

## The IP Adaptation of Fantasy Genre in Chinese Online Films

### -- The Online Film Adaptation of Journey to the West as an Example of the Manifestation of the Classicism of the Masterpiece

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#### Abstract

With the new crown pneumonia epidemic, online movies have gained great opportunities for development. Among them, IP adaptation of fantasy movies as an important component has always occupied an important position. Through the adaptation of the online movie based on "Journey to the West", we explore the new innovation of movie adaptation and further explain how to highlight the classicism of the masterpiece in movie adaptation, so as to emphasize the new development strategy that online movies should take "content as king" and pursue high quality to cope with the opportunities and challenges faced by online movies under the epidemic.

#### Keywords

Journey to the West; Internet Movie; Film Adaptation; Classicity.

#### 1. Introduction

The 48th Statistical Report on the Development Status of China's Internet Network released by China Internet Network Information Center shows that as of June 2021, the scale of China's Internet video users reached 944 million, accounting for 93.4% of Internet users as a whole. [1] Internet movies have been maintaining rapid growth since their birth in 2014 and have become one of the important choices for people to carry out cultural entertainment consumption, especially under the impact of the epidemic and the boost of national policies, Internet movies have ushered in a new development opportunity. [2] The content genres of online movies are diversified, from melodrama to family ethics, from youth campus to fairy fantasy, from criminal investigation to workplace life, including almost all topics and fields. In this, the classic adaptation of fantasy IP undoubtedly occupies an important position. As early as 2014, when Akiyoshi proposed the "network movie" plan, there were fantasy themes such as "Taoist monk out of the mountain" and "Journey to the East", which have gained some commercial success. In 2018-2019, the box office list of Akiyoshi shows that IP-based adaptations almost dominate the box office list of online movies, and among the IP adaptations of online movies, fantasy genres are especially popular, firmly occupying more than half of the top ten seats, showing strong market potential. Among them, traditional Chinese mythology and folklore, such as "Strange Tales from Liaozhai", "Journey to the West", "List of Gods", "the Classic of Mountains and River" and "Stories of Immortals" have become the main material for adaptation.

Whether it is a theatrical movie or a network movie, "Journey to the West" is undoubtedly being repeatedly performed as a classic IP. Take the network movies adapted from the theme of Journey to the West as an example, "Journey to the West - Origin", "Journey to the West - Red Child", "Journey to the West - Bijou Kingdom", "Journey to the West - Double Saint War God", "Journey to the West - One Road to the East", "The Great Dream Journey to the West" series, "Magic Journey to the West", "The Return of the Heavenly Canopy", "Journey to the West - Locked Demon Seal Tower", "The Great Sage" and many other network movies adapted from

the theme of Journey to the West have also undoubtedly become a diversified type of network movies. In addition to that, there are as many as 45 films with the theme of the Western travels on record with the Film Bureau, a large part of which will be spread through the network platform. The fantasy genre, which is an important component of online movies, and the Journey to the West, which is an important component of fantasy movies, undoubtedly provide a direction for examining the content of online movies. This is on the one hand based on the characteristics of the Journey to the West theme itself. On the other hand, based on the six-minute principle of online movie screening, how to make the classic subject matter gain the audience's attention in the shortest time is an extremely worthy of consideration.

From the perspective of "Journey to the West" itself, it has undoubtedly created an alternative mythological world, with author Wu Chengen's romantic approach and humorous language building a world of gods, demons and humans. As a literary classic favored by contemporary filmmakers and audiences, film adaptations based on the Journey to the West have proliferated but are of mixed quality, and among this large number of film and television works, there are some works that subvert the ideas conveyed in the original and the character settings in the original, which also provide a new direction for our interpretation of the Journey to the West. These excellent works have changed with the times, giving the masterpiece a spiritual connotation that matches the times, caring for the universal values of human beings and conveying the common emotions of human beings. While being artistic, they have achieved notable box office results in theatrical movies and gained considerable attention in online movies. Therefore, we hope to discuss how to highlight the classical nature of the masterpiece through the study of the online movie adaptation of Journey to the West, and help online movies better realize the film strategy of content as king.

