

Analysis of Shanhaijing Elements in Ancient Chinese Mythological Animated Films

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Abstract: Ancient Chinese mythology plays an important role in the classic work of Shanhaijing. This thesis aims to explore the inheritance and innovation of mythological elements in animated films by analysing the elements of Shanhaijing in ancient Chinese mythological animated films. Through the observation and study of several ancient mythological animated films, this paper finds that the elements of Shanhaijing have been widely used in animated films, such as the portrayal of birds and beasts, mountains and rivers, gods and immortals, and other images. In addition, the animated films have also adapted and created the Shanhaijing stories, incorporating them into new storylines to meet the needs of modern audiences for animated films. This paper argues that the success and popularity of animated films based on ancient myths is due to the use and re-creation of the elements of the Shanhaijing, which makes these ancient myths take on a new vitality.

Keywords: Ancient Chinese Mythology; Shanhaijing; Animated Film; Elements; Inheritance; Innovation.

1. Introduction

Ancient Chinese myths have become a hot spot of research in the academic world for their rich content and unique artistic charm, and have produced a large number of research results. In addition to the field of literature, animated films, as an emerging form of culture, have gradually attracted people's attention. As an art form, the essence of animation film is to convey information through visual images and provide aesthetic education to the audience. Animated films contain rich cultural elements, among which the Shanhaijing element plays an important role in animated films. The Classic of Mountains and Seas is a mythological book with the earliest records and the widest circulation among ancient Chinese books, which is regarded as "Ancient Chinese Encyclopaedia". The Shanhaijing is a classic work in the field of ancient mythology, providing a large amount of material for later generations to study the myths of the ancient period. Since the 1950s, domestic scholars have begun to study the Shanhaijing, and have conducted in-depth discussions on its content and artistic characteristics. The Classic of Mountains and Seas is one of the most representative works in the study of ancient Chinese mythology, and animation, as an emerging cultural form, also has its own unique charm. After researching and exploring the Shanhaijing, this thesis tries to apply the elements of Shanhaijing to the animated film of ancient Chinese myths and discuss its inheritance and innovation.

1.1. Artistic Value of Shanhaijing Elements

Ancient Chinese mythological animated films have attracted many viewers and received attention from all walks of life for their unique artistic value. The Classic of Mountains and Seas is a classic work in the field of ancient Chinese mythology and a widely circulated book. The cultural connotations and artistic values it contains provide rich materials for researchers of later generations. In Shanhaijing, many stories can be regarded as mythological stories, which also provide inspiration and materials for later animation creation. As an emerging cultural form, animation films based on ancient Chinese myths play an important role in the

inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese culture. Many elements in the Classic of Mountains and Seas have high artistic value, among which the exotic animals, mythical characters and architecture in the Classic of Mountains and Seas provide a lot of inspiration for modern animation creation. For example, there are many exotic animals in the Classic of Mountains and Seas, such as dragons, unicorns, phoenixes and so on. In modern animation creation, these elements can be integrated into the animation image to create an animation image with unique Chinese characteristics. Animation is an art form with visual images as the carrier, in which the elements of Shanhaijing provide rich materials and enrich the content of animation with high artistic value. In addition, many mythological characters in Shanhaijing have distinctive features and unique character charms.

1.2. Elements of Shanhaijing in Animation

Ancient Chinese mythology is one of the main themes of China's animation films. China's mythological animation film industry started late, the animated feature film Princess Iron Fan, which took one and a half years to complete by the Wan Brothers in 1941, was the longest animated film produced in the 1940s. In April 1957, the Shanghai Fine Arts Film Studio was formally established, which is the earliest animation film studio to be established since the founding of New China, and produced many excellent mythological animated films, such as The Palace of Heavenly Creatures and Nezha's Follies in the Sea, etc. This is also the first time for China's animation industry to establish an animation studio since the founding of the new China. It produced many excellent mythological animation films such as "The Great Pandemonium" and "Ne Zha Pandemonium of the Sea", which led to the climax of mythological animation creation in the 1960s and 1980s. [1] The reason why these works are loved by the audience is inseparable from the uniqueness and artistic characteristics of their storylines. The work shows people's pursuit of an ideal life through imaginative and artistically infectious storylines. When analysing "The Palace of Heaven", this thesis mainly discusses the narrative structure, character image, narrative technique and visual performance. Among them, narrative structure is the most important element in the whole animated

film, so this thesis mainly analyses the character images and narrative techniques in the animated film. In terms of narrative techniques, this thesis focuses on characterisation. Applying the elements of the Classic of Mountains and Seas to the animated films on ancient Chinese myths not only enriches the expression of the animated films, but also educates the audience aesthetically and helps them better understand and pass on the ancient Chinese culture.

