

# *An Analysis of Chinese Animation Marketing Strategies from the Perspective of 4P Theory in the Era of ChatGPT*

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**Abstract:** Despite the negative impact of the epidemic on the film industry, the domestic animation film market has developed significantly in recent years. From *Monkey King: Hero is Back* to *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*, to *Boonie Bears: Guardian Code*, which ranked among the top three films in the Spring Festival this year, more and more local original animated films have gained popularity. Combined with the classic 4P theory of marketing, this paper has insight and analysis of the differentiation characteristics of the booming animation film market from four dimensions and concluded that Chinese animation films should put IP marketing in the first place, and further expand the influence of film IP through new media channels. At the same time, through the analysis of the correlation between animated films and information technology, this paper concluded that in the contemporary era of rapid development of information technology, animated films should embrace information technology more actively and use information technology to achieve personalized promotion.

**Keywords:** animation films, marketing strategies, 4p theory

## **1. Introduction to the Chinese Animation Film Market**

The number of domestic animated films released in the mainland market was relatively average between 2012 and 2021 and showed no obvious growth trend (see Fig. 1). 2016 saw the highest number of releases in a decade, with 44. In 2020, amid the spread of COVID-19, only 18 domestic films were aired, the lowest in a decade. In 2021, the situation of the epidemic improved, and cinemas on the mainland that were forced to close last year were gradually opened, which brought the opportunity for the release of some unaired films in 2020. As a result, the number of domestic animated films released in the year soared to 43. Compared with the non-obvious growth of domestic animation films, the number of imported animated films in the mainland market generally showed an upward trend, with an average release number of around 20, reaching 44 in 2019, which was the same as the peak release number of domestic animated films. It is worth noting that the proportion of domestic animated films showed a floating downward trend. Before 2016, the proportion was above

60%, but in 2017 and the following three years, the proportion dropped by nearly 10%, and then rose to 66.15% in 2021 [1].

