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EMMY: Welcome to the Talks at Google podcast, where great minds meet. Once again, I'm Emmy, bringing you this week's episode with world-renowned Chinese recording artist Nicholas Tse. Talks at Google brings the world's most influential thinkers, creators, makers, and doers all to one place. Every episode of this podcast is taken from a video that can be seen at youtube.com/talksatgoogle. Nicholas first stepped onto the entertainment scene as a singer at the age of 16 in 1996. Two years later, Nicholas filmed his first movie "Young and Dangerous: The Prequel" and won Best New Performer at the 18th Hong Kong Film Awards. At the age of 21, Nicholas received the World's Best Chinese Artist Award at the World Music Awards in 2002, making him the youngest Chinese awardee. In 2003, Nicholas founded Post Production Office, which was the pioneer computer graphic and special effects group in China, before gradually reaching and expanding his business to real estate, catering, and entertainment.

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In 2010, Nicholas won Best Actor in the 30th Hong Kong Film Awards for his role in the movie "The Stool Pigeon," making him the first from his era of actors born in the '80s to receive such an honorable award. Since his acting debut, Nicholas has filmed nearly 50 movies so far. Moderated by Googler James Tao, here is "Nicholas Tse: Passion and Innovation."

NICHOLAS TSE: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's an honor to be here. Thank you for having me at Google Hong Kong. Yeah. I hope today, through this session, both parties can have a blast. And at any time if you feel that you want to voice out or ask questions, please feel free, okay? So when I first got the invitation to come to Google Hong Kong, I was thinking to myself, "What the hell am I gonna do at Google?"

[laughter]

Seriously. 'Cause you guys are the people I go to when I look at my stuff. Seriously. It could be through the search engine. It could be through Maps. I like to travel a lot.

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I like to throw on a backpack and just wander off somewhere into the world and see the world. So I'm always, you know, navigating through Maps. And lately, actually--speaking of which, I've been trying to pick up on more Japanese. So I do this a lot now every day. Hey, Siri-san.

SIRI: [speaking Japanese].

NICHOLAS TSE: [speaking Japanese]

SIRI: [speaking Japanese]

NICHOLAS TSE: I've been trying to pick up on more Japanese. So lately, I've made Google Translate my best friend. So I've even--

[cheers and applause]

I'm even forcing my smartphone to converse in Japanese with me 'cause, you know, we only have 24 hours a day, so yeah. But I must say, sometimes the translations are still a bit funky. But 80% of the time it does the job very well.

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So thank you for, you know, whoever out there that's making my life a lot easier. Right. So yes, I do visit you guys very, very often every day. But I'm not here to talk about what we can Google. I think you guys out of everybody knows best what we can search on the Internet. But maybe today, we could touch on some other keywords where we cannot fully understand through the Internet,

maybe keywords like "creativity." I think creativity, for me, it's the biggest thing, either it be through my music, or my food shows, or movies, or my business because, I think, without creativity, we cannot really ensure our place in the market, and eventually, you will be left behind in the world. Creativity comes in many different forms and styles, I guess.

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It doesn't have to be through movies or that kind of artistry. It could be through tennis. It could be through agriculture, architecture, woodworking, lecturing, whatever it may be. It could be through programming or engineering. I think if Google was not as creative when they were doing the algorithms back then, it would not be what it is today. So a lot of people would say, you know, "Yeah, I'm not the creative type." No, we all are. We just have to find that one edge. We have to find how we can synergize and capitalize on that on our own strengths. But it is getting harder and harder to be creative, I think, in this world because, every day, we are flooded by so much content in our phones. You know, all the blogs that we look at, all the comments, all the likes, all the streamings, all the films, everything.

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But unknowingly, unknowingly, we are so--almost too inspired to a point where we are losing ourselves because we are taking in everybody else's ideas, their thoughts, their voices. Therefore, if we are not creative enough, we tend to what we call--we would ride on other people's ideas. Let's twist, let's tweak. Let's--in Guangdong, we would say [speaking Chinese]. But when we get into a habit of that, we forget about being original, being really creative, starting our own ideas.

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And to me, that is very, very dangerous because if what you put out is no different than the person next to you, if what you contribute to the company is just the same as everybody else in the room, let me tell you something, next year, you won't be here. The company doesn't need you. Eventually, the market doesn't need you. And the world, they don't need you. So constantly ask yourself how you can contribute more than the person next to you. I've been in my industry for more than 22 years now. And I tell you, I ask myself that question every damn day. Every day. Through music, through film, through my shows, through my business, "How do I be more creative?" That is very, very hard. And maybe even in some fields, it's getting harder and harder.

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Like in music, I would say that it is harder for me now to compose a very good piece of music than it was 15, 20 years ago because the time signatures or the combinations of the notes are simply being taken up. It is harder to write something original now and have it not sound like it has been written by someone sometime, like some song back then because it's been done. But in our world, that's what is happening is because all the ideas are being voiced up, and we are seeing it. So if we don't voice out loud enough, clear enough, soon enough, we are actually behind. So I urge you, the first keyword that I would want to touch on is actually creativity. Does anybody have anything to say? Any other things that you want to talk about?

