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Reflections on Earthly Deeds : Mythical Consequences in *Along with the Gods : The Two Worlds*

Abstract

Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds is a 2017 South Korean fantasy action film directed by Kim Yong-hwa. It blends Korean mythical beliefs with fantasy, portraying the afterlife intertwined with earthly actions. This film is based on a webtoon by Joo Ho-min, "Along with the Gods," which was inspired by the Korean Joseon dynasty Buddhist paintings and early Buddhist texts of the Ten Kings of Hell. The film follows the story of Kim Ja-Hong, a firefighter, who is guided through the afterlife by three guardians and has to undergo seven trials over forty-nine days to reincarnate, with each trial representing a different sin he committed in his life.

Beyond its fantastical elements, *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds* explores universal themes. It delves into the human experience, the power of redemption and highlights on one's actions and their potential consequences in life. This film is deeply rooted in Korean mythology and folklore, featuring gods, demons, and other supernatural beings, where myth serves as a powerful metaphor for the moral and ethical implications of our actions. Mythologies and folklore are traditional stories, beliefs, that are often passed down by elders and storytellers as a way to teach younger generations about ethical values and cultural wisdom. They illustrate the consequences of our actions and teaches valuable lessons about right and wrong.

This paper analyses the role of mythologies in imparting moral education and guiding individuals toward virtuous living as witnessed in the film *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds*. By portraying the rewards and punishments faced by the characters based on their virtues and vices, the film emphasizes the importance of considering morality in one's life. The film encourages to reflect on decisions and actions, reminding them that one's choices have lasting effects not only on themselves but also on those around them. Utilizing mythologies as a narrative device, the film instils a sense of responsibility and encourages individuals to strive for a more ethical and virtuous existence.

Keywords: Mythologies, Moral values, Fantasy

The movie *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds* is a masterpiece that interweaves elements of fantasy with deep reflections on human actions and their consequential impacts. Directed by Kim Yong-hwa, this South Korean film presents an ethereal landscape where the afterlife is meticulously portrayed as an intricate realm governed by

trials and judgments. The film is based on the webtoon series by Joo Ho-min, *Along with the Gods*, which was inspired by the Korean Joseon dynasty Buddhist paintings and early Buddhist texts of the Ten Kings of Hell. It features Ha Jung-woo, Cha Tae-hyun, Ju Ji-hoon and Kim Hyang-gi as the main cast. The film centres on the unexpected death of the firefighter Kim Ja-Hong who is guided through the afterlife by three guardians. He undergoes seven trials over forty-nine days to determine the fate of his soul. As he navigates through the fantastical realms of the afterlife, he encounters gods, demons, and other mythical beings, all while uncovering the truth about his past life and the sins he committed. Along the way, Ja-Hong forms deep bonds with his guardians and learns valuable lessons about sacrifice, redemption, and the power of love. The protagonist must ultimately confront his inner demons and face off against powerful forces to earn a second chance at life.

Myths are traditional stories or narratives that often involves supernatural beings, gods, heroes, and symbolic elements. They are deeply rooted in cultural or religious traditions and serve various purposes within a society. Myths typically explain natural phenomena, the origins of the world, human behaviour, and the relationship between the divine and mortal realms. They often carry moral lessons, cultural norms, and explanations for the unexplainable aspects of life. These narratives are often transmitted orally across generations, adapting and evolving while retaining their core elements. Myths can encompass creation stories, tales of heroic deeds, explanations for the existence of certain cultural practices or natural phenomena, and stories that establish the moral or ethical codes of the society. They are integral to understanding the worldview, values, and traditions of a culture, providing a framework for how people perceive themselves and the world around them.

The film portrays the consequences of one's actions in life, drawing from both mythological ideas and its narrative nuances. The film aligns with mythological concepts by presenting the afterlife as a place where individuals face repercussions for their earthly deeds. It mirrors traditional beliefs about accountability and the judgment of one's actions after death, staying true to the idea that moral choices have consequences beyond life. Mythology often outlines the general idea of judgment and consequences; the movie creates a structured system of trials, each representing specific aspects of a person's life and choices. This meticulous representation goes beyond mythological concepts, providing a more elaborate and visual interpretation of the consequences tied to different actions. The film emphasizes the possibility of redemption and second chances, which might not always align with strict mythological ideas. While myths often portray a fixed judgment, the movie weaves in elements of hope and the potential for personal growth and redemption, offering a nuanced perspective on the consequences of one's actions that might deviate from traditional beliefs. The film's depiction of fantastical realms is steeped in Korean mythologies, featuring a diverse array of otherworldly landscapes

inhabited by guardians, demons, and deities from traditional folklore. Through the visuals and intricate storytelling, it presents a tapestry of the afterlife that resonates with cultural beliefs and spiritual traditions. This portrayal not only offers a cinematic spectacle but also serves as a conduit to explore deeper themes of accountability, redemption, and the interconnectedness of actions and their repercussions beyond mortal life.