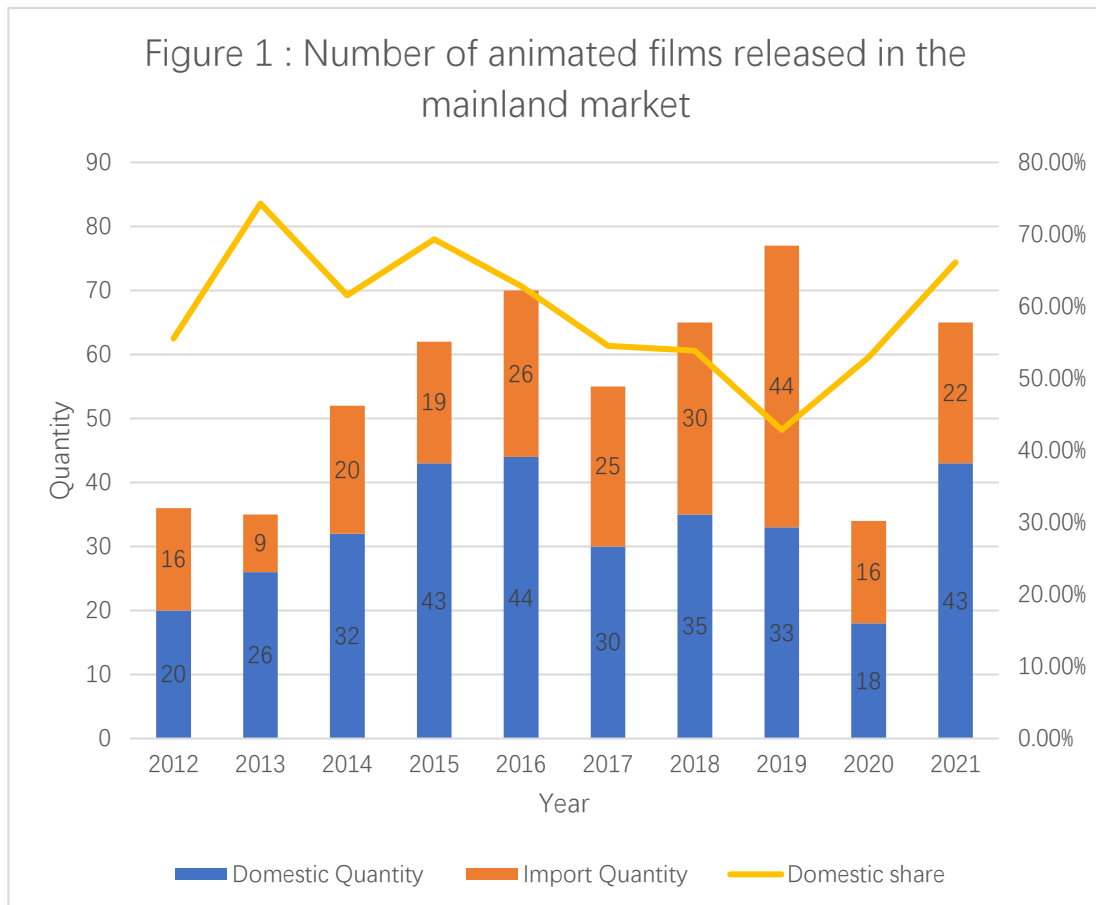


Figure 1: Number of animated films releases in the mainland market.  
(Photo credit: Original), Source: [1]

Among the above data, 2016 is particularly noteworthy. Before 2016, domestic animated films tended to pursue quantity rather than quality; After 2016, influenced by a variety of market factors, the number of animated films gradually decreased, and they are developing towards sophisticated production. Among high-quality animated films, *Monkey King: Hero is Back* in 2015 is the most outstanding. With a box office of 95.4-billion-yuan, *Monkey King: Hero is Back* became the most promising film of the year, which promoted the boom of animation films from quantification to quality. After *Monkey King: Hero is Back*, more high-quality animated films, such as *Big Fish & Begonia* and *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*, gradually spread widely in the mainland.

From the perspective of the box office (see Fig. 2), the proportion of animated film box office in the total box office of domestic films is a relatively fluctuating development. The turning point of 2016 is consistent with the above analysis, that is, before 2016, the total box office and the proportion of animated films continued to increase due to the substantial increase in the number of animated films, while after 2016, in the process of qualitative change to quantitative change, the proportion of animated films' box office declined significantly. Then in 2019, thanks to the outstanding box office contribution of *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*, the total box office of the mainland market exceeded 10 billion yuan, and the share of animated films in the box office exceeded 15% during the year [1]. Still, with an average box office share of 10.7%, the animated film market has plenty of room to grow.

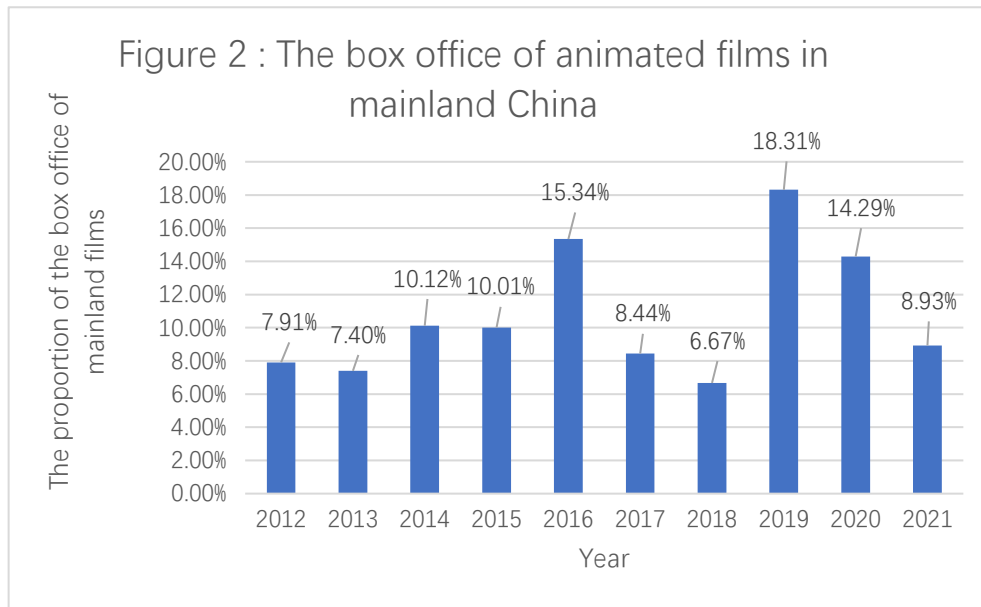


Figure 2: The box office of animated films in mainland China.  
(Photo credit: Original), Source: [1]

Finally, the "head phenomenon" has always existed in the animation film market, that is, the main source of the box office of domestic and imported animated films in the mainland market is the head film (see Fig. 3). The total box office of films with a box office of more than 100 million yuan can account for more than 50%. More and more people in the industry realize that well-made "blockbusters" can get higher word-of-mouth and box office, so pursuing high quality is the right direction for animated films.

