

Myth, Imagination and Digital Imaging: On the Aesthetic Expression of Nationality in Chinese Fantasy Films

Peng Liu

School of Language and Culture, Graduate University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 11000, Mongolia

Abstract: Chinese fantasy movies have been based on Chinese myths and legends or ancient novels about monsters since the beginning, and have mixed martial arts, kung fu, traditional opera and other folk-art forms in the form of expression. As China's digital film technology production system matures, the boundaries between national films and transnational films in Chinese fantasy films are becoming increasingly blurred. This article mainly analyzes how Chinese magic movies, driven by technology, use local cultural elements to generate images and aesthetic conceptions with national characteristics. It proposes that magic movies should create a visual style with oriental aesthetic attributes, build cultural confidence, and enhance China through image dissemination. cultural influence.

Keywords: Digital Imaging; Chinese Fantasy Movies; Nationality; Aesthetic Expression.

1. Introduction

In terms of genre, fantasy films should belong to the subgenre of fantasy films, and they entered the Chinese public's field of vision because of the Hollywood blockbusters "Harry Potter" series and "Lord of the Rings" series that are popular all over the world. The most notable genre characteristics of fantasy movies are the textual adaptation of fantasy literature and the visual presentation of an imaginary world. As far as Chinese movies are concerned, magic movies are not a new type of movie. From the early development process, it can be seen that mythology movies and martial arts movies have already taken the rudiment of magic movies. Due to the completely different mythology system and aesthetic traditions from the West, Chinese magic films have been based on Chinese myths and legends or ancient strange novels since the beginning, and mixed folk-art forms such as martial arts, kung fu, and opera in the form of expression. After entering the new century, with the application of digital technology and changes in the structure of film audiences, directors and producers from both sides of the Taiwan Strait have turned their attention to the field of magical themes. Legends are based on modern adaptations, and there are also works such as "Samurai God Order" and "Legend of the Demon Cat" based on Japanese novels and culture. It is one of the most closely related film genres to the Chinese film industry, and it is also an excellent text for the study of Chinese genre films.

In the digital age, when film creation and aesthetic expression are undergoing profound changes, fantasy movies also rely on computer graphics generation technology to complete the "hyper-real" expression of fantasy space. Under the premise that new aesthetics in the digital era are constantly being proposed, this article uses Chinese magic movies as research texts to conduct an in-depth study of the relationship between national culture and audio-visual language. Explore how local cultural elements generate images and aesthetic moods with national characteristics.

2. Genre Exploration in the Film Era: Historical Narration as a National Film

In the production and exploration of genres, early Chinese films (bordered on 1949) produced many films with magical elements. These films were mostly integrated into martial arts films, mythological films, and ghost and supernatural films. The reason is that most of these films are based on myths and legends or traditional opera texts, and movies have an innate connection with the materials from these texts. Therefore, mythological films and monster and supernatural films can be regarded as the originators of Chinese fantasy films.

The emergence of magic elements began in 1920S-1930S, and its main creation place was Shanghai, China. At that time, Shanghai, as an international metropolis, introduced many Hollywood movies. In order to compete with Hollywood movies, Chinese film production companies drew their films from traditional classical literature or fantasy novels, especially from "Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio" and "Sou Shen". The creative materials are drawn from texts such as "The Story of the White Snake", "The Legend of the White Snake", and "Legends of the Tang Dynasty". Movies mostly appear in the form of martial arts, gods and monsters, etc. These movies include "The Immortal Stick", "The Righteous Demon Kills the White Snake", "The Emperor of the Tang Dynasty Journeys to the Underworld", "Pansi Cave", "Princess Iron Fan", "The List of Gods" - —Yang Jianmei Mountain Collects Seven Monsters", "Feng Shen Bang - Nezha Nao Hai", "Looking for the Father and Encountering Immortals", etc.[1]

The second period should be from 1937 to the mid-1940s. Affected by the September 1st Incident, most of the film companies in Shanghai at that time moved south to the relatively peaceful Hong Kong, continuing the Shanghai style of the first period, such as "New Arabian Nights" (1947), "Sleepwalking in Heaven" (1948), "Beast Kingdom Gods and Demons" (1948), "The Peach Blossom Girl's Hands" (1949) and other works. The reinterpretation of myths and legends

fully explores the magical elements and has a distinctive ethnic color.

