

# The causes and measures of Chinese animation mainly for young age

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**Abstract:** Animation industry has a high degree of internationalization, a wide range of consumer groups, large market demand, long product life cycle, high added value and other characteristics (1). In recent years, China's market economy tends to mature, and the animation market has great potential, however, the animation industry is still in a strategic period and no real industrialization has been formed. Although China's animation business has made some achievements in diversification and exploration of all ages, the current achievements cannot shake the whole market of low age, and animation content at a young age is still the main constraint for the development of domestic animation. It is realized that animation works have multiple meanings and cannot be regarded as educational symbols in line with children's view. By sorting out the development context and general situation of animation, this article analyzes the reasons for the low age of animation, and w a series of solutions to solve the reasons, so as to promote the transition of animation industry from the low age to the full age group as soon as possible, promote the animation market to form a sustainable development model, and lay the foundation for the animation industry to achieve qualitative leap.

## 1. Introduction

From 1921 to now, we have examined the development and journey of the animation industry in the past hundred years from the height of the historical background and theory. When the country was in trouble, Chinese animation sounded the clarion call for progress with a powerful artistic pattern, but also had a confused prospect in the flood of social progress. The development of animation industry has not only been supported by policies but also shouldered the mission of national cultural consciousness and national aesthetic ideal reconstruction. Nowadays, the animation industry structure and production technology are fully in line with the international development level, but the growth of the animation industry is always difficult to balance in the track of the new era, how to make the industry take into account the vision of children and adults. Mainly affected by the following factors, through the analysis of the market has a tendency for children's animation, animation content output of the status quo. The measures to alleviate the current low age problem are concluded.

## 2. History of the chinese animation

### 2.1. 1921-1964 The first stage of development: Initial exploration

From 1921 to 1930, the United States produced a large

number of anti-Chinese works, such as Marvel's Fu Manchun series. Due to the flagrant discrimination that angered a large number of Chinese people in the United States, on the basis of the motive of national indignation, in 1921, Mei Xuechou and a group of overseas Chinese founded the first real professional film production company, Great Wall Picture Company, in the history of Chinese film. In 1926, four Wan brothers (Wan Laiming, Wan Guchan, Wan Chaochen and Wan Dihuan) created the first animation, Uproar in the Studio, which marked the beginning of Chinese art films.

From 1931 to 1945, China experienced a 14-year War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. Influenced by the war, most of the animations in this period were related to national awakening and the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. *National Pain History* and *The Camel Dance* are expressing dissatisfaction with the aggressors and attacking the imperialist's ruthless ambition. Among them, *The Camel Dance* realized the transformation of Chinese animation from silent to sound. In 1937, *Snow White*, the first color animated feature produced by Disney, was introduced in the Shanghai Concession. The exquisite production and successful global business model of this animation had a deep influence. Due to the special background of the time, in order to make compatriots wake up quickly during the suffering environment, most cartoons emphasize a distinct position in order to clarify the role of enlightenment, and ignore the due implication, humor and entertainment.

From 1946 to 1964, the Civil War between the

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Kuomintang and the Communist Party, the founding of New China and the "Great Leap Forward" movement were the periods when the diversified styles of Chinese animation were explored and the creative subjects were influenced by that times and determined to strengthen themselves. After the victory of the Anti-Japanese War, the second Kuomintang and Communist Civil War broke out. At this time, most animations featured ideological struggles and became the mainstream combined with the current situation stories. In 1947, the first puppet animation *Emperor's Dream* was released which exposed the darkness and corruption of the Kuomintang. After the founding of New China, China started to follow the Soviet Union's path, abandoning marketization and giving full play to the characteristics of planned economy with visible hands. During this period, animation works had great educational and artistic value.

## **2.2. 1964-1999 The Second stage of Development: Seeking development in the New Era**

From 1966 to 1976, during the decade of the Cultural Revolution, animations were mainly for educational purposes, directly led to the development of Chinese animations at a younger age. Most animation studios went into a state of production suspension, animation production technology also stagnated, there was a serious shortage of talent, resulting in the animation market into a depression.

From 1977 to 1990, after the reform and opening up, the enthusiasm of animation creation was rekindled, and the animation industry has entered a rebirth period. *Uproar in Heaven* won Best film at the London Film Festival In 1978. In 1979, *NeZha Conquers the Dragon King* was the first animated film full of tragedy. With the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Peace between China and Japan in 1978, Japanese famous animations such as *Jungle Emperor Leo* were introduced into the Chinese market which injected new vitality into the Chinese animation market, but also exposed a series of problem: lack of innovation, backward production technology and simplicity of the content. In order to change the status quo of single style and lack of depth, our country introduced some animations with distinct styles in the 1980s. In the past 13 years, with the rapid development of the society, the total output of animation increased significantly, Chinese animation has made breakthroughs in the diversity of animation themes, the artistic attainments have reached a very high level.

