

Experience keeping Jilin strong in animation

By CHAI HUA
AND ZHANG ZHAO

Jilin province, in northeastern China, is considered the cradle of New China's animated film industry and has grown into a national animation and talent development center, where one of the main players is the Jilin Animation Comic and Games Group (ACG).

Although ACG was founded quite recently, in 2009, it is a rising star in the animation and games industry, with at least 800 employees and 16 affiliated companies. It had assets of 1.2 billion yuan (\$189 million) last year, sales of 300 million yuan, and profits of more than 83 million yuan.

Its major company is the Jilin Animation Comic and Games Co Ltd, whose largest shareholder is a State-owned company, which has put more than 8 million yuan into it.

It covers every aspect of the animation and comic games sector, from investment to software development and production, to promotion and distribution of animated and comic products, and exhibitions.

ACG has acquired five subsidiaries over the past two years that handle different parts of the industry.

The Mokun Culture and Communication Co, which was founded by ACG and the Jilin Fine Arts Publishing Co, focuses on comic books and has more than 50 series.

The Changchun Senhong Information Technology Service Co concentrates on animation and video games development, with a team of 60 young people who cooperate with internationally known video game developers. They produce online games and video games for home use on various platforms including PS3, PSP, NDS, Wii and Xbox 360.

Dramatic plays for children are another sector the group covers, with a company it set up in conjunction with the Beijing Children's Art Theater, the Jilin Theater, and a local newspaper. It has put on more than 100 shows with audiences running into the thousands after opening only a year ago.

Industry support

To provide support for the industry, the local government put 40 million yuan into it last year to build a technical service system for animation and comic games, with production centers, special effects studios, and publishing centers.

It has also become the most important place for training personnel, as well as for research and development, to provide resources for the various companies.

And, the results have been quite remarkable. One example is the Zhihe Animation Group, a Changchun cartoon and animation company, in the provincial capital, which had sales of 87 million yuan in 2010. It is now planning an international animation park.

Another animation company has produced 200 hours' worth of cartoons and three of its products were shown on CCTV, China's national TV station.

Meanwhile, the Jilin Yushuo Animation and Comic Games Co produced a 4D movie that was shown in the Jilin pavilion at Shanghai Expo. The company was given a national award as an industrial demonstration site.

At the same time, the Yilian Culture and Art Development Co has held its sixth International Comic and Animation Fair in Changchun.

The province had more than 360 animation and game producers by the end of last year, 51 of which focused on animation and the rest on



Artists in their workshop in Changchun, the capital of Jilin, creating items for animation and comics. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

video games and entertainment.

The companies have 1.2 billion yuan in registered capital in all and more than 47,000 employees. Their output last year was worth 6.2 billion yuan, or about 30 percent more than for 2009.

The province's most recent figures for the animation industry's output in the first half of this year, show it up 26 percent from the same period of 2010.

Jilin's animators turn out

more than 800 hours of footage a year.

Now, thanks to government support, Changchun and cities in the surrounding area, including Jilin, Siping, and Yanji, have industrial zones for developing the animation industry, some of the more prominent of which are the Jilin Asian Cultural Creative Technology Zone, Zhihe International Animation Industry Park, and Changchun Software and Animation Outsourcing Park.



Detailed artwork in an animation and comics studio in Changchun.

Jilin Culture Department head Lin Jun (right) introducing the Public Technology Platform for Jilin Comics and Animations. The entire project of developing Jilin's animation business costs 60 million yuan.



New park project puts it way out ahead

By SHAO WEI

Jilin province, whose animation business output showed immense growth in 2010, could turn itself into a training and research center for China's animation industry, the head of an animation group there remarked recently.

The output value of Jilin's animation industry was 6.2 billion yuan (\$1 billion) in 2010, a 30 percent year-on-year increase, said Yang Zhouxian, executive director and deputy general manager of the Jilin Animation Comic and Games Group, in a recent interview with China Daily.

The group began a 60-million-yuan technology construction project in 2010, to help develop the animation business in Jilin.

The first-phase, which involved 10 animation technology centers and 10 animation service centers, has been completed.

At the same time, the Jilin Original Animation Park and the Changchun Zhihe International Animation Industrial Park, in the capital of Jilin, are now

ready to accommodate any animation companies that are ready to go.

The Jilin project has put it out ahead in China in the area of advanced equipment, technology, and research, in the field. Its motion-capturing studio is China's most advanced and the parks' companies use the facilities there for free or at a minimal cost.

Yang explained that his ambitious project has gotten help from the country's animation industry policies which have led to a surge in both production and revenues.

China produced 385 animated films in 2010, a 28-percent increase from 2009. The industry also earned more than 500 million yuan from exports in 2010, a 60-percent year-on-year increase, according to the State Radio, Film and Television Administration.

Yang is optimistic and it is easy to see why: "China's animation industry is flourishing, but still has a lot of potential. The domestic cartoon market is enormous. You know, China has more than 370 million people below the age of 16, the primary consumer segment."

The project has had some "remarkable achievements" in innovation and professional training, Yang added, and is providing technology services to more than 40 animation companies in and out of Jilin province and training for nearly 1,000 people.

More than 10 cartoons were created through technological support from the project.

