ANALYSIS OF CHINESE MYTHOLOGICAL ANIMATED FILMS OF CHINA IN 2015-2024

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ANALYSIS OF CHINESE MYTHOLOGICAL ANIMATED FILMS OF CHINA IN 2015-2024

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This study aimed to analyze the narrative techniques of award-winning Chinese mythological animated films from 2015 to 2024, the evolution of their value representations, and audience attitudes toward narrative and aesthetic values, in order to provide both theoretical and empirical support for the creation and development of Chinese mythological animation. Ten representative and award-winning feature-length animated films were selected as samples, covering diverse mythological themes and artistic styles. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining textual analysis based on the "six-element narrative framework," interviews with creators and scholars, and a questionnaire survey with 204 valid responses from audiences. The findings reveal a shift from traditional three-act structures to more psychological and symbolic narratives, as well as a modern transformation of value representation—from collective-oriented expressions to an emphasis on individual growth, social justice, and multicultural identity. Audiences widely recognized the films' "Guofeng" (traditional Chinese style) aesthetics and emotional expression mechanisms, acknowledging their positive role in conveying core values and reconstructing cultural identity. The study concludes that Chinese mythological animated films have become important cultural media that integrate value transmission with aesthetic identity, offering valuable theoretical and practical insights for future animation production, policy formulation, and cross-cultural communication.

Keyword : Chinese Mythological Animated Films, Narrative Analysis, Chinese Values, Audience Reception, Aesthetics Values

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In the context of globalization, mythology plays a crucial role in cross-cultural communication and identity construction. It is not merely a collection of ancient tales, but a symbolic system deeply rooted in history, philosophy, and social structures, reflecting shared psychological patterns across humanity. Carl Jung viewed myths as manifestations of the collective unconscious, expressing universal emotional and symbolic structures(Jung, 1936). Claude Lévi-Strauss saw myths as cognitive tools that reveal the fundamental structures of human society and thought through their narrative patterns (Lévi-Strauss, 1955). Roland Barthes defined modern myths as secondary semiological systems that naturalize ideology and cultural values (Barthes, 1999).

Chinese mythology is rich in moral teachings, historical memory, philosophical reflection, and cultural identity. It is an essential key to understanding Chinese civilization. Scholars such as Yuan Ke, Ye Shuxian, and Yang Lihui emphasized that mythology deeply influences Chinese religion, social structures, and traditional values(Ke, 2019; Lihui, 2009; Shuxian, 2012). With changes in media over time, the transmission of myths has evolved from oral storytelling to literature and modern digital forms. Animated films, as a contemporary artistic medium, offer strong visual and narrative power, creating new opportunities for mythological reinterpretation in a modern context.

The development of Chinese animation can be divided into five stages.

The first stage (1922–1948) marked the beginning of the industry. The Wan brothers pioneered Chinese animation with works like Princess Iron Fan (1941), the first feature-length mythological animated film in China.

The second stage (1949–1965) saw the flourishing of a national animation style. Films such as Havoc in Heaven, The Proud General, and The Shepherd's Flute combined Chinese folk aesthetics with modern animation techniques, forming the "Chinese school" of animation(Tie, 2018)..

The third stage (1966–1977), during the Cultural Revolution, witnessed a significant decline in animation production.

The fourth stage (1978–1999) was characterized by a revival of national themes under Reform and Opening-Up. Works like Ne zha Conquers the Dragon King and Three Monks reflected rich cultural expression, but by the 1990s, domestic animation struggled with marketization, funding issues, and competition from imported works. Lotus Lantern (1999) became the first major animation to adopt market-oriented production, symbolizing the industry's structural reform.

The fifth stage (2000–2024) saw a full-scale recovery of Chinese animation, fueled by digital technology and state policies. From 2011 to 2015, box office revenue and domestic animated film production increased significantly. However, it was Monkey King: Hero Is Back (2015) that marked a true turning point—its 956 million RMB box office performance revived audience interest in domestic animation and initiated a new wave of mythological animated films.

This study focuses on ten award-winning Chinese mythological animated films released between 2015 and 2024. Animated feature films, rather than TV series or web animations, are selected due to their representative use of audiovisual language, production technology, artistic expression, and marketing strategies. The year 2015 represents a watershed moment in Chinese animation history, not only because of Monkey King: Hero Is Back's box office success, but also because of the shift toward more culturally resonant and thematically mature content.

In addition to market performance, this trend has been driven by national cultural policy. The "14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Industry Development" emphasizes enhancing animation quality, telling Chinese stories well, promoting socialist core values, and strengthening cultural confidence—objectives directly aligned with mythological animation. From 2015 to 2024, 43 mythological animated films were released, of which 11 received major domestic or international awards. These include the Tokyo Anime Award (Monkey King: Hero Is Back), Golden Dragon Award, Golden Monkey Award, and

prestigious domestic accolades such as the Golden Rooster Awards, Hundred Flowers Awards, and Huabiao Awards.

The success of these films can be attributed to three main factors. First, narrative innovation—traditional myths have been reinterpreted to address modern psychological and social issues. For instance, Goodbye Monster (2022) explores emotional trauma and healing through a mythological lens. Second, technological advancement—high-quality visual effects and animation techniques have greatly enhanced storytelling. For example, Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child (2019) utilized advanced special effects to bring Eastern mythology to life, while New Gods: Yang Jian (2022) employed motion capture and dynamic camera systems for immersive experiences. Third, aesthetic fusion—traditional Chinese visual symbols are blended with contemporary design elements, creating stylistic hybridity that appeals to a wide audience. New Gods: Yang Jian notably integrates cyberpunk aesthetics into mythological narratives, bridging the classical and the futuristic.

This study aims to analyze the narrative techniques, cultural significance, and audience reception of these ten representative films, exploring how they reconstruct traditional mythology, respond to contemporary issues, and shape cultural identity. Using narrative theory and Chinese cultural communication theory as the analytical framework, the research examines the evolution of storytelling structures, character construction, and aesthetic systems in mythological animated films between 2015 and 2024.

Additionally, this study integrates textual analysis with audience surveys to understand viewers' preferences across different age groups, genders, and cultural backgrounds. By doing so, it seeks to reveal how Chinese animated films contribute to cultural transmission, emotional resonance, and value education in the digital age. Ultimately, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the contemporary functions of mythology and animation as vehicles for cultural continuity and innovation.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the narrative technique of award-winning Chinese mythological Animated films from 2015 to 2024.

2. To analyze Chinese values change through Chinese mythological Animated films.

3. To Study the audience's attitudes about Chinese values and aesthetics values of Chinese mythological Animated films and suggest the guideline of Chinese mythological Animated films currently.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the unique narrative technique of award-winning Chinese mythological Animated films from 2015 to 2024?

2. What changes in Chinese values are reflected in Chinese mythological Animated films?

3. What are the audience's perceptions of Chinese values and aesthetics values in Chinese mythological animated films? Based on audience feedback, what guidelines should current Chinese mythological animated films follow in their creation?

1.4 Definition of terms

1. Chinese Mythological Animated Film

In this study, Chinese mythological Animated films refer to animated films that won awards between 2015 and 2024 and are based on Chinese mythology. The term "mythology" here is used in a broad sense, including ancient myths, myths of historical figures, fairy tales, myths from Buddhist scriptures, folklore, and mythological novels.

2. Narrative Analysis

Conduct a narrative analysis of 10 award-winning Chinese mythological animated films from 2015 to 2024, focusing on the following elements: story and plot, time, space, character development, narrators, and narrative systems. This analysis will primarily explore the narrative structure and visual storytelling of these animated films. From these analyses, the unique narrative technique of contemporary Chinese mythological animation during this period are identified.

3. Chinese Values

To analyze how Chinese mythological animations reflect Chinese values, one can examine how the core values of socialism with Chinese characteristics are manifested in these animations. The core socialist values are a crucial part of the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, summarized as the "Three Advocacies": advocating "prosperity, democracy, civility, and harmony" at the national level; "freedom, equality, justice, and rule of law" at the social level; and "patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship" at the personal level. These core values embody the fundamental beliefs, moral standards, and value pursuits of Chinese society. They reflect the contemporary Chinese Communist Party's expectations for national development, social progress, and personal ethics, aiming to build social consensus, guide social trends, and provide spiritual motivation for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

4. Aesthetics Values

The audience's perception of elements such as character design, scene design, color and lighting, editing rhythm, visual symbols, and special effects in animated films. These elements not only shape artistic expression but also influence the audience's perception, emotional resonance, and cultural significance.

1.5 Importance of the Research

1. Understanding the Inheritance and Transformation of Traditional Chinese Culture in Modern Society:

By examining the narrative characteristics, social and cultural reflections, and audience preferences of Chinese mythological animated films from 2015 to 2024, this study aims to understand the inheritance and transformation of traditional Chinese culture in modern society. This understanding is significant for enhancing national cultural consciousness and pride, as well as promoting cultural diversity.

2. Provide Reference for Animation Creators and Researchers:

his study will offer valuable references for animation creators and researchers. By systematically analyzing the narrative techniques, technical applications, visual effects, and cultural connotations of Chinese mythological animated films in recent years, this research provides deep insights and empirical data for animation creators. These

insights can assist creators in better integrating traditional cultural elements with the aesthetic preferences of modern audiences in future animation works. Additionally, this study provides new perspectives and theoretical support for academic research. The findings can also serve as educational references for animation educators, promoting further development and innovation in the Chinese animation industry

1.6 Study Framework
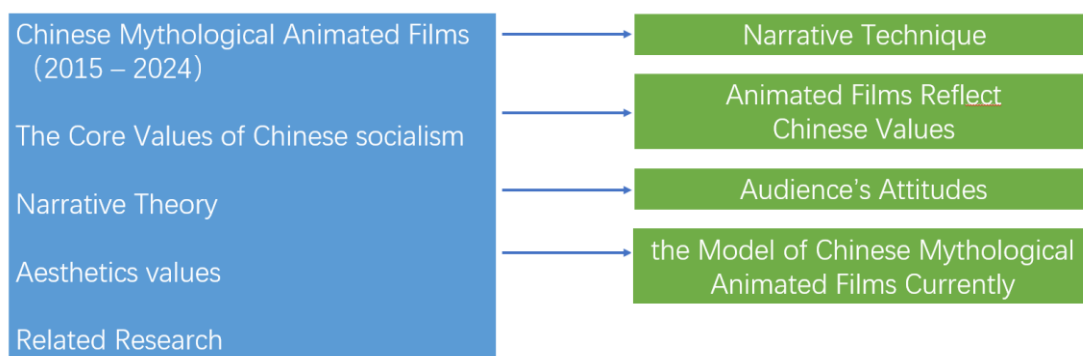
Figure 1 Research framework diagram

Source: Photographed by the Author

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In recent years, Chinese mythological animated films have achieved significant success globally. Particularly between 2015 and 2024, numerous works such as "Monkey

King: Hero Is Back" and "Ne Zha" have not only excelled at the box office but also made groundbreaking advancements in narrative techniques, cultural expression, and audience feedback. This paper reviews related research to provide a reference for future studies on Chinese mythological animated films.

2.1 Chinese Mythological Animated Films

2.2 Research Theories

2.2.1 Narrative Theory

2.2.2 Chinese Values

2.3 Related Research

2.3.1 Studies on the Narrative Techniques of Chinese Mythological Animated Films

2.3.2 Cultural Changes Reflected in Chinese Mythological Animated Films

2.3.3 Audience Attitudes Towards Chinese Mythological Animated Films

2.1 Chinese Mythological Animated Films

This study focuses on award-winning Chinese mythological animated films released between 2015 and 2024. The term "mythology" here is broadly defined, encompassing ancient myths, mythologized historical figures, Taoist and Buddhist legends, folk tales, and mythological fiction. The origins of Chinese mythological animation can be traced back to 1923, with Princess Iron Fan (1941) marking the first full-length animated film in Asia and initiating myth-based storytelling in Chinese animation.

Since then, domestic mythological animation has undergone three major periods of development: the 1950s–60s (classical experimentation), the 1970s–90s (stylistic refinement), and the post-2015 era (industrial revitalization). While the earlier two phases have already been the subject of substantial scholarly research, the post-2015 period has seen significant breakthroughs in narrative and aesthetics, driven by technological advancement, market expansion, and policy support.

In 2015, Monkey King: Hero Is Back generated 956 million yuan in box office revenue and sparked renewed interest in domestic animation. In 2019, Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child set a new national record with 5.036 billion yuan in ticket sales. Between 2015 and 2024, a total of 43 mythological animated films were released, with 11 winning major national and international awards, including the Golden Monkey Award, Golden Dragon Award, Golden Rooster Award, and others—demonstrating both artistic quality and international recognition. The 14th Five-Year Plan for Cultural Industry Development also explicitly encouraged the use of animation to "tell Chinese stories well," further supporting the growth of ethnically themed animation.

Notably, the narrative style of recent award-winning Chinese animated films has undergone a significant evolution, progressively moving beyond traditional linear storytelling. These works increasingly employ multi-threaded plotlines, psychological realism, and symbolic narrative strategies. This transformation signals a structural enhancement in the narrative sophistication and cultural expressiveness of domestic animation, shaped by the shifting sociocultural landscape of contemporary China. As such, it holds both substantial theoretical significance and practical value for this study.

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2.2 Research Theories

2.2.1 Narrative Theory

To analyze narrative construction in Chinese mythological animated films, this study adopts a multi-theorist approach based on the works of Seymour Chatman, David Bordwell, and Li Xianjie. All three emphasize the distinction between story (the sequence of events as mentally reconstructed by the audience) and discourse (the way those events are presented). Chatman focuses on narrative structure and the role of the

narrator (Chatman, 1978), Bordwell on cinematic cues and viewer cognition(Bordwell et al., 2008), and Li Xianjie on culturally grounded narrative logic, symbolic space, and ethical structures specific to Chinese cinema (Xianjie, 2000). Together, their theories provide a balanced framework that accounts for both universal narrative mechanisms and localized cultural aesthetics.

This study analyzes six key narrative dimensions:

(1) Story and Plot: Drawing on Chatman and Bordwell, this element distinguishes the inferred causal logic of events (story) from their selected presentation (plot). Plot guides not just structure but also emotional and thematic impact.

(2) Time: Referencing Chatman, Bordwell, and Genette, narrative time includes:

Order: Whether events unfold linearly or through non-linear devices like flashbacks.

Duration: Manipulating time compression or expansion to affect rhythm.

Frequency: Repetition of events for dramatic emphasis or thematic layering.

(3) Space: Based on Li and Bordwell, spatial design involves both set construction and frame composition. Spatial arrangement contributes not only to visual immersion but also to symbolic meaning and narrative logic, particularly in mythological settings where visual symbolism often conveys moral or cosmological structure.

(4) Character Development: Characters drive the narrative through choices, conflicts, and growth. Chatman, Bordwell, and Li emphasize motivations, personality traits, and transformation arcs, often rooted in traditional heroic or moral roles.

(5) Narrator: A narrative can be delivered by an implied narrator—shaping interpretation through visual language—or an explicit narrator—via voiceover or character perspective. This distinction influences viewer alignment and emotional tone (Bordwell et al., 2008; Chatman, 1978).

(6) Narrative Systems: As defined by Bordwell (1985), narrative systems refer to the organizing principles of cinematic storytelling. He identifies three major types: Classical Hollywood Narration: Goal-driven characters, cause-effect logic, clear

resolution. Art-Cinema Narration: Ambiguous motives, internal conflicts, open endings. Modernist/Avant-Garde Narration: Non-linear, experimental forms that subvert narrative expectations(Bordwell, 2013).

By mapping these dimensions across multiple theoretical perspectives, this study ensures analytical depth while remaining sensitive to the cultural and aesthetic particularities of Chinese mythological animation. This integrative model allows for both formal narrative dissection and culturally contextual interpretation.

2.2.2 Chinese Values

The Core Socialist Values with Chinese Characteristics were formally introduced at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2012. These values are structured across three levels: national-level goals (Prosperity, Democracy, Civility, Harmony), societal-level orientations (Freedom, Equality, Justice, Rule of Law), and individual-level moral standards (Patriotism, Dedication, Integrity, Friendship). This "Three-Level Twelve-Value" system reflects the moral and ideological foundations of contemporary Chinese society(baike, 2007).

The formation of these values stems from a long historical and ideological evolution. Beginning with the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and through key milestones such as the 1978 Third Plenary Session, the 2006 proposition of the "socialist core value system," and the 2013 publication of official guidelines for cultivating these values, the CPC has continuously refined this framework. In 2018, the incorporation of the Core Socialist Values into the Constitution further affirmed their constitutional and national significance.

Each layer of the value system addresses a distinct societal dimension. At the national level, values like Prosperity and Harmony articulate the vision of a modern socialist country. Democracy in this context emphasizes "people's democracy," rooted in the principle that citizens are the masters of the nation. Civility captures China's aim to foster culturally advanced, globally aware, and ethically conscious citizens.

Societal values such as Freedom and Justice represent aspirations for a fair and equitable society, where the rule of law ensures the protection of rights and social

harmony. Freedom is understood not only as individual autonomy but as a collective right safeguarded by institutions. Equality and Justice stress legal equity and social fairness, while Rule of Law underpins all systemic governance.

At the individual level, values such as Patriotism and Dedication guide citizens' behavior in everyday life. Patriotism, as a central emotional and moral commitment, calls on individuals to contribute to national unity and cultural rejuvenation. Dedication and Integrity reflect ideals of professional responsibility and moral trustworthiness. Friendship highlights interpersonal ethics such as mutual respect and cooperation.

In the field of animation, these values are often conveyed through storylines, character arcs, and visual metaphors. National-level values are depicted through portrayals of collective identity and social harmony; societal values emerge in narrative conflicts concerning justice and institutional authority; and individual values manifest in protagonists' personal growth, moral choices, and emotional journeys. For example, animated heroes who fight against fate, protect communities, or uphold justice often embody core socialist values in both explicit and symbolic ways.

As a widely consumed cultural product, animation functions not only as entertainment but also as a vehicle for cultural education. By embedding these values into mythological narratives, Chinese animated films from 2015 to 2024 effectively contribute to the internalization of core socialist values among viewers, especially younger generations, reinforcing both cultural continuity and ideological consensus.

2.3 Related Research

2.3.1 Studies on the Narrative Techniques of Chinese Mythological Animated Films

In recent years, Chinese mythological animated films have attracted increasing scholarly attention. From a mythological lens, scholars such as Jack Zipes, Roland Barthes, and Marina Warner have examined how myths are continually adapted and recontextualized in modern media(Barthes, 1972; Warner, 1995; Zipes, 2013).

Barthes, in particularly, conceptualizes myth as a "second-order semiological system," whereby ancient symbols are absorbed into contemporary narratives to serve ideological or cultural functions. Within this framework, Chinese mythological animation functions not only as a medium for preserving cultural heritage but also as a dynamic platform for reinterpreting myth in response to modern identity formation and state discourse.

Existing studies primarily focus on four dimensions: narrative structure, character development, spatial construction, and narrative strategies. In terms of narrative structure, Si Haonan points out that most works adopt Syd Field's three-act structure alongside Campbell's "hero's journey" model, enhancing causality and emotional progression(Haonan, 2024). Films like Monkey King: Hero Is Back and Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child place the protagonist's growth and psychological transformation at the core(Jinke, 2022). However, some scholars have noted structural homogeneity and a lack of narrative climax(Ming, 2015), indicating room for innovation in domestic animation's narrative mechanisms.

In terms of character construction, research has focused on the shift from divine symbolism to individualized human representation. Wang Yi and Gan Lin argue that, since 2015, heroic characters commonly follow a trajectory of "growth–struggle–breakthrough.(Yi & Lin, 2024)" Diao Ying notes that traditional figures like Sun Wukong, Ne Zha, and Jiang Ziya are being reinterpreted with contemporary psychological tension and realistic challenges(Ying, 2021). Peng Huiyuan and Li Keying trace the evolution of the Ne Zha character, observing its increasing emotional depth and individuality as a reflection of shifting societal values(Huiyuan & Keying, 2019).

In the domain of spatial narrative, scholars suggest that space has moved beyond a passive backdrop to become a key medium for cultural imagery and psychological expression. Wu Yaoyao proposes three types of space: material, social, and cultural, all of which serve narrative progression and thematic development(Yaoyao, 2024). and cultural functions of space—paralleling Paul Wells' notion of animation as a vehicle for metaphysical and philosophical exploration(Wells, 2002, 2013). Li Feiying and Su Xinyue further note the integration of traditional Chinese landscape aesthetics,

symbolic motifs, and psychological mapping in spatial design, enabling a poetic unity of expression and cultural inheritance in domestic animation(Feiying, 2024; Xinyue, 2023).

Regarding narrative strategies, research shows a shift from linear storytelling to hybridized approaches. Kang Yuchen argues that Chinese fantasy animation tends to collage realism with fantasy aesthetics, using dreams, symbols, and metaphors to construct an Eastern narrative context(Yuchen, 2022). Zhao Ran emphasizes how widespread application of 3D animation has enhanced visual narration and immersion, facilitating a shift from 2D symbolism to three-dimensional space(Ran, 2023). Diao Ying further asserts that recent domestic animation is breaking away from mythological conventions, leaning toward fantasy adventure and psychological drama, and forming a more open and modern narrative system(Ying, 2020).

In sum, from 2015 to 2024, Chinese mythological animated films have exhibited a multidimensional exploration of both traditional inheritance and modern transformation in narrative technique and style. However, research gaps remain: (1) most studies focus on individual case analyses, lacking systematic comparisons across award-winning works; (2) insufficient horizontal generalization and vertical evolution mapping of narrative innovations make it difficult to fully reveal the diversity and cultural implications of domestic animation storytelling.

2.3.2 Chinese Values Changes Reflected in Chinese Mythological Animated Films

Recent research has increasingly examined how Chinese mythological animated films reflect cultural shifts, particularly in how they reinterpret traditional values for modern audiences.

Inheritance and Innovation of Cultural Connotations

Scholars such as Han Yuejing and Wu Xiang argue that these films reconstruct cultural memory by blending traditional symbols—like mythic figures and folk legends—with contemporary storytelling and aesthetics. While maintaining core traditional themes, modern mythological animations also integrate current social concerns(Xiang, 2023; Yuejing, 2022). Wang Xiaohui and Du Jinze emphasize that these

films adapt cultural heritage in ways that resonate with modern viewers, bridging past and present through innovative visual and narrative techniques(Jinze, 2021; Xiaohui, 2024).

Reflection of Modern Social Issues

Many films go beyond cultural inheritance to address pressing contemporary topics. Meng Fanxin notes that themes like environmental protection, technology, and justice are woven into myth-based plots(Fanxin, 2021). Wang Wenwei and Xu Chen highlight how these works fuse ancient stories with modern life, offering relevance and emotional engagement through current concerns(Chen, 2022; Wenwei, 2021).

Modern Expression of Traditional Elements

Hou Anhui and Ma Wanrong explore how traditional aesthetics—such as ink painting or folk art—are revitalized using digital tools(Anhui, 2021; Wanrong, 2023). These innovations help maintain cultural continuity while enhancing the visual appeal for younger, tech-savvy audiences.

Moral Education and Cultural Identity

These films also serve as tools for moral guidance. Ye Ting suggests that mythological animations promote values like loyalty, filial piety, and resilience(Ting, 2014). Wang Jingjing's study on Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child shows how modern character designs reinforce cultural identity by allowing viewers to see aspects of contemporary life reflected in mythic narratives(Jingjing, 2021). These works subtly shape values through compelling character arcs and emotionally resonant storytelling. For example, Monkey King: Hero is Back emphasizes perseverance and teamwork through Sun Wukong's journey.

Current Research Gaps

Although existing studies have explored cultural reconstruction in mythological animated films, there is still a lack of systematic research based on the three-tiered structure of the Core Socialist Values (national, societal, and individual levels). In particular, few studies examine how these values influence narrative structures and audience perception. Future research could incorporate methods such as surveys and

case analyses to investigate the mechanisms through which values are embedded in animation and how traditional culture is updated in modern contexts.

In conclusion, while Chinese mythological animated films have played a dual role in cultural inheritance and contemporary storytelling, there remains a pressing need to apply the theoretical framework of the Core Socialist Values. Doing so would enable a deeper understanding of their ideological functions and cultural orientation.

2.3.3 Audience Attitudes Towards Chinese Mythological Animated Films

Chinese mythological animated films have gained popularity among both domestic and international audiences. Recent studies have examined how viewers perceive narrative styles, value expressions, and visual aesthetics in such films.

Narrative Techniques.

Audiences show high interest in narratives that are both coherent and innovative. Xu Fanshu finds that viewers prefer storylines that integrate traditional myths with modern themes to achieve emotional resonance and psychological immersion(Fanshu, 2018). Ji Siting emphasizes that successful animation narratives must create emotional identification while satisfying aesthetic needs(Siting, 2020).

Chinese Values.

Research shows that audiences appreciate films conveying traditional virtues like loyalty, bravery, and perseverance. Fu Zhikun notes that these moral messages evoke emotional resonance and positively influence viewer behavior(Zhikun, 2022). For instance, Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child presents a rebellious protagonist fighting fate, which resonates with younger audiences and reflects a fusion of traditional and modern values(Guoxiang, 1992).

Aesthetics Values.