In the process of reconstructing ancient myths, domestic animation must integrate the popular cultural forms of today's era into ancient mythological stories, and reshape the animation works to meet the aesthetic demands of the times in terms of plots, characters and artistic styles, etc. The recently released "The New Gods" is an animation film with the theme of ancient Chinese culture. In the recently released films *New Gods: Rebirth of Nezha* and *White Snake 2: The Rise of the Green Snake*, the creators abandoned most of the original storylines in order to better integrate the original text into these newer artistic styles, and created more innovative otherworldly or parallel space and time storylines that appeal to modern youth. In addition to this innovative reconstruction of storylines, many animation works have reconstructed the original mythological text with an appropriate amount of plotting, which also aims to make the narrative more appealing and more in line with the aesthetic needs of modern audiences. [2]

2. The Relationship between Myth and Shanhaijing (Classic of Mountains and Seas)

The Classic of Mountains and Seas is one of the important ancient books of the pre-Qin period in China, known as the "Three Great Wonders" together with the *I Ching* and the *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, and is an important source of information for the study of ancient history, geography, myths, religion and so on. According to the records, *Shanhaijing* is an important book of ancient myths and legends, which contains a lot of content about ancient history as well as ancient nature and geography. Most of these myths and legends come from people's imagination, for example, the legend of Pangu in Chinese mythology about the opening of the sky and the earth comes from the observation and imagination of natural phenomena; most of the characters in ancient Chinese myths come from real life, for example, Nuwa created man and Kuafu chased the sun. Most of these myths are people's understanding of natural and social phenomena in ancient times, and they have a certain enlightening effect on people's understanding of the world. With the passage of time, these myths have gradually evolved into what we know as "myths". It can be said that myths and the *Shanhaijing* have the same origin and the same root. Whether it is the description of social life in the ancient times, or the elaboration of natural phenomena and life phenomena, all of them can be found in the *Shanhaijing*.

3. The Development and Characteristics of Ancient Chinese Animated Films with Mythological Themes

China's first animated film "The Great Pandemonium" opened the prelude to mythological animated films, and since then Chinese animated films have gradually developed and

formed their own styles. From the 1980s to the present, the creation of animated films with ancient Chinese mythological themes has continued to heat up, with the emergence of many excellent works, such as "Nezha Haunts the Sea" and "The Wonderful Book of the Sky", etc. These animated films have not only inherited the ancient Chinese mythological themes, but have also inherited the ancient Chinese animated films. These animated films not only inherited the mythological elements from ancient Chinese myths, but also incorporated modern artistic expressions.

In terms of modelling, ink animation mainly adopts the technique of "leaving white space" to express the picture; in terms of colour, it adopts ink painting to express the picture; in terms of composition, it adopts scattered perspective to express the picture; in terms of details, it adopts the technique of "leaving white space" to express the picture. The details are expressed by the technique of "leaving white space". Traditional Chinese narrative mainly consists of two ways: textual narrative and pictorial narrative. Textual narrative refers to presenting the story to the audience in the form of words; pictorial narrative refers to presenting the story to the audience in the form of images by means of painting, photography and other means. For example, the main plots of *Journey to the West*, such as Sun Wukong's havoc in the Heavenly Palace and the struggle between the gods in the Heavenly Court and the demons and devils, are all presented to the audience through images.

4. The Embodiment of Shanhaijing Elements in Ancient Chinese Mythological Cartoons

Ancient Chinese mythological animated films have high artistic value. With the development of the times, the audience's requirements for animated films are getting higher and higher, and they not only hope that the animated films can show the mythological mood of ancient mythological stories, but also innovate on the basis of traditional culture and modern aesthetics. Therefore, many modern animated films with mythological themes have been inspired by ancient Chinese animated films with mythological themes, and the elements of *Shanhaijing* have been integrated into the animated films, so as to make them show new charms.

