

The China Strategy Hollywood Doesn't Want You to Know About

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A Hollywood producer who spent years courting China to support American film studios is now speaking out against Tinseltown's attempts to work with the communist nation.

Christopher Fenton, producer of the new film, "Bad Counselors," told CBN News Hollywood is always trying to find new businesses and new sources of capital to help make expensive films and projects possible.

"Then, on top of it, on the output side of things ... once you actually get it into theaters, are there markets there that we haven't explored?" he said, detailing the questions executives are often faced with. "Are there potential ways to generate new revenue?"

Decades ago, he said the U.S. approach to China started to shift, with America opening up more relations with the nation. While America initially had a "frozen relationship" with China, an idea took root: that the more products and services the U.S. could get into the nation, the "more we would spread the aspirational quality of democracy inside of a communist country."

In addition to growing the economy in the U.S., Fenton said there was a higher mission and purpose in engaging China and opening up the market.



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“What we found over time ... is that aspirational quality of democracy inside a communist country plan hasn’t really worked out all that well,” he said.

Fenton said jobs were generated and GDP growth came, but that it was only a “sugar high” that didn’t last. Overall, he said Hollywood’s market share in China has been lost. The initial plans simply didn’t pan out the way he and others wanted.

“The initial thought was the more products and services we could get in that country, the better, no matter what it took to get them in,” he said. “So it was like an ends-justify-the-means plan.”

While 99% of people seeking to engage China in this way were looking to help the U.S., he said the other “1% was very willing to sell out the soul of America to make a buck.”

Regardless of the mission, there was an unintended consequence of the relationship between China and the U.S. — and it involved bias and a quest for the communist party to push its ideologies on the masses.

“For the most part, we were under this other higher mission,” he said. “And part of that for Beijing and the entertainment content space was to placate them and their directives in terms of messaging and narrative, the way they wanted their system of government presented to their own people to essentially make that 1.3 billion people just happy enough that they don’t revolt and have another Tiananmen Square incident like June 4, 1989.”

But it didn't end there.

"Essentially they saw it as a propaganda engine in the West, this Hollywood content ecosystem," Fenton said. "To essentially take and trumpet their messaging and narratives around the world."

He cited the film "Looper," which he produced, as an example. Fenton said the time-travel film initially depicted a future utopian society in France.

"But Beijing said, 'If you want access to our market, you need to change your time travel story to one where China is the utopian place to live, where the weight of the world is shifting, and if you change the plot to be where everybody wants to be someday is China, we'll let you have that movie in,'" Fenton said. "So we actually completely changed the script, completely changed the narrative to be pro-Beijing, pro-China in order to get access to that market."

He continued, "It gave us a top 10 movie that year in the market, and no one else in the world noticed the fact that they were digesting propaganda from what was a pretty good movie."

Fenton said this sort of dynamic might not be as prevalent right now as "the golden goose of China is sort of cooked right now," with many people and businesses moving away from the communist country.

"This kind of propaganda, this kind of messaging, this kind of control over narrative globally is across all industries," he said. "So yes, entertainment business is sort of the easiest one to see because we tell stories that prepare that narrative and messaging from Beijing, but it's happening in all industries in the way they're throttled on certain things they can say or the things that they really might not want to say or things that they need to trumpet are amplified and they're pushed to amplify."

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He said these portrayals affect how young Americans view China, with some believing there are incredible buildings, skyscrapers, and happy people everywhere.

"They see nothing bad about China," he said. "And it's why we're starting to see Pew studies show that people actually think more favorably in terms of China than they do the United States."

This framing is one reason why Fenton is now pushing for films and projects to be made in America. His new film, "Bad Counselors," is an example of a movie that was fully created here in the US.

“We wanted all American backdrops,” he said. “We shot in North Carolina. We did a little in Texas, a little in Tennessee. We used all vendors that were American and we fully employed Americans, your brethren, my brethren. We made sure that we took care of our citizens.”

The premise of “[Bad Counselors](#)” is comical — and very American.

“Two frat bros must become church bros, fast,” the synopsis reads. “After one wild night ends in handcuffs and a campus police escort, two best friends are slapped with 120 hours of community service due in two weeks, or they’re expelled. Their genius plan? Pose as counselors at a local Christian youth camp, where every sing-along, campfire devotional, and trust fall counts toward the clock. Just one problem (okay, three): they don’t like kids, they hate camping, and they have barely set foot in a church.”

Find out more [here](#).

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