

The Narrative Evolution and Innovation of Mythical Epic Films: A Case Study of Creation of the God: Kingdom of Storms

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Abstract: In the summer of 2023, the mythical epic film Creation of The God: Kingdom of Storms, which took ten years to prepare, was successfully released. This film cleverly utilizes genre narrative, not only showcasing the adaptation strategies of mythical elements but also creating an engaging atmosphere through a multi-threaded narrative structure and an indefinite perspective. This narrative innovation has achieved significant success in both box office performance and social response, providing valuable insights for the further development of modern mythical epic films.

1. Introduction

Mythological legends are an important part of traditional Chinese culture, dating back to ancient times. They represent the primitive human understanding of natural phenomena that were inexplicable, such as wind, rain, thunder, lightning, and natural disasters. These mythological stories were initially closely related to human production and life, demonstrating the magical colors of primitive humans' struggle against nature. Unlike the Western mythological world dominated by Zeus, the indigenous Chinese mythological system is diverse, providing ample space for the development of Chinese mythological epic films. In 1925, with the release of the film San Qi Fu, Chinese mythological epic films began to emerge. Although San Qi Fu is not strictly a mythological epic film, it was a bold attempt at creating Chinese mythological epic films and marked the first exploration of mythological themes in Chinese cinema. In the later stages of the War of Resistance Against Japan, the domestic film market became active again, with mythological epic films focusing more on animation production. Classic animations such as Prince Nezha's Triumph Against Dragon King and The Monkey King became a reflection of the public's strong demand for mythological stories during that era."In the first two decades of the new century, the Chinese film market saw a surge of genre blockbusters based on Oriental mythological stories. Due to the creative demands of special effects technology, these works often connected with advanced foreign production experiences in terms of creative models and talent usage. With the continuous expansion of the film industry and the

implementation of relevant national policies, the market as a whole showed a trend towards film industrialization." [1] However, for a long time, adaptations of Chinese mythological epic films did not break through the limitations of traditional mythological themes and lacked effective creative adaptations. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary has consistently emphasized the historical influence and importance of traditional Chinese culture, advocating for the integration of artistic creativity with Chinese cultural values. This has rekindled filmmakers' interest in the theme of Chinese mythology, centering on the original mythological stories and expanding them with rationality and creativity, imbuing them with contemporary spirit. This has made mythological epic films a popular choice in Chinese cinema once again. Take, for example, *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* and *Legend of Deification*, which have achieved box office success in recent years. These successes not only mark the rise of Chinese animation but also represent a new level for Chinese mythological epic films. By innovating and expanding on the original stories, these films have broken through stereotypical character perceptions, presenting more complex and profound character images. These successful cases demonstrate the new breakthroughs in the creation of Chinese mythological epic films, which play a significant role in promoting the development of the film industry and inheriting traditional Chinese culture.

Creation of *The God: Kingdom of Storms* is a mythical epic film directed by Wu Ershan, the story mainly revolves around King Yin Shou of Shang, who colludes with the fox demon Daji, resulting in divine retribution. The Kunlun immortal Jiang Ziya descends with the "Fengshen Bang" to find a common ruler and save the people. Meanwhile, Ji Fa, the son of the Western Marquis, gradually reveals Yin Shou's true nature, leading to a series of events resisting Chaoge. After its release, the film received strong social reactions, with audiences praising its unique narrative and novel plot. The film portrays the theme of heroism in ancient mythological stories through the conspiracy between King Yin Shou and Daji, the heroic deeds of Jiang Ziya, and Ji Fa's revelation of Yin Shou's true nature, prompting deep reflections on good and evil among the audience. At the same time, Creation of *The God: Kingdom of Storms* innovates the adaptation of traditional mythological themes, breaking away from the stereotypical images in traditional mythical epic films. By reshaping character personalities and plot directions, the film breaks traditional concepts, presenting a richer and more thought-provoking core. Against this backdrop, this paper will focus on Creation of *The God: Kingdom of Storms*, discussing its narrative evolution and innovation within the realm of mythical epic films. Through an in-depth analysis of the film's genre-specific narrative features, myth adaptation, multi-threaded narrative structure, and indefinite perspective, the paper aims to provide insights and references for the subsequent development of modern mythical epic films from the perspectives of audience emotional resonance and the film market.

