

Research on the International Dissemination Paths of Chinese Characteristic Genre Films—Taking the Film "Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms" as an Example

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Abstract: Creation of The Gods I: Kingdom of Storms not only inherits the genre style of traditional supernatural films, but also achieves an innovation in its film aesthetics on this basis. In terms of narrative strategy, it simplifies the story based on the traditional supernatural novel "Investiture of the Gods" and incorporates contemporary visual perspectives to present the ancient Chinese mythological imagination in the form of a trilogy. It continues the intertextual tradition between supernatural films and classical literature, and tells the story in a narrative style that is more acceptable to contemporary audiences, laying the foundation for the film "Creation of The Gods I: Kingdom of Storms" to go global. In terms of industrialized film production, there are also innovative strategies in film space aesthetics and audio-visual effects, so as to better showcase the charm of traditional Chinese culture through visual language.

1. Introduction

The first part of "Creation of The Gods I: Kingdom of Storms" is a film adapted from the original texts of the Southern Song Dynasty narrative book "The Pinghua of King Wu's Campaign against Zhou" and the Ming Dynasty novel "The Investiture of the Gods". After its release, the film had a low start but a high finish. By the early days of the National Day holiday, it had already surpassed 2.6 billion yuan in box office receipts and began to be scheduled overseas. The film "Creation of The Gods I: Kingdom of Storms" grossed over 187 million yuan overseas on its first day of release, and the "going global" of "The Legend of Deification" was undoubtedly a success. Director Ulsan brings three thousand years of Chinese folk mythological imagination to the screen and innovatively interprets ancient Chinese mythological stories from a modern perspective. The successful dissemination of China's fine traditional culture has enabled the cultural value of the Chinese genre of supernatural films to be demonstrated. It also provides creative experience for other domestic film genres in terms of genre innovation and dissemination, and promotes the release of high-quality production capacity in China's film industry.

2. The aesthetic orientation of the evolution of the genre of supernatural films

Supernatural films evolved from supernatural martial arts films. "Supernatural martial arts films are a genre transformation caused by the extreme exaggeration and mythologization of martial arts skills in martial arts films, and a new form of the continuation and evolution of the martial arts film genre." ^[1]Supernatural films present supernatural spectacle effects through the involvement of cinematic techniques, and as the proportion of supernatural elements increases, the interweaving of humans, ghosts, immortals and monsters and the introduction of more spectacle phenomena have led to the current supernatural films. In the 1920s and 1930s, costume dramas, martial arts films and supernatural martial arts films jointly sparked the first large-scale commercial film wave in China. The release of "The Burning of the Red Lotus Temple" in 1928 marked the beginning of the supernatural martial arts craze. In an age when audio-visual technology was backward, the bizarre scenes could only be achieved by hand. "Stunts such as 'top-up' techniques, post-production compositing, reverse shooting, and the use of wire pulleys to lift actors into the air were all successfully attempted in 'Burning Red Lotus Temple'." ^[2] The popularity of "Red Lotus Temple" has sparked a craze among filmmakers for supernatural films dominated by supernatural elements. However, due to the large amount of shoddy production, the films have become superficial and focused only on attracting attention, using absurd stories to foster superstitious thoughts among viewers, and thus have gradually been banned by the authorities and fallen silent. Although they resurface with the peak of commercial films during the wartime "island" period, they also come to a halt with the end of the "island" period. Overall, the upsurge of supernatural films in the 1920s and 1930s contributed to the development of filming techniques, and also laid the technical foundation, filming experience and story prototypes for the Hong Kong China supernatural film development wave that began in the late 1970s.

The new wave of Hong Kong China cinema, which began in the late 1970s, was an opportunity for the revival of supernatural films. "The new wave in Hong Kong China is more diverse and rich than the pattern of early commercial genre films. Martial arts and supernatural themes have always met the aesthetic and commercial demands of the masses, which has led to a continuous stream of films in this genre," he said. ^[3]During this period, supernatural films shone brightly by aligning their unique cultural genes with the aesthetic identity of Chinese audiences. Compared with the supernatural films of the 1920s and 1930s, the images of gods, ghosts, immortals and monsters in these films are also changing. Characters like Bai Suzhen in "The Green Snake" and Nie Xiaoqian in "A Chinese Ghost Story" have moved away from the traditional demonic image and become kind, beautiful and human. The audience's aesthetic tendencies towards human-ghost and human-demon love stories have also led to the continuous evolution of narrative strategies in supernatural films, incorporating elements of romance, action comedy and other genres.