In the film, fantasy acts as a reflective canvas upon which the consequences of earthly actions are vividly portrayed. The imaginative landscapes and supernatural trials the protagonist encounters symbolize the complexities and consequences of his past life. By constructing a visually stunning and immersive world of trials and otherworldly realms, the fantasy genre breathes life into the mythological concept of judgment after death. Integrating fantasy elements in film, especially when depicting two distinct worlds inhabited by gods and mortals, offers a rich tapestry to convey moral and mythological themes with depth and resonance. The juxtaposition of these realms allows filmmakers to explore complex ethical dilemmas and age-old human struggles in a visually compelling and imaginative manner. By introducing gods embodying virtues or vices and mortals navigating their intertwined fates, the storytelling gains a heightened sense of symbolism and relatability. This portrayal allows audiences to witness the consequences of earthly deeds tangibly and engagingly. Fantasy serves as a transformative vehicle, allowing the audience to engage with the abstract notions of karma, redemption, and the interconnectedness of human actions in a visually compelling manner.

The fantasy genre's universal appeal serves as a powerful conduit for conveying moral messages embedded in mythical narratives. Its allure lies in transcending cultural, geographical, and temporal boundaries, making it an ideal vehicle for imparting timeless moral lessons. Fantasy's imaginative realms and fantastical elements engage diverse audiences, drawing them into worlds where the boundaries of reality are fluid. This escapism allows for the exploration of complex moral dilemmas in settings removed from specific cultural contexts, enabling audiences from various backgrounds to relate to the underlying themes. Moreover, the fantastical nature of the genre offers a safe distance from reality, allowing for the portrayal of moral conflicts and ethical choices in a heightened, metaphorical manner. This abstraction enables storytellers to address sensitive or challenging topics without being confined to the limitations of realistic settings. Ja-Hong, the deceased protagonist in the film embodies a character deeply influenced by selflessness, familial responsibility, and sacrifice, impacting his journey through the afterlife. His earthly deeds shape his trials in the afterlife, reflecting the moral complexities of his choices. Ja-Hong's selfless sacrifices for his family become a cornerstone of his afterlife trials, emphasizing the moral lesson of sacrifice and familial devotion. His journey becomes a reflection of the moral virtues of integrity, sacrifice, and responsibility, showcasing the profound impact of his actions on his journey through the

afterlife. The fantasy setting in the film allows for a vivid visualization of the characters' internal moral conflicts. The mythical beings, guardians, and otherworldly landscapes become symbolic representations of their struggles, providing a visual narrative that intensifies their moral journeys. This fantastical realm becomes a mirror reflecting their past actions and guiding their paths toward redemption and growth. The three afterlife guardians- Gang-Lim, Haewonmak, and Lee-Deok-Choon play pivotal roles as mentors and guides in Ja-Hong's journey. Their characters are deeply intertwined with Korean mythology, representing concepts like justice, compassion, and sacrifice. Each guardian contributes to Ja-Hong's growth, providing him with valuable insights and challenging his beliefs.

As the narrative unfolds, the fantasy elements of the film, such as supernatural creatures and other worldly realms serve as metaphor for moral dilemmas and the consequence of one's actions. Ja- Hong's character development is intricately linked to these fantastical elements, highlighting the interplay between mythical and the moral in storytelling. Moreover, the film introduces a complex system of reincarnation and divine judgement, drawing inspiration from various religious and mythological traditions. This world-building aspect adds depth to the characters roles, they navigate the intricate balance between fate and free will, sin and redemption. In the context of fantasy and mythology character development takes on a transcendent dimension. The characters in the film are not only shaped by their personal histories but also by the cosmic forces at play in the afterlife. This fusion of the fantastical and the mythic creates a unique narrative space where characters grapple with universal themes of morality and afterlife.

The seven trials in the afterlife depicted in the film intricately intertwine mythological elements with profound moral lessons. Each trial, deeply rooted in Korean mythologies, symbolizes a distinct aspect of ethical dilemmas. Drawing from cultural beliefs, these trials offer allegorical representations of earthly deeds and their consequences, mirroring universal moral principles. The film delves into the consequences of violence, deceit, indolence, injustice, betrayal, filial impiety, and unfulfilled dreams.

