

Imports get to the core of local tastes

US, Taiwanese and even Indian titles overshadowed Hong Kong fare at its home box office in 2011. **Liz Shackleton** reports on a territory looking abroad for its next blockbuster

he big surprise at the Hong Kong box office over the past year has been the success of Taiwanese romantic comedy *You Are The Apple Of My Eye*, which grossed nearly \$8m at the end of 2011 to become the biggest ever Chinese-language release in Hong Kong.

A huge hit in Taiwan, where it was also released by Fox, the film flourished on word-of-mouth and repeat viewings. Based on the director's own experiences, the story features a young man on his way to a wedding, reminiscing about his days at high school

"It had a unique way of capturing young moviegoers as well as older ones," says Fox's senior vicepresident, Asia Pacific, Sunder Kimatrai. "Those experiences of first love, first heartbreak, are so universal they translate to any culture, but they hadn't been told in this way in this part of the world before."

With its combination of romance and gross-out humour, the film also managed to appeal to both sexes. More recently, two Hong Kong productions released in March — Ann Hui's *A Simple Life* and Pang Ho Cheung's *Love In The Buff* — became much-welcomed hits on home territory. By the



'You Are The Apple Of My Eye had a unique way of capturing young moviegoers as well as older ones' Sunder Kimatrai, 20th Century Fox International end of April, A Simple Life had grossed \$3.57m in Hong Kong, while Love In The Buff, which follows a Hong Kong couple in Beijing, had grossed \$3.6m.

But on the whole, Hollywood films, particularly effects-laden 3D spectaculars, continued to rule the roost in Hong Kong — *Apple* ranked third in the 2011 top 10 behind the latest instalments in the *Transformers* and *Harry Potter* series.

Likewise, last Christmas, Hong Kong audiences favoured *Mission: Impossible — Ghost Protocol* and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game Of Shadows* over the big Chinese end-of-year release, Tsui Hark's *Flying Swords Of Dragon Gate*, despite the latter's high-quality 3D sequences. And during this year's Chinese New Year holiday (January 23-25), *Journey 2: The Mysterious Island* streaked ahead of the local Chinese New Year comedies and Dante Lam's globe-trotting adventure *The Viral Factor*.

As elsewhere around the globe, this trend towards premium fare is resulting in an overall upwards trend in ticket sales. According to the Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry Association (MPIA), box office grew by almost 4% to \$177.8m (HK\$1.38bn) in 2011, despite a decrease

in the number of releases from 286 in 2010 to 276 last year.

Hong Kong movies had only a 20.2% market share in 2011 compared to 22.6% in 2010. Local producers are making fewer films specifically for the local market and Hong Kong audiences tend to reject the bigger budget Hong Kong-China coproductions, which make most of their returns on the mainland. Tellingly, the two Hong Kong films to rank in the top 10 — erotic drama 3D Sex And Zen: Extreme Ecstasy and I Love Hong Kong — were not co-productions with China.

Hong Kong audiences also seem to have turned their backs on Korean and Japanese films — no Korean releases and only two Japanese films (*The Borrower Arrietty* and *Umizaru 3: The Last Message*) ranked in the top 100 in 2011. However, another surprise was the success of Bollywood title *3 Idiots*, which grossed \$3m to rank number 14 in the year-end chart. Edko Films released it nearly two years after its Indian release, as they were waiting for the film to pass censorship in mainland China.

Edko's Audrey Lee says it was 3 *Idiots*' humour and subject matter, especially the storyline about »

UNI/EISE PROUDLY PRESENTS

are in

Genre: Disaster film / 3D **Directors: Pang Brothers**

(The Eye, The Storm Warriors)

Executive Producer: Daneil Lam

Producers: Alvin Lam, Pang Brothers

Cast: Louis Koo (Election, Protégé, Overheard), Sean Lau (Mad Detective, Overheard, Life Without Principle), Wang Xue Qi (Bodyquards and Assassins, The Founding of a Republic), Lee Sinje (The Eye), Wang Bao Qiang (A World Without Thieves), Chen Si

Cheng In development // Principal Photography.: Jul 2012 //

expected delivery: End 2013

Conspirators

Genre: Suspense Action

Director: Oxide Pang (The Eye, Bangkok Dangerous,

The Detective)

Executive Producer: Daneil Lam

Producers: Alvin Lam, Oxide Pang

Cast: Aaron Kwok (Divergence, The Detective),

Nick Cheung (Beast Stalker, Nightfall)

Post production // expected delivery: End 2012



The

Genre: Cop Action

Director: Benny Chan (New Police Story,

Invisible Target, Shaolin)

Executive Producer: Daneil Lam

Producers: **Alvin Lam, Benny Chan**

Cast: Louis Koo (Election, Protégé, Overheard), Sean Lau (Mad Detective, Overheard, Life Without Principle), **Nick Cheung** (Beast Stalker, Nightfall)

In development // principal photography.: Oct 2012

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the pressures of the education system, that struck a chord with local audiences. It remains difficult to release most Bollywood films in Hong Kong.

