



Jane Kim's Suki is caught up in a criminal subculture.

'West 32nd'

For all intents and purposes, "West 32nd" is the kind of urban crime drama that has played out on screens for years. Few have never seen a gangland thriller, and Korea has coasted on an industry of these kinds of films for many years. What separates Michael Kang's second feature from the rest, however, is the location: New York's shady Koreatown. By transplanting the room salons and hierarchies to Queens, Kang has created a film that's both fresh and familiar.

"West 32nd" has enough to make it appealing to both general and niche festivals, but the familiarity of the narrative could make it a moderate success on the art house circuit overseas, the same market that supported

"Infernal Affairs" and many of Kitano Takeshi's films.

John (John Cho) is an ambitious junior defense lawyer fresh out the public defender's office. He pursues the case of a 14-year-old who allegedly killed a prominent gangster, Jin-Ho (Korean actor Jeong Jun-Ho). While sniffing around for details, he meets up-and-coming foot soldier Mike (the extremely charismatic Jun Kim), who's just as ambitious as John is.

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BY
ELIZABETH
KERR

the bottom line
Engrossing and
economical crime
drama energized
by a fresh
perspective.

Asian d-cinema plays catch-up

N. American firms lead way

By Carolyn Giardina
and Gregg Kilday

While a new wave of digital 3-D movies promises to energize the film business, Asia lags behind the rest of the world in making the d-cinema transition.

North America is furthest along in the rollout, followed by Europe and then Asia, according to Michael Lewis, CEO of Real D, a 3-D provider.

North America has a devel-

oping business model that calls for distributors to pony up "virtual license fees" that allow exhibitors to invest in the new digital projection systems used

"There is a significant interest in 3-D film presentation in China and throughout Asia."

— Larry O'Reilly,
Imax executive vp,
theatrical development

for 3-D presentations, but Europe and Asia have not yet adopted similar business models.

"Asia is somewhat in the same position as Europe is in," Lewis said. "The digital business arrangements have not been worked out, and you are

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Director Yang honored

By Jonathan Landreth

Taiwanese director Edward Yang Te-Chang was honored with the 2007 Filmmaker of the Year Award at the 12th annual Pusan International Film Festival on Saturday, the award's first posthumous presentation.

Accepting the award were his widow, Kaili Peng, and son, Sean Yang, 7, who stood in for his father to produce a traditional ceramic tile of handprints. Designed to decorate the sidewalks of the festival's original stamping grounds in the Nampodong neighborhood, the handprints will join



Edward Yang in Cannes

those of earlier honorees, including China's Zhang Yimou, Germany's Wim Wenders and Yang's countryman Hou Hsiao-Hsien,

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Yang

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with whom he started Taiwan's cinema "New Wave."

"Edward always admired the spirit in his festival and would have been deeply honored to receive this award," Peng said. "I hope that Sean doing this for his father will help him process his own grief."

In 2005, Yang promised PIFF director Kim Dong-Ho he would come back in 2006 as president of the jury, Peng said. Kim presented her with the award which she will take home to Beverly Hills.

Yang, whose often was called the "Michelangelo Antonioni of the East" for his long shots and leisurely takes, but the influences of Robert Bresson and Federico Fellini are also clear in his work. What distinguished him as an auteur in his own right was his exploration of cultural context. Rather than focus on one character, his films explore the relationships of many, with each other and society.

Yang distinguished himself with his feature directorial debut in 1983 with "That Day on the Beach," a film that explored the aftermath of a husband gone missing at a beach outing, and again, in



Kaili Peng was in Pusan to accept the honor on behalf of her husband.

1985, with "Taipei Story," a Hou collaboration.

As part of his legacy, legendary Hong Kong film star Jackie Chan said he hopes to finish an animated movie "The Wind," budgeted at \$25 million, which Yang was working on with him at the time of his death. "I can't let his efforts go to waste," Chan said.

Yang died on June 29 in Beverly Hills of complications from colon cancer. He was 60 years old.

Richard Trombly contributed to this report from Shanghai.

'West 32nd'

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Between them is the killer's sister, Lila (Grace Park, "Battlestar Galactica"), who went to school with Mike. Needless to say, John and Mike's worlds clash, setting them up for some fresh doses of reality that ends in a détente of sorts.

What makes "West 32nd" stand out is its peek into the Korean diaspora's criminal subculture, one that is overshadowed by Triads and Yakuza. While that's novel in itself — at least for overseas audiences —

Kang and writer Edmund Lee do an effective job of creating characters that are equally out of place in their chosen worlds.

