

THE ROAD TO REJUVENATION: THE ANIMATED XI JINPING

Nick Stember

FUTURE HISTORIANS OF CHINESE animation may remember 2015 as a banner year for Chinese animations with the release of more than twenty feature-length and countless short animated films. Major feature length titles include *Amazing Pleasant Goat* 羊年喜羊羊, the big screen adaptation of the hit television series *Pleasant Goat and Big Bad Wolf* 喜羊羊与灰太狼; the dystopian sci-fi epic *10,000 Years Later* 一万年以后; and *Teenage Mao Zedong* 少年毛泽东.

Most memorable of all perhaps, though, was a three-minute English language YouTube video described by *The Wall Street Journal* as ‘a psychedelic music video’ produced to promote China’s Thirteenth Five-Year

Plan. Dubbed ‘The 13 What’ by CCTV America, the film is credited to Road to Rejuvenation Studios 复兴路上工作室, a mysterious film production studio that has no official website and only a scattered social media presence across several accounts. The Chinese name of the studio can alternately be translated into English as ‘The Studio on Fuxing Road’. There are many Fuxing Roads in China, but one of the best known is just down the street from the Beijing offices of not only CCTV, but also the General Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (GAPPRFT), at No. 2 Fuxing Gate Outer Street, Xicheng district 西城区复兴门外大街2号, just outside Beijing’s Second Ring Road.



‘The 13 What’
Source: daliulian.net

Xinhua News Agency, *China Daily*, and other party mouthpieces have reposted more than a half dozen short films produced by the studio since late 2013, some animated, some not. Several of the films were released to coincide with important events such as the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan, the Boao Forum, and Xi Jinping’s official trips abroad. While two videos, one highlighting Chinese investment in the UK and the other in the US states of North and South Carolina, have racked up equivalent view counts, neither are quite as eye- (or ear-) catching as ‘The 13 What’.

Visually speaking, ‘The 13 What’ calls to mind the cut-and-paste collage aesthetic of Terry Gilliam’s early animations for Monty Python: a pink, dismembered hand holds up the moon on a string, while a cubist elk with a giant mouth on its side and eyeball where its face should be dances in the background. The song that accompanies the film is performed entirely in English, with the exception of the words *shi san wu* 十三五 (‘thirteen five’), the Chinese abbreviation for the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan. Like other productions of Road to Rejuvenation Studios, the target audience seems to

be foreign rather than domestic audiences. What might surprise veteran China watchers is the levity with which that message is communicated—in another video titled ‘Who is Xi Dada?’ (ostensibly produced by the *People’s Daily* but bearing all the hallmarks of a Road to Rejuvenation Studios video), a Korean student studying Chinese language jokes that, ‘If Xi Jinping were my husband, I bet I’d be really happy’.

‘Xi Dada’ 习大大 or Uncle Xi, as he is often referred to in the videos, is a constant presence. *The Power of Deepening Reforms* 深改的力量, which seems to have been produced by the studio, was released on Sohu 搜狐 and other Chinese language news sites in late 2015. Audio clips of Xi’s speeches are used as hooks for a rap song explaining the goals of the anti-corruption campaign. ‘China Comes to Carolina,’ meanwhile, released just prior to Xi’s 2015 visit to the US, borrows the format of an American political campaign ad, with heartfelt testimonies from American employees of companies saved from bankruptcy by an infusion of Chinese capital.

The variety of techniques employed by Road to Rejuvenation Studios suggests a sophisticated, tailored approach to public relations, involving



The Power of Reform: a rap song explaining the anti-corruption campaign
Source: youtube.com

a skilled team of producers, marketers, directors, artists, writers, and voice talent (the latter being particularly impressive, given that several of the videos, like ‘The 13 What’ are entirely in English). Inquiries made by Matthew Robertson for the *Epoch Times* (a Falun Gong-controlled newspaper) indicate that at least some of this process is being outsourced to private firms outside of China. An anonymous employee of the London-based search engine optimisation (SEO) company Viralseeding.com claimed that his company was paid ‘a few thousand to [potentially] tens of thousands’ to promote the Road to Rejuvenation Studios’ short film *Britain Meets China*, without being told who produced it. In an interview with the AFP news agency, a spokesperson for Road to Rejuvenation Studios said



How Leaders are Made: uploaded in October 2015, this Chinese propaganda video has been viewed more than one million times. It presents a view of how the US President, the UK's Prime Minister, and China's President are elected

Source: youtube.com

they had 'continuously co-ordinated and co-operated with' the global advertising agency BBDO on 'The 13 What', although the Shanghai office of BBDO declined to comment on this.

As of 6 June 2016, CCTV America's posting of 'The 13 What' has garnered over 180,000 views on YouTube, while the posting of the video to Road to Rejuvenation Studios own YouTube page has gained it another 45,000 views. A more recent video released in April

2016 (with some 24,000 views over two channels), however, reflects the challenging reality of the Chinese economy in 2016: 'Kung Fu and the Chinese Economy' ends with a play on words that doesn't quite work in English. In Chinese, *kung fu* 功夫 is a homophone for *gongfu* 工夫, meaning free, or sufficient time: 'With *gongfu*,' states the narrator, anyone can understand Chinese kung fu ... and yes, even the Chinese economy!'

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