

Adding color to the world

China's animation industry extending global reach through movies and comics thanks to government support

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The Chinese government's continuous support and investment in the domestic animation industry has begun to bear fruit. More and more homegrown animated films have become blockbusters in recent years, with the most popular release, *Monkey King: Hero is Back*, taking \$153 million at the box office in 2015. It received positive feedback around the world, from audiences in countries including the United States, the United Arab Emirates and Russia.

This is a different scenario from a decade ago when foreign cartoons imported from Japan and the US dominated the Chinese market. An increasing number of Chinese cartoons are now capturing larger shares of the domestic market, and the surge of Chinese investment in content and the country's push to create world-class intellectual property are facilitating more Chinese animations to "go global".

Hangzhou, the capital of East China's Zhejiang province, is encouraging local enterprises to tap foreign markets.

Fanfan Comic Group, a cartoon and comic studio founded in 2008, is one example of Chinese companies exporting local comics to the world. The Hangzhou-based company trains young comic artists at its 3,000-square-meter production base, and it seeks to introduce original work to global readers in various ways, including online, international exhibitions and competitions.

To help young artists grow with international professionals, Fanfan holds exchange programs every year by sending Chinese artists to Japan's famous comic studios and publications. Young Chinese artists get to witness the creation of high-quality Japanese cartoons and learn from well-known local comic artists.

"Chinese comics are being gradually accepted by foreign readers. Readers from Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam, France, the US and Korea speak highly of Chinese comics," said Shen Hao, chairman of Fanfan.

"In the past, Japanese comics played a leading role in the industry, but now Chinese comics, with its rich cultural heritage, will have more influences on the Asian



Alex Chien, former head of brand, general manager and vice-president of creative & content with Nickelodeon, Jon Rennie, managing director of Cloth Cat Animation, and Paul Young, chairman of Animation Ireland, host a discussion at the 13th China International Cartoon and Animation Festival.

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comic market."

Another example of online platforms helping Chinese cartoons to go out is MegaMedia. Founded in March 2014 in Hangzhou, MegaMedia is a major cultural export company in the eastern province of Zhejiang.

The company has a national cultural export project, China's only online platform focusing on promoting cross-border trading and cooperation between domestic and foreign TV, film and animation companies.

The platform displays all content in Chinese and English to showcase Chinese TV, film and animation companies and their products. It has more than 1,400 members from countries including South Korea, Japan, the United Kingdom and Canada. It has collected more than 3,300

video samples of different languages in its online database.

MegaMedia also organizes its members to participate in various offline events like international TV, film and animation festivals, training sessions and promotion conferences.

It aims to create an industry-leading and internationalized platform providing comprehensive services for Chinese and foreign companies exploring the Chinese market.

"China's 'go global' strategy has propelled local companies going out, but the biggest challenges for us now are the cultural and language differences. Some countries along the Belt and Road Initiative share similar culture with China, such as Turkey and Egypt. That's the reason why we chose these two countries to enter into," said Chen Ying, general manager of MegaMedia.

"We have overseas translation teams to localize the subtitles of Chinese animations in order to help our member companies better promote and distribute their content. For example, we have translated *Monkey King: Hero is Back* into Spanish and Hindi," Chen said.

The emergence of Chinese cartoons and comics on the global stage would not be possible without government support. Thanks to the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television, Zhejiang provincial people's government and Hangzhou municipal people's government, the annual China International Cartoon and Animation Festival (CICAF) has successfully run for 13th

consecutive years. It is the only state-level professional animation festival of its kind in the mainland.

Held in Hangzhou this April, this year's event attracted more than 2,500 enterprises and institutions from 82 countries, including US animation giants Pixar and Disney. Over the six-day event, contracts or cooperation intentions for 986 projects were signed, worth a total of 13 billion yuan (\$1.9 billion).

With the theme of International Animation, Embrace the World, the 13th CICAF launched 59 activities in 17 venues across the city, hosting exhibitions, forums, business competitions and activities.

In the future, CICAF aims to further enhance its brand influence and event quality, so as to develop into a communication platform with broader international visions and higher professional standards, according to organizers.

However, challenges hinder the overseas reach of Chinese cartoons.

First and foremost are cultural differences. Although animation is relatively easy for people from different cultures to pick up, cultural barriers are major problems for Chinese cartoons going out. Chinese cartoon producers need to internationalize the content from a global perspective that resonates with overseas audiences.

Second is the existence of "black sheep" in the market. Some Chinese enterprises produce substandard work and sell it at low prices overseas to increase market share, damaging the reputation of Chinese cartoons.

Although the situation has improved with the emergence of quality work over the years, people's mind-set of "cheap, low quality" Chinese animation still exists.

In order to encourage more Chinese enterprises to open up to the international market and participate in international competition, CICAF Exhibition Office provided a number of preferential policies this year to encourage Chinese enterprises to "go out".

For Chinese companies attending foreign cartoon and animation festivals, the government provided up to 50 percent of the exhibition booth subsidies. For Chinese companies licensing intellectual property rights in the international market, the government provided subsidies based on the companies' annual actual overseas licensing revenue, up to 1 million yuan.

For those who introduced foreign projects to the CICAF, the government gave booth fee concessions and financial subsidies. The government also provided a 3 percent subsidy based on the box-office revenue for films coproduced by China and foreign companies, up to 1 million yuan.

The government particularly focused on supporting two types of work to go global. One was science-themed animation which has less cultural differences with foreign audiences, and the other were non-verbal cartoons for children, which do not require any translation.

The emphasis is on producing quality work and improving the ability of Chinese animation producers to employ premium pricing in order to enhance international competitiveness.



A parade takes place on Zhongshan North Road in Hangzhou, East China's Zhejiang province, during the 13th China International Cartoon and Animation Festival.