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Another word I would say is--a keyword for me is "experience," especially--well, experience in terms of the verb experience, not the noun experience, especially for you lot where your work requires you to sit behind a desk and a computer the whole day, maybe the whole year. But I would say that it is very important to get out there to the world and really experience it because I think the phone still only brings you halfway, and you must walk the other half. You know, nowadays, when I'm chatting with a lot of the younger generation kids, what really happens a lot is that maybe the topic would be along the line of, "Man, I was in--I was in Finland last weekend, the Aurora lights, they were beautiful."

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And then the kid would say something like, "Yeah, I know. I know. I saw it on YouTube."

[laughter]

Or "Yeah, yeah. That was really cool. I saw it on Facebook." "Yeah? Okay." I'm sure it's an opening. It's an idea. It's a glimpse of, you know, what it really is. But if that's how you see things, you don't know sh--again, it's a great entrance to the world. But it's halfway. Please, when the opportunity allows, get off your butt and walk the other half, which may be even more important, okay? Experience the world, okay? The phone is awesome. The net is awesome. But that is--that is halfway, halfway. Is it too early for you guys 'cause you guys look kind of stale.

[laughter]

00:09:33

James, maybe we could start with a more Q&A. If anybody wants, please jump in.

PERSON: One of the things that is on our minds is also giving back, right?

NICHOLAS TSE: Right.

PERSON: You talk about creativity, you talk about experience, a lot of that is because we're sort of going through life through a screen, and we're not interacting much. Here at Google, we spend a lot of time thinking about what we're doing for Hong Kong, how we're supporting non-profits, how are we providing services for schools, training kids at coding, for example. What advice do you have for us and also for sort of the broader millennial crowd who is interested in doing something for Hong Kong? How to get started? How to think about that? And what approach to take? Thank you.

NICHOLAS TSE: Thank you. I think keep doing what you're doing, really. But we cannot lose the--what we're trying to do is share, I think, in this era. And of course, sharing comes in different forms also.

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And that's what Chef Nic, the brand, is trying to do is because, I think, even now, when you see families going off to--out to dinners, they're actually just, you know--they're eating through looking through their--looking through their phones the whole time. Actually, that's losing the true essence of why we are eating together. And that's what we're trying to promote through the "Chef Nic" show is [speaking Chinese]. What is [speaking Chinese]? It is to--you know, it is to actually enjoy a meal together. And that's why--that's what cooking has also taught me is--let me tell you. I was in really, really bad terms with my parents for the longest time. I was in boarding school ever since I was 12. And then at the age of 14, I was sent to Tokyo to start training in music. By 16, I started working. And I never really got a chance to have a relationship with my parents.

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And we've been on bad terms for the longest time until--until I started cooking because, when you cook, the food, you don't eat it alone, you want to share it, you want to get some feedbacks. And it gave me a medium to know how to talk to my parents and say, [speaking Chinese] Or, "Mom, [speaking Chinese]. Whatever you cooked back then was really cool. You want to teach me?" It became--now it's a habit, you know? Does the food matter? Of course it does. But what really matters is how you find your way to share. And I think, keep doing what you're doing. But if you can think of the third party, then I think that the whole picture is much bigger.

JAMES TAO: Cool. Why don't you take a seat.

NICHOLAS TSE: Okay.

JAMES TAO: We'll chat a little bit. Get comfortable.

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It was a very inspiring talk, hearing you talk about creativity and the journey where you just mentioned how cooking brought you and your family closer together.

NICHOLAS TSE: Right.

JAMES TAO: So a little bit on "Chef Nic." It's now in its fifth season. We're seeing a lot of traction both online and offline. But I want to kind of turn back the clock back to 2014. Besides what you just mentioned about the parents thing, but what was the thing that made you transition from the singer, the actor signing a film to "Chef Nic"? And what was that transition like?

NICHOLAS TSE: I didn't think I--I wasn't looking for a transition, really. I thought I could do everything together.

[laughter]

Right? I'm still doing music. I'm still doing films. It's weird because people look at this like I'm moving from woodworking to pharmacy. It's not that far.

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I think what I'm doing with food, with movies, and also music, and the business together, I think, as a whole, it has perfect synergy. I don't think that they're really unrelated. And that's how I do things. If I cannot pull resources from somewhere somehow to contribute into a new thing I do, then I really would reconsider to either do it or not because to start fresh at a later age--later age is maybe at a disadvantage. But first of all, I found food to be a true passion. And then I also saw that it would be the next biggest thing after communication and tech. So I thought how I could, you know, kind of rejuvenate the whole entertainment business of mine and make it a long-lasting one, I guess.

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JAMES TAO: Was this interest in food something that was always there?

NICHOLAS TSE: It was always there. But I thought to make it a bit more serious. And at the time I think, Mainland China was actually--it was really lacking a decent food or lifestyle show.

