Academic Education Publishing House

Economic Society and Humanities Vol. 3 No. 8, 2026

A Visual Narrative Study of Mythical Reconstruction in the Film "Jiang Ziya"

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Abstract: Jiang Ziya rewrites traditional mythological stories into modern mythological stories that question the Way of Heaven and resist divine power. This article takes visual narrative as the starting point and discusses from three dimensions: deified forms and clothing, color, and spatial composition. This article argues that visual narrative is the flesh and blood and core of myth rewriting. The character design sets the tone for rewriting, the three sets of costumes showcase the process of faith conversion, color differentiation rights, and spatial composition determines stance and contradictions. These three dimensions together constitute the visual narrative transition from "god centered" to "human centered", providing a formal sample for mythological reconstruction animation.

Keywords: Jiang Ziya; Mythical Reconstruction; Visual Narrative

1. Introduction

The rewriting of the story of Fengshen in "Jiang Ziya" has become a phenomenon level event in the rewriting of myths in domestic animation. In many existing studies, emphasis has been placed on thematic symbolism, plot narrative, character ethical shaping, and other aspects. However, there is no systematic analysis of the role that the visual system plays in mythological rewriting. This article focuses on analyzing how the visual system participates in the construction of new ideas and narratives, revealing the operational mechanism that visual narrative provides for mythological rewriting.

2. The Narrative Basis of Mythical Reconstruction

Fengshen Bang "is one of the important works of Chinese literature. In traditional literary works, Jiang Ziya is more well-known to the public in "Fengshen Yanyi". At the age of 80, he met King Wen and accompanied King Wu in defeating Zhou. At his peak, he enfeoffed the gods at the Fengshen Terrace and was a representative of the righteous path in the world. [1] Jiang Ziya, as the eldest disciple under the throne of the Yuan Shi Tian Zun in the Jingxu Palace, held a divine whip and rode on four different mounts. He was ordered by his master to go down the mountain to assist King Wu of Zhou in his campaign against King Zhou and to overthrow Shang and establish Zhou. In this traditional form of expression, the image of Jiang Ziya has always been that of a god with a strong and immortal character. He is clever and full of energy, able to solve one crisis after another, turn danger into safety, and ultimately achieve victory. Most of the story structures revolve around the content of overthrowing the Shang Dynasty and the Zhou Dynasty. In the movie "Jiang Ziya", the story begins ten years after the end of the Great War. At the last moment of killing the Nine Tailed Fox Demon, Jiang Ziya discovers that the truth is different and disobeys his master's orders. He is punished and sent to the ancient battlefield of Beihai to practice. He meets Xiao Jiu and goes to Youdu Mountain together to uncover the truth. It turns out that this great war was the result of the collusion between his master and the fox demon, only to complete the arrangement of the Yuan Shi Tian Zun for the human chess game. His master believes that abandoning the human Su Daji alone to save the people of the world is the best arrangement. This war not only makes the people of the world miserable and devastated, but also violates his promise at that time. He not only does not give the fox tribe the opportunity to ascend to immortality, but also harms the fox tribe. While Jiang Ziya was pursuing the truth, the master continued to set up a scam, falsely claiming that returning to the countryside was the only way to solve the problem, but in fact, Master planned to annihilate along with Xiao Jiu and 100000 souls of the Fox Clan. In the end, Jiang Ziya awakened, no longer following the path of heaven but standing up for the common

people. He shattered the giant axe, cut off the lock of fate, faced his master directly, cut off the ladder of heaven, cut off the control of the heavenly court over the human world, and finally the spring of the human world returned to the earth. [2] The film showcases Jiang Ziya's abnormality from the beginning, and the skepticism from the beginning shows the character's change. The full title of the film revolves around Jiang Ziya's suspicion of his master's school, laying the foundation for the concept of shifting from "god centered" to "human centered" from the beginning. As the protagonist of the film, Jiang Ziya's character design contains a sense of rebellion from the beginning, and the three changes in character image are also three changes in mood and choice. From becoming a god, to being demoted to a mortal, and then to becoming a god on their own, achieving a transformation from a "god centered" to a "human centered" approach.

