LIFE



Industry insiders talk about the production ecosystem of micro-dramas at a forum held during the 2nd Beijing Internet Audiovisual Arts Conference earlier this month.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Micro-dramas make big impact

Short series surge in domestic market, expecting to match scale of film industry, **Xu Fan** reports.

In the hustle and bustle of daily subway commutes, many may frequently witness such a scene — passengers wearing headphones engrossed in short videos on their smartphones.

Amid this unprecedented expansion of the internet era, China's entertainment landscape is rapidly evolving. Younger generations have become more accustomed to consuming short tales in bite-sized moments, whether during their daily commutes or leisurely dinners.

The latest statistics indicate the domestic market size of micro-dramas reached 37.39 billion yuan ($5.31 billion) last year, marking a sizable surge of 267.65 percent year-on-year, according to a forum during the recently concluded 2nd Beijing Internet Audiovisual Arts Conference.

"This figure accounts for around 70 percent of the domestic film industry's annual box-office receipts last year. We anticipate that by the end of 2024, the overall scale of the micro-drama industry could match that of the film market," says Wang Chen, head of Douyin's micro-drama division, one of the country's leading short-video platforms.

"The micro-drama industry has expanded rapidly in recent years, already shifting from a niche new market to a mainstream, established one," adds Wang.





Clockwise from top left: A visitor uses a virtual reality device at one of the conference's exhibitions; the poster for a sci-fi micro-drama inspired by the archaeological site Sanxingdui in Sichuan province displayed in the exhibition; and a scene from *Da Guo Nian De* (The Spring Festival), a popular micro-drama.

Li Jiang, chief executive officer of Dianzhong Tech, a Beijing-based company that focuses on digital content for mobile devices, says that in a survey, they found over 10,000 micro-dramas on the market last year, 70 percent of which were adapted from internet literature.

As a product of China's mobile internet ecosystem, micro-dramas typically feature episodes that range from tens of seconds to 15 minutes, showcasing fast-paced storytelling that easily resonates with audiences, providing entertainment and alleviating negative emotions such as stress and anxiety.

Recognizing the huge market potential, Wang reveals that Douyin has partnered with major television production companies and internet influencers to create a total of 40 micro-dramas earlier this year, with 15 amassing over 100 million views each.

Among these, one standout is *Da Guo Nian De* (The Spring Festival), a thought-provoking series delving into the challenges women face in maintaining their marriages. With each episode spanning four minutes, the series has garnered over 1.2 billion views online, with the most popular episode receiving 1.92 million "likes".

Shen Hongxiang, the director of the program, reveals that the key to crafting a successful micro-drama lies in developing the script from the audience's perspective, through understanding their challenges, difficulties and dilemmas to make the drama serve as an emotional outlet.

Interestingly, some cutting-edge technologies, which are still limited in use in traditional showbiz sectors like the movie and TV industries, have already made their way into the emerging micro-drama industry.

An internet celebrity who goes by the name Huihuizhou, with 15 million fans on Douyin, says that her show *Qi Liang Ren Sheng* (The Weight of Life) has utilized virtual reality production — which enables scenes captured by the camera to instantly merge computer-generated scenes with actual imagery.

The 16-episode series tells a suspenseful story unraveling the case of a missing child. It begins with a tense scene in a moving cable car where the desperate mother confronts the suspects.

Recalling the production process, she says that the drama was filmed on a soundstage in Changsha, Hunan province. A life-size cable car prop was installed about a meter above the ground against a giant LED screen, which displayed the urban backdrop featured in the show, creating an immersive environment that helped the actresses and actors deliver more powerful performances.

Li from Dianzhong Tech echoes that the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence technologies will also enhance the productivity of the micro-drama industry, predicting that creativity and innovation will become the most crucial skills for content creators in the future.

However, he highlights a major challenge — the prevalence of similarities in storytelling and themes. Li says he hopes micro-drama creators can diversify beyond commonly seen themes like time-travel narratives to explore more unique stories.

Li also mentions that micro-dramas could serve as a new avenue to promote Chinese stories and cultures overseas, with North America currently being the largest foreign market for consuming such content. He adds that some micro-dramas were shot in the United States and Canada, with themes ranging from original fantasy tales featuring wolverines and vampires to realistic urban romances.

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Anime fan witnesses subculture become mainstream



Haydn James Fogel
Second Thoughts

I was 11 years old in 1999 when the anime series *Dragon Ball Z* aired in the United States for the second time. Its blend of action, sci-fi and fantasy was unlike anything available to American children at the time. The show's naive yet brave protagonist Son Goku became my hero. Goku flew on a cloud and battled demons and aliens using kung fu and a staff that could extend.

