

China in the spotlight at Filmart 2012

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The potential of mainland China's booming film market may have lured many visitors to Hong Kong Filmart (March 19-22), but the present reality in this region are the trends of localisation and the growth of Asian TV.

Asian sales agents had a reasonably busy market selling to distributors in the region. "We've been extremely busy and traffic was good – we usually focus on South-East Asia at this market, but this time we've closed some Korean deals," said Golden Network Asia's Carrie Wong.

But while some Asian titles were selling, in general there was growing concern about the diminishing space for non-domestic theatrical product. Over the past few years, Asian audiences have become increasingly focused on either home-grown fare or Hollywood blockbusters. And with smaller territories such as Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan and Indonesia all experiencing a boom in local production, it is becoming tougher than ever to make money with acquired films.

In some cases product works across boundaries: "Between Singapore and Malaysia, we can recoup a \$1m budget," said Lim Teck of Singapore's Clover Films, which recently had a hit in both markets with *The Wedding Diary*. But outside of big-budget tentpoles, films that travel around the region are few and far between.

Meanwhile, non-Asian sellers found that the only product in demand at Filmart was action, horror, animation and anything in 3D. Los Angeles-based Cinema Management Group (CMG) was doing roaring trade on product such as horror title *Creature* and action thriller *Carjacked*, both acquired by Thailand's M-Pictures, and thriller *Stranger In Paradise*, which went to Korea's JoyNContents Group.

"We met a lot of new companies here and did our first ever sale to Mongolia," said CMG's Dene Anderberg, who sold three animation titles to Mongolian distributor Jonon Source.

But for anyone handling arthouse product, the only bright spot was the growing number of cash-rich cable channels and pay-TV platforms across the region. Ivan Hronec, CEO of Prague-based movie channel Film Europe, said he came to Filmart with low expectations but found interest in carriage deals and branded blocks of European movies for VoD: "We had positive meetings with all the major pay-TV companies in Hong Kong." The market was also abuzz with rumours of the imminent launch of a new channel focusing on arthouse films.

As in previous years, Filmart was dominated by Asian buyers. The leading US distributors that focus on Asian product – Indovina, The Weinstein Company, China Lion and Well Go USA – were all present, but European buyers were hardly to be seen. Asian sales agents shrugged and said they'd see their European clients at Cannes and MIP-TV.

As for mainland China – everyone was keen to learn more about market conditions and the relaxed revenue-sharing quota, but apart from library sales to online platforms, not much actual China business was being done. Several sales agents, who prefer not to be named, said they've given up on doing flat-fee sales to China as the time and expense involved, not to mention uncertainty over the censorship process, isn't justified by the tiny amounts of revenue received.

However, there is no doubt that China is becoming the vortex around which all other Asian markets will gravitate. All the booming production centres in South-East Asia were speaking breathlessly about their ambition to co-produce with this emerging giant.

Meanwhile, Filmart had a publishing component for the first time this year – Book Meets Film Forum, organised by the Taipei International Book Exhibition (TIBE), which brought the publishers of 16 Chinese-language books to the <http://www.screendaily.com>

market.

TIBE reported that production companies from the US, Japan, Hong Kong and China had expressed interest in adapting books such as Jimmy Liao's illustrated novel *The Rainbow Of Time* and Taiwan-Japan family saga *The Wandering Family*. The initiative hopes to expand its presence at both Filmart and the Hong Kong Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF) next year.

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