With advances in animation technology, audience expectations for visual quality have increased. Wang Jingjing observes that viewers appreciate high-quality special effects and modern visual styles that incorporate traditional elements(Jingjing, 2021). Ma Wanrong highlights how digital technology revitalizes ink painting and other folk art forms, enriching both visual experience and cultural depth(Wanrong, 2023). Xu
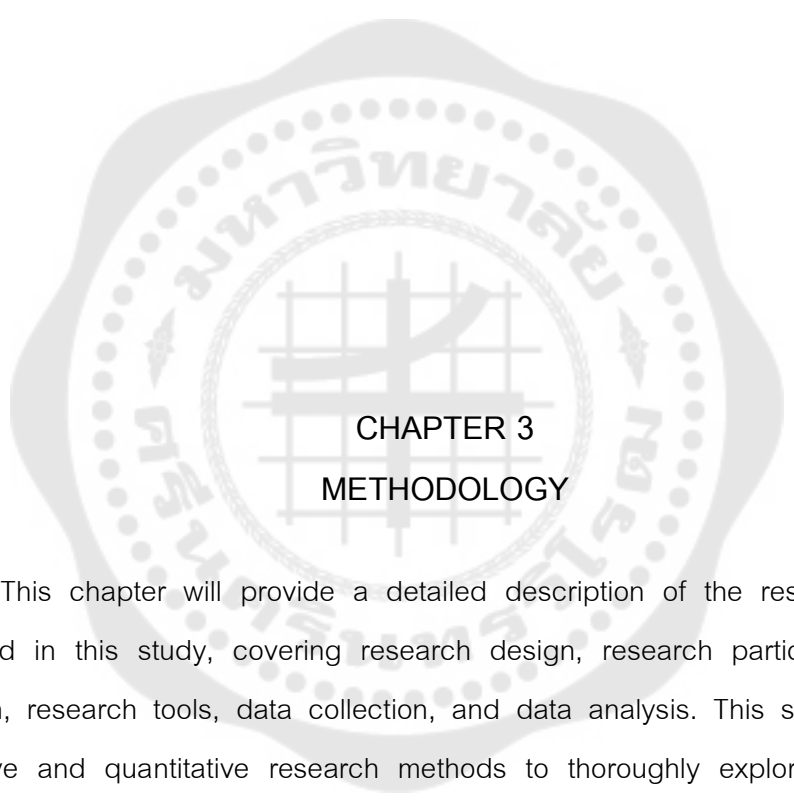
Fanshu further points out that the use of traditional arts enhances not only the visual appeal but also narrative symbolism(Fanshu, 2018).

Research Gaps.

While audience attitudes have been explored, some limitations remain. First, few studies differentiate responses by demographic variables such as age or cultural background. Most findings reflect generalized responses without segmentation. Second, current research lacks longitudinal data on how audience aesthetic preferences evolve. Lastly, there is insufficient empirical analysis of audience feedback on narrative innovation. Future studies could employ surveys, interviews, or experimental design to investigate audience reception in more targeted and dynamic ways.

Summary of Related Research

Overall, there is a noticeable gap in systematic research on narrative methods in Chinese mythological animated films. Many existing studies tend to focus on the analysis of individual films or specific elements, without providing a comprehensive exploration of narrative techniques across a broader context. In addition, most research on cultural change in these films relies on qualitative methods based on personal analysis, lacking empirical studies supported by multi-respondent interviews or theoretical frameworks such as the Socialist Core Values to deeply analyze cultural expression. Furthermore, when it comes to audience attitudes, research is often limited to examining the general audience's reactions. There is a lack of in-depth analysis on differences in acceptance among diverse audience subgroups, such as those defined by age, gender, and cultural background, leaving the nuanced understanding of audience perception relatively underexplored. Consequently, a more holistic approach is needed to fill these gaps by combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, focusing on multiple perspectives to comprehensively investigate narrative strategies, cultural implications, and audience reception.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This chapter will provide a detailed description of the research methods employed in this study, covering research design, research participants, sample selection, research tools, data collection, and data analysis. This study uses both qualitative and quantitative research methods to thoroughly explore the narrative techniques, cultural reflections, and audience attitudes towards Chinese mythological animated films from 2015 to 2024.

3.1 Research Design

3.2 Participants of the Study

3.3 Sample selection

3.4 Research Instruments

3.5 Data Collection

3.6 Data Analysis

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a Mixed Methods Research approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods. It analyzes ten award-winning Chinese mythological animated films (2015–2024) through textual analysis, revealing narrative techniques and cultural expressions. Qualitative data are enriched by in-depth interviews with filmmakers and scholars. Quantitatively, a questionnaire survey assesses audience attitudes toward narrative techniques, Chinese values, and aesthetic expression. This design offers a comprehensive understanding of how these films convey cultural meaning and reflect evolving values.

3.2 Participants of the Study

To ensure diverse perspectives in analyzing Chinese mythological animated films, this study selects four groups: animation production personnel, film critics, university animation faculty, and general audiences.

Reasons for Selection:

Producers are directly involved in the creative process and can provide insights into narrative and visual techniques. Critics contribute professional interpretations

based on research and review experience. University faculty offer academic perspectives on animation theory and pedagogy. General audiences reflect broader cultural acceptance and reception.

Selection Criteria:

Producers must have worked on at least one notable mythological animation and include roles such as animators, editors, and VFX artists. Critics must have published reviews and possess expertise in film critique. Faculty must have 5+ years of animation teaching experience and research in film theory. Audience participants are selected from 286 followers of the influential Weibo platform "Animation Academic Party," a hub for professionals and enthusiasts. These members include scholars, students, and creators with sustained interest in narrative, aesthetics, and cultural analysis, ensuring informed and reflective responses.

This study's sample is drawn from 286 members of the Animation Academic Party's fan base. The selected sample comes from a specific group of fans within the Animation Academic Party, mainly consisting of scholars, students, animation creators, and enthusiasts who have been closely following developments in the animation field for a long time. These members are active in discussing animation content and have a deep interest and insight into the narrative, visual aesthetics, and cultural expressions of animated films.

3.3 Sample selection

This study selects 10 representative films from 43 Chinese mythological animated films released between 2015 and 2024. The aim is to examine changes in narrative techniques, cultural expression, and audience response within a context shaped by national policy support and global reinterpretation of Chinese mythology.

Table 1   10 films list:

No	Film Title	Release Year	Number of Awards	Major Awards	Box Offiec(R	Douban

					MB Billion)	rating
1	*Monkey King: Hero is Back*	2015	12	2015 Best Art Direction Award, 30th China Golden Rooster Awards.	956	8.3
2	*Little Door Gods*	2016	1	The 2016 Silk Road International Film Festival award the Best Animation	78.6	6.9
3	*Big Fish & Begonia*	2016	14	2017 Best Animated Feature Film Award of the 15th Budapest International Animated Film Festival	575	7.0
4	*Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*	2019	17	2020 Best Art Film Award, 33rd Golden Rooster Awards of Chinese Movies	5035	8.4
5	*White Snake*	2019	4	November 23, 2021 Best Animation Work of the Fourth Animation Award of China Culture and Arts Government Award	433	7.8
6	*Legend of Deification*	2020	3	Outstanding Feature Film, 19th China Movie Huabiao Award, May 2023	1602	6.6
7	*New Gods: Nezha Reborn*	2021	6	2022 Silver Award for Animated Movie, "Golden Monkey Award", 18th China International Animation Festival	456	6.8
8	*Green Snake*	2021	2	2021 Best Art Film, The 34th Golden Rooster Awards of Chinese Cinema	562	6.8
9	*New Gods: Yang Jian*	2022	4	Best Animated Feature Film and Best Animation Director at the 19th China Animation Golden Dragon Award in 2022	550	7.0
10	*Goodbye Monster*	2022	1	Silver Award for Best Animated Feature Film and Best Animated Screenplay at the 19th China Animation Golden Dragon Awards, 2022	35	6.3

Selection Criteria and Rationale:

Representativeness: Selected films reflect key trends and achievements in the genre.

Cultural Inheritance and Innovation: These works blend traditional mythology with modern storytelling and aesthetics.

Market & Global Impact: Most films achieved box office success and international awards, enhancing China's cultural reach.

Technological Progress: Innovations in animation, especially 3D and visual effects, mark significant technical evolution.

Diversity & Educational Value: Films span diverse mythological themes and demonstrate strong cultural and educational significance.

Criteria include: (1) major award recognition; (2) strong commercial performance; (3) thematic variety; (4) technical innovation; (5) cultural depth. These standards ensure that selected samples are artistically, commercially, and culturally valuable, supporting a holistic analysis of Chinese mythological animation over the past decade.

3.4 Research Instruments

Tools for Qualitative Research

For qualitative research, the following tools are used:

In-depth Interview Tools

This study designed a semi-structured interview guide covering questions on the film's narrative systems, cultural expression, and creative background. The interview questions were evaluated using the IOC (Index of Item-Objective Congruence) method.

Tools for Quantitative Research

For quantitative research, the following tools are used:

Questionnaire Survey Tools

A survey questionnaire is designed to cover audience attitudes toward the film's Chinese values and aesthetics values. The questionnaire is designed using a Likert scale.

3.5 Data Collection

Textual Analysis Data Collection

The film selection includes 10 Chinese mythological animated films released between 2015 and 2024, based on criteria such as awards, market performance, thematic diversity, production techniques, and cultural value. The data is acquired through legal platforms, authorized resources, or film archives.

In-depth Interview Data Collection

In-depth interviews are conducted as one-on-one or online video interviews. The entire process is recorded and transcribed for further analysis. All data is stored in an encrypted system, ensuring strict confidentiality.

Questionnaire Survey Data Collection

Data collection is conducted using the Wen juan xing online survey platform and distributed through social media and email channels targeting 286 members from the Animation Academic Party fan group. The platform automatically aggregates respondents' answers and exports the data as Excel files for further analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is conducted using qualitative methods based on narrative theory and a cultural research framework. The focus areas include narrative analysis, such as story structure, time, character development, narrator ,and narrative systems, as well as Chinese values analysis, focusing on the reflection of narrative technique and Chinese values.

In-depth Interview Analysis

In-depth interview analysis involves thematic analysis to extract key themes such as narrative techniques, cultural transmission, and artistic innovation, as well as comparative analysis to compare interviewees' perspectives on narrative and Chinese values elements.

Questionnaire Survey Analysis

Questionnaire survey analysis uses descriptive statistics to analyze demographic data such as age, gender, and education, along with regression analysis to identify key factors influencing audience attitudes toward Chinese values, and aesthetics values.

CHAPTER 4
RESULT

On the basis of sorting out the research background, theoretical foundation and methodological approaches in the first three chapters, this chapter enters the stage of presenting research findings. Based on the theoretical framework of the "six elements of narrative" and mixed research methods, this chapter will systematically analyze the expressive characteristics of ten representative Chinese mythological animated films during 2015-2024 from three major aspects: First, how the films construct a unique story system through diverse narrative structures and genre techniques; Second, how the values reflected in the films interact with and reconstruct the core socialist values and traditional cultural values; Third, the audience's acceptance attitudes towards their artistic styles, narrative expressions and cultural meanings, as well as their feedback and suggestions for future creations. The above analysis not only responds to the three core research objectives of this study, but also provides a systematic reference for understanding the cultural significance and communication potential of Chinese mythological animated films in the context of the new era.

4.1 Narrative, Value, and Aesthetic Analysis of Selected Films (2015–2024)

4.2 Thematic Synthesis and Audience Perspectives

4.1 Narrative, Value, and Aesthetic Analysis of Selected Films (2015–2024)

       4.1.1 Monkey King: Hero is Back

      (1) Narrative Analysis

Monkey King: Hero is Back adopts a classical three-act narrative structure that aligns with Campbell's (1949) "Hero's Journey" model, presenting the theme of "the hero's fall and awakening." The story follows Sun Wukong's transformation from a disgraced and suppressed figure to a restored mythical hero. In Act One, he is introduced as a fallen deity who has lost his magical powers and has been imprisoned for five hundred years. His accidental release by the young monk Jiang Liuer marks the narrative incitement. Jiang's unwavering faith in the Great Sage prompts Wukong's reluctant journey toward reengagement with the world. Act Two develops the emotional and psychological bond between the two. Wukong's repeated failures and internal self-doubt are counterbalanced by Jiang's bravery and moral clarity. It is only after Jiang's symbolic "sacrifice" that Wukong breaks through his inner shackles. Act Three culminates in Wukong's divine revival and his decisive victory over the Chaos Demon King, fulfilling the narrative promise of heroic return (Gong Shiyao and He Tielong, 2025).

Temporally, the film predominantly employs a linear structure, punctuated with flashbacks and visual motifs that reinforce character development and emotional resonance. As Liu Lizhi and Liu Zhenning (2025) note, sequences such as Zhu Bajie's memories and Wukong's flashbacks enrich narrative layering. The film effectively manipulates "duration" by employing rapid editing for action and slow pacing for emotional transitions, enhancing immersive viewer engagement. Symbolic repetitions—most notably Jiang's puppet of the Monkey King—function as narrative anchors that trace the arc of Wukong's self-rediscovery.

Spatially, the film constructs a mythological world rooted in traditional Chinese aesthetics. According to Hu Mingqiang and Gong Shiyao (2025), spatial progression—from the earthly town, through mountainous landscapes, to the sea-of-clouds battlefield—mirrors the inner transformation of the protagonist. Scenes such as the hanging temple of the Chaos Demon King and the golden-lit final battle reflect both cultural specificity and symbolic sublimation. These spatial shifts contribute not only to narrative advancement but also to psychological depth and ceremonial tone.

In terms of character development, Sun Wukong is reimagined as a psychologically complex, "humanized" hero. Unlike traditional depictions of omnipotence, this version of Wukong undergoes emotional transformation through guilt, memory, and rediscovered purpose. Jiang Liuer plays a catalytic role in this transformation. As Liu Dexin and Hu Mingqiang (2025) argue, the dynamic between Wukong and Jiang represents not a conventional master-disciple relationship, but a model of reciprocal salvation. The narrative positions Jiang's childlike faith as the emotional axis of the story, with the breaking of the puppet symbolizing the handover of heroic responsibility.

Narrative perspective in the film alternates between a third-person omniscient and subjective point of view. This strategy enhances both the scope of world-building and the depth of emotional experience. As Sun Hengyi and Tang Qi (2025) observe, the film utilizes visual metaphors and cinematic framing—such as low-angle shots and shifting focal perspectives—to subtly imply power dynamics and internal change. These methods allow the audience to witness both external events and internal psychology without overt narration.

At the systemic level, Monkey King: Hero is Back exemplifies a dual narrative logic. One thread traces Wukong's arc of redemption; the other follows Jiang's coming-of-age journey. These dual paths intersect at key turning points—such as the inn battle and Jiang's near-death moment—constructing a mutual transformation that propels the story forward. According to Li Shan, the narrative structure successfully integrates the Western motif of "growth and redemption" with localized cultural values (Shan, 2016). It

follows classical Hollywood logic in goal-driven causality and escalation, yet remains grounded in the symbolic framework of Chinese mythology.

Moreover, the film employs several distinctive narrative techniques. As Chen Kehong suggests, the genre hybridization—mixing action, fantasy, road adventure, and comedy—creates a "collage effect" that broadens its appeal(Kehong, 2015). The use of Campbell's (1949) journey framework, combined with anti-heroic character complexity and spatial-symbolic layering, marks a significant narrative innovation. Notably, the film recontextualizes traditional mythological figures, preserving their divine essence while embedding them in modern emotional and psychological dilemmas. This dual narrative strategy, according to Li Yu and Guo Fengming, reflects the increasing sophistication of domestic animation in reconciling cultural heritage with contemporary storytelling practices(Yu & Fengming, 2016).

In summary, Monkey King: Hero is Back presents a composite narrative system that balances classical structure with modern psychological realism. Through its integration of spatial symbolism, dual character arcs, dynamic perspectives, and genre fusion, the film both inherits and transforms traditional Chinese mythology. It exemplifies the narrative evolution of Chinese animated cinema toward a model that is emotionally resonant, aesthetically rich, and culturally adaptive.

(2) Values Analysis

Monkey King: Hero is Back presents a dual-layered value system that both reflects China's Core Socialist Values and explores expressions beyond mainstream ideological boundaries. At the national level, the film embodies "civility" and "harmony" through the modernization of traditional mythology and its cultural heritage. Sun Wukong's transformation from a divine warrior to a humanized hero demonstrates inheritance through innovation(Jiazhen, 2020). Traditional visual elements such as shadow puppetry and martial arts further reinforce national identity, with 54.9% of surveyed viewers affirming recognition of these expressions (Fang Zhaoli, 2025).

At the societal level, the film underscores "equality" and "justice" by positioning Jiang Liuer, an ordinary child, as a key agent of heroic transformation. His

courage in awakening the fallen hero aligns with the concept of universal responsibility, with over 57% of respondents supporting his embodiment of responsibility and moral courage (Liu Dexin, Hu Mingqiang, 2025). Sun Wukong's return to justice in his final battle further reinforces the triumph of righteousness.

Individually, the film conveys "patriotism" and "friendship" through Sun Wukong's evolution from reluctance to sacrifice, embodying responsibility for the collective. The emotional bond between him and Jiang Liuer—characterized by trust, kindness, and mutual protection—highlights positive values such as compassion and selflessness, with audience approval exceeding 55% (Gong Shiyao, 2025).

Beyond these, the film challenges collectivist norms by emphasizing personal heroism. Wukong's final transformation is driven not by group effort but by individual awakening—a narrative closer to Western heroic individualism(Yu & Fengming, 2016). Moreover, its portrayal of emotional struggle and redemption introduces adult emotional depth uncommon in Chinese animated works, resonating strongly with older viewers(Xiangqian, 2015).

In summary, the film achieves a balance between ideological fidelity and emotional modernity. It adheres to socialist core values while expanding expressive boundaries through individualist and psychologically complex storytelling. This "dual expression" framework not only enhances audience resonance—validated by survey data—but also provides a referential model for the evolution of value representation in Chinese animated cinema.

(3) Audience Attitudes Toward the Aesthetic Values

The aesthetic design of Monkey King: Hero is Back demonstrates a high degree of integration between traditional cultural symbols and contemporary visual language, earning strong recognition from both audiences and scholars. Questionnaire results reveal a generally positive attitude toward the film's visual expression, indicating its success in establishing a modern aesthetic for Chinese animation. Regarding character design, over 66% of respondents expressed liking the Monkey King's appearance (Q64), while Jiang Liuer, Zhu Bajie, and the Chaos Demon King also received

favorable ratings above 56% (Q65–67), showing a balance of mythical fidelity and fashionable innovation(Lei & Ying, 2015). The 3D-modeled Monkey King departs from traditional flat imagery, instead reflecting muscular strength, expressive realism, and anti-hero characteristics favored by modern audiences(Shan, 2016).

Scene design emphasizes poetic Chinese aesthetics, from Jiangnan towns to mythic cloudscapes, with 56.86% of viewers reporting strong visual impressions (Q68). Color and lighting serve narrative emotion, with 53.43% praising the tonal transitions used to foreshadow conflict (Q69), supported by Wu Zebin's analysis of cinematic contrast(Zebin, 2016). Camera language and editing were also well received (Q71–72), employing dynamic compositions like overhead and upward shots to reflect emotion and plot escalation (Sun Chao & Liu Lizhi, 2025). Han Meiying noted this as a milestone in domestic animation's cinematic progression(Meiying, 2015).

Visual symbols—including golden clouds, puppet icons, and Wukong's chains—convey layered meaning, with 64% audience approval (Q73), supporting Zhang Shaohua's view of animation as a cross-generational cultural carrier (Shaohua, 2016). Lastly, action choreography and CG special effects (55.39% approval, Q74) demonstrate a fusion of martial artistry and digital fluency, with sequences like Wukong's armor reshaping showcasing "emotional-technological unity"(Yinan, 2019). Overall, the film's aesthetic achievement lies in its fusion of tradition, innovation, and emotion, offering a paradigm for future explorations of Chinese animated visual culture.

4.1.2 Little Door Gods

(1) Narrative Analysis

Little Door Gods (2015), directed by Gary Wang, presents a sophisticated dual storyline that intertwines the mythical realm of declining deities with the modern human world struggling under economic pressure. The film's central plot focuses on Yu Lv, a once-revered Door God who seeks to restore the gods' waning relevance by unsealing a demon—a desperate act symbolizing both protest and belief in purposeful renewal. Simultaneously, the narrative follows a struggling single mother and her daughter who attempt to save their handmade noodle shop, a business rooted in cultural tradition but endangered by modernization and corporate competition. These two narrative threads

converge as Yu Lv ultimately chooses compassion over violence, joining forces with the human characters to defeat the threat he himself released. This convergence highlights a shared fate between gods and mortals, as well as a symbolic reconciliation between heritage and contemporary life.

The film's story and plot are structured in a classical three-act model, effectively balancing myth and realism. Act I introduces the fading relevance of the divine world and the economic precarity of human life. Act II escalates tensions—Yu Lv's controversial decision to release the demon parallels the increasing crisis faced by the noodle shop. In Act III, the film resolves both conflicts through interdimensional cooperation and emotional reconciliation. This dual-line storytelling strategy enriches the narrative complexity and expands the mythological genre into new thematic terrain.

In terms of time, the film follows a generally linear structure but introduces flashbacks that reveal Yu Lv's internal motivations and backstory. These analepses not only humanize the Door God but also trace the transition from a time when gods were revered to a secular present that renders them obsolete. The manipulation of temporal layers allows for the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity, enhancing emotional engagement and thematic depth.

Space is crucial to the narrative logic. The divine realm is depicted as an empty, bureaucratic heaven where retired gods live mundane lives, while the human world is a vibrant yet harsh urban environment. The spatial contrast serves as a metaphor for the gods' irrelevance in contemporary society. The temple ruins, heavenly bureaucracy, and demon's realm are presented in faded tones and desaturated palettes, symbolizing decay, whereas the modern noodle shop is rendered in warm, saturated colors, suggesting resilience and emotional warmth. The boundary-crossing between divine and mortal spaces reflects the permeability of myth and the capacity of folklore to adapt to contemporary realities.

Character development is a core narrative strength. Yu Lv begins as a proud and desperate guardian, clinging to obsolete roles and beliefs. His transformation occurs gradually as he encounters human suffering, love, and perseverance, particularly through

observing the mother and daughter's unyielding spirit. This transformation aligns with a redemptive character arc, culminating in his ultimate choice to sacrifice divine status in favor of moral renewal. The human protagonists also undergo growth, shifting from passive resignation to proactive resistance, mirroring the empowerment motif frequently seen in contemporary Chinese animation.

The film's narrative perspective is primarily omniscient but often focalizes through Yu Lv. This dual-layered narrative voice enables viewers to access both the mythological and emotional dimensions of the story. The audience is encouraged to empathize with Yu Lv as both a deity and a disillusioned figure, enhancing the film's psychological complexity. The human subplot is framed more observationally, allowing the contrast between divine existential crises and earthly survival to emerge more sharply.

Finally, the narrative system fuses fantasy conventions with contemporary satire and social allegory. The use of decaying temples, bureaucratic gods, and anthropomorphic demons satirizes the redundancy of tradition when detached from modern relevance. Simultaneously, visual symbols such as the broken door charms and empty incense burners underscore the theme of cultural fading. The narrative functions as a "cultural palimpsest," where ancient myth is overlaid with modern anxieties, resulting in a layered text open to multiple readings.

In conclusion, *Little Door Gods* exemplifies a hybridized narrative model in Chinese mythological animation. By integrating six narrative elements—story and plot, time, space, character development, narrators, and narrative systems—the film delivers a structurally coherent and thematically nuanced story. It balances humor and pathos, tradition and innovation, offering both entertainment and critical reflection on cultural continuity in the face of modernization. As such, it contributes to a broader trend in Chinese animation where myth is not only preserved but reimagined to address contemporary societal concerns.

(2) Values Analysis

The animated film *Little Door Gods* (2015) explores the intersection of traditional cultural values and contemporary social realities through a dual narrative

structure. The mythological realm, symbolized by fading Door Gods, and the human world, represented by a struggling wonton shop, serve as parallel spaces for expressing values such as civilization, harmony, justice, integrity, kindness, and dedication from China's Core Socialist Values. The narrative reflects not only collective cultural ideals but also modern tensions surrounding identity, belief, and survival.

At the national level, the film emphasizes "civilization" and "harmony" by portraying the decline and renewal of traditional faith. The conflict between Shenshu's conservative loyalty and Yulv's radical action to release the demon allegorizes two strategies of cultural adaptation: preservation versus transformation(Mengying, 2017; Yuxuan, 2018). The resolution of the Nian Beast crisis through interdimensional collaboration and the Kongming lantern ritual represents cultural memory activation and value reinvention. Survey results show that 55.88% of audiences support "respecting traditional culture," and 57.84% favor "innovative continuation of tradition" (Q13, Q14).

At the societal level, the film promotes "justice" through the ethical struggle between the honest wonton shop and the unethical fast-food chain. The shop relies on quality improvement and sincerity, while the latter uses sabotage tactics such as drugging and noise. The fast-food chain's eventual downfall reinforces public belief in justice and moral causality. According to the survey, over 56% of respondents endorse the value of "Karma and Justice" (Q17), validating the film's ethical stance (Fang Zhaoli & Tang Qi, 2025).