After the 1990s, the planned economic policy of film studios was replaced by the market economic system, and the animation industry officially started the market economic model of "self-responsibility for profits and losses". Then the traditional animation market was badly hit. After the market was opened to the outside world, foreign animations gradually occupied the mainland market, and the development space of domestic animations was severely occupied again. In order to seek survival and development, Chinese animation actively responded to market changes by producing animation

series such as *Shuke and Beita*, *Big-Headed*, *Small-Headed Father* and *Haier Brothers*, but the reviews was not as good as expected. There is a gap between local animation production and Europe and America, while the domestic animation works only attracted a minority of younger audiences (8). This situation has slowed the development of Chinese animation, and since then it has gradually faded out of the vision of Chinese people and teenagers (7). The animation film *Lotus Lantern* released in 1999, is an animation for all-age audience, marking the beginning of the transformation of Chinese animation into a commercial, and starting a new mode of operation and survival.

## **2.3. 2000-2022 The third stage: present the characteristics of the new era**

With the rise of the local market from 2000 to 2010, the number of animation production companies including related enterprises in China reached more than 120, which increased by 6 times compared with more than 20 in the late 1980s (3). Most of these enterprises were "contract factories" of American and Japanese animation, which could not become the industry leader. While there are some masterpieces was also produced such as *I'm Crazy About the Song*, *The Great Hero Di Qing*, *The Legend of Ne Zha*. However, in this era of rapid information development, the animation market dominated by the United States, Japan and other countries, has not changed the weak situation of our animation industry, the status of marginalization also makes the survival environment of domestic animation worse.

Since 2011, risks and opportunities have co-existed. We are faced with the problem of the lower age audiences and embarked on a new journey with the help of policies, science and technology. The rise of the network platform has broadened the transmission channels of animation, and network broadcasting has provided the possibility for animation to occupy more market shares, as well as new vitality for animation creation. For example, on the basis of Guduo data, *Luo Xiao Hei Zhan Ji* has accumulated 190 million views in 2011 through online broadcasting. In July 2012, the network animation *One Hundred Thousand Bad Jokes* was released. Compared with the animation broadcast on TV, Online platforms have fewer restrictions on animation content, it conducive to increase the interest and enrich the imagination of animation.

In 2015, *Monkey King: Hero is Back* earned 954 million yuan at the box office due to "tap water", based on this animation, the domestic market makes the whole domestic market once again see the infinite possibilities of the development of Chinese animation, which proves that high-quality domestic animation can also create a strong influence on the market and earn the money. It was followed by *Big Fish & Begonia* with 573 million yuan and *White Snake* with 448 million yuan. In 2019, *Ne Zha* became the second biggest hit in China's film history with a box office of 5.035 billion yuan. According to the data from Maoyan Professional Edition.

The animation is a powerful symbol of the rise of China's animation industry. With the continuous improvement of domestic animation's commercial and artistic achievements, the user group attracted by domestic animation has expanded from the younger age group to a wider age group. Although the consumer base is expanding, escapism and denial is an epidemic in the animation industry (13). *Nezha* and the critically acclaimed *I Am What I Am* launched in 2021 also reflect the over-interpretation of animation by some media and audiences in the mainland market (6), which is also a hidden danger of the "younger age" of domestic animation. For example, the protagonist Nezha is not supposed to be the rebel of the evil king, while Taiyi is lazy as a master. The image design of the hero in *I Am What I Am* was suspected to involve national image and other issues, and some netizens resisted. The development of Chinese animation has been greatly restricted by the superstructure for a long time. If the animation content has been deliberately or unintentionally distorted, then the popular works on the market can only be meaningless and brainless.

### **3. Why chinese animation as "kids stuff"**

#### **3.1. Lack of creativity in animations**

The idea of animation production tends to be conservative and the restriction of industrial policy is an important reason for the lack of animation innovation. The animation market is relatively depressed due to the lack of attractiveness of animation works to the audience. Until today, Chinese animation digital technology, character design and picture quality have been significantly improved, but stereotyped characters and formulaic plots is still the most important problems. For a long time, Chinese audiences believed that animation was only for children, and many animations were positioned for children at the beginning of their creation under this misconception (4), which lead to many animation contents show the characteristics of puerility (8). Chinese animations are adapted from classic stories, while Disney will collect global stories or cultural elements as the production blueprint. The unrestrained imagination has also become an endless source of creative power for Disney. Hence, content innovation is the foundation of the development of animation industry.