JAMES TAO: Okay.

NICHOLAS TSE: Yeah. So we started 2014. Right?

JAMES TAO: Yeah.

NICHOLAS TSE: And--and we just finished the fifth season this year.

JAMES TAO: Yeah. I've been watching.

NICHOLAS TSE: Oh, thank you.

[laughter]

JAMES TAO: So on the food topic, I'm sure you hear this a lot. And even people who know me doing this have asked this as well is that, "You've never worked in the kitchen. Can you really cook?" Like, obviously, I heard stories. And I know that you put a lot of hard work and dedication and courage into being who you are today and achieving what you've done. But not everybody has seen that. So what goes through your mind when you hear criticism like this? And how do you deal with it?

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NICHOLAS TSE: It's logically acceptable because, first of all, we may think that because someone has not been doing something for really long, they can't be good at it, right? That's the logic. It's okay. It's okay. But that's almost like saying--let me put it this way. That's almost like saying, we as a human race, we've been using the landline telephone for centuries. Why don't we stick with it? That must be the best way. So dump all your iPhones. Dump all your mobiles right now. Let's go back to the landline because we have been doing that for the longest time, right? That's like saying, we as a human race, we've been using the--we've been driving gasoline automobiles for centuries. So has Elon Musk gone crazy to start Tesla, right? Why are there so many electronic cars out there now? Because that must be the best way because we've been doing that for the longest time.

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I think if we are that narrowminded, that really frightens me because we are in a new era, there are perks and different texts now out there that allows us to pick up on information much more rapidly than it has been in the traditional kitchen, I would say. I'm sorry. But the way I've heard is maybe the first apprentice cook would be peeling vegetables for maybe a year or two. But I have--I have my ways or I have saved up enough money to be peeling something much more in the first year.

JAMES TAO: Yeah. I mean, like we hear all these stories about like, chefs training in Japan.

NICHOLAS TSE: Right, right.

JAMES TAO: And they're, like, washing rice for like seven years before they can make sushi.

NICHOLAS TSE: Right. So is that the best and only way? I don't think we can be that narrowminded in thinking like that, right?

JAMES TAO: Okay.

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NICHOLAS TSE: Of course, there has been a lot of hard work and time and effort put into it. But I don't have to get into those, yeah?

JAMES TAO: Yeah. But how do you stay focused on doing what you need to do? Do you have like a system? Do you have a way to do things? 'Cause, obviously, it's a lot of work.

NICHOLAS TSE: It's a lot of work.

JAMES TAO: There's a lot of learning involved. Like, how do you stay organized? How do you stay focused?

NICHOLAS TSE: That's one thing I learned in the kitchen is time management because when you're trying to serve two dishes, it's easy. For two, it's easy. For four, it's okay. For eight, yeah, it's not bad. But when you try and do eight dishes for a table of ten, and they all have to be hot when

you serve, like, in Chinese food, it's not that easy. And when you do one of my Michelin galas, when you're serving for 700, they still have to be hot.

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And you've got 8 minutes of serving time for 700 fine dining, it's very hard. But then you learn, you know, gradually, eventually you learn how to pace ourselves and then your organization. Like, what I just demonstrated on my phone, you know, I try to squeeze in all these little seconds and milliseconds in my life to gain just that much more. But I guess when there's a will, there's a way. I don't know your time schedules. But you figure that out for yourself. But there are these little gaps in life where you can just squeeze in a bit more, you know, here and there, knowledge. And then eventually, that adds up. That adds up. Yeah?

JAMES TAO: Yeah. I think it's amazing how you're able to balance so many things and do everything so well.

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NICHOLAS TSE: And I'm a very--naturally, I'm a very [speaking Chinese] person. I'm a very--I'm very curious about everything, you know? I mean, I look up stuff just to know, just to ask why, where, when, how. And when I start something, I don't like to stop until I actually get somewhere. You know, that's just a personality.

JAMES TAO: Yeah, I've heard many stories as well about...

NICHOLAS TSE: Really?

JAMES TAO: How deep you go and how kind of focused you are and how deep down you drill into everything that you try to learn. And I think that's something that's very admirable.

NICHOLAS TSE: Yeah. Okay. I can be a pain in the ass in that aspect. Yeah.

JAMES TAO: But like I said, you're a man of many hats. You're developing a chef career on the side. You have music. You have acting. All that together.

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Kind of bringing the conversation back to where it started with music, your last Cantonese album was in 2005.

NICHOLAS TSE: Really?

JAMES TAO: One Step Closer.

NICHOLAS TSE: Right.

JAMES TAO: And then your last Mandarin album was 10 years ago, it was 2009.

NICHOLAS TSE: Oh.

[laughter]

JAMES TAO: So I that--I know you haven't stopped doing music. So you've done movie songs, you did songs for your show. And over the past 12 months, personally, I've seen you kind of do a little bit more. Started with 2018 [inaudible] performance. You launched three singles this year. You

were a guest judge on "The Voice." And now just recently you had the RTHK performance. So is this foreshadowing something? Are we gonna see more music coming from you in 2019?

