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Paradox of the Chinese AI short film



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AI short films exploded in China thanks to low costs, but rapid supply caused revenue to drop sharply and most of the works found it difficult to make a profit.



A character in the AI short film "Chuyện lạ ở Trương An". Photo: Xinhua

Market grows but profits fall

AI short films are becoming one of the fast-growing segments of China's digital content industry. In the first 5 months of 2026, the scale of the AI short film market has exceeded 22 billion CNY and for the whole year it is forecast to reach 40 billion CNY.

According to the China National Radio and Television Administration, 430,000 short films were uploaded online in the first 8 months of this year, 13 times the total of the whole year of 2025. **Notably, AI films account for more than 90% of the works.**

This rapid growth largely comes from cost advantages. A short film with real people in it usually needs about 300,000 - 500,000 CNY to produce, while an **AI short film can be made with about 30,000 - 50,000 CNY.**

The production time is also **reduced from one to two months to one to two weeks.** Previously, it required a whole crew including actors, cinematographers, sets, post-production... now, just a few people coordinating with AI tools can complete a work.

TRENDING



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As technology develops, the gap in image quality between AI films and traditional product films is also narrowing.

However, reduced production costs do not mean increased profits.

In the first half of this year, the Douyin platform alone had about 221,900 AI short films released. But if we take the 50 million views mark as a breakeven point, only **about 1.3% of works achieve no loss**. There are 1,055 films exceeding 100 million views, equivalent to a rate of about 0.48%.

Even if it reaches 100 million views, an AI movie is not necessarily profitable.

According to First Financial, revenue per 10,000 views of AI films has decreased from about 30 - 100 CNY in 2025 to 5 - 10 CNY this year. A work with 100 million views may only bring in about 50,000 - 100,000 CNY from this revenue source.

Meanwhile, manufacturers still have to pay for personnel, operations, promotions... When revenue per view decreases, even the cost advantage of AI is not enough to ensure profits.

Support from the platform is also decreasing. Hongguo once supported and ensured a minimum revenue of 40,000 - 50,000 CNY for high-quality AI films S+ (highest level), but this level has now decreased to about 10,000 CNY.



The easier it is to produce AI short films, the fiercer the profit competition. Photo: Xinhua

The easier it is to make films, the fiercer the competition

The paradox of the AI short film market is that the easier it is to make, the more producers there are. But the rapid increase in the number of films does not mean that the audience will watch more, because the time and attention of each person are limited. Producers therefore have to **compete harder to win viewers**.

When making AI films becomes too easy, producers tend to make as much as possible. Because most films are difficult to make money, they do not want to spend too much time and costs on each work. Instead, they produce in series, hoping that a few famous films can compensate for the costs of the remaining films.

An AI film can be created in a short time, but there are also dozens, hundreds of similar products appearing almost at the same time. **Motives such as rebirth, revenge, going against the tide or shocking details are constantly repeated** to attract viewers and respond to algorithms.

As a result, the market is increasingly showing low-quality content, likened to "digital trash", while truly outstanding films still account for a very small proportion.

This is also why platforms are starting to adjust support policies, while Chinese regulators are strengthening content control.

From September 1, 2026, the "Regulation on management of short film development" takes effect in China, requiring short films created or produced by AI to have clear recognition marks attached in each episode.

But the bigger problem of the market is still the economy. AI has made filmmaking cheaper and easier, but that is what pulls thousands of producers into a race where quantity no longer guarantees profits.

In a market where anyone can create content at a very fast pace, what is increasingly scarce is not movies, but the attention of the audience and works that can stop them.



AI short films earn viewers' money: When a few-minute content becomes a new market

Short film episodes that are only a few minutes long, broadcast for free a part and then require payment to continue watching are creating a new content market.



China tightens control over AI-generated "digital waste"

China is strengthening management from production, censorship to distribution, and labeling AI video content.



Chinese short film market exceeds 100 billion RMB, AI films account for more than 90%

The explosion of AI short films is opening up new opportunities for China's digital content industry, while also posing a problem of quality, copyright and content management.



Chinese movies, Short film, WHO



SAME CATEGORY



Lao Dong Newspaper organizes a seminar on developing the tourist market in Ho Chi Minh City and Southeast Vietnam

Ho Chi Minh City - On October 18, Lao Dong Newspaper organized a seminar "Developing the tourist market in Ho Chi Minh City and Southeast Vietnam - From gateways to chain destinations".



Expected fireworks display in art program to celebrate Vietnam Culture Day

Hanoi is completing a plan to organize a special art program to celebrate Vietnam Culture Day November 24.



BTS becomes the first group to surpass 10 billion Spotify listens in a year

BTS is the first group in the world to surpass the 10 billion accumulated listens mark on Spotify in a year, in which the album "ARIRANG" contributed more than 5...



Displaying more than 300 documents and artifacts to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Uncle Ho's visit to Hai Phong

Hai Phong - On October 16th, the Hai Phong Museum opened a thematic exhibition "80 years - Hai Phong engraves Uncle Ho's words".