At the individual level, the Door Gods embody "dedication" and "integrity" by continuing their duties despite public neglect. Their perseverance aligns with the "professional spirit" valorized in socialist values. Meanwhile, the familial bonds between Yuer, her daughter, and grandmother demonstrate "friendship" and emotional support. Survey data shows 58.33% value "professional spirit," 61.76% support "responsibility and accountability," and 59.81% resonate with "mutual assistance" (Q15–Q18).

Beyond state-endorsed values, the film also explores themes beyond the socialist core, such as individual awakening and demythologization. Yulv's transformation from guardian to self-aware actor exemplifies contemporary values of autonomy and self-

realization(Qizhong, 2016). Meanwhile, the satire of divine bureaucracy—gods clocking in, layoffs, performance reviews—demystifies traditional authority(Danhong, 2017; Yu, 2016), bridging cultural distance and inviting modern identification.

In conclusion, *Little Door Gods* successfully integrates core socialist values while also addressing deeper concerns about cultural sustainability and individual relevance. Supported by survey data, the film's dual approach—value reinforcement and modern reinterpretation—resonates strongly with contemporary audiences, revealing the evolving function of myth in modern Chinese animation.

(3) Audience Attitudes Toward the Aesthetic Values

As a culturally embedded animated film, *Little Door Gods* (2015) has received widespread audience approval for its aesthetic design. According to survey data, respondents demonstrated high satisfaction across multiple dimensions, including character modeling, scene construction, color and lighting use, camera work, and symbolic visual imagery. These responses highlight the film's strong visual narrative capacity and its effectiveness in cultural communication.

In terms of character styling, the designs of Yulv (59.31%), Shenshu (60.78%), and the Flower Fairy (61.27%) were widely appreciated (Q75–Q77), demonstrating successful integration of traditional imagery with a modern cartoon aesthetic. Wang Mengying suggests that fusing traditional iconography with contemporary fashion enhances accessibility and revitalizes cultural memory(Mengying, 2017).

Regarding scene design, 57.84% of respondents (Q78) favored the spatial contrast between the divine realm and the earthly noodle shop, visually symbolizing the clash and reconciliation of tradition and modernity. Chen Jia and Wang Shengxuan argue that this juxtaposition reflects cultural marginalization and reintegration(Jia & Shengxuan, 2023).

In color and lighting, 56.86% and 61.77% of viewers respectively praised the film's use of mood-enhancing tones and spatial lighting effects (Q79–Q80). Zhang Jie

(2025) emphasizes that these visual strategies advance both narrative and emotional resonance.

In terms of camera work and editing rhythm, 59.80% appreciated the film's framing techniques (Q81), such as contrasting divine overhead shots and earthly eye-level perspectives, while 55.39% acknowledged its dynamic editing in action sequences (Q82). Liu Lizhi(2025) notes that these techniques enrich spatial perception and intensify narrative rhythm.

Visual symbolism also resonated strongly, with 61.28% recognizing the effective use of traditional imagery like New Year's door god paintings and puppet shows (Q83). Liu Yifan and Guo Jieyun state that such "allegorical" visuals enable cultural transmission without didacticism(Yifan & Jieyun, 2022).

Finally, special effects and action design were well-received by 66.18% of respondents (Q84), especially the climax featuring Shenshu and Yulv battling the Nian Beast. Hu Mingqiang (2025) observes that the film successfully merges Hollywood-style visual impact with Chinese aesthetic traditions.

In summary, *Little Door Gods* exemplifies how domestic animation can effectively integrate cultural values with visual innovation, winning both aesthetic admiration and emotional resonance from audiences.

4.1.3 Big Fish & Begonia

(1) Narrative Analysis

Big Fish & Begonia presents a rich fantasy tale rooted in themes of growth, sacrifice, and the life cycle. It follows the journey of Chun, a divine being who defies cosmic order to resurrect a human boy, Kun, who once saved her. Though structured with a visible three-act progression, the film is better viewed as a coming-of-age narrative, centering on Chun's psychological and emotional growth (Tang Qi & He Tielong, 2025).

Act I introduces Chun's world and her moral dilemma after Kun's sacrifice. She trades half of her life to resurrect Kun's soul, challenging divine laws. Act II sees escalating conflicts as Chun hides Kun, causing natural chaos. Her companion Qiu aids her at great personal cost, leading to fractures in the divine world. Act III concludes with

Chun's self-sacrifice to restore balance and Qiu's final act of love, cementing the themes of altruism and destiny.

The film's temporal structure utilizes a nonlinear framed narrative, bookended by the elderly Chun's monologue. This cycle of recollection and experience conveys Eastern philosophies of time and fate. Slow-motion and repeated symbolic imagery—like begonias, flying whales, and the soul gate—enhance immersion and deepen thematic resonance(Jin & Xuewen, 2018; Yanxia, 2018).

Spatially, the film integrates Hakka Tulou architecture to reflect a world where gods and humans coexist. It employs symbolic, surreal visuals—like floating fish and ceremonial landscapes—to evoke transcendence and divinity(Wenjuan, 2018; Yu, 2017). Color contrast further distinguishes worlds, and specific spaces (e.g., Soul keeper's cave, the Sky-Sea Gate) reflect emotional and narrative functions.

In characterization, Chun matures from guilt to responsibility, Qiu embodies silent sacrifice and Confucian-Taoist virtues, and Kun, as a symbolic soul, catalyzes transformation. Supporting figures like the Soul keeper and Ratty Granny inject philosophical depth and societal critique(Min & Yu, 2019; Yalan, 2016).

The film adopts a dual narrative perspective: a first-person philosophical frame and a third-person omniscient body. Chun's voiceover adds emotional weight and cyclical narrative logic. Visual perspectives also shift symbolically—Qiu becomes a wind-and-rain guardian, a silent, omnipresent narrator(Xian, 2016; Zupan & Linjian, 2017).

Its narrative system combines classical Hollywood causality with Eastern metaphysical reflection. While it follows the linear three-act structure, it embeds Taoist-Buddhist concepts such as reincarnation and fate intertextuality. Chun and Qiu, symbolizing "Spring" and "Autumn," enact a cyclical identity exchange—Chun returns to humanity, Qiu becomes the new Soul keeper. The narrative also explores the dialectic of conditional vs. unconditional love, elevating plot progression into spiritual reincarnation (Li, 2018; Yang & Shaoxu, 2023).

The film's unique narrative techniques include:

Emotionally driven growth narrative centered on Chun's transformation;

Imagery-rich poetic rhythm, where mood overrides plot;

Philosophical theming, with Taoist ideals of letting go and reincarnation;

Intersecting structural lines—Chun's rescue mission vs. Qiu's silent guardianship;

Symbolic motifs—fish, begonias, gates, and natural forces reinforce abstract themes;

Empowered female protagonist—Chun actively chooses, challenges order, and asserts autonomy.

In conclusion, Big Fish & Begonia blends visual poetry and Eastern philosophy with narrative experimentation. It transcends conventional animation by constructing a symbolic, emotionally resonant narrative system. The film exemplifies how modern Chinese animation can merge local cultural depth with global narrative techniques to offer fresh aesthetic paradigms(Min & Yu, 2019; Xian, 2016).

(2) Values Analysis

Big Fish & Begonia draws from Chinese mythology and Taoist cosmology to construct a fantasy world that explores themes like life, freedom, responsibility, and sacrifice. It reflects China's Core Socialist Values—"civilization," "harmony," "freedom," and "friendship"—through symbolic visual language, metaphysical structure, and cultural allegory(Yang & Shaoxu, 2023).

At the national level, the film conveys "civilization" and "harmony" by integrating Taoist cosmology and Confucian ethics. Chun's violation of clan law to save Kun disrupts order but ultimately reaffirms the Taoist idea of life cycles and unity with nature. Visual symbols like the Sea and Sky Gate and the tulou-style Rusheng Tower represent cosmological balance and cultural continuity(Xiangzhi, 2020). Survey data show that 58.82% of viewers resonated with the film's depiction of human-nature harmony (Q22).

At the societal level, "freedom" is explored through the Kun fish's transformation, symbolizing transcendence. The contradiction between Chun's emotional choices and clan expectations mirrors Laozi's dialectics of natural order. Qiu's ultimate

sacrifice highlights the tension between freedom and responsibility. Audiences recognize the cost of freedom and its layered meanings, with 53.92% acknowledging the film's emphasis on sacrifice (Q23).

At the individual level, "friendship" is expressed through Chun, Qiu, and Kun's emotional bonds, which transcend species and life-death boundaries. Their altruistic acts reflect Confucian benevolence and Taoist oneness. Visual cues like red begonias and circular towers symbolize mutual trust and emotional resonance. Over 55% of respondents identified with the film's depiction of emotional responsibility and moral choices(Jin & Xuewen, 2018).

Beyond socialist values, the film offers anti-utilitarian ethics, where decisions are guided by emotion over reason—Chun's and Qiu's sacrifices are rooted in gratitude and care rather than logic. This challenges mainstream moral binaries and foregrounds emotional truth(Wenjuan, 2018).

The aesthetic ending, with elderly Chun's narration, reflects Eastern philosophies of reincarnation and open fate. Rather than offering closure, the narrative encourages philosophical contemplation on life as a cyclical journey(Xiu, 2016).

In summary, the film harmonizes traditional and modern values while breaking through utilitarian and collectivist frameworks. It affirms socialist core values yet advocates for emotional freedom, ecological awareness, and personal agency. As audience data suggest, the film's themes—resistance to fate, emotional sacrifice, and nature reverence—resonate deeply with viewers, affirming its cultural and ethical significance (Hu Mingqiang & Zhang Jie, 2025).

(3) Audience Attitudes Toward the Aesthetic Values

Big Fish & Begonia blends Eastern mythology and philosophical aesthetics through its visual style, character modeling, spatial design, and audiovisual expression. Based on questionnaire results and academic literature, this section analyzes audience attitudes toward the film's aesthetic components, including character styling, scene construction, color and lighting, cinematography, visual symbolism, and special effects.

Regarding character design, survey data indicate generally positive responses. Chun's styling (57.35%) combines classical beauty with divine elegance, reflecting her dual identity(Yang & Shaoxu, 2023). Qiu's aquatic blue design (58.82%) suggests freedom and moral strength(Kunfang, 2017), while Kun received 94.78% approval for its innocent and symbolic representation of the life cycle(Jian & Di, 2019). Secondary characters like the Soul Keeper and Ratty Granny earned over 56% approval due to their unique blend of mythological and animated features.

Scene design, praised by over 55% of respondents (Q90), demonstrates a poetic-symbolic spatial approach(Wenjuan, 2018). Locations such as the Soul Keeper's Loft, the Sea and Sky Gate, and the flood-ravaged divine world embody reinterpreted traditional space. The Hakka Tulou residence visually expresses cultural boundaries and divine order(Xiangzhi, 2020), while its destruction during the flood reinforces thematic tension(Xi, 2016).

Color and lighting also enhance emotional resonance. Dominant red, blue, and gold hues symbolize sacrifice, soul, and redemption respectively, with 58.33% audience approval(Zupan & Linjian, 2017). Lighting contrasts—like shifting halos and piercing skylight—received 55.89% positive feedback, emphasizing fate's volatility(Ya & Guangrui, 2019).

Camera language and editing rhythm were well received, with 61.27% praising camera design and over 61% impressed by the editing (Q93–94). Lyrical shots such as Chun looking up at the mortal world or Kun floating upward amplify narrative poetry(Yu, 2017). The editing rhythm between disaster and sacrifice enhances emotional drive(Jia, 2016).

Visual symbols like the Kun fish, begonia flower, and golden gate were appreciated by 57.84% (Q95) for their cultural significance and narrative function(Yao & Weihua, 2016). The flower and weather motifs in Chun and Qiu's relationship subtly represent unspoken love and cosmic balance(Yalan, 2016).

Over 60.79% of respondents approved the special effects (Q96). Fluid dynamics and particle animation support an "Eastern flexible explosion" aesthetic(Xian,

2016), while music fuses traditional Chinese instruments with environmental sounds, enhancing immersion(Ya & Guangrui, 2019).

In conclusion, *Big Fish & Begonia* achieves a cohesive aesthetic system that integrates narrative, emotion, and cultural meaning. The film's visual design not only supports plot development but also evokes poetic expression and cultural resonance(Hedan, 2016).

4.1.4 Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child

(1) Narrative Analysis

Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child (2019) retells a traditional Chinese myth with a modern sensibility, framing Ne Zha's journey as a rebellious, misunderstood child born from the "Demon Pill" who ultimately achieves self-definition. The film centers on the theme "I am the master of my own fate" and reconfigures the myth into a coming-of-age narrative (Sun Chao & Hu Mingqiang, 2025).

Structured around a three-act model, the story begins with a fated identity switch—Ne Zha is mistakenly born with the Demon Pill's power due to Shen Gongbao's betrayal. Labeled a demon, he is shunned by society, leading to his inner turmoil and rebellious acts in Chentang Pass. Parallelly, Ao Bing, born of the Spirit Pearl, represents duty and sacrifice. The mirror narrative between these two characters builds dramatic tension and highlights their shared struggle against destiny(Qinghua & Jingran, 2020).

In Act Two, Ne Zha attempts heroism, but misunderstanding deepens. His bond with Ao Bing adds emotional complexity. Shen Gongbao reveals Ne Zha's origins at his birthday banquet, intensifying conflict. As Ao Bing plans to destroy Chentang Pass, Ne Zha learns the truth about his parents' sacrifice and regains resolve.

The final act culminates in their joint defiance of heavenly judgment. Ne Zha chooses not to kill Ao Bing, breaking the moral binary. Their souls survive as a symbol of fate's transcendence, and villagers finally acknowledge Ne Zha. This shift from tragic sacrifice to self-redemption marks a new model for mythological narrative in Chinese animation(Shushu & Li, 2021).

The film's time structure is governed by the "Three-Year Tribulation," providing urgency and psychological tension. Flashbacks supplement emotional depth,

while contrasting tempo—fast-paced comedy vs. slow-motion tragedy—guides viewers' emotional rhythm (Tang Qi & Fang Zhaoli, 2025).

In terms of space, the film contrasts realistic village life with surreal mythic realms. The Chentang Pass setting embodies social tension and exclusion; fantasy spaces like the Scroll of Mountains and Rivers evoke divine authority through ink-style aesthetics. The Dragon Palace, in cold tones and chained motifs, symbolizes Ao Bing's destiny, while the thunderstorm climax uses visual extremes to represent fate's collision (Sun Hengyi & Gong Shiyao, 2025).

Character development is nuanced: Ne Zha is a subversive protagonist with symbolic design—dark circles and sharp teeth—signaling his outsider status(Fei, 2019). His arc follows a path from alienation to self-affirmation. Ao Bing, his mirror counterpart, shifts from mission-bound pawn to awakened individual. Secondary characters also subvert stereotypes, like the humorous Taiyi Zhenren or conflicted Shen Gongbao, expanding emotional depth(Sha & Panjun, 2020).

The film adopts a hybrid narrative perspective. While an omniscient narrator provides structural balance, emotional immersion is achieved through focalization—e.g., Ne Zha gazing at the moon, Ao Bing's introspection, or Li Jing's silent watching. Multi-perspective narrative threads enrich the moral landscape and break the mythological singularity(Xi, 2020).

Narratively, the film blends Hollywood-style cause-effect logic with Chinese mythological depth. Internal (identity vs. instinct) and external (labeling, social exclusion) conflicts converge to form a cohesive tension arc. Dual protagonists merge personal and collective struggles, symbolizing identity resistance and the building of a shared value community (Liu Zhenning & Zhang Jie, 2025).

Stylistically, the film fuses realism with fantasy, tradition with modernity. Techniques like montage, visual metaphor, and humorous dialogue reflect a balance of aesthetic sensibility and emotional engagement. It deconstructs fatalism, constructs empathetic identities, and offers a new mythic narrative mode for contemporary audiences (Sun Chao & Liu Lizhi, 2025).

(2) Values Analysis

Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child combines mythological reconstruction, modern consciousness, and visual spectacle. Anchored in the phrase "I'm the master of my own fate," it explores the dynamics of selfhood, institutional power, and social ethics. The film integrates China's Core Socialist Values—"civilization," "equality," "justice," "freedom," "dedication," and "kindness"—and has been well received by audiences for its emotional and ideological resonance.

At the national level, the film reflects the value of "civilization" through visual and narrative techniques. Traditional elements like wind-fire wheels and qiankun hoops are reimagined via 3D animation, Dunhuang-inspired palettes, and Tang-Song architecture, creating a technologically enriched aesthetic rooted in heritage. The yin-yang duality of the "Demon Pill" and "Spirit Pearl" transcends good-evil binaries and reinterprets Taoist destiny. Ne Zha's final declaration symbolizes an evolution from fatalism to agency, contributing to a modern cultural reinterpretation (Sun Hengyi & Hu Mingqiang, 2025).

At the social level, the identity conflict between Ne Zha and Ao Bing conveys the values of "equality" and "freedom." Despite being demonized, Ne Zha proves that birth does not define destiny. Audience survey data show that 58.33% agree with the message of embracing diversity (Q27), and 54.41% resonate with Ne Zha's resistance to fate (Q24). The suppression of the Dragon Clan underlines institutional injustice, while Ne Zha's moral resistance garners approval from 62.26% of respondents (Q26), indicating strong support for the value of "justice."

At the individual level, values of "dedication" and "kindness" emerge through character actions. Taiyi Zhenren mentors Ne Zha with patience and equality, reflecting educational dedication (56.86% approval, Q31). Ao Bing's sacrifice embodies altruistic friendship (61.77%, Q28). Parental love is a core emotional anchor: Li Jing and Madam Yin risk their lives to protect Ne Zha, with 62.75% of audiences approving this portrayal of

family ethics (Q29). Even the antagonist Shen Gongbao is given moral nuance, with 57.35% expressing empathy for his inner conflict (Q30).

Beyond mainstream ideology, the film embraces pluralism. Characters like Ne Zha and Ao Bing embody individual rebellion, while comedic tone and modern language broaden accessibility. The film also avoids binary moral logic, inviting deeper reflections on good and evil(Sha & Panjun, 2020).

In sum, the film constructs a layered value system integrating national culture and modern ethics. It emotionally translates serious topics into popular form and exemplifies how domestic animation can engage deeply with cultural identity and social ideals(Jinping, 2019) (Hu Mingqiang & Zhang Jie, 2025).

(3) Audience Attitudes Toward the Aesthetic Values

Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child has received broad acclaim for blending national visual symbols with modern aesthetics. This study analyzes audience responses based on questionnaire data, covering aspects such as character styling, scene design, color use, camera language, and symbolic visuals, highlighting the resonance between the film's aesthetics and contemporary cultural identity (Gong Shiyao & Tang Qi, 2025).

Regarding character styling, the film breaks away from traditional heroic beauty, designing Ne Zha with dark circles and smoky makeup to symbolize rebellion and marginality. 34.82% of respondents liked Ne Zha's look (Q97), and Ao Bing, with his melancholic temperament and icy blue palette, received 54.90% approval (Q98), showing strong emotional projection potential. Supporting characters like Taiyi Zhenren (55.39%, Q99), Shen Gongbao (56.37%, Q100), and the Dragon King (over 60%, Q101) also gained audience favor, proving consistency in visual identity.

In scene construction, audiences were impressed by the Scroll of Mountains and Rivers, the Undersea Dragon Palace, and the Gate of the Void. About 34.8% expressed positive impressions, while 25% rated the scenes "very stunning" (Q102). These spatial designs integrate traditional culture and CG techniques to construct immersive psychological and narrative spaces(Shushu & Li, 2021).

The color palette contrasts Ne Zha's fiery red with Ao Bing's icy blue to convey emotional opposition. 55.39% of respondents appreciated the color language (Q103), acknowledging its mood-enhancing effect(Yuanqiang, 2020). In lighting and camera, 58.33% expressed satisfaction with dramatic contrasts during climactic scenes like lightning strikes (Q104). Sports shots and close-ups also earned 57.35% approval (Q105), increasing immersion(Qinghua & Jingran, 2020).

In terms of editing rhythm, fast-slow pacing strategies build emotional tension, with 33.33% impressed by key sequences and 25% calling the pacing "amazing" (Q106), particularly in transformation and confrontation scenes(Siwei & Hongli, 2020).

The film also excels in symbolic visuals, using elements like Qiankun circles and wind-fire wheels. 54.91% of respondents were "quite" or "very" satisfied with the use of such imagery (Q107), which conveys cultural metaphors and traditional values(Yuanqiang, 2020).

Finally, in action and special effects, battle scenes and elemental explosions heightened narrative intensity. 60.79% of audiences praised these effects (Q108), citing sequences like Ne Zha's duel with Ao Bing and the lightning climax for their visual power(Fei, 2019).

Overall, the film achieved strong audience approval across all visual dimensions. Its integration of Chinese traditional aesthetics with modern cinematic techniques demonstrates domestic animation's capacity to construct a culturally confident and emotionally engaging visual language (Sun Hengyi & Liu Zhenning, 2025).

4.1.5 White Snake

(1) Narrative Analysis

White Snake reinterprets the classical legend with modern narrative techniques, centering on fate and the struggle for love and freedom. Instead of simply retelling the story, the film reconstructs the prequel with philosophical depth. It blends "love between human and demon" with socio-political oppression, forming a multi-layered, parallel narrative on race, identity, and autonomy(Nan, 2019).

The story retains the three-act structure. In Act One, White Snake, tasked with assassinating the Grand Master, loses her memory and is saved by Xu Xuan. Their bond

develops as they journey together, exploring themes of identity, trust, and forbidden love. By saving White Snake, even after discovering her demon identity, Xu Xuan shows emotional resilience. The crisis point comes when White Snake transforms into a giant serpent and he still embraces her, solidifying their connection and setting up the rebellion arc.

Act Two introduces confrontation. While seeking her memory in Baoqing Workshop, White Snake regains past emotions and chooses to part ways, accepting her mission. Xu Xuan sacrifices his cultivation potential, becoming a low-tier demon, which signifies the ultimate expression of love. Conflicts escalate: the Snake Mother reveals her dictatorial goals, and the Grand Master intensifies his racial war. White Snake awakens to both external (human oppression) and internal (demon authoritarianism) threats and chooses resistance.

In Act Three, Xu Xuan dies activating a magic array to defeat the Grand Master. White Snake seals his soul and begins the cycle of searching for his reincarnation. The semi-open ending implies the continuation of their love in another life, reflecting themes of reincarnation and unresolved interspecies tension.

The film employs a framed narrative structure, with the modern-day White Snake recollecting the events of 500 years ago. It uses dual temporal lines—present and memory—integrating mythical concepts of past lives and cycles. The subplot about the demon hunt mirrors the oppressive human-demon power dynamic, intertwining with the love story at key climactic points(Xing & Xiaoming, 2019).

Temporally, the film uses symbolic repetition—rescue scenes, identity reveals, and reconciliations—enhancing fate's cyclical feel. Flashbacks, dreams, and memory fragments introduce a non-linear flow that intensifies emotional engagement. Duration is manipulated through pacing: battle scenes are fast-cut; tragic moments are slowed for emotional emphasis(Jiang, 2019). These create a meditative rhythm echoing Eastern time philosophy.

Spatially, the film constructs an "Oriental poetic space." Traditional Chinese aesthetics—ink-wash landscapes, Taoist temples, and enclosed villages—serve both

symbolic and narrative functions. Spaces like the Snake Catcher Village or Demon-Suppressing Pagoda reflect prejudice, oppression, and eventual sacrifice. The use of fog, light, and altitude underscores character psychology, such as alienation or awakening (Fang Zhaoli & Hu Mingqiang, 2025)(Dongdong, 2019).

Character development is central. White Snake evolves from a mission-driven assassin to an awakened, autonomous woman. Her motivations shift from vengeance to self-sacrifice, mirroring modern identity struggles(Yingdi, 2019). Xu Xuan transforms from a kind-hearted villager into a moral hero, illustrating modern ethical agency. Green Snake, as her assertive sister, becomes both a foil and emotional anchor.

The antagonists—the Snake Mother and Grand Master—embody internal and external oppression, respectively. While the Grand Master represents institutionalized racial violence under the guise of order, the Snake Mother personifies corrupted power within marginalized groups. Their conflict reflects the film's core theme: resistance against domination, regardless of origin (Zhang Jie & Gong Shiyao, 2025).

The narrator adopts an implied, visual mode, shifting between internal focalization (protagonist viewpoint) and omniscient perspective in key moments. For example, when White Snake loses her memory, the audience shares her confusion; during the war scenes, we shift to a wider power dynamic (Gong Shiyao & Liu Lizhi, 2025). Memory, dream, and hallucination sequences also reveal deep inner worlds, merging narrative and emotion(Wenkai & Hong, 2022).

The film's narrative system fuses classical Hollywood and art cinema traditions. It uses a dual-line structure—emotional growth versus political oppression—culminating in the altar showdown. The structural loop (starting and ending in cultivation) supports the reincarnation theme. While the three-act structure and causal chain reflect Hollywood style, visual metaphors, poetic rhythm, and gender dynamics reflect art film aesthetics(Nan, 2019; Xiaojie, 2019).

The semi-open ending—spiritual redemption but unresolved fate—blends emotional closure with philosophical openness. Their love transcends time, but the

human-demon divide persists. This layered design maintains audience engagement while inviting reflection.

