

Very Short Videos Are Changing Film Industries

今回のニュースは、中国で話題沸騰中の「マイクロドラマ」です。マイクロドラマとは、スマホ視聴に最適化された、数分でサクッと楽しめる短編ドラマのこと。ちなみに、本文で登場する plot twist は「予想外の展開」という意味。物語が大きく覆される、思わず「えっ！」となるような展開のことを指します。海外の友人とドラマの感想を話すときに使うと、ちょっとカッコいいかも！あなたのお気に入りの短編ドラマはありますか？ぜひ、レッスンで講師と話してみましょう。



1. Article

Read the following article aloud.

On a film set in China, a 69-year-old actor is playing the part of a wealthy family leader.

In “Grandma’s Moon,” actor Zhu Jian celebrates his birthday with a costly dinner party. And he is about to get a big surprise: One of the workers at the party is his granddaughter.

But there is another big surprise.

“Grandma’s Moon” is not a movie or even a television show. Instead, it is a series of short videos, called a micro drama. Creators shoot them vertically for easy watching on cell phones. Each episode is only minutes long.

Most of the people watching “Grandma’s Moon” are middle-aged workers and retired people. Zhu said that these viewers do not go to movie theaters anymore. He added that it is so easy “...to hold a mobile phone and watch something anytime you want.”

Micro dramas use story-telling methods like hooks and **plot** twists to keep millions of viewers watching on their cellphones. And these audiences are very willing to pay for more.

The **cliffhangers** at the end of each episode are critical to the success of micro dramas. Cliffhangers keep a viewer interested and wanting to watch more. Audiences must pay for the next episode to find out what happened.

Changing the industry

Reuters News Agency reports that China's micro drama industry is worth \$5 billion. Micro dramas are shot quickly and with little money. The first few episodes are often free. But to watch the whole micro drama series, audiences may have to pay money to watch additional episodes.

Experts say micro dramas are successfully competing with China's film industry.

The micro drama leader is the app Kuaishou. The app is responsible for 60 percent of the top 50 Chinese micro dramas last year. That information comes from Endata, a company that studies media.

Douyin is owned by internet technology company Bytedance, which is also popular with micro drama fans. Other Chinese social media apps like Xiaohongshu and YouTube competitor Bilibili have announced plans to make more.

Micro dramas are now spreading to the United States.

"China discovered this audience first," said Layla Cao, a Chinese producer based in Los Angeles. Hollywood, she says, has not yet.

Popular Storylines story-telling techniques

Micro dramas are successful not only for their story-telling methods but also for their interesting plots.

Many popular micro dramas for Chinese audiences are stories about revenge or reaching higher social status. Their popularity is happening at a time when making money and changing your status in China is difficult. Youth unemployment is also high.

The micro dramas often "show people who one day are lower class and the next day become upper class ..." said a 26-year-old screenwriter. Writing under the name Camille Rao, she recently left a low-paid job in the traditional film industry. Now, she writes micro drama stories for American audiences.

Criticisms of micro dramas

China's Communist Party has been critical of micro dramas. Between late 2022 and early 2023, China's **regulatory** agency, the National Radio and Television Administration, or NRTA, removed 25,300 micro dramas.

In June, the Chinese government began requiring some creators to register micro dramas with the NRTA. The regulator did not answer Reuters' request for comment.

Actor Zhu added that the plot is often unreal or over-the-top; "...so it catches people's attention and a large audience wants to see them," he said.

Zhu said he loves classic films, like "Casablanca." And like many other film lovers working in micro dramas, he thinks they have limited artistic value. He said, "I see it as fast food..."

However, loyal fans of micro dramas disagree.

Huang Siyi is a 28-year-old customer service agent. She enjoys watching romantic micro dramas because "the acting is good and the male and female leads are good-looking."

She adds that it is easy to get hooked on micro dramas.

Explosive growth

Micro dramas can be made with little money. The amount of money needed to make them can be between \$28,000 (200,000 yuan) and \$280,000 (2 million yuan), the market research company iResearch reports.

In the central Chinese city of Zhengzhou, creators are making "Grandma's Moon" with not much money and not much time. The show was filmed in just six days.

As micro dramas grow in popularity, actors' [earnings](#) have grown too.

Many Chinese micro drama producers have their eye on Western markets.

Micro dramas designed for the West are often made by production and acting crews in Los Angeles and shot on location. The stories are in English and often involve wealth, [cheating](#) partners, and miracles.

One of the apps that distributes micro dramas in the West is called LoveShots. In one of its latest micro dramas, a paralyzed woman miraculously regains her ability to walk. Then, she walks in to find her husband cheating on her.

I'm Andrew Smith. And I'm Anna Matteo.

Antoni Slodkowski reported this story for Reuters with additional reporting from Tingshu Wang and Xiaoyu Yin. Anna Matteo adapted it for VOA Learning English.

2. Key phrases and vocabulary

First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

1. plot (n.) the basic action or events in a story

The plot of the new detective movie is unoriginal and boring.

2. cliffhanger (n.) the sudden end of a story in the middle of a problem or crisis

The film *The Empire Strikes Back* ended in a cliffhanger.

3. regulatory (adj.) related to control by the government

The FCC is a regulatory body that makes the rules for radio, TV, and internet use.

4. earnings (n., plural) the money that a person makes from work

It is safer to keep your earnings in the bank than at home.

5. cheat (v.) to have a love relationship with someone even though you are already in another love relationship

Don's wife was cheating on him while he was on business trips.

3. Questions

Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. How do micro dramas differ from films or TV shows in their content, style, and production?
2. What attracts viewers to micro dramas?
3. How do micro drama producers and companies get viewers to pay to watch?
4. Do you think people in other countries will start producing micro dramas?
5. Would you rather watch a thirty- or sixty-minute drama or a micro drama? Why?