After Hong Kong China's return in 1997, a large number of Hong Kong China film and television industry practitioners entered the mainland, bringing film production experience and injecting vitality into the development of supernatural films in the mainland. Since the beginning of the new century, excellent supernatural films have not only been visually spectacular, but also inherently rooted in traditional Chinese supernatural culture. Most of these films are based on classic Chinese literary masterpieces and folk tales, with narrative experiences that have been passed down for a hundred years and are familiar to most audiences. The preconceived experiences that exist in the audience's minds are dissolved by adapted visual stories, thus creating a novel aesthetic experience. On the one hand, supernatural films have a commercial nature from the very beginning and have an inherent advantage in following the aesthetic trends of the audience. In the process of continuous genre blending and evolution, they have developed their unique cinematic grammar and mature narrative strategies. On the other hand, the development of supernatural films has a direct connection with the

advancement of audio-visual technology. The development of digital technology has directly contributed to the narrative of supernatural films and enhanced the audio-visual experience. In films like "Monster Hunt" and "Painted Skin", the monster images and spectacular Settings were constructed with the participation of CG and 3D technologies.

The film "Creation of The Gods I: Kingdom of Storms" continues the elements of the supernatural genre and fully exploits traditional cultural resources, drawing the story from the Chinese classical mythological novel "The Investiture of the Gods". After absorbing the supernatural culture from the original novel, it innovates the narrative strategy from a contemporary visual perspective, balancing the relationship between "gods" and "humans" and focusing the story's entry point on humans. Instead of making the film a fictional mythological story, it is a film with humanistic spiritual connotations. The innovation and blending of genre narratives allow the film "The Legend of Deification" not only to retain the expected genre narrative of supernatural films, but also to incorporate elements of genres such as martial arts and war into the narrative logic of the film. Epic war scenes and fantastical magical wonders can offer foreign audiences a more diverse aesthetic experience, not bound by the stereotypical image of Chinese ancient costume martial arts. While enjoying the action scenes, one can also experience the surprises of Chinese supernatural aesthetic culture. This will enable the film, which has the charm of Eastern mythology, to confidently go abroad and gain widespread attention.

3. Innovative presentation of traditional supernatural culture from a modern visual perspective

"In the historical process of Chinese cinema, the construction of supernatural films has relied on the dual impetus of film aesthetics and traditional supernatural culture. The narrative of images has a direct connection with the formation of concepts, narrative and aesthetic choices, and the continuation of cultural traditions in Chinese cinema." ^[4]The success of the film "The Legend of the Gods" is inseparable from the story blueprint, narrative tradition and aesthetic style it has drawn from Chinese traditional culture. The "Investiture of the Gods" trilogy is mainly adapted from the classic Chinese supernatural novel "Investiture of the Gods" in the Ming Dynasty. After the Ming Dynasty, this book spread widely and had a profound influence on folk beliefs, folk operas and legends, and was even jokingly called "the fifth Great Novel". The storylines of "The Investiture of the Gods" have been adopted by many local dramas, folk art performances and storytelling tales. The original novel of "The Investiture of the Gods" has many characters and plots. Many classic characters, such as Nezha, Yang Jian, Lei Zhenzi, etc., have been independently recreated in the text, demonstrating the strong intertextuality between the literary text of "The Investiture of the Gods" and the film and television works. "Intertextuality emerged in the 1960s as a characteristic term of postmodernism and post-structuralism, referring to the relationship between two specific or particular texts (transtextuality) or the intertextuality that one text has on other texts through memory, repetition, and correction." ^[5]Director Ulsun's "The Investiture of the Gods" is a re-creation of the text while retaining the characters and main plot of the original novel.

In terms of the aesthetic style of the film, it continues the whimsical and magnificent imagination of classic Chinese supernatural novels, and uses modern film and television technology to present the romantic cultural essence of the Chinese people over three thousand years to the screen. The strange and dangerous are the prominent aesthetic markers of supernatural films, which give them a pleasing aesthetic value. "Supernatural films, with their superb artistic imagination, break the boundaries between humans and gods, monsters, beasts, and time and space through extreme distortion and exaggeration, creating a sense of aesthetic strangeness, mystery and wonder, and expanding the space of artistic thinking and aesthetic imagination." ^[6]In terms of classic character development, the primary villain, King Zhou Yin Shou, is modeled after the image of King Zhou in Xunzi's "Non-Appearance" : "A great and beautiful man, the most outstanding of the world; At the beginning of the

film, Fei Xiang appears in military uniform, riding a tall and imposing horse, presenting a grand and imposing image of an emperor. Shen Gongbao is a master recruited by King Zhou of Shang to escape the fate of self-immolation and sacrifice to Heaven, changing the relationship between Shen Gongbao and Jiang Ziya in the original work, forming a clear opposition between good and evil, making the conflict between the characters more intense. Whether it's the decapitation magic displayed by Shen Gongbao when he first appears or his use of talismans to control the stone statue of Taotie to chase Jiang Ziya at the end of the film, they all reveal his evil and strange side, while also creating a bizarre and perilous visual spectacle. The use of Chinese religious and cultural symbols in the film can evoke cultural identity among domestic audiences, and it is also a Chinese fantasy element that attracts overseas audiences. Director Ulshan presents ancient Chinese mythological stories from a contemporary visual perspective, bringing surprises to overseas audiences and spreading China's fine culture of gods and monsters.