#### **3.2. Audience positioning is not accurate, education function is serious**

Adult audiences are the main audience of Chinese animation movie-watching market, but at present, animation positioning is becoming common in China. According to statistics, 73.6 percent of Chinese adults chose Japanese animation, 35.8 percent chose Europe and the United States, and only 9.1 percent chose local animation. Animation content determines the audience, and the audience determines the market share. On the

one hand, simple character setting, boring story, rigid frame and formatted thinking are the main reasons for the loss of adult audiences. On the other hand, the educational significance is given too much, the picture information is transmitted mainly in the way of preaching, the interest is weakened, and children's feelings of watching movies are ignored, which leads to children's conflict and aversion. As a result, the promotion of animation in adults and children both belong to the situation of the wall. Therefore, the market should strive to integrate more adult thinking into domestic animation, weaken the educational function and enhance the entertainment attribute, and improve the positioning of domestic animation.

#### **3.3. Contents-limited**

Strict censorship and vague grading system form invisible creative shackles for practitioners. Many exquisite animations are pulled from the cinema or even unable to be released due to strict censorship. According to the latest "original animation genre data survey", fairy tales and educational themes occupy the first place. For avoiding the risk of economic loss and project failure, investors and producers will give priority to children's animation with high security. In this environment, animation practitioners' creative space is squeezed, the content is too simple, and the output of works is difficult. The limited subject matter cannot communicate smoothly with adult audiences, and it is more difficult to play a targeted role for audiences of different ages.

#### **3.4. Market disorder**

Investors blindly follow the trend for the purpose of profit, resulting in serious homogeneous competition of works. After the success of one or a certain type of animation, producers copy and paste, the production of the same type of work phenomenon frequently appears (6). On the other hand, due to poor market supervision, serious problems such as plagiarism and infringement occur repeatedly. Pirated works are rampant in the market, pirated goods also affect the order of franchise market (10). But with the enhancement of copyright awareness and legal awareness in recent years, such problems have been alleviated. However, most works still ignore the awareness of copyright, piracy is prevalent, legitimate works cannot be maintained and compensated, frustrate the initiative of original authors, disturb the market order, so that the problem of homogeneity of works has not been fundamentally solved.

#### **3.5. The industrial chain is not well developed**

The composition of the industrial chain has become an important form of the global development of the animation industry, and a single block or animation product cannot support the overall development of the industry. In terms of the domestic situation, the development of animation industry chain is relatively

weak, and there is a situation of chain breaking. The animation industry chain is mainly composed of three parts: upstream production, midstream distribution and downstream sales (9). At present, the upstream stage is characterized by the continuous growth of the number of films, but the lack of competitive works in the market. Due to the lack of brand awareness and funds in the midstream stage, animation companies tend to ignore the publicity effect and cannot play a marketing role in the finished films. Downstream is the best stage of generating the greatest income and extending brand effect, but there are obvious defects downstream in our country. Even with national policy support, the animation broadcast situation is still not ideal. Restricted by the broadcasting control mechanism, animation broadcasting platforms are limited, while TV stations are rarely willing to pay copyright fees, and the copyright fees are cheap, making it difficult for animation companies to make profits. Due to problems such as the prevalence of piracy and the lack of competitive animation brands and animation images, most derivative development can only gain short-term profits, and it is difficult to achieve long-term profits. The separation of the upper, middle and lower stages of the animation industry chain is the main problem affecting the development of the industry. It is worth thinking about how to improve the creative ability, fill the policy gap and dig deep into the animation derivative market.

### **3.6. Mainstream media lack correct guidance**

In the name of protecting the mental health of minors, some media and public accounts deliberately criticize and misinterpret animation scenes for the purpose of earning traffic, and deliberately cause parents' anger against some animation scenes out of traffic considerations. Some mainstream media propaganda animation content should spread correct values, transfer positive energy, call on parents to take the responsibility of supervision, encourage the society to report the contents containing violence, bloody, dark terror, instigation of crime and so on. However, in the case of unclear rating system, parents have no evaluation criteria and only choose films based on subjective consciousness, love is regarded as erotic, fighting as violent, gods, demons and foxes are feudal superstition, so it is easy to put forward unreasonable reports. For example, *Snow Children*, a domestic animation with a score of 9 points on Douban, tells the friendship story between a white rabbit and a snowman. In the end, the snowman melts in the fire to save the white rabbit in the fire. This touching animation is full of love and friendship. In recent years, however, many parents have suggested that the ending is too sad and negative to allow children to accept the aspects of death too early for children's psychological development. Under the influence of media, parents' "excessive" concern for cartoons often raises the issue of values and right and wrong, which also becomes the main factor of the trend of juvenile animation.

