

## Life imitates art; scam echoes blockbuster, *No More Bets*

Authorities issue scam  
warning after Chinese  
actor Wang Xing rescue  
from Myanmar

Recruitment scam warnings are being issued in Thailand and Myanmar following the abduction of young Chinese actor, Wang Xing, better known as Xingxing, earlier this month. The warnings by Chinese embassies follow Wang's safe return to China after falling victim to a human trafficking scam that had him illegally transported to Myanmar.

*The full story is on page 3*



## Cinema faces a test year in Asia's developed markets

Korea, China lose  
audiences to streaming;  
micro-drama overtakes  
cinema revenue in China

A strong December in North American and non-Asian territories left global cinema box office showing a modest contraction in 2024 – down 7% using current exchange rates. Some analysts rejoiced that the downturn was not worse. But the key parts of the theatrical market in Asia were weaker than that rosy, global picture.

*The full story is on page 5*

# FILMART

17-20 MARCH 2025 | HONG KONG

Asia's Largest  
Entertainment Content Marketplace

EXHIBITION | BUSINESS MEETINGS  
ONLINE IP CATALOGUE |  
MARKET SCREENINGS |  
SEMINARS & SPECIAL EVENTS

FILM · TV · DOCUMENTARY · SHORT · ANIMATION

PRODUCTION · FINANCING · ACQUISITION · DISTRIBUTION  
AI · FACILITY & SERVICE · LICENSING



Secure your **FILMART** visitor badge with  
**60% OFF** early bird discount **NOW!**

[www.hktdc.com/hkfilmart](http://www.hktdc.com/hkfilmart)  
Email • [filmart@hktdc.org](mailto:filmart@hktdc.org)  
Enquiry • (852) 1830 668



7 Feb debut for Netflix  
*The Greatest Rivalry:  
India vs Pakistan*



Netflix will be all about cricket in India on 7 February with *The Greatest Rivalry: India vs Pakistan*. Announcing the premiere date today (13 Feb), the streamer said the documentary series “explores the drama, passion, and high-stakes intensity of this rivalry on the home soil of both nations” and promised a “front-row seat to history” plus surprise appearances. *The Greatest Rivalry: India vs Pakistan* is directed by Chandradev Bhagat and Stewart Sugg, and produced by Grey Matter Entertainment. The executive producer is Payal Mathur Bhagat.



RTHK puts caregivers in  
the spotlight in new  
co-pro with Hong Kong’s  
Labor and Welfare Bureau

Caregivers take centre stage at Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), which has tied up with the government’s Labor and Welfare Bureau on new series, *Carers*. The 10-episode programme, which talks to a range of caregivers, from parents taking care of children with rare diseases to children caring for elderly parents, is part of a broader inclusion initiative to encourage consumers to care about the needs of different social segments. *Carers* premiered this weekend (12 Jan) and airs weekly on Sundays.

**Philippines battle: Vic Sotto vs Darryl Yap**  
Clash erupts over Pepsi Paloma movie allegations



Picture: Facebook/Darryl Yap

Rhed Bustamante as Pepsi Paloma in *The Rapists of Pepsi Paloma*

The battle between Philippines’ TV host, Vic Sotto, and the filmmakers behind *The Rapists of Pepsi Paloma*, written and directed by Darryl Yap, intensifies this week, with opposing sides scheduled to present their cases before a judge on Wednesday (15 Jan).

The trailer for the biopic, starring Rhed Bustamante as 1980s Filipina actress Delia Dueñas Smith (aka Pepsi Paloma), includes a scene where Paloma alleges she was raped by Sotto.

The scene resurfaces a scandal that broke out in the early 1980s when the actress was 14 years old and was allegedly raped by three celebrities. Paloma died by suicide in 1985.

Meanwhile, the high-profile battle, which erupted last week as the film’s publicity campaign kicked off, is dominating domestic headlines.

Sotto, who has filed a petition to take down the film’s trailer and stop the

promotional campaign, has also lodged a Ps35-million/US\$597,000 suit for cyber libel and related damages.

Yap, previously known for *Maid in Malacañang*, is gathering his own forces to fight Sotto’s objection.

