

The Study of Traditional Chinese Culture Displayed in the Chinese Film 'Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms'

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Abstract. This study examines the portrayal of traditional Chinese culture in the film "Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms." The movie integrates historical, mythological, and religious elements, highlighting the mythological warfare among humans, immortals, and demons, presenting profound cultural connotations. The article briefly outlines the film's domestic and international success and acclaim, emphasizing its importance in promoting Chinese cultural values and aesthetics globally. Directed by Wuershan, "Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms" is the first installment of the fantasy costume trilogy "Fengshen." It stars Fei Xiang, Li Xuejian, Yu Shi, and Na Ran. Based on the Ming Dynasty supernatural novel "Investiture of the Gods" and the Yuan Dynasty storytelling "Narratives of the Fall of the Shang Dynasty," the film depicts the story of King Yinshou of the Shang Dynasty colluding with the fox demon Daji, triggering divine retribution. The article provides an overview of the film's storyline, key characters, and distinctive features. This study will analyze the portrayal of traditional Chinese culture in the film "Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms" from four aspects, including storyline, set design, character depiction, and music and dance. By comprehensively analyzing these aspects, the film's interpretation of ancient Chinese history and culture will be revealed, enriching the audience's understanding of traditional values and aesthetics. The film cleverly integrates themes such as divination, filial piety, and moral ethics, showcasing the essence of ancient Chinese culture. With meticulous set design, lifelike character depiction, and seamless music and dance, it creates a vivid portrayal imbued with traditional Chinese charm. The film's success has not only garnered acclaim domestically but also garnered widespread international attention, contributing positively to the global dissemination of Chinese culture.

Keywords: Chinese Film, Fengshen Legend, Traditional Culture, Mythological Warfare, Cultural Dissemination.

1. Introduction

The enduring fascination with "Fengshen," which translates to "Creation of The God" in English, underscores its lasting impact on Chinese cultural heritage. The film seamlessly melds historical, mythological, legendary, and religious elements, utilizing the transition from the Shang to the Zhou Dynasty as its canvas to paint the epic struggle between humanity, immortality, and demonic forces. Moreover, it intertwines mystical elements such as talismans, spells, immortals, and divination, infusing traditional Chinese culture with an aura of mystery and fantasy.

Premiering in mainland China on July 20, 2023, 'Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms' garnered widespread acclaim, amassing a staggering total box office revenue of 2.634 billion yuan and captivating an audience of 60.68 million viewers by January 19, 2024. It clinched the title of the 2023 Action Film Box Office and Audience Champion, securing the 25th spot in China's overall film box office and ranking 5th in the 2023 film box office specifically. Breaking numerous records since its debut, the film amassed 57 milestone achievements and earned 18 awards and nominations, including the coveted Best Story Film Award, Best Supporting Actor Award, and Best Cinematography Award at the 36th China Golden Rooster Awards. It also received international recognition, with screenings held in North America, Australia, the UK, and France.

Renowned Chinese media outlet "People's Daily" hailed "Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms" as a decade-long homage to the epic narrative, extolling its role in championing Chinese culture and propelling the nation's film industry forward. Experts from Xinhua News Agency lauded the film for its exploration of Chinese cultural motifs and aesthetics, affirming its pivotal role in

disseminating contemporary Chinese values and preserving the essence of Chinese culture through storytelling. International film critic David Stratton acclaimed the film as a cinematic tour de force, drawing parallels to Hollywood classics like "Gladiator." He commended its meticulously choreographed action sequences, breathtaking equestrian stunts, and dazzling special effects, alongside accolades for stellar performances and exceptional cinematography by Wang Yu.

The enduring allure of the "Fengshen" intellectual property underscores its indelible mark on Chinese cultural heritage. Adapted across various mediums including film, television, animation, and gaming, the legend of Fengshen continues to captivate audiences globally. Through its vivid portrayal of Chinese mythology, "Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms" showcases the profound cultural heritage and rich symbolism embedded within Chinese culture, cementing its status as a timeless masterpiece.

