

China

‘Bad in every aspect’: derided low-tech animation Niu Lai rivals blockbusters at Chinese box office

Commentary about the ‘so bad it’s good’ qualities of mother and son’s movie has driven people to see it at cinema



Niu Lai (The Cow is Coming) was almost entirely created by two people. Photograph: PR

Amy Hawkins

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A crude, low-tech animation about a cow and a skylark has become a sleeper hit at China’s box office, sitting alongside blockbusters such as *The Odyssey* and *Spider-Man: Brand New Day* in cinema revenue rankings.

Niu Lai, which translates to *The Cow is Coming*, is an 86-minute budget animation about a newborn calf and a skylark whose relationship develops over the course of an abstract dream sequence.

Released on 5 August, the film reportedly made just 7,700 yuan (£842) in its first 10 days of screenings, with fewer than 300 people nationwide buying a ticket. It did not have any promotional tour, pre-release publicity or even a trailer.

But discussion online about how bad the film was turned it into a meme, which drove hordes of film fans to the cinema. It has now made more than 14.9m yuan, according to the movie tracking site Mao Yan, making it one of the top-performing films of the year.

The *Odyssey* earned 192m yuan (£21m) across its official **three-day opening weekend** in China, coming in second place to the homegrown film *Once Upon a Time in the Middle East*, which tells the story of a Chinese chef who opens a restaurant in the Middle East as conflict erupts. The Chinese film took in 477.9m yuan between Friday and Sunday.

Niu Lai’s success appears to stem less from its merits and more from its “so bad it’s good” energy. Made by just two people over five years, it is the antithesis of the slick, high-budget animation that have drawn in huge crowds

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