

Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf: Creative Industry, Market and the State-Animated Modernity in China

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ABSTRACT

Animation/comic industry is one of the core creative industries in China. This paper is a case study of the most popular domestic animation *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* since 2009. This exemplary case is an epitome of the creative industries in China representing a popular hype that is promoted by the commercial as well as the political discourses in China. On the one hand, *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* demonstrates a real commercial success, and its perpetual influence and populism are precipitated by the online discussion among the major social network sites in China. This discussion is not only bottom-up but also commercially driven by the producers and above all supported by the united front of the state found online and other official television stations. It is a domain in which the audience's taste and the state's top down strategies align. The rationale for the state's support is clear: this animation illustrates how the state-driven and state-censored animation can serve to produce a kind of modernity that can mesmerize the young generations. The paper argues that *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* represents a conjuncture in which the state's interest is resonant with the market sentiments; it is then able to manufacture the consent and popularity among the market, and at the same time embody the current social contradictions at large. For the latter, rather than being left uncontrolled and inciting further dissidence in society, the discourse produced by *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* offers an imaginary solution to the problem. The animation as a creative industry sells a kind of modernity that reflects and echoes the state's hegemonic discourse of harmony.

Keywords: Animation, China, Comic, Hegemonic discourse, *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf*

1. INTRODUCTION

*Dongman**, the Chinese equivalent to “animation and comic”, always carries the negative connotation of naïveté, triviality, indulgence, and even ideological unhealthiness. It is also a cultural consumption that is associated with youth culture (although it is not limited to the youth). Yet, for the post 1980s, the youth have been exposed to various genres of *dongman* and they are the generation of *dongman*, living and consuming *dongman*-related products. Driven by the increase of national income, there has been a rise of consumer’s demand of *dongman* products and the state’s emphasis on the *dongman* industries. Why is there such a transformation?

Dongman in the Chinese context encompasses both comic and animation, with the latter produced in a larger scale as a cultural or creative industry in the 2000s. The Chinese animation started in 1928 and the first animation was called *Uproar in the Studio**, which was created by the wan brothers, including *Wan Laiming**, *Wan Guchan**, *Wan Chochen** and *Wan Dihuan**. The Wan brothers have long been recognized as the founder of Chinese animation. Without any formal education in art and design, they developed the earliest Chinese animation *Uproar in the Studio**. Other works included *Princess Iron Fan** and *Havoc in Heaven**, which were influenced by imagination from the east.

The year 1950 to 1964 is a golden stage of Chinese animation as a lot of Chinese fairy tales and traditional techniques have been incorporated into animation production. Works in this stage include *Pigsy Eats Watermelon**, *Little Tadpole Looks for Mamma**, *A Clever Duckling**, *Nezha Fights the Sea**, *Story of Effendi**, *Three Monks**, *Lotus Lantern**, *Legends of Monkey King**, *Music Up** and among others. The production of the Chinese animation was nearly prohibited during the Cultural Revolution, and it was only resumed since 1977. Up to 1984, there were approximately 100 animation productions in total.

With more than 85 years in history, *dongman* has been recognized as a form of subculture in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and until recent years it is considered as a part of

mass entertainment and popular culture. In this authoritarian state, except for the mainstream televised cartoons or the commercial comic, few of these kinds of popular culture appear in the mass media. In recent years, basically, we could only witness the kind of genre that deals with fun, laughter and love. Political comics in the Chinese context does not exist (c.f. political cartoons in Middle East e.g. Gocek, 1998). Given the politically and ideologically correct content, the state prefers local *dongman* to the imported ones, so the state controls the number of imported manga. Still, in the 80s, the local *dongman* was not as well-received by the audiences as the imported *dongman* such as *Astro Boy** from Japan.