"We polished the sub-titles to help Hong Kong people understand the references," explains Lee. "It catered to a wide audience, professionals, parents and retirees, and it's been a long time since we've seen people in the cinema laugh so frequently."

Less of a laughing matter is the impact of Hong Kong's sky-high rents on the exhibition sector. Several cinemas have closed recently, including the UA Cinemas site in the Times Square mall, which closed at the end of January when it could not match the rent paid by a luxury brand retailer.

The Hong Kong Theatres Association has referred this matter to the Hong Kong Film Development Council, observing that Hong Kong has only around 45 cinemas with 199 screens, compared to more than 120 cinemas in the 1980s. A special taskforce has been formed to look into the problem and find possible solutions.



Release date

Apr 14

Feh 3

Aug 18

Feb 2

Jan 27

Mar 31

Jan 13

Oct 20

Feb 3

July 28

Gross

\$5.3m

\$3.4m

\$3.1m

\$2.6m

\$2m

\$1.59m

\$1.57m

\$1.09m

\$1.05m

\$1.03m

Distributor

Newport

Intercon

Newport

Newport

UA/Emperor

UA/Media Asia

UA/Emperor

UA/We

UA/We

UA/Media Asia

Rank	Title	Country of origin	Distributor	Release date	Gross
1	Transformers: Dark Of The Moon	US	Par/Intercon	June 29	\$11m
2	Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows: Part II	US	Warner Bros	July 14	\$9.9m
3	You Are The Apple Of My Eye	Taiwan	Fox	Oct 20	\$7.9m
4	Pirates Of The Caribbean: On Stranger Tides	US	Disney	May 19	\$5.9m
5	3D Sex And Zen: Extreme Ecstasy	HK	Newport	Apr 14	\$5.3m
6	Kung Fu Panda 2	US	Par/Intercon	July 21	\$5.1m
7	Mission: Impossible — Ghost Protocol	US	Par/Intercon	Dec 15	\$57m
8	I Love Hong Kong	HK	Intercon	Feb 3	\$3.4m
9	X-Men: First Class	US	Fox	June 2	\$3.33m
10	Sherlock Holmes: A Game Of Shadows	US	Warner Bros	Dec 14	\$3.29m

\$11m	1
\$9.9m	
	2
\$7.9m	3
\$5.9m	4
\$5.3m	5
\$5.1m	6
\$57m	
	7
\$3.4m	8
\$3.33m	
\$3.29m	9
÷	10

Source: Rentral

Rank

Title

Ecstasy I Love Hong Kong

2011 Shaolin

Heart

Overheard 2

All's Well Ends Well

Don't Go Breaking My

Let The Bullets Fly

Mr & Mrs Incredible

Life Without

Principle

Wu Xia

3D Sex And Zen: Extreme

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IN PRODUCTION



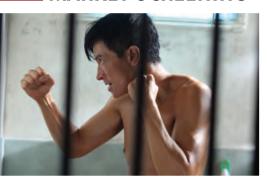
Untitled TANG Wei Project Directed by: XUE Xiaolu (Ocean Heaven)

Casting: TANG Wei (Lust Caution, Wu Xia, Late Autumn)

Spoiled city girl Wen is embarking on a trip from Beijing to Seattle with one goal in mind: to give birth to her rich, married boyfriend's son and secure herself the life of luxury she's always wanted. But when Wen arrives in Seattle, a city colored by the romantic undertones of her favorite film Sleepless in Seattle, she will meet and unexpectedly fall for her driver Frank who's the opposite of everything she thought she wanted in a man.