2. Genre Narrative and Myth Adaptation

2.1. The Evolution and Characteristics of Genre Narrative

"Contemporary Chinese films are increasingly adopting genre-based narratives, where filmmakers select, concentrate, and organize narrative materials based on well-established genre conventions. This is not only due to the inherent development laws of film art but also closely linked to external political and economic environments, especially the increasingly mature cultural market mechanisms and the dominant national ideology [2]." The evolution of genre narratives can be traced back to the tradition of ancient myth transmission and oral literature. Classic epics such as Homer's Epics and traditional feudal myths in ancient China were often transmitted orally, making them easily understandable and memorable. This genre-based storytelling tradition has permeated ancient literary traditions and continues to influence the fields of film and literature today. Genre narrative is widely used in films, characterized by storylines and characters constructed to conform to a specific genre

or style. This approach aims to better meet audience expectations and comprehension, making stories more accessible, reducing cognitive load, and enhancing viewing pleasure. Creation of The God: Kingdom of Storms employs genre narrative techniques to enhance resonance with contemporary audiences. By depicting heroic characters, the film enhances the dramatic nature of the story. The narrative's accessibility and audience-friendliness also reflect a continuation and innovation of ancient genre storytelling traditions. The evolution of genre narratives is influenced by contemporary audience aesthetic preferences and cognitive abilities. The creative team of Creation of The God: Kingdom of Storms considered the viewing habits and cognitive foundations of young audiences, ensuring they could understand the story without additional information. The arrangement of the storyline plays a crucial role in the genre narrative of Creation of The God: Kingdom of Storms. The story is filled with war, intrigue, revenge, love, and other intense and thrilling plots. These elements are cleverly connected, forming the entire storyline. The story is also full of various coincidences and twists, making the plot more complex and engaging. Culturally, the genre narrative of Creation of The God: Kingdom of Storms is equally significant. As a mythical epic film, it carries rich cultural connotations and values such as loyalty, bravery, wisdom, and benevolence. These values are emphasized and elevated through the story, playing an important role in inheriting and promoting excellent Chinese traditional culture.

2.2. Adaptation Strategies of Mythological Elements in Films

"As a part of traditional Chinese culture, traditional myths and folklore stories, in their creation, transmission, literary adaptation, and film presentation, showcase the unique and exquisite Chinese cultural imagery[3]." Creation of The God: Kingdom of Storms is based on the understanding of the mythological epic genre and uses a modern perspective to re-examine the original work The Legend of Deification. It refines the overall mood and tone, endowing the story with an epic nature while utilizing genre narrative strategies to build a grand story backdrop centered around heroic characters. In adapting the film, it is essential to retain the essence of the original myth while infusing modern values to better resonate with the audience's emotions. The film's adaptation strategy involves several key aspects: The film introduces typical characters like Jiang Ziya and King Zhou, allowing the audience to quickly establish an understanding of the roles, laying the groundwork for the unfolding story. This genre-based narrative approach helps the audience quickly engage with the plot, avoiding confusion from too many characters. The film continuously updates and extends character relationships, enabling the audience to follow the evolution of the characters' fates. Especially focusing on the father-son pairs of Ji Chang and Yin Jiao, it touches the audience's hearts, aligning the film more closely with contemporary values and deepening emotional recognition of the characters. The adaptation discards some outdated concepts and character portrayals from the original, such as the stigmatization of female characters and fatalism. This strategy aims to inject modern values by removing old elements, making the film more positively impactful. Particularly regarding the setup of the "Fengshen Bang" (List of the Gods), the film emphasizes the power of the leader's authority and the idea of caring for the world, highlighting the characters' kindness and sense of justice, making the story more attractive. Overall, the ingenious adaptation of mythological elements in Creation of The God: Kingdom of Storms successfully creates a film world that combines an epic feel with a close connection to contemporary audiences. The film retains the original myths, making careful selections and introducing new creations to enrich the story with cultural depth and modernity. This adaptation strategy has revitalized Chinese cinema and demonstrates a bright future for the continuous development of film narratives.

3. Multithreaded Narrative Replacing Linear Narrative

3.1. The Interweaving and Connection of Four Narrative Threads

"Multithreaded narrative films differ from traditional single, focused narrative plots by connecting multiple characters, multiple threads, and multiple sets of time and space in a non-linear manner. This approach uses diverse perspectives to tell the story, enhancing the film's dramatic effect and complexity[4]." Creation of *The God: Kingdom of Storms* skillfully interweaves four narrative threads, presenting a colorful and well-structured film. The first narrative thread centers around Yin Shou's descent into darkness. Initially appearing as a loyal and decisive leader, Yin Shou is manipulated by Daji, gradually becoming corrupt and ultimately usurping the throne. This thread focuses on Yin Shou, highlighting his transformation through power struggles, which leads to court turmoil and resistance from the hostages. This thread outlines Yin Shou's personal fate while reflecting the cruelty and corruption of political intrigue. The second thread, tightly linked to the first, follows Crown Prince Yin Jiao's efforts to eliminate the demoness Daji. Misled by Daji, Yin Jiao attempts to assassinate her but ends up injuring King Zhou, becoming a fugitive. This thread reveals the collusion between King Zhou and Daji, deepening the audience's understanding of the dark aspects of the political system. Yin Jiao's realization of his father's and Daji's true nature drives the story forward. Simultaneously, Jiang Ziya's offering of the List of the Gods and its rejection intertwines with the first and second threads. Jiang Ziya's presence brings opportunities for the List of the Gods but also foreshadows future rebellion and turmoil. His rejection and subsequent escape from Chaohe serve as a crucial turning point that links several narrative threads, highlighting the story's complexity and depth. Finally, the thread of Jifa's awakening and resistance is built on the first three threads. Responding to Yin Shou's corruption, Yin Jiao's attempt to eliminate Daji, and Jiang Ziya's rejection, Jifa represents the hostages questioning King Zhou's rule and ultimately choosing to flee Chaohe. The interweaving of these four narrative threads creates a grand and intricate story structure, allowing the audience to deeply understand the characters' fates, emotions, and conflicts. The fragmented narrative design offers a visual and emotional impact, breaking away from the traditional linear narrative and providing a more three-dimensional, diverse story experience.