In sum, *White Snake* exemplifies the modernization of Chinese mythology through a unique narrative strategy. By combining female subjectivity, Eastern time philosophy, poetic spatial aesthetics, and hybrid narrative systems, the film creates a modern "mythopoetic" structure rooted in national culture but globally resonant. It demonstrates a valuable path for future mythological animations in both narrative innovation and cultural articulation.

(2) Values Analysis

White Snake (2019), a modern reinterpretation of the traditional myth "The Legend of the White Snake," combines classical love narratives with contemporary value exploration. It integrates key dimensions of China's Core Socialist Values while also reflecting openness and philosophical transcendence (Fang Zhaoli & Gong Shiyao, 2025).

At the national level, the film embodies "civilization" through its vivid reconstruction of Chinese aesthetic traditions and cultural symbols, such as ink-wash landscapes, Dunhuang motifs, and the "pearl hairpin" as a symbol of cultural continuity. The notion of "harmony" is expressed through ecological ethics and cross-species symbiosis, such as the love between Bai Suzhen and Xu Xuan, which challenges binary oppositions and promotes peaceful coexistence. The destruction of both the National Preceptor's violence and the Snake Mother's vengeance symbolizes the transcendence of extremism. Survey data shows 55.39% of viewers resonated with its ecological vision (Q40).

On the societal level, White Snake promotes values of "freedom" and "equality." Xu Xuan's transformation into a demon critiques human-centric hierarchies and exemplifies cross-boundary empathy. The film critiques traditional binaries (human/demon, good/evil), advocating for relative justice and moral pluralism—supported by 60.78% of surveyed audiences (Q39). The White Snake's climactic defiance of destiny reflects the tension between free will and predestination, a theme endorsed by

55.37% of viewers (Q36). Fluid identity portrayals, such as Xu Xuan's evolution and the duality of the fox demon, reinforce identity diversity and equality.

At the individual level, the film portrays "integrity" through moral perseverance. Xu Xuan chooses trust over prejudice, while Bai Suzhen abides by her values even amid memory loss. Their mutual sacrifice—shielding one another at the cost of their lives—elevates personal loyalty into a virtue. The theme of "friendship" is further shown in cross-species empathy: villagers move from fear to acceptance, and secondary characters such as the dog Dudou embrace altruism. These arcs highlight how kindness and moral understanding transcend species and social divisions.

Beyond the Core Socialist Values, White Snake also reveals transcendent ideals. It champions romantic individualism—emotional will over institutional duty—and embraces postmodern ambiguity. Fa Hai is not wholly evil, nor is the White Snake purely righteous, signaling a shift toward aesthetic and ethical complexity (Hu Mingqiang & Gong Shiyao, 2025).

In summary, White Snake integrates socialist values with modern ethical tensions, blending cultural inheritance, ecological critique, identity diversity, and emotional ethics. Its dual narrative of myth and modernity not only resonates with young audiences but also contributes to the global cultural discourse of Chinese animation (Sun Chao & He Tielong, 2025).

(3) Audience Attitudes Toward the Aesthetic Values

White Snake fuses traditional Eastern aesthetics with modern animation, earning strong audience approval across visual dimensions such as character design, scene construction, color schemes, and camera language (Fang Zhaoli & Sun Hengyi, 2025).

In character modeling, the White Snake's gentle and mysterious appearance won favor from 59.31% of viewers (Q109), while the Green Snake's bold contrast was affirmed by over 60% (Q110). Supporting roles like Xu Xuan and the Mistress of Baoqing Workshop also gained favorable feedback (Q111–Q113), with 60.29% admiring the Workshop Mistress's fantasy styling.

The film's spatial design impressed audiences with richly layered environments—Snake Catching Village, Demon Suppressing Pagoda, and Yongzhou City—blending nature and architecture. 57.84% of respondents expressed amazement at these settings (Q114), confirming the depth of spatial aesthetics and cultural meaning.

Color usage combined traditional Chinese palettes (dark cyan, vermilion, smoky purple) with modern lighting and emotional gradients, resonating with 58.33% of viewers (Q115). Lighting design further enhanced atmosphere, especially during emotional peaks, gaining 60.78% satisfaction (Q116).

Camera language was praised by 50% of respondents (Q117) for employing varied techniques—close-ups, slow motion, and panning—to increase immersion. Editing rhythm was also highly rated, with over 60% impressed by its effectiveness in action and emotional transitions (Q118).

In terms of visual symbols, the film effectively employed cultural elements like snake totems, demon towers, and ancient costumes. 52.45% of viewers (Q119) recognized and appreciated this system of mythologically inspired imagery.

Action and special effects, including aerial battles, underwater duels, and serpent transformations, were rendered through 3D animation and received approval from 56.86% of the audience (Q120), reflecting high technical quality and narrative enhancement.

In summary, White Snake achieves a rich visual language that combines cultural symbolism and modern aesthetics. It satisfies the contemporary longing for a "Beautiful East" and demonstrates how domestic animation can successfully blend tradition and innovation to achieve both artistic maturity and audience resonance.

4.1.6 Legend of Deification

(1) Narrative Analysis

Legend of Deification reframes the classical myth from The Investiture of the Gods, shifting its focus from epic war to Jiang Ziya's personal fall and moral struggle. The story is structured around a classic three-act format: the collapse of belief, confrontation with divine authority, and final redemption. After refusing to execute the Nine-Tailed Fox due to the presence of an innocent spirit (Xiao Jiu), Jiang is exiled and stripped of power.

His act of compassion initiates a journey to uncover the truth, challenging the notion of sacrificing one to save many(Pengcheng, 2021).

Act II reveals the conspiracy behind the fox spirit's fate and Jiang's internal conflict escalates. Shen Gongbao's transformation from skeptic to ally further intensifies the tension. A key climax emerges in the dialogue between Jiang and his master atop the Celestial Ladder, where Jiang ultimately sacrifices his chance at deification to protect Xiao Jiu. The film ends semi-openly: Jiang achieves personal redemption, yet the fate of divine-human order remains unresolved(Yong & Qingmei, 2021).

Temporally, the film employs linear storytelling with psychological time extensions and flashbacks. Scenes such as Jiang's exile and Xiao Jiu's memories use slow-motion and visual symbolism to deepen emotional resonance (Tang Qi & Gong Shiyao, 2025). The rhythm of time alternates between slow psychological immersion and rapid conflict sequences, balancing inner reflection with external action.

Spatially, the film builds symbolic environments: Beihai represents frozen ideals; Youdu Mountain and Guixu embody oppression and memory entrapment; the Celestial Ladder signifies divine control; and the human world reflects the war's trauma. The collapsing Heavenly Ladder is a visual climax symbolizing resistance to institutional authority (Liu Lizhi & Fang Zhaoli, 2025). These spaces are not passive settings but emotional and ideological extensions of the characters.

Character development centers on Jiang Ziya's shift from divine agent to a morally awakened human. Xiao Jiu serves as both victim and guide, forcing Jiang to reevaluate his values. The Nine-Tailed Fox, once a traditional antagonist, is reframed as a manipulated victim of power, revealing the gray morality behind divine justice(Tao, 2021; Yanyan, 2012). Supporting roles like Shen Gongbao and the Master reinforce the institutional critique—the former represents internalized obedience, while the latter is a detached authority figure.

Narratively, the film adopts an initially omniscient but gradually unreliable narrator, revealing manipulation behind divine power. Visual techniques such as handheld cameras and low-to-high angle shifts reflect Jiang's psychological journey and resistance

(Fang Zhaoli & Liu Zhenning, 2025). Xiao Jiu's and the Fox's perspectives add emotional depth, exposing control and institutional violence from below.

Structurally, the film blends Hollywood-style character-driven causality with philosophical themes. Jiang's moral choices drive the plot, and the classic three-act model is interwoven with art film aesthetics: symbolic mise-en-scène, ethical ambiguity, and emotional introspection. It balances goal-conflict-resolution dynamics with abstract spiritual exploration (Zhang Jie & Tang Qi, 2025).

Unique narrative features include the deconstruction of heroic myths and dual spatial systems. The "collapse of divinity" becomes a narrative of anti-heroic growth. Visual symbolism—chains, ladders, and bone wind chimes—conveys resistance, sacrifice, and redefinition of justice. The fluid narrator perspective enhances cognitive engagement, transforming viewer experience from passive reception to active reflection (Gong Shiyao & He Tielong, 2025).

In conclusion, Legend of Deification exemplifies the narrative evolution of Chinese mythological animation. By integrating psychological realism, moral inquiry, and audiovisual sophistication, it offers a modern reinterpretation of ancient myth, critiquing power and redefining heroism in contemporary terms.

(2) Values Analysis

Legend of Deification, a key installment in the "Fengshen Universe," reinterprets socialist core values through critical myth reconstruction and complex philosophical narratives. Departing from traditional divine obedience, the film reframes values like "civilization," "justice," "equality," and "kindness" by exploring individual resistance, institutional critique, and emotional ethics (Fang Zhaoli & Liu Lizhi, 2025).

At the national level, the film critiques theocratic civilization. Visually, Jingxu Palace symbolizes divine authority, while its collapse and the transformation of the Heavenly Ladder into chains suggest the violent essence behind sacred structures. Jiang Ziya's refusal to sacrifice the innocent reflects a shift from divine determinism to humanistic ethics. The use of spatial metaphors and symbols like the Fate Lock emphasize structural injustice and resistance.

On the societal level, the film deconstructs hierarchical injustice by challenging collective sacrifice narratives. Characters like Xiao Jiu, deemed disposable by divine order, reveal how systems scapegoat the weak. The audience strongly resonated with Jiang Ziya's defiance (60.78% agreed in Q32), reflecting support for individual dignity and fair process(Weikang & Liang, 2021).

At the individual level, "kindness" is redefined as empathetic responsibility. Jiang Ziya's choice to save Xiao Jiu, despite institutional opposition, represents ethical awakening. Characters like Shen Gongbao and the spirit beast Simian also sacrifice for others, affirming altruism beyond orders. Audience responses (62.26% for Q33) confirmed this resonance. Xiao Jiu's resilience and refusal to hate even after suffering further strengthen the film's moral core.

Beyond core values, the film incorporates anti-heroic elements and philosophical reflection. Jiang Ziya, flawed and self-questioning, breaks from traditional hero molds. The inclusion of sacrifice ethics, institutional critique, and identity boundaries adds depth and realism. Over 55% of viewers (Q34) appreciated the complexity, showing demand for nuanced, non-binary narratives(Qiuwen, 2020; Xiaowei, 2021).

In sum, the film constructs a three-tier value system: challenging divine authority (nation), questioning systemic justice (society), and choosing compassion (individual). Through symbolic scenes, layered characters, and myth-modern hybrid aesthetics, Legend of Deification resonates with contemporary audiences' ethical concerns. It not only reflects on power and resistance but offers a new paradigm for value expression in Chinese animation.

(3) Audience Attitudes Toward the Aesthetic Values

Legend of Deification has received widespread audience recognition for its aesthetic achievements, combining Eastern philosophical imagery with modern animation techniques. According to survey data, viewers express high satisfaction with the film's overall visual presentation, particularly in character modeling, scene construction, color application, cinematography, symbolic design, and special effects (Gong Shiyao & Zhang Jie, 2025).

In terms of character modeling, the film subverts traditional immortal imagery by highlighting emotional complexity. 55.39% of respondents appreciated Jiang Ziya's humanized design (Q121), while 59.8% favored Xiao Jiu's visual blend of fragility and strength (Q122). Shen Gongbao (55.88%, Q123), the Nine-Tailed Fox Demon (57.84%, Q124), and Four Different (53.92%, Q125) also received positive feedback, showing the audience's acceptance of the film's symbolic and expressive art style.

Scene-wise, the film constructs a multi-realm spatial system reflecting psychological states. Desolate Beihai, oppressive Youdu Mountain, and ethereal Guixu serve as emotional extensions of the characters. 55.88% of respondents found these scenes highly impactful (Q126), showing that the spatial design enhanced both narrative and emotional depth.

In color and lighting, the contrast between cool tones and vibrant hues underscores inner struggles. 56.38% acknowledged the emotional power of color (Q127), and 56.86% praised the lighting's atmospheric contribution (Q128). These elements effectively heightened narrative tension and tragic themes.

Cinematically, 61.72% approved of the camera work (Q129), citing dynamic framing and rhythm. However, editing rhythm received more neutral feedback, with 29.41% rating it as "average" (Q130), suggesting space for refinement.

Regarding symbolic visuals, motifs like the Celestial Ladder, Fate Lock, and Mysterious Bird create a culturally resonant symbol system. 58.33% of viewers expressed satisfaction with this symbolic integration (Q131), appreciating its philosophical weight.

Special effects in action sequences—such as divine confrontations and spatial collapses—impressed 58.33% of the audience (Q132), confirming that the film delivered a mythic spectacle that matched audience expectations.

In summary, the audience shows clear appreciation for the film's visual identity, especially in its fusion of traditional aesthetics with contemporary cinematic language. Although some technical aspects like editing rhythm remain areas for improvement, the film successfully balances visual richness with thematic depth. It

reflects a maturing aesthetic model in Chinese mythological animation that aligns cultural imagery with modern sensibilities.

4.1.7 New Gods: Nezha Reborn

(1) Narrative Analysis

Narrative Analysis of *New Gods: Nezha Reborn*

New Gods: Nezha Reborn reconstructs the traditional Nezha myth through a modern lens, blending cyberpunk aesthetics with classical hero mythology to tell a story about identity, resistance, and social transformation(Peng, 2021). The protagonist, Li Yunxiang, a rebellious young man from the slums of Donghai City, discovers that he is the reincarnation of Nezha. His journey unfolds in a classic three-act structure.

Act One sets the stage with identity conflict and class confrontation. Li Yunxiang, a motorbike racer and water rebel, sabotages the Dragon Clan's monopoly over water resources. After a violent encounter with Ao Bing, his hidden divine power awakens, pushing him into the world of mythological reincarnation.

Act Two focuses on confrontation and internal awakening. Under the guidance of the masked Six-Eared Macaque, Li battles divine foes while wrestling with the darker nature of Nezha's original spirit, which is aggressive and self-destructive. His refusal to become a killing god leads to emotional and narrative tension.

Act Three sees resolution and rebirth. Li sacrifices himself to defeat the Dragon King, then is reborn, fully merging with Nezha's spirit. He gains divine power and saves Donghai City, declaring "I am Nezha." The ending suggests continuity in divine conflict, leaving space for sequels (Tang Qi & Fang Zhaoli, 2025).

Time in the film follows a linear structure with symbolic flashbacks. Past life memories are interspersed with the present, creating a dual-layered timeline. Techniques such as slow-motion and repetition enhance the audience's emotional engagement and highlight themes of reincarnation(Ji et al., 2021; Xiaoyin, 2023).

Space is symbolically rich, particularly Donghai City—a mythic metropolis infused with cyberpunk visuals, class division, and postmodern urbanism. From the underwater Dragon Tower to the hospital beneath the giant Buddha, spatial design

metaphorically supports the narrative's critique of power and societal oppression(Rong, 2021).

Character Development reflects youth consciousness and psychological realism. Li Yunxiang embodies rebellion, struggle, and growth. Ao Bing symbolizes elite failure, while the Dragon King represents divine oppression. Supporting characters like Doctor Su and the Masked Monkey King introduce gender breakthroughs and fringe deity critiques, respectively (Liu Zhiqiang, 2025).

Narrative Perspective is mainly third-person omniscient, with moments of limited focalization to deepen audience empathy. Psychological narration, dream sequences, and subjective visual language highlight the protagonist's internal transformation, blurring the lines between myth and reality(Bo, 2022).

Narrative System combines Hollywood storytelling with postmodern elements. The film embeds class struggle and power dynamics in genre film form, reshaping Nezha as a modern folk hero who defies divine fate and fights institutional injustice (Liu Zhenning & Gong Shiyao, 2025).

Unique Narrative Techniques include deconstruction of divine identity and integration of cyberpunk aesthetics with Eastern mythology. Through symbolic visuals (e.g., cyberlotus, mechanical dragons), a multi-point perspective, and flashbacks, the film critiques the divine hierarchy while constructing a "new mythology" that resonates with contemporary youth and real-world issues such as inequality, ecological destruction, and power monopoly.

In conclusion, *New Gods: Nezha Reborn* offers a layered narrative that merges myth, modernity, and ideology. It reinterprets Nezha's legacy through cinematic language and contemporary themes, shaping a new direction for Chinese mythological animation rooted in cultural reflection and aesthetic innovation.

(2) Values Analysis

New Gods: Nezha Reborn reimagines the mythological figure of Nezha through a cyberpunk lens, embedding traditional values into a futuristic dystopia. Set in

Donghai City, the film addresses issues such as resource monopoly, technological alienation, and class oppression. It revitalizes the spirit of "my fate is determined by me" as a reflection on systemic injustice, while also conveying the socialist core values of civilization, justice, and kindness at national, social, and individual levels(Peng, 2021).

At the national level, the film critiques alienated urban civilization through its depiction of Donghai City's authoritarian control systems and visual juxtaposition of ancient myth with technological imagery. The narrative reflects civilizational hybridity, symbolized by Li Yunxiang's evolution into a subject of moral agency resisting an oppressive order.

Socially, the film explores class injustice through the monopoly of water resources by the Dexing Group and the violent suppression of slum dwellers. The control tower and surveillance systems serve as metaphors for the dominance of capital and technological power. Li Yunxiang's resistance, aided by marginalized groups, represents grassroots efforts to reclaim justice. Technological artifacts such as the Hun Tian Ling are reimagined as tools of resistance, symbolizing the localization and democratization of mythological power.

On the individual level, the film promotes kindness as an ethical anchor. Li Yunxiang's sacrifices and mutual aid actions—alongside the trust built among underprivileged characters—highlight how compassion persists in alienated societies. Nezha's identity, often stigmatized, is redefined through altruistic behavior, advocating that morality stems from actions, not labels. The emotional evolution of familial bonds also demonstrates how "kindness" is transmitted intergenerationally.

Despite its strengths, the film exhibits contradictions: it relies on divine power to achieve justice, potentially weakening the autonomy of grassroots resistance. Moreover, its visual spectacle sometimes overshadows emotional depth. Ethical dilemmas emerge around whether violence is justified to achieve justice.

Beyond the scope of China's core socialist values, the film reflects existential individualism and modern liberal concerns. Nezha is framed not as a collectivist hero but as a self-determined subject resisting fate, aligning with youth culture's emphasis on

identity and autonomy(Rong, 2021; Yimei, 2021). Its cyberpunk aesthetic subverts theocratic symbols, translating power into a critique of institutional logic.

In sum, Nezha Reborn presents a layered exploration of traditional and modern values. It fuses mythology with social critique, promotes kindness in fragmented societies, and expands the possibilities for visualizing Chinese values in a global context. The film exemplifies the contemporary ambitions of Chinese animation in narrative innovation and ethical reflection.

(3) Audience Attitudes Toward the Aesthetic Values

New Gods: Nezha Reborn integrates mythological motifs with cyberpunk aesthetics, showcasing distinctive visual language in areas such as character modeling, scene design, color, and symbolism. According to questionnaire data, a majority of the audience positively evaluated its visual innovation and aesthetic integration (Zhang Jie & Hu Mingqiang, 2025).

Character design blends myth with modern youth subculture. 55.39% of respondents liked Nezha's image as a "street youth + reincarnated god" (Q121), and 58.82% approved of Ao Bing's design as a cybernetically alienated tragic figure (Q134). The Masked Monkey King (55.88%, Q135) combines Sun Wukong's classical imagery with cyberpunk nihilism, while over 60% praised the Dragon King's hybrid look of elegance and tyranny (Q136).

Scene construction, especially Donghai City, blends mythic symbols and futuristic industry. Over 56% of respondents found key scenes—like the underwater palace or Dexing Group tower—visually striking (Q137). These spaces reflect social hierarchies and critique technological hegemony, transforming mythology into sociopolitical allegory(Rong, 2021).

In terms of color and lighting, the film uses sharp contrasts—icy blue for elites vs. rusty red for civilians—to reinforce class differences. 56.86% approved of the color use (Q138), while 54.41% praised lighting's role in setting tone (Q139)(Yimei, 2021).

Camera work and editing heighten immersion. For instance, POV and tracking shots in motorcycle chases intensify the speed and tension. 58.82% gave positive feedback on camera language (Q140), while 63.23% were impressed by editing rhythm (Q141) (Liu Lizhi & He Tielong, 2025).

The film's use of visual symbols also resonated. Nezha's motorcycle symbolizes modern transformation of his Wind-Fire Wheels, and the Monkey King's mask implies mythological identity breakdowns in the digital era(Bo, 2022). 57.84% expressed satisfaction with these visual metaphors (Q142).

Finally, action scenes and special effects transform classical magic into mechanical spectacle. 60.79% appreciated their audiovisual impact and narrative tension (Q143)(Peng, 2021).

In conclusion, *New Gods: Nezha Reborn* was well-received for its artistic innovation, symbolic reconstruction, and narrative integration. It effectively modernizes traditional myth through cyber aesthetics, becoming a landmark example of aesthetic modernization in Chinese animation.

4.1.8 Green Snake

(1) Narrative Analysis

The animated film Green Snake continues the worldview of White Snake, centering on the protagonist Green Snake's transformation through a journey in the illusionary space "Shura City." Structured around a stream-of-consciousness narrative, the film explores the psychological evolution from revenge-driven obsession to independent self-awareness(Jilin & Liping, 2022; Kehong, 2021).

In Act One, Green Snake is exiled to Shura City after confronting Fahai. This urbanized underworld reflects emotional entrapments. Stripped of her powers, she partners with Miss Sun and meets the mysterious masked youth. A violent conflict leads to Miss Sun's death, triggering Green Snake's first value shift: the realization that dependence on strength is vital in a hostile world(Zhiwei & Ke, 2022).

Act Two deepens the psychological complexity. The rules of Shura City— such as jumping into the "Wu Pool" or crossing the "Ruguo Bridge" to escape—materialize obsession as spatial metaphors. Betrayed by Sima Gentleman and rescued by the

masked youth, Green Snake discovers the youth is not her sister but had taken White Snake's form to give her hope. This confrontation catalyzes Green Snake's spiritual awakening: she must rely on herself, not others, to change fate(Wangli & Xiangxiang, 2022).

In Act Three, Green Snake retreats to the Black Wind Cave, a spiritual space representing cultivation. Through battles with Fahai and repeated training, she reaches enlightenment. Emerging victorious, she causes Fahai's power to collapse and the "Ruguo Bridge" to materialize. However, the masked youth sacrifices himself to save her, revealing in his final words that he had always sought her. In the real world, Green Snake reunites White Snake's hairpin fragments, realizing the youth was her sister's reincarnation. The open ending—White Snake's voice calls out but is not shown—leaves space for emotional interpretation.

The narrative avoids traditional linear heroism, centering instead on internal struggle. The film integrates gamified storytelling (e.g., level progression, NPC functions), stream-of-consciousness techniques, and symbolic visual language. Spatially, Shura City and the Black Wind Cave externalize inner turmoil, while modern Hangzhou bridges tradition and present(Huixin, 2022) (Liu Lizhi & Sun Hengyi, 2025).

The character arc focuses on Green Snake's growth from a side character to a self-sufficient heroine, rejecting dependence and patriarchal constructs. Other characters symbolize aspects of obsession, power, and capital. For instance, Madam Baoqing commodifies obsession; Sima represents utilitarian betrayal; and the Ox Head Leader reflects authoritarian order (Hu Mingqiang & Zhang Jie, 2025).

The film employs subjective focalization, avoiding omniscient narration. Through psychological editing and fragmented memories, the audience shares Green Snake's internal conflict, blurring the line between protagonist and narrator (Liu Zhenning, 2025).

The narrative system balances classic Hollywood structure (three acts, causal logic) and postmodern deconstruction. Time is layered: mythic cycles, traumatic

memories, and eternal returns overlap, echoing Jungian archetypes and Lacanian mirroring (He Tielong & Sun Chao, 2025).

Ultimately, *Green Snake* represents a "neo-mythic" breakthrough in Chinese animation, blending genre cinema with auteur ambition. It pioneers feminist and post-humanist themes within a mythological framework, offering a symbolic, emotional, and philosophical reinterpretation of traditional IP (Fang Zhaoli & Gong Shiyao, 2025).

(2) Values Analysis

Green Snake explores the core values of freedom, friendship, and civilization through a cyberpunk reinterpretation of the classic White Snake myth. Set in the heterotopian space of Shura City, the film departs from traditional moral instruction and instead emphasizes inner awakening and emotional ethics. It uses mythological reconstruction, visual allegories, and symbolic narrative strategies to address themes of gender, identity, and social order (Zhang Jie, 2025).

At the national level, the film embodies an implicit reconstruction of Eastern values through hybrid imagery—combining Song Dynasty architecture, mechanical structures, and Buddhist symbolism—to reflect on Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist traditions. This suggests that civilization, as a socialist core value, involves both historical inheritance and modern critique.

At the societal level, *Green Snake* focuses on "freedom" by showing female subjectivity resisting institutional oppression. Green Snake is no longer a passive character but reclaims agency through violent rebellion and spiritual struggle. The film critiques patriarchal systems and portrays female collaboration as a form of communal resistance. The spatial metaphor of Shura City also reflects technological alienation and existential dilemmas (Tang Qi, 2024).

