They need someone to guide them slowly and give room to develop [their skills]. I think we will get better in the future and provide that guidance. It is just the beginning for our industry.

Y: Please describe your work on any current projects and the challenges that need to be overcome when working in this industry.

RD: I think clients are the most difficult part. First, the cultural differences can cause understanding each other to be very difficult. What the Chinese clients see of the Korean industry is only surface-level, so they think “K-pop is popular all over the world. Why can we not do [the same]?”. But during that thought process, they forget why they are making music videos and what their ultimate goal is.

We had a lot of Chinese clients this year in particular whom had limited budgets but wanted to follow the big production aesthetic of major Korean acts. Knowing this, we felt that the economy this year was not very good and [as a result] companies were laying people off. As such, we are trying to manage within this small budget to meet the client’s requirements. The difficulty in working in this industry is money. How can we meet their requirements with a financial handicap while also satisfying the client with the quality of our videos?

Y: South Korean cinema and music has been explosively popular in East and South East Asia through the *Hallyu Wave*, but it has recently been spotlighted in the mainstream due to the success of artists like BTS. How does this affect the international perception of the South Korean industry? Do you think that this is contributing to Korea’s soft power?

RD: *Hallyu Wave* is the hallmark of South Korea’s entertainment industry in which they absorb Western music elements and apply them to the music they make, forging their own unique style. This may be a big reason as to why people all over the world are curious about, and interested in, South Korean pop music. It definitely contributes to Korea’s soft power internationally [from my perspective].

Y: There’s been a push for Asian representation in the entertainment industry, and most strongly in Hollywood. Do you think the success and global distribution of recent transnational Asian media is contributing to positive representation? Or are there more challenges that need to be overcome?

RD: I think more talented Asian artists are emerging and gaining recognition from Western countries. They are earning good reputations and applause [for their skills], which garners glory for their own nations. As for what I think, maybe one day they can take up their own place in the Western industry. If they can create more unique styles and content that is exclusive to them, it may help them tap further into the international market.

Y: What is important when working on a transnational project?

RD: Communication. First, as a bridge between the clients and directors, there is a delay when communicating between them. Sometimes misunderstandings occur and it takes time to cover every detail in order to convey everything with complete

accuracy. Additionally, when we work with some Chinese entertainment companies, they do not give specific [information necessary for completion of a project] so it is hard to know their exact needs unless we check with them repeatedly. Therefore, it requires us to be very patient and be considerate of the words we say to confirm everything at each phase [of the production process].

Y: Any advice for those hoping to enter the film and media industry?

RD: Know the basic principles of how things work. You have to deal with different kinds of people from various countries [and languages], so when you explain something to them, you have to understand it fully beforehand. [As an example], right now I am studying while working and [balancing the two] is hard; you have to be mentally prepared because you do not know what will happen. When producing a video, you are Party B. Party A always comes up with unexpected ideas that you have to cater to and figure out a way to solve issues without making the client uncomfortable. Be prepared in knowledge, mindset, and perspective.