As a national policy to support cultural industries, the state started supporting the animation industry proactively since 2000, following the announcement of “The Notice of Strengthening the Import and Management of Animated Films” in March. Another official statement entitled “Suggestions on the Development of the Animation Industry”, which was issued in 2004, demonstrating the state’s focus on the animation industry. As the statement puts it, “Under the economic conditions of socialism, developing the country’s animation industry is an important way to enrich the socialist culture, to satisfy the mental needs of people especially the youth, and to improve the economic and industry structure. It is also a way to add value to facilitate new technology, to increase employment and to strengthen country’s competitiveness in the era of economic globalization” (SARFT, 2004). Since then, a great progress has been made in the *dongman* industry, exemplified by an increase of 47% in production in 2005, compared with 2004.

In 2006, the State Council issued another official statement, entitled “Suggestions on Developing the Animation Industry”, which was defined as “a creativity-focused industry with a wide range of forms, from animation to comic and movie” (Ministry of Finance et al., 2006). The industry also includes publication, film, TV, audio, dramatic and cartoon images related to businesses, such as costume, toy and digital game. To understand this broad industry better, the state conducted an extensive study of the field

* List of Chinese-English Translations (in alphabetical order):

A Clever Duckling / 聰明的小鴨
Astro Boy / 鐵臂阿童木
Dongman / 動漫
Havoc in Heaven / 大鬧天宮
Legends of Monkey King / 西遊記
Little Tadpole Looks for Mamma / 小蝌蚪找媽媽

Lotus Lantern / 寶蓮燈
Music Up / 我為歌狂
Nezha Fights the Sea / 哪吒鬧海
Pigsy Eats Watermelon / 豬八戒吃西瓜
Princess Iron Fan / 鐵扇公主
Story of Effendi / 阿凡提的故事
Three Monks / 三個和尚

Uproar in the Studio / 大鬧畫室
Wan Chochen / 萬超塵
Wan Dihuan / 萬滌寰
Wan Guchan / 萬古蟾
Wan Laiming / 萬籟鳴

in 2011. According to the Ministry of Culture, the study covered 29 provinces and collected data from 1228 animation companies. The Chinese animation industry was estimated to be valued RMB 47 billion in 2010, which was a 27.8% increase from 2009 (Ministry of Culture, 2011). It is estimated that by 2015 the valuation of the industry will exceed RMB 200 billion and the industry professional will reach 1 million (Securities Times, 2011). Since 2006, the Chinese government put an annual investment of 200 million yuan (USD 29.2 million) in the animation industry. Up to 2009, there were already 10,000 companies producing cartoons, comics and animation, creating employment to more than 200,000 people. According to the statistics from the International Cultural Industries Fair, Europe and America have been the major markets of export of China's cultural industries. China's tendency to globalize and export animation products ties in with the discussion of so-called soft power of China in the academic circle.

This paper specifically examines the animation and comic industry in China with a case study of the most popular Chinese animation *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf*, which was produced by a private corporate owned by Huang Weiming, Lin Yuting and Luo Yinggeng. This 100-episode TV series of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* have not only been aired on almost 50 TV channels, but also been shown on the Disney channel, which reached a wide range of audiences from 52 Asian countries. The TV series were turned into film with its initial commercial success with 80 million yuan (USD 11.7 million) profits in 3 weeks. The film *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* was the first Chinese animation that achieved a huge commercial success at this scale. Globally, even the Finnish producer of *Angry Birds* considered *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* as its main competitor.

This exemplary case of creative industry represents a popular hype that is promoted by the commercial as well as the political discourses in China, and one that results with political implications and controls. Research methods involved in this study include policy analysis, industry analysis and interview with government

and officials and senior business executives in the industry. *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* is chosen as a case study because it demonstrates a real commercial success, and its perpetual influence and populism are precipitated by the online discussion among the major social network sites in China. This discussion is not only bottom-up but also commercially driven by the producers and above all supported by the united front of the state found online and other official television stations. It is a domain in which the audience's taste, commercial interests and the state's top down strategies align. The rationale for the state's support is clear: this animation illustrates how the state-driven and state-censored animation can serve to produce a kind of modernity that can mesmerize the young generations.