On the individual level, the theme of "friendship" is portrayed through sisterhood and interspecies emotional alliances. The bond between Green and White Snake transcends blood and gender, forming an ethics of mutual trust. Characters like the masked youth and Baoqing Workshop Master illustrate how emotional connection and

integrity can function under oppressive systems. Yet, the film does not avoid ethical tensions—such as the reliance on violence and elite intervention—revealing the fragile structure of friendliness in extreme conditions.

Moreover, the film expresses values beyond the Core Socialist Values framework. Feminist resistance, ethical ambiguity, and existential questioning are presented through Xiaoqing's character arc and the allegorical cityscape. These elements respond to modern concerns such as identity crises, technological control, and spiritual freedom. The film thus positions itself as a postmodern exploration of value, breaking away from the binary structure of good and evil and embracing philosophical reflection (Liu Dexin, 2025).

In summary, Green Snake integrates traditional mythology with global visual grammar, shifting from collective ideological transmission to individual spiritual introspection. Its decentralized, emotionally charged value expression reflects a new direction in Chinese animation—towards aesthetic innovation and diversified value articulation.

(3) Audience Attitudes Toward the Aesthetic Values

Green Snake continues the artistic excellence of *White Snake*, achieving notable breakthroughs in character styling, scene design, color, and lighting. Survey data indicates that audiences responded positively to its aesthetic innovation and cultural resonance (Gong Shiyao & Liu Lizhi, 2025).

The visual transformation of Green Snake—high ponytail, leather jacket, ripped jeans—conveys agility and independence, forming a symbol of female empowerment. Her hybrid form, revealed during the battle in Black Wind Cave, represents internal identity conflict and evolution from reliance to autonomy (Tang Qi & Liu Zhenning, 2025). 56.86% of respondents favored her Shura City design (Q144).

The masked youth, embodying reincarnated memory and Eastern aesthetics, received over 57% approval (Q145), enhancing emotional and philosophical depth (Liu Zhiqiang & Liu Dexin, 2025). Stylings of Sima, the Ox Head Gang leader, and Fahai were also highly rated, each visually symbolizing themes of desire, violence, and rule.

The film's world-building—an integration of "Oriental Fantasy + Wasteland Punk"—uses spaces like Shura City, Black Wind Cave, and the Wu Pool, incorporating mythological symbols such as Feilian and Bifang. 54.9% expressed satisfaction with these visual scenes (Q149), which created strong emotional resonance (Zhang Jie & Liu Lizhi, 2025).

Color and lighting also support the narrative. Cool tones evoke loneliness, while red and gold highlight emotional peaks. 51.96% approved the color usage (Q150); 57.85% praised the lighting (Q151) for enhancing uncertainty and psychological tension.

Shot design and editing deepen immersion. Moving perspectives, rapid cuts, and rhythm variation convey chaos and emotion. 57.84% responded positively to camera work (Q152), and 59.8% praised the editing rhythm (Q153).

Visually symbolic spaces—Black Wind Cave (obsession), Wu Pool (rebirth), Wanyi Supermarket (desire)—form a contemporary mythological system, with 57.36% audience approval (Q154) (Hu Mingqiang & Gong Shiyao, 2025).

Finally, action scenes—especially the Calamity sequences—use game-style aesthetics and CG to deliver strong sensory impact. 56.86% of respondents praised the special effects (Q155), emphasizing the synergy of narrative, emotion, and audiovisual spectacle.

In conclusion, Green Snake has successfully constructed a rich visual universe that blends Eastern aesthetics and postmodern techniques. The film not only meets audience expectations for visual creativity but also advances the integration of cultural expression and technical sophistication in Chinese animation.

4.1.9 New Gods: Yang Jian

(1) Narrative Analysis

New Gods: Yang Jian reinterprets the myth of "splitting the mountain to save the mother" through a modern anti-hero lens. The film sets a post-divine world where gods have lost their flying powers, constructing a hierarchical cyberpunk realm. Yang Jian, once a divine enforcer, is now a bounty hunter. His journey from "interest-driven" to "truth-seeking" is set in motion by a mission to pursue Chen Xiang, unaware of their blood

relation. The three-act structure unfolds with family revelations and institutional critiques(Jing, 2023; Zijian, 2025).

In the second act, the narrative intensifies with layered betrayals: Shen Gongbao manipulates Chen Xiang, Wanluo acts as both seductress and assassin, and Yu Ding Zhenren embodies institutional evil. These developments lead Yang Jian to realize that his sister Yang Chan voluntarily sealed the Mysterious Bird, causing a shift from personal conflict to collective awakening. By the climax, Yang Jian assists Chen Xiang in restoring the Lotus Lantern, challenging the theocratic system. The recovery of his Heavenly Eye signifies both magical and ideological rebirth(Xiaojin, 2023).

The film concludes with a semi-open ending: Chen Xiang reunites spiritually with his mother while the Three Realms remain in flux, symbolizing partial victory and future reform. The story blends the Hollywood hero's journey with Eastern symbolism, presenting a narrative of awakening, redemption, and systemic resistance.

Temporally, the film uses linear progression with interspersed flashbacks, memory dreams, and repeated motifs such as the Lotus Lantern. This enhances tension and deepens psychological insight(Tong & Yigong, 2023) (Tang Qi & Sun Hengyi, 2025).

Spatially, it juxtaposes mythological elements with cyberpunk aesthetics. Penglai and Fanghu represent technological cultivation and secularized divinity; Jinxia Cave critiques authoritarianism; Yingzhou suggests cultural hybridity; the Taiji battle scene visualizes internal collapse and awakening(Kehong, 2022; Qianwen, 2024).

Yang Jian's character arc—from a disillusioned immortal to awakened guardian—exemplifies the anti-hero's journey. Chen Xiang acts as both a mythic agent and moral mirror. Shen Gongbao, Wanluo, and Yu Ding reflect systemic oppressions rather than pure evil, aligning the film with postmodern structural critiques(Dandan, 2022; Yan, 2022).

Narratively, the film uses a limited third-person perspective, revealing truths through fragmented character knowledge. This keeps the audience slightly ahead, yet immersed in piecing together the moral and emotional truths(Ji & Juan, 2022).

The narrative system fuses Hollywood causality with postmodern subversion: myth is deconstructed; space is hybrid; identity is fluid; and symbols like the Mysterious Bird evoke ambiguous hope. Intertextuality, allegory, and social realism amplify the cultural critique(Tong & Yigong, 2023).

Ultimately, *New Gods: Yang Jian* marks a breakthrough in Chinese animated storytelling, balancing spectacle with depth. Its hybrid narrative and symbolic systems offer a modern reinterpretation of myth aligned with Gen Z's cultural anxieties and philosophical reflections.

(2) Values Analysis

New Gods: Yang Jian presents a layered value narrative combining technological aesthetics and philosophical reflection. Through Yang Jian's transformation from a judicial executor to an order-subverter, the film explores three value dimensions: civilization, justice, and kindness (Liu Zhiqiang & Zhang Jie, 2025).

At the national level, the film reconstructs the notion of civilization by merging steampunk visuals and traditional Chinese symbols. It challenges the patriarchal mythological order by reimagining kinship dynamics (e.g., uncle-nephew equality), and philosophically redefines "destiny" through the metaphor of the Mysterious Bird. Yang Jian's choice to release the bird symbolizes the renewal of civilization, aligning with socialist values like harmony and people-oriented development. Visual elements such as the celestial realm's hybrid architecture, the Lotus Lantern, and ink-wash aesthetics reinforce this civilizational symbolism.

At the societal level, the film critiques institutional injustice. The Fengshen List becomes a tool of oppression manipulated by divine authorities under the pretense of "heavenly law." Yang Jian's evolution—shifting allegiance from systemic justice to ethical awakening—reveals a dialectical justice that prioritizes reflection over rigid adherence to law. The people's struggle, including Chenxiang's theft of the Lotus Lantern and folk interventions, illustrate the grassroots challenge to resource monopolies and power hierarchies.

On the individual level, the film reconstructs "kindness" through mutual redemption and marginal alliances. Yang Jian and Chenxiang evolve from hierarchical kin to emotionally equal allies. Figures like Wanluo and the Ferocious Heavenly Dog add ethical depth to "marginal guardianship." Moreover, Yang Jian's final decision to end the reincarnation cycle expresses kindness not as passive tolerance, but as sacrificial protection of the vulnerable.

Beyond core socialist values, the film addresses modern themes like self-determination and resistance to fate. Over 55% of viewers (Q58) support this, echoing modern ideals of individual autonomy. Philosophically, it questions divine authority, rules, and moral truth, resonating with 56.37% of audiences (Q56). These layers transcend simplistic moral binaries.

In conclusion, *New Gods: Yang Jian* integrates myth and modernity across three value dimensions: national (civilizational hybridity and renewal), societal (justice as order reconstruction), and individual (kindness as moral empathy). Its philosophical inquiries, open ending, and technological artistry enrich the expression of "Chinese values" in a global narrative landscape (Gong Shiyao & Liu Lizhi, 2025).

(3) Audience Attitudes Toward the Aesthetic Values

New Gods: Yang Jian has been widely praised for its Guofeng fantasy aesthetics and multidimensional visual language. According to survey data, audiences generally hold positive views on the film's artistic performance, including character design, scenes, colors, and symbolism (Gong Shiyao & He Tielong, 2025).

Character styling is a major highlight. 59.8% of viewers favored Yang Jian's elegant, downcast immortal look, characterized by flowing robes and a headscarf (Tang Qi & Zhang Jie, 2025). Chenxiang's darker styling expresses his guarded nature, contrasting Yang Jian's world-weariness, with 53.92% approval. Characters such as the Howling Celestial Dog (59.81%) and Shen Gongbao (61.27%) also received high praise, indicating a successful blend of tradition and modernity (Q156–Q161).

In spatial design, the fusion of Eastern mythology and cyberpunk created immersive spaces like Penglai Island and Jinxia Cave. 56.86% of respondents expressed

satisfaction, particularly appreciating metaphorical structures like the floating city (Sun & Liu, 2025). The use of warm and cold color contrasts and dynamic lighting created a fantasy atmosphere; color (Q163) and lighting (Q164) both received over 60% positive feedback.

Camera and editing techniques were also affirmed. 60.78% of respondents appreciated the use of close-ups and subjective angles, such as the circular shot of the petrified tree visualizing Taoist philosophy. Editing tempo in emotional and action sequences like Yang Jian's transformation maintained narrative rhythm (Liu Lizhi & Liu Zhenning, 2025; Q165–Q166).

Symbolically, motifs like the Lotus Lantern, Mysterious Bird, and Dunhuang Apsaras formed a deep visual-cultural system. 58.33% of respondents praised this aspect (Fang Zhaoli & Liu Zhiqiang, 2025). The film's action scenes, powered by CG and particle effects, created a stylized spectacle, winning approval from 58.82% (Q168).

Overall, *New Gods: Yang Jian* merges mythology, visual artistry, and philosophical meaning into a coherent aesthetic system. It exemplifies how Chinese animation can innovate stylistically while retaining cultural depth, contributing to the broader aesthetic discourse of mythological storytelling in contemporary China.

4.1.10 Goodbye Monster

(1) Narrative Analysis

Goodbye Monster adopts a classical three-act structure, blending fantasy adventure with emotional and philosophical depth to portray a healer's transformation. The story follows Bai Ze, a once overconfident doctor, who, after causing a catastrophic outbreak while trying to cure the Black Spirit Disease, is expelled from the Kunlun Medical Guild. Years later, he embarks on a redemptive journey, seeking the true roots of the disease and transforming from a technically skilled physician into a spiritually awakened healer (Hu Mingqiang & Liu Lizhi, 2025).

In Act One, Bai Ze's reckless actions and medical ambition result in disaster, initiating his fall from grace. Seven years later, still determined to find a cure, he becomes a fugitive after being framed, leading to the central narrative goal: confronting the disease's essence. In Act Two, Bai Ze meets Yi, a marginalized patient, and gradually

realizes the disease represents emotional trauma rather than a purely physical illness. His fall into the Weak Water Abyss marks his full epiphany—healing must come from inner light, not external spells (Sun Chao & Liu Zhenning, 2025). In Act Three, Bai Ze returns to stop Huo Zhu, whose obsession with control has turned him into a Black Spirit. Bai Ze saves everyone through compassion and understanding, including helping Yi accept himself. The film ends with a semi-open conclusion—acknowledging that Black Spirits will never disappear but can be met with light and acceptance.

The film's temporal structure spans seven years, using flashbacks and time ruptures to juxtapose Bai Ze's past idealism with his matured worldview. Fragmented memories and mirrored events (e.g., Yi's rejection echoing Bai Ze's past) underscore time as both a witness and vehicle of healing (Liu Zhiqiang & Liu Dexin, 2025).

Spatially, the narrative moves from the grand Kunlun Hospital to a symbolic abyss, each space carrying cultural and psychological meaning. The transition from the medical guild's rigid rationalism to the Black Spirit shelter's emotional resonance charts Bai Ze's ideological transformation(Baoqing & Haiyan, 2023). The Abyss of Weak Water serves as a spiritual crucible, while the ritual square becomes the site where violent control collapses and compassion triumphs(Ren, 2023).

Character arcs are multilayered. Bai Ze evolves from a technique-obsessed doctor to a healer of the soul. Yi overcomes identity anxiety, symbolizing youth self-acceptance. Huo Zhu, driven by unrecognized service and envy, falls tragically, illustrating the perils of utilitarian medicine. Supporting roles like the Nine-Tailed Fox and Bi Fang enrich the film's exploration of trust, authority, and institutional critique(Zhongwei & Lvlin, 2024).

The film employs a third-person omniscient narrator, allowing insight into Bai Ze and Huo Zhu's inner transformations. Subjective perspectives—e.g., first-person shots of Yi's fear—enhance emotional immersion. The dual narrator structure, beginning with a folkloric voice-over and ending with Bai Ze's reflection, adds thematic closure and mythic resonance(Sun & Yan, 2022).

Narratively, *Goodbye Monster* fuses Hollywood's hero's journey with modernist introspection. While following the "setup–confrontation–resolution" model, it reinterprets the journey through the lens of healing, with metaphors like the golden butterfly (hope) and Weak Water (rebirth). It also introduces Eastern narrative principles— coexistence with darkness rather than conquest—offering a philosophically open ending.

In conclusion, the film constructs a distinct healing narrative combining personal growth, mythological symbolism, and psychological introspection. It moves beyond genre conventions, creating a uniquely Chinese animation model that emphasizes empathy, reconciliation, and the inner journey of the healer.

(2) Values Analysis

Goodbye Monster integrates Chinese mythology with psychological storytelling to express themes of growth, compassion, and social reflection. Based on the Core Socialist Values framework, the film conveys national, social, and personal values, while also extending into individualistic and philosophical dimensions (Hu Mingqiang & Gong Shiyao, 2025).

At the national level, the film embodies "civilization" by revitalizing Shan Hai Jing imagery—e.g., Kunlun Healing Pavilion and golden butterflies—creating a modern interpretation of cultural heritage(Baoqing & Haiyan, 2023). Its humanitarian care, expressed through spaces like the Black Spirit patient shelter, also reflects the pursuit of "harmony." Survey results show 51.96% of viewers agree that the film delivers messages of healing and hope [Q59].

At the societal level, Bai Ze exemplifies "justice" and "patriotism" through his unwavering pursuit of medical truth. Audience feedback supports this: 58.84% approve his commitment to justice [Q60] and 66.88% agree the film stresses social responsibility [Q62].

On the personal level, Bai Ze's dedication to healing embodies "dedication." His growth from "treating diseases" to "healing the soul" reflects an internalized, ethical

commitment. Meanwhile, the contrast between his integrity and Huozhu's deceitful methods highlights "integrity"(Sun & Yan, 2022). Compassionate figures like Madam Fang represent "friendliness," supported by 65.69% of viewers [Q63].

Beyond this framework, the film explores individual resistance to institutional authority. Bai Ze's spiritual journey emphasizes self-driven truth-seeking, resonating with viewers(Xiaojie, 2023). Huozhu is depicted not as a villain but as a tragically flawed character, aligning with modern psychological complexity(Zhongwei & Lvlin, 2024). Moreover, the resolution abandons binary conflict in favor of acceptance—"smiling at the Black Spirit"—echoing Eastern philosophy over moral conquest.

In conclusion, Goodbye Monster both affirms socialist values and expands toward personal healing, emphasizing emotional care, inner light, and mutual empathy. It shifts the focus from external systems to internal strength, merging national ideology with individual introspection. This hybrid value framework, supported by strong audience reception, marks a new direction for Chinese animated films in cultural and psychological expression.

(3) Audience Attitudes Toward the Aesthetic Values

As a Chinese animated film fusing myth with psychology, Goodbye Monster establishes a symbolic and emotional aesthetic system. Based on survey data and academic literature, the film demonstrates strong audience approval across visual dimensions, including character design, scene construction, color, lighting, cinematography, symbolism, and special effects (Hu Mingqiang & Gong Shiyao, 2025).

Character designs such as Bai Ze (60.78%), Yi (51.47%), Huozhu (57.84%), and the Nine-Tailed Fox (60.79%) were well received [Q169–173]. Bai Ze's teal robes and talisman motifs convey healing and agility(Sun & Yan, 2022), while Yi's rounded qilin features reflect psychological incompleteness. Huozhu's monstrous transformation visualizes inner corruption. Antagonists like the Black Spirit (62.26%) and Bi Fang (53.92%) also impressed viewers, reflecting the depth of Chinese animation in symbolic character imagery.

Scenes like the Healing Pavilion, Weak Water Abyss, and Great Island Ruins structure a layered narrative space. 57.84% of viewers responded positively [Q175]. These settings metaphorically represent healing, rebirth, and inherited wisdom(Baoqing & Haiyan, 2023; Xiaojie, 2023).

Color contrasts highlight emotional tone—e.g., dark gray-blue during Black Spirit outbreaks versus golden hues symbolizing hope. 58.34% approved the color palette [Q176], and 62.26% praised the lighting [Q177], especially in moments of transformation and enlightenment(Zhongwei & Lvlin, 2024).

Cinematography techniques such as close-ups, subjective shots, and fluid movement received support from 55.39% of respondents [Q178], with editing rhythm praised by over 56% [Q179]. The balance between fast and slow pacing (e.g., Huozhu's battle vs. Bai Ze's healer flashbacks) enhances emotional immersion(Xiaojie, 2023).

Visual symbols like golden butterflies (hope), five-element talismans (order), and the Black Spirit (psychological trauma) were affirmed by 60% of viewers [Q180]. These motifs communicate cultural values both emotionally and visually(Xiaojie, 2023).

The use of 3D CG and particle effects creates impactful action scenes, such as Huozhu's chaotic transformation and Bai Ze's healing climax. Over 57% of viewers praised the effects [Q181], citing alignment between spectacle and emotional narrative(Sun & Yan, 2022).

In conclusion, Goodbye Monster has achieved a high degree of aesthetic reception by merging mythological symbols with psychological depth and modern visual language. It represents a shift from traditional motif accumulation to symbolic cultural systems, marking a sophisticated advancement in Chinese animated aesthetics.

4.2 Thematic Synthesis and Audience Perspectives

4.2.1 Narrative Trends and Structural Innovations in Chinese Mythological Animated Films (2015–2024)

This study adopts the "six narrative elements" framework to systematically analyze ten award-winning Chinese mythological animated films released between 2015 and 2024. The analysis focuses on six key dimensions: story structure, temporal

arrangement, spatial construction, character development, narrator design, and narrative style. In addition, the study incorporates multi-dimensional comparative approaches such as thematic orientation, character motivation, and temporal structure typology. By comparing the narrative strategies of different films, the study not only reveals the diverse explorations of narrative innovation in domestic animation but also helps to explain why these works effectively engage audiences on levels of narrative logic, emotional resonance, and cultural identity—offering valuable insights into narrative practices and audience reception mechanisms that can inform future Chinese animation production.

(1) Story and Plot

To further explore the narrative characteristics of Chinese mythological animated films, this study examined how ten representative works (2015–2024) construct their three-act structures in alignment with their core thematic orientations. The analysis classifies the films into three thematic categories: (1) Heroic Awakening and Identity Reconstruction, (2) Emotional Ethics and Philosophical Reflection, and (3) Cultural Inheritance and Modern Negotiation.

In the heroic awakening group, films such as Monkey King: Hero Is Back, Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child, and Jiang Ziya follow a classical trajectory of fall, trial, and redemption. The first act typically establishes a protagonist in a state of repression, social exclusion, or loss of identity. The second act introduces personal or systemic challenges that trigger transformation, while the third act resolves the arc through symbolic or literal re-empowerment. These narratives emphasize individual agency, rebellion against fate, and redefinition of heroism under modern values.

The emotional ethics group, including Big Fish & Begonia and the White Snake series, is driven by internal conflict and moral dilemmas. These films often start with emotionally charged relationships or ethical transgressions. In Act II, characters undergo trials of guilt, memory loss, or emotional dependency, leading to reflective or sacrificial resolutions in Act III. The structure here is frequently nonlinear or cyclic, with dreamscapes and symbolic settings enhancing introspection and poetic expression.

In contrast, the cultural negotiation group—represented by Little Door Gods and The Mythical Ark: Goodbye Monster—centers on the transformation of tradition within modern contexts. The three acts often juxtapose divine or folkloric crises (Act I), cultural disruption or hybrid conflict (Act II), and ultimately, collaborative or reconciliatory solutions (Act III). These narratives highlight the reinvention of mythology through present-day lenses, promoting intergenerational dialogue and the soft power of Chinese cultural identity.

Overall, the correlation between thematic focus and narrative architecture reveals a broader evolution: from heroic determinism to psychological complexity and socio-cultural dialogue. The three-act structure serves as a flexible yet consistent framework through which these films articulate not only plot but also ideological and emotional transformation.

Table 2 Three-Act Structure Analysis of Chinese Mythological Animated Films (Grouped by Thematic Category)

I. Heroic Awakening and Identity Reconstruction

Film Title	Narrative Theme	Act I	Act II	Act III	Remarks
Monkey King: Hero Is Back	Heroic awakening and return to duty	Sun Wukong is sealed; Jiang Liu'er appears	Jiang Liu'er is kidnapped by the demon; emotional trigger	Breaks the seal, defeats Chaos Demon, reclaims identity	Classic hero's journey with clear transformation
Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child	Defying fate and self-identity	Nezha's identity as a "demon pill" revealed; public hostility	Meets Ao Bing; misunderstanding and parental sacrifice drive growth	Defies fate; joins Ao Bing to resist the heavenly tribulation	Strong anti-fate theme; fast pacing and tension
New Gods: Nezha Reborn	Social oppression and personal rebellion	Li Yunxiang appears; Nezha's power reawakens	Faces Ao Guang's class-based oppression; accepts divine identity	Combines divine and human strength to resist monopoly	Urban context blended with action narrative

Legend of Deification	Crisis of faith and value reconstruction	Banished after the War of the Gods	Searches for Xiao Jiu's truth; questions divine logic	Rejects fate; reaffirms human-centered morality	Anti-hero narrative with philosophical tone
New Gods: Yang Jian	Divinity reconstruction and institutional critique	Yang Jian appears as a "working god"	Investigates Chen Tang Pass; suffers collapse of faith	Awakens divinity; confronts the heavenly system	Workplace metaphor + family and belief exploration

Source: Produced by the Author

II. Emotional Ethics and Philosophical Reflection

Film Title	Narrative Theme	Act I	Act II	Act III	Remarks
Big Fish & Begonia	Emotional sacrifice and life cycle	Chun forms a bond with a human boy	Revives him against nature's law, causing disaster	Sacrifices herself to save the tribe; completes reincarnation	Coexists dream logic and philosophical reflection
White Snake	Love and fate between human and demon	Xiao Bai and Xu Xuan fall in love	Pursued by the state; Xiao Bai loses her memory	Love rekindled; self-sacrifice; reincarnation unfinished	Dream-memory interwoven romance
Green Snake	Feminist awakening	Xiao Bai is captured; Xiao Qing falls into Asura illusion realm	Multiple trials; self-denial and inner struggle	Awakens and fights alone; rescues herself and her sister	Cyclical structure with psychological transformation

Source: Produced by the Author

III. Cultural Inheritance and Modern Negotiation

Film Title	Narrative Theme	Act I	Act II	Act III	Remarks
Little Door Gods	Decline of tradition and divine-human cooperation	Crisis of divine jobs triggers godly action	Nian Beast revives; gods descend to the mortal world	Humans and gods unite to restore faith	Dual narrative structure; culturally reflective plot
Goodbye Monster	Psychological healing and mythic reinterpretation	Bai Ze fails as a healer; experiences trauma	Enters dream space; battles inner demons	Emotional healing; reconstructs the philosophy of healing	Symbolic structure with psychological dimensions

Source: Produced by the Author

(2) Time

This study adopts the "six narrative elements" framework to systematically analyze ten award-winning Chinese mythological animated films released between 2015 and 2024. The analysis focuses on six key dimensions: story structure, temporal arrangement, spatial construction, character development, narrator design, and narrative style. In addition, the study incorporates multi-dimensional comparative approaches such as thematic orientation, character motivation, and temporal structure typology. By comparing the narrative strategies of different films, the study not only reveals the diverse explorations of narrative innovation in domestic animation but also helps to explain why these works effectively engage audiences on levels of narrative logic, emotional resonance, and cultural identity—offering valuable insights into narrative practices and audience reception mechanisms that can inform future Chinese animation production.