## 2. The Value Significance of the Adaptation of Journey to the West

Mr. Lu Xun said in his evaluation of "Journey to the West", "Gods and demons have human feelings, and ghosts and monsters also understand the world." The Journey to the West, through rich imagination, combines with the real society and shows the world a magical world where demons and monsters are rampant. The novel adopts the unique structure of chapter and verse in traditional literature, with a total of one hundred rounds, and takes the scriptures in the Western Paradise through the hardships, taking the scriptures as the main line of the story, with the "fight and upgrade" type of plot setting, each difficulty can be an independent story. In this way, the adaptation of "Journey to the West" is very flexible, as it can be adapted from a fragment of the story or from the whole story. The Journey to the West, as one of the Four Great Masterpieces, has its own special significance in that it is still widely circulated today and adaptations are proliferating.

The first is the connotation of the novel Journey to the West itself. Through the unique perspective of divine and demonic fiction, author Wu Chengen unfolds the story with the main line of the scripture-taking story, which both attracts the audience's attention and has a reflection of reality that has gained unanimous approval. Instead of a direct reaction to social reality, Wu Chengen employs a metaphorical approach, incarnating real-life villains as demons and incorporating all of society's real-life problems into the novel. The Jade Emperor in Journey to the West has a special meaning, as he cannot convince Sun Wukong to be under his discipline, but instead adopts a policy of inviting the "shrewish monkey" and granting him the official position of Pilgrim; in the face of Sun Wukong, who is making a scene in the Heavenly Palace, he has to use the power of Buddha to suppress him under the Five Elements Mountain. The Jade Emperor is precisely reacting to the image of weak and powerless rulers in the real society, which has profound realistic significance and makes the political satire present a light-hearted atmosphere in a playful manner. Such a work, with its own profound connotation, will only

burst forth with colorful sparks when adapting its story and colliding with our modern social thinking.

Secondly, the creative style of "Journey to the West" is both real and fantasy. The world of gods and demons created in the novel is full of magical magic, with environments and magic treasures that are hard to find in reality, and characters that are beyond reality. In "Journey to the West", there is the river of quicksand, "goose feathers floating, reed flowers set to sink"; there is also the Flaming Mountain, "800 miles of flame, surrounded by not an inch of grass". And the whole novel is the most famous is the Monkey King's golden hoop stick, the size can be changed at will, large up to the sky, and small up like an embroidery needle. In terms of characterization, the four teachers and disciples have their own characteristics, and the characteristics of both real and fantasy are most evident in the portrayal of Sun Wukong and Porky Pig. For example, the prototype of Sun Wukong is a stone monkey, so he has the characteristics of a monkey, "thunder face" "lonely abduction face", and at the same time he has extraordinary skills, good at 72 changes. And the image of the pig, it becomes much more bulky, and his lazy character also has the characteristics of the real pig. No matter how magical this world of gods and demons is, it still has a basis in reality. The mythical environment, mythical characters and mythical magic are unified in the author's writing, giving people a realistic feeling. Such a writing style, applied to the specific film adaptation, will also make the overall recognition and avoid the realm of illusion, reflecting both real life and highlighting the extraordinary experience.

Finally, there is the novel's unique structural language. The plot of "Journey to the West" is travelogue in nature, and the difficulties encountered along the way are the main body of the story, but there is a certain relative independence between the individual stories of the journey, but at the same time there is also unity, and all of them act on the four teachers and disciples at the same time to promote their personal development. Such a writing style is similar to our current sitcom creation, where after setting a fixed characterization, only different events need to be set to act on different characters each time to show an episode. In "Journey to the West", there are 91 difficulties, each of which is both a story within the framework of the overall story and has its own characteristics, and many classic moments are still unforgettable to us, such as "The Three Beatings of the White Bone Spirit", "The True and False Monkey King", "The Land of the Daughters", etc. "The Land of the Daughters" and so on. It is this structure that makes the film adaptation of Journey to the West have its own flexibility, which can meet the conditions of complete presentation of the whole story, but can also select a single or a few fragments for interpretation. At the same time, in terms of language, it has the elegance and splendor of a literary novel, with a large number of poems and allusions, and the playfulness of a popular novel, with a large number of folk sayings, which makes the whole novel seem to meet most of the needs and make it stand out in the flood of history. Such a film adaptation of a classic heirloom work has the function of passing on traditional culture, but also exudes a new luster by combining it with the specific connotations of the times.

Overall, "Journey to the West" is a profoundly analytical metaphor and romanticized rewriting of the social landscape over a period of time through the form of mythology, and in later generations this has given rise to operas, books, and post-tales of "Journey to the West" with a certain social fervor, and its social influence and the classic nature of its writings are evident. Therefore, such a heirloom masterpiece still has profound and meaningful connotations waiting for the world to develop. So a series of adaptations of the film "Journey to the West" has its justification and significance of existence and a large audience base, while the study and interpretation of classics and traditions is also a response to the need for the cultural strengthening strategy of General Secretary Xi Jinping in the new era, and is of vital importance to the cultivation of national cultural confidence. Explore the charm of the classics and let them play a different luster in the new era.

