China movie industry also benefits US

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Charles H. Rivkin, the new chairman and CEO of the Motion Picture Association of America, visited China recently as the country surpassed the United States to have the most cinema screens in the world.  
As to prepare for his trip, Rivkin watched Wolf Warrior 2 on his flight to Beijing. "It's fantastic and a lot of fun. Its box office takings in the Chinese market alone are extraordinary. It's a sign of things to come," says Rivkin, commenting on the top-grossing movie in China of all time.  
Wolf Warrior 2 earned 5.68 billion yuan ($860 million), boosting this year's box office to score a record 50 billion yuan in November.  
Rivkin may have recently taken up his new post at the MPAA, but he has always kept a close eye on the Chinese movie industry.  
He estimates that China's box-office takings will exceed 55 billion yuan for 2017. He also predicts that China will overtake the US as the top movie market in terms of box-office takings by 2020.  
"Everything is changing dramatically," says the new Hollywood lobbyist-in-chief.  
"Last quarter, China built 26 screens every single day. Now you have more than 50,000 screens. There are only 41,000 screens in the US," he says, adding the construction spree is also increasing the number of high-tech cinemas.  
Besides the figures, Rivkin also highlights China's efforts in fighting copyright piracy.  
Among his engagements was a meeting with Zhou Huilin, the deputy head of the National Copyright Administration of China, who introduced China's annual campaign dubbed jian wang (sword net) to crack down on online pirates.  
From 2012 to 2016, 2,756 cases were handled and 1,193 websites were closed down, Zhou was quoted by China Press and Publishing Journal as saying.  
This year, 1,655 sites have been shut, 274,800 links deleted and 314 cases are being probed, according to the newspaper report.  
Commenting on China's actions, Rivkin says: "Anti-piracy is the most important thing that we can fight together.  
"The reason that piracy matters so much is that I don't think enough people understand that when pirates steal Chinese movies or American movies, they are not stealing from big productions or the governments. They are stealing from hardworking Chinese and American citizens."  
According to a report released by the MPAA on Dec 15, China's film and TV industry sustained 4.1 million jobs in 2016. Rivkin says the figure in the US is 2 million.  
"They (the people in the industry) are hardworking people. It (piracy) needs to be stopped. It impacts the box office and everything. Fighting piracy is extremely important for everybody who wants to create something. Who will want to create something if it will be stolen?" says Rivkin, once the head of several entertainment companies.  
The report by Oxford Economics, an advisory venture of Oxford University, which uses statistics from the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television, also finds that China's movie and television industry made a total direct contribution to Chinese gross domestic product of 254 billion yuan in 2016, representing 0.34 percent of the Chinese economy.  
China's rapidly expanding industry also benefits the US, as seven Hollywood movies earned more in China than they did in North America in 2017, says Rivkin.  
Those movies were The Fate of the Furious; Kong: Skull Island; Resident Evil: The Final Chapter; The Mummy; xXx: The Return of Xander Cage; Transformers: The Last Knight; and A Dog's Purpose.  
As for Disney's announcement about buying most of 21st Century Fox, Rivkin says he has yet to study the issue. But he believes the possible deal is indicative of the changing landscape in the motion-picture industry and shows his job will remain challenging.  
Before succeeding Christopher Dodd at the MPAA, Rivkin served as assistant secretary of state for economic and business affairs from 2014 to 2017 in the Obama administration.  
Before that appointment, he was the US ambassador to France and Monaco for more than four years.  
As a diplomat, he was the first US ambassador to France to jump from 3,700 meters over Normandy in a mass parachute jump to mark the 68th anniversary of the Allied invasion of Europe in World War II. An estimated crowd of 25,000 watched him land amid heavy winds.  
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