



Australian Government

SCREEN
AUSTRALIA

Sichuan Television Festival Chengdu, China, 5–7 November 2009

Report by Mary-Ellen Mullane, Investment/Development Manager, Documentary

Mary-Ellen Mullane accompanied a delegation of Australian documentary producers to the Sichuan Television Festival 5–7 November 2009. The aim of her visit was to assist in deal making, form relationships with key broadcasters and producers, and encourage the sale and marketing of Australian documentaries in China.

The success of Mary-Ellen's trip was assisted greatly by Chris Oliver's groundwork one week prior to her visit (Chris was invited to be a member of the highly esteemed Sichuan Festival judging panel).

Although the first visit to a Chinese market by Screen Australia's Production Investment Department, the discussions with Chinese broadcasters, regulators and producers were very productive, positive and timely.

China snapshot

- Over 2,000 television channels
- Produces 10,000 hours of drama per year
- Constructing 1.5 cinema screens per week
- Largest population in the world – 1.3 billion people
- Largest television market in the world
- The Sichuan Television Festival was held in Chengdu, a provincial city of 11 million people
- Up until now China has been a difficult market for sales and co-production opportunities.

Highlights of the market

- Australia Day presentations – created strong interest among Chinese broadcasters and independent producers
- Australian Lounges were well attended
- Very informative lunch session with Jill Collins, Australian Cultural Counsellor
- Awards for two Australian documentaries – *The Seed Hunter* (360 Degree Films), *Dance Like Nobody's Watching* (GAP Media) – *Sacred Ground* (Mav Media) won two Golden Pandas and received one honourable mention.

China Market – overview

According to State Administration of Radio, Film & TV (SARFT) the distinction between 'film' and 'television' is very important. If you are making a film in China it is governed by special legislation and subject to many controls. However television production is comparatively much more flexible. Content about history, art, architecture, food, wildlife and wildlife conservation works best. It should not include religious, sexually explicit and/or political content. All media is state-owned and administered; however, there are an increasing number of independent producers who are licensed to provide content for broadcast. Licences are not granted on a project-by-project basis but to a producer and/or production company. Australians require an invitation and permit to work in China.

Traditionally, broadcasters have not offered pre-sales and have acquired rather than produced content. Rather, producers provide the content to the broadcaster and in return exploit advertising space. Ironically in China there is no such thing as 'no advertising'.

There have been a number of recent important changes. CCTV has split its news and production services. The first is still controlled by the government while production is now often subcontracted. CCTV has received a recent injection of production funds and is now offering a small number of ballpark pre-sales/facilities deals for documentary co-productions.

There are over 2,000 television stations in China. CCTV has 13 channels and 26 time slots for documentary.

The key broadcast and production companies are:

- CCTV
- Shanghai Media Group
- Nanjing TV
- Hunan (GBS) Entertainment (big in formats)

SARFT is the agency that makes changes regarding broadcast content and policy. They insisted that stations release funds to support serials and now there is a booming television serials market. In theory they could do the same for documentary production.

Young Chinese are surfing the net rather than watching television.

Most broadcasters have had some exposure to co-production and are aware that they need to undertake more – SHM, CCTV, Canton TV.

CTAA (Chinese Television Artist Association), which is an organisation similar to SPAA, have expressed their interest in attending AIDC in 2010. There is also an annual conference for producers and directors arranged between China, Hong Kong, Korea and Japan. CTAA wants to invite SPAA and Screen Australia to be part of this pan-Asian event.

DFAT cultural initiative

The Australian Year of Culture in China will launch in June 2010, for a period of 12 months, and be followed by the Year of Chinese Culture in Australia 2011/12. This is a bilateral initiative supported at the highest levels by both

governments. DFAT is almost at the stage of signing off on a formal agreement to stage the reciprocal cultural years. It already has senior level support including from the Prime Minister. The theme of our year is 'collaboration' as it is intended to build on existing links between Australian and Chinese practitioners in the arts and to have sustainable outcomes.

The cultural initiative will include a film and television component:

- activities around the commercial release of the AMPCO/Hengdian official feature film co-production *Searching Dragon, Hunting Pearl* in July 2010 (media release in China last weekend)
- DFAT is discussing a possible screen industry forum with Beijing Film Academy, envisage this would involve Australian and Chinese film and television producers coming together for an industry-oriented forum; theme could be around co-production (or similar) given the increasing activity on this front in light of the Film Co-production Agreement
- Tropfest is interested in staging a festival in China
- DFAT is exploring with CCTV-6 (film channel) prospects for showing a series of Australian films on television
- DFAT is also exploring activities with CCTV-10's Film Review program, including a possible visit to Australia to produce a series for television on the Australian film industry, or another angle of Australia, with Australian films brought into the mix
- other screening events are possible, though DFAT would prefer these be small-scale and to 'hang' off industry events.

