

The policies of Chinese animation under the strategy of the Cultural Renaissance

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Abstract: This paper reviews the strategy of “cultural renaissance” proposed by the Chinese government in recent years and the Animation Restriction Orders proposed in this context. We believe that the development of Chinese animation under the current cultural revival strategy is a process of marketizing and will hugely expands the animation market.

1. Introduction

China has abandoned the contract production and exclusive sale agreement policies of domestic animation since the late years in 1980's. Subsequently, Chinese animation has undergone great changes and has been affected by unequal competition from foreign animation products. Since 2006, the State Administration of radio, film and television (SARFT) issued a series of "Animation Restriction Orders" . Academic circles have different views on these limitation orders and the development of Chinese animation.

2. Cultural Renaissance strategy in the new era

The historical mission of national revival is to revitalize a country or nation that was historically prosperous but now lags behind. National revival has been a consensus goal for which the Chinese people have strived since the New Democratic Revolution. After thirty years of reform and opening up, China has made extraordinary achievements in the economic field. As China gets richer, people are more eager to realize the dream of the Chinese nation's rejuvenation. Upon visiting "The Road of Revival" exhibition in 2012, President Xi said "We can all feel that we are now closer to this goal than in any period in history, and we now have more confidence and ability to achieve this goal than in any period in history".

Despite its extraordinary economic achievements, China is still weak in its cultural fields, even though it is an ancient civilization. Kapp Robert A, the former chairman of the US-China Business Council (USCBC), stated "My preliminary conclusion is that China's emergence to global prominence may, in fact, bear no particular moral or normative lessons at all" and that "the China of today and tomorrow may present the world with an economic and military power for whom high-sounding philosophical and ideological formulations are either contrived or irrelevant" [1]. In response, many scholars have also noted that China should not ignore the construction of the cultural field as they obtain remarkable achievements in economic construction. Junru Li has stated that "If there were no Renaissance, there would not be modernization of Western Europe, in the same way, there would be no modernization of China without the reunification and renaissance in Chinese civilization" [2] . It has also been stated that "The formulation of Chinese cultural strategy at the turn of the century is not only related to the adjustment of the international cultural forces, the reconstruction of the new international cultural relations and the establishment of the new international cultural order, but also directly related to the position of Chinese culture in the world in the 21st Century and the image of the Chinese nation in the world" [3].

After entering the new century, the cultural renaissance strategy has been increasingly valued by the CPC and the Chinese government. After "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" was put forth at the 15th CPC National Congress in 1997, cultural reform was proposed at the 16th Party CPC Congress in November 2002. In October 2007, the 17th CPC National Congress proposed the promotion of the development and prosperity of socialist culture and the improvement of national cultural soft power. In September 2009, the State Council issued the "Cultural Industry Promotion Plan", in which the development of cultural industries was promoted to a national strategy for the first time. In October 2011, the seventh session of the Sixth Plenary Session of the CPC adopted the "Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Major Issues Pertaining to Deepening Reform of the Cultural System and Promoting the Great Development and Flourishing of Social Culture", which was proposed foremost as a strategic goal of building a culturally strong country. President Xi also repeatedly addressed the issue of developing a strong socialist culture and making brilliant new cultural achievements in China.

3. Animation restriction policies in the new era

As a part of the popular culture, in the planned economy era, China's national animation, represented by Shanghai Animation Film Studio (SAFS), had achieved very good results. "Danao tiangong (Uproar in Heaven, 1961-1964)", "Nezha naohai (Nezha Conquers the Dragon King, 1979)" and other films became world-renowned classic films in animation history. Ink animation has become the world's bright pearl in the history of animation, though paper-cut animation, puppet animation and other types of animation have also undergone considerable development.

However, in the 1990s, the SAFS and other Chinese animation production bases suffered the impact of transitioning to a market economy. Much talent was attracted to the contract animation manufacturers in Shenzhen, which specifically make animation films for foreign studios. These animators were paid only 200-300 yuan monthly at SAFS, which was the average salary and wage of Chinese workers at that time but was too little compared to the salaries of southern factories, which offered up to 2,000-10,000 yuan monthly[4]. Hu Zhaohong, the SAFS deputy director at the time, observed that "the workers left, room by room, and they are all front-line workers, and the original animation making was almost stopped".

