

China's iQIYI and Sony to produce online series in Mandarin

December 1 2016, by Louise Watt

A Chinese online video site announced Thursday it will be working with Sony Pictures Television to produce a Mandarin-language action thriller series for online viewers.

Chinese and foreign producers have increasingly teamed up in recent years to make movies for distribution in both markets, but the deal between iQIYI and the division of Hollywood studio Sony Pictures is a rare example of collaboration between Chinese and Hollywood companies to produce programming for the Chinese audience.

Streaming sites in China showing Chinese and foreign films and TV shows as well as user-generated content have become hugely popular in recent years. Companies like iQIYI, which is owned by Chinese search engine Baidu, have also developed their own shows.

iQIYI said at a news conference that the co-production will be a three-part adaptation of an American drama called "Chosen," which aired in the U.S. on an online streaming video service owned by Sony called Crackle.

iQIYI said the series is expected to feature top Chinese stars while also using international actors and production professionals. Production is expected to begin in spring 2017 with an anticipated launch in the fall. It will be produced by Sony's Playmaker Media with support from Australian regional fund Screen NSW.

Chinese and Hollywood companies are increasingly working together to produce content and market Hollywood movies. Sony said in September that it had teamed up with China's Wanda Group, which owns theater chains around the world, to cooperate on big-budget movies.

iQIYI earlier this week announced it had signed a licensing agreement with Hollywood studio Lionsgate to give it exclusive streaming rights in China to upcoming Lionsgate movies and some library titles.

Hollywood is keen to extend its reach to China to make more bucks from the world's second biggest movie-going market, while Chinese producers want to learn technological know-how and storytelling techniques from abroad.

That is why iQiyi also announced on Thursday a program that aims to enlist world-class directors to act as mentors to Chinese filmmakers as they attempt to appeal to China's increasing numbers of online viewers.

Its first sign-up is low-budget horror film producer Roger Corman, who attended Thursday's news conference. The 90-year-old American producer of films including "The St. Valentine's Day Massacre" and "Attack of the 50 Foot Cheerleader" will lead a team of young Chinese filmmakers and act as producer on a sci-fi film made for viewing on the internet or mobile phone called "Invasion."

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