Genre: Romantic Comedy Production Year: 2012 Language: Mandarin Delivery: Fall 2012

MARKET SCREENING



NIGHTFALL

Directed by: CHOW Hin Yeung Casting: Nick CHEUNG, Simon YAM, Janice MAN, Kay TSE

In revenge, there's a fine line between love and hate

A crime thriller pitting two screen giants against each other in a tense murder investigation

Genre: Crime, Suspense/Thriller

Production Year: 2012

Language: Cantonese/Mandarin

Delivery: Ready

MARKET SCREENING

May 18 (Fri) 13:30 Riviera 2

PRESENTING



COLD WAR

Directed by: Longman LEUNG and Sunny LUK Casting: (in alphabetical order) Aaron KWOK, Tony LEUNG Ka-Fai, Eddie PENG, Aarif RAHMAN, Charlie YOUNG

Asia's safest city is about to be tested

An edge-of-your-seat, grand scale police action film featuring the biggest names in Asian cinema

Genre: Police Action Production Year: 2012

Language: Cantonese/Mandarin

Delivery: Summer 2012

FIRST TIME

Directed by: HAN Yan

Casting: Angelababy, Mark CHAO, Shan JIANG, BAI Baihe, TIAN Yuan

Though time can make a memory fade, the feeling of the first love lasts forever

A touching tale of first love between two of Asia's most popular young stars

Genre: Romantic Drama Production Year: 2012 Language: Mandarin Delivery: June 2012



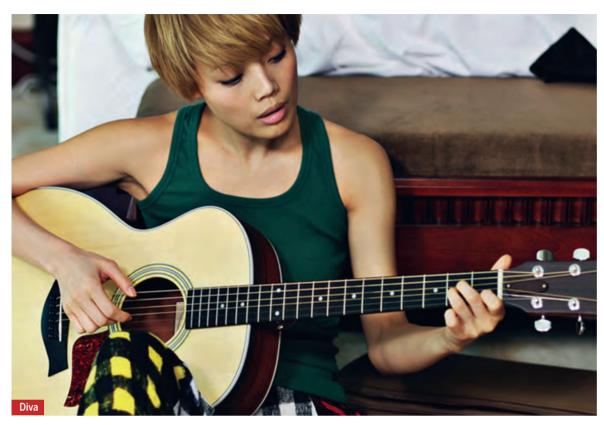
LOVE IS NOT BLIND

Directed by: TENG Huatao Casting: WEN Zhang, BAI Baihe

Sometimes, breaking up means giving love a chance

The box office hit of 2011, breaking \$100 million RMB (\$16M USD) in its first four days of release

Genre: Romantic Comedy Production Year: 2011 Language: Mandarin Delivery: Ready



Tuned in to demand

Hong Kong producers are debating their future strategy in the face of regional competition and the booming mainland market. **Liz Shackleton** reports

he past year has been full of contradictions for Hong Kong's local production sector. Two Hong Kong films — Ann Hui's A Simple Life and Pang Ho Cheung's Love In The Buff — have been flying high at the local box office. A Simple Life's Deanie Ip also scooped best actress at last year's Venice film festival and at the Asian Film Awards in March.

But at the end of last year, a Taiwanese film, Giddens Ko's *You Are The Apple Of My Eye*, smashed the record set for a Chinese-language film in Hong Kong, previously held by Stephen Chow's 2004 *Kung-fu Hustle*.

Released last October, *Apple* finished on a tally of nearly \$8m at the Hong Kong box office, narrowly overtaking *Hustle*'s \$7.9m (HK\$61.3m). Its success highlights the recent resurgence of Taiwanese cinema and raised many questions among Hong Kong film executives about their future strategy.

For several years now, Hong Kong has focused on producing big-budget titles aimed at the mainland China market. Among those expected this year are Jackie Chan's *Chinese Zodiac*, Ronny Yu's *Saving General Yang* and Stephen Chow's *Journey To The West*.

Hong Kong audiences often reject such titles due to their strong mainland content, but it is becoming harder than ever to produce smaller titles specifically for Hong Kong. The booming mainland market is driving up demand for Hong Kong talent, making actors and directors prohibitively expensive. Even a medium-budget film has little chance of recouping in a territory of just 7 million people.

Meanwhile, Taiwan is benefiting from the open-

Hong Kong remains a professional, transparent and outwardlooking production hub ing of the mainland market, and also has proactive local government support, resulting in an unexpected source of competition for Hong Kong.

Nevertheless, exceptions such as *A Simple Life* and *Love In The Buff* prove the staying power of Hong Kong writing, directing and acting talent. Though both tapped mainland funding, they were overwhelmingly Hong Kong productions in content and style.