2. Literature Review

In "Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms," the interpretation of the axe and yue wielded by Yin Shou, as well as the performance of the coronation dancer mimicking the mythical Xuan Niao, receives a special exposition, embodying significant symbolic meanings of imperial power in the Shang dynasty. The film adeptly utilizes symbols to highlight the symbolic significance of the axe and yue during the Shang period, while ingeniously portraying reverence towards the Xuan Niao through the dancer's performance, thereby deepening the understanding of Shang imperial authority and cultural origins [1]. Furthermore, through costume and character design, the film showcases the unique charm of Shang culture. The meticulous details in the film convey profound cultural information, such as reflecting the attire of different social classes, providing a window for global audiences to understand Chinese traditions. Moreover, it facilitates cross-cultural exchange and understanding [2] [3]. The portrayal of familial and national sentiments, embodied by Yin Shou and Ji Chang, perfectly exemplifies the cultural concept of unity between family and nation, demonstrating the influence of moral conduct on the human heart and emphasizing the importance of cultural values in national governance and family education [4].

The literature also points out that Wang Yu's portrayal of Eastern culture and traditional values in film highlights the necessity of concretizing abstract concepts. The incorporation of Chinese elements in costume design, character imagery, and monster design serves as a method of cultural transmission, through which values and educational significance can be realized through the scenes, characters, and props of the film [5]. The transformation of Ji Fa's character and his unwavering spirit not only reinterprets personal heroism but also successfully integrates Chinese heroism with the globally popular superhero culture, showcasing the concept of heroes in Chinese tradition. This serves as a reminder to researchers of the importance of indigenous cultural characteristics and their historical heritage [6]. Mythology serves as a vehicle for cultural inheritance and innovation, with it being reinterpreted in different eras and through different media. The film's usage provides researchers with deep insights into the reinterpretation of traditional culture by different eras and creators, as well as innovative approaches in filmmaking [7].

The high-frequency vocabulary reflected in films mirrors the audience's historical aesthetic experiences and the derivations of Chinese historical aesthetics [8]. This provides researchers with a window into how audiences perceive and cognize history, elucidating the impact of film creation on the inheritance and innovation of traditional culture. Film practitioners and educators play crucial roles in the dissemination of cultural values and in shaping students' understanding of values. Practitioners should focus on both cultural inheritance and modern interpretation, while educators should adopt films as tools for conveying elements of the information age and conducting ideological and political education [9].

The correlation between the animal characters and the iconic martial arts in "Kung Fu Panda" showcases the cultural background of character development alongside the traditional martial arts

origins of anthropomorphized animals. This perspective offers researchers a new avenue to explore traditional cultural values and connotations through character selection [10].

Furthermore, the significance of film music cannot be overlooked in conveying cultural values and emotional resonance. For instance, in "Monkey King: Hero is Back," various cultural elements are integrated into the music to convey thematic messages and emotional experiences [11]. The film details such as reverence for ancestors and familial commitments reflect the culture of "filial piety," while the role of props in showcasing cultural differences deepens the cultural significance of the work [12][13]. The lyrics of "Tunnel Warfare" reiterate the revolutionary spirit of mass participation in resistance. Red, symbolizing happiness and celebration, permeates various aspects of Chinese culture, prompting researchers to pay attention to the concrete and symbolic use of color in film [14].

Themes of ethical conflicts and conflicting values often recur in films, such as the loyalty and justice portrayed in "Aquaman," which resonates with the traditional Chinese motif of "splitting mountains to rescue one's mother" [15]. Folk customs, as cultural phenomena, reflect the cultural and psychological characteristics of society. Researching the presentation of folk culture in films and its role in society is an important means of understanding people's daily lives [16].

In dealing with attitudes towards nature, the contrasting perspectives of Confucianism and Daoism provide a theoretical framework for the portrayal of relationships between humans and nature, as well as between humans themselves, in the film. Through various philosophical interpretations, the film demonstrates diverse perspectives on life and morality [17].

The final source in the text also discusses the analysis of Hollywood's global influence in the film industry, providing insights for the global dissemination of traditional Chinese culture through Chinese cinema. It underscores the importance of leveraging influence and global dissemination capabilities for Chinese cinema [18].

