

Research on the Development Strategy of Chinese “Animation Series” in the Internet Era

From the Perspective of System, Enterprises and Colleges

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Abstract—This paper analyses the development strategy of “animation series” in the Internet era from the perspective of system, enterprise and college, proposes the countermeasures from the weaknesses of animation industry.

Keywords—*animation series; Internet crowd-funding; weekly playing system; ranking system; national character*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the We-media era, the popularity of internet changes the living style of the public, as well as the way of watching animation. From previous researches, researchers tend to classify animations played on television in series as “television animation”, but the scope of “television animation” cannot cover the internet “animation series” after the rising of internet animation in the new era. The concept of “animation series” refers to the animation played on television, as well as on the internet. Animation that played in series can be classified under the concept of “animation series”. “Animation series” in this paper refers to the “business animation series”, not including the artistic and main theme animation that is distant from animation industry. After make clear the concept of “animation series”, we will analyze the problems of the development of “animation series” in China, and finds out the solutions.

II. FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SYSTEM

From the research materials, some experts and scholars in China rely too much on the system in their researches, resulting to the deviation of the academic guidance. This guidance deviation leads to the deviation of the practices in animation field. Theoretical knowledge developed from rigorous academic attitudes is the indispensable and important condition for the animation development. Therefore, the viewpoints in this paper are for discussion the academic scope, and have nothing to do with political stand.

The development of animation industry, especially the development of “animation series”, cannot be realized without the strong support of national polices, which can be proved from the national polices for animation industry in France, Korea and Japan. In China, since the animation industry was listed as the key cultural industry with special

support by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, the government has issued a series of polices to support the development of domestic animation. These polices have provided favorable political environment for the development of Chinese “animation series”. In recent years, it has achieved rapid progress with the support of national policies, but also confronted with some problems in the developing process.

Some enterprises take advantage of national policies, enclosure lands under the slogan of developing animation industry and building new animation base, but change into real estate development once pass the examination and approval, and the animation project is only perfunctory. In order to deal with these problems, the related state departments should record the enterprises applying the permission of animation base, sign agreements with them, and specify the audience rating or click rate. Each year, enterprise that could hit the target will continue to enjoy the preferential policies. On the contrary, the enterprise should pay the land lease money or penalty for nonperformance of contract. The state should establish supervision organizations as well, inspect and supervise the newly approved animation base at regular intervals, such as put an end to the abuse of land.

Some enterprises produce a large number of animation with low quality rely on the national animation awarding policies, pursuing the number and omitting the quality, so as to gain more national policy subsidies. Along with the increasing support to the animation industry from the state, provinces and cities issued the awarding policies according to the length of animation, taking the playing platform and number of minutes as the basic standard. After the animation be played in CCTV, the state will give certain subsidies according to number of minutes, the local government will also give subsidies according to number of minutes and the rank of playing platform, which means the enterprise will receive two superimposed bonus. This awarding system that takes the playing platform and number of minutes as the basic standard provides business opportunity for some opportunists. Some enterprises extract awarding money from the government by producing “animation series” with low quality but long length, and some even take this as the profit

point and produce low quality “animation series” constantly. In order to get the subsidies by playing the animation on CCTV, the enterprise employs low price competition strategy that against the development law. Because there are too many low quality animations, the television station take the initiative to lower the purchasing price of “animation series”, resulting to the lower and lower of the purchasing price, and thus form a vicious circle. Some enterprises even pay for the playing on television without any profit. When these phenomena become the common condition, the strong animation enterprises cannot gain the national subsidies instead because of the vicious competition. The low quality animation is low in cost because it sacrifices quality to achieve quantity. However, the enterprise that produces high quality animation cannot compete fairly with the enterprise produces low quality animation due to the cost. The planning system of the television station interfere the role of market in the allocation of resources. The policy of purchasing low price animation violated the basic rule of the market, which make the strong animation enterprises are inferior in television playing. Losing the important playing platform, the animation enterprise will lose key profit channel and fall into hard situation. At the same time, the national policy support funds are greatly wasted by the he enterprise that produces low quality animation.

