**Annual Conference 2014, Boao Forum for Asia**

**Session Summary**

Session 30 April 11, 2014

**Boao Cultural Forum  
 Cultures: the East Meets the West**

**Moderator: James SU, Chinese American Film Festival**

**Panelists**

* **YIUMING SHUMING TSUI, Chairman of the Hong Kong Televisioners Association, Film and Television Producer and Director**
* **YU Dong, Founder & CEO, Bona Film Group**
* **Dan MINTZ, CEO, DMG Group**

**Key points:**

* **As China’s influence grows generally, Chinese perspectives will become further integrated into international film markets.**
* **Mobile internet technology is more than just the next phase of content delivery; it offers greater prospects for cultural exchange and market discovery.**
* **While the best movies made in China can now compete with Western films, China has yet to overtake Hollywood.**

Will 2014 be another breakout year for the Chinese film industry? How effective are today’s Chinese movies at bridging cultures? What are the current technological trends in the film industry, and are Chinese producers ready for them?

Panel moderator, James Su, observed that with economic globalization, we are seeing more and more exchanges and more success in cooperation between Eastern and Western cultures. The line-up of panellists was emblematic of this trend. It is only through combining the technologies of new media that we can unite cultures around the world.

How can we make localized features of the culture prosper? What is the difference between Chinese and Western cultures? Mr. Yiuming Shuming Tsui saw it as the director's responsibility to promote culture. He saw many areas of convergence, and gave as one example the influence of Hong Kong's action movies impacting viewers through the fashion and the behaviour demonstrated by the actors. The US cowboy movies of the 1970s increased people's interest in travelling to the U.S. to see the cowboy life. Mr. Tsui observed that the images today are even stronger.

Mr. Yu Dong of Bona Film Group proposed that movies are pivotal in connecting Chinese and Western culture. Movies can transcend regions and times and can be played anywhere in the world. Effecting this transcendence is the responsibility of the director.

The Chinese movie industry is developing very quickly now, and we are seeing competition in the market. Mr. Yu suggests that China's 1.4 billion population is a key driver, propelling the Chinese movie industry to become Hollywood's biggest competitor. A generation ago, while the Chinese film industry was still weak, Western movies would transmit their mindsets and culture to viewers because everyone was purchasing their films; but as China grows into the second-largest market in the world, the Chinese view will be integrated into international markets.

Yu believes that the current phase is significant and will see Chinese movies potentially more successful than those of Hollywood given the trend of the Chinese movie industry which has grown from basically nothing to USD 20 billion over the past few years. It is conceivable that within one more year, the Chinese movie industry will grow to USD 30 billion, with an increasing trend of international directors and producers cooperating with the Chinese film industry heralding a new era for the industry.

Speaking in Chinese, the American panellist, Dan Mintz of DMG group, said that what the panel is really talking about is how to integrate the industry. The world is getting smaller. As the panellists discuss culture, they are talking about it from the perspective of film directors. Film is about influencing people. Cooperation between peoples requires a process of understanding each other. The obstacles to mutual understanding derive from different perspectives. In this mutual process of communication, movies as a tool can bridge the gaps. Movies are more critical than politics or economics because they go straight to people’s hearts.

Asked what is the new means of communication, Mr. Yu described the consecutive eras the film industry has passed through historically: from silent to sound, black-and-white to color, two-dimensional to 3D, and most recently from screen to internet delivery. He expects the mobile internet to transform the movie industry just as it has transformed the retail shopping experience from bricks-and-mortar to e-commerce. In the past decade, the internet was just a carrier, without feeling. However, today the smart phone carries emotions, it provides choices, and it has its own personality.

Mr. Tsui argued that in terms of content, there is no ‘new’ media. Between the new and conventional media, there is a widening gap in quality and variety. In contrast to the movie industry which can control quality and variety by distribution, and the television industry which can do so by programming, new media has an enormous variety of content which changes very quickly. The technologies available today allow ordinary people to create their own content, and to manipulate content produced by others, which presents some risk to content creators. But the overall result is positive, in that tis new media is assisting in cultural exchange, and helps content creators to discover the market for their products. Now China has its own concrete and large market, and is attracting investment from the West. Essentially though, Chinese products still need to be embraced by the market; without the market’s support, it will take much longer.

Mr. Tsui hopes that cooperation can result in movies that have both Western and Chinese content. Although China has this technology, the U.S. is far further ahead and the latter's technology is worth learning and should be embraced for mutual benefit.

Asked about internationalization of the Chinese culture, Mr. Yu asserted that Chinese movies face a competitive opportunity. Though lagging in special effects and facing an invasion of big Hollywood productions, the Chinese industry made 20,000 films last year and has invested substantial amounts in screens to draw more viewers. He poignantly described the 2002 release of the Zhang Yimou film *Hero* at the only movie screen in Changchun a decade ago, where there were not enough seats for all the would-be viewers. With multiple delivery options, there is now no shortage of screens in China.

For Mr. Yu, the quality of films, the richness of content, and the diversity of subject matter will all figure into whether Chinese movies will be well-received by international audiences. Western movies now embody all of these elements. Chinese movies now face an opportunity in this golden era, but as to quality there is still some way to go and the industry still needs more high-calibre talent in order to be able to shoot the movie the way the director envisions. That said, the best movies in China can definitely compete with Hollywood productions.

Movies have four main elements: commercial production, artistry, technology, and humanity. Movie companies may not be able to cover all four of these in every movie but they need to be clear about their focus.

Mr Mintz added that film-makers should recognize shared cultural themes and integrate those into their films. Film-makers, wherever they are in the world, should aim to create something that will be universally liked.

Mr. Tsui revisited the changes in the Chinese film industry over the course of his own career. In marked contrast to the early days of his career, the Mainland China market now produces a lot of talent and he is confident about investing in the production of good movies and expanding China's cinema industry. He spoke for all the panellists in expressing greater expectations for the future, along with the prospects for learning from others and merging East and West.