Hong Kong also remains a professional, transparent and outward-looking production hub in what is increasingly becoming a pan-Chinese market. As the list of upcoming projects below testifies, Hong Kong producers and talent will continue to sell tickets and win accolades, not just locally but at an international level, for some time to come.



Blind Detective

Starring Andy Lau and Sammi Cheng, Johnnie To's most recent directing project tells the story of a detective — forced to leave the police service after turning blind — who solves cold cases. It marks the first pairing of Lau and Cheng since *Yesterday Once More* in 2004. The duo previously starred together in To's 2000 hit romantic comedy. *Needing You*.

Contact Media Asia, Ricky Tse ⊠ricky_tse@mediaasia.com

The Bullet Vanishes

Nicolas Tse and Lau Ching Wan head the cast of this suspense thriller, directed by Law Chi-leung and produced by Derek Yee, which is in post-production. Backed by China's Le Vision Pictures, the film revolves around a series of mysterious murders in China's largest armoury during the Republic era.

Contact Emperor Motion Pictures, May Yip

Mayyip@emp.hk

Chinese Zodiac

Jackie Chan directs and stars in this globe-trotting action adventure which is scheduled for release in both regular and IMAX versions on December 12. Produced by Chan's JC Group, Huayi Bros and Emperor Motion Pictures, the film was shot in Beijing and France where it took in locations including the Chateau de Chantilly. The story is under wraps but is understood to revolve around a global search for ancient treasure related to China's history.

Contact Jackie & JJ International, Ramy Choi

⊠ramychoi@gmail.com

Cold War

Bill Kong's Edko Films and his new talent venture, Irresistible Films, are producing this police action film which kicks off with a hostage situation. Directed by Longman Leung and Sunny Luk, the film has a budget of around \$9m and stars Aaron Kwok and Tony Leung Ka-fai. It is scheduled for a summer 2012 release.

Conspirators

Oxide Pang, one half of the Pang brothers, is directing suspense action title *Conspirators*, starring Aaron Kwok and Nick Cheung. The story, which is a spin-off from Pang's 2007 *The Detective*, follows a Thailand-based private detective as he travels to Malaysia to unravel the truth behind his parents' deaths. The \$5m picture is in post-production after shooting in Thailand, Malaysia and mainland China. **Contact** Universe Films Distribution, Alice Leung Malice_leung@uih.com.hk

Diva

One of Hong Kong's hottest female directors, Heiward Mak, directs this drama about two young singers navigating the rocky roads of fame and romance. Chapman To, who produced Mak's well-received youth drama *Ex*, is again producing and the cast is headed by Joey Yung. Mak's credits as director also include *High Noon* and she co-scripted *Love In A Puff* with Pang Ho Cheung. *Diva* is in post-production for a release in the third quarter of 2012.

Contact Emperor Motion Pictures, May Yip ☑mayyip@emp.hk Buckle your seat belts for the most adrenaline pumping chase scenes you'll experience!



directed by SOI CHEANG

Director of ACCIDENT

produced by **JOHNNIE TO**

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Floating City

Produced by Mandarin Films, this historical epic stars Aaron Kwok, Charlie Yeung and Nina Paw Hee-ching in the tale of a fisherman's son who rises to become a powerful 'tai pan' or businessman. Scheduled for local release on May 19, it is directed by Yim Ho, one of the leaders of the Hong Kong New Wave in the 1980s.

Contact Mandarin Films, Chiu-yi Leung ⊠cyleung@mandarinfilms.com

The Guillotines

Andrew Lau is directing this \$15m action drama, produced by Peter Ho-sun Chan. The story revolves around an elite squad of imperial bodyguards, trained to use the deadly flying guillotine, who face a conspiracy against their mission. The cast is headed by hot pan-Chinese trio Huang Xiaoming (*The Message*), Ethan Juan (*Monga*) and Shawn Yue (*Reign Of Assassins*). Media Asia is handling Asian territories excluding China.

Contact We Distribution, Katherine Lee
kat@wedistribution.com

Journey To The West

Stephen Chow, one of Hong Kong's most bankable film-makers, is writing, producing and directing this follow-up to his two *Chinese Odyssey* films, which became cult classics in the 1990s. The film is produced by Chow's Bingo Group, Edko Films and Village Roadshow Entertainment Group's new Chinese film-making division.