2. ANIMATION/COMIC AS A STATE-DRIVEN CREATIVE INDUSTRY

The development of the animation industry has long been driven by the state. Since the state issued The 10th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development in 2001, a new function has been introduced to culture, not only as a vehicle of propaganda and political advocacy, but also as an industry to foster economic impacts while the state stays vigilant on the industry's social impacts. In other words, the state increasingly values cultural industry as a key to drive the state's future economic development. The state issued The 10th Five-Year Plan on Cultural Industry in 2001, suggesting seven measures to develop the cultural industry: 1) to encourage sizeable operation and professionalization; 2) to facilitate reasonable competition across the industry; 3) to invest on large scale projects for cultural resources development; 4) to raise capital on the cultural industry; 5) to adjust the taxation system and IMF policy; 6) to improve talent management system; 7) to encourage expansion-oriented cultural industry (National Development and Reform Commission, 2001). In 2002, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television issued the first animation industry related document, entitled "Development Plan on the Animation Industry During '15'", outlining the major challenges of China's animation

industry between 1996 and 2000, including: 1) the insufficient domestic animation production; 2) poor quality of the domestic animation production; 3) fragmented institution and immature system; 4) insensible industry structure. Since the development plan was introduced, the number of the provinces of animation production increased from four to eleven, resulting 7.2 times more production outputs in 2002.

The year 2004 appeared as a critical year for the manga industry. The state released “Suggestions on the Development of the Animation Industry” and proposed 18 relevant policies to ensure the stability of its development, restating its pivotal role in China’s economic reform. These policies include limiting the ratio between domestic animation and imported animation on TV channel no less than 6:4 and stipulating a 1:1 ratio between domestic and imported animation. Notably, there had been a steady growth from 2005 to 2009. The number of provinces producing animation has doubled and the total number of outputs has increased four times in four years. And yet, until 2010, coincided with a reduced pace of intervention from the state, the number of provinces producing animation was reduced from 22 in 2005 to 19 in 2009. The phenomenon evidenced that the boom of the industry was mainly a consequence of the state intervention, and while market force may be secondary.

To ensure the market share of animation industry and its survival, the state adopted several approaches to support the industry development. Firstly, the state established four satellite channels specifically for this cultural product. Secondly, the state would provide financial resources to the TV channels if they broadcast locally-produced animation, mainly focusing on domestic production. Such approach seeks to guarantee the domestic demand and boost up the amount of production. And yet, there were problems driving the quantity of domestic production through this approach. To gain the subsidy from the government, the TV channels would broadcast the domestic production regardless of the quality of the production. Some of these productions were scheduled to screen at mid-night as a token

to fulfill the funding requirement at the expenses of the interest of the youth and children audience. As such, the state’s subsidy policy had been widely criticized by the media.

The state’s influence was not confined to its manipulation on the broadcast channels. Its rein over the industry was primarily exercised through censorship. Over the past decade, there was only one domestic production, *Cat and Blue Rabbit**, which had been banned in 2007, not by the state, but by the TV channel, CCTV. The animation was banned because of a few violent shots but the animation went live again after it was awarded with the first prize of outstanding domestic production in 2012. Although only a few domestic animations were banned, there are far more examples among the imported animations. The Japanese production *Death Note** was one of the most controversial cases. The animation was about a gifted high school kid who accidentally discovered the supernatural “Death Notebook” by which he could rule a world “cleansed of evil” as “God”, despite the fact that the government intended to stop him. Ideologically it contradicts to the state: it is not just that the teen challenges the state, but that the narrative touches the taboo of talking supernatural and spiritual matters to the public. Despite its popularity among the youngsters, the content of *Death Note* was soon framed as an imported content detrimental to the personal development of children. As such, in 2007, the relevant unit investigated and punished all the relevant bodies and individuals who distributed *Death Note* across the country. In the meantime, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television would recommend animation films based on their relevance and alignment to the state’s ideology. *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* was one remarkable case.