## **4. How to solve this problem**

### **4.1. Encourage animation innovation.**

As an intelligence-intensive and labor-intensive industry (11), mainly promote China's innovative animation industry, which should be started from three aspects. Firstly, cultivate talents about the animation industry. Create a relaxed campus creative environment, encourage student to innovate. Strengthening cooperation between schools and industry is very important to drive innovation. Secondly, content innovation, selecting novel themes, vigorously developing original works, broadening creative ideas. The selection of subject matter should be diversified, which should not only pay attention to Chinese culture, but also use foreign culture in the world. Finally, the government encourages innovation. The government should correctly understand the importance of animation development and deeply understand the constraints on animation development caused by the problem of low age. The government should give full play to the guiding force and introduce relevant policies to escort animation enterprises, provide animation producers with the confidence to innovate, and create a loose creative environment to encourage animation artists to strengthen their cultural creativity.

### **4.2. Repositioning consumer groups**

The adult-oriented viewing market has become a trend. For animation enterprises and production companies, they should target marketing strategies according to consumer characteristics (13). children are not the only orientation for consumer groups, get rid of the perception of "animation belongs to children". Thus, the animation market should attract more different ages groups of consumers. There are two ways can appeal to more audience, one is to value the family fun function of animation, making works suitable for all ages to attract the whole family to watch. Second, good works can stand the test of time and maintain fresh vitality. A memorable animation can last generations, such as *Seven Dragon Ball* and *Conan*. As for the audience, in the pluralistic society of value, the audience's judgment of animation according to the acceptance attitude of new ideas and new thoughts, and the understanding of the unusual behavior of the unrestrained imagination of animation, so as to provide the producers with the courage to create, and vigorously develop the children and the other consumer groups market of animation.

### **4.3. Maintain market order**

The copyright advance mechanism is the foundation to protect the stable and benign development of the animation market, and our government should construct the policy of intellectual property rights as soon as possible (2). The interests of animation companies and investors can only be guaranteed if the law effectively strengthens the protection of animation copyright. Animation to a younger age and the development of the

industry cannot rely on the rescue of a certain popular animation, and individual successful cases cannot become the market blindly follow the trend of the wind, the rule of law and order of the animation market to a great extent to avoid the occurrence of the identity of animation works, stimulate the diversified development of the animation market.

#### 4.4. The media play a positive role in guiding

In the era of universal communication, the media should take a responsible attitude and comment on animated films from an objective perspective, so as to create a more inclusive comment environment for the animation market. In addition to mainstream scoring software such as Douban and Maoyan, media personnel can jointly establish a convincing and prestigious comment account to gather outstanding talents in related fields to express their opinions and avoid malicious guidance from media accounts. Official media should establish good credibility and influence, enhance the ability to face public opinion in the animation market, and deal with emergencies in a timely and stable manner. The mainstream media should always pay attention to the public opinion in the animation market and standardize the public opinion order in time to create a good environment for the animation market.

#### 4.5. Improve the animation industrial chain.

Realize the sustainable development of creation, production and marketing, accelerate the integration of resources, and create an orderly and reasonable recyclable production line (5). First, improve the marketization, scale and commercialization of the animation industry; Secondly, vigorously develop derivatives, extend the production chain of animation industry, speed up the return of capital, and achieve sustainable and rapid development. Finally, the animation production establishes contact with upstream and downstream enterprises, diversities the animation industry, actively builds animation works, animation IP and creative derivatives of all ages, and is committed to meeting the animation preferences of people of different ages and expanding the number of audiences.

### 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the development countermeasures of China's animation industry presented in this paper in view of the current situation of the low age of animation are actually paving the way for the complete ecosystem model of the animation industry. The full text can be regarded as two levels. The first level is the ideological level, which realizes the importance of expanding animation to all ages to promote the animation industry and eliminates the sensitization of the audience to the animation content. In the second stage, after solving the problem of consciousness, the industry should innovate the production concept of animation, accurately position the market, improve the copyright and censorship system,

and recycle the industrial chain to solve the problem that the market has been troubled by the low age. Throughout the development history of China's animation industry, it is not difficult to see that it is difficult, but it still retains its distinctive characteristics in different times, especially after the reform and opening up, the overall situation of a hundred flowers blooming. So far, there are still many problems in the development of Chinese animation market. The vacancy of youth and adult animation market needs to be explored and explored by animation workers. The diversity and comprehensiveness of animation market is the focus of future development. To change the current situation of the low age in the animation market, animators, government, media and audiences need to work together to improve the bond between all parties and make concerted efforts to reverse the situation of the low age in the animation market. To a great extent, it will promote the overall prosperity of China's animation market and make China's animation market advance steadily.

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