

Study of movie prodcing trend based on the analysis of recent history movies -focusing on movies released after year 2011

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1. Introduction

The Korean movies based on historic events (*History movies*) have been big hits for last 3 years in Korea. 5 out of 10 biggest hit movie titles in Korea are based on historical events.

In the same period there were only 2 out of 10 biggest hit movie titles were based on historic events in china, and zero out of 10 biggest hits were based on historic events in Japan and U.S.

[Table 1] 2011-2013 Korean Box-Office (KOFIC), History movies

rank	titles	release	Sales	number of people
1	<i>The Thieves</i>	2012-07-25	93,665,568,500	12,983,330
2	<i>Miracle in Cell No.7</i>	2013-01-23	91,431,914,670	12,811,206
3	<i>Masquerade</i>	2012-09-13	88,907,726,769	12,323,291
4	<i>The Attorney</i>	2013-12-18	82,880,716,300	11,375,946
5	<i>Snowpiercer</i>	2013-08-01	67,011,367,000	9,350,192
6	<i>The Face Reader</i>	2013-09-11	66,007,557,500	9,135,545
7	<i>Miss Granny</i>	2014-01-22	62,681,576,749	8,653,144
8	<i>War of the Arrows</i>	2011-08-10	55,827,861,500	7,470,633
9	<i>Sunny</i>	2011-05-04	54,036,428,100	7,362,789
10	<i>The Berlin File</i>	2013-01-30	52,355,568,637	7,166,290

It is obvious that Korean movie goers love *History movies*. This trend has been strengthened since year 2011.

Why Korean movie goers prefer *History movies* over other movie genres? What is the common elements of successful *History movies*?

This thesis analyze *History movies* from year 2011 and finds out the common elements of recent *History movies*. Based on this analysis I will suggest the essential elements you should keep in mind when you produce successful *History movies*.

2. The analysis of *History movies* from year 2011.

According to the KOFIC, 205 movie titles were produced in year 2013. Thus, more than 600 titles were produced from 2011. The last 3 years, *History movies* were released in 14 titles. Among these 14 *History movies*, 5 titles are in the top 10 lists of last 3years biggest hits. 3 of them are in the list of all time biggest hits top10 list. This means that the *History movies* have the higher possibility of success than other movie genres in Korea.

By Recently published research “Year 2012 Korean movie industry actual conditions and investment profitability”¹ the investment profitability of *History movies* are 82.25%, ranked the first out of 10 movie genres. Average production cost of *History movies* was ₩10,226,000,000, but the average sales of *History movies* was ₩18,636,000,000, average earnings were ₩8,401,000,000.

These successes lead the boom of *History movie* production. However not all *History movies* are successful like <*Masquerade*2012> and <*the Attorney*2013>. As the table blow shows, some of *History movies* were not successful like the <*Huntress*2013> and <*I am the King*2012>.

[Table 2] periods and logline of history movies(KOFIC Box-Office)

Rank	Title	Period	Logline	Number of people
1	<i>Masquerade</i>	Chosun	The street comedian who has identical figure of the king becomes the king and tries to reform the government	12,323,291
2	<i>The Attorney</i>	1980's	A tax attorney stands against unjust government authority by defending a neighbor boy.	11,375,946
3	<i>The Face Reader</i>	Chosun	A face reader and his son are sacrificed by the coup of Sejo in Chosun dynasty.	9,135,545
4	<i>War of the Arrows</i>	Chosun	A civilian fights against invading army to protect his own family in the Manchu war of 1636.	7,470,633
5	<i>Sunny</i>	1980's	Mid aged ladies' nostalgic teenage drama set in 1980's	7,362,789

¹ KOFIC homepage industry stastics.<http://www.kobis.or.kr/kobis/business>

6	<i>The Grand Heist</i>	Chosun	Young scholars in Chosun make a fool of corrupted government's ice trading	4,909,937
7	<i>Detective K</i>	Chosun	A genius government official reveals the identity of a corrupted high level official.	4,786,259
8	<i>Nameless Gangster</i>	1980's	1980s' story of gangsters and colluded local government in Busan.	4,720,050
9	<i>The Front Line</i>	1950's	The fierce battles on the east front line while the ceasefire negotiation was undergoing	2,945,151
10	<i>The Concubine</i>	Chosun	A lady becomes concubine and power games around her	2,636,340
11	<i>My way</i>	1940's	A buddy movie in which two young men becomes friends by Marathon	2,142,670
12	<i>Battlefield Heroes</i>	Ancient	Gogureyo's internal strife in the process of unification by Silla	1,717,566
13	<i>I am the King</i>	Chosun	A comic episodes happen when the identities of king and the slave were changed in Chosun	790,101
14	<i>The Huntresses</i>	Chosun	Fantasy of beautiful slave hunters in Chosun	471,699