Table 3 Time Structure Types

Type	Film	Time Structure Features	Thematic Focus
Linear Time	*Monkey King: Hero Is Back*	Linear with limited flashbacks	Fall and awakening
	Little Door Gods	Alternation between mortal and divine realms	Tension between traditional beliefs and modern life

	Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child	Countdown-driven linear structure	Struggle against fate, burden of responsibility
	New Gods: Nezha Reborn	Juxtaposition of present and past-life memories	Struggle against fate, burden of responsibility
	New Gods: Yang Jian	Modern timeline with reincarnation flashbacks	Crisis of belief and spiritual rebirth
	Legend of Deification	Flashbacks to mythological background	Crisis of belief and spiritual rebirth
	Goodbye Monster	Embedded psychological time with some flashbacks	Healing through confronting inner fears
	Big Fish & Begonia	Framed narrative with embedded memories	Reincarnation and reciprocal gratitude
Nonlinear Structure	*White Snake*	Circular structure with reincarnation layers	Love across cycles of rebirth and ethnic boundaries
	Green Snake	Symbolic and psychological time structure	Struggles of obsession and spiritual growth

Source: Produced by the Author

(3) space

This study identifies five dominant spatial narrative patterns across ten representative Chinese mythological animated films from 2015 to 2022: Linear Journey Space, Emotional/Fantasy Space, Cultural Contrast Space, Layered/Collapsing Space, and Technological-Mutated Space. These spatial modes reflect a significant shift in animation from space as passive setting to an active narrative mechanism. Linear Journey Spaces support character growth through sequential environments, while Emotional/Fantasy Spaces externalize psychological conflicts via dreamscapes or symbolic realms. Cultural Contrast Spaces juxtapose divine and mortal worlds, emphasizing hybrid identities and value tensions. Layered/Collapsing Spaces employ nested environments that disintegrate as characters confront moral dilemmas.

Technological-Mutated Spaces, meanwhile, reframe mythology through cyberpunk and dystopian aesthetics. Across these types, spatial transformation frequently functions as a secondary narrative drive, reinforcing character development, emotional arcs, and thematic reflection.

Table 4 Type of Spatial Narrative

Type	Description	Representative Films
Linear Journey Space	The protagonist grows through a sequential spatial path; space transitions align with narrative progression.	*Monkey King: Hero is Back, Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child, Legend of Deification (partial)*
Emotional/Fantasy Space (Dreamscape/Maze)	Symbolic or emotional spaces reflect the protagonist's internal struggles and transformations.	*Green Snake, White Snake, Goodbye Monster, New Gods: Yang Jian*
Cultural Contrast Space (Dual/Parallel Structure)	Juxtaposition of human and divine realms or traditional and modern environments to highlight cultural hybridity.	*Little Door Gods, New Gods: Nezha Reborn*
Layered/Collapsing Space (Nested Structure)	Multi-layered spatial systems that eventually collapse, prompting the protagonist's critical decision-making.	*Big Fish & Begonia, Legend of Deification, Green Snake*
Technological-Mutated Space (Futuristic/Cyberpunk)	Mechanized, apocalyptic, or cyber-enhanced spaces representing futuristic mythological imaginaries.	*New Gods: Nezha Reborn, Goodbye Monster*

Source: Produced by the Author

(4) Character Development

This study conducted a classification analysis of the second narrative drives in ten representative Chinese mythological animated films released between 2015 and 2022. The term "second narrative drive" refers to the primary driving force of the plot after the film enters the second act—namely, the core motivation that propels conflict

escalation, character development, and thematic deepening. The results show clear differences in how each film progresses from the beginning of the second act, based on the source of narrative momentum. The films were grouped into three types: External Drive, Internal Drive, and Dual Drive.

Films such as Monkey King: Hero Is Back, Little Door Gods, and New Gods: Nezha Reborn rely primarily on external forces—including antagonists, social conflict, or institutional systems—as their key drivers, forming narratives based on combat, mission, or adventure. In contrast, works like Big Fish & Begonia, Jiang Ziya, Green Snake, and Goodbye Monster are internally driven, where emotional struggle, loss of faith, or psychological reflection become the core mechanisms that push the narrative forward. Meanwhile, Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child, White Snake, and New Gods: Yang Jian display dual-drive structures, in which external crises catalyze internal awakenings, enabling multilayered explorations of fate, identity, and systemic tension.

This classification not only clarifies the narrative differences in plot dynamics and act structures across the sample films but also lays the groundwork for deeper analyses of character growth trajectories, thematic transitions, and genre hybridity in contemporary Chinese mythological animation.

Table 5 Analysis of Character Development Based on the 'Second Driving Force of the Plot'

Drive Type	Representative Films	Core Thematic Orientation
External Drive	Monkey King: Hero is Back, Little Door Gods, New Gods: Nezha Reborn	Traditional adventure, heroic combat, mission-based arcs
Internal Drive	Big Fish & Begonia, Legend of Deification, Green Snake, Goodbye Monster	Psychological growth, self-discovery, value reconstruction
Dual Drive	Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child, White Snake, New Gods: Yang Jian	Identity crisis + systemic oppression; complex, layered themes

Source: Produced by the Author

(5) Narrator

This study identifies five distinct types of narrative agents in ten Chinese mythological animated films released between 2015 and 2024, revealing a shift from traditional omniscient narration to more diverse and psychologically engaging narrative strategies. The five types include: (1) Externally Driven Growth Narrators, which align limited third-person perspective with the protagonist's development (e.g., Monkey King: Hero is Back, Jiang Ziya); (2) Emotionally Subjective Internal Narrators, characterized by dreamlike and symbolic inner narration (Big Fish & Begonia, White Snake 2); (3) Composite Narrators, using multiple focal points to reflect sociocultural tensions (Little Door Gods, Goodbye Monster); (4) Implicit Narrators, where perspective is shaped visually without an overt narrator (White Snake, New Gods: Yang Jian); and (5) Satirical or Anti-Traditional Narrators, which use critical narration to reinterpret mythic structures (Ne zha: Birth of the Demon Child). These narrative trends reflect the increasing complexity and emotional depth of contemporary Chinese animated storytelling. Typology of Narrative Agents in Chinese Mythological Animated Films

Table 6 Narrator analysis

Type	Features	Representative Films
Externally Driven Growth Narrator	Focalized perspective aligned with protagonist's growth; goal-oriented and logically coherent	*Monkey King: Hero is Back, New Gods: Nezha Reborn, Legend of Deification*
Emotionally Subjective Internal Narrator	Narration blends personal memory and dream-like states; softened emotional rhythm	*Big Fish & Begonia, Green Snake*
Dual-Line/Multi-perspective Composite Narrator	Multi-character narration emphasizing social/traditional themes	*Little Door Gods, Goodbye Monster*
Implicitly Controlled Narrator	No explicit narrator; perspective controlled via visual focus	*White Snake, New Gods: Yang Jian*

| Satirical/Anti-traditional Narrator | All-knowing or audience-aligned narrator delivering critical perspective | *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* |

(6) Narrative System

Based on the classification of ten representative Chinese mythological animated films released between 2015 and 2024, this study finds that most works exhibit a fusion of Classical Hollywood narration with other stylistic modes such as local folklore, art-cinema narration, modernist, and postmodernist elements. This stylistic hybridity not only reflects the industrial evolution of Chinese animation but also highlights its aesthetic diversification and cultural localization.

Firstly, films such as Monkey King: Hero is Back (2015), Little Door Gods (2015), and Ne Zha (2019) embody a fusion of Classical Hollywood narrative structure with Chinese folk and mythological themes. These films adopt clear three-act structures, goal-driven protagonists, and coherent cause-effect logic while embedding familiar cultural symbols and traditions, enhancing emotional resonance and audience accessibility.

Secondly, works such as Big Fish & Begonia (2016), White Snake (2019), and Jiang Ziya (2020) combine Classical narrative logic with art-cinema features. These include introspective character motivations, poetic visuals, and emotionally open-ended storytelling, thereby moving toward a more personal and philosophical mode of narration.

Thirdly, Journey to the West: Goodbye Monster (2022) exemplifies a fusion of Classical narrative foundation with modernist aesthetics, using fragmented timelines, symbolic dreamscapes, and nonlinear emotional arcs to explore trauma and healing.

Lastly, recent films like New Gods: Nezha Reborn (2021), White Snake II: The Tribulation of the Green Snake (2021), and New Gods: Yang Jian (2022) reflect postmodernist strategies within the Hollywood narrative framework. These include genre

blending, identity deconstruction, and visual experimentation, signaling a shift toward playful and reflexive narrative forms.

Overall, the study reveals that Chinese mythological animated films are no longer confined to singular narrative models. Instead, they demonstrate a growing trend toward hybridization—both structurally and aesthetically—reflecting an ongoing negotiation between industrial norms, cultural specificity, and artistic exploration.

Table 7 Narrative System Analysis

Narrative System	Representative Films	Explanation
Classical Hollywood + Local Folklore	*Monkey King: Hero is Back (2015), Little Door Gods (2015), Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child (2019)*	Uses three-act structure and goal-driven protagonists while incorporating Chinese mythology and folk customs to strengthen cultural identity and audience familiarity.
Classical Hollywood + Art-cinema	*Big Fish & Begonia (2016), White Snake (2019),* *Legend of Deification (2020)*	Combines structured narrative with poetic visuals, internal character conflicts, and emotional ambiguity, reflecting personal and philosophical introspection.
Classical Hollywood + Modernist	*Goodbye Monster (2022)*	While retaining goal-oriented structure, it introduces fragmented space-time, psychological symbols, and dream sequences to express trauma and healing.
Classical Hollywood + Postmodernist	*New Gods: Nezha Reborn (2021), Green Snake (2021),* *New Gods: Yang Jian (2022)*	Merges linear action with stylistic experimentation, genre blending, identity reconstruction, and meta-narratives, emphasizing individuality and visual spectacle.

Source: Produced by the Author

Between 2015 and 2022, Chinese mythological animated films achieved a dual breakthrough in both systematic development and creative innovation—particularly in story logic, character growth, spatial-temporal construction, and stylistic integration. Through the lens of six narrative elements, this study reveals how domestic animation has explored contemporary modes of mythological expression and cultural communication

strategies amid the intersecting forces of globalization and the revival of local cultural identity.

(7) Evolution of Narrative Strategies Across Three Periods (2015–2024)

Between 2015 and 2024, the narrative model of Chinese mythological animated films underwent a distinct evolutionary process that can be roughly divided into three phases: the exploratory phase (2015–2016), the narrative maturation phase (2019–2020), and the stylistic hybridization phase (2021–2024). During the exploratory phase, represented by films such as Monkey King: Hero Is Back (2015), Little Door Gods (2015), and Big Fish & Begonia (2016), Chinese animation widely adopted the classical Hollywood three-act structure and experimented with transforming traditional mythology into modern storytelling. These narratives often centered on themes such as "heroic awakening" or "cultural crisis," featuring linear journey-based spatial structures and contrasting divine-human relationships. The aesthetic presentation remained exploratory, and technical expression was still in its early stages, with a narrative system characterized by a blend of classical frameworks and folkloric elements.

The period between 2019 and 2020 marked a golden age of narrative development, led by works such as Ne Zha (2019), White Snake (2019), and Jiang Ziya (2020). These films commonly adopted a dual narrative path that combined heroic growth with internal psychological struggle, highlighting personal dilemmas and moral complexity. Temporal structures became increasingly nonlinear, employing flashbacks and cyclic storytelling, while spatial construction expanded into multilayered, nested realms. Characters became more nuanced and multidimensional. At the system level, the Hollywood narrative structure was effectively fused with art-cinema techniques, and cultural expression balanced national values with youth-oriented individual consciousness, resulting in strong audience resonance and cultural relevance.

From 2021 onward, Chinese mythological animation entered a phase of stylistic diversification. Films such as New Gods: Nezha Reborn (2021), White Snake 2: The Tribulation of the Green Snake (2021), New Gods: Yang Jian (2022), and I Am What I Am (2022) displayed clear tendencies toward postmodernism and psychological

realism. Nonlinear timelines, dreamlike structures, and symbolic or cyberized spaces became common, shifting the narrative focus from external plot advancement to internal experience and emotional visualization. Anti-hero and multi-protagonist structures emerged, and narratives became more fragmented and open-ended. These films responded to the values of Generation Z—emphasizing identity pluralism, personal autonomy, and cultural reinterpretation——and succeeded in reconstructing mythology as a vehicle for critical reflection and contemporary expression. This stage demonstrates a growing narrative autonomy and capacity for cultural transformation in Chinese animation.

This temporal comparison reveals that narrative techniques in Chinese mythological animation have shifted from structural clarity and cultural reaffirmation to psychological realism and interpretive openness, ultimately culminating in complex hybrid narratives that fuse tradition with futurist aesthetics and global storytelling paradigms.

4.2.2 Shifts in Value Representation in Chinese Mythological Animation (2015–2024)

Based on a systematic analysis of ten Chinese mythological animated films from 2015 to 2024, it can be clearly observed that the expression of socialist core values in domestic animations exhibits obvious phased evolutionary characteristics. According to the release time of the films, the rhythm of industrial development, the transformation of narrative modes, and the differences in the depth and breadth of value themes, this paper divides the sample films into three time stages: the "value exploration period" from 2015 to 2016, the "value transformation period" from 2019 to 2020, and the "value deepening and integration period" from 2021 to 2024. This stage division not only reflects the upgrading path of the industrialization process of domestic animations but also reveals the dynamic communication mechanism of the mainstream value system in cultural products. The following is a summary by time stage:

2015—2018: Value Exploration Period

Among the selected 10 sample films, there are 3 works from 2015 to 2016, namely *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* (2015), *Little Door Gods* (2015), and *Big Fish & Begonia* (2016). Their value expressions mainly exhibit the following characteristics:

Monkey King: Hero Is Back centrally showcases core elements of the Socialist Core Values, including "Civilization" (at the national level), "Justice" (at the social level), "Patriotism," and "Friendship" (at the individual level).

At the national level, "civilization" is reflected in the film's deep excavation and contemporary expression of the classical literature *Journey to the West*. The film gives new images consistent with modern aesthetics to characters such as Sun Wukong and Jiang Liuer, while preserving their spiritual core, achieving the creative transformation and dynamic inheritance of traditional culture. Through the motif of "the hero's return," the film tells the growth process of Sun Wukong from silence and self-neglect to rediscovering faith, responding to the spiritual pursuit of contemporary youth for identity and value realization, and strengthening the concept of "inheritance and innovation" of Chinese culture. The benevolence and courage embodied in Jiang Liuer, as well as Sun Wukong's chivalrous responsibility, jointly construct a civilized picture with the connotation of "integrity and kindness, self-improvement." At the same time, the setting of Jiang Liuer as "an ordinary person can also become a hero" conveys the traditional value spirit of "heroes serving the people."

At the social level, the concept of "justice" is manifested through the opposition between good and evil in the film. The Chaos Demon king enslaves the people through violence and plunders children, creating a tyrannical order governed by the law of the jungle. Eventually, he is defeated by the joint efforts of Sun Wukong and Jiang Liuer, demonstrating the universal value that "justice will ultimately prevail over evil."

At the individual level, the emotion of "patriotism" is reflected in the sacrifices made by the protagonists to protect their homeland and children. Jiang Liuer and Sun Wukong's willingness to take risks to rescue the kidnapped children embodies the patriotic sentiment of "heroes serving the people".

The value of "Friendship" permeates character relationships and plot development. As an ordinary mortal, Jiang Liuer fearlessly braves dangers in multiple adventures, takes the initiative to rescue others, and even defends Sun Wukong with his frail body in critical moments, demonstrating respect for life and the spirit of altruism.

Through his interactions with Jiang Liuer, Sun Wukong is gradually inspired and ultimately steps forward to protect the vulnerable, completing a psychological transformation from "egoism" to "altruism." This showcases the profound ethics of friendship and chivalrous spirit.

The Little Door Gods presents the value dimensions of socialism's core values, including "civilization" (at the national level), "justice" (at the social level), as well as "dedication," "integrity," and "friendship" (at the individual level).

At the national level, "civilization" is reflected in the modern reinterpretation of the images of the door gods Shenshu and Yulv. The film places traditional mythological figures since the Han Dynasty in a contemporary context. Through settings such as the "employment crisis in the divine realm," it integrates the cultural symbols of ancient gods with the workplace pressures of modern society, preserving historical heritage while prompting audiences to reflect on the practical functions and contemporary values of traditional culture. Additionally, the film deeply incorporates traditional Chinese folk customs such as using fireworks to drive away the "Nian" beast, releasing Kongming lanterns to convey yearning, and puppet shows, strengthening the emotional connection between audiences and folk culture as the foundation of national identity.

At the social level, "justice" is reflected in the positive construction of market order and moral ethics. Boss Hu, the owner of a fast-food restaurant, suppresses Xiaoying's wonton shop through means such as malicious reporting and stealing recipes, symbolizing real-world commercial monopolies and unfair competition that severely undermine social fairness. In the end, Xiaoying regains market recognition through her craftsmanship and integrity, while Boss Hu suffers losses due to his moral failings. This conveys the value logic of "good deeds lead to good outcomes, and evil deeds bring bad consequences," emphasizing the positive feedback of consequential justice on individual striving.

At the individual level, the spirit of "dedication" is highlighted through the characters' actions. As door gods, Shenshu and Yulv insist on their mission to guard the human world even in the face of a "layoff crisis," reflecting their commitment and belief in

professional responsibilities. Xiaoying, as a craftsperson, inherits the century-old soup-making technique and adheres to the use of genuine ingredients and hygiene standards, demonstrating the contemporary value of the craftsmanship spirit. In contrast, although Boss Hu appears diligent on the surface, he actually seeks profits through unethical means. His "pseudo-dedication" contrasts sharply with the preciousness of true professional spirit.

The value of "integrity" is embodied in the business philosophy of the wonton shop. Xiaoying adheres to quality as the foundation and keeps her promise of "using genuine ingredients," thereby winning the reputation of customers. In contrast, Boss Hu's actions of falsifying hygiene standards and stealing others' recipes serve as a negative example, reinforcing the business ethics of "taking integrity as the foundation" and highlighting the core role of integrity in market relationships.

The value of "friendliness" is mainly reflected in family warmth and interactions between humans and gods. Xiaoying and her daughter Yuer support each other and jointly face business difficulties, demonstrating mutual understanding within family bonds and intergenerational collaboration. Yuer conveys her longing for her grandmother by releasing a Kongming lantern, evoking tender empathy in the audience for cross-generational emotions. The divine characters also exemplify kindness: Yulv evolves from selfishness to self-sacrifice, sealing the "Nian" beast to protect the human world and completing the awakening of inner goodness; Shenshu takes the initiative to assist the mother and daughter in times of hardship, fostering friendly relationships between humans and gods.

In addition, the film goes beyond the basic framework of socialist core values and presents a profound reflection on the "survival logic" of traditional culture. Rather than advocating for "protecting tradition," the film reveals the paradoxical situation of traditional value systems in modern society: Shenshu, who adheres strictly to rules, is marginalized, while Yulv, who violates rules, instead reshapes traditional status. This structure of "subversive redemption" prompts audiences to recognize that the continuity of culture does not lie in static preservation, but in dynamic renewal, deconstruction, and

reconstruction. In doing so, it transcends the binary opposition of "protection or abandonment" and achieves genuine traditional regeneration.

Big Fish & Begonia embodies the values of "civilization" and "harmony" (at the national level) and "friendship" (at the individual level) in the socialist core values.

At the national level, the values of "civilization" and "harmony" are reflected in the film's respect for and awe of natural laws and ecological order. The core concept of "all things follow their own laws" runs through the entire film, conveying the idea of ecological civilization by criticizing human arrogance toward nature (such as excessive fishing). The film constructs a cosmology of "fish-human reincarnation," introducing the premise that "all human souls are big fish," which integrates humans into the natural cycle of the community of life, dismantling "anthropocentrism" and demonstrating the ecological consciousness of equality and harmonious coexistence among all things. This value not only inherits the traditional Taoist philosophy of "unity of man and nature" but also aligns with the contemporary Chinese concept of "green development." Through the growth of the protagonist Chun, the film reveals that true civilization is not a mechanical adherence to rules but a proactive responsibility and care for life based on an understanding of natural laws, embodying a deep - seated spirit of civilization.

At the individual level, the value of "friendship" runs through character relationships and plot structures, centrally embodying the traditional ethical spirit of "repaying kindness with kindness" and "sacrifice for fulfillment." To repay Kun for saving her life, Chun spares no effort to exchange half of her lifespan for his soul and insists on raising Kun despite doubts from her clanspeople, reflecting the profound emotion of "returning a drop of favor with a burst of spring." In order to fulfill Chun's wish, Qiu is willing to trade his life for hers, transforming into wind and rain at the boundary between the sea and sky to send Chun and Kun back to the human world, thus interpreting the dedication spirit of "sacrificing oneself for others" through practical actions. When the flood disaster strikes, the clanspeople jointly defend their homeland, demonstrating mutual aid and unity in collective crises, which mirrors the group concept of friendliness that "true friendship emerges in adversity."

The part exceeding the socialist core values is reflected in the film's deep exploration of the conflict between individual will and collective ethics. In order to fulfill her personal emotions and moral responsibilities, Chun violates the clan's ban to revive Kun, triggering the collapse of the natural order and group crises. Although this choice stems from the traditional motive of "repaying kindness," it also constitutes a challenge to natural laws and collective regulations, touching on the ethical boundary between "individual interests and collective interests." This paradox not only reflects the moral tension of individual choices but also inspires the audience to deeply think about "responsibility ethics" and "institutional rationality." In the end, through such plots as Chun transforming into a begonia tree to protect her clanspeople and Qiu sacrificing himself to fulfill others, the film achieves a reconciliation between the individual and the collective, as well as between emotions and order, completing a poetic and profound value redemption.

Conclusion

Chinese mythological animated films from 2015 to 2018 exhibit distinct stage characteristics in value expression, generally presenting an expressive orientation that integrates the inheritance of traditional culture with modern social issues. They emphasize multi-layered value dimensions centered on "civilization" and "friendship," and gradually explore the tension between individual ethics and collective norms. Representative films of this period include *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*, *The Little Door Gods*, and *Big Fish & Begonia*. Their narrative themes and characterizations generally revolve around issues such as cultural rejuvenation, the opposition between good and evil, individual growth, and emotional ethics, responding to the different value demands of socialist core values at the national, social, and individual levels.

At the national level, these three films all strive to highlight the modern transformation of the value of "civilization". *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* reconstructs a story of "hero's return" that meets the spiritual needs of contemporary youth by reinterpreting the classic text of *Journey to the West*. *The Little Door Gods* uses the plot setting of mythological characters coping with the "divine layoff crisis" to imply the modern adaptation of traditional culture. *Big Fish & Begonia* integrates the Taoist philosophy of

"unity of man and nature", reflecting on the relationship between humans and nature through ecological ethics, and demonstrating an artistic response to the contemporary concept of "ecological civilization".

At the social level, the films mostly focus on the theme of "justice". Especially in *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* and *The Little Door Gods*, the exposure of evil forces and unfair competition reinforces the concepts of "justice will prevail" and "goodness is rewarded", mirroring the call for a fair social order in reality.

At the individual level, the three films collectively emphasize the value of "friendliness", while *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* also demonstrates "patriotism", and *The Little Door Gods* simultaneously showcases "dedication" and "integrity". In *Monkey King: Hero Is Back*, Jiang Liuer's benevolence and courage embody the spirit of heroes serving the people. In *The Little Door Gods*, Xiaoying's perseverance in craftsmanship and honest management, as well as Chun's gratitude and Qiu's selfless dedication in *Big Fish & Begonia*, all reflect the perceptibility and emotional value of traditional virtues in modern contexts.

It is worth noting that some films from this period also broke through the established framework of socialist core values, raising more complex cultural and ethical issues. *The Little Door Gods* does not present traditional culture as absolutely positive but reveals the contradictions and structural crises in the process of cultural inheritance, showcasing the paradoxical path of cultural rejuvenation through the contrast in the fates of Shenshu and Yulv. *Big Fish & Begonia*, on the other hand, explores the conflict between individual emotional choices and collective ethical order, depicting the moral struggles of characters between repaying kindness and fulfilling responsibilities. Although their actions stem from noble motivations, they trigger disasters by violating "clan rules," prompting audiences to deeply reflect on the relationship between "institutional rationality" and "individual legitimacy." This expression of value tension marks that Chinese mythological animated films in the new era are no longer satisfied with single mainstream expressions but are moving toward more complex and critical cultural expressions.

4.2.3 Aesthetic Preferences and Audience Reception

Through the statistics and induction of 204 valid questionnaires, the audience generally holds a positive attitude towards the aesthetic expression of Chinese mythological animated films from 2015 to 2024, especially showing stable aesthetic preferences in aspects such as character modeling, scene design, color and lighting, lens language and editing rhythm, visual symbols, and special effects performance. The summary is as follows:

In terms of character modeling, audiences generally prefer designs that blend the characteristics of traditional mythological characters with modern aesthetic styles. For example, the image of the White Snake in *White Snake* combines the aesthetic form of Tang and Song dynasty court ladies with contemporary "pure and delicate" aesthetic features. The use of a plain white color scheme, jade hairpins, and dynamic floating ribbons embodies her pure soul and the tension of her identity. Details such as vertical pupils and freckles enhance the character's sense of realism and subjectivity, achieving a visual balance between "demon nature" and "divine aura," while also symbolizing the transformation of Eastern women from traditional symbols to self-aware subjects.

