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Those works were created soon after the COVID-19 epidemic broke out in China, when people were in lockdown and in need of some cuteness for mental comfort. I think that's why Panghu went viral.

"I still remember the feeling of 'entering a new world' when I read the Japanese manga 'Dragon Ball Z' for the first time in third grade," he said. "I adored its author Akira Toriyama and wanted to become a manga artist like him."

Bu2ma, however, majored in architecture at university, though he confesses that he is still inept at drawing buildings.

In his senior year, a Beijing magazine published his debut comic, entitled "Mr Adam." It was a European-style comic — very different from Japanese-style manga.

After publishing several works, Bu2ma decided to abandon manga. His latest work went unfinished, prompting rumors on the Internet that he had undergone cervical spine surgery, which weren't true.

"I just couldn't see any future doing manga," he said.

The Beijing magazine that published his serialized works shut down as mobile devices and other forms of entertainment captured the public's fancy.

"I believe there will still be good manga and manga artists in China, but the era of comics has passed," he said.

After he quit manga work, Bu2ma became a toy developer. His tiger works rejuvenated his career, but along with fame came the inevitable online repudiation.

A Weibo blogger who goes by the screen name Liangnian claimed that Panghu was a

rip-off of tigers he drew and compared his own works with Bu2ma's.

"I was so angry that it felt like I was going to have a heart attack," said Bu2ma. "Metaphorically speaking, if you are a cat lover and people accuse you of abusing cats, how would you feel?"

Bu2ma ignored Liangnian's attacks on him at first, but after the posts drew thousands of comments and reposts on Weibo, he went on the offensive.

Bu2ma did a long post to explain how he created Panghu and the detailed process of painting.

"I referred to traditional Chinese paintings and pictures of real tigers, yes, but that's called parody," he wrote in his post. "Why would I rip off a cartoon tiger?"

Fortunately for Bu2ma, fans of Panghu believed his version.

"I'm always proud to be original, and being original is my bottom line," he said. "That's why I felt so angry."

Now that the dust has settled, Bu2ma is back to creating more cartoons and toys.

"My biggest trouble now is that Panghu is so popular that it takes up too much of my energy, and I don't have enough time to learn new things and improve myself, which is a dangerous sign for me," he said.

"I hope that in this Year of the Tiger, I can make some positive changes."



"Xiaoshu" (Minor Heat)



"Dashu" (Major Heat)



"Qiufen" (Autumn Equinox)



"Liqiu" (Autumn Begins)