What is the common elements of successful *History movies*? I've analyzed last 3years of *History movies* by eras and subject materials to find out the common elements of successful *History movies*.

First, I sorted *History movies* by periods. Out of 14 *History movies*, 8 titles were set in Chosun period, 4 titles were set in modern era between 1945 to 1980'. 1 title was set in colonial area(1940'S), 1 title was set in ancient times. Among 5 biggest hit *History movies*, 3 of them were set in Chosun. 2 of them were set in modern era.

Second, I sorted *History movies* based on Logline. 4 of biggest hits deal with the conflicts between government authority and people. In <*Masquerade*>, a street comedian becomes the King and tries to reform the country. In <*the Attorney*>, an attorney stands against the unjust government power by saying "The owner of country is the people". In <*Face Reader*> the face reader's son is sacrificed by the power games. In <*War of the Arrow*> civilians fight against invading army instead of incapable national army force.

<*I am the King, 2012*> released at the same time of the release of <*Masquerade,2012*>. However <*I am the King, 2012*> was focuses on the changing identities and comic factors of the characters instead of the conflicts between government authority and people like <*Masquerade,2012*>. <*I am the King, 2012*> was failed to attract Korean moviegoers. In <*The Huntresses, 2013*> creators were focused on fantasy and costumes of the period not the meanings of historical events, and also failed to attract moviegoers. However the same comic historic genre movies like <*The Grand Heist, 2012*><*Detective K, 2011*> were successful because they focused on the conflict between people versus government authorities.

This trend shows that the conflict between people and government authority as a subject material is very effective in *History movies* and still works to attract moviegoers.

As we see the 5 biggest movies list, the movies focused on the storytelling and realistic characters instead of visual effects and costumes have been more successful. For example big budget blockbuster movie <*My way, 2011*> has failed to attract Korean moviegoers because of weak storyline and no newness.

3. What history movies we should produce

Historian Tessa Morris-suzuki says "recently media should focus on evaluating Seriousness of creating meanings of past not the veracity of the past."²

This statement should be considered when we plan *History movies*. Korean moviegoers prefer movies that are some what related to the reality today not the faithful revival of the past.

"Seriousness" is not genre term. It means that the exploration of the meanings of the historic events in terms of nowness.

Recently historical academia defined as "*History movies* are not to represent past but to represent the contemporary"³ *History movies* express the nowness of historic events not the history itself. Furthermore people tries to get hints of future from *History movies*.

History movies should embrace not only the history education and entertainments but also the discourse of nowness. Korean moviegoers want to see the clue of social issues "Now" in the history movies. Movie producers should take this in account and try to suggest the answers of nowness in the history movies.

[1] KOFIC homepage industry stastics. <http://www.kobis.or.kr/kobis/business>

[2] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The past within us: media, memory, history*, W W Norton & Co Inc, 2007

[3] Chino Chu, "Attainments and limits in Korean History Movies", *Human Sciences Research* 13, The Institute of Liberal Arts Sangmyung University, 2004.3.

[4] Kwangchul Shin, "The Structure of 'Ten Million-Movie' through Killer Content-Analysis Instruments" *Human content, Human Contents of Association*, 2013.6.

[5] Sunjun Park, "Preliminary Research for the Establishment of the "History and Movies" as an Independent Teaching Subject", *History & the Boundaries*, Pusan-Kyungnam Historical Society, 2010.3

² Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The past within us: media, memory, history*, W W Norton & Co Inc, 2007

³ Sunjun Park, "Preliminary Research for the Establishment of the "History and Movies" as an Independent Teaching Subject", *History & the Boundaries*, Pusan-Kyungnam Historical Society, 2010.3.