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A Comparative Analysis of the Narrative Styles of Shanhaijing and Ancient Myths in Animated TV Series

Yasheng Deng

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

Abstract: This thesis compares and analyses the narrative styles of Shanhaijing and ancient myths in animated TV dramas, discusses the similarities and differences between the two in terms of narrative structure, character portrayal, and visual presentation, so as to reveal their roles in cultural inheritance and innovation, and puts forward suggestions for the future production of animated TV dramas.

Keywords: Shanhaijing; Ancient Mythology; Animated TV Series; Narrative Mode; Cultural Inheritance.

1. Introduction

In the development of Chinese culture, myth is an important part. However, with the development of the times, social environment and people's concept changes, the development of myths in today's society has gradually shown a downward trend. The ancient cultural heritage related to myths is also facing problems such as disappearance and alienation, therefore, how to protect traditional cultural resources is an important topic of concern for contemporary scholars. Therefore, animated TV series, as an emerging art form, has both the support of modern technology and rich visual language, as well as deep traditional cultural heritage and artistic charm. Therefore, this paper takes Shanhaijing and ancient myths as examples to compare and analyse the similarities and differences between the two narrative styles in animated TV dramas, and explore the role of the two for cultural inheritance and innovation. As an emerging art form, animated TV drama has been widely used in many media fields such as film, TV and network. Compared with film, television, network and other media, animated TV dramas are more flexible and diverse in their narrative mode. In this paper, we will analyse the similarities and differences in the narrative styles of Shanhaijing and ancient myths in animated TV series from the aspects of narrative structure, character portrayal, visual presentation, etc., and then we will discuss the role of animated TV series in cultural inheritance and innovation. Finally, it will put forward relevant suggestions for the creation of future animated TV dramas.

1.1. Narrative Structure

Shanhaijing adopts a narrative structure of "interweaving time and space" in its narrative structure. This narrative structure is centred on "human beings", taking time as a clue, and interweaving multiple clues into a complete story. Therefore, the narrative structure of the Classic of Mountains and Seas is very clear and explicit. In "The Classic of Mountains and Seas", "Man" is the central character of the story, and the rest of the characters all revolve around "Man". However, this narrative structure is broken in animated TV series. As the plot develops, other characters or characters will appear in the animated TV series, who are connected to the main character through their own story line, thus promoting the development of the storyline. For example, in "The Descent of Na Cha's Demon Child", Na Cha, Ao C and others have their own story lines, and they change their destiny through their own efforts and become connected to the protagonist. In "The Classic of Mountains and Seas", "man" is the central character of the story, so the narrative structure is relatively single. However, in animated TV series, as the plot develops and advances, the "people" will also change. In "The Descent of Nezha", "human" is one of the most important characters in the film, and all the other characters take "human" as the centre of the storyline. For example, in "Big Fish Begonia", although "human" is one of the main characters in the story, the film does not focus on "human", but on "big fish".

Narrative illustration tells a story through images, allowing the viewer to understand the images through their own imagination, which is fascinating. This visualisation is much more profound and the memory points are much stronger. This is why narrative illustrations have more detail and content, are more readable and thought-provoking. Narrative stories are split and deconstructed, and reassembled as elemental parts in the illustration picture, so that the viewer can find the story through the illustration picture, feel the charm of narrative illustration intuitively through their own eyes, and dig out the storytelling in it by themselves, so as to experience the fun of discovering the story.

Narrative illustration "Jingwei reclaiming the sea" tells the story of a female child who drowned in the water in pain and grief, and then transformed into Jingwei, who kept putting stones into the East Sea, reflecting the spirit of Jingwei's defiance of power and resilience. In the composition of the picture, the bird of Jingwei and the female child are placed in the visual centre, and what the female child is holding in her hand and what the bird of Jingwei is carrying in its beak are the clues in the picture - the stones. At the bottom of the picture is the seawater that Gong Gong, the god of water, was impressed by Jingwei's act of reclaiming the sea and stirred up with flood water. The seawater is intermingled with the girl's hair, which also hints at the tragedy of the girl's life being buried in the sea. In order to emphasise the magnificence of the tragedy, rainy weather and twisted water ripples are used in the background, foreshadowing the cruelty of natural disasters. In the painting treatment, a layer of halo is superimposed on the body of the girl child, reflecting the process of the soul's transformation into a bird of prey. Part of the sea water is also covered with a layer of faint glow effect, making the whole picture full of sadness with a hint of hope.