The third period was the 1980s-1990s. Influenced by the martial arts films directed by Chang Cheh and King Hu, the Hong Kong film industry gradually began to see magical films with martial arts colors, such as the "A Chinese Ghost Story" series (1987), "The Snake" (1993), etc. These works gradually adopt more advanced special effects technology, and their creative concepts are more in line with the aesthetics of modern audiences and should be regarded as transformational works. In particular, the "A Chinese Journey to the West" (1994) series of films came out, which incorporated comedy elements and post-modern narrative logic in its creation. It is a representative work of Hong Kong fantasy films in the period of transformation. After 2000, cross-strait film production teams began to cooperate, and Hong Kong directors moved north. Chinese fantasy films in the new century began to show the characteristics of diversification and integration, and the genre began to take shape.

Through the above simple combing of the historical origins of Chinese fantasy films, we can find that whether it is the genre exploration of martial arts and monster films in the early Shanghai period, or the continuation of the creative style in the Hong Kong period, the creative ideas are all derived from ghost novels. Draw inspiration from traditional cultural resources such as, folk stories, fantasy literature, etc., build a blueprint, and express traditional cultural and moral concepts.

3. Narrative Norms in the Digital Age

The advent of the digital age has enabled various types of movies, especially fantasy movies, to have the function of transforming the imaginary world into visual spectacles. This function has brought about a visual carnival of popular culture in the consumer era. The audience marveled at the "hyper-real" experience under digital imaging virtual technology, thus expanding the audio-visual expression of the movie.

3.1. Narrative Tradition under Virtual Aesthetics: Inheritance of Cultural Resources of Classical Novels

As far as the current creation of Chinese fantasy movies is concerned, the aesthetics of virtual images are mainly reflected in two aspects: scenes and characters. As for the adapted material, it is still based on Chinese classical novels. First of all, "Journey to the West" has a huge influence and rich connotations. Its themes, characters, narrative prototypes, etc. all have a lot of room for development and reconstruction. Movies in this regard include "Journey to the West" series Chapters", "Journey to the West: Sun Wukong Fights Three Bone Demons", "Wukong Biography", etc.; secondly, the "Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio" series is based on the development of films such as "Painted Pictures 1", "Painted Pictures 2", and "A Chinese Ghost Story" The most outstanding; thirdly, "The White Snake Forever Zhenleifeng Pagoda" recorded in Feng Menglong's "Warning Words", as the earliest story-telling novel collection to record the legend of the White Snake, provided a literary basis for later adaptations of the Legend of the White Snake. Movies in this area include "White Snake: Origin", "White Snake: Love" and "Green Snake", which are relatively outstanding. In addition, "The Romance of the Gods", as a typical example of the perfect combination of historical themes and myths and

legends, provides greater creative space for later adaptations of themes. Movies in this area include "New God List: Nezha Reborn", "New God List: Yang Jian", "Jiang Ziya", "Legend of the Gods", etc. Finally, "The Case of Di" in the late Qing Dynasty was developed by later generations as a public case novel. While retaining the legendary color of the original text, it also made excellent use of film special effects. Movies in this area include "Detective Dee: The Great Empire" and "Detective Detective Dee: The Dragon King" directed by Tsui Hark. In addition, there are also supernatural novels such as "Sou Shen Ji" and "Legends of the Tang Dynasty" that provide creative materials. It can be seen that the cultural resource attributes of Chinese classical novels have been reflected in the creative practice of Chinese fantasy films since the new century, and also provided a strong foundation for their prosperity.

3.2. Visual Style under Virtual Aesthetics: The Presentation of Eastern Aesthetic Conception

Although the generation of digital images (virtual scenes, the beauty of characters) has gradually formed a technology-first artistic creation method in the entire contemporary film industry. However, the formation of visual style and the cultural genes of traditional aesthetic experience are still the criteria for the consideration of film nationality.

In terms of visual modeling, the most notable feature of Chinese fantasy movies is the presentation of martial arts elements. For example, characters are as light as a swallow flying over eaves and walls, flying sand and stones are flying under the shadow of swords, or they are floating in the air or like shadows. These transformed martial arts and magical arts show a unique visual style based on the film's special effects. From the schema specifications, we can see that most of the scenes appear in the countryside, deserts, islands, and mountains and forests, giving them an ethereal and independent feeling. The martial arts movements in martial arts films draw on the stylized design of traditional Chinese operas. These movements are hypothetical in nature and focus on "virtual" images. The creation of the scene atmosphere also embodies the aesthetic interests of the "Chinese School". These movements The embodiment of style is the visual paradigm with the most Chinese national characteristics. However, high-tech audio-visual technology has achieved unprecedented breakthroughs, and the use of virtual simulation technology has made fantasy movies popular in constructing imaginary gods and demons. However, in terms of style, it has gone to the other extreme, that is, with huge movies Exaggerated audio-visual modeling to restore the spatial performance of the story. For example, Tangcheng in "The Legend of the Demon Cat", "Journey to the West: Three Fighting White Spirits", Heavenly Court in "The Legend of Wukong", Yongning Village in "Monster Catching", the Great Wall in "The Great Wall", The fairy world in "Painting the Wall", the world of gods and demons in "Zhong Kui Conquering the Demons", etc. These overly intuitive space creation and Western-style styling weaken the film's Eastern aesthetic attributes.