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NICHOLAS TSE: I didn't really plan this. I think I'm just going with the flow, really, sometimes. But I think at different times with different inspirations or sometimes I feel that there are different advantages for different fields, you know, how sometimes the stock market is doing better than the real estate. Sometimes music is doing better than film. And that's how I can kind of weasel around and do my thing because there's never one trend that's always at the top. That's actually true. If you really look at the market, something is always doing a bit better. And if the trend is like that and you kind of catch the wave, man, you're on top because--like when we started the "Chef Nic" show, we are definitely the biggest food show in China.

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When we started in 2014, by the third season, we were doing over 300 million RMB. And now we're in the fifth season. But if you catch the wave, that's a different thing, that's a different thing. So I think, you know, we're doing very stable in "Chef Nic." So I think now I have the time to kind of...

JAMES TAO: Do more music.

NICHOLAS TSE: Do more music.

JAMES TAO: So does that mean we'll see the album--an album this year?

NICHOLAS TSE: I don't know if I'm working on a full album. But I don't really think if that really matters anymore in the new market, right? But yeah.

JAMES TAO: But what does matter?

[laughter]

NICHOLAS TSE: I'm hoping for--I'm actually working on a concert. But there's--I don't know what--

JAMES TAO: That's what we were going to ask.

NICHOLAS TSE: In Hong Kong, everybody is starting a concert as if they have nothing else to do.

[laughter]

JAMES TAO: And still hard to buy tickets, so--

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NICHOLAS TSE: We need a bigger stadium. That's what we need. Yeah.

JAMES TAO: Yeah. We need a bigger platform

NICHOLAS TSE: A new, bigger stadium.

JAMES TAO: We need more creativity.

NICHOLAS TSE: Maybe that's why I couldn't book my stadium schedule 'cause I've been dissing it the whole time.

JAMES TAO: Well, time to get creative and think about something different, right? Back on the topic of [speaking Chinese], "The Voice." A lot of people have said that this season was a lot better than previous seasons. I think so. Personally, I think you being on it injected kind of a different dynamic. It was--it was interesting to see how seriously you took it. Again, stories. I heard a story that maybe I want you to share with everybody about the drumming performance. So I actually heard from Derek...

NICHOLAS TSE: Right.

JAMES TAO: How hard you prepared for it and how you kept on, like, rehearsal--

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NICHOLAS TSE: Well, preparation for the performance is a given. But actually, when you talk about "The Voice," what I would actually want to share is--I don't know how many people has watched the show, but you know how I got totally bashed when I started hammering onto the button at first in the first two episodes...

JAMES TAO: Yeah.

NICHOLAS TSE: ...because there are actually these two new perks they changed with the gameplay this year. That to start off with, all the contestants--there are about 150 contestants put into one room. And they are watching a live feed of whatever is happening on stage--the performance, along with the judges' comments and how they would choose their team. That's one thing. The second thing is each judge would have a six-person quota to choose into assembling their team.

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And if you do choose a seventh person, that person would have to battle out any of their chosen--the person from the original team. So thinking like that, there are a few things I tried doing is, the first episode, if people who have seen the show would see me just hearing the first two sentences, and then I would be smashing onto the button. And then, you know, the reporters, the viewers would say, "He doesn't know jack about music! You know, go back to cooking!"

[laughter]

"How could you choose someone from just listening for the first two words?" What I found out was, I am very aware that for the past ten years--like you said, my last album was maybe ten years ago, I'm very aware that a lot of the younger kids, they don't see me as a singer, they don't see me as a musician.

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If I were to fight for these contestants over with the other judges, I would have a very big disadvantage. The only way I could plant some ideas into the 150 contestants that are watching the live feed is by hammering onto that button and solely turning around because, therefore, I have the floor, I have the power of speech because they didn't choose the person, I did. So actually, I'm trying to voice out and tell, not the person on the stage, but the 150 in the room, what I have done or what my views on music is so that they would feel more comfortable joining my team. But then, man, I got totally bashed by the media, by everybody else. "Yeah. Stop this guy or he's crazy," whatever.

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And that's one thing I found that was really helping me out strategically. The second thing is people are also bashing me for--I would choose a lot of contestants because I was solely pressing onto the

button. But what I was also doing is, I found out if you had to choose a seventh member, and if your whole team was equally matched, six of them were equally as good, it's very hard for a newcomer to choose who they would like to battle. But if you have two that are--it's cruel to say this, but if you have two that is obviously a bit weaker, it's easier for the newcomer to choose from. So you could always keep on upgrading your team, if that makes sense to anybody. But strategically, I think I've done something new in the show. Yeah.

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JAMES TAO: So it seems like you took a very strategic approach on how you picked your team and how you--

NICHOLAS TSE: Yes. But at the end, I hope all these elements would bring a better show.