3. GAINING POPULARITY THROUGH BROADCASTING AND MARKETING

Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf is a story based on the timeline of 3131 in the lamb’s traditional calendar (which is equivalent to 2231 in Gregorian calendar). A group of lambs move to the green grassland, during which time, the lamb community is prosperous and every community

* List of Chinese-English Translations (in alphabetical order):
Cat and Blue Rabbit / 虹貓藍兔
Death Note / 死亡筆記

member is happy. Meanwhile, a couple of wolves, which live in a forest next to the green grassland, are jealous about the harmonious lamb community and they constantly intend to attack the lamb community for food and resources. In other words, the storyline is driven by the underlying conflict over the scarcity of resources. There are several other characters in the green grassland: the tiger that protects the security of the land; the elephant who follows the law and seeks to maintain the justice; cockroaches and mikes whose power in a group cannot be underestimated. Despite numberless conflicts among the characters, most episodes ended with a peaceful resolution. No matter how hard the wolves seek to harm the lambs, the lambs always handle the situation wittily and resolve the conflicts. The storyline carries a cultural connotation to 'harmonious society', which is in line with the state's ideology. In other words, *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* appears humorous and entertaining; yet it is laden with ideologies, indoctrination and cultural meanings.

First aired on Hangzhou Television in 2005, the animation immediately gained its popularity across the country. With more than 500 episodes, the animation series have been aired on almost 50 TV channels, from CCTV to TVB and BTV Animation Channel. Its producer Creative Power Entertaining Corporation (CPE), an animation company based in Guangdong Province, with its partnership with Disney also aired the animation *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* in 52 other countries including India, Singapore and Australia. The animation later has been turned into movie with only RMB 6 million initial investment but its box office reaches 80 million sales in its first season, which is even more than the sales of another American production *Kung Fu Panda** and hit the record in China. Driven by the success of both the animation series and the movie, a wide range of products with the images associated with the animation, from toy to accessories, have been rapidly circulated in the market. *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* is then regarded as the first successful domestic animation production in the PRC. At this point, I propose an intriguing academic question: what are the economic, social and

political factors that lead to the success of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf*?

Firstly, the marketing campaign of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* successfully leverages the influences among the different key players in and around the animation industry. For instance, in view of the popularity of the animation series on CCTV, one of the Chinese TV channels with the widest base of audience, the company invested heavily on the advertising campaign on the same TV channel, generating huge exposure of the animation and thus public interest in the series and the movie. Built on the success of the animation series, *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* attracts various partnership and investment, resulting in a variety of side products related to the story. These products not only generate additional revenue but also increase the publicity of the story. For example, the marketing partnership with KFC, which gives out toys with the characters of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* through the set menu, creates a win-win situation for both the restaurant and the animation.

Apart from the conventional marketing approach, online advertising and marketing also serve as important ingredients of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf*'s success formula. In view of "The Most Creative Animation Award" in 2007, the company launched its digital campaign to intensify public interest in the upcoming movie. The company also identified popular websites and invested heavily on online advertising on these platforms to maximize the campaign's exposure. The company invited celebrities to do the dubbing and produced a theme song *Happy Ox Year* (*Happy 牛** Year*), which had been widely circulated on digital space. Several online call-out campaigns were launched, such as inviting the audiences to share the most likeable lamb in the animation. All these digital initiatives generated huge buzz on digital space and that contributed to the commercial success of the animation film.

4. LEVERAGING COMMERCIAL INFLUENCES THROUGH CYBER COMMUNITIES

Current success in cultural industries relies on publicity on the Internet, in particular if they want

* List of Chinese-English Translations (in alphabetical order):

Kung Fu Panda / 功夫熊猫

** The pronunciation of the word '牛 (cow)' in Chinese is similar to 'new' in English.

to target the young audience. The commercial success of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* was not only because of its advantage of state-driven TV monopoly, but also its use of mass communication channel, namely social media, to build up a cyber community around the animation.