3. Deized Forms and Clothing

The tone of the film breaks down and reconstructs traditional mythological stories, with the protagonist's setting shifting from immortals to ordinary people, in traditional mythological stories, Jiang Ziya is the image of a wise man with white hair. He strategizes, overthrows the rule of tyrants, and saves the world from fire and water. [3] The most prominent feature of Jiang Ziya in the drama is her thinness, sharp face shape, and fleshless cheeks. This image is set in line with a self doubting personal belief for ten years, and Jiang Ziya was punished to undergo rigorous training in Beihai, where she had to exchange her food for the cloud patterns on her clothes. Faced with ten years of confusion and unresolved issues, Jiang Ziya's image carries a secularized and decadent aura. This confusion and decadence is manifested through lifeless eyes, slightly furrowed eyebrows, downward sloping corners of the mouth and beard, hunched back, and sluggish footsteps. This character setting fails to provide the audience with a convincing image of a deity, and instead becomes the most common middle-aged man in the secular world. The clever setting of this character image visually and intuitively tells the audience that it is a "rebellion" against the usual mythological stories, the first step in reconstructing myths, and also lays the first groundwork for the rationality of the development of stories that sever divinity in the future.

Character styling cannot be separated from clothing decoration. A set of clothing can most intuitively display the background and mental state of the character, as well as other details. The three sets of clothing also represent the entire process of Jiang Ziya's belief transformation, and the clothing represents Jiang Ziya's identity stance, from unwavering belief to questioning. Doubting the so-called 'truth', reflecting on why the Way of Heaven brings suffering, how divine power intervenes in human destiny, and the division between justice and evil. [4] Firstly, the first set is the white background gold patterned Taoist robe worn by Jiang Ziya when he subdues the fox demon and returns to the Jingxu Palace to receive rewards. At this time, Jiang Ziya is full of vigor and is the "leader of the gods" who insists on practicing the Tao for heaven. He believes that practicing the Tao for heaven is the fairest justice for humanity. The second set of clothes is the black and gray crane cloak that appears for the longest time in the entire drama. When he was exiled to Beihai, this set of clothes was always worn by Jiang Ziya. At the same time, the character's image became that of a middle-aged man with a decadent aura. The sacred white color was stripped away, and the divinity disappeared. The image of the exiled god turned into a dim person's image on paper. On the way to Youdu Mountain with Xiao Jiu, Jiang Ziya witnessed the disasters brought by the war, the devastation, the resentment of ghosts, and the hatred of humans. This made Jiang Ziya, who had become a mortal, feel sad and empathetic because of his human identity. At this moment, he deeply doubted the gods and the Tao. The third set of clothes was worn by Jiang Ziya after her enlightenment, with the crane cloak removed and her upper body almost naked. The rest of her body was also wrapped in the simplest white cloth. At this point, Jiang Ziya had reached the image of old age, with her hair, eyebrows, and beard all turning white. At this time, there were no symbols of power in the clothing, and the most primitive form of clothing with only a sense of obstruction was used to represent Jiang Ziya abandoning all the rights granted by the Jingxu Palace, abandoning the concept of acting for heaven, chopping off the giant axe, cutting off the lock of destiny, cutting off the ladder of heaven, and cutting off the control of the heavenly court over the

human world. Jiang Ziya became a god on her own, completing the transformation of human centeredness.

As the opposing deity, his image is almost always presented with an unclear face. As a representative of the gods, different from humans, the character design of the Heavenly Lord adopts a white and transparent jade like texture as the main body, and the skin material and luster fully demonstrate the extraordinary nature of the gods. [5] The huge branches occupy the visual center, highlighting divinity. The indifference of human nature is also highlighted in such character images. The faces of the Twelve Golden Immortals are covered by clear masks, draped in golden robes, and their divine features are abstractly magnified, as if they were truly gods made of wood and mud. They have no human warmth or emotions, but simply follow the rules of the so-called Jingxu Palace indifferently, forming a huge contrast with the image of Jiang Ziya and laying the groundwork for the great war. Character images and costumes are clear language symbols that present the intention of mythological reconstruction in the most intuitive and clear way, laying a foundation for the smooth development of the story.