It wasn't long before I learned the series came from Japan; it was part of a vast library of animation geared toward teens and adults. At the back of my local video rental store, I could find VHS copies of Japanese classics like *Akira*, *Mobile Suit Gundam* and *Perfect Blue*. I was drawn to the novelty of the visuals and cultural inspirations.

I bought *Dragon Ball Z* toys when I could and demanded my parents drive me to esoteric shops in the city so I could pay extra for a bootleg copy of the PlayStation game because it wasn't released for American distribution. I had become an anime nerd.

I sensed that I was part of a subculture because my friends who were brave enough to wear print T-shirts emblazoned with Goku as a super *saiyan* were teased in class. We all received that treatment whenever we used terms like "Kamehameha", the most widely used finishing attack in the Dragon Ball series, Goku's signature technique. Our classmates accused us of speaking foreign gibberish.

Twenty-five years later, I reflected on those memories when I heard a panel of celebrities discuss Son Goku on late-night television. The audience didn't need a primer to understand who the character was. These days, anime is as mainstream as Mickey Mouse.

Despite Son Goku's fame in the United States, relatively few Americans might know that his creator, Akira Toriyama, drew inspiration from the Chinese classic novel *Journey to the West*. The novel's protagonist is Sun Wukong, the Monkey King, who rides a cloud and battles spirits using kung fu and a staff that can extend.

He is the titular character of the smash hit video game *Black Myth: Wukong*. The game is gorgeous, punishing and, most importantly, fun. Players must battle through a gauntlet of bosses based on Chinese mythology. As is the popular trend in gaming, the plot isn't explained explicitly; players must read disconnected text to infer the greater story. The international gaming community is feverishly gobbling up any lore they can.

This has been my life for the past few weeks. I've scoured the internet for morsels of backstory and symbolism. I'll admit that I have felt remorse at least once for killing a boss in-game after reading about his tragic backstory.

I am a child again, eager to nerd out over novel content.

Such is the way culture is shared. Curious individuals seek what is new and share it with their friends and family. Eventually, a trendsetter will catch on and expose the gem to a broader audience. What is foreign becomes familiar and subcultures become mainstream. Culture is sticky; it cross-pollinates.

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Crossbow hits the bull's-eye in Pengshui

By TAN YINGZI and **DENG RUI** in Chongqing

A traditional sport, Miao crossbow, is becoming increasingly popular among young people in Chongqing's Pengshui Miao and Tujia autonomous county, as youth display a keen interest in Chinese culture and history in recent years.

Located in southeast Chongqing, Pengshui is home to 318,000 Miao people who comprise 45.4 percent of the county's population.

The crossbow holds significant historical and cultural importance among the Miao ethnic group in China. The Miao people have a long tradition of using crossbows for hunting, warfare, and cultural ceremonies. The crossbow is not only a practical tool for survival but also a symbol of bravery and skill within Miao society.

In the 1980s, it began to grow in popularity among many ethnic groups. In 1986, it was listed as a competitive event at the 3rd National Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities.

The Miao crossbow is known for its unique design and craftsmanship. It is typically made of wood and bamboo, with intricate carvings and decorations that reflect the cultural heritage of the Miao people. The crossbow bolts are often decorated with feathers and other embellishments, adding to their aesthetic appeal.

In 2005, the production and shooting skills of the Miao crossbow were included in the intangible cultural heritage list of Pengshui county.

Pengshui boasts a long history of making and using the Miao crossbow with a professional team set up in 1989. In 1999, the Pengshui Crossbow Team represented Chongqing for the first time at the 6th National Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities and got fourth place in the individual event. Now, it is the home to the only professional Miao crossbow shooting and manufacturing team in the southwestern municipality which has won eights golds, 14 silvers and 12 bronzes at the national events.

"All of our crossbows are made in the traditional way," says Zhang Hao, coach of the team.

The traditional Miao crossbow is made without any metal parts, but with wood, bamboo, animal bone, rope and other materials, he says.

In the county, local communities and schools will organize crossbow activities every month to promote the sport, especially among young students. In Miao culture, men were trained in the traditional art of using the crossbow from a young age.



A member of the local Miao crossbow team practices shooting at a training base in Pengshui Miao and Tujia autonomous county, Chongqing, on Sept 19. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"More and more people are participating in crossbow shooting," says Wang Heng, a champion of the men's standing position in the national standard crossbow event at the 10th National Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities in 2015.

"This intangible cultural heritage is our excellent ethnic culture, and we have a responsibility to protect and pass it on," he says.

Among the 10 members of the local crossbow team, most are Miao people. They all have their own jobs, but when they have free time, they gather together for training.

"We strive to improve their competitive level while making efforts to pass on this skill to future generations," the champion says.

The Miao ethnic group can be traced back to a group living in the eastern plains of China over 7,000 years ago. More than 11 million Miao people are now scattered across nine provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in southern China.

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