At present, the domestic TV station is in the mode of semi-planning and semi-market. Under such environment, the playing of animation is easily to be mastered by the part that holds the speaking right. If the opportunist made a kind of agreement with the part that hold the speaking right, the opportunist can affect the evaluation criterion of the animation quality to some extent. In order to truly promote the development of “animation series”, the speaking part should emphasize the scientificity of awarding mechanism. This kind of awarding mechanism should not simply take the number of playing minutes and playing platform as the criterion. The criterion of evaluating animation should be centered on the audience rating of the playing platform or the website hit. Animation with high audience rating (website hit) should be given awards. This criterion is based on popularity, and is beneficial to activate the development of domestic animation series industry. In addition, such policy can be issued: the local TV station can select and send high quality animation to play on CCTV at regular interval, the TV station should provide audience rating certificate and apply awards for the related enterprise from related state department.

There are too many administrative departments to form composition forces. After the completion of a “animation series”, the follow-up industry should receive the permission from the Ministry of Culture, General Administration of Press and Publication, State Administration for Industry and Commerce, Patent Office, National Copyright Administration, etc.. In the practical work, different departments are inter-constrained that cannot form composition forces. This problem cannot be solved by establish a new administrative department drawn staff from different departments. If merging different departments, each department must not agree to loss its right of speaking due to

the damage of the management right. The only effective solution is to establish a new animation administrative department directly under the central government. The administrative personnel should include the experts in this field. The responsibility is to make proposal for the domestic animation development planning, examination and approval, animation policy formulation and so on. This department is responsible for the central government directly, and the ministries and commissions are directly responsible for the animation department. In the next few years, the animation administrative department should withdraw the rights related to animation from the ministries and commissions, and gradually realize the target of special management in one department.

The false judgment on “national character” guidance. Some experts propose that “national character” above all rely on the part with speaking right. This false guidance is also an important reason of the slow development of present animation industry. At first, “national character” in artistic work is the representation of the national character, without which the work could not be approved by other countries, just like a man without his personal character does not has his special personal charm. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to hold the “national character” in animation. The problem lies in that whether it is necessary for each animation type to hold “national character”? How to carry forward the true “national character”?

At present, the domestic animation can be divided into three types according to the value orientation, namely business animation, artistic animation and main theme animation. Business animation includes cinema animation and “animation series”. These different types have their own features, so different responsibilities should be proposed for each animation type. Just as its name implies, business animation are the animation made for pursuing profits for the enterprise, which direct target is benefits rather than welfare. Whether it can gain profits is important for the existence of the enterprise. If the enterprise cannot maintain its survival, how could it assist the country to carry forward “national character” in the world? Of course, we cannot exclude that there are some enterprises that could make balance between business and “national character”, and make contribution for the animation “national character”, such as the cinema animation “Monkey King Hero is Back” and the “animation series” “Boonis Bears”, etc.. But after detail analysis, we can find that the “national character” in these animations is no longer the national artistic form pursued by the senior Chinese animation school, but rather the combination of western animation form, universal value and Chinese national spirits. The main creator of business animation is enterprise, which task is to tell the audience marvelous stories. Here, the business animation is a kind of spiritual goods facing the public, which orientation should be spectacle, entertaining and popular. The business animation enterprise should not shoulder too much responsibility of “national character”. Making profits is the guarantee of survival for the enterprise. Abide by the law and moral standards, animation series enterprise should make maximum profits for their survival.

The task of artistic animation is to explore all the possibilities of animation to the largest extent, including theme, presentation form, and content and so on. This kind of animation should be completed by animation artists and students majoring in animation. Works in the golden era of “Chinese animation school” are mostly belonging to artistic animation. At that time, animation was not produced for making profits. It also actively explored different animation form and content. Due to the special environment, the political pursuit of “national character” and the artistic pursuit unified to form a state integrated artistic animation and main theme animation. But at present, “national character” should be the main constraint of artistic animation. The spirits of artistic animation should be free to explore different type of animation style and content. Political task should not be enforced to artistic animation.

The animation that carries forward national character, propose social doctrine and eulogize main theme belongs to main theme animation, which purpose is to serve for the country and the society. The development of this kind “animation series” has close relation with the spreading of national ideology and has deep influence to the consolidation of national power, so it is the major type supported by national polices. When carrying forward the main national value orientation, it also transfer Chinese artistic spirits to the world and display the national charm of Chinese animation. So the government holds positive attitude toward this kind animation. Main theme animation can also be presented in the form of “animation series”, and hold clear political as the basic character. When presenting “national character” in the artistic animation, the work should emphasize the injection of the connotation of national thought, but not simply indulge in the form of “national character”.