In *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*, Ne Zha's "ugly-cute" image—with dark circles under the eyes and messy red hair—completely subverts the paradigm of celestial children, emphasizing his marginalized status and rebellious temperament as a visual projection of social prejudice. Cultural symbols in his costume design, such as red clothing and the Qiankun Circle, construct a visual system of Taoist concepts of life and the philosophy of the Five Elements. The character's appearance also evolves with his growth, showcasing an arc from rebellion to responsibility, which precisely resonates with Generation Z's emotions about individual awakening and identity dilemmas.

The main character images in all 10 films have gained widespread audience recognition, indicating that current domestic animations are developing toward "de-stereotyping," "emphasizing emotional depth," and "strengthening cultural resonance" in character design. Through vividly individualized and semantically rich modeling

expressions, they meet contemporary audiences' aesthetic expectations for character realism and modernity.

In terms of scene design, audiences prefer spatial constructions that are both visually striking and culturally connotative, particularly favoring expressions that integrate "Oriental aesthetics" with "futuristic technology" or "modern techniques." For example, in *New Gods: Yang Jian*, the Penglai Immortal Island organically combines wooden dougong (corbel bracket) architecture with mechanical transmission structures—close-up shots reveal the precise dynamics of interlocking gears. Pavilions and towers are juxtaposed with floating mechanical airships, forming a vertically stacked aerial building system, while holographic fairyland billboards collectively create a sense of spatial folding in a "cyberpunk fairyland metropolis." This design breaks free from the freehand style of traditional mythological fairy realms, using the contrast between wooden structural elements and metallic machinery to achieve an industrial reconstruction of fairyland visual symbols.

Another example is Yongzhou City in *White Snake*, which draws inspiration from Tang Dynasty architectural styles, using dougong brackets, upturned eaves, and vermilion-lacquered wooden structures to construct the ancient charm of a late Tang urban landscape. The Snake Catcher Village, meanwhile, is set within karst mountains, integrating the stilt house form of Miao villages with the artistic conception of mountain-water landscapes to showcase the unique texture of regional culture. The film's water surface visuals combine particle systems with traditional Chinese painting ink wash algorithms, successfully recreating the Oriental poetic imagery of "vast misty waves."

Overall, such scene designs are rooted in "Oriental aesthetics," layered with modern visual effects technology, and fused with fantasy, cyberpunk, and steampunk styles. They not only expand the aesthetic space of domestic animation but also endow mythological scenes with a contemporary temperament and technological imagination, becoming an important visual expression direction for modern Chinese animation.

In terms of color and lighting design, audiences generally prefer expressions that integrate traditional Chinese color systems with modern emotional expression

strategies, particularly appreciating the use of cold-warm contrasts, unified primary color tones, and light-shadow progression to distinguish spatial hierarchies such as the divine realm, human realm, and demon realm, while conveying the emotional tension of characters. For example, *Big Fish & Begonia* uses crimson and indigo as its main colors: crimson symbolizes the authority of the divine clan and the intensity of emotions, while indigo sets off the tranquility and sense of destiny in the human realm. In climactic scenes, explosive reddish-gold tones combined with light beam projections create an epic atmosphere and tragic emotions.

White Snake overall employs low-saturation tones such as cyan, white, and gray: the snake clan's space leans toward cool colors, creating a gloomy and mysterious demon realm temperament; in character interaction scenes, soft warm light is used for color temperature transitions to strengthen the tender evolution of character relationships, while natural light effects like mist, moonlight, and firelight convey the virtual-real artistic conception in Eastern aesthetics. *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child* uses highly saturated red and blue as its main tones to reinforce character opposition: Ne Zha's crimson embodies rebellion and anger, while Ao Bing's blue carries fate and restraint. When the two confront each other, the intense collision of color blocks implicitly echoes the themes of the Five Elements opposition and fate struggle. As the plot progresses, Ne Zha's color tone gradually shifts from blazing red to warm gold, metaphorizing his growth from resisting fate to taking active responsibility.

Such designs transform traditional Chinese cultural colors into emotional symbols recognizable to modern audiences through a visual structure of "color narrative + light-shadow guidance," enhancing the film's atmosphere and emotional resonance. This makes color not only serve aesthetics but also become an indispensable channel for value expression in mythological narratives.

In terms of editing rhythm, audiences generally recognize animated works with flexible rhythm control and rich lens language, particularly favoring a lens style that achieves progressive emotional layers through contrast between movement and stillness, as well as subjective expression and spatial expressiveness.

On one hand, films such as *Green Snake* and *New Gods: Nezha Reborn* widely use rapid editing, shaking/moving shots, and rotating perspectives to create highly impactful audio-visual rhythms in high-intensity scenes like fights and chases, shaping a dynamic and tense modern mythological world. In the "Asura City" escape-and-kill sequence of *Green Snake*, the camera closely follows the characters' movement paths, paired with short flashbacks and close-up cuts to intensify subjective fear and spatial oppression, allowing audiences to gain an immersive sense of substitution through high-frequency editing. In *New Gods: Nezha Reborn*, multiple motorcycle chase sequences advance through long shots combined with jump cuts, not only showcasing the layered depth of urban spaces but also highlighting the matching between character consciousness flow and rhythm changes.

On the other hand, works like *Big Fish & Begonia* and *Legend of Deification* extensively use slow motion and blank space strategies in key scenes to weaken narrative pacing and strengthen emotional incubation and philosophical contemplation. In the sea ritual bridge scene of *Big Fish & Begonia*, the alternation of slow underwater shots and water surface reflections integrates character emotions with natural imagery, creating a rhythmic aesthetic of poetic narration. In the "Falling into Illusion" sequence of *Legend of Deification*, time suspension and shot deceleration guide audiences into the characters' inner conflicts, creating strong spiritual tension.

Overall, these works with rich rhythm and differentiated editing strategies strike a good balance between narrative function and aesthetic experience, satisfying contemporary audiences' dual demands for "audio-visual stimulation" and "emotional immersion." They also reflect the technical maturity and aesthetic exploration of domestic animation in editing art.

In terms of visual symbols, audiences highly recognize symbolic elements containing the connotations of Chinese culture, and particularly prefer visual systems constructed with "traditional symbols + allegorical structures." Such designs not only have strong cultural recognition but also effectively enhance the symbolic layer of the narrative and the audience's cultural resonance. For example, the Qiankun Circle, Huntian Silk, and

Wind-Fire Wheels in *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child* symbolize fate's imprisonment, blood ties, and freedom of action, respectively. Their multiple transformations in the plot reflect the Taoist philosophy of "all things coexisting," as the Qiankun Circle evolves from a fetter suppressing demonic nature into a medium of emotional identification, strengthening the character's growth trajectory and identity.

The image of the Heavenly Ladder in *Legend of Deification* runs through the entire film, symbolizing the reconstruction of the boundary between humans and gods and the order of faith. Its collapse is not only a questioning of divine authority but also a spiritual channel for the protagonist to rebuild his beliefs and responsibilities, full of allegorical color. In *Big Fish & Begonia*, the "begonia tree" serves as a symbolic symbol running through life and reincarnation, not only carrying Chinese family and country feelings but also implying the cosmic philosophy of "endless life." Details such as tree roots, branches, leaves, and petals are repeatedly visually reproduced in the fates of different characters, forming a highly layered image system.

Overall, such visual symbols reconstruct the connotations of traditional culture by combining "mythological elements + modern iconography," making abstract concepts concrete and emotional propositions visual. While enhancing the cultural tension of the film, they also improve the audience's acceptance and sense of identity, becoming an indispensable core of visual language in domestic mythological animations.

In terms of action scenes and special effects performance, audiences generally highly recognize the technical maturity and visual effects expressiveness of domestic animations in recent years. Especially in mythological themes, action design is no longer limited to traditional combat scenes. Instead, through the collaborative use of CG special effects, particle animation, and camera scheduling, it constructs narrative tension and visual spectacles that blend divinity and humanity.

Taking *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child* as an example, the aerial duel between Ne Zha and Ao Bing amid the blending of ice and fire is hailed by audiences as an "epic-level battle in Chinese animation." The film uses high-density visual elements such as red-blue color collisions, particle explosions, and environmental fragmentation to

showcase the clash of water and fire elements and the externalization of the characters' inner conflicts. In the "Shura City" escape-and-kill sequence of *Green Snake*, three-dimensional space scheduling combined with smoke effects and mirror refractions constructs a layered space of "illusion—reality," where the action rhythm is highly synchronized with the special effects rhythm, completing the progression of psychological rhythm through rapid camera cuts. *New Gods: Nezha Reborn* reshapes the battle scenes between Nezha and the Dragon King in a mechanical punk style. Through precise control of electro-optical particles, energy explosions, and dynamic light effects, it strengthens the tension of integrating mechanical aesthetics with mythological imagery.

Additionally, audiences generally note that these films exhibit obvious "rhythmic layers" and "emotional driving force" in action scenes: from static gazes to explosive conflicts, from close-up shots to distant views, camera movements coordinate with musical rhythms to enhance emotional tension and the appeal of climactic moments. Overall, such action scenes are not only highlights of visual effects displays but also serve as important nodes for narrative and emotional progression. They fully demonstrate the significant advancements of domestic animations in action design aesthetics and special effects synthesis technology, while also bringing audiences sensory experiences that combine aesthetic value and cultural impact.

In conclusion, through the statistics and analysis of 204 valid questionnaires, it can be found that Chinese mythological animated films from 2015 to 2024 have achieved remarkable breakthroughs in the aesthetic dimension and won wide recognition from the audience.

In terms of character modeling, the audience prefers the construction of images that integrate traditional mythological genes with modern aesthetic styles, emphasizing a sense of realism, individuality, and cultural tension. In scene design, there is a tendency towards the spatial integration path of "Oriental aesthetics + modern technology," maintaining cultural roots in industrialized expressions. The application of colors and lighting stimulates emotional resonance through cold-warm contrasts and the semantics of traditional colors, while constructing multiple temporal and spatial images.

Editing rhythms and camera language demonstrate a trend of emphasizing both "audio-visual impact" and "emotional immersion," achieving synergy between aesthetics and narrative. Regarding visual symbols, the audience highly approves of the reconstruction of traditional elements rich in cultural connotations and philosophical symbolism, enhancing cultural identity and aesthetic resonance. The technological leap in action scenes and special effects not only brings a stunning experience but also serves as a medium for spiritual expression and character growth.

Overall, domestic mythological animations are gradually constructing an aesthetic expression system with unique Chinese characteristics. They have achieved the modern translation of traditional culture and the local innovation of visual language within the global animation context, forming an aesthetic paradigm with distinct contemporary features and national styles.

4.2.4 Strategic Suggestions for the Future Development of Chinese Mythological Animation

This section integrates narrative analysis, interview feedback, and data from 204 valid questionnaires to summarize audiences' expectations and suggestions for the future of Chinese mythological animation in three aspects: narrative techniques, value expression, and aesthetic design. Overall, audiences not only focus on story logic and emotional resonance but also put forward multi-dimensional demands for the natural presentation of cultural values and innovations in visual expression.

1. Suggestions for Narrative Aspects

Audiences generally believe that some current works suffer from issues such as loose story logic and thin character growth arcs. In the future, efforts should be made to enhance narrative coherence and the shaping of character motivations. For instance, in the film *Legend of Deification*, grand concepts like the "Heavenly Ladder," "Guixu," and "Fate Lock" are introduced, yet there is a lack of detailed explanations and proper foreshadowing. Audiences find it difficult to understand why the "Heavenly Ladder" connects the will of the heavens and ordinary people, or why Jiang Ziya must break the "Fate Lock" to save "Xiao Jiu." Although these important settings are symbolic, insufficient

elaboration through plot development leads to jumps in narrative logic and weakens the audience's emotional investment.

In *Big Fish & Begonia*, there are breaks in the world - view logic, character motivations, and plot cohesion. The vagueness and contradictions in the film's rule system, such as the Soul keeper's trading rule (exchanging half of one's lifespan for a soul) without previously informing the consequences of breaking the contract (triggering natural disasters), undermine the solemnity of the life - death system. The sudden appearance of the Ratty Granny's escape condition (requiring a token from the human world) without prior foreshadowing makes it merely a mechanical plot device. Chun is willing to sacrifice her entire clan to save Kun, but her affection for Kun is only based on the "debt of gratitude" and lacks in - depth interaction and foreshadowing.

Moreover, in films like *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* and *Green Snake*, the growth of the protagonists is mostly propelled by external events, lacking internal psychological drivers, which weakens emotional resonance.

Data shows that 74.0% of respondents hope to enhance the coherence of stories and emotional logic, 68.1% emphasize the importance of character growth motivations, and 65.2% look forward to innovative settings based on respecting the spirit of traditional mythology (Q183).

In terms of narrative style, audiences have dual expectations for the classic hero's journey model (31.9%) and multi-thread, multi-perspective structures (24.0%). Additionally, 21.1% support anti-hero narratives that emphasize characters' psychological conflicts and emotional struggles (Q184). For example, in *New Gods: Yang Jian*, the abrupt switching of main storylines and unbalanced multi-threaded narrative weaken the protagonist's growth arc—his transition from a "bounty hunter" to aiding Chen Xiang in splitting the mountain lacks psychological development, driven only by blood relations. The film's suspenseful threads collapse: subplots like Shen Gongbao's death and Wanluo's assassination build suspense in the early stages but rush to reveal the truth (Yu Ding Zhenren's manipulation) through dialogue in the middle, then abandon unresolved mysteries in the later stages, resulting in ineffective storytelling.

In summary, future narratives should strengthen the clarity of the main storyline and the internal driving forces of characters, achieve a balance between structural complexity and emotional expression, and promote the integration of traditional mythological spirit and modern narrative techniques.

2. Suggestions for Value Expression

In terms of values, audiences generally expect Chinese mythological animations to be more attuned to the psychological realities and social emotions of contemporary viewers while promoting fine traditional Chinese culture. They not only pay attention to the continuation of traditional values such as "loyalty, filial piety, integrity, and righteousness" and "the unity of heaven and man," but also hope that works can address real-world issues faced by today's youth, such as self-identity, fate choices, and generational conflicts, thereby achieving the dual effects of value resonance and emotional identification.

Survey data shows that 70.1% of respondents support depicting the process of individual struggle and spiritual transformation through complete character growth arcs, rather than merely presenting the outcomes of "success" or "victory." For example, in *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*, Ne Zha's rebellion against the label of "destiny" reflects the spirit of individual resistance, but the early stages rely heavily on verbal guidance from parents and teachers, lacking internal foreshadowing of Ne Zha's own proactive awakening. This makes his value transformation appear slightly driven by external forces.

In future works, greater attention should be paid to the "behavioral" and "internalized" expression of values—that is, showcasing the formation of beliefs and the growth of individual consciousness through characters' proactive choices in moments of conflict. Such expressions not only echo the "individual-level" spiritual pursuits of "self-improvement, integrity, and kindness" in socialist core values but also align with contemporary youth's focus on "personality construction" and "spiritual independence."

At the same time, 66.2% of the audience believe that promoting traditional culture remains an important mission of mythological animations, but they emphasize that

such promotion should be "naturally integrated" rather than "superficially stacked." Take *Little Door Gods* as an example: although the film incorporates a large number of folk deities and traditional festival elements, it fails to effectively establish deep connections with the main plot and character fates, resulting in cultural images appearing instrumental and labeled. Audiences expect an internal logic to form between traditional culture, character behaviors, and plot structures, allowing cultural values to permeate naturally through storytelling. This integrative expression also serves as a contemporary interpretation of the cultural ideals of "civilization" and "harmony" at the "national level" in socialist core values.

In addition, 62.3% of respondents are concerned with contemporary expressions such as free will, individual emotions, and life choices, reflecting the audience's high attention to personal agency and spiritual independence amid changes in social structures. In *Green Snake*, Green Snake's continuous challenge to illusions and transcendence of obsessions to save her sister embodies the rise of female subjectivity and autonomous control over fate. The film uses the symbolic space of "Shura City" to externalize individual psychological dilemmas while constructing in-depth discussions on values such as "freedom," "choice," and "love and sacrifice." These themes not only respond to the modern demands of "freedom and justice" at the "social level" of China's Core Socialist Values but also expand the diversity and depth of animation as a medium for value education.

In terms of expression, audiences generally prefer allegorical and symbolic approaches. Data shows that 57.8% of respondents favor conveying deep-seated values through metaphors, dreams, symbols, and other means. For example, in *Big Fish & Begonia*, the "red dolphin " symbolizes the cycle of souls, while the "Soul keeper's transaction" metaphorizes ethical choices and the price of life. This artistic method of "teaching through beauty" and "expressing meaning through objects" not only enhances aesthetic acceptance but also strengthens the audience's active construction and immersive understanding of value content, reflecting a shift from " indoctrinatory dissemination" to "perceptual identification."

It is worth noting that audiences also show a high level of interest in globally resonant topics such as ecological ethics, gender issues, and multicultural inclusivity. For example, *Goodbye Monster* constructs a metaphorical narrative around "emotional illness" and "spiritual healing," artistically expressing the connection between individual mental dilemmas and social order imbalance. In terms of gender expression, the agency, active emotions, and identity construction of female characters have gradually shifted from being "the other" to being "the subject." These themes echo the core concepts of "rule of law," "equality," and "justice" in China's Core Socialist Values, demonstrating the active response of domestic animation to the diversity and complexity of contemporary social values.

Therefore, in terms of value expression, future Chinese mythological animations should strive to achieve the collaborative integration of "traditional spirit" and "modern consciousness," as well as the intersecting expression of "local ethics" and "global issues." While maintaining cultural roots, they should promote the aesthetic translation and conceptual penetration of socialist core values. Through symbolic narratives, character development, and deep metaphors, a value expression system rich in philosophical thinking, emotional warmth, and contemporary tension should be constructed. This will enable works to not only resonate with the cultural psychology of domestic audiences but also possess ideological appeal and cultural persuasiveness in global communication.

3. Suggestions for Aesthetic Design

In terms of aesthetics, audiences generally hold a highly positive attitude toward the integration of Chinese-style aesthetics and modern visual language in Chinese mythological animated works (Q187). Data shows that 73.0% of respondents hope that animated works will continue to strengthen traditional cultural visual elements, such as ink-wash gradients, landscape composition, ancient architectural aesthetics, and traditional costumes. This style not only has a strong cultural identity but also can stimulate the audience's national identity and aesthetic resonance. For example, *Big Fish & Begonia* uses a color scheme of red and cyan-green in large quantities, as well as the

Taoist architectural imagery of the space where the Soul keeper resides, both of which allow traditional aesthetic elements to be fully expressed visually.

At the same time, 62.3% of respondents also expressed a strong expectation for modern aesthetic trends, such as the introduction of visual vocabulary like a sense of technology, futurism, and cyber styles. Especially in themes like *New Gods: Nezha Reborn* and *Goodbye Monster* that combine "mythology with cyberpunk," the films demonstrate the integration of modernity and mythological imagery through elements such as urban industrial ruins, neon lights, and mecha transformations. This design approach is regarded by many young audiences as the development direction of "future Chinese style."

In terms of visual expressiveness, 69.1% of respondents noted a desire to further enhance the overall delicacy of the visuals and the expressive tension of color narration, particularly in emotional transitions and mood rendering, where colors should carry stronger psychological symbolic meaning. For example, in *White Snake*, the soft warm tones used in the scene where the White Snake first meets Xu Xuan create an intimate atmosphere, while the high-saturation cool tones employed during the confrontation with the National Preceptor intensify the tension of the conflict. This interaction between color and narrative has already shown initial effectiveness, but there is still room for improvement in the future.

64.7% of the audience emphasize the expressiveness of special effects and action scenes, particularly in plots such as battles, spellcasting, and illusion construction, where viewers expect visual rhythms to be more dynamic and impactful. For example, the special effects in the "Collapse of the Guixu" scene in *Legend of Deification* excel in creating atmosphere, but the coherence and rhythm control in some combat scenes still appear rough.

In addition, 56.4% of respondents proposed the need to build a unified visual symbol system, meaning that films should establish systematic connections among artistic styles, symbolic logic, and cultural imagery to enhance the depth and consistency of visual storytelling. For example, in *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*, the "lotus flower"

serves as a symbolic motif for Ne Zha's rebirth, weaving through the character's fate, expressions of maternal love, and rebellious will to form a relatively self-contained visual metaphor system with high completeness. This consistent integration of "symbols—plot—values" deserves reference from more works.

In terms of character design, audiences also demonstrate a positive attitude toward aesthetic reinterpretation. 55.9% of respondents prefer modern translations of traditional mythological images, which involve incorporating contemporary aesthetic elements and personality traits while preserving the cultural identity of the characters. For example, the White Snake in *White Snake* integrates Tang Dynasty court lady hair ornaments with a modern "pure and delicate" facial style, maintaining the mythological "celestial aura" while aligning with current mainstream aesthetics. In contrast, only 17.6% of respondents expect a completely faithful reproduction of mythological prototypes, while 26.5% prefer fully innovative character design settings.

Overall, the audience has put forward comprehensive requirements for aesthetic design that integrate cultural significance, modernity, and symbolic systematicness. In the future, the aesthetic construction of Chinese mythological animations should maintain the essence of traditional Eastern aesthetics while emphasizing technological innovation and systematic expression in visual presentation. Through continuous innovation in artistic styles, it should promote the contemporary expression and global dissemination of mythological narratives.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the systematic analysis of ten representative Chinese mythological animated films from 2015 to 2024 in the first four chapters, this chapter provides a comprehensive review and in-depth discussion of the research findings. Through textual analysis of three dimensions—narrative structure, aesthetic expression, and value construction—and combining multiple data from expert interviews and audience questionnaires, this study reveals: These award-winning works not only demonstrate a systematic evolution in narrative strategies from structural imitation to genre integration but also achieve a dual presentation of mainstream ideology and individual spiritual aspirations in value expression. More importantly, they have gained broad audience recognition at the aesthetic level, forming a visual cultural identity mechanism centered on "Chinese-style narrative."

This chapter will elaborate on the above findings through three components:

First, Section 5.1 summarizes the research results to address the research objectives and questions; Second, Section 5.2 discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings from perspectives such as cultural functions, value construction, and audience reception; Finally, Section 5.3 puts forward targeted suggestions for animation creators, policymakers, and academic researchers, aiming to provide feasible paths and research insights for the sustainable development and cultural dissemination of Chinese mythological animated films.

5.1 Research Summary

5.2 Research Discussion

5.3 Suggestions

5.1 Research Summary

This study analyzes ten award-winning Chinese mythological animated films (2015–2024) through textual analysis, interviews, and audience surveys. It reveals evolving narrative structures from classical three-act to hybrid forms, dual-track value expression combining mainstream ideology and personal emotion, and a nationally styled aesthetic system. The findings respond to three research aims: to trace narrative development, interpret value expression within Socialist Core Values, and assess audience attitudes toward aesthetics and cultural identity. Overall, the study highlights the systematic growth of Chinese mythological animation in narrative, value, and aesthetic dimensions, offering a foundation for future theoretical and practical advancements.

5.1.1 Summary of Narrative Techniques in Chinese Mythological Animated Films (2015–2024)

Between 2015 and 2024, Chinese mythological animated films underwent a systematic evolution in narrative strategies—from structural imitation to innovative integration—gradually establishing a localized narrative paradigm characterized by cultural distinctiveness and global communicability. Using a six-dimensional narrative framework—story and plot, time, space, character development, narrators, and narrative systems—this study systematically analyzes ten award-winning films to reveal how contemporary Chinese animation merges traditional mythology with modern narrative logic and diverse aesthetic styles to construct emotionally resonant and culturally meaningful storytelling models.

Specifically, in terms of story structure, most films adopt the classical three-act framework, branching into three distinct narrative types: "heroic awakening and identity reconstruction," "emotional ethics and philosophical reflection," and "traditional culture and modern negotiation." Temporal structures range from linear progression to nonlinear and psychological time constructions. Spatial representation evolves from functional physical settings to composite symbolic, psychological, and technologically altered spaces. Character motivation transitions from externally driven to internally and

dual-driven arcs, highlighting increased psychological complexity. Narrator types include externally focalized, emotionally subjective, multi-threaded limited, and implicit narrators—enhancing perspective diversity and audience immersion. At the narrative system level, a hybridization of classical Hollywood models with Chinese folklore, art film aesthetics, psychological modernism, and postmodern collage techniques reflects domestic animation's growing structural maturity and cultural expressiveness.

Overall, the narrative development of Chinese mythological animation across the decade can be divided into three stages: the exploratory phase (2015–2016), the maturation phase (2019–2020), and the hybridization phase (2021–2024). This progression—from structural replication to narrative innovation, from national discourse to individualized expression—demonstrates a dynamic interplay among technological advancement, narrative experimentation, and cultural strategy. It also signifies the formation of a distinct Chinese narrative discourse within the global animation landscape.

5.1.2 The Evolution of Value Representation in Chinese Mythological Animated Films (2015–2024)

Through a periodized analysis of value representation in ten Chinese mythological animated films produced between 2015 and 2024, it is evident that these works demonstrate a progressive evolution in the articulation of China's Core Socialist Values.