There were 457 million Internet users at the end of 2010, and 265 million of them were estimated to use social networks regularly (Asia Digital Marketing Association, 2011). Among multiple social channels, Weibo, literally Sina Microblog, remains one of the most popular social networking sites with more than 300 million registered users in 2012. The functionality of Weibo is similar to the international social media platform, Twitter. There was a convention of using Weibo for social purposes. For instance, there was an online campaign to help parents find their missing children by taking snapshots of children begging on the street so that their parents may identify if those beggars are their children. By February 8, 2011, more than 83,000 users had participated in the campaign and 6 missing children were found. People in the manga industries admitted that online Weibo strategies are essential for the manga to expand the territorial influence: the latter is always achieved by a parallel online promotion and a real city event that features the fictional characters.

In view of the rapidly growing popularity of Weibo, along with the references to the Arabic spring, however, the central government is very sensitive to the discourse on social media; as such censorship appears common among Chinese social channels. Whatever is considered as a threat to the state's legitimacy will be deleted. The case of Shanghai Metro crash in 2011 is one of the typical cases of censorship on social media in China. There was a subway crash 2011, resulting in more than 200 people injured. In two hours, the accident emerged as the top discussion topic on Weibo. Citizens associated this accident to another accident in Wenzhou and blamed the central government for the state's monopoly and its corrupted officials. The furious posts around the accident were deleted mysteriously and only the positive posts from Shanghai Metro remained. The case served as a proof of the state's censorship

on Chinese social media with the ultimate goal to harmonize the online discourse.

Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf was probably one of the few animations that used Weibo for both commercial and political public relations. The company took advantage of the interconnectedness and the interactive nature of the social platform, and regularly conveyed positive messages as reflected by the characters and plots of the animation. Evidence on Weibo suggested that *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* always upholds social values and morals and pitches in with various social campaigns of the government. The Weibo account of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* was shown to customize its messaging in accordance with the key social issues around the time frame, such as "the lamb family's joining the joy of the relief of disaster and helping Yushu residents rebuild their home" and greeting the online audiences for the Chinese New Year. The publicity was presented via human faces for the brand. More importantly, the campaign's messaging was in line with the state's big initiatives, including, such as, "the lamb's family invites you to visit the expo" and "I love Guangzhou Asian Games". Indeed, the two events were both a significant benchmark of the rapidly growing China. For example, with the theme of "Better City – Better Life", the site of the Shanghai World Expo was the largest in the history of events, and the international fair sought to position Shanghai as an international city. As for the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou, it was the second time to be hosted by China after being held in Beijing in 1990. The game became a platform for China to showcase its economic achievements over the past ten years. The Weibo's posts helped the state to promote its big initiatives on behalf of the cartoon character would undoubtedly reinforce its pro-constitution image.

In addition to Weibo, the digital presence of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* was also on other international social networking sites. For instance, the company launched a Facebook page, particularly targeting Taiwanese audiences, and it uploaded past animation videos on YouTube, extending its base of audiences. In 2011, an online hub with social networking functions was

developed, facilitating the interaction among its fans and thus strengthening their brand loyalty. All these could be conceived as the animation's own strategy to brand itself as a potential powerful global cultural product which hopefully the state could include in its policy regarding globalization. Thus, there is no surprise that the company circulated the news online about "*Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* won the most popular cartoon award, beating over *Doraemon*" (April 27, 2010) and "Japanese media described *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* as internationally recognized Chinese animation, which may be even better than Japanese animation" (November 28, 2011). Widely circulated online was a picture showing the cartoon figure of Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf greeting the former Prime Minister of Japan Taro Aso and the state's premier Wen Jiabao. The picture was widely circulated online and it helped the animation to establish its status as a national cultural product.

Apart from the online commercial strategies that we have discussed, the internet-circulated animation could amplify its social effect. Studies in the West (e.g. the US) have demonstrated that, from *Flintstones* to *The Simpsons*, animation not only constructs a representation of family, gender and class, and reveals social problems and contradictions. For some specific programs, they also show that cyber communities are particularly active in co-constructing these values (Stabile, 2003). In China, should there be a hidden ideology embodied in *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf*, the values would be widely internalized by the young audience.

