



THE CURIOUS CASE OF NIU LAI



A low-budget animated film has become a burning topic on Chinese social media. Directed by Xin Yumeng and written by his mother Sun Lifang, *Niu Lai* was made on a reportedly tiny budget of just 20,000 to 30,000 yuan (HK\$23,430 to HK\$35,150).

The film took over five years to make and was finally released in August. It follows Niu Lai, a newborn calf who struggles to stand up. He passes out and has a dream about courage, friendship and sacrifice. As he wakes up, he brings his new-found strength and bravery back into the real world.

But this charming plot has little to do with the film's virality.

Initial box office sales struggled until the film suddenly became a talking point online for its low-quality animation. Its notoriously bad graphics and animation, and some stand-out dialogue, paved the way for the film's surprising success.

The film features stiff movement, rough rendering and horrible visuals. It accidentally made for perfect meme fuel. Its budget was so low that it did not have marketing allowance, resulting in some cinema staff hand-drawing the posters themselves.

The film has shockingly become one of the most profitable films ever in terms of a gross-to-budget ratio.

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