JAMES TAO: Yeah.

NICHOLAS TSE: Right.

JAMES TAO: So how long was the filming of the entire process?

NICHOLAS TSE: The shooting days was 29 days.

JAMES TAO: Okay.

NICHOLAS TSE: But the whole process with all the rehearsal and all the training was maybe three months.

JAMES TAO: So over that span, like being on "The Voice," and this is a relatively new experience for you...

NICHOLAS TSE: Yeah.

JAMES TAO: What do you think was the biggest thing that you learned or gained from that?

NICHOLAS TSE: For me, it was a great platform to get back into music because it has the most reach right now in terms of variety shows in China, so--

JAMES TAO: Okay.

NICHOLAS TSE: Yeah.

JAMES TAO: Are you going back next season?

NICHOLAS TSE: I don't know. I don't know.

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JAMES TAO: Okay. But some stuff like that, like kind of music shows and stuff are still something you'd like to be more involved in?

NICHOLAS TSE: Definitely. Definitely.

JAMES TAO: Okay. As I talked about at the beginning of the talk, you're the first guest we're having here at Talks at Google in Hong Kong. So I'd be remiss not to bring the conversation back to tech a little bit.

NICHOLAS TSE: All right.

JAMES TAO: I heard that you're a very heavy YouTube user. So let's start from there.

[laughter]

NICHOLAS TSE: No, no.

JAMES TAO: Yeah. You told me in the room.

NICHOLAS TSE: Sure, sure.

JAMES TAO: So what's your view on kind of technology and how we interact with platforms like YouTube and other social media? And how do you think that plays into today's world, and even your own life and career?

NICHOLAS TSE: Well, definitely, for me, it's a very important part of my life now. I think for any of us, really. We've just gotten into the habit of learning a lot.

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Even my kids, they're always on YouTube, seriously. I think the tech nowadays, it has really enhanced the speed of our learning curve. We are picking up the goods and bads through Internet, like, even through food, like how tech has really changed food immensely through the past ten years. Now the delivery system has allowed us to choose fresh goods from the Internet, stuff like that.

JAMES TAO: You're not a very heavy user on social media.

NICHOLAS TSE: I'm not a--right, right. I'm not a social media guy. But if there's a destination I'm looking for, then I would definitely go on that.

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JAMES TAO: Do you feel that social media nowadays has kind of become something that more or less kind of consumes people and has become more of an addiction for some people...

NICHOLAS TSE: Well, definitely.

JAMES TAO: And it takes away from kind of the benefits of technology?

NICHOLAS TSE: But then I think it's a balance between--you know, for everything that we do, right? If we go to extreme, it's always kind of harmful.

JAMES TAO: Okay.

NICHOLAS TSE: So we just have to balance it out.

JAMES TAO: Is that why you're not on it or you just don't like it?

NICHOLAS TSE: I'm just not in the habit of doing the--

[laughter]

That maybe, it's just not me, right?

JAMES TAO: Yeah. But it's--I think it's also a platform for you to kind share your views...

NICHOLAS TSE: Sure, sure.

JAMES TAO: And share what you've done and something like that. So maybe something to consider.

NICHOLAS TSE: Of course. Of course.

JAMES TAO: I'm sure if you opened up a YouTube channel and shared your cooking tips, everyone here would be--love to subscribe.

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NICHOLAS TSE: But then that's another thing right now that's really, you know--there's a bit of a language barrier. I mean, I have a lot of clips, but they're in Mandarin.

JAMES TAO: Yeah.

NICHOLAS TSE: So if I do put it on YouTube, then I would have to kind of redo the exact same thing, but one maybe in English or in Cantonese. That really pisses me off, right? I have to do three of the same thing. I would have to kill three fish to do a steam fish.

JAMES TAO: Yeah. And if you only kill one fish, people will be commenting again and saying--

NICHOLAS TSE: Right?

JAMES TAO: There's already a cut there. Yeah.

[laughter]

Okay, I've been meaning to ask you about a show that you did called "Celebrity Chef: East vs West." So you faced off against star chef David Rocco. And it was a five episodes mini-series. And spoiler alert, you won. Why did you choose to go film an English show?

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What was that experience like?

NICHOLAS TSE: Well, back to the part where a lot of people has been doubting me for the cooking part. So all you could do really is just to go the extent to prove yourselves. I think that in--I've been doing that in every field, really. That's why I put myself through competitions. Especially when you do a foreign show like from FOX.

JAMES TAO: Yeah.

NICHOLAS TSE: Then it's not a "Chef Nic" show. That if I can't prove myself through that kind of platform, then the haters will be haters. But at least I've gone the extent, you know? I might even be going back this year to be judging or even competing. I'm okay with competing. But yeah, I think

you just have to find yourself to--find ways to prove yourself. I have done many crazy stuff just to prove myself.

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But sometimes, you know, that's the extent you would have to do. I've jumped off buildings. I've jumped off convention center in Hong Kong to do my movies.