[1] Throughout the current application and adaptation of the mythological elements of the Shanhaijing, different countries show different styles, but they all pay more attention to the use of the mythological elements of the Shanhaijing, which is determined by the nature of the book itself. The Shanhaijing is similar to a geographical journal, and its development and creation is much more difficult than imagined. It is not like Journey to the West, which is a complete novel in itself, with characters and storylines running through it. The Shanhaijing is a fragmented account of astronomy and geography, and does not contain any complete story or myth. It is precisely because of the fragmented nature of the content of the account that it gives people ample room for imagination, and provides a variety of possibilities for animation adaptations of the Shanhaijing. Including the simple references to mythological elements such as "Filling in the Sea with Jingwei" and "Quafu Chasing the Sun"; the combined use of mythological elements such as "Mountain and Sea" and "Big Fish Begonia"; and the references to and adaptations of "Shan Hai Jing" in different animated films have also taken on a new significance of the times and social value. Including the renewal of character creation, which makes the original mythological elements more intuitive and concrete; the deepening of the theme, which makes the original scattered records of the mythological elements of the Shanhaijing in the books have different thematic expressions in different times; and the redevelopment of the value, which makes the ancient books of the Shanhaijing, which are rich in content and have extensive records, come back to our field of vision under the re-adaptation of the animation. [2]

1.2. Characterisation

In animation TV series, characterisation is the core presentation of the character story, which can present a complete and full character image through the portrayal and display of the character, and highlight the theme of the work through distinctive and unique character traits. Therefore, in mythological stories, characterisation usually shows the conflicts between man and nature, man and god from all sides. For example, mythological stories such as Nuwa mending the sky and Kuafu chasing the sun all reflect the theme of the work by portraying different characters. In Shanhaijing, since its story structure is a complete thread, all the conflicts in its story development must be presented through the characters' images. For example, the image of Kuafu in Kuafu Chasing the Sun is a brave and fearless hero. In order to chase back the sun, Kwa-Fu defied difficulties, dared to take risks and sacrifices, and finally died in front of the sun. Since the sun that Kwa-Fu chases is in the direction of the sun, his image also shows a yearning for the real world and the pursuit of the ideal world. Through the analysis of the characters in Shanhaijing, it can be seen that the characters in the story are portrayed with obvious character personality characteristics. And animated TV series need to pay more attention to the character traits when shaping the characters, and show the fate of the characters through the differences between the characters' personalities. For example, the Monkey King in The Return of the Great Sage is lively, has a sense of justice, and loves and hates clearly, while Na Tcha in Na Tcha's Demon Boy Descends to the World shows character traits such as rebelliousness, bravery, and cleverness. Therefore, when adapting mythological stories, we can add character traits appropriately to make them more in line with the values of young people in modern society.

The Classic of Mountains and Seas presents a wealth of "strange", "weird" and "mysterious" features. In today's animation, film and game creation, the reasonable use of these thinking characteristics, with simple and easy to understand the form of dissemination of ancient texts, can receive very good results. The geographic knowledge in Shanhaijing, the volume of mountains, rivers, animals, plants and other data also provides a fertile soil for the creation of animation films and games, for example, the introduction of more than 470 mountains in the Hainai Wujing alone is enough to make people sigh in admiration. If it is a game framework creation, with this as the background of the story era, can completely let the player immersed in this rich geography and culture plot. [3]

1.3. Visual presentation

Animated TV series as a new type of art form, its visual presentation is also an important factor that affects the audience's perception. Excellent animation TV series in the visual presentation, not only focus on the presentation of traditional culture, but also reflect the characteristics of the times. In terms of visual presentation, both Shanhaijing and ancient myths incorporate a large number of traditional Chinese elements, including clothing, architecture, artefacts, animals and other aspects. These elements are given a new meaning through the visual presentation of the animated TV series.

Through the comparative analysis of the narrative styles of Shanhaijing and ancient myths in animated TV dramas, it is easy to see that both of them possess the essence of traditional culture, and both of them have profound historical heritage and artistic charm. However, there are differences in narrative structure, characterisation, visual presentation and other aspects. Therefore, how to better integrate the Classic of Mountains and Seas and ancient myths into animated TV dramas, and play a role in the inheritance and innovation in this paper needs to explore the issue. The author believes that this can be achieved in the following aspects: 1. In the narrative structure, the ancient myths should be combined with modern culture, and the ancient myths should be combined with modern society to form a mythological story with modern atmosphere. At the same time, in order to avoid showing the ancient myths with modern style animated TV series, it can appropriately increase the primitive style of some ancient mythological stories.2. In the characterisation, it can introduce the image that young people nowadays are more fond of as the main character in the animated TV series, and unfold the story centred on the character.3. In the visual presentation, it can be expressed by using the modern technological means, and the animated TV series can be used to Expression of traditional Chinese culture. For example, we can draw on the expression methods and methods of film, television and other media to show ancient Chinese mythological stories. At the same time, attention should also be paid to the production process of animated TV series to avoid over-exaggeration, distortion and other problems.