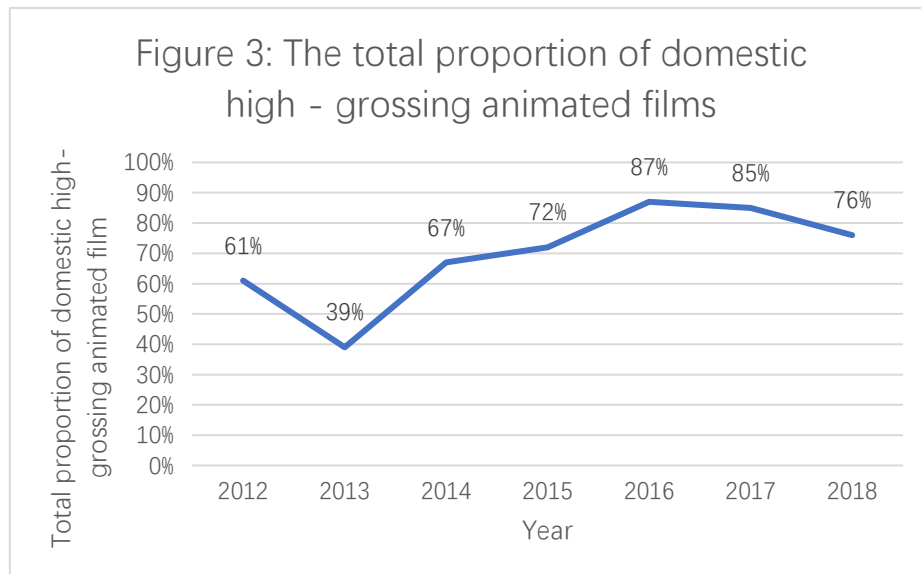


Figure 3: The total proportion of domestic high-grossing films.  
(Photo credit: Original), Source:[1]

To sum up, in the past decade, domestic animated films have transformed from blindly pursuing quantity to being streamlined and well-made. In the current situation where the average box office

percentage of animated films is just double digits and the subject matter still has many directions, the market has a good development space.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Overview of the Overall Market Situation**

Domestic scholars have conducted in-depth studies on the overall situation of China's animation market. Wang Yu [1], through the overall analysis of the animation film market in the past ten years, especially the change and average analysis of the proportion of domestic animation films, concluded that the domestic animation film market has been transformed from the blind pursuit of a quantity to the pursuit of high-quality products, and the overall box office proportion of animation films is not high at present. The market has plenty of room to grow. Qiu Enxin [2] analyzed China's animation film market based on SCP theory and proposed that China's animation film industry has problems such as a highly fragmented market and lack of scale operation, and its business model needs to be improved. Wang Zhigang [3] summarized the development status of China's film and television animation industry through the analysis of various relations: the production scale continues to expand, the content and subject matter of animated films are more and more diversified, but the phenomenon of poor production is still serious.

### **2.2. Overview of Animated Film Products and Marketing Channels**

At present, there is abundant research on the products and marketing channels of animated films in China. Yu Rui and Zhou Jun [4] focus on the cross-cultural communication channels of Chinese animated films, pointing out that Chinese animated films should be based on the pursuit of cultural empathy, integrate traditional Chinese culture into film production, and create a positive image of China. Yan Lili [5] analyzed the bottlenecks and opportunities in the development of animated films in the era of "Internet +". She concluded that the creators of animated films should make appropriate adaptations based on network literature, to create differentiated animated film IP, and actively absorb advanced creative ideas to form innovative adaptations of creative ideas and create highly recognizable animated IP images. By studying the development of digital technology and its application in the field of animation, Wei Ying [6] concluded that digital technology, after entering the film market, has endowed animated films with new art connotations, enriched the aesthetic form of animation, and brought a leap in quality and technological innovation for animated films. Ren Ding [7] combined the aesthetic trend and expression mode of Pixar animation films, studied the correlation between technology and art of Pixar animation films from the aspects of film structure, and proved that Pixar animation greatly improved the audience's perception through the application of digital technology. Although there has been some research on the application of information technology in art, few domestic scholars have studied the role of the latest technology such as artificial intelligence in the creativity and production of animated films, so this paper will try to fill the gap.

