



A scene from the short film *You, Me and Beijing*, written by Crosby Selander.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Capturing Beijing through the viewfinder

American screenwriters take on the challenge of knowing the real China in an international competition, **Deng Zhangyu** reports.

Is it romantic for an American boy and his brand-new Chinese girlfriend to meet at Tiananmen Square or at the Forbidden City? Foreigners say yes but the Chinese wrinkle their foreheads, whispering it's weird. That was what screenwriter Crosby Selander and his Chinese film team faced often when they sat down to discuss the script in Beijing last month — collisions of ideas between two different cultures.

Selander is one of the participants of the just-finished 2013 Beijing International Screenwriting Competition. The 29-year-old is among seven winners in the short-film category who will be financed to make their scripts into movies in Beijing.

Starting in March in the US, the screenwriting competition called for the US-based writers to submit scripts of either short films or features themed on Beijing. There were 861 scripts offered, including many submitted by writers at top universities like Harvard, Princeton, Yale and MIT.

In recent years, efforts to push Chinese culture onto the international stage have expanded greatly — in arts, music and films. But this was the first-of-its-kind competition held by Beijing and it got good feedback, based on the international public exposure and number of participants.

"We hope the young Americans know more about the culture of Beijing and China by taking part in the contest. It's also a good way to strengthen the exchange and communications between the young generations of China and America," says Kevin Niu, chairman of the competition.

So how do the contestants feel? "The experience in Beijing has opened my eyes to a culture and a country that I'd never truly know," says Selander, a freelance writer and director in Hollywood. He graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in 2010.

Like other winners, Selander stayed in Beijing for one week with his Chinese shooting team from the Beijing Film Academy. The seven-day trip and countless discussions with his Chinese partners gave him a deeper sense of Beijing. Selander has reworked his script to "make it more authentic to Beijing."

"The original story is like an adventure. The hero has explored all those famous tourist spots in Beijing. It looks more like a promotion film for the city," jokes Gao Cao, director of Selander's script *You, Me and Beijing*. Gao is now at his second year for his master degree at Beijing Film Academy.

Selander's script follows a boy who left his American mother to live in



Selander discusses the script with his Chinese film team members.



The cast for Selander's film *You, Me and Beijing* is on the set.

Beijing with his Chinese father. Floundering in his new life in Beijing, the boy established a friendship with a Chinese girl through games and misadventures. Finally, he also eased the rigid attitudes of his father.

"It's weird for people living in Beijing to date at Tiananmen Square or the Forbidden City. We won't do that," says Nian Jianlun, the producer of *You, Me and Beijing*, also a student from Beijing Film Academy.

Selander had never been to China before. Most of his impressions of Beijing were based on what he had read. So there's no wonder he could write

anecdotes like having the kids of his film eat *tanghulu* — a traditional snack of candied fruit on skewers popular in winter — while the story happens in summer.

Among the 15 winners at the competition award ceremony, Selander is one of the few who had come to Beijing for the first time; most others already had connections with China, including Cameron White from Princeton.

White has studied Chinese for eight years. His fluency makes it easy to communicate with his Chinese producer Huang Han, also a student from Beijing Film Academy. "He knows

China so well that I have no difficulty talking with him," says Huang.

White writes of a talented flutist who comes to Beijing to pursue her music dream. The girl from a regional city finally finds that a life spent in a practice room will not ensure her success.

Huang says she is reduced to a Chinese stereotype of a girl struggling from a life transition from a poor town to a big city at first. But White says it has nothing to do with where the heroine comes from and whether she's poor or not. It's a story about a girl opening her mind to a new life.

"It's very usual for Chinese to shoot the conflict between the poor and the rich. But the international audience can identify more with White's idea. That's what a story on Beijing should be," says the 25-year-old producer.

During the one-week stay in Beijing, the US script writers and Chinese video teams have compromised, exchanged ideas and been inspired by each other. Selander says the biggest impression was made by the people in Beijing. Their hard work and talent makes him think of people he worked with as a screenwriter in Hollywood.

"There are cultural differences: the food, the language, but these are surface distinctions," Selander says. "The Chinese I met all have the same concerns as Americans: job, school, family and traffic."

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Chinese join the wave of Leica collectors

By **DENG ZHANGYU**
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Since its birth 100 years ago, German camera Leica has been wooed by collectors and fans from Europe, the US and Japan. Chinese collectors have recently jumped on the bandwagon, with their favorite being vintage Leica to make up for the missing years.

In June, Hong Kong-based L&H Auction held a photographic auction for the growing collection market from the Chinese mainland. A custom-made M6 camera for the Brunei sultan's 50th birthday was sold at a hammer price with commission of HK\$4.47 million (\$576,231) to a collector from the mainland.

"In the past seven years, the number of Chinese Leica buyers has been spiraling upwards. Many of the record hammer prices are offered by buyers from the Chinese mainland," says Henry Chau, president of L&H Auction.