2. Comparative Analysis of Narrative Structure

"Narrative structure is a process of using techniques to organise and arrange the psychological state of the characters and the occurrence, development and outcome of events in the work in a logical way." Unlike the linear narrative

structure of mythological stories, which is chronological in nature, animated TV series are made up of a number of different story segments, each with its own independent process of development. However, the Shanhaijing all tell their stories in chronological order, which requires that the characters' behaviour and plot development in the animated TV series be consistent with the timeline. In order to meet this requirement, the animated TV series has made the timeline simplified. The timeline in The Classic of Mountains and Seas is simple and irregular: "The first few chapters unfold on a 'year' timeline, while the later chapters unfold on a 'day' timeline." Although there is a timeline in The Classic of Mountains and Seas, each segment has a fixed point in time, "twelve months in a year and thirty days in a month." The actions of the characters in the animated TV series are aligned with the timeline, which results in a clearer story line throughout the animated TV series. Cognitive narratologist David Herman explains the concept of "story world" as "the brain's reproduction of the world that has been evoked by the narrative, either explicitly or implicitly", and that traditional forms of printed text, verbal narration, media images, and even the media are not the only forms of storytelling. The traditional forms of printed text, verbal narratives, media images, or even conceptualised artefacts or story frames can all be part of a storyworld. Storyworlds are defined as "mental models of time and situations that are retold." [4]

3. Comparative Analysis of Characterisation

Characters in the Shanhaijing are mainly of three types: mountain gods, divine animals, and foreigners. The difference between the characterisation in the Classic of Mountains and Seas and that in Journey to the West lies in the higher level of their godhood. For example, the mountain gods in the Classic of Mountains and Seas are the sons of the Heavenly Emperor and the gods of the human world. And Sun Wukong is Sun Wukong. The mountain gods are gods outside the "three realms", while the Monkey King is a god within the "three realms". From this point of view, the characters in the Classic of Mountains and Seas are more exalted than those in Journey to the West. However, although the mountain gods and godly beasts are of a higher rank, they do not give a clear description of their status and duties. In Journey to the West, Sun Wukong was named "Pil Ma Wen" by the Jade Emperor after he had caused havoc in the Heavenly Palace, and gradually learnt his identity through a series of subsequent events. Although the mountain gods and divine beasts share the same status as the Monkey King, their status levels are not clearly stated. Therefore, these characters are portrayed in The Classic of Mountains and Seas more in line with their status and duties.

4. Comparative Analysis of Visual Presentation

Visual presentation refers to the image formed in the audience's mind by the film, including the synthesis of picture, sound and colour. In animated TV series, the picture is the most basic element, which is directly related to the audience's perception of the work. As one of the earliest mythological works in China, The Classic of Mountains and Seas can be said to be unique in terms of graphics. Among them, there is nothing more typical than the exquisite and beautiful pictures in the Classic of Mountains and Seas. Each picture in the Shanhaijing is the most original and unique style of painting in the ancient times of China, and these pictures, full of whimsical ideas, have become the most valuable part of this work. In the Shanhaijing, whether it is the human face with a bird's body or Nuwa mending the sky or Jingwei reclaiming the sea, all of these are praises and affirmations of the courage and wisdom that mankind displayed in the face of nature in the ancient times. The wisdom of ancient man in dealing with nature, as reflected in the Shanhaijing, is still relevant to us today as we face the complex and changing environment. The "Classic of Mountains and Seas" has very strict requirements for characters' facial expressions, movements, scenes, etc. For example, for the characters' facial expressions, there are "joy and anger do not show their colours", "eyebrows into the sideburns", "eyes do not look askance", "eyes do not look down", "eyes do not look up", and "eyes do not look down", "eyes do not look askance" and other requirements. And in the scene is more to show the nature is mainly, such as the "Classic of Mountains and Seas" in many mountains, rivers and lakes, as well as mountains, rivers and lakes between a variety of beasts, which are familiar to the audience. In the animated TV series, the scenes are mostly architectural and shot against the backdrop of a modern city. Going back to the original text, the image symbols of gods and monsters in Shanhaijing are primitive, sensual, grotesque, mysterious, imaginative and wild from the modelling concept; and from the story form, they belong to a kind of simplicity and fantasy that has not been disciplined by Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Starting from the original text, whether it is books, films, games or corporate brands, they all borrow the symbols of the gods and monsters appearing in the Classic of Mountains and Seas, often borrowed from the Four Fierce Ones, Candle Dragon, Interceptor, Fusang Divine Tree, Three-Footed Crow, Zhu Rong, etc., and more or less in the modelling of the aesthetics suitable for the contemporary audience. "Modernity". [5]

5. Conclusion

For Chinese culture, the research and development of mythological stories is not only a kind of literary creation, but also the protection and inheritance of Chinese traditional culture. At the same time, mythological stories are also an important resource for the production of modern animated TV series. China's animated TV dramas should make reasonable adaptations and creations of mythological stories in the process of production, so as to better carry on the inheritance and innovation of Chinese traditional culture. On the one hand, it can attract the audience's attention by telling a mythological story that does not match the real life, and on the other hand, it can innovate and enrich the storyline, thus making the story more interesting. At the same time, multimedia and other technical means can also be used to combine Chinese mythological stories with modern technology, to achieve the intermingling of traditional culture and modern technology and mutual promotion, so as to better promote the inheritance and development of China's traditional culture.

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