Under the planned economy, film production by SAFS relied entirely on state investment, and the finished films were repurchased by the country; however, this unified purchase and vending system was cancelled in the process of market economic reform. SAFS therefore had to face market reform and take into account the production cost, film profits and other factors in order to adapt to the market. For example, Puwen Zhu has described that the SAFS presentation of many TV series animations for the rise of the TV market, such as "Schunck and Betta", "Big Head Son and Small Head Dad", "The Ancient Heroes of Youth", and so on; They also tried to process animation for factories in Japan, Canada, Germany, France and other countries. The Japanese anime "Tenku Senki Shurato" had outsourced the line and colour tasks to SAFS[5].

Despite these various efforts, SAFS still failed to restore the diminishing trend of Chinese animation. SAFS produced no animated feature films for 13 years, from 1986 to 1998. Instead, the domestic animation market was occupied by "Ikkyu-san", "Saint Seiya", "Transformers", "The Lion King", "Toy story", and other foreign animations.

4. The historical background of the restriction policies

Facing this brain drain, the sagging domestic animation industry and the popularity of American and Japanese animation, everyone from the Chinese national leadership to ordinary citizens began to question why domestic animation had failed to be as successful as foreign animation had in the huge Chinese animation market. The hit of "Mulan" encouraged people to reflect on why a Chinese folk legend was so favourable to an audience after it was made into a cartoon film. Why was Chinese national animation, once so brilliant, fading now?

To change the backward situation of domestic animation, SARFT issued "China's 10th Five-Year plan of film and television animation industry" on April 2, 2002. The plan contains two very important provisions: Firstly, it encouraged the establishment of professional animation broadcast channels and institutions in order to increase the number of broadcast animation programmes; Secondly, it required each agency or channel to air no fewer than 300 minutes of animation programmes per month, while provincial satellite TV channels should air no fewer than 900 minutes of animation programmes monthly. In particular, it required that the total number of domestic cartoons broadcast should not be less than 60% of all the cartoons aired by the agencies. Then, SARFT issued "Some Opinions of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television on Expediting the Development of the Film Industry" on January 8, 2004. These "opinions" strengthened the regulations of the "Tenth Five Year Plan", which aimed to expand the number of broadcast animations and improve the ratio of foreign and domestic animation, which should not be less than 6:4 every quarter. This plan further encouraged television stations to broadcast domestic cartoons during prime time (19:00 to 22:00) and required children's channels and animation channels to allocate a time slot for domestic cartoon broadcasts during prime time, thereby gradually increasing the time and proportion of domestic animation. On September 13, 2005, SARFT issued an "Urgent Notice of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television on Prohibiting the Broadcasting of Overseas Animated Cartoons in the form of Column", which further emphasized that "We must resolutely put a stop to broadcast any overseas animated cartoons or co-produced animations that have not been examined by SARFT and whose distribution licences have not been obtained" and "prohibit the airing of any uncensored overseas cartoons that are either purchased from overseas animation companies or complimentary from them, prohibit the airing of any overseas cartoons recommended by a social intermediary agency without the SARFT's examination".

Since then, the Ministry of Culture and SARFT have issued a series of policies and regulations to further restrict and regulate the introduction and broadcast of foreign cartoons and to encourage the production and airing of domestic animation, such as "Specific measures for the development of China's animation creation", "Suggestions of the Ministry of Culture on supporting the development of the animation industry in China", "Notice of the Ministry of Finance and the State Administration of Taxation on Issues Concerning Tax Policies on Supporting the Development of the Animation Sector", "China's 12th Five-Year plan for the film and television animation industry", "The Regulation on the identification of animation enterprises (Trial)", and so on.

5. The historical background of the restriction policies

In response to these "protective" policies and regulations, some scholars believed that these policies represented a case of nationalism and protectionism and questioned the rationality of their existence, while other scholars suspected the timeliness and continuity of these policies. They believed that "the human intervention" of the government was either useless or would have only a marginal effect on domestic animation; rather, such intervention might prevent Chinese animation from being subject to market forces and return it to the old system of the planned economy era.

From the relevant industry policies of other countries, it is clear that these cultural industry policies have models that date back to fifty or sixty years ago and have continued ever since. Since the market-oriented reform in 1993, China's relevant policies have had more than 10 years of in-depth market research before these policies released. Since the release of these new cultural industry policies, successive Chinese governments have agreed to uphold and deepen these policies, making them unlikely to be impermanent.

6. Conclusion

This paper discusses the animation restriction policy and its historical background under the current strategy of cultural renaissance. We believe that these policies will contribute to the marketization of animation culture. The historical development evaluation of Chinese animation

should not be divorced from its basic historical background.

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