JAMES TAO: "Police Story."

NICHOLAS TSE: Right. When people also thought that I--because I'm the son of two celebrities, maybe I don't take my job seriously. And that's--that's why I've been putting myself through all this hardship and this pain and buildings after buildings because if that's not serious enough for you, then what is? It may be silly to some people. But then you go try it, right?

JAMES TAO: Yeah. I mean, I'm sure in the room not everybody is familiar with how you started and everything. But definitely as someone who grew up in that generation, I was able to witness all the negative--

NICHOLAS TSE: Really?

JAMES TAO: Yeah, yeah.

NICHOLAS TSE: All right.

JAMES TAO: I was the same generation. But I was--yeah.

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NICHOLAS TSE: For people who doesn't know, the first four years of my career was 99% booing. I would not get any applause anywhere. The minute I stepped onstage, it was all boos and foul language and profanities, four years.

JAMES TAO: And it wasn't because of what you did. It was because of your background and who you were.

NICHOLAS TSE: Sure, sure. And it was really, really tough for four years. Every time I walked off stage, I would see my managers and my team. They would be just--they would be all holding their fist and just crying. And I would be the only one that could walk back to the changing room and cool myself down. But I would have to endure that for every day for four years.

JAMES TAO: And you kept going.

00:35:15

NICHOLAS TSE: Because back then, we had so much promotion to do, all the performances. Back then, it was work after work 'cause there was no Internet yet. So everything was live. Every day was live. Every time before I walked on stage, I would almost get paranoid about being booed because it got to an extent where I could not hear one word of the song I was singing. It was getting that nasty. Then somewhere in year 2000, it turned around.

JAMES TAO: What was the turning point?

NICHOLAS TSE: I don't know, man.

[laughter]

JAMES TAO: You don't know.

NICHOLAS TSE: Maybe there was some new kid to pick on, but--

[laughter]

Or maybe they just got tired of all the hating.

JAMES TAO: Or maybe they saw--

NICHOLAS TSE: Or maybe there was enough buildings jumped. But what I mean is--

JAMES TAO: You didn't jump the convention in 2000.

00:36:12

NICHOLAS TSE: No, I didn't. I jumped it in 2003, somewhere like that with Mr. Jackie Chan. But yeah. When there is that need, you just have to find your way to excel. Maybe there are some crazy things that we got to do.

JAMES TAO: Thank you for that. Any live questions?

PERSON: So during the first few years, when things were really tough, did you ever doubt yourself and think that you just weren't good enough? And if you did, what kept you going?

NICHOLAS TSE: I did. But maybe for a very short time. I never doubted myself in terms of music. I never doubted myself in terms of all the hard work I was putting in. I believe in--I think I'm a logical person. And I think anybody can accomplish anything if you work hard enough.

00:37:11

Really, I don't think there was a time where I think I could have given up. I would just--I'm the person that does not give up. Naturally, I just have that kind of personality. And the second thing is I can't give up because I had to make a living. You know, a lot of people would imagine that because I came from a family of two actors and actresses--an actress that I don't take my job seriously. But I've been self-sustained ever since my debut. At the age of 20, I've been paying my sister's education. So that's behind the scenes stories. But I could not afford to give up my job back then.

00:38:09

So I took everything more seriously than anybody would have ever thought.

JAMES TAO: I have a question online. "Do you think--" You've been in, like I said, over 50 films.

NICHOLAS TSE: I didn't know that.

JAMES TAO: Yeah. I looked that up. What's your outlook on the genre of [speaking Chinese]? Do you think there's a future? What do you think the future looks like?

NICHOLAS TSE: Back to the creativity thing. I think we are--Hong Kong right now is--we are really lacking this part. I think we have been geniuses in the stock market. We are excellent in the real estate market. But maybe that's the last generation, the past generations. To get by in this generation, we've got to be really creative in our own fields

00:39:04

Like in movies, if you're talking about the movie industry, I think we've all had our fair shares of the Marvel, DC franchises, right? We've all seen our Supermans, our Batmans, our Iron Mans, our Hulks, our Flashes, our Wonder Womans, our--I can go on and on. And we have all seen them. The thing is, don't we have 5,000 years of history and culture? But yet we are still shooting "The Monkey King." Right? [speaking Chinese].

[laughter]

Right? So I urge any of you guys out there, if you guys ever fantasize about our own superheroes, please jot down something, write a paragraph or two, send them to me or to whoever that you think can make something happen because we have to.

00:40:04

If we don't, we are going to be really, really behind, really, really far.

JAMES TAO: Send in your movie idea to me. I'll pass them along. Yeah.

[laughter]

Next live question.

PERSON: The question I want to ask is, can you share with us the failures, one of the failure story or the moment you doubt yourself, "Is it a good decision to kick off this 'Chef Nic' show"? And then if that is yes, how you overcome? How you self-motivate yourself and then put back your passion in it? Thank you.