John is a pitch-perfect illustration of a Korean-American who can't find a way into the affluent Manhattan life he so craves. He doesn't speak the language but resorts to using his "Asian advantage" to get there. Mike is too American for his colleagues and bosses — he's perceived as a disrespectful cowboy — and eventually turns to violence to prove his Korean-ness and move up the ranks. Lila is the good daughter

3-D

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dealing with more indigenous content, which means that more of the digital projector has to be paid for by the exhibitors."

Lewis estimates that 3-D digital cinema installations include roughly 14 installations in Korea, 16 in Australia and three in Japan. Other sources put the number of 3-D screens in Korea, where chains like CGV and Lotte have led the transition, as high as 20.

In the states, such films as the special editions of "The Polar Express," "Superman Returns" and "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix," all presented in part or in whole in Imax 3D as well as the animated 3-D flicks "Chicken Little" and "Monster House" have shown that audiences are eager to don new, high-tech 3-D specs.

By 2009, a clash of two potential 3-D titans looms as DreamWorks' fourth "Shrek" movie and James Cameron's sci-fi tale "Avatar" plot worldwide 3-D rollouts.

Those films also will certainly encourage Asian theater owners to jump on board. But when it comes to local production, Asia faces its own chicken-and-egg problem. Local 3-D productions are needed to fur-

ther encourage exhibitors to outfit 3-D screens, but more 3-D screens are needed before producers invest in more expensive 3-D films.

3-D Hollywood features may be available in the region. But the production of local 3-D content as well as the "Dimensionalization" of content from the region's film libraries — that is to say, creating 3-D versions of existing 2-D films — has only just begun.

David Seigle, CEO of In-Three, which has developed its own Dimensionalization process, said that before producers can commit to 3-D projects, they "need to have a certain level of an installed base within the market in order for the producers to receive a good return on investment."

In-Three is slowly beginning to have conversations in the Asian region. "The number of theaters projected to be coming online is becoming meaningful, which is why there is so much interest today in America. Content is driving the increase," Seigle said. "But in Asia there are still not meaningful numbers of 3-D theaters. The interest is growing (in Dimensionalization), but it may take a little while, or an American market to make it an interesting pursuit."

In some markets, Imax has begun to pave the way.

"There is a significant interest in 3-D film presentation in China and throughout Asia," said Larry O'Reilly, Imax executive vp theatrical development. "For example, 'Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix' played day-and-date in an Imax theater in Hong Kong with a couple hundred seats. That one screen has already grossed \$640,000 from that one title."

The Asian Film Market plans to confront the challenges the new 3-D era poses Tuesday when the Busan Film Commission sponsors a 3-D seminar examining the costs of making and exhibiting movies in 3-D. In addition, it will sponsor individual demonstrations from such companies as In-Three, Master Image Co., Visual Communications, Stereopia Co. and Big I Entertainment. ●

WEST 32ND

A CJ Entertainment America production

Credits: Director: Michael Kang; Writer: Edmund Lee, Michael Kang; Producer: Teddy Zee; Executive producer: Jamin O'Brien, Ted Kim, Kim Joo-Sung; Director of photography: Simon Cuoll; Production designer: Carol Strober; Music: Nathan Larson; Co-producer: Sabine Schenk, Choi Joon-Hwan; Costume designer: Kitty Boots; Editor: David Leonard.
Cast: John Kim: John Cho; Mike Juhn: Jun Kim; Lila Lee: Grace Park; Suki: Jane Kim; Danny: Dante Ham; Saeng: Lanny Joon; Jin-Ho: Jeong Jun-Ho; Kyuc: Hans Kim.

Running time 96 minutes.

that puts family first, though she's not above working outside the system to protect it.

Kang, whose last film was the comedic coming-of-age comedy "The Motel," coaxes believable and, for some, recognizable performances from his leads, and each does a superb job of crystallizing the experience of simultaneously being labeled foreign and domestic.

The film also offers a look at intra-Asian dynamics that are easily overlooked by English-speaking audiences and filmmakers in favor of more easily identifiable sources of urban friction (Spike Lee's "Do the Right Thing" springs to mind).

Cinematographer Simon Cuoll's neon-pierced nighttime landscapes efficiently realize the dark corners Mike and his crew live in and that John becomes enamored with. It's not a new story, but the players are, and that gives the film its edge.