While scholars have already conducted research on the portrayal of traditional Chinese culture in Chinese cinema, there remains a significant research gap in the specific analysis of the ways, effectiveness, and impact on audiences of traditional cultural elements in different film works.

The significance of studying the portrayal of traditional Chinese culture in Chinese cinema lies in gaining a deeper understanding of the potential of film as a cultural medium, as well as the inheritance, evolution, and impact of traditional culture in contemporary Chinese society.

Studying the portrayal of traditional Chinese culture in Chinese cinema is significant for gaining a deeper understanding of the potential of film as a cultural medium, as well as the inheritance, evolution, and impact of traditional culture in contemporary Chinese society. This research delves into the multifaceted roles of cinema beyond mere entertainment, recognizing its capacity to serve as a powerful tool for cultural expression, preservation, and dissemination. Moreover, it sheds light on how traditional cultural elements are depicted, reinterpreted, and contextualized within the narratives and visual aesthetics of Chinese films, offering insights into the complex interplay between tradition and modernity in Chinese society. By examining the thematic concerns, artistic techniques, and socio-political implications of these cinematic representations, scholars can discern the ways in which Chinese cinema both reflects and shapes cultural attitudes, values, and identities, thereby enriching our understanding of the dynamic relationship between cinema, culture, and society.

3. Methodology

This article aims to delve into how the film "Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms" portrays traditional Chinese culture through its narrative. It will be analyzed in four main aspects: storyline elements (such as divination, ancestral halls, and contemporary ideologies), set design and props (with attention to detail), character portrayal (including character development, makeup, and costumes), and music and dance (featuring bronze musical instruments and the Xuan Bird dance). These aspects collectively form the core components of the film, particularly in works like "Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms," which serve as a profound reflection of ancient Chinese history and cultural heritage, significantly enhancing its appeal and cultural significance.

4. Results

This film excels in reflecting Chinese historical and traditional cultural and divination practices within its storyline. For instance, at the beginning of the movie, Su Quanxiao urges his father to surrender at the city wall, in contrast to Ji Fa's different choices when facing Yin Shou's hostage-taking and patricide. Additionally, during the enthronement ceremony, there are scenes depicting divination practices, such as the turtle shell divination performed by the Crown Prince Bi Gan when inquiring about the country's fortune, and the use of divination with divining rods by the Marquis of Western Zhou, Ji Chang, in the Dragon Virtue Hall.

The film also pays meticulous attention to set design and prop details, showcasing the aesthetic and war culture of traditional Chinese history. For instance, the physical setting of the Dragon Virtue Hall is adorned with unique patterns of mythical birds and beasts on screens, lanterns, and hall doors. The virtual setting of Kunlun Mountain draws inspiration from the "A Thousand Lis of Rivers and Mountains" painting. Moreover, the use of horse equipment during battlefield attacks is carefully depicted.

Furthermore, the film portrays Chinese historical and traditional cultural elements in character makeup, costumes, and character development. For example, Su Daji's makeup design is inspired by the Yuan Dynasty Yongle Palace's Three Clear Halls mural 'Paying homage to the Origins', and the costumes of various lords, hostages, Yin Shou, and the queen are matched with the five elements. The jade ring worn by Ji Fa symbolizes the metaphor of Ji Chang's desire for his son to "return." Additionally, the contrasting character images conveyed by the instruments played by Bo Yikao and the instruments played by Yin Shou.

Moreover, the film effectively utilizes traditional Chinese music and dance to showcase the historical and cultural aspects of Chinese music and dance. For example, the sacrificial music during the enthronement ceremony features numerous bronze instruments from the Yin Shang period, such as bamboo flutes and se. There is a change in music after King Zhou's enthronement. The Xuan Bird dance and Daji's dance during the enthronement ceremony are also noteworthy examples.