These three types of animation can be integrated with each other, but should not be mixed in their own responsibilities. Once the political appeal of the nation and the commercial appeal of the enterprise are both satisfied in the animation, it would be the perfect condition of the combination of the national interest and the business interest. The animation of this kind not only meets the requirement of national main theme, but also caters the public, supported by the country and the public as well. This would be the best animation type in the development of animation industry. However, if these three types are mixed together, it would be rigid uniformity, like taking things all of a lump without any discrimination. This false direction will definitely hinder the benign development of national animation development.

Ranking system and weekly playing system. At present, there is no ranking system on films and television programs in China. If there is no ranking system, the enterprise cannot effectively expand the market. The restriction on the development of market would become the major reason that hinders the development of animation series. The teenagers are the main body of the most consumption power, as well as the most loyal audience of animation. Since Chinese animation policy defines all animations be suitable for children potentially, domestic animation market cannot expand to the teenagers effectively. Under such restriction, domestic “animation series” gradually develop into less

intelligent and infant animation. This kind of animation does not meet the needs of teenagers, and thus loses the teenager market in the beginning and cannot win the strong support from the backbone of the market, because the most active consumption group for animation industry is teenagers. The teenagers already classify “domestic animation series” as “less intelligent and infant” and reject them from their hearts after long time contact with those animations, which bring great difficulty to the development of domestic animation series. The present domestic animation series only grasp the limited children market, but give up the teenage and adult market, resulting to the popularity of American and Japanese animation in China. The development of animation needs the activation from the market. If the market cannot be expanded effectively, the enterprise development would be restricted. After issue the ranking system, the enterprise can make precise analysis and positioning according to the market, and produce animation works that are more suitable for the major consumption. Once the animation influences the major consumption, the audience rating would increase and the enterprise can gain benefits, and thus would provide strong guarantee for its development and the improvement of animation quality. As a result, the whole animation industry chain is activated. The focus of the development of domestic animation industry is to activate the domestic market, which activation needs the opening of market from the national policy.

The daily playing system of Chinese animation series is the problem left over by history. When this unfavorable system cannot be specified through self-adjustment of the market, the national administrative departments should enforce administrative measure to specify this bad situation. At present, the playing of “animation series” on domestic TV station is always in daily playing system, which causes great pressure to the animation producer. The present domestic animation series are mainly of 13 episodes, 26 episodes and 52 episodes. The playing period of a 52 episodes animation is about 2 months according to daily playing system, while its production cycle is of few years. It would be few years for the animation be played on the TV station after finish it. The public’s tastes, market trend and the making techniques would also change. In addition, two months’ playing period is too short to build effective emotional connection with the audience. If weekly playing system is conducted, a 52 episodes animation can be played for one year, which is enough to build effective emotional connection with the audiences. The best advantage of weekly playing system is flexibility, playing one episode per week. Under this system, the producer only need to make one episode for one week, and could timely control the technique, manpower, fund, market and so on. If the audience are not too much interested into the contents, the producer can also consider giving up the shooting of the work and put the saved money into the making of a new work. This kind of playing system can effectively help avoid huge funds waste under daily playing system. In addition, the implementation of weekly playing system can spare more time to other animation series, which provide the audience with more choices and be beneficial for the diversified development of animation type.

Problems of piracy. The pirate traders steal other's creative achievements, but their profits are several times and even more than the genuine publisher. However, the pirate traders do not pay any cost on the steal spiritual achievements. They make the steal contents into discs to sell, and they will make profits even if the price of pirated discs be a little higher than the cost of the discs. When facing the expensive genuine products and the cheap pirate products, the public tend to choose the cheap pirate products, which is conformed to the principle of benefit to the buyer. Basically, pirate is the co-work of the pirate trader and the buyer, carving the legal income of the creator, which can be classified as robbery of spiritual treasure. In China, rampant pirate has become a common phenomenon. On surface, this phenomenon is beneficial to the public, but it violates the rights and interests of the creator of film and television from the angle of industrial development, thus should be strongly abandoned. Pirate in animation industry has different forms including pirate disc, production and selling of unauthorized derivative products, online publication of pirate work (refers to the sneak preview, usually secretly shoot in cinema and upload on the internet, with bad image quality). The effect of fighting against pirates directly influences the benefits of the creator. If there are not enough remediation efforts on pirates, the receiver of the legal copy market will be reduced. Most profits of the creator are extracted by the pirate trader, and the creative work is divided by pirates. So they cannot realize the desired benefits, and the creator's enthusiasm will be lower and lower. In the long term, fighting against pirates is beneficial to create a favorable creation environment in China, and greatly promote the benign cycle development of animation industry.