### 3. The Evolution of the Online Film Adaptation of the Journey to the West Series

Relying on the magical storyline is not enough to maintain the vitality of the "Journey to the West" film series, but relies more on the power of adaptation. Since the 1990s, there have been many adaptations of the film "Journey to the West", and audiences' comments have been mixed, but objectively speaking, each version of "Journey to the West" has been able to interpret and explore the story from a different perspective. The film has its own unique artistic creation means, from conception to formation through the layers of creation, it must carry the ideals and aesthetic pursuit of contemporary society, while seeking the ideological connotation that can trigger the emotional resonance of the audience, seeking the narrative style acceptable to the modern audience, and bringing a new aesthetic feeling to today's audience. At a time when streaming media is more popular, the western theme, as an important source of online movie creation, has once again been enriched in its content meaning.

First of all, it is to highlight the individual heroic style of the story of the West. In the creation of the film, taking into account the development situation of society, the "Journey to the West" series of films came into being. When making the adaptation of the masterpiece, attention was paid to combining the needs of the times and highlighting the image of characters with heroism to support the big picture. Therefore, in the online movie "Journey to the West - The Origin", the personal image of the Supreme Treasure is highlighted while the rest of the characters of the Journey to the West are simplified, continuing the setup of the theatrical movie "Journey to the West" series. In terms of the image of the Supreme Treasure, it preserves the original spiritual character of the Monkey King, but at the same time adds to his own rebellious color, humanity over godliness. In the ending part, the final climax is placed on the choice of Zixia, choosing to modify the acquaintance with the Supreme Treasure to avoid the recurrence of tragedy. Such an adaptation retains the heroic image of the original series, but at the same time makes the image of Zixia more fleshed out. On the whole, the film's continuation of the celebration of love is in line with the choice of the youth group, but also to meet the collective memory of the old fan base. The image of the Tang Monk in "Journey to the West of the Dream" also inherits the characteristics of "Journey to the West of the Dream" in which he loves pop songs and speaks naggingly. At the same time, the image of Sun Wukong makes a breakthrough to form a sharp contrast with the Tang Monk. After changing his body, the Tang Monk wears a white brocade coat and has a mischievous and capricious character, while the Sun Wukong dressed as a humanist and elegant man is calm and self-possessed. Demonstrates the direction of the adaptation of the Journey to the West under the invasion of pop culture.

Secondly, it is a return to the traditional story of the West. The current society is indifferent to the lack of communication between people, while the reality of the pursuit of fame and fortune at all costs in society is intensifying, people's hearts are restless and not purified for a long time, so people began to explore the meaning of tradition again, in order to seek solace in the soul. The most representative of this phenomenon is "Journey to the West Red Child", the film creatively replaced the protagonist with a red child, and the origin of the story is because as a demon monkey Sun Wukong messed up the sky, kicking over the eight trigrams, resulting in heavenly fire spilled to earth. So the film's Iron Fan Princess also from the original image, become bent on saving the people. In the film, the red child was designed by the wolf monster turned into a demon, is a symbol of the restlessness of people's hearts, and the film is the motherly love of Princess Tie Fan as the starting point, awakened the red child, and in the process also made the Monkey King enlightenment of Buddhism, understand the cause and effect, and finally choose self-sacrifice. In general, the theme of the Journey to the West returns to the level of exploring the original heart, in order to overcome the impetuous with the power of tradition, and eulogize the traditional ethical values of society, such as human kindness,

courage and devotion. In addition, the "Journey to the West: The Two Saints of War" also portrays an image of the Monkey King who is willing to sacrifice himself to save others, and this deviation from the original is a vivid reflection of the pursuit of contemporary social values.