5. THE POLITICAL CORRECTNESS OF HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

Nevertheless, despite the above-mentioned social and economic factors, what made *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* successful was its alignment to the state's ideology, the harmonious society, which made the animation gain the approval and support from the state. The notion the harmonious society came from the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and that is "to maintain social stability through proactively leveraging positive influences,

strengthening the creativity of society, mediating the interest of multiple parties and facilitating collaboration among people." In 2006, the party even described that "the resolution of conflict is an ongoing process to construct a socialist and harmonious society".

Even the most commercial animation from Disney in the US, such as *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, or the *Lion King* also attempts to capture a utopian, prescriptive and moral version of truth in society (Pinsky, 2004). From Batman's battles against corrupted local officials and politicians to Captain America's war against Nazi Germany, these comic stories all echo the American's "national mood" in an imaginative, subtle and fictional way (Wright, 2003). Most importantly, albeit the fact that they are more consumer-oriented, they are proven to be influential among the children and the youth generations. That is why in China, it is not unnatural for the state to preach their discourse of harmony in society. Besides, in Asia such as Japan, there have been studies under a Marxist framework, indicating that animation and comics have started to shift from an entertainment medium, targeting for lower class or marginal citizens, to a "novel form of official communication" operated and subsidized by corporates and semi-governmental institutions (Sharon, 2000). This is what has been observed in China, where the privately-owned *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* and the state co-produce the same message for the public.

The message of harmonious society embedded in *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* could be seen in three aspects: firstly, the rational way of handling interpersonal conflicts, secondly, the harmony between human and environment, and last but not least, the symbolic meaning of green grassland. Take episode 16th for example: in view of the silence of the wolves, the lamb community suspected there would be a bigger conspiracy, so they decided to use the "magic box" to defeat the wolves. Yet, when they opened the "magic box", there was a note saying, "only with courage will you be able to win" – suggesting the lamb community to be brave and cooperative in order to overcome any obstacles. In episode 28th, the wolves pretended to be a peacemaker although not

everyone in the lamb community was convinced. Still, one of them quoted a story from Buddhism that explains the wisdom of “taking revenge would never end”, so they decided to review the wolves’ mediation proposal with vigilance. Despite the insincerity of the wolves, the lamb community was still able to figure out the trick and then punish the wolves. All these episodes drew references to the Chinese tradition and encouraged an unsentimental way of handling interpersonal conflicts in order to maintain harmony in the society.

Despite numerous conflicts throughout the storyline, there were a few episodes focusing on the cooperation between the lambs and the wolves. For example, from episode 525th to 530th, the aliens invented a technology called “big triangle”, which sought to transfer massive wastes to the green grassland. Given the perceived environmental impacts on the habitat, both the wolves and the lambs found out the solution and helped the aliens to fix its broken “big triangle”. Another example could be the storyline from episode 53rd to 60th. Both the wolves and the lambs became goldfish and they cooperated to search “the pearl of deep sea”. As the lambs were aware of the pearl’s important function in balancing the oceans and the land, they sought to put the pearl back to its original place, ensuring environmental stability. The environmentalism within the storyline extended the notion of harmony beyond the scope of interpersonal relationship; there was a pressing need to maintain the harmony between human and the environment.

Putting *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* into the context of contemporary China, the story used the animal community as a metaphor to the social community. The green grassland actually mirrored contemporary China. A couple of pressing social problems in China had been incorporated into the storyline of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf*, such as corruption, inequality, food security, human right and environment protection. All these problems intensified the conflicts between the lambs and the wolves, which represented the increasing tension between the new middle class and the working class. Since the economic reform in 1978, there has been an

increasing tension between the rich, who benefited from the reform, and the massive working class who faced the challenges of the rapid economic transition. Another underlying cultural reference could be the corrupted government officials, who abused their power to suppress and take advantage of the ordinary people. The storyline was different from the natural law that lamb is the vulnerable victim and the wolf beats the lamb. In the contrary, with the wisdom and collectivity within the lamb community, it was able to win over the wolf. In other words, the story *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* was packed with allusions to the contemporary China and the state-advocated way to handle the current situation.