In order to solve the problem of piracy, the country should punish piracy severely in legislation, further protect animation works and build strict and impartial rewards and punishments mechanism. For example, reward the informer that inform the pirate trader from the illegal income; double severe penalty on the pirate trader; severe double penalty on internet pirate and cammed version, and handsome reward the informer; fine the audience who watch pirate works and reward the informer; double severe penalty on merchants that development derivative product without the authorization of the creator and reward the informer.

III. PROBLEMS CONFRONTED BY THE ENTERPRISE

The incorrect market positioning of the enterprise is partially because of the disfavored of ranking system by the policy maker. The market development of the enterprise is restricted by administrative rule, and the basic market cannot fully play the role of resource allocation. Of course, the enterprise has not invest enough efforts in the limited market, and the development of infant market has not appear a good developing trend because of the enterprise's efforts. The ranking system can solve this problem. After the issue of ranking system, the enterprise can development the market to the maximum extent within the policy according to the market. Fully exploiting the market can ensure the enterprise to gain profits to the largest extent, which will further activate the initiative of the enterprise. The animation market

is booming and the animation industrial chain tends to be perfect. In this process, the biggest responsibility of administrative institutions is to monitor the immoral behaviors and behaviors that touch the bottom line. In creating works, the enterprise should ensure the content to be healthy, positive, active and optimistic, and do not propaganda bad thoughts. Looking all around the world, animations that are popular among the public always contain the universal value that accepted by the public, such as against the war, friendship, love, trust and so on. These works tend to praise the good thoughts rather than criticize the wrong side in the obscure manner, which should be learned by the enterprise producer. When make market positioning, the enterprise should fully use big data to classify and analyze the audience on their favorites in theme, story, and image, then make research according to the investigation data and develop animation project based on the research, which will greatly increase the possibility of success.

As for the fund, animation industry is a high investment industry. The amount of investment affects the quality of animation. The enterprise can raise fund from lending institution, partner and internet crowd-funding. The enterprise can receive fund from lending institution through lending formalities, or lobby to the domestic partner or the multinational partner to gain fund support. Under the new era, it has become a trend to create animation work through transnational cooperation and sell worldwide, sharing the profits according to the proportion. Internet crowd-funding is to attract fund support from the audience through internet by playing the trailer on the internet. After making benefits, the creator will share certain benefits to the financial backers according to the investment ratio. Since the audiences are involved by crowd-funding, the quality of the work directly affects their benefits, thus makes them become the strong support and spreader of the animation. This has greatly arouse the enthusiasm of the audience and promoted the spread of the animation, thus become the develop trend under internet era. We should also notice that the popularization of this mode should have a sound guarantee mechanism to guarantee the benefits of the investor.

The primary task of business animation is to tell a wonderful story, but "animation series" propose higher requirements on story. If the manifestation pattern of animation is not exquisite enough or the movement rule not precise enough, the mode of taking story as the most important would be more important. Wonderful story sometimes can even make up the inadequate of animation form, which is common in Japanese animation. Japanese "animation series" are more attractive in story than in form. The attraction of story itself can shift the audience attention from form to content, so sometimes a wonderful story is more meaningful than the manifestation form. This doesn't mean content is more important than form, but means that it would be wiser to tell a wonderful story if the animation can only satisfy the content or the form. If an animation has both the elegant manifestation form and the wonderful story at the same time, it surely will be a successful "animation series".

