



"The Bad Guys" is scheduled to hit cinemas across China on April 29. — Ti Gong



"Hotel Transylvania: Transformania"

Animation comes of age in China with more releases in the pipeline

Xu Wei

Animated movies have grown in popularity in China.

On the Chinese mainland, 65 animated films were released last year, and 12 of them grossed more than 100 million yuan (US\$15.7 million) at the box office, while six of the top-grossing animations were produced in China.

Last year, 22 foreign animated films were released, most of them from Japan and the United States. Chinese productions such as "Boonie Bears: The Wild Life," "Green Snake" and "New Gods: Nezha Reborn" topped the yearly box office charts in the animation category. Realistic film "I Am What I Am" was also well received by audiences for their in-depth depiction of the lives of "left-behind" rural children.

Chinese animation has made significant advances in scripting and storytelling, besides graphic visuals. Many of them have drawn inspiration from Chinese culture, especially ancient mythology and intangible cultural heritage. Some of the animators are blending real-life stories with folk arts and customs.

This year, animation fans will be able to enjoy a variety of creations, both foreign and domestic, in cinemas and on streaming platforms.

"Hotel Transylvania: Transformania," the fourth and final installment of the popular cartoon film series, will be released in China tomorrow.



A poster for "God with Three Eyes"

The Sony Pictures production tells the story of how Johnny turns into a monster, while Johnny's vampire father-in-law and other monster companions change into humans. They try to adjust to their new mismatched bodies but work together to discover a way to return to their original selves.

The film series premiered in 2012, and has since enjoyed a global following because of its funny representation of vampire and monster characters, emphasis on family bonding, and amusing moments.

The American animation "The Bad Guys" is scheduled to hit cinemas across China on April 29. The adventure comedy revolves around the efforts of several reformed but misunderstood wild animals who try to be good. However, it is definitely not an easy job for the "bad guys," including Mr Wolf,

Shark and Snake.

The film is directed by veteran animator Pierre Perifel, whose previous works include "Rise of the Guardians" and "Kung Fu Panda 2."

Other foreign works tipped to be introduced this year include "Lightyear," "Minions: The Rise of Gru," "Slam Dunk" and "Super Hero."

Several Chinese animations, mainly targeting children during the summer vacation from July to August, are also in the pipeline.

Among them is Wang Jun's "God with Three Eyes," an adventure story about Yang Jian, a mythical hero with a third eye on his forehead. It took him four years to complete the film.

Yang is banished to the mortal world. The only way to return to heaven is to open his third eye and defeat the thousand-year dragon. But he gets caught up in a conspiracy.

Director Wang was previously involved in the production of the critically acclaimed works "Monkey King: Hero Is Back" and "Ne Zha." "God with Three Eyes" will feature spectacular and artistic scenes depicting Eastern aesthetics.

Hu Yibo, a Chinese animator, spent six years directing the science-fiction animation "Out of the Earth." The plot revolves around a 14-year-old boy's efforts to flee the earth after it is destroyed by a meteorite rain.

Beijing's distinct architecture is incorporated into the scenes. A one-second shot usually requires 24 sketches, and

this is the Chinese animators' first attempt at narrating a sci-fi story.

Hu said that as a sci-fi lover, he tries to bring new possibilities and inspiration to Chinese animations.

"Chinese animation has many untapped potentials, and it has the potential to transcend the boundaries of ancient mythology and folklore," he added. "I hope to tell a future story that demonstrates the Chinese people's bravery, tenacity and heroism in the face of adversity."

"A Portrait of the Artist as A Young Man" is another domestic production that follows a group of young guys chasing their artistic dreams. The film will be narrated by well-known filmmaker Jia Zhangke and singers Ren Ke and Peng Lei.

Gu Xiaoming, former vice chairman of the Shanghai Film Critics Society, has praised the remarkable breakthroughs made in Chinese animation, particularly in character images and visual styles.

"Chinese animation, in addition to traditional stories and images, can also combine philosophical thoughts with touching real-life stories to explore and depict humanity," Gu said. "The genre requires the collaboration of many people, including animators, scriptwriters and directors."

He also told Chinese animators to make more interesting short animated films and to never stop looking for new ways to bring new life and possibilities to the genre.