Online photographic auction websites used to have only English and Japanese languages. Many have added the Chinese language.

It cannot be denied that Leica collectors are mainly from the US and Europe because of their long history, but Chinese collectors are catching up.

Chau has been a fan and collector of Leica since he was young. For him, a vintage Leica is more than a camera. It's a sophisticated artwork and yet still has the ability of taking good quality photos.

"When I click the shutter, the sound is crisp. I love it," says Chau. He uses his Leica cameras every day, to have a fuller enjoyment from his collection.

Like in collecting paintings and antiques, Hong Kong and Taiwan are well ahead of the Chinese mainland in vintage Leica collection.

Chau says collectors in Hong Kong are planning to build a Leica museum. And in Taiwan, Barry Lam, who is the biggest collector of Chinese painter Zhang Daqian's works, has the most Leica cameras.

Photographer Tian Zhili from Beijing also loves the crisp clicks of vintage Leicas. Tian calls himself a "big fan" rather than a collector, boasting a selection of about 40 Leica cameras and accessories.

"Camera is a man's big toy. But Germany has made its camera into an industrial revolution classic. That's what we

lack. We haven't experienced the industrial revolution. We admire the classic and the spirit of that period," says Tian.

The first Leica collectors in China started their connection with the luxury camera in the 1970s. Most were photographers with the military or State-owned newspapers.

In the 1980s, Tian bought his first camera — Chinese brand Seagull — with a price seven times his monthly pay, at 300 yuan. At that time, people had to go abroad to buy a Leica camera and pay over 5,000 yuan for an M6 Leica camera without a lens. That was a huge sum of money.

It was not until 2004 that Tian could afford an M6 Leica camera. After having one, Tian could not stop buying. Once he was told by a friend that his Japanese friend had brought a vintage Leica lens to Shanghai. He immediately flew to Shanghai from Beijing and bought the lens at the airport.

"Every part of the camera is of the highest quality. Its compactness and classical design makes it hard to beat," says Tian.

When the Leica camera was first produced in 1913, made-in-Germany equaled low quality and low price. After World War II, the sophistication and strict style turned German products into classics.

"We are charmed by the stories behind Leica and its spirit, from ordinary to classical," says Tian.

"Chinese people were too poor to appreciate the creations of the industrial revolution. Now we have money and time to discover the part we have missed out."

Tian says the Leica camera intrigues Chinese collectors because of its long history. Many historical moments were captured by photographers who used Leica, such as the V-J Day in Times Square when an American sailor kissed a young woman as people turned up on the streets to celebrate the victory of World War II.

There are always celebrities among the list of Leica users including Queen Elizabeth II, Dwight David Eisenhower and photojournalist Alfred Eisenstaedt. Since 2006, Chinese names joined the list. They include the country's first space traveler Yang Liwei.

"Leica now produces digital lens reflex cameras. But for collectors, the most valuable ones are always those classical 35-mm cameras," Tian says.



JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

Two vintage Leica cameras are displayed at an exhibition held by L&H Auction in Beijing.



The custom-made M6 camera for the sultan of Brunei's 50th birthday is an important exhibit of the show. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

STORIES OF SOME WINNING SCRIPTS

FEATURE FILM

The Panjiyuan Diary
by Tim Plaehn

Juliet Manning is a rather complicated girl. The fact that her parents were going to divorce was a heavy blow to Juliet, while the news that she would move to Beijing overwhelmed her to the point of losing hope. After coming to China, Juliet began her adventures in Chaoyang district on her own. One day, she went to an antique market called "Panjiyuan". She bought a dusty Chinese diary from an old merchant. With the help of this diary, she reevaluated herself and finally found a thing that had always been lacking in her life, her own voice.

The Monkey King
by Galen Tong

In 1900, China was in the period of the Boxer Rebellion. A Chinese student named Lee returned to Beijing. One of his friends was killed by Marquis Charles, an infamous French commander of forces against China. Lee secretly joined "Boxers", a mysterious organization aiming at fighting against the aggression and disguised himself with the identity of "Monkey King". Finally, in the battle against imperialist powers, Lee defeated Marquis Charles. Now, the "Boxers" began to make preparations for the next battle against foreign invaders. Nevertheless, "Boxers" had a new leader: the classic character in Beijing opera, "Monkey King". And he was Lee.

SHORT FILM

Duck and Cover
by Michael Thai

A venerable Taoist duck who lives a peaceful life in Beijing must use all his training and wisdom to escape the clutches of an unyielding Peking duck chef. Who says you can't teach an old duck new tricks?

Patchwork Dreams
by Lee Quarrre

Xiang is a young seamstress, working in a fashion shop in Beijing. When she is passed over for the honor of sewing a special project for the Beijing Kite Festival, Xiang strives to create a work of art worthy of Beijing's beauty.