

Popular Chinese microfilm turned into a movie

By Louise Watt
The Associated Press

BEIJING — A Chinese online microfilm, *Old Boys*, which was watched by tens of millions and helped to establish the genre, is being made into a feature-length movie.

The filmmakers presented a trailer at a media event in Beijing and said *Old Boys: The Way of the Dragon* would be shown in Chinese cinemas in May. The project's genesis as a 43-minute microfilm that netted nearly 70 million views on a video website demonstrates how online films are influencing China's traditional movie industry.

"If people like me wanted to make a movie 10 years ago, we had to get approval from government agencies and officials first," said director and actor Xiao Yang. "But now, with the internet, we can show our works to an audience directly and we get feedback from the audience directly. When my work gains a large number of viewers, it starts to influence investors."

Xiao's microfilm *Old Boys* kickstarted the Chinese microfilm phenomenon — films around 40 minutes or less that are distributed online and generally viewed on mobile phones or laptops. They have become intensely popular with people born in the 1980s or later. Today, microfilm producers face fierce competition for



MICROFILM TO MOVIE. Chinese film director and actor Xiao Yang, second from left, and actor Wang Taili, center, pose with dancers on stage as they promote their new movie, *Old Boys: The Way of the Dragon*, in Beijing. An online microfilm watched by tens of millions that helped establish the genre is being made into a feature-length movie. The planned debut of *Old Boys* at cinemas in China is May 2014. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

video website Youku and the state-run China Film Group as part of a project to showcase promising young microfilm makers.

The overwhelming popularity of online viewing is redefining how China's mainstream industry markets itself and chooses themes. Xiao said that after his microfilm became popular online, investors approached him.

"What is popular online is a good indication of what will be popular with young people," said Shao Dan, Youku Tudou's director of international communications.

So Young, one of 2013's biggest Chinese box office winners, started life as a web novel about a young woman's journey into adulthood that gained lots of fans online.

The 2011 movie *Love Is Not Blind*, about a young woman's heartbreak, was low budget, but it concentrated its marketing online, including videos of people tearfully relating their own tales of being lovelorn. It came out in time for China's Singles Day, reaping box office revenue that was many times its investment.

Film critic Raymond Zhou said traditional films were increasingly relying on microfilms for promotion, putting short documentaries about the making of the feature film online to attract attention ahead of the release date.

Zhou said he didn't expect *Old Boys* to work so well as a feature film. "I really doubt it, because there's a time for everything," he said.

When *Old Boys* the microfilm premiered in 2010, "it really clicked with the online public, (but) things change so fast. Whatever is popular right now will be totally forgotten in say half a year," Zhou said.

sponsorship and advertising, so many try to cater for mass viewing and employ comedy elements and sexual themes.

The original film is a story with comedic elements of a wedding host and a barber who reminisce about their school-day dreams of making it big in music. They decide to team up for a talent show, performing Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean," but their hopes are dashed by the producer, who doesn't want them in the competition.

The school-day nostalgia and the pair's sadness at losing out on their childhood dreams struck a chord with the viewing public when the film was released online in

2010. Its main song became a karaoke favorite.

The movie starts where the microfilm left off, with the duo — played by the same actors, director Xiao and Wang Taili, who wrote three of the movie's songs — heading to New York to seek fame. The trailer shows the pair doing kung fu moves at John F. Kennedy airport while being chased by two North Korean assassins, who the two also play.

The microfilm came about after the pair, known as the Chopsticks Brothers, posted their own music videos online and garnered attention. They were later sponsored to make *Old Boys* by the popular

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by Asian Americans and casting Asian actors in roles in stage plays. And this is why *Chinglish* is important. Portland Center Stage is making an effort. They didn't have to. But they are. We have a chance to see a play by a veteran Asian-American playwright. And it must be supported by making sure that Asians are represented in the audience. PCS has taken a financial risk with this play. I hope

it pays off. The works of David Henry Hwang are worth it.

Editor's note: Chinglish runs through February 9 at the Gerding Theater at the Armory, located at 128 N.W. 11th Avenue in Portland. To learn more, or to buy tickets to the show, visit <www.pcs.org/chinglish>. On Monday, January 27 at 7:00pm, Dmae is directing a reading of another Hwang play, The Dance and the Railroad. The event, which is free and open to the public, features movement by Minh Tran as well as performers Heath Hyun Houghton (as Lone) and Samson Syharath (as Ma).

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