Infant story attracts infant audience, while meaningful story attracts thoughtful people. The reason of audience watching animation mostly is that they are attracted by the exquisite form and wonderful story. The exquisite form affects the audience's receiving of story to some extent. The manifestation form of domestic "animation series" can be divided into Q type, single line painting and realistic modeling. Among these three types, realistic modeling is most easily accepted by the public, and suitable to present stories of all themes. Because the modeling restriction of Q type, it is appropriate to represent lively theme. Single line painting is the most significant type of the "animation school", which can better represent the artistic conception in Chinese classic aesthetics. However, the teenagers have been immersed by the American and Japanese animations. Those audiences have formed their certain aesthetic habits that the forms with fine shadow effects and distinct body feeling are easier to be accept, especially the modeling elements in typical Japanese animation. For example, big eyes, snub nose, pointed chin, small mouth, various hairstyle and hair color, etc.. The reason of the popularity of typical Japanese animation is because it satisfies certain aesthetic laws that are commonly recognized by audiences worldwide. This universal aesthetic habit and modeling deserve serious research. For example, the strict stipulation on the ratio of head and body makes the hero looks more beautiful or handsome; the proportion of heroine's eyes on her face also agree with the aesthetic standard of men towards perfect women. These standards should be studied. Animators should not blindly reject works in Japanese style, but learn from them to improve their quality. On the other hand, the change of the audience's aesthetic habit does not mean that single line painting should be given up. Japanese animation "Crayon Shin-chan" still receive welcome from the contemporary people even it was of single line painting type. As long as the content is attractive enough, the audience would not be too picky on the manifestation type.

Under the new era, the publishing channel of domestic "animation series" is restricted by the planning system of the TV station, so there is no high efficient operation. However, the rapid development of internet has brought opportunities for the propaganda and publication of animation. The status of TV station gradually drops by the shock of internet, losing its authority gradually. The video websites have become the "personal TV station" in the new era. With the increasing of audience, their influence is growing among the public. Under such environment, the animation enterprise can sign weekly playing contract with the video websites, publishing the work through internet channel, providing benefits according to the clicking rate of the website. The two parts can divide benefits according to the contract after making benefits. Or the animation enterprise and the internet jointly invest in the production of animation work and divide the profits according to investment proportion. In addition, since the piracy problem is serious in China at present, the publishing and selling environment of the derivative products is passive. So the business can sign overseas distribution agreement with foreign companies directly and avoid the immature domestic animation market. The work can be publishing overseas where copyright can be better protected. The

derivative products can be developed with authorization. After making benefits from overseas publishing, the work can be introduced into China and use low price marketing strategy, so as to eradicate piracy fundamentally.

IV. PERSONNEL TRAINING COLLEGES

The personnel training colleges have important influence on the development of "animation series" industry. Whether talents cultivated by the colleges can satisfy the needs of enterprise or not is the key to revitalize animation industry. It is a common condition that students majoring in animation cannot find job after graduate from domestic colleges. The reason is that what they learned in colleges does not satisfy the needs of the enterprise. The graduates cannot connect with the enterprise smoothly. If this problem cannot be solved, it would always be the difficulty of the graduates' employment. In order to solve this problem, we should rely on the teaching reform of animation subject in the colleges. The college should realize the fact that animation subject is a practical subject fundamentally, so the subject setting should be centered on practice closely and also consider the study of theoretical knowledge be beneficial to animation practice.

The reform of evaluation system for students is the fundamental measure to influence students studying tendency. Colleges should increase the number of works submitted for students majoring in animation subject, and give students credits according to the quality of their works. This will lead the students into animation practice actively, and lay good foundation for future employment. Colleges should also increase the exchanges and cooperation between enterprises and colleges and build an effective college-enterprise cooperation mechanism, co-creating animation work by human resources of students and technological resources of enterprises. In this way, college students can receive technical guidance, while the enterprises can cultivate good staff. This is win-win cooperation for colleges and enterprises.

To sum up, in order to promote the vigorous development of "animation series" in China, there should be some adjustments on the national policy. The enterprise should also make some changes in fund raising, propaganda and publication according to the present environment. The colleges should stick to the principle of cooperating closely with the enterprise, and make reform on evaluation system for students. Only if the country, enterprise and college work together to form a highly effective joint-action mechanism that can strongly push the development of the national animation industry. This mechanism also will definitely recreate a golden era of the domestic "animation series".

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