Contact Bingo Group, Alice Chow

☑alice.chow@bingogroup.com.hk

Lacuna

Hot up-and-coming directors Derek Tsang and Jimmy Wan move north of the border for this romantic comedy about two strangers who wake up in bed together, oblivious to what happened, and have to figure out how they got there. Pang Ho Cheung, who produced the duo's portmanteau drama *Lover's Discourse*, is again producing and Shawn Yue and Zhang Jingchu head the cast.

Contact Media Asia, Ricky Tse ⊠ricky_tse@mediaasia.com

The Last Tycoon

Chow Yun-fat is starring in this period gangster thriller which tells the story of real-life gangster Du Yuesheng, who built his crime empire in Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s. Wong Jing is directing with Peter Pau on board as DoP and *Infernal Affairs* director Andrew Lau as producer. The cast will also include martial-arts maestro Sammo Hung. The project, previously known as *Grand Shanghai* (*Da Shanghai*), is in production.

Contact Distribution Workshop, Virginia Leung ⊠virginia@distributionworkshop.com

The Monkey King

Hong Kong's Filmko and Mandarin Films are joining forces on this \$30m 3D fantasy based on Chinese classic *Journey To The West*. Soi Cheang is directing and the cast includes Donnie Yen, Chow Yun-fat and Aaron Kwok. Hollywood technical talent has also been brought on board, including VFX supervisor







Hot up-andcoming directors Derek Tsang and Jimmy Wan move north of the border for rom-com Lacuna David Ebner (*Alice In Wonderland*), and post-production is taking place in the US.

Contact Filmko, Mandarin Films ☑dominicyip@filmkoholdings.com

Once Upon A Time In Shanghai

Philip Ng and Sammo Hung star in this \$10m martial-arts action film, directed by award-winning Hong Kong film-maker Wong Ching Po and produced by Wong Jing. Ng plays a poor labourer who moves to 1920s Shanghai with dreams of making his fortune but ends up using his powerful fists. Wong Ching Po is one of Hong Kong's hottest young directors with credits such as *Revenge: A Love Story* which has sold widely around the world. Yuen Woo Ping (*The Matrix*) is on board as action director.

Saving General Yang

Ronny Yu's action drama is a reworking of the Yang clan folk tales that have inspired countless stage plays, comics, films and TV dramas. Produced by Raymond Wong's Pegasus Motion Pictures with China's Henan Film Group and Huayi Brothers, the film has a starry ensemble cast including Ekin Cheng, Adam Cheng, Wu Chun and Vic Chou. The screenplay is written by Wong's son, Edmond Wong, who also wrote *Ip Man* and *Ip Man 2*.

Contact Pegasus Motion Pictures, Alvina Wong ⊠alvina.wong@pegasusmovie.com

Shadows Of Love

Award-winning Hong Kong film-maker Stanley Kwan is producing this romantic drama directed by up-and-coming talent Calvin Poon, who was nominated as best new director at this year's Hong Kong Film Awards for *Hi*, *Fidelity*. Cecilia Cheung and Korean actor Kwon Sang-

woo star in the story of a woman asked to impersonate the daughter of a CEO in an inheritance battle.

Contact Golden Scene, Winnie Tsang

Minfo@goldenscene.com

The Silent War

An \$18m action drama set in 1950s China, starring Tony Leung Chiu-wai as a blind piano tuner who is drafted into a spying mission due to his exceptional hearing abilities. Alan Mak directs from a script by his *Infernal Affairs* co-writer Felix Chong, and Zhou Xun also stars. In post-production.

Contact Mei Ah Distribution, Sara Law ☑sara@meiah.com

Switch

Formerly known as *Dwelling In The Fuchun Mountains*, this \$20m action adventure is in post-production after shooting in several international locations including Dubai. Andy Lau, Zhang Jingchu and Lin Chi-ling head the cast. The story revolves around the famous Chinese painting Dwelling In The Fuchun Mountains, which was split in two 300 years ago. The film imagines the painting is finally to be put back together again, and follows gangs of thieves as they scramble to steal it.

Contact China Film Group, Media Asia, Ricky Tse ⊠ricky_tse@mediaasia.com

Wu Dang

This \$10m martial-arts drama showcases Wu Dang kung-fu, one of the two major styles along with Shaolin, and stars three established kung-fu artists — Vincent Chiu, Dennis To and Louis Fan. Patrick Leung is directing the film, which is in post. Corey Yuen (*The Transporter*) is the action director. The story revolves around an American attempting to steal treasure from the Wudang mountain range, where legend has it the Wu Dang style originated.

Contact Mei Ah Distribution, Sara Law





a Jackie Chan Film



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