In the course of China's animation development, the nine-tailed fox has often appeared in a number of animated films, especially after the release of *White Snake: Fate* and *White Snake 2: Green Snake Hijacking*, the character of the nine-tailed fox has attracted a lot of attention. In the "White Snake" animated movie, the Nine-Tailed Fox appeared in human form as the boss lady of Po Ching Fong, who is not the main character but is loved by the audience. Dressed in a red cedar green dress and holding an emerald pipe, the owner of Po Ching Fong has powerful magical powers. Her archetype is a two-faced fox evolved from the nine-tailed fox. Her front face is a cute and playful woman with a sweet voice, but the back of her head is a fox face with red eyebrows and green eyes. Looking at her overall design, she retains the characteristics of the traditional nine-tailed fox while incorporating modern elements. The character of Baoqing Fangmaster is difficult to define, and at the same time confirms her double-faced fox characteristics, giving an image of cunning, charming, spontaneous and flexible. The design of Baoqing Fangmaster is based on the novel's description, combining the fascinating image of the ancient fox demon with modern elements,

making her temperament no longer one-dimensional. She is mysterious, kind and cunning at the same time, with a complex and varied character that is thought-provoking. She possesses the character traits of national characteristics and modern innovations, which is one of the important factors for the popularity of Baoqing Fangmu. [3]

5. Influence and Prospect of Ancient Chinese Mythological Theme Animation Films

Ancient Chinese mythological theme animated films have had a great influence as a cultural carrier. The mythological elements of Shanhaijing provide creative inspiration for ancient mythological theme animated films and enrich the content of animated films. Ancient Chinese mythological animated films provide valuable materials and experience for Chinese animation creation, broaden the creative space of Chinese animation, and expand the connotation and extension of Chinese animation. As an important part of Chinese traditional culture, Shanhaijing culture should receive more attention and importance. China needs more excellent animation films with traditional cultural themes to improve its cultural added value. At the same time, it is also necessary to continue to innovate, so that people can get more inspiration and thinking from this theme. For example, through the innovation of storyline, character setting, lens use, etc., so that the elements of the Classic of Mountains and Seas in modern animation creation has been inherited and innovation, so that animation creation bursts with new vitality.

5.1. Broaden the Creative Space and Give More Imagination

It provides rich materials for modern animation and gives more imagination space. The animated films such as "The Greatest Hilarious Palace", "Huluan Wa" and "The Treasure Lotus Lamp" are all created on the basis of this, which makes the creative space of Chinese animation widened more, and makes the content of modern animation more colourful. The Return of the Great Sage" has set an example in this respect, as it tells a traditional story from a brand new perspective. It tells a traditional story from a new perspective. Not only does it give the audience emotional resonance during the viewing process, but it also allows people to see the future of Chinese animation creation. However, there are some problems in the animation film of ancient Chinese mythological themes. Such as the lack of innovation, uniform; character image single, lack of personality; narrative way old, lack of novelty; character design lack of innovation and so on. To a large extent, these problems are due to the fact that the creators have not mastered the law of Chinese animation development. From the viewpoint of creative space, ancient Chinese mythological animation film is only a kind of historical and cultural heritage, should also consider the needs of contemporary social development. From the content point of view, the ancient Chinese mythological animation film needs to dig deep into the traditional Chinese cultural elements, combined with the modern society, to provide more materials and inspiration for animation creation. From the point of view of narrative mode, ancient Chinese mythological animation film adopts traditional narrative mode, such as split-screen script, character modelling, scene setting and so on. These narrative methods need to be combined with modern animation creation. Only in this way can ancient Chinese

mythological theme animated films gain more audience favour.