The reason why this happens is very simple. "The difference between Eastern and Western aesthetics is reflected in the creative methods, artistic styles and aesthetic ideals. Western imitation theory tends to be realistic, representational and lifelike, while Eastern aesthetics tend to The theory tends to freehand brushwork, expression, and realm. It is reflected

in the development of art categories, including epics, dramas, novels, narrative poems, and sculptures in the West, and lyric poems, prose, paintings, and calligraphy in China. Chinese traditional art has Appreciation and comprehension of natural beauty is still one of the outstanding advantages of Chinese aesthetics.” [2] Chinese aesthetics lies more in the creation of an artistic conception. "Specifically, it is more expressed in the simplified lightness of the picture. For example, in "The Sleeping Bird, Hidden Bird"[3], Li Mubai chases Tong Jiaomu. The pursuit is not noisy, but only lights the water on the mirror-like lake. However, with a piece of water and a few rooms, this scene has the ethereal inspiration of Eastern Mountain water. In "Spring in a Small Town", there are just dilapidated courtyards and city walls, and the camera slowly moves among them, each time When the rhinestones spread out against the broken city wall, there will be large pieces of sky in the picture, just like the mood of the characters at that time, empty and sad." [4] However, at this stage, the audience is thinking when watching the movie. The way seems to have changed, and they have become accustomed to enjoying movies with intuitive visual thinking. Therefore, how to construct the relationship between images and expressions should be one of the most critical propositions in the discussion of the visual style of magic movies.

4. The Transnational Background and Cultural Identity of Chinese Fantasy Films

As the trend of globalization continues to deepen, filmmakers from the three regions (including cooperation with Hollywood) have entered a new stage of mutual penetration, influence and integration, and international cooperation is becoming more and more frequent. At the same time, with the advent of the era of Internet visual culture, the materials and configurations of film media are becoming more and more diversified. Therefore, in this wave of the times, the "ethnicity" and "transnational (region)" of Chinese films The relationship between "background" is more complex. These two aspects are also prominently reflected in Chinese magic films with the characteristics of cross-cultural, transnational and pluralistic. Since 2005, the fifth-generation directors such as Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, Zhuang Zhuang, etc. who have created the brilliant "ethnic film" have joined the creation trend of magical films, producing "The Promise", "The Great Wall", Movies such as "Wolf Disaster" and

"Legend of the Demon Cat" made this type of movie appear in people's field of vision again in a new "transnational (regional)" mode after a period of silence in the 1990s. The development momentum has been getting stronger and stronger in recent years. For example, the production team of "The Great Wall" has Hollywood capital participation, and "The Legend of the Wolf" and "The Legend of the Demon Cat" are derived from Japanese novels. Therefore, these movies cannot be fully recognized by the audience in the process of expressing national cultural identity. . For example, in the movie "The Great Wall", the only image symbols that can represent ethnic characteristics are the Great Wall and Taotie, which represents monsters. In "The Legend of the Demon Cat", the only image symbols that can represent ethnic characteristics are the prosperity of the Tang Dynasty and the unrulyness of the poet Li Bai. Although the story background of "Wolf Disaster" points to the Qin Dynasty 2000 years ago, the image style is rough and sharp and does not present the ancient style of the Warring States Period. These simple symbol displays cannot obtain cultural identity and touch the national memory. plays an important role.

5. Conclusion

Nowadays, the powerful productivity of digital film technology and the expansion of media functions make it dedicated to exploring the sensory functions of the audience. As a creator, what should be concerned about is how realistic virtual images can grasp the relationship between reality and virtuality, thereby making digital films conform to The laws of art.

References

- [1] Gong Jie. China's "God and Demon Fantasy Film": Development and Deficiency[J]. Sichuan Drama. 2009(03):94-97.
- [2] Jiang Meng. The preliminary construction of the concept of "Modern Chinese National Film" - An introduction to early Chinese film trends (1905-1930) [J]. Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition). 2022 (09): 174-181.
- [3] Luo Yijun. Thoughts on Film Poetics [J]. Literature and Art Research. 1999 (05): 45-47.
- [4] Peng Liu. Analysis of Classical Aesthetic Expression in Eastern and Western Films [J]. Art Technology. 2017 (08): 124, 137.