Some, such as Shaolin Haibao, appeared on CCTV and the 4-D cartoon, My Fellow Villagers, was acclaimed at the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. It has also published more than 150 cartoon books, including the Three Character Classic, The Monkey King — Havoc in Heaven, and China's Twelve Zodiac Signs.

Now, to increase their service capacity, the Jilin Animation Comic and Games Group plans to put 180 million yuan into the second phase of the project over the next three to five years. When it is completed, the new public technology project will have an extra 100,000 square meters of space to grow into.

Chinese fan devotes an entire volume to his idol — Yanni

By ZHANG ZIXUAN

While fans of movie and sports stars like paying tribute to their idols in many different ways, few can do what Zhang Mingyu has done for his favorite, the renowned Greek keyboardist and composer, Yanni.

Zhang, 48, is a loyal Yanni follower from Changchun, Jilin province who has spent more than 13 years enjoying and studying Yanni's music.

Now, his recently published book, *Elegant Music and Intimate Voice — the Hand Scroll of Yanni's Music*, is a compilation of reviews and interpretation of more than 180 Yanni songs.

It uses 200,000 Chinese characters to do this, accompanied by photos capture the moments, in about a dozen countries, when Yanni held a live concert, such as in China's Forbidden City, and India's Taj Mahal.

Zhang is similar to Yanni in at least one respect — he's a self-taught musician, and has never had any formal training. But he is supremely confident that he understands every Yanni song and feels that the book was a necessary project.

"This isn't just a review of Yanni's work, but a biography, a travel story, and even a Chicken Soup for the Soul kind of book as well," Zhang says by way of definition.

It's not difficult to see that Zhang's a hard-core Yanni fan. He knows all about the songs of his idol and talks endlessly of them. He has even turned his private blog into an only Yanni zone, with bits and pieces of the artist's art and life, with a special selection of Yanni's songs in the background as the visitor browses.

Zhang first got to know the Greek artist when the Internet began popularizing his music in the late 1990s in China, and says, "I've known some vivid life experience of Yanni through his music."

One song, *Felista*, for example, Yanni dedicated to his mother and gave it her name, Zhang explains.

The song *Standing in Motion* describes a frightening earthquake that Yanni experienced in his hometown, Kalamata.

Yanni's music has often been described as "new age" by music critics and the media, but he himself prefers the term "contemporary instrumental", with which Zhang agrees completely.

Zhang calls Yanni's music "diverse and boundless, with complex orchestration", and says



Greek keyboardist and composer Yanni (left) signing an autograph for hard-core fan Zhang Mingyu, who published a book of reviews and interpretation of Yanni's songs, in September.

it combines natural sound effects with an electronic sound created by modern devices, which makes it "much richer than new age".

Among Zhang's many favorite songs, he singles out *Nightingale* as the "favorite of favorites". That song, which Yanni composed just for the Beijing concert, in the Forbidden City in 1997, contains Chinese musical elements, which many fans, including Zhang, firmly believe hit a peak that Yanni himself could not surpass.

In fact, the song became so popular in China that it was selected as learning material for a junior-high textbook, Zhang adds.

Lost in translation

Still, even though the composer's music has been used extensively on TV and for televised sporting events in China, few people really recognize his name, let alone the names of the songs being played.

For Zhang, this is similar to "people eating some delicious dish without knowing who the chef is or even what they're eating." This, he says, is a bit unfair.

One possible reason for this may simply be the language barrier, according to Zhang, who says that most of Yanni's songs have an English name, while some are in Spanish or Italian. These are difficult for the Chinese.

And, although the names have a certain poetic beauty, the feeling can vanish when they're translated into Chinese. So, for Zhang, restoring their original beauty was a major motive in compiling the book.

A second reason was the result of the *Yanni Voices* tours of 2008

and 2009. That was when the Greek artist, who had previously insisted on the purity of his music, as the most emotional expression, but then, suddenly, had his popular songs performed by vocalists, with new lyrics. Some fans were in a state of shock and could not accept such a "betrayal", and ominously foresaw the end of Yanni's career.

And, Zhang was one of those pessimists, but, when he tried to translate some of the new Yanni lyrics, he found to his surprise that the emotional feel and inspiration were just as clear and consistent as ever.

"That's when I made my mind to analyze his songs one by one," Zhang recalls.

Payback

After 13 years of becoming familiar with Yanni, Zhang was able to finish the first draft of his book in just two months and many enthusiasts had already ordered a copy while it was still being written. An art institute in Changchun even ordered 395 copies as textbooks, in advance.

This September, when the book finally appeared, from the Changchun Publishing House, Zhang had a chance to meet his admired figure, in Beijing, just as Yanni began a new China tour for 2011.

The 58-year-old Greek musician was surprised at being the subject of a book by a Chinese fan whom he'd never met.

"With all my respect and admiration," Yanni wrote for Zhang on the first page of one copy.

"I've benefited from Yanni's music for many years," says Zhang. "I would feel awful if I didn't give something in return."



FRESH AND NEW START

An Guiwu (left), head of the Jilin Tourism Administration, hands a five-star national hotel plaque to Gao Fuquan, general manager of the Changchun New Century Grand Hotel at a recent ceremony. This was a first for a hotel in the Luyuan district of Changchun, Jilin's capital. Gao said this award will bring more benefits to its guests.