In a Facebook post on Friday, Yap said: “Truth is the only defence to all the questions... Delia, Pepsi, we’re going back to court.” The post had 15,000 responses (including more than 5,600 heart emojis, 2,000 comments and 650 shares as of Sunday evening).

Local media platforms have pointed out the possibility of political motives behind the new movie, which coincides with the campaigns of Sotto’s son, Vico, for Pasig mayor, and brother Tito for senator.

Yap has denied allegations of political interference or support from Sotto’s political rivals.

The film is supposed to be released in February.

# contentasia

Reserve  
Now

## @MIP LONDON 2025 & The Big List Directory

Connecting your brand and products with more than 13,400 verified executives in the Asia-Pacific content space, across all platforms in 22 APAC markets. ContentAsia's clear editorial focus on Asia delivers all the latest trends, market developments, influences, information & analysis that make a difference.

### Contact

Leah@contentasia.tv (Americas/Europe)

Malena@contentasia.tv (Asia Pacific/Middle East)

CJ@contentasia.tv (China/Taiwan)



# Life imitates art; scam echoes blockbuster, *No More Bets*

## Authorities issue scam warning after Chinese actor Wang Xing rescue from Myanmar

Recruitment scam warnings are being issued in Thailand and Myanmar following the abduction of young Chinese actor, Wang Xing, better known as Xingxing, earlier this month.

The warnings by Chinese embassies follow Wang's safe return to China after falling victim to a human trafficking scam that had him illegally transported to Myanmar.

Thailand's Prime Minister, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, announced Wang's rescue and transfer to Thai authorities four days after his abduction to Myanmar on 3 January.

Wang was delivered into the care of Thai police in the Mae Sot district of Tak province.

Thai and Chinese media reported that Wang had flown from Shanghai to Bangkok in response to what he believed to be a job offer. Arriving at 3am on Friday (3 January), he was told he would be taken directly to the film's casting location.

Instead, it appears that Wang was driven some 500km to the northwest of Thailand, where contact with him was lost. Wang's girlfriend, Jiajia, had been using location tracking software to track his movements. After some 60 hours without contact, she raised the alarm by contacting authorities in China and Thailand.

Wang is known for his roles in TV series *Fox Spirit Matchmaker: Red-Moon Pact*, *The Tale of Rose* and Linmon Media's *Under the Skin 2*, a 28-part crime, drama series that started airing last month.

According to Jiajia, Wang had responded to a job advertisement on Chinese social messaging platform WeChat from a casting co-ordinator named Yan Shiliu, who purported to be working with leading Thai production company, GMM Grammy.

Mae Sot borders Myawaddy, part of eastern Myanmar where criminal gangs have previously lured victims across the border. Once in Myanmar, they are forced into slave labor as scam-call operatives.

Such operations have flourished in the



Picture credit: Royal Thai Police/AP

Chinese actor Wang Xing at a Royal Thai Police briefing after his rescue

nearly four years of civil war in Myanmar since the military coup of February 2021. But both junta and rebel groups are believed to have ramped up drug production and scam centres to finance their war efforts.

Myanmar is now the biggest nexus of organised crime on the planet, according to a recent report by Global Organised Crime Index.

Thai authorities said they had been unable to find any record of Wang having exited the country. But a source at Linmon told this correspondent that the company had been informed that Wang had been rescued in Myanmar.

It is unclear how many other Chinese actors have been duped into forced labor in Myanmar.

This weekend, another Chinese actor, Deng You, used Chinese social video platform Weibo to report that he too had been contacted by Yan and that he had travelled to Bangkok for work on a TV series.

Deng reported that, on his arrival, the film crew tried to confiscate his passport. When he refused, they cancelled his re-

turn plane ticket.

The swift response by the Thai government to the Wang incident may reflect the potential for damage to the country's lucrative tourism industry from publicity about cyber-scam, drugs and illegal gambling industries along its borders with Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia.

In 2023, *No More Bets*, depicting the trafficking of a model and a computer analyst to an unnamed southeast Asian country where they were forced into cybercrime, was a huge hit. The Chinese crime film earned some US\$540 million, mostly at the mainland China box office, and provoked a social backlash within China against Thailand and other countries in the region.