### **2.3. Overview of Price and Promotion**

Domestic scholars have studied the marketing strategies of animated films. Yu Xia [8] proposed that domestic film marketing currently has problems such as insufficient funds for publicity and distribution, and should focus on expanding audience positioning, implementing diversified marketing, and improving derivative development. Jia Han [9] explored the marketing mode of animated films under new media and pointed out that the new media marketing strategy of animated films is to fully develop the communication potential of new media, accurately position marketing channels, utilize the influence of opinion leaders and pay attention to stimulating the cultural identity

of the audience. Li Peili and Yu Chun [10] point out the strong marketing potential of Chinese animated films in terms of market positioning and product strategy of domestic animated films. Gao Suying [11] applied the 4C theory in the analysis of the marketing strategies of animated films and concluded that the Chinese animated film market should accurately target the audience and develop differentiated ticket prices and a new marketing model of "word-of-mouth + we-media" by combining online and offline modes. Lu Xinjie and Zhao Chengguo [12] pointed out that Chinese animated films should make full use of new media, highlight the content of film characteristics in marketing, and put film content in the first place in marketing, to win word-of-mouth. In the above studies, scholars paid little attention to channels such as live broadcasting of short video platforms, which have a huge user base.

To sum up, in the literature on the Chinese animation film market, media channels/platforms and the latest technologies are still lacking in attention, as well as in the combination of channels/platforms and technologies in combination with the IP-based differentiation of animated films. This paper can arouse some attention and thinking.

### **3. Analysis, Thinking and Suggestions of the Chinese Animation Film Market Based on 4P Theory**

#### **3.1. Product and Place**

##### **3.1.1.Product**

From a product perspective, animated films first need story ideas, that is, "content is king". In recent years, Chinese animated films have mostly taken inspiration from traditional myths and legends, with "hit films" emerging one after another, such as *Ne Zha*, *Big Fish & Begonia*, *Jiang Ziya*, and many other blockbusters works, or the younger ones, like the *Boonie Bears* series. In contrast, historical animated films are relatively rare, and science fiction, youth, reality, sports, and other themes are rarely involved [1]. Therefore, there is still a lot of room to enrich and diversify the subject types of domestic animated films.

At the same time, compared with other types of films, animated films have a differentiating feature, that is, the shaping of characters and content is not only fundamental to the box office of cinemas, but also can bring more non-theatrical revenue by being IP into film development companies. In the utilization of this differentiation feature, there is still a big gap between the domestic animation film market and overseas animation film, which is mainly reflected in the lack of long-term and unified planning of domestic original IP and the single way of publicity. This paper has the following suggestions for the IP development of animated films.

##### **3.1.1.1. Start with Localization and Then Extend to More International**

The mainstream audience of animated films is still children and teenagers. Although children and teenagers in countries around the world have differences in nationality, race, ethnicity, and so on, the psychology of people in the same age group still has some common points. Just as marketing requires learning psychology first, the development of animation film IP should start from the universal psychology of children and teenagers, seize those universal characteristics, and look for new creativity in the visualization and positioning of IP.

#### **3.1.1.2. Let Users Participate in the IP Planning and Development Process**

At the early stage of IP development and planning, User Generate Content (UGC) model is referred to, so that end users can be fully involved. On the one hand, more good ideas are provided for original IP, on the other hand, it is also a good publicity process.

#### **3.1.1.3. A Good IP Requires a Good Story and Infinite Derivative Ideas**

Online novel bloggers play a key role in creating popular stories, so cross-border cooperation with online novel bloggers can serve as a way for film companies to promote their IP. And at the beginning of the planning, the company should actively plan for the medium and long term, so that when the IP is brought to market, the story will be richer and more attractive.

#### **3.1.1.4. Combine with Information Technology to Create Personalized Marketing Content**

Finally, in the ChatGPT era, today's animated filmmaking is increasingly relevant to digital technology. With the development of computer technology, digital animation makes comprehensive use of computer science, painting art, graphic and image technology, and other means to integrate into a continuous generation of colorful and vivid virtual animation. The emergence of digital animation has made the application of 3D animation, CG virtual special effects, digital graphics and images, animation synthesis, and other technical means more and more widely, and the animation image is richer and richer, completely subverting the nature of traditional animation image, and create a new digital virtual animation technology aesthetic application. At present, the main technical branches of artificial intelligence are machine learning, computer vision (CV), natural language processing (NLP), text mining/classification, machine translation and speech recognition, and robotics. These technical branches have brought infinite possibilities for the development of domestic animated films, and AI will show more brilliance in the field of animation in the future. For example, in terms of story creation, the computer can fully learn and analyze all the popular animation movie ideas and IP in the past, so as to form an IP story background that is in line with the current hot topics.