Applying Foucault’s view on discourse (1980), which referred to the system of thoughts, to the underlying symbolic meanings of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf*, the animation was resonant with the dominant political discourse of a harmonious society. For instance, the image of meadow, where the animals lived peacefully with sufficient resources, mirrored the ideal Chinese society. The image of gloomy forest, where the wolves live, formed a sharp contrast to the image meadow. Such comparison differentiated and highlighted the bright side of a harmonious society. With its squared alignment to the state’s advocated political discourse, *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* was awarded “The Best Animation Image” and “The Best Animation Branding” at the 1st animation award competition, organized by the Chinese government (Department of Cultural Industry, 2011). These awards represented the endorsement from the state, and that strengthened parents’ confidence in the quality of the animation, resulting in enormous popularity and influence over its audiences. The animation became a soft tool to reinforce the ideology of a harmonious society among the new generation.

Apart from that, the name of the main characters also carries connotation to the notion of harmonious society (Acgma11, 2010). Take the official name of Big Big Wolf for example: it differentiates from the bad wolves in various Western fables, such as the one in *Little Red Riding Hood*. Why would the state project a negative image on the wolf who in fact threatens the

interest of the goats? The official answer may be that the state tends to project a peaceful picture for any children animation, thus minimizing the wickedness and undesirability of the de facto evils. I would think a political interpretation is more concordant with the discourse of harmony. If the story is an epitome of the Chinese society, goats naturally imply the laymen and wolves are the rich, the powerful, and the officials. Unquestionably, the state would like to avoid stigmatizing the powerful as bad cadres in the society as they owe the vested interest. A more neutral portrayal of the wolf not only saves the face of the powerful but also emphasizes the good intention of the state to ease the row between the two classes.

In other words, aside from the successful marketing campaign, *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* appeared more popular than other animations because of its relevance to the social phenomenon in China and its alignment with the state's ideology. The storyline of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf's* focused on the bonding within the lamb community and the non-violent method as an ideal way for the resolution of conflict, which aligned with the notion of harmonious society. With the young generation as its target audiences, the animation served as a propaganda vehicle to educate the youth with the ideology of a harmonious society. The state sought to introduce this idea was to reduce people's intention to participate in social movements, which would be a threat to the state's absolute authority.

However, there is also a slight difference between China's strategic use of animation for public discourses and the Western ones. For the latter, for example, John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett (2002) argue that the American comic story exemplified by *Superman* underscores the mono-myth of the superheroes that embodies values of virtues and justice to selflessly serve as a servant of the public alone. To certain extent, Shelton and Jewett argue that comic heroes are against the system, which are malevolent and imperfect, and heroes constitute a form of not just modern mythology but also popular fascism (Lawrence and Jewett, 2002; Reynolds, 1994). However, in China, *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* in the comic is a model, more or less like the political

hero of Lei Feng, who aligns with the institutions and the state to serve the community zealously. In this sense, comics in China are part of the grand narratives of the state and the collective public. Rather than anti-hegemonic, it is a form of popular nationalism.

Another distinction between *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* and other foreign animations, both of which used conflicts among characters to develop the storyline, was that there was a lack of violence in *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf*. Take the movie in 2012 for example: despite martial art as one of the selling points, 'violence' rarely appeared. As violence would be considered as harmful to the audiences' mental health, the producer had to avoid these elements in order to pass the state's censorship. Apart from that, *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* advocates a rational way to handle the conflicts among groups. For instance, there was an episode about the lamb community's intention to defeat the wolf. And yet, the leader referred to Buddhism and suggested to build a friendship instead. The underlying cultural meaning is to encourage people to use negotiation and communication for problem solving.

6. DISCOURSE AND THE ANIMATED-MODERNITY

Media scholars would possibly investigate the question which is about the effect and consequences created by animations. In this paper, I think there is no need to enumerate the inconclusive studies of the media effect from cartoons on children. Culturally, in my view, what needs to be emphasized is the manipulative consequence of the discourse of harmony. Karen Dill (2009) discussed how manufactured images, imagined desires and fabricated stories from TV, films, video games and music could "rectify" what people believe to be reality, needs and facts in daily life. In the end, fantasy becomes the authenticity and mediated whim becomes the truth. In the Chinese context, it seems that the peaceful resolution as shown by the relationship between *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* becomes the legitimate answer to the social problems, if any.