In response to *No More Bets*, Thai authorities travelled to China and denied that the crimes shown in the film were taking place in Thailand. Myanmar complained to China that use of the Burmese language throughout the movie hurt its reputation. Cambodia banned the film on the grounds that it could discourage foreign investors and tourists. –

By Patrick Frater



## Cinema faces a test year in Asia's developed territories

Korea, China lose audiences to streaming; micro-drama overtakes cinema \$ in China

A strong December in North American and non-Asian territories left the global cinema box office market showing a modest contraction in 2024 – down 7% using current exchange rates, or 11% using historic currency rates, to US\$30.1 billion, compared with US\$33.9 billion in 2023. Some analysts rejoiced that the downturn was not worse.

"Given the limited release calendar of 2024, caused by the long-running actors' and writers' strikes in Hollywood 2023, this can be seen as a significant success. It is another testament of the theatrical industry's resilience," said London-based consultancy firm Gower Street Analytics. "A return to pre-pandemic levels was never expected for 2024," the company added.

But the key parts of the theatrical market in Asia were weaker than that rosy, global picture.

Mainland China, normally accounting for a fifth or more of the global total and in 2020 and 2021 the world's richest territory, went into sharp reverse last year.

Gross revenues fell by some 23% to RMB42.5 billion/US\$5.8 billion, down from US\$7.7 billion in 2023. That total is 27% below the 2017-19 average and 34% below 2019, the last normal year before Covid.

With Russia, China had the dubious honour of being one of only two markets worldwide where the 2024 annual box office figure was lower than 2021.

Cinema revenues in South Korea were down only 5% year-on-year in local currency terms at KRW1.19 trillion and 2% lower when using ticket sales volume as the yardstick.

But the modest recovery of late 2022 has stalled and the figures are still a woeful 45% below 2019. (Korea's weakening currency makes comparison sicker still and translates as just US\$818 million in dollar terms.)

Hong Kong, a much smaller market but one that has previously been a bellwether, was worth HK\$1.34 billion/US\$172 million. That was only a 6% year-



Chinese comedy drama, *Yolo* (2024), directed by Jia Ling and starring Jia and Lei Jiayin

on-year decline, but takes the Special Administrative Region back to 2011 levels of business (lower still, taking inflation into account).

Other Asia-Pacific territories are slower to produce definitive annual box office statistics (Japan and Australia will likely report at the end of January) or are considerably more opaque.

While two mid-sized Southeast Asian territories – Vietnam and Indonesia – are likely to have enjoyed year-on-year growth, driven by a virtuous cycle of cinema construction, young demographics and growing film production volumes, the trend in Asia's large and mature markets is a cause for concern.

China remains heavily regulated, with censorship, quotas and state-owned enterprises all having significant influence. Korea is essentially open and enjoys one of the highest volumes of new film releases in the world.

But, in both countries, executives, analysts and commentators point to the difficulty of attracting young people into cinemas on a regular and habitual basis. They also point to audiences drift-

ing away to streaming.

Korea has one of the world's most competitive streaming environments. And global corporations led by Netflix and Disney have invested billions of dollars into Korean TV content, making SVOD a powerful competitor. SVOD platforms can make movie stars and a wider, multi-device choice available for the same cost as a single cinema ticket.

In China, SVOD and AVOD platforms represent less of a threat than short-form, mobile content. According to consultancy iResearch, these achieved revenues of RMB48.4 billion/US\$6.64 billion) in 2024. If correct, that means micro-drama revenues have overtaken theatrical cinema. – By Patrick Frater

The full story, including a watch-list for 2025, is available to ContentAsia Insider subscribers only.

Email [malena@contentasia.tv](mailto:malena@contentasia.tv) for subscription information

# Breeze by the Sea tops rankings on three platforms

Taiwanese drama tops AXN Saturday ratings, ranks #1 Chinese drama in Taiwan



Puff Kuo and Bolin Chen in *Breeze by the Sea*

Taiwanese drama, *Breeze by the Sea*, was Taiwan's Chunghwa Telecom platform Hami Video's top-rated drama within 14 days of its mid-December 2024 release, and topped rankings on three platforms, according to data from KC Global Media's Taiwan HQ.

In addition to Hami Video, the series was #1 Chinese drama in Taiwan on AXN and the regional entertainment channel AXN's top Saturday show, as well as Rakuten Viki U.S.'s top Taiwanese drama.