5. Discussion

The film delves into numerous storylines revolving around divination, father-son relationships, and moral ethics. For instance, the Marquis of Western Zhou foresees Yin Shou's demise at the hands of a blood relative, while King Zhou takes a hostage to eliminate his father. The film's recurrent theme of "In the Ancient Near East, kings were believed to be offspring of a god." Underscores the pivotal role of divination, a longstanding tradition in China. These divination scenes not only intricately weave the plot but also pique the audience's curiosity, fostering a deeper exploration of Chinese culture. At the outset, Su Hu's second son, Su Quanxiao, urges his father to surrender under the city walls, displaying unwavering loyalty but failing in filial duty. Conversely, his eldest son, Su Quanzhong, rebels alongside his father, demonstrating filial piety but lacking loyalty, epitomizing the ancient Chinese adage that "loyalty and filial piety are difficult to reconcile." Through the characters' names, the director metaphorically foreshadows their development, offering the audience a clearer understanding of their trajectories and the film's underlying themes. Yin Shou's indifference to his main wife, Jiang Queen's, remonstrations, Crown Prince Bigan's burning of the ancestral hall, and the execution of Yin Jiao, his eldest son, all contravene traditional Chinese ethical principles, emphasizing the moral complexities depicted in the film. Drawing inspiration from the prevailing Confucian thought of the Ming Dynasty, the film resonates with domestic audiences by challenging traditional narratives and reflecting on contemporary societal values. However, when exported abroad, these narratives may require contextualization to bridge cultural gaps and facilitate a deeper appreciation of Chinese culture. By shifting the focus from blaming a femme fatale to exposing King Zhou Yin Shou's ambitions for dictatorship, "Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms" underscores the evolving significance of Chinese historical culture in modern times, contributing positively to its global dissemination.

In the pivotal scene set in the grandiose "Dragon Virtue Hall," every meticulously crafted lamp serves as a testament to the rich tapestry of the Yin Shang period. Each lamp, painstakingly made by hand, bears unique designs meticulously derived from historical accounts. This attention to detail not only speaks volumes about the artistic prowess of the era but also immerses contemporary audiences in the palpable ambiance of ancient China.

The monumental screen adorning the hall, against which Yin Shou is depicted, is a visual feast of symbolism and history. Embellished with motifs representing the mythical "Xuan Niao" bird and adorned with oracle bone script denoting the word "Shang," it serves as a gateway to the ancestral legacy of the Shang Dynasty. Flanking these central motifs are depictions narrating the legendary exploits of Shang Tang, from his eleven military campaigns to his pivotal role in toppling the Xia Dynasty. Each detail, meticulously rendered, breathes life into the historical narrative, offering viewers a window into the grandeur and ambition of the era.

Moreover, the abundance of taotie motifs scattered throughout the screen speaks volumes about the aspirations and ambitions of the rulers of that time. These motifs, laden with symbolic significance, not only add layers of depth to the visual narrative but also underscore the power dynamics prevalent during the era.

While these intricate details may escape the notice of those unacquainted with Chinese cultural nuances, they offer a treasure trove of educational opportunities. Supplementary materials, such as explanatory videos, can serve as invaluable resources for curious viewers eager to delve deeper into the rich tapestry of Chinese history and culture.

Furthermore, the breathtaking special effects scene set against the backdrop of "Kunlun Mountain" elevates the audience's cinematic experience to new heights. Drawing inspiration from the illustrious Song Dynasty masterpiece "A Thousand Lis of Rivers and Mountains" by Wang Ximeng, this scene not only captivates the senses but also pays homage to the enduring legacy of Chinese artistic heritage. Through meticulous attention to detail and a deep reverence for tradition, the film transcends mere entertainment, offering audiences an immersive journey through the annals of history and culture.

The makeup and costume details of the characters draw inspiration from the five elements. In the intricate details of the characters' attire, the costumes of individuals from the eastern, western, southern, and northern regions of the Shang Dynasty correspond to colors and patterns representing the five elements. Specifically, the eastern region, associated with wood, is depicted in shades of green. While the western region, traditionally associated with metal and originally depicted in white, is portrayed in yellow in the film due to historical references suggesting that "Shang people favor white." The southern region, symbolizing fire, is depicted in red, while the northern region, representing water, is portrayed in black. Additionally, the Shang region, symbolizing earth, has its color changed to white based on ancient texts.