4. Modern Interpretation of Classical texts

Whether it is the Ming Dynasty's "Investiture of the Gods" or the Song and Yuan Dynasty's "Wu Wang's Pacification of Zhou" and other classical texts, their stories are set against the backdrop of the transition of the Shang and Zhou dynasties. The antiquity of the Shang and Zhou dynasties and the lack of historical records have provided fertile ground for ancient people to imagine myths, attributing the change of dynasties during this period to the will of the gods. "If today's 'Investiture of the Gods' films are content with the myth of 'gods fighting', they will undoubtedly lose the historical depth of this national myth and become a fictional Eastern fantasy." ^[7] The setting of the battle between Shang and Zhou in the original "Investiture of the Gods" is actually a battle of magic between the two major divine factions, the Chan Sect and the Jie Sect. It is the "gods" in the ninth heaven who want to restore order to trigger a human war to improve the "Investiture of the Gods" list, weakening the role and value of human beings. "Many heroes who follow the course of heaven are also hastily arranged to die, as if to serve the final list of Deities. Under the name of fate and destiny, the pain caused by the crowd against the crowd, the system against the individual, the force against the weak is obscured and ignored by the Investiture of the Gods." ^[8] In the film "The Invture of the Gods", director Ulshan retells the story core of Chinese classical supernatural novels from a modern perspective, shifting the "power of fate" emphasized in the original "Invture of the Gods" to "human beings", who can control their own destinies to choose their future paths.

Such a setting has already taken shape in the first part of the "Creation of The Gods I: Kingdom of Storms" trilogy, expanding the character relationships and behavioral motives, adding the concept of "proton", setting King Wu of Zhou Ji Fa as the proton sent by Xiqi into Chaohe and trained and raised by Yin Shou, and creating multiple layers of contradictions. "We hope that through this film, every contemporary young person can experience the process of spiritual growth, feel the essence of our national culture, and feel the continuous power of Chinese tradition," director Ulshan said at the Beijing premiere of "Dream Building". The director and the screenwriter have transformed Ji Fa, a stereotyped character in the original work, into a character with multiple contradictions between the character and himself, others, and the environment, allowing him to showcase and refine his character as the story progresses. By replacing Jiang Ziya's connecting role in the story with Ji Fa, the lofty mythological construction is placed on the down-to-earth "human", and the core of the humanistic spirit makes it easier for modern audiences to immerse themselves in the film, to break away from the shell of the myth and find their own identity, infusing the ancient literary work with contemporary fresh blood. In addition to Ji Fa, the "personalities" of the other characters in the film are also more prominent than in the original work. Jiang Ziya is set as an old man without magic, and the tyrannical and incompetent King Zhou of Shang is a different image from the flat villain. He is not a mindless

tyrant bewitched by a demonic woman, but an ambitious man who is good at managing his own image and has strategic means. With such changes, compared to the mythological themes of fate, reconstruction, adventures, and battles between immortals and monsters in the original "The Investiture of the Gods", human choices and identity recognition have become the main themes presented in the film "The Investiture of the Gods Part One". "Motifs are the most natural basic elements in the narrative process, can be used as a specific unit or standard for quantitative or qualitative analysis of mythological stories, can exist independently in various channels of inheritance in literary and even cultural relations, can be repeated or replicated in other genres of later generations, can flow in different narrative structures and can form new links through different permutations and combinations.

Under such an interdimensional and multiple relationship, the film has a strong dramatic tension. It also leaves the audience with reflections on several pairs of "father and son" relationships while retaining positive values such as punishing evil and promoting good and the belief that justice will eventually prevail over evil. Although the "Deification" series was created in the form of a trilogy, the film also has a complete dramatic structure of beginning, development and ending. The first installment not only constructs the conflicts of the trilogy as a whole, but also is a complete film that presents the vast system of Chinese classical literary works in a way that conforms to the psychological identity of contemporary people, enhancing the acceptance of "The Investiture of the Gods" among overseas audiences.

5. Conclusion

The "Investiture of the Gods" trilogy has been honed for a decade, and the sword's edge is not only aimed at setting a benchmark for domestic supernatural films, but also at going global to showcase China's aesthetic culture. It is precisely this aesthetic innovation in film genre, traditional culture and narrative strategy that has enabled "The Legend of the Gods" to win box office success and word-of-mouth from audiences both at home and abroad. Although it is slightly lacking in visual effects, with the first film's word-of-mouth and box office success, it is believed that the next two "The Legend of the Gods" films will not disappoint audiences in terms of audio-visual effects. The industrial innovation journey of Chinese films has just set sail, and there will surely be shortcomings and flaws. It is hoped that audiences will give Chinese films enough confidence and tolerance, so that the aesthetic innovation of Chinese films can keep advancing, and they can move towards the international film market with a more confident attitude.

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