The 18-episode original production aired on AXN and streamed simultaneously in 170+ countries exclusively through Rakuten Viki and in 16 markets on Hong Kong-based regional streamer Viu.

The US\$3-million original series was announced at the end of 2022.

Produced with Central Motion Picture Corporation and Deepwaters Digital Support, the drama is based on CJ ENM's 2018 series, *Top Star U-back*.

*Breeze by the Sea*, filmed in Kinmen off the coast of Taiwan, is helmed by Peter Ho, and stars Taiwan's Bolin Chen and Puff Kuo along with Singapore's Hong Hui Fang and Fann Wong.

The series was picked up for global distribution by KC Global Media towards the end of last year, kicking off the Asian channels operator's new IP distribution division. KC Global Media Distribution launched in December 2024.

The original Korean drama, starring Kim Ji-Suk and Jeon So-Min, is about a superstar who gets into trouble and is exiled to a remote island.

In the Mandarin version, Puff Kuo

The screenshot shows a ranking page titled '影劇節目聲量榜'. The top item is '現在撥打的電話' (The Phone Being Dialed Now) with a rating of 9.5 and a '★ 留言評分去' button. The second item is '魷魚遊戲 第2季' (Squid Game Season 2) with a rating of 5.4. The third item, highlighted with a red border, is '不如海邊吹吹風' (Breeze by the Sea) with a rating of 9.5 and a '★ 留言評分去' button. The source is cited as 'Source: Line Today'.

The screenshot shows a '戲劇人氣榜' (Drama Popularity Ranking) with three items. The top item is '不如海邊吹吹風' (Breeze by the Sea) with a rating of 9.5. The second item is '蜀錢人家' (The Money People) with a rating of 8.5. The third item is '九重紫' (Nine Layers of Purple) with a rating of 8.5.

(*Light The Wild*) plays a down-to-earth housekeeper in a family-owned bed & breakfast who takes on multiple part-time jobs – including oyster quarrying – to support a failing business. Bolin Chen (*In Time With You*) plays a demanding, no-nonsense city person.

# What's on where...

February 2025	23-27	Mip London 2025	London, U.K.
	23-24	Mip Doc 2025	London, U.K.
	23-24	Mip Formats 2025	London, U.K.
	23-28	The London TV Screenings 2025	London, U.K.
March 2025	2-5	Australian International Documentary Conference 2025	Melbourne / Naarm
	17-20	Hong Kong FILMART 2025	Hong Kong
	25-27	Series Mania Forum 2025	Lille, Hauts-de-France
April 2025	24-29	Canneseries 2025	Cannes, France
	24	AVIA: Future of Video India 2025	Mumbai, India
May 2025	26	AVIA: Satellite Industry Forum 2025	Singapore
	28-31	19th Busan Content Market 2025 (BCM)	Busan, Korea
June 2025	12-14	Telefilm Vietnam 2025	Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
	23-26	Sunny Side of the Doc 2025	La Rochelle, France
	24-26	APOS 2025	Bali, Indonesia
July 2025	2-4	17th Content Tokyo 2025	Tokyo, Japan
	7-8	DW Global Media Forum 2025	Bonn, Germany
August 2025	20-23	Beijing International Radio, TV & Film Exhibition 2025	Beijing, China
September 2025		ContentAsia Summit 2025	Taipei, Taiwan
		ContentAsia Awards 2025	Taipei, Taiwan
	2	AVIA: Indonesia in View 2025	Jakarta, Indonesia
	17-26	Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) 2025	Busan, Korea
	20-23	Asian Contents & Film Market 2025	Busan, Korea
October 2025	11-12	MipJunior 2025	Cannes, France
	13-16	Mipcom 2025	Cannes, France
	28	AVIA: Japan in View 2025	Tokyo, Japan
November 2025		Dubai International Content Market 2025	Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai
December 2025	3-5	ATF 2025	Singapore
	3-4	AVIA: Asia Video & OTT Summit 2025	Singapore

\* As of 10 January 2024

The full list of events is available at [www.contentasia.tv/events](http://www.contentasia.tv/events)

