Bona Film Group AI feature film

IMPLEMENTED 2024–2026 · MEDIA AND PUBLISHING · CHINA · BAND E · PARTLY PROVED
VERSION 1.0 · PUBLISHED 16 NOVEMBER 2026 · UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026 · FACTS CHECKED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

Bona Film Group released China's first AI-generated feature film in cinemas in October 2026. It cost more than 10 million yuan to make, by the studio's account, and took about $180,000 in its first four days, per Maoyan data.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

This is MarLuc's summary and grading of publicly available sources, for information only. It is not investment, legal, financial or professional advice, and should not be relied on for any decision. Readers must validate it against the original sources and, where appropriate, challenge its conclusions.

Facts and figures are as reported by the sources listed below, which may be incomplete, self-reported or out of date. Check the original source before relying on any figure.

The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

No measurable effect: tested, no effect.

AI used: Generative AI tools for visuals, sound effects and other production elements; accounts of the tools used differ.

Implemented: 2024–2026. Grade: band E, No measurable effect, Partly proved.

Headline result, as reported: AI-made feature cost more than 10 million yuan and took about $180,000 in its first four days, per Maoyan, October 2026

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 5 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

Bona Film Group. Chinese film studio. The film was produced by its department for AI-generated film and television series, per Yicai Global. Canvas block: 3. Customers and proposition. Also 4. Operations and process, 6. Data and technology.

Business challenge

The challenge. Not reported as a stated business problem. Yicai Global reported that AI-generated production is becoming more common in China's film and television industry. Bona's chief operating officer described the film as the first to be tested by audiences.

How it was addressed. Bona's AI department made Sanxingdui: Future Past, a 100-minute

Who implemented it

In-house (In-house): Bona Film Group AI department: produced the film.
ByteDance (Model or cloud provider): AI video tools, per Caixin.
ShengShu Technology (Model or cloud provider): Says its Vidu video model provided technical support, per TNW.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: not established; the sources do not say how the system works. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: ByteDance (per Caixin), ShengShu Technology (by its own account), Vidu (by ShengShu's account).

Where it was built in: Used by Bona's department for AI-generated film and television to generate visuals, sound effects and other production elements under human creative direction.

What changed

Before: no AI-generated feature had been licensed for Chinese cinemas. After: Bona released one nationally on 23 October 2026. Commercially, takings in the first days were far below the production cost, per Maoyan data. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

What it cost

Production cost more than 10 million yuan ($1.5 million), by Bona's account, per TNW.

What it saved

Not reported [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Governance and control

Human creators led concept, artistic direction and narrative decisions, by Bona's account via Yicai Global. The film received a public screening permit from the National Film Administration. AI-specific controls: Not reported.

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
Chief operating officer Jiang Defu was the film's producer, per TNW. [5]

A1 · Safe use · Not reported
Not reported.

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
Human creators led concept, artistic direction and narrative decisions while AI generated visuals and sound, by Bona's account. [2]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Not reported
Not reported.

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
Accounts of the AI tools differ: ByteDance per Caixin, ShengShu's Vidu by ShengShu's account. [1] [5]

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Outside scrutiny (a regulator, court, auditor or similar body acted)
China's National Film Administration granted a public screening licence and classified the film as animation, as it had no category for AI-generated content, per Caixin. [1]

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Regulatory approval: the first film produced with AI to receive a public screening permit in China, per Yicai Global and Caixin.

– A national release with more than 10,000 screenings scheduled, per AFP.

DID NOT

– About $180,000 in the first four days against a cost of more than 10 million yuan, per Maoyan data relayed by TNW.

– AFP counted four people at the opening-day screening it attended, per TNW.

UNPROVEN

– Final box office and any streaming or other revenue: Not reported.

– Whether AI cut production cost or time compared with conventional animation: no comparison published.

Timeline

Apr 2026 National Film Administration grants a public screening licence, classifying the film as animation [1]

Sept 2026 Bona announces a 23 October nationwide release [3]

Oct 2026 Film opens with more than 10,000 screenings scheduled [4]

Oct 2026 About $180,000 taken in the first four days, per Maoyan [5]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: E, No measurable effect. Proof: Partly proved. Level of change: Not graded.

No level assessed: band E, an AI-made feature tested with cinema audiences that took far less than it cost in its first days.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The production model worked well enough to win a licence and a national release; the test was the audience, and early takings were low. Bona's chief operating officer framed it as a first test. For a larger organisation, a first-of-kind AI product proves feasibility, not demand; set the commercial measure before launch.

1. Separate the feasibility test from the market test, and budget for both.
2. Set the commercial measure of success before release.
3. Name the AI tools used, so audiences and regulators know what they are judging.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Independent: box office figures from the ticketing platform Maoyan, relayed by AFP and TNW; cost and process from the studio.

Evaluation method. Third-party box office data and company statements.

Sources disagree. Caixin, in April 2026, said the film was made with AI video tools from ByteDance and gave a 90-minute running time and the title Sanxingdui: Future Memories; Yicai Global gives 100 minutes and Future Past. ShengShu Technology said its Vidu model provided technical support, per TNW. AFP reported a forecast of about 390,000 yuan in total takings at opening; TNW reports a Maoyan forecast of below 150,000 yuan.

Status. Ongoing: in cinemas from 23 October 2026; final takings Not reported at 16 November 2026.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/bona-film-sanxingdui-ai-feature-film

[1] Caixin Global: Bona Film Wins Approval for China's First AI Movie in Theaters (April 2026)
https://www.caixinglobal.com/2026-04-28/bona-film-wins-approval-for-chinas-first-ai-movie-in-theaters-102438575.html

[2] Yicai Global: China's Film Industry Reaches New Milepost With First AI Theatrical Release
https://www.yicaiglobal.com/news/chinas-film-industry-reaches-new-milepost-with-first-ai-theatrical-release

[3] TechNode: China's first AI-produced theatrical film sets October 23 release
https://technode.com/2026/09/28/chinas-first-ai-produced-theatrical-film-sets-october-23-release/

[4] Kuwait Times (AFP): China's first AI film hits cinemas, but ticket sales lag
https://kuwaittimes.com/article/52500/technology/chinas-first-ai-film-hits-cinemas-but-ticket-sales-lag/

[5] TNW: China's first all-AI feature film cost $1.5m and has made about $180,000
https://thenextweb.com/news/sanxingdui-china-first-ai-film-box-office

Version 1.0 · Published 16 November 2026 · Updated 16 November 2026 · Facts checked against sources 16 November 2026 · Downloaded 26 November 2026. This PDF may be out of date: the latest version, and a way to report an error or a better source, is at https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/bona-film-sanxingdui-ai-feature-film

VERSION HISTORY

v1.0 16 November 2026 First published