This strategic use of color in costumes not only showcases the interconnectedness and harmony among the five elements in Chinese culture but also enables viewers to instantly identify the origins of each character. Furthermore, it provides valuable insights into the characters' roles, whether they are protagonists or antagonists, facilitating a deeper understanding of the film's narrative. Additionally, it fosters a sense of cultural identity among viewers, although it may not be immediately apparent to international audiences unfamiliar with these cultural nuances. To address this, educational initiatives during international screenings can serve to enlighten audiences about these cultural references.

The film extensively incorporates music to convey both the heroic and emotional aspects of the story. For instance, during the scene of "Yin Shou's Enthronement Ceremony," the musical arrangement draws inspiration from Han Dynasty ritual depictions. Performers kneel in reverence, while the orchestra is meticulously arranged in a square formation, featuring a diverse array of traditional Chinese instruments such as Shaman drums, Bianqing (bronze chimes), bamboo flutes, and se (a plucked zither). Additionally, a bass-baritone voice sings the verses of the ancient Chinese text "Shi Jing · Shang Song · Xuan Niao," invoking the mythical "Xuan Niao" bird's divine intervention in the founding of the Shang Dynasty. Traditional dance moves, specifically the "Xuan

Niao Dance," are incorporated into the ritual, complementing the music, dance, ceremonial etiquette, and poetry to evoke a profound cultural resonance among domestic audiences. The poetic verses also ignite viewers' imaginations, creating an atmosphere of solemn mystique.

This rich cultural tapestry can be effectively conveyed to international audiences during the film's international release, sparking their curiosity about traditional Chinese musical instruments, poetry, and ceremonial customs, prompting further exploration and study. Notably, the scene featuring Bo Yikao playing the bamboo flute in atonement, King Zhou Yin Shou striking the bronze drum, and Daji performing a dance subtly hints at Yin Shou's burgeoning desires while elucidating the transformation of Shang Dynasty music. Before ascending the throne, King Zhou Yin Shou only utilized "witch music" for rituals, devoid of formal ceremonial music. However, after his coronation, he commissioned the creation of "hedonistic music," reflecting his ambitious desires through a musical lens. This depiction encapsulates the profound historical and cultural heritage of Chinese music and dance.

6. Conclusion

This study delves deeply into the intricate portrayal of traditional Chinese culture within the film "Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms." Through meticulous analysis of various elements including storyline intricacies, detailed set designs, nuanced character depictions, and the incorporation of music and dance, the research sheds light on the film's pivotal role in presenting the essence of ancient Chinese history and culture.

By weaving together captivating narratives and skillful character development, the film adeptly showcases fundamental values deeply rooted in ancient Chinese culture, such as the practices of divination, the significance of filial piety, and the adherence to moral ethics. These thematic elements not only serve as reflections of the philosophical underpinnings of traditional Chinese society but also serve to provoke contemplation and emotional resonance among audiences, fostering a deeper appreciation for and understanding of Chinese cultural heritage. Moreover, the meticulous attention to detail in set design and prop selection meticulously brings to life the aesthetic allure and martial ethos of ancient Chinese civilization. Whether it's the grandeur of the Longde Hall or the mystique of Kunlun Mountain, each scene pays homage to the rich tapestry of Chinese historical traditions, immersing viewers in a visually stunning representation of bygone eras. Furthermore, the incorporation of traditional Chinese music and dance adds an additional layer of authenticity and immersion, effectively transporting viewers into the heart of Chinese history and tradition. Through evocative scenes depicting ancient sacrificial rites and graceful performances like the Xuan Niao Dance, audiences not only bear witness to the solemnity of ancient rituals but also experience firsthand the captivating allure of traditional Chinese artistic expression. In essence, "Creation of The God I: Kingdom of Storms" stands as a testament to the enduring richness and allure of traditional Chinese culture. Its success both domestically and internationally not only speaks to its artistic merit but also underscores its significant contribution to the global dissemination and appreciation of Chinese cultural heritage.

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