3.2. The Application and Effect of the Indeterminate Narrative Perspective

"Point of view, also known as focalization or perspective, refers to the position or state corresponding to the narrator or characters within the narrative. Narrative perspectives can generally be divided into omniscient, first-person, and third-person perspectives, with first-person and third-person perspectives further subdivided into internal and external focalization[5]." Compared to the omniscient perspective in traditional narratives, the indeterminate narrative perspective emphasizes presenting the story through the expression of different characters' subjective thoughts. Creation of *The God: Kingdom of Storms* employs this narrative technique, switching and shifting perspectives across multiple characters, allowing the audience to gain a deeper understanding of each character's inner world and presenting a richer and more complex narrative effect. Under the indeterminate narrative perspective, the shifts and changes in the stories of different characters successfully showcase their subjective thoughts. The film intertwines four narrative threads, each focusing on different protagonists and depicting their growth, awakening, and resistance. For example, the threads of Yin Shou's descent into darkness, Jiang Ziya's rejected sacrifice of the List of the Gods, and Jifa's awakening and resistance each highlight the rise and fall of different characters' fates. The indeterminate narrative perspective deeply explores the internal conflicts and emotional fluctuations of each character. Secondly, this narrative technique in mythological epic films embodies a profound and extensive quality. Mythological epics typically focus on the rise and fall of a race or nation,

seeking a panoramic narrative of vast time and space. By employing the indeterminate narrative perspective, the film can reveal characters' emotions, motivations, and growth trajectories more deeply, making the entire mythological epic more enriched and moving. The audience can see both the grand stories of heroes and resonate with their own struggles and choices, thus making the mythological story more humanized and emotionally resonant. However, the film also faces challenges from the causally linear narrative approach. Given the numerous characters and complex plotlines, using such a narrative method can lead to a situation where the story appears scattered, limiting the film's length and making it difficult to clearly present a large amount of plot within a short period. This can result in secondary plotlines overshadowing the main narrative, making the primary storylines seem too compressed. For instance, the scene of Taotie chasing Jifa, while visually spectacular due to the extensive use of special effects, might disrupt the narrative flow and make it challenging for the audience to stay focused on the main storyline.

4. Conclusion

In summary, this paper explores narrative strategies, mythological adaptation, and narrative innovation, aiming to provide a series of insights into the creation of mythological epic films. First, the multi-threaded narrative strategy intertwines the corruption of Yin Shou, Prince Yin Jiao's elimination of Daji, Jiang Ziya's rejected sacrifice of the List of the Gods, and Ji Fa's awakening and resistance. These four threads are woven together, enriching the storylines, showcasing the complexity of the characters, and providing the audience with a more immersive viewing experience. The use of the indeterminate narrative perspective allows the audience to gain a deeper understanding of each character's inner world, enhancing emotional resonance. Second, it provides insights for the development of modern mythological epic films, emphasizing literary quality and deep thinking in creation. By re-examining character roles and exploring complex storylines, such films can meet the audience's demands for visual impact while offering more profound and substantial intellectual content. Future creation of mythological epic films should place greater emphasis on narrative depth and diversity, using innovative approaches to guide the audience in a deeper understanding of the story and characters. This approach better caters to modern audiences' diverse requirements for film works.

Author contributions

In this paper, Zixuan Hu was responsible for the main writing, ensuring the coherence and flow of the manuscript. Yu Yan conducted a comprehensive literature review, identifying and summarizing key research relevant to our study. Yichun Wang organized the literature, categorizing and synthesizing the information for easy reference. Xinyu Zhang translated crucial documents and studies, making international research accessible for our analysis. Lastly, Yidi Zhang meticulously proofread the entire manuscript, ensuring accuracy and consistency in language and format.

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