NICHOLAS TSE: Thank you. Failures. Wow. Many failures, really. But I think, in business, I would say one of the more obvious ones were I invested in a company that did a post-production at the age of 22, 23. That was 2003. I started a post company--post-production company.

00:41:02

And we would do computer graphics. We would do color grading. We would do editing, dubbing for a lot of commercials and films, stuff like that, right? So when you're in that kind of a hardware tech company, you buy a lot of stuff. You buy a lot of--we call telecines, editors, and mics, and this and that. But back then, we were at the end of the analog trend. And all of a sudden, things changed. They don't use tapes anymore. They went from analog to digital. But all my hardware, they were a lot of money. So all those all of a sudden went into the can. And that's back to the where I was just saying, if you can catch the trend, that's a different story. I didn't back then. And I lost a lot of money back then.

00:42:02

You know, I had to mortgage my house and all that. But that was on me. You know, everything just changed. But do I still--at that time, it was hard. But I still believed in the network that I had built, all the connections, and the work we were doing. And then at the end, we were okay. But there were a few years that was really, really tough. But as long as--you have to stick with it. I mean, a lot of stuff I do, it doesn't reflect right away. Most of the stuff doesn't reflect right away. The "Chef Nic" show didn't reflect right away. But eventually, eventually, like how everybody would doubt me through my--in my culinary journey. But then last month or two months, just now, I think maybe a lot of people had also had the "Chef Nic" McDonald burger.

00:43:02

JAMES TAO: It was really good.

[laughter]

NICHOLAS TSE: Thank you. Thank you. At that price, I think we did a great job. And, you know, actually, right after this meeting, I'm going into inventing--into the Central Kitchen to invent the 2019 one again. And we sold within five weeks. Just only in Hong Kong, we sold over 2 million burgers. And there is only--let me remind you, only 6-point-somewhat million population in Hong Kong.

JAMES TAO: I ate, like, five, so--

[laughter]

NICHOLAS TSE: Thank you. I thank you. But then yes, it took five years to kind of prove yourself. Just you really have to stick with it.

JAMES TAO: Just a quick question also online on the McDonald's collaboration.

NICHOLAS TSE: Right.

JAMES TAO: Throughout the whole process, how many burgers did you have to eat?

NICHOLAS TSE: Man, I ate--

[laughter]

I ate a lot of burgers.

00:43:54

And there are--I ate a lot of burgers. We also tested a lot of the fries, a lot of the ice cream, a lot of drinks. And yeah. There were a lot of other crazy stuff that we tested.

JAMES TAO: What's that creative process working to create a new menu item? Or to do something that's never been done before, like the pork chop?

NICHOLAS TSE: Right. That one's so good. Yes!

JAMES TAO: So good.

NICHOLAS TSE: That's part of being creative. I think that's something that I really enjoy is creating menus or writing songs and making something my own. And when they gave me the homework to start up something that has [speaking Chinese], Hong Kong [speaking Chinese], it actually--I didn't know how to translate that, that taste--

JAMES TAO: Taste of Hong Kong.

NICHOLAS TSE: Taste of Hong Kong, right.

[laughter]

00:44:51

I was thinking how I could relate the taste of my childhood to a McDonald's burger. And there are other ideas that I'm still working on right now, maybe later in the kitchen today. Stuff like you know

how Hong Kong people love their [speaking Chinese]? Right? I would always think that it would probably work with a [speaking Chinese], right? Because that's almost the same thing.

[laughter]

But maybe a [speaking Chinese], right? Exactly. But then there are ups and downs we have to overcome. Like, if we do work on a curry dish, then the kids would be left out, right? So it's a long journey. But I really love it. These are some of the creative juices that I have to get out.

JAMES TAO: I can't wait to see what you have in store.

NICHOLAS TSE: Thank you. Thank you.

JAMES TAO: Any other questions?

PERSON: Thank you for coming.

NICHOLAS TSE: Thank you.

00:45:48

PERSON: And thank you for being so honest with everything you say. I can just feel it that you're not scripted.

[laughter]

So thanks, James. It seems like you have a lot of wisdom. You're invested in a company back when you were 22, even though it kind of went through rough times. So through all these times, do you look up to somebody? Is somebody your mentor that has always been since day one? Or that has evolved depending on which part of the industry that you're in?

NICHOLAS TSE: Good question, actually. I don't have that person. I've always thought of my mentor as logic. I've really not gone to anybody about much of this kind of stuff. Maybe I should, really. But I just don't have that person in life.

PERSON: Do people come to you?

NICHOLAS TSE: Yes. In my company, yes. That's actually interesting.

00:46:48

I don't have that person.

JAMES TAO: Are you open to seeking mentorship? Like seeking help and asking for that? Or I don't know. Like--

[laughter]

AUDIENCE: James--

JAMES TAO: Yeah, yeah, yeah. No. But what I'm saying is--

NICHOLAS TSE: Are you guys opening a new department?

JAMES TAO: Like, I know you help a lot of young people. But you're also a young person yourself, right? So when you do come across--

NICHOLAS TSE: Same generation.