Finally, it is the story of the journey to the West that rediscovers itself. We emphasize cultural self-confidence, not to be lost in the waves of Western culture, but to be based on our own traditional culture, convinced that we can shine and shine. 2020 online movie "The Great Sage" is based on the classic story of the real and fake Monkey King, showing the pressure of the title of the Great Sage on the Monkey King, and also interpreting the meaning of the image of the Great Sage from the perspective of the monkeys. Here we see how the once unruly hero finds himself after his trials and tribulations. The highlight of this adaptation is that it captures the pressure and difficulties carried by the Monkey King in facing the title of the Great Sage of Qi Tian. In the original Journey to the West, Sun Wukong, who was crushed under the Five Finger Mountain for five hundred years and dared to make a scene in the Palace of Heaven, was always complacent about his title of Qi Tian Da Sheng and never seemed to have any doubts. Self-denial, but still full of confidence. And "Great Sage" in the adaptation, using the plot of the Monkey King, seized this detail and deepened, showing the journey of the Monkey King's heart under the reputation. It is this design, so that the audience has a strong sense of immersion and realism, so that the return of the Great Sage when we can not help but weep for the generation of the King. In the story of "The Great Sage", Sun Wukong once again breaks through the image of "King of Demons" and returns to his original heroic image, with the intention of "all sins are sins", the performance is the story of regaining one's self, or having lost oneself briefly in the fame but being able to come out of the gloom The story is about regaining one's own self, or one who has briefly lost oneself in the fame but can come out of the darkness and return to the top. Such a theme is not an exhortation to the people of today, everyone is ultimately broken is a false name, the most important thing is to be able to break through the self and not forget the original heart.

#### **4. Reflections on the Adaptation of the Journey to the West Series of Online Movies**

From the evaluation system of online movies, the movie evaluation ecology represented by Watercress does not favor online movies, and the comments below show that "vulgar, bad, and eye-catching" are common. In the current online movies with male as the main audience group, there are few movies that focus on the female body as the content to gain attention [3]. This is also the case with the adaptation of the Journey to the West series. The scene of the spider spirit played by the web star Nansheng in the "Journey to the West of the Great Dreams of the Demon" trying to seduce Sun Wukong in every way possible satisfies the male voyeurism and desire for women.

So the adaptation of Journey to the West as a classic masterpiece, although it can stimulate the audience's desire to watch it, is also easy to get poor reviews because it goes against the audience's aesthetic expectations. When the movie adaptation of Journey to the West is made, if there is no deep feeling and accurate grasp to find a new angle of adaptation, then the adaptation work is undoubtedly meaningless for the dissemination of Journey to the West. The adaptation of the current network western travel film, without seeing the emotional input of the creators behind the scenes, just to pursue commercial interests, there are many problems: firstly, the loss of humanistic subject spirit, secondly, the blind marketization, the existence of genre monolithic trend, and the uneven production level. To avoid such problems, we need to learn from the experience of theatrical films. Insist on the re-intention of "faithful to the original". For the inheritance of classics, there is no need to accept them all without thinking, the classics are passed down from generation to generation because of their spiritual

connotation rather than appearance. The adaptation of literary masterpieces is not about putting the familiar stories on the screen over and over again, but about finding new points to reinterpret the stories, so that the new film adaptations can provide people with certain nutrition. If we only do superficial things, it will only make the work flow with the world and will eventually be forgotten. The success of the film adaptations such as the theatrical films "Journey to the West" and "The Return of the Great Sage" is not because they are faithful to the original or subvert the original, but because they have found new points to interpret the story of Journey to the West, which can make many people experience the emotional resonance. Secondly, it combines the spirit of the times to interpret the new connotation. A good work must be a work that integrates with the social reality of the time, and the continuous remake of the masterpiece precisely shows the new interpretation of the story of the Journey to the West by people of different times. Each adaptation of a classic masterpiece should appropriately integrate new features of the times and reflect the spirit of the times, while boldly invoking new technical means and new artistic expressions to bring out the artistic charm of the classic masterpiece, only in this way can film adaptations continue to renew their vitality. From "Journey to the West" to "Journey to the West" to "The Return of the Great Sage", all of them are connected with the background of the times and explain a new connotation.

The current outbreak of the new crown epidemic is reshaping the way of human production and life, but it is also causing a surge in online entertainment consumption. Films using online media as a carrier are gaining new opportunities for development due to the epidemic. It is an indisputable fact that more and more online movies are being produced. Compared with the high entry threshold of theatrical movies, online movies are becoming more and more popular due to their low investment, short cycle and high return. However, many audiences still equate online movies with cottage industry and shoddy production, and the evaluation is low. Most of the audience's dissatisfaction with online movies is focused on story, production, performance and other aspects. Therefore, "content is king" has been the consensus of the industry. If online movies want to take advantage of the epidemic to gain public recognition, they must improve product quality, and the script, production and post-production all need to be strictly controlled. Online movies have a wide space for development in the future, and "content is king" is the only path for the sustainable development of online movies in the future.

## Acknowledgments

National College Students' innovation and entrepreneurship training program S202010446013.

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