



Hong Kong producer Bill Kong and his company Edko Films will partner with the French director Jean-Jacques Annaud for the big screen version of the bestselling Chinese novel “Wolf Totem.” It will be their first filmmaking collaboration.

Kong has joined the “Wolf Totem” production led by Beijing Forbidden City Film Co, whose general manager, Xu Jianhai, told The Hollywood Reporter “the film about a Chinese student – Jean-Jacques Annaud’s production of the film based on Jiang Rong’s novel is expected to take five years to make. “With ‘Wolf Totem’ we have to go through the whole process and see where we are with the budget then,” said Kong, CEO of EDKO Films, who previously distributed Annaud’s “The Lover” and “Quest for Fire” in Hong Kong.

“It will be difficult to work with the wolves, but 99% of what we show will be real,” said Annaud to AP, who plans to train live wolf-stars for the production, much as he did for his 1988 film “The Bear.”

“Wolf Totem” has enjoyed record sales in China. It is a semi-autobiographical account of life in the late 1960s in the remote China-Mongolia border region and the struggle between tradition and modernity told through a young

man’s relationship with wolves. It’s a philosophical work of fiction dedicated to the disappearing primitive grasslands and one of its inhabitants, the wolf.

Wolf Totem has been on China’s top 10 best-seller list for six years since it was published. More than 3 million copies (and more than 17 million pirated copies)

have been sold domestically since 2004 and translated into 30 languages, Wolf Totem has been published in 110 countries and regions. It was the first Chinese book to successfully enter the Western book market.

Beijing Forbidden City Film Company purchased adaptation film rights to the book six years ago, just after it was published. However, due to the difficulty of shooting the film, no one was willing to take on the project. At the end of last year Annaud read the French edition of the novel. Deeply moved, he contacted the film company after reading only 100 pages.

The movie “Wolf Totem” is the first Chinese film to be helmed by a noted foreign director, marking a bold step for domestic films to march into the international market.

The renowned director taking on the project is perhaps best known for films such as “Two Brothers”, “The Bear”, “The Lover”, and “Enemy at the Gates”. He says he is deeply touched by the subtle relationship between humans and animals described in the book. And he has long hoped to film in China. The highly acclaimed director reportedly turned down four Hollywood film offers to take on the project.

“My interest in the relationship between humans and animals is magnificently described by this book,” explained Annaud. “It is the story of a young man who discovers a civilization – that has been the theme in many of my films.”

Annaud plans to spend three years breeding wolves before the film begins shooting. As they grow up, they will be faithfully recorded for use in the upcoming production. “You have to be very very patient about shooting animals. The domestication of wolves will take one and a half years. And the average effective scene per day may only be 20 seconds,” he said. More than 100 wolf cubs will be trained for the production, with 20 eventually chosen to star in the film. In preparation for production Annaud has already completed extensive research in Mongolia and China’s Inner Mongolia.

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One of the reasons Annaud was given the film was because of his extensive experience with animals. Directing The Bear in 1998 (originally L’Ours) and Two Brothers, the story of twin tiger cubs, Annaud is known for his patience and affinity with animals.

Casting is currently underway for the movie and according to Annaud, the feature is expected to be released in three years time. Annaud has just begun writing the script and said he hopes to begin filming in 2011. “It’s a difficult script to write, I’ll need at least six months,” he said.