JAMES TAO: Yeah, yeah. Same generation.

[laughter]

When you do come across difficult decisions and stuff, like, do you just solely--you're comfortable relying on yourself and just thinking that through? That's something I'm actually really interested in 'cause I'm facing similar kind of situations for my career.

[laughter]

NICHOLAS TSE: I've always been able to--I've always been able to gradually work out the problems in my life.

00:47:44

So yeah. I've really, you know, not found that person to go to. And then because of the different fields that I work on, sometimes it's music, sometimes it's film. Sometimes it's business. Sometimes it's kind of a bit tech. So there's not really that one person I can talk to regarding all the different fields.

PERSON: Believe it or not, some of us actually delayed or postponed our flight so we can join-- come to your talk.

NICHOLAS TSE: Thank you. Thank you.

JAMES TAO: Some people actually flew in, so--

NICHOLAS TSE: Really?

PERSON: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

NICHOLAS TSE: Thank you. Thank you.

PERSON: So I'm curious to know what are the messages or expectation or impact that you expect to bring through your music, your art, your entire passion to your audience?

NICHOLAS TSE: Through music, through movies, of course. Mainly, it's entertainment. And music, I could say, I hope it, you know, brings more--I hope my music can also stimulate or console you in your everyday life.

00:48:42

But in terms of a deeper message, we're trying to do that through the "Chef Nic" show because like what I was saying about now we don't share correctly or how we are missing the essence of eating together, I really, really learned a lot through the kitchen, the time management stuff, the sharing part. It has changed my personality immensely. I was a really different person before I started cooking. And I think, especially in this day and age, we hope to promote a lot more activities or wilderness, wildlife activities, or stuff that you could do apart from just looking at the phone or the computer. I think that's a very, very important part of life.

PERSON: I got a question more about your film career.

00:49:40

So I just wanted to know moving forward--first of all, congratulations on the Best Actor award. Moving forward for your future film projects, are you going to be pursuing more action-driven movies like "Police Story"? Or are you gonna go for more controversial or dramatic roles that are gonna further challenge your acting abilities?

NICHOLAS TSE: I don't really have a preference. I think that I am--sometimes, you need a bit of luck when you're given a script. The cast has got to be right. The story has to be right. The whole crew has to be right. The timing has to be right. We always say that in the movie industry, each movie has its own journey, really. All you could do is do your best when it is handed to you. But I do think, there is one that I'm planning on in a few months. It is action packed.

00:50:36

I do think Hong Kong has to find its roots some way, somehow. And to me, Hong Kong movie is about Hong Kong action. It has never really been about Hong Kong drama. So it's going to be tough. But I think, yes, I'm going to have to dig down and fight again. And maybe jump off some buildings.

[laughter]

PERSON: I think many of us are big fans of yours...

NICHOLAS TSE: Thank you.

PERSON: Here in the room and on video. And you started the talk with keywords today. So I was just wondering, reflecting back on your life path, what are some of the keywords that define your character, who you are today, that made you to be a successful life, successful career, and maybe just share some words of wisdom with us. Thank you.

NICHOLAS TSE: Keywords would be creativity.

00:51:32

Keywords would be--would be tenacity. Keywords would be synergy, actually, resourcefulness. But different keywords come at different times, really. And to me, if I was to be greedy, I would say every word is a keyword. Yeah.

JAMES TAO: Cool. So before we wrap up, just one question from somebody watching from the States, actually.

NICHOLAS TSE: Wow. What time is it over there?

JAMES TAO: It is late. So basically, they said, at our headquarters, we have a program called Kitchen Sync. And there are chefs that come all the time to teach how to cook. And if you're ever in the area, would that be something you would be interested in hosting?

[applause]

NICHOLAS TSE: Cool, cool, cool.

00:52:27

Hey, speaking of which, you know, I think tech-wise, right now I'm having problems with working on the VR goggle. Like, when you're teaching cooking, the problem is the depth. You know, you can't lean into the pot and see what's in there. If you guys crack that problem, please tell me.

[laughter]

Yeah? Yeah?

JAMES TAO: Oh, we can work together to see what we can do.

NICHOLAS TSE: Seriously, because I'm still the Asia-Pacific marketing director for the digital domain company in L.A., and we're still doing all the post-production for "Avengers," for all those series. So if you guys ever come up with that kind of tech, tell me, please.

JAMES TAO: Awesome. So that brings us to the end of our Talks at Google. Thank you everybody for coming. Thank you, Nick, for taking your precious time to share with us.

NICHOLAS TSE: Thank you.

[applause]

00:53:24

PERSON: Thanks for listening. If you have any feedback about this or any other episode, we'd love to hear from you. You can visit g.co/talksatgoogle/podcastfeedback to leave your comments. To discover more incredible content, you can always find us online at youtube.com/talksatgoogle, on our website google.com/talks, or via our Twitter handle, @talksatgoogle. Talk soon.

[mellow music]