5.2. Innovative Storyline, Giving New Life to Traditional Culture

The plots of ancient Chinese mythological animated films are the products of combining the elements of Shanhaijing with modern social life. The innovation of storyline and character setting makes the works have strong characteristics of the times and can attract more audiences. Take the Legend of Na Cha as an example, the love-hate relationship between Na Cha and Ao Beng in the film is an important part of the film's storyline innovation. Na Tcha fights against the heavenly tribulation in order to protect the people and his master, and is eventually injured by the heavenly thunder. Ao Beng also lost his own life for protecting the people. In the film, the plot setting of these two main characters dedicating their lives in order to achieve their respective ideals makes the whole film full of inheritance and innovation of traditional culture. The film not only adds innovations in the portrayal and characterisation of characters such as Na Tcha, Ao B, and the Dragon King, but also adds a brand new storyline. On the basis of the traditional storyline, new elements and new ideas are added to enrich the content of the film and give the film a new lease of life. For example, "Journey to the West - The Return of the Great Sage" adds new elements and ideas to its storyline, such as the Monkey King saving the people and fighting against the apocalypse, so that the film is rich in a sense of the times. These are all explorations of plot innovation in animated films with ancient Chinese mythological themes. In future animation creation, storyline innovation should be combined with the spirit of the times and traditional cultural characteristics.

In the new media era, due to the development of domestic film and television dramas, the creative direction and audience groups of animation films are getting narrower and narrower, gradually developing towards the youth and children's groups, and it is difficult to have animation films suitable for the audience of adult groups. There are two main reasons for this situation, one is that the United States Disney, Fox and other film industry giants regularly send high-quality animated films to the Chinese market every year, this kind of fully industrialised production and operation of animated films, whether from the technical point of view or from the point of view of the dissemination of the arts, is the world's advanced level, compared to China's domestic animated films are very inferior. The introduction of the world's top-level animation film, on the one hand, has a great monopoly effect on China's film market, so that domestic animation films do not have any competitive advantage. On the other hand, the aesthetic ability of the domestic film-viewing public is also gradually improving, and the traditional simple animation creation technology is no longer suitable for the current aesthetic trend. [4] Co-operation inheritance and innovation culture, animation language means to become a new way of animation art life. By combining the excellent mythological elements with modern technology, Chinese animation can be presented in front of the audience with a brand-new look and win the audience's favour. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary for us to fully understand the cultural essence of our nation, and understand the public's aesthetic psychological needs and state of mind. Myth, as the essence of our traditional cultural and artistic treasury, combines elements of historical and biographical information, fables and legends; it

is a piece of music that inculcates the human mind and has become the source of the far-reaching Chinese culture. Therefore, "the inheritance of myths requires artistic expressions that are combined with them and can be recognised by the people, and animation is precisely the most suitable art form for the expression of fictional myths." [5]

5.3. Using Lens Language to Enhance the Infectious Force of Animation

Animation as a comprehensive art, including painting, photography, music, literature, theatre and other forms of art. Different art forms use different lens language, the content expressed will also be different. When using camera language, ancient Chinese mythological animation films should be based on national characteristics, highlighting localised expression and avoiding uniformity. Animation works such as "White Snake: Fate" and "Big Fish Begonia" adopt novel and chic camera language, which is well received by the audience. In the portrayal of characters, the characters from classical Chinese mythological stories are borrowed to create an animation image with great oriental characteristics. For example, in "White Snake: The Origin", the "White Lady" appears in human form, compared with the "Green Snake" in animal form, the character image has more artistic tension and vitality. In the design of the background environment, reference to traditional Chinese painting, calligraphy, paper-cutting and other forms of art, creating an animation world full of oriental flavour and traditional cultural atmosphere. Big Fish Begonia adopts the characters of "Kun" and "Kun" from Chinese classical mythology as its main characters. Kun" and "Kun" appear many times in the film, showing their growth in "Begonia" through their movements and emotional changes. These camera languages not only add Chinese elements and cultural flavour to the animation, but also enhance the infectiousness of the animation.

6. Conclusion

Myth is the crystallisation of the wisdom of the ancient people of China and an important driving force for the development of human civilisation. It is through the use of these mythological elements that ancient Chinese mythological animation films make these traditional cultural elements take on a new vitality, which also provides a new path for the protection of traditional culture in China. Although some excellent animated films on ancient Chinese myths have gained good market response, the research on excellent animated films on ancient Chinese myths in China is still in its infancy and has to be further developed. In this paper, we believe that China should accelerate the research on ancient Chinese mythological animated films, strengthen the use of ancient Chinese mythological elements in animated films, and make them compatible with the modern society, so as to enable the inheritance and development of these excellent traditional cultural elements.

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