The consequence is not only a circulation of the discourse of harmony but above all, the creation of an implicit and general atmosphere

of content with the discourse. Critical as they are, the general populace, in particular, the new generation, might appreciate a kind of modernity that *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* attempts to create. *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* is able to animate such modernity from a practical point of view, not relying on foreign interference and empty political ideals such as freedom, human rights and equality that Western nations cannot even fulfill, but catering the local and individual situations. While admitting the existence of social vicissitudes as reflected in the cartoons, it uses the discourse of harmony as a departure and prescribes a version of modernity for individuals who would greatly enjoy their vested interest and wealth. On a personal level, the lives of the *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* are never interrupted by the system. They pursue their own pleasure and individual goals just like the satisfaction of everyone in the city life through consumption, and for the latter, the state would even enhance it rather than suppress it as in the Mao's era. The importance is that the individuality or individualism still exists in a small circle in society. It is only when certain social groups meet, do the so-called conflicts emerge and have to be solved. With an improving materialistic life for city dwellers, *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* simply forestalls a picture of a stable transitional society that they are longing for. In this transitional stage, people are expected to have significantly advanced their living condition with ever-escalating materialistic desires, although for society they continue to expect and await the piecemeal improvement of the state in terms of social equality, law and order, and political freedom. Animation as a sort of creative industry seems to be a perfect platform or medium for the state and the state-owned media to animate the goal and give a fantasy that this transitional development of China lingers. Technically the creation can be big imaginations without boundaries. It can craft a new world that problems can be eventually solved but immediate happiness is vividly seen!

7. CONCLUSION: A HAPPY SOCIETY AND A PLEASANT GOAT

In a nutshell, *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* is indeed a story of commercial success but its success, in fact, is not just about the power of marketing. As

its storyline is packed with sophistication and relevance to the contemporary Chinese society and the ideology of a harmonious society, *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* is sublimed into a privileged cultural product that is massively produced as an industry with state rapport. The political correctness not only helped the animation survive the censorship, but also made it favorable by the state, gaining the state's recognition and thus public exposure. To amplify the messages of its marketing campaign, the company made good use of social media, which had been mainly used for social purposes, to circulate its commercial messages, and to build up an online community around its fans, which strengthens their brand loyalty. So the real success formula of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* is a combination of business and online strategies, the development of the creative industries, and positive intervention and leveraging influences of the Chinese state.

Of course, the success of *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* has its own commercial reason beyond the political one. At the end, though, what attracts the audience is the primary theme of the animation or comics: the fictional representation of emotion and human relationships in the current social context, and a conclusion echoed by researchers of animation (e.g. Prough's conclusion in the study of *shojo* manga in Japan in 2010). On an individual level, this is not too different from engaging in social network on Weibo or Facebook. Affect or emotion is what retains audience on social network, and in animation, audience witnesses people's relationships as if they are investing in their own. Ironically, on the aggregated level, the connection to others through relationship is also on the same wavelength with the intended discourse of the government. While the utterance of collectivism, unity or harmony from the point of view of the state is conceived as a political mission, for the ordinary public, few of them want to deviate from this ideal as well. As already discussed earlier, the new version of modernity for the public created in *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* is a non-intervened self-pursuit of pleasure that—as play, food, territory and so forth in the cartoon--the state would not objectify at all. Rather than subduing it, in a rising economy—the state tends to enlarge the consumer society and

join the global materialistic world. In this sense, modernity is helpful for the state as well as for the individuals. Domestically, cultural or creative industry like *Pleasant Goat and Grey Wolf* aids the state to rule while externally, it demonstrates the state's soft power. Thus, in the name of pushing the national culture, creativity and economy, we would expect that the state would continue to use this model to rule. In other words, the discourse of harmony, though disparaged or mocked by the Chinese online community, is not too discordant with the pragmatic values of many Chinese middle class and new riches in this rising economy.

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