### **3.1.2. Place**

Animation film marketing channels are mainly divided into online and offline modes. The offline mode mainly includes direct marketing of theaters and derivative marketing, while the online mode includes soft marketing of well-known movie software and social media.

#### **3.1.2.1. Offline Channels Focus on the Consistency and Richness of Audience Experience**

Although the pandemic caused a major impact on offline movie-watching for several years, the strong rebound of the 2023 Spring Festival box office shows that the audience's enthusiasm for movie-watching is still high. Marketing channels should now focus on the consistency and richness of the audience experience, specifically enabling audiences to access and experience the IP and plot of their favorite animated films in as many online Settings as possible, in addition to the movie theater. At present, the creativity of offline scenes is relatively limited. For example, only IP-animated movie derivatives can be found in similar toy stores of Toys "R" Us, which lacks more innovative cross-border cooperation based on the needs of mainstream audiences.

#### **3.1.2.2. Online Channels can Embrace More Personalization and Precision**

In the current era of Internet +, especially teenagers are in the digital world all the time. Modern people are confronted with a huge amount of information every day, so by taking full advantage of



digital technologies such as big data and cloud computing, identifying audience preferences and audience's personalized information access channels, studios can more efficiently reach and connect with their target audiences. On this basis, information technology is used to accurately personalize the audience in the digital world, so as to provide each audience with unique push content.

### **3.2. Price and Promotion**

In the 4Ps, Price, and Promotion have the most direct relationship with business income. This paper also analyzes these two factors together. First, the pricing of animated movies should be a global input-output pricing idea of movie +IP derivatives, rather than just looking at an isolated module, movie ticket price, or IP derivative price, because the goal is to realize the profit maximization of the total revenue over the total input. For the sake of capital turnover efficiency, many producers may want to turn a profit as soon as possible, but the animation film industry suggests that a long-term operation idea centered on IP should be adopted, which may be the only way to truly create well-made quality animated films and IP. As for the marketing and promotion of animated films, the main problems in the pre-marketing and promotion include traditional and single marketing methods, insufficient capital and manpower investment, insufficient emotional marketing, and so on. Some suggestions for addressing these deficiencies are as follows.

#### **3.2.1.1. Omni Media and Word-of-mouth Marketing**

With the rapid development of "we media" and short videos, the army of "media" is growing rapidly. Anyone and anywhere can do live broadcasting with one click. In addition to traditional marketing communication based on various kinds of media, the company can hold audience live broadcasts through short video platforms with fast live broadcasting, to achieve a wider range of communication. In the Internet era, the audience trusts the endorsement of big V or celebrity figures more. Although the animation is a cartoon, some stars also start to voice it behind them. These dubbed stars should go to the stage to promote the film, so as to greatly improve the reputation of the film before the official release of the animated film.

#### **3.2.1.2. Content is Essential**

The key information that can move the audience should be fully mined from the content of the film and developed into small and beautiful propaganda materials that are easy to spread and share. The sharing effect of the audience in their moments of friends will be much better than that of the official website.

#### **3.2.1.3. Feelings and Emotional Marketing**

Compared to real films, animated films can carry more emotional factors. Teenagers are a group with dreams and passions. Whether it is the feelings of home and country, the friendship between friends, or the courage and responsibility to pursue dreams, they can arouse strong resonance among the audience from the psychological level, thus producing a good publicity effect.

## **4. Conclusion**

Through the preliminary analysis and research of the Chinese animation film market, this paper finds that animation film has two key development directions while it has a good development space.

The IPability of animated films is an important feature that distinguishes them from other types of films, and therefore brings great malleability: Animation film is only an important output of the industry, but it is not the whole of the animation film industry. No matter at the beginning of the

planning and development of an animation film, or in the marketing link of the film to the market, we should have the perspective and ideas of the industry operation and take long-term consideration. At the same time, based on the differentiation characteristics of IP, the marketing strategy of animated films should be more innovative. The marketing target is not limited to the crowd entering the cinema, but to maximize the connection and interaction with the audience through various contact points, so as to maximize the economic benefits.

Animated films are more relevant to digital technology than any other genre: in today's world, digital technology is advancing by leaps and bounds. We should not only limit ourselves to the existing digital technology of animated films but should embrace digital technology more open to the planning, production, distribution, operation, and other links of animated films. We believe that artificial intelligence and other technologies will surely help more and more excellent animated films to enter the market.

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