General observations

- Big demand for light factual
- Programs about art and wildlife work well in this market
- Regulated capitalism is still embryonic and the censor is still all powerful
- Strong South East Asian (including Myanmar) presence at Sichuan Festival – but no pre-sales from South East Asia on offer, yet.

Process for making a co-production work in China – requirements

- Co-producer who is licensed to deliver content (this can come from within a broadcaster or an independent producer)
- Permit to work in China (invitation)
- Certified as a reputable Australian company (Screen Australia can assist and has already done so for two production companies as a result of interest generated in their projects in Sichuan)
- Patience.

Other information

The new Chinese documentary *Ghost Town*, caused quite a stir at the New York Film Festival in August 2009. It's a great example of the challenging fare being produced in China by a small group of documentary makers working completely without institutional support. The producer (an American based in

HK) has offered to send screeners to anyone in Australia interested in seeing the film.

Other market intelligence – animation

Animation projects for children:

- fundamentally a merchandising business; the greatest opportunity is in the merchandising of characters, etc
- Disney has the greatest share of the market in China (we also heard conflicting information that this is not the case). Disney has just had the go ahead to create a Disney theme park in Shanghai
- ‘action’ shows do better than shows that have more social comment or ‘messages’ because of the cultural differences
- there is one hour of foreign children’s programming per day after 9pm on CCTV. After 1 January, it will be after 10pm
- companies like Disney, who have been long established in China, are not affected by the same regulations
- it is a very difficult market to crack. But because of the size of the population, and thus the merchandising potential, it is a market to be pursued
- *In the Night Garden* is the most popular foreign pre-school animation show on CCTV. It debuted on 13 May 2009 (Ragdoll Productions produce this, they also created the Teletubbies)
- children’s programming is highly controlled, ie to make children’s programming in China, you need to apply for a censorship permit (I presume this is if you are a local producer or working with a Chinese company). The last one was granted over three years ago.

Key animation contacts

Barry Plews
Australian Shanghai-based producer
Producer of Sweet & Sour

Laura
Media Manager
Sun-Top Media
Hubei Sun-Top Media Company

Sharon Gomes Thomas
Little Airplane Productions
New York

The Australian Delegation consisted of the following production companies and industry representatives:

- 360 Degree Productions
- Carbon Media
- Convex Productions
- Film Projects
- Jag Films
- Nick Torrens Film Productions

- Nirvana Films
- Purple Films
- Steve Warne
- The Picture Tank
- MAV Media
- Gap Media
- SPAA
- AIDC
- Screen Australia

Key documentary and factual contacts – China

Miss Li Wei
Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio
Oriental Companion Media (Beijing)
Senior Director
International Affairs Department
– Looking for co-production partners

Miss Milly
Executive Director
Beijing Xinying Century Media Corp.
Executive Director
Promotion Department
Looking for co-production partners

Mr Zhou Bing
Director
Production Centre of China
Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio
Overseas Program Department
Looking for co-production partners

Miss Li Lin
Deputy Supervisor
Section of Programming
Guangzhou Television
Involved with Guangzhou Festival
Offering pre-sales

Tang Jiexiang
Chief Director
Science & Education programming Center Great Maters
Offering possible pre-sales and production support/facilities deals for the right programs

Ivy Makelin
General Manager
Beijing Key Frame Cultural Development
Independent producer – good co-production partner

Leland Ling
LIC Media

Australian production company based in Beijing
Big production company
Employs Australian producers
Good local knowledge

Miss Jianying Sun
Vice Chairman of Sichuan provincial TV Artists Association.
Miss Sun visited Screen Australia as a key organiser of Sichuan Festival
She is a multi-award winning producer of anthropology and nature programs

Ms Xue Ling
Director International Cooperation Dept
State Administration of Radio, Film & TV (SARFT)
Permissions, permits issued for independent producers, licences to film
Local Chengdu and Sichuan Producers
Many seemed to be looking for ways to make co-pro documentaries on last year's earthquake in the region. A lot of interest in disaster subject matter.

Liu Bing Jun
Chengdu Junqu Zhenghibu Diashi Vishu Zhongxn
Looking for co-production

Liang Qin Yong
Producer
C-Studio
Reconstructing Beichuan

Tony Huang
Producer
Future Media Co.
Interested in co-pros to produce tourism films for Sichuan Region

Hong Kong

Radio TV HK
Clara Choi
Senior Executive Producer
Documentary Section (TV)
Clara is looking for international co-productions

HK Film Development Council
Wellington Fung
Secretary General
Very helpful and informative. Similar remit to Screen NSW. They assist with locations, collect information on the local market for both local and international filmmakers wanting to work in Hong Kong or wanting to work in Hong Kong as a springboard into China. Producers of *Guide to Filming in Hong Kong 2009/10*.
The Council does not offer film development by way of development funds but assist with low-budget feature funding.
Currently experiencing very high demand for technical staff in mainland China. Large amount of production underway.
Advised that Taiwan is also another large market for Australian producers.