4. The Divine Order and Collapse Displayed through Color and Spatial Composition

Color often has symbolic and metaphorical meanings in contemporary films, and deepens emotional expression. [6] By shaping character images through visual tones, creating emotional atmosphere, and dividing time and space narrative. In 'Jiang Ziya', color is not only used to reproduce objective objects, but also a vivid display of the director's intention, promoting narrative and symbolic expression. The core expression of "Jiang Ziya" is a rebellion against power, shifting from a god centered approach to a human centered approach. Therefore, the power color of the entire film is divided into two colors: the right of the gods represented by the Heavenly Sovereign and the Palace of Tranquility, and the right of the people represented by Jiang Ziya. The main contradiction in the narrative of the entire film is also borne by the opposition between these two rights. Gold and white are the two main colors that make up the Palace of Tranquility. All images representing the exercise of power are depicted with golden textures, the ladder is golden, and the punishment imposed by the master is golden. The faces of the Twelve Golden Immortals are covered in gold, their robes are golden, and Jiang Ziya's magical power during the initial killing of fox demons is also golden. Even the cloud patterns on all disciples' clothing are golden. Gold represents power in traditional Chinese color expression, Gold is the most important color in China's "Five Color Concept". It comes from the color of the earth and in ancient times, it usually symbolized power. [7] In this film, it is magnified as the visual foundation of the entire divine power, and whoever holds the upper hand represents the superior will be endowed with gold. As his contrasting color, blue represents life in the traditional Chinese color system and also carries a hint of compassion in 'Jiang Ziya'. The first appearance of blue was on the ancient battlefield, where lost souls lost their families, homes, and even their lives due to the "best arrangement" from the Heavenly Lord. Later, the Xuanniao, who was moved by the sincerity of time and came to the human world to transform the lost souls, appeared. The Xuanniao was all blue in color, and finally appeared on Jiang Ziya, who had achieved great enlightenment. Abandoning his divine position and no longer walking for heaven, but standing up for the world, a mass of blue surged into the sky, cutting through layers of obstacles, and finally facing those in power. Blue was no longer the color of the weak. He used its vigorous vitality to resist those in power and face the so-called "best arrangement". In addition, there are two major colors in the film, red and black. The image represented by red has always been violence and conflict, so all the fight scenes in the film have the presence of red elements. Black frequently appears in every discussion about the truth, using color to visually depict the fact that the truth has been concealed. In the final battle, there was a confrontation between black and white on the inside, and a struggle between red and gold on the outside. The ultimate color opposition conveyed the core theme of rebellion and the core of mythological reconstruction.

Spatial layout is an important expression of power language, and the vertical spatial distribution demonstrates the absolute control of power. The order encoding of vertical space is not a simple scene setting, but a precise replication and profound criticism of social

class structure. [8] The Palace of Tranquility hangs high in the sky, and the ladder descends from the sky. The human world is connected to the heavenly realm, and whoever is at a high place holds the power and discourse. The Jingxu Palace at high places and the human world at low places naturally form a way of looking down and up. The Jingxu Palace stands high above, observing the human world as an observer, which is also the underlying logic that allows the Heavenly Lord to confidently state the 'best arrangement'. The human world yearns upwards, begging the heavens to save the people. The human gaze reinforces the sanctity and strength of the Jingxu Palace, but the suffering experienced by the human world is bestowed by the gods that ordinary people long for. The contrast in perspective brought about by vertical composition reinforces the opposition once again, highlighting the meaning of rebellion. This foreshadowing also creates a shocking atmosphere for the scene where Jiang Ziya cuts off the ladder from bottom to top. The more solemn the gold is, the more vigorous the vitality of the blue is. The higher the ladder is, the more shocking the scene of its cutting off is. The higher the Jingxu Palace is, the more precious the independence of the human world is. At this moment, visual narrative also completes the transformation from "god centered" to "human centered", and the rebellion is completely realized [9].

5. Integration of Visual Narrative and Mythical Reconstruction

Visual design has never been a passive subordinate of plot narrative, it is an important element directly involved in the construction of the screen worldview. [10] In this film, there are three visual clues that run through the entire film, and these three clues spread and intersect with each other, forming the core strategy of visual narrative. Working together on the main character Jiang Ziya, serving the fundamental purpose of mythological reconstruction, ultimately completing the transition from advocating for heaven to standing up for the common people. From the white and gold patterned Taoist robe to the black and gray crane cloak, and then to the tattered clothes wrapped in white cloth, it is the visual representation of the characters' transformation from belief to doubt to rebellion. The opposition between gold and blue, the opposition between the upper and lower facades, provides a venue for resistance in this rebellion. The vivid display of visual aesthetics in the film is the driving force for narrative development and the carrier of ethical expression. The character design creates a natural and unusual tone, the clothing makes the form of faith real and visible, the colors make the distinction between power and position clear, and the composition makes conflicts sharply opposed. If the film does not have a refined visual system, the transition between "god centered" and "human centered", Jiang Ziya's resistance, and the reconstruction of mythology can only rely on the rigid expression of lines, losing their luster and leaving only the skeleton. Jiang Ziya's ability to reconstruct mythology is not only due to the simple rewriting of the story plot, but also because it rewrites the visual effects and aesthetic expression, redistributing the sacred and secular, rights and voices. The narrative relying on the visual system is the foundation of this rebellion.

6. Conclusion

The mythological reconstruction of "Jiang Ziya" relies on the integration of story plot and visual communication system, presenting new mythological positions from multiple perspectives such as character modeling, clothing, color, and spatial composition. This also provides a reference sample for the form and meaning of subsequent mythological reconstruction, which is the key to establishing a foothold for mythological reconstruction. Enhance the credibility of mythological reconstruction, expand the audience of mythological stories, and make mythological stories the carrier of Eastern aesthetics.

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