The "Exploratory Phase of Values" (2015–2016) emphasized the visual revival of traditional culture and a gentle expression of humanistic ethics, centering on the values of *Civility* and *Friendship*. This phase laid the groundwork for the initial engagement of domestic mythological animation with China's Core Socialist Values.

The "Transformative Phase of Values" (2019–2020) marked a shift toward modern concerns, focusing on social themes such as *Freedom*, *Equality*, and *Justice*. These films highlighted individual agency, moral choice, and social ethics, reflecting a value innovation that resonates with the collective psychology of contemporary Chinese society.

The "Deepening and Integrative Phase of Values" (2021–2024) achieved multidimensional integration and symbolic construction through themes such as

institutional critique, gender equality, and public responsibility. This phase reflects a trend toward more systematic, stratified, and reality-oriented value expression.

Across these three stages, the films exhibit an expansion of value types from individual ethics to sociopolitical dimensions, alongside a shift in expression from concrete narrative to symbolic systems. Together, these changes demonstrate the gradual establishment of a culturally autonomous and ideologically rich value discourse within Chinese mythological animated films.

At the national level, *Civility* has remained a consistently expressed value across all three phases, though its connotations have gradually expanded. In the early stage, it focused on the visual transmission of traditional culture and mythological systems; in the middle phase, it shifted toward a critical rethinking and rational reinterpretation of divine authority and the natural order; and in the later stage, it further incorporated themes such as modern social responsibility, gender consciousness, and spiritual care—marking a transformation from "cultural identity" to a modern concept of *civilization*.

Meanwhile, the value of *Harmony* was notably present during the 2015–2016 and 2019–2020 phases, primarily expressed through the relationship between humans and the natural environment, reflecting the traditional Chinese philosophy of the unity of man and nature.

At the social level, the values reflected in Chinese mythological animated films exhibit a clear trajectory of modernization. During the 2015–2016 phase, the expression remained relatively conservative, focusing primarily on *Justice*—manifested through universal narratives of good triumphing over evil. In the 2019–2020 phase, key concepts such as *Freedom*, *Equality*, and *Justice* were introduced, reflecting the deeper demands of the younger generation for institutional fairness and self-determined identity in the new era.

In the 2021–2024 phase, the focus further intensified on *Justice* and *Freedom*, with these values increasingly transformed into public discourses—such as women's rights, class struggle, and institutional critique. Here, *Freedom* evolved from individual

autonomy to collective emancipation, while *Justice* extended from moral judgment to structural reconstruction, demonstrating domestic animation's growing engagement with complex social issues.

At the individual level, the value of *Friendship* serves as a central thread across all three phases, illustrating a continuous expansion from familial ethics to social mutual aid and, ultimately, to public responsibility. This progression reflects the underlying tone of warmth and collective care in the moral construction of domestic animation.

Additionally, the value of *Dedication* appears in both the 2015–2016 and 2021–2024 phases, signaling a return to real-world ethics in value expression. It reinforces animation's role in promoting the spirit of hard work and professional ideals, thereby further grounding China's Core Socialist Values in lived reality and everyday cultural representation within cinematic works.

In summary, the value representation in Chinese mythological animated films has evolved from an early focus on cultural heritage and the reconstruction of collective memory to a deeper engagement with individual existence, social structures, and public ethics. This shift reflects an internal logic of value system evolution and a broader turn toward modernity in artistic expression. Such transformation not only aligns with the concurrent development of national cultural strategies and audience psychology, but also highlights the unique capacity and cultural responsibility of domestic animation in articulating ideological values and guiding public discourse.

5.1.3 Summary of Audience Preferences for Aesthetic Values

Based on 204 valid questionnaire responses, this study systematically summarizes audience preferences regarding the aesthetic values of Chinese mythological animated films produced between 2015 and 2024. The results indicate that audiences generally hold a positive and affirmative attitude, demonstrating a multidimensional and layered set of aesthetic expectations.

First, in terms of character design, audiences tend to favor creative approaches that integrate traditional mythological imagery with modern aesthetic

sensibilities. They emphasize the importance of emotional expressiveness, cultural symbolism, and individual distinctiveness in character representation.

Second, regarding scene design, audiences strongly prefer hybrid visual expressions that combine Eastern aesthetic ambience with futuristic technological elements, with particular attention paid to the cultural depth and visual intensity of spatial construction.

In terms of color and lighting, audiences show a clear preference for visual styles rooted in the semantic system of traditional Chinese colors. They expect the use of color rhythm and light-shadow variation to convey multilayered emotions and spatial boundaries.

For editing rhythm and camera language, viewers favor a balanced combination of dynamic and static shots, with a clear and expressive visual rhythm that enhances emotional pacing and immersive experience.

Concerning visual symbols, audiences highly appreciate the use of concrete cultural symbols and allegorical imagery derived from traditional motifs, believing they significantly enhance the film's cultural recognizability and symbolic richness. Lastly, with respect to action sequences and special effects, audiences generally affirm the notable improvement in technical maturity, rhythm control, and visual impact in domestic animation. They particularly highlight the aesthetic function of visual effects in advancing narrative development and conveying emotional intensity.

In summary, audience preferences regarding the aesthetic values of Chinese mythological animated films reflect a balanced emphasis on both cultural rootedness and technological modernity, as well as an integration of emotional expression with symbolic visual language. This indicates a nuanced and comprehensive set of aesthetic expectations among contemporary viewers, while also highlighting the efforts and achievements of domestic animation in constructing a modern visual system imbued with distinct Chinese cultural characteristics within a global context.

Moreover, audiences' positive recognition of the aesthetic expression in domestic mythological animation extends beyond visual preference, revealing deeper

mechanisms of cultural reception. The underlying cultural construction embedded in this aesthetic acceptance will be further explored in the following section on research discussion.

5.2 Research Discussion

Since 2014, under the strong and sustained promotion of the national strategy of "cultural confidence", myth-themed animations have completed a profound evolutionary transformation in this context, gradually achieving an identity leap from "edge texts for children" to "national cultural expressions". This chapter will explore the transformation path and cultural connotations of Chinese mythological animated films from 2015 to 2024 from three comprehensive dimensions: "narrative style—value expression—national style aesthetics".

5.2.1 The Changes and Achievements of Narrative and Values in Chinese Mythological Animation from 2014 to 2024

Since 2014, when General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed "cultural confidence" and elevated it to a national strategy, the creative transformation and innovative development of fine traditional Chinese culture have become important orientations of national cultural policies. In 2015, the box office breakthrough and cultural buzz of *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* not only marked the resurgence of the marketization of domestic mythological animations but also kicked off a new era of narrative and value reconstruction in Chinese animation. Over the following decade, mythological animations gradually shed the traditional impressions of being "childish" and "externally styled," moving toward national storytelling, deep value cultivation, and aesthetic innovation.

At the narrative level, Chinese mythological animations are no longer confined to single-line task-based structures, but have developed diversified narrative paths and stylistic integrations. Based on the systematic analysis of ten representative works from 2015 to 2024 in this study, domestic mythological animations generally adopt the classic Hollywood three-act structure in terms of structure, while integrating local cultural contexts and mythological motifs, forming the following four mainstream narrative modes:

(1) Hollywood three-act structure + traditional Chinese cultural symbols (such as festivals, rituals, and god systems);

(2) Hollywood three-act structure + art film-style subjective narration (such as dreams, reincarnation, and inner perspectives);

(3) Hollywood three-act structure + social issues/realistic metaphors (such as institutional criticism and identity anxiety);

(4) Hollywood three-act structure + postmodern anti-genre (such as multi-threaded plots and de-divinization of characters).

Meanwhile, there has been a deep-seated transformation in the expression of values. Early works such as *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* and *Little Door Gods* still took traditional ethics like "loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, and righteousness" and "cultural preservation" as the narrative core. However, after 2019, a more distinct modern value orientation emerged. In works like *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*, *Legend of Deification*, and *Green Snake*, core themes shifted to individual choices, emotional struggles, and institutional critique. The expression of socialist core values has evolved from "injecting main themes" to "embedding in plots" and "motivating character arcs", breaking away from traditional preaching discourse. By aligning with contemporary social psychology, these works have achieved a transformation from collective norms to individual negotiation.

The changes are the result of multiple combined forces. At the policy level, documents such as *China's Cultural Development Outline (2016-2020)* issued by the State Council, *Opinions on Implementing the Project for Inheriting and Developing Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture (2017)*, and *the 14th Five-Year Plan for China's Film Development* issued by the National Film Administration have continuously promoted the output of national culture and the rise of domestic animations, providing fertile ground for the development of mythological themes. At the social level, against the backdrop of the "post-pandemic era", the youth group faces identity anxiety and value swings, such as heavy academic pressure, employment anxiety, class solidification and other issues. The Generation Z is more inclined to seek emotional projection and value comfort in

animations. At the market level, with the maturity of technology and the entry of capital, mythological animations have the dual conditions to balance aesthetic ideals and commercial returns.

In summary, between 2014 and 2024, the narrative logic and value expression of Chinese mythological animated films have undergone a systematic evolution from superficial to profound, from discipline to negotiation, and from external imitation to internal construction. This not only responds to the epochal demands of the national cultural strategy but also reflects the collaborative transformation between the changes in social structure and the cultural psychology of the youth generation, propelling Chinese animation to gradually step into a new stage of "modern mythological narrative".

5.2.2 The Ways of Integrating China's Core Socialist Values

The dissemination and transformation of China's Core Socialist Values have been one of the key missions of Chinese mythological animated films in recent years. Outstanding works no longer simply impose values as "mainstream theme" labels through external indoctrination. Instead, they naturally integrate the value concepts advocated by the state into the plot advancement and character growth of animations through narrative structures, character motivations, and visual metaphors, embodying an artistic path of "value internalization".

At the national level, core concepts such as "civilization" and "harmony" are often embodied through the critique and reconstruction of traditional theocratic systems, reflecting the exploration of ideal political orders and civilized forms. For example, in *Legend of Deification*, the collapse of the "Fengshen System" and Jiang Ziya's questioning of the "Mandate of Heaven" metaphorize the evolution of modern political concepts from theocracy to rule of man, and from obedience to rational negotiation, highlighting the new-era connotations of "civilization" and "harmony".

At the social level, films focus on expressing concepts such as "freedom, justice, and the rule of law", reflecting contemporary society's demands for institutional reform, class mobility, and social equity. For example, in *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*, the stigmatized marginal status of the Dragon Clan, through the joint struggle of Ne

Zha and Ao Bing, reveals the phenomena of identity suppression and resource injustice. It expresses the expectation for "fairness and justice" and "equal opportunity" in social systems, reinforcing the value appeals of individual rights and institutional reform in a socialist society.

At the individual level, films demonstrate humanistic spirits such as "patriotism, dedication, integrity, and kindness" through the setup of character emotions and growth arcs. For instance, in *Big Fish & Begonia*, the heroine Chun is willing to exchange her life to save Kun, reflecting a high sense of responsibility and altruism, which echoes the value connotation of "kindness". In *White Snake*, the love vow between the White Snake and Xu Xuan across life and death shows the glorious personality of "integrity" and "kindness" through the characters' unswerving faith.

The key to this process of embedding values lies in achieving the artistic transformation from the abstract to the concrete, and from concepts to stories. In other words, instead of directly delivering core values as stiff political slogans, they are integrated into the audience's "emotional experience" and "psychological identification" through characters' choices, plot advancement, and aesthetic construction. The characters in the story serve as the embodied representation of values, while the plot structure constitutes the mechanism for value judgment. Through the path of "storytelling, characterization, and contextualization", Chinese mythological animations have established a dual mechanism of emotional appeal and value dissemination, enhancing the communicative power, affinity, and appeal of the Core Socialist Values.

The formation of this mechanism marks a new leap in the cultural soft power of Chinese animation: while telling Chinese stories well, it has also achieved a model transformation of mainstream values from indoctrination-style education to "empathy-based communication".

5.2.3 The Influence of Art Style Changes on the Cognition of the New Generation of Viewers

The remarkable changes in the art style system of Chinese mythological animations between 2015 and 2024 have profoundly influenced the cognitive patterns, emotional identification, and value choices of the new generation of viewers. This

transformation is not only a shift in creative concepts but also a reflection of the changing psychological characteristics and media habits of Generation Z audiences.

First, the narrative mode has shifted from the traditional "single-line task-based structure" to more complex and diversified structures of "emotional-ethical type", "social metaphor type", and "philosophical exploration type". Many films have weakened the functional orientation of the traditional "hero vs. monster" model, instead emphasizing the psychological struggles, ethical choices, and spiritual growth of characters. For example, *Green Snake* focuses on Green Snake's repeated reincarnation and self-reconstruction in a fantasy realm, presenting a strong context of psychological portrayal and philosophical reflection. This narrative transformation provides audiences with a broader space for emotional projection and a platform for value-based speculation, strengthening the cultural function of animation as a "psychological text".

Secondly, the aesthetic style has also undergone remarkable evolution. It has shifted from the early "retro-restorative" style dominated by traditional elements such as ink wash and paper-cutting to the "national trend integration" style that combines sci-fi fantasy, cyberpunk, and futuristic designs. This change not only caters to the preference of Generation Z for high-density information and high sensory stimulation but also reflects the new generation of audiences' identification needs for the "modern expression of national symbols". For example, *New Gods: Yang Jian* integrates Dunhuang murals, cyber cities, and hero narratives to construct an aesthetic form of "traditional divinity + technological language", responding to the youth group's expectation for a coexisting structure of "culture and the future".

The changes in narrative and style are closely related to the cognitive structure of Generation Z. As digital natives, this generation prefers fragmented reception, emotional expression, and diversified value judgments. They are skeptical of authoritative narratives, single-value systems, and linear causal models, and tend to seek "uncertainty," "open endings," and "psychological resonance" in works.

Many films adopt dreamlike structures, multi-threaded perspectives, flashbacks, and non-linear temporal logic, breaking the traditional "setup-development-

climax-conclusion" framework. They replace event-driven progression with emotional flow and substitute task-oriented goals with psychological motivations. This style represents not only an artistic innovation but also a process of negotiating with the audience's "shared experiential structure".

From a communication studies perspective, these changes confirm McLuhan's "medium is the message" theory: transformations in media forms are reconstructing people's cognitive patterns and cultural reception paths. As a composite medium integrating visual and dynamic elements, the narrative style transformation of animation is not merely a formal innovation, but more profoundly reflects the cultural communication trend towards "immersive, empathetic, and interactive" modes.

To sum up, the changes in the narrative and style of mythological animations have not only enhanced artistic expressiveness but also constructed a cultural expression that aligns with the psychological structure and emotional rhythm of the new generation. This transformation revitalizes the ancient motif of myths with contemporary expressive power, deeply connecting with Generation Z in terms of emotional mobilization, identity formation, and value cognition. As a result, Chinese animation has evolved into a cultural force that truly facilitates intergenerational communication.

5.2.4 The Modern Transformation of Mythological Beliefs

In the development of Chinese mythological animations from 2015 to 2024, mythological beliefs no longer appear in the form of "untouchable gods" as religious worship, but gradually transform into personified expressions of "gods as humans" and spiritual symbols of "fate determined by oneself". This transformation reflects the secular and psychological reinterpretation of traditional beliefs in contemporary mythological narratives, and also mirrors the demand of Generation Z audiences for a realistic understanding of the meaning of belief.

First, the expression of belief has shifted from "worship of transcendent forces" to "identification with personal spirit". In past myths, deities held unquestionable authority and fateful arrangements, but in new-generation mythological animations such as *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*, *Legend of Deification*, and *New Gods: Yang Jian*,

deities often exhibit human-like characteristics: they can make mistakes, get lost, suffer, and also need to grow and make choices. This narrative transformation of "disenchantment of divinity" and "strengthening of humanity" allows audiences to more easily regard characters as objects of emotional projection and spiritual sustenance, achieving an approachable realization of belief significance.

Secondly, mythological beliefs are modernly transformed through concrete visual symbols and psychological spaces. At the visual level, directors use highly stylized pictorial language to materialize and sensualize abstract beliefs. For example, the mechanical lotus armor of Ne Zha in *New Gods: Nezha Reborn* and the mechanical temple of Taiyi Zhenren in *New Gods: Yang Jian* are both products of re-encoding traditional divine powers with futuristic industrial imagery. These visualized symbols not only carry mythological elements but also cater to contemporary aesthetic preferences, constructing a visual system of beliefs that bridges ancient and modern times.

In terms of narrative space, an increasing number of works use structural settings such as dreams, illusions, memory corridors, and spiritual reincarnation to construct a "psychological belief trial ground". For example, the Shura City in *Green Snake* is a projection of Green Snake's inner fears and obsessions, as well as a spiritual map for her belief reconstruction. Such settings blur the boundary between reality and consciousness, making the belief experience no longer dependent on external rituals but turning to the process of inner psychological resonance.

In addition, technology and aesthetic techniques have also reconstructed the forms of belief expression. Through the subjective switching of camera language, the emotional rendering of light and shadow composition, and the emotional layering of rhythm scheduling, films transform "belief" from an unreachable religious imagination into a spiritual experience with realistic touch and an empathic foundation. This aesthetic strategy not only enhances the audience's sense of immersion but also enables belief to form a genuine connection with the psychological structure of modern viewers.

In summary, Chinese mythological animations from 2015 to 2024 have completed the transformation of contemporary expression of mythological beliefs through

the means of "demystification", "personification" and "visual-psychologicalization". This process not only retains the symbolic function of myths as cultural foundations, but also endows them with the communication ability to adapt to the context of modern society, promoting Chinese myths to obtain new narrative vitality and cultural identity value in the new era.

5.2.5 The Changes and Continuities in Chinese Mythological Animation

Between 2015 and 2024, Chinese mythological animations have seen remarkable changes in narrative structures, aesthetic styles, and value expressions. However, their cultural spirit and core mythological elements have remained consistent. The interplay between change and continuity forms the dual logic of Chinese mythological animations during this period, reflecting their cultural path of continuous negotiation and recreation between modernity and tradition.

At the level of narrative structure, domestic mythological animations present four forms of integration: first, the combination of the classic Hollywood three-act narrative structure with traditional cultural symbols, as seen in *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*; second, the integration with modernist expression, such as the exploration of life-and-death philosophy in *Big Fish & Begonia*; third, the subjective expression that incorporates the style of art films, for example, *White Snake* uses a non-linear structure interwoven with dreams and memories; fourth, the integration of postmodern anti-genre deconstruction and multi-perspective narrative, like *Goodbye Monster*. These integration strategies reflect the increasingly mature industrial capabilities and cultural expressiveness of domestic animations, and also mark a paradigm shift from "imitation" to "construction of self-style".

In terms of changes, the first is the modernization of technical language. Whether in animation rendering, editing rhythm, special effects performance or audio-visual scheduling, they have reached the international mainstream level. Secondly, the aesthetic style tends to be more complex, developing from the early straightforward narrative mode to a more symbolic, stream-of-consciousness and visually experimental

expression. Thirdly, the value expression is more open and diversified, shifting from collectivist indoctrination to individual life experience and multiple ethical negotiations.

However, in the deep structure, Chinese mythological animations still adhere to several unchanging cultural essences. First, the cultural root of myths is always present: themes such as the relationship between heaven and humanity, cause-and-effect reincarnation, and loyalty-filial piety-benevolence-righteousness remain the spiritual framework of stories. Second, the structural reliance on folk legends has not changed: for example, the growth motif of "trial-sacrifice-reincarnation" repeatedly appears in most works. Third, Oriental aesthetic characteristics are continuously reflected in visual composition, rhythm design, and symbolic systems—traditional artistic principles such as blank space, vital energy, and artistic conception are constantly reshaped and incorporated into contemporary expressions.

Compared with the hero-centricism of American animation and the psychological growth narrative of Japanese animation, Chinese mythological animation has formed a unique path between "narrative system + cultural expression", emphasizing the dual structure of "cultural implication + aesthetic metaphor" and constructing an "Oriental visual philosophy" with Chinese characteristics. This philosophy can not only tell grand narratives but also accommodate individual emotions. It retains the ritual sense of mythological narratives while conforming to the contemporary youth's framework for understanding the "relationship between self and the world".

Therefore, the "changes" in Chinese mythological animation are manifested in the continuous innovation of media language and formal expressions, while the "constants" are reflected in the adherence to cultural spirit and the continuation of mythological logic. The creative transformation achieved within the tension of "modernity-nativity" is the key to its continuous vitality and cultural reproduction.

5.3 Recommendations

This study finds that from 2015 to 2024, Chinese mythological animated films have formed a modern narrative system blending genre hybridity, flexible values, and national aesthetics. Despite market success, challenges remain, including limited

innovation and value homogeneity. Targeted recommendations for creators, policymakers, and researchers are proposed to support sustainable development and enhance global communication.

5.3.1 Recommendations for Animation Creators

As key agents in the visual dissemination of Chinese mythological culture, animation creators shape narrative structures, value systems, and visual aesthetics. However, issues such as weak story coherence, shallow character motivation, and aesthetic superficiality still exist. To meet domestic and global audience expectations, future works must enhance narrative logic, ideological depth, and aesthetic integration.

(1) Strengthening Narrative Structure and Cultural Coherence

Many films suffer from fragmented plots, unmotivated character behavior, and weak worldbuilding. Creators should ensure clear causality, emotional progression, and coherent character arcs driven by internal values. Integrating Eastern storytelling methods like nonlinear timelines, parallel narratives, and restricted perspectives can enrich narrative diversity. Moreover, poetic imagery and symbolic expressions from traditional aesthetics—such as dreams, metaphors, and divine motifs—should be employed to build layered, emotionally resonant stories.

(2) Deepening Value Expression Through Internalization and Relevance

Chinese mythological animation is transitioning from overt moral messaging to value internalization. Future narratives should show value formation through characters' decisions and psychological development, not slogans or explicit lessons. While honoring traditional virtues, creators should also explore contemporary themes like identity, generational conflict, and emotional autonomy. Using metaphors, dream sequences, and symbolic structures can enhance ideological nuance and invite interpretive engagement. Additionally, incorporating global concerns—ecology, gender equality, social justice— within mythological frameworks allows for universal relevance while retaining cultural specificity.

(3) Refining Aesthetics for Coherence and Identity Construction

Visual style is crucial for cultural transmission and audience connection. Many current films show stylistic fragmentation, weak symbolic logic, or excessive design.

To counter this, creators should unify character design, spatial composition, color symbolism, and visual rhythm. Traditional Chinese visual elements—such as ink painting, paper-cut patterns, and landscape aesthetics—can be innovatively fused with digital tools like 3D modeling, AI-generated imagery, and particle effects to develop a "Futuristic Guofeng" aesthetic. Character design should reinterpret mythological icons with cultural depth and emotional expressiveness, enhancing both heritage value and contemporary appeal.

Together, these strategies help shape a distinct, modern Chinese mythological animation style rooted in national identity and capable of cross-cultural communication.

5.3.2 Recommendations for Policymakers

As a vital part of China's national cultural strategy and cultural industry development, Chinese mythological animated films depend not only on creators' artistic efforts but also on supportive policies, industry mechanisms, and platform ecosystems. To promote high-quality development, this section proposes the following three policy directions:

(1) Establish a Multi-Dimensional Support System for Cultural Originality

It is recommended to include a "Special Support Program for Original Mythological Animation" in national and local plans to fund outstanding creators, studios, and academic projects rooted in traditional culture. A "Young Creators Initiative" should also be launched to support emerging directors, writers, and designers, ensuring continuous innovation and intergenerational evolution in domestic animation.

(2) Improve the Coordination Between Value Guidance and Cultural Diversity

While value-oriented review systems are in place, more flexible, symbolic, and hybrid expressions should be encouraged. Evaluation criteria should recognize metaphorical narratives and cultural hybridity. In addition, a "Core Socialist Values Translation Mechanism" should be developed to transform abstract values like "prosperity," "freedom," and "harmony" into visual narratives and character actions, enhancing creative expression.

(3) Build a Global-Oriented Communication System

Despite its cultural richness, Chinese mythological animation faces challenges in global reach. A "Mythological Animation Going Global Initiative" should be advanced through international festivals, translation centers, and co-productions. Collaboration with platforms like Netflix and Disney+ should be encouraged, along with the development of overseas communication teams skilled in cultural interpretation, to bridge cultural gaps and amplify Chinese values on the global stage.

5.3.3 Recommendations for Academic Research

Chinese mythological animated films lie at the intersection of cultural narrative, national image, and audience psychology, requiring research beyond traditional single-film analysis. This study proposes the following academic directions:

(1) Build a Systematic Research Framework

Academic research on Chinese mythological animation lacks clear classification and unified paradigms. It is recommended to establish a "Mythological Animation Research Database" cataloging works from 1941 to present, supporting empirical and trend studies. Simultaneously, a theoretical genealogy combining Chinese narratology and Western visual theories should be developed to build a culturally grounded academic discourse.

(2) Advance Audience Reception and Aesthetic Psychology Research

While this study explores audience views on narrative, values, and aesthetics, future research should deepen comparative studies across age, gender, and culture, and adopt interdisciplinary tools such as neuroaesthetics and cognitive psychology to investigate emotional immersion and identity construction in animation viewing.

(3) Integrate University Education and Research

It is recommended to include Chinese mythological animation studies in film, animation, and cultural curricula through modules like "Mythological Narratives and Visual Design." Universities should also collaborate with studios in joint projects and practice-based teaching, promoting cross-media expansion into games, tourism, and publishing.

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