**contentasia MarketDailies**

**Be Included.**  
**Contact CJ at [cj@contentasia.tv](mailto:cj@contentasia.tv)**

Timo Tjahjanto's "The Shadow Strays" hits Netflix top 10 lists in 85 countries; high-action underworld feature debuts at #2 on non-English films global top 10  
 Mediacorp's "Emerald Hill" in Netflix pre-sale; Chinese drama to simulcast on meWATCH 10 March 2025

# Prime Video beats local originals in China

## Secret Level tops demand rankings – Parrot Analytics

Amazon Prime Video's adult animated anthology, *Secret Level*, beat demand for local Chinese originals in China for the week of 16-22 December 2024. Data science platform, Parrot Analytics, shows the series, with Aleks Le, Nelson Lee, Keanu Reeves and Arnold Schwarzenegger among others, ahead of local Tencent Video originals on the digital top 10 for the week, as well as outstripping demand for Japan's *Dan Da Dan* on the

overall TV list.

Overall, Tencent dominated digital demand, with four of the top 10 places on the digital ranking, followed by Netflix (which is still not available as a standalone subscription platform in China) with three titles – Taiwanese original *Born for the Spotlight*, *Squid Game S1*, and *Arcane*. Chinese streamer Bilibili scraped onto the top 10 digital list with *Tales of Herding Gods*.

### Top 10 overall TV originals: China

Rank	Title	Difference from Market Average (x times)
1	<i>Secret Level</i>	27.5
2	<i>Dan Da Dan (ダンダダン)</i>	24.5
3	<i>Blossoms Shanghai (繁花)</i>	22.6
4	<i>Bocchi The Rock! (ぼっち・ざ・ろっく!)</i>	22.5
5	<i>Empresses In The Palace (后宫甄嬛传)</i>	22.5
6	<i>The Tale Of Rose (玫瑰的故事)</i>	21.3
7	<i>Joy Of Life (庆余年)</i>	21.0
8	<i>Born For The Spotlight (影后)</i>	20.5
9	<i>Squid Game (오징어 게임)</i>	20.4
10	<i>Light Shop (조명가게)</i>	20.0

### Top 10 digital originals: China

Rank	Title	Platform	Difference from Market Average (x times)
1	<i>Secret Level</i>	Amazon Prime Video	27.5
2	<i>Blossoms Shanghai (繁花)</i>	Tencent Video	22.6
3	<i>The Tale Of Rose (玫瑰的故事)</i>	Tencent Video	21.3
4	<i>Joy Of Life (庆余年)</i>	Tencent Video	21.0
5	<i>Born For The Spotlight (影后)</i>	Netflix	20.5
6	<i>Squid Game (오징어 게임)</i>	Netflix	20.4
7	<i>Light Shop (조명가게)</i>	Disney+	20.0
8	<i>Arcane</i>	Netflix	18.9
9	<i>Three-Body (三体)</i>	Tencent Video	17.2
10	<i>Tales Of Herding Gods (牧神记)</i>	Bilibili	17.0

Date range: 16-22 December 2024

The total audience demand being expressed for a title, within a market. Audience demand reflects the desire, engagement and viewership, weighted by importance; so a stream/download is a higher expression of demand than a 'like'/comment. In this dataset we are comparing the demand that exists for each series in this market, against the average TV show. A difference of 1x represents the market average and 10x means a series is ten times more in demand than the average TV show in this market



Editorial Director  
**Janine Stein**  
 janine@contentasia.tv  
 Events Manager  
**CJ Yong**  
 cj@contentasia.tv  
 ContentAsia Marketing & Awards  
**Heather Berger**  
 heather@contentasia.tv  
 Design  
**Rae Yong**  
 Research  
**Rhealyn Rigodon**  
 iyah@contentasia.tv

Associate Publisher  
 (Americas, Europe) and VP,  
 International Business Development  
**Leah Gordon**  
 leah@contentasia.tv

Assistant Publisher  
 (Asia/Middle East)  
**Malena Amzah**  
 malena@contentasia.tv

To receive your regular free copy of ContentAsia, please email contentasia@contentasia.tv

Published fortnightly by:  
 Pencil Media Pte Ltd  
 www.contentasia.tv

Copyright 2025 Pencil Media Pte Ltd.  
 All Rights Reserved.



Daily news with ContentAsia Insider  
 email malena@contentasia.tv for subscription details