They serve as a framework that reflects not only cultural values but also universal ethical teachings, emphasizing virtues like honesty, empathy, justice, loyalty, and familial respect. For an instance in the scene of the Trial of Murder, Ja-Hong confronts situations where his actions, intentional orunintentional, led to someone's death. This trial examines their responsibility and accountability for the lives they've affected. During this trial, characters are shown scenes from their past where their actions, directly or indirectly, resulted in someone's demise. They're forced to relive these moments and confront the consequences of their choices. The trials, guided by guardians and mythological beings, embody the journey of the soul through moral reckonings, highlighting the interconnectedness of actions and their enduring impact in the afterlife, illustrating the complexities of human morality within the cultural and mythical context.

The film draws heavily from Korean afterlife beliefs, particularly the concept of the afterlife journey, which spans forty-nine days of trials in seven hells. This belief is rooted in Korean Buddhism and folklore, where the deceased undergoes judgment and trials before reincarnation. By incorporating these beliefs, the film provides a culturally resonant depiction of the afterlife journey. Beyond mere entertainment, the film serves as a vessel for ethical teachings and moral complexities prevalent in Korean stories, emphasizing virtues, accountability, and the consequences of actions. Through the fantastical lens, the film portrays the repercussions of earthly deeds in the afterlife trials. Each trial confronts the characters with the consequences of their past actions, compelling them to confront their flaws, seek redemption, and reckon with their choices. The trial of betrayal examines the characters' loyalty and trustworthiness. They encounter situations demanding a choice between loyalty and betrayal, testing their commitment to their beliefs and relationships. The trial of indolence evaluates diligence and effort. Characters confront instances where they may have lacked commitment or persistence, stressing the value of perseverance and hard work. The trial of filial piety centres on familial bonds, particularly characters' reverence and nurturing of their parents. It challenges their devotion to their family and highlights the significance of honouring and caring for parents. The trial of violence confronts characters with their past violent actions or tendencies. It tests their ability to overcome anger and aggression, emphasizing the need for peace and reconciliation. The trial of deceit honesty and truthfulness. Characters face situations where they might have deceived others or themselves, emphasizing the importance of integrity and facing the truth. The final trial, the trial of murder, evaluates characters' actions that directly or indirectly caused someone's death. It tests their responsibility for others' lives, emphasizing accountability for one's actions. These trials serve as allegories for ethical dilemmas, showcasing the weight of decisions made in life. This exploration of moral consequences transcends the supernatural realm, echoing universal themes of accountability, integrity, compassion, and the complexity of human nature. The film emphasizes the significance of ethical choices, the pursuit of justice, and the ever-present possibility of redemption, resonating as a universal testament to the human yearning for moral growth and absolution. In *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds* the usage of myths serves as a powerful tool to prompt viewers to rethink their actions. By drawing on cultural and mythological elements, the film invites audiences to reflect on fundamental experiences and moral dilemmas. The ancient myths embedded in the narrative act as mirrors, reflecting universal themes of redemption, justice, and the afterlife. This reflection becomes a catalyst for introspection, prompting viewers to reconsider their own choices and values. The film's skilful incorporation of myths doesn't merely entertain but act as a poignant guide, encouraging individuals to reassess their actions and contemplate the consequences, fostering a deeper connection between a fantastical world on screen and the real-world choices of the audiences. Thus, myths become not just stories but essential tools for passing down cultural heritage and

prompting reflections on the shared values that guide human actions across generations. For an instance, the myth about not shaking legs as it may bring negative consequences to one's parents is prevalent in various cultures, particularly in some Asian societies. The belief suggests that shaking one's legs is considered disrespectful or inauspicious as it might bring misfortune or harm to parents or the family.

Elders often pass down this belief as a form of cultural etiquette or superstition, emphasizing the need for proper manners and respect towards elders and ancestors. It serves as a way to instil discipline and mindfulness in behaviour, teaching individuals to be mindful of their actions and their potential impact on family harmony and fortune. Myths have served as moral compasses, imparting lessons, values, and ethical guidelines to societies. They serve as powerful allegories, illustrating the consequences of actions, the importance of virtues like courage, wisdom, and justice, and the pitfalls of hubris, greed, and dishonesty. By presenting characters facing moral dilemmas and showcasing the outcomes of their choices, myths offer valuable lessons. These myths often serve as cautionary tales, warning against immoral behaviour or arrogance while promoting virtues that contribute to the greater good.

The study concludes by acquiring that through the fantasy film *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds*, mythologies play a crucial role in imparting education and guiding individuals toward virtuous living. The film depicts the power of storytelling and how ancient myths continue to shape our understanding of morals and virtues. By merging fantastical elements with valuable life lessons, the movie encourages viewers to explore their own values and strive for goodness in their actions. This integration of mythology in the film also highlights the universal themes present in ancient stories that are still relevant today. The characters in the movie, both human and godlike, face dilemmas and challenges that mirror the struggles we encounter in our own lives. Through these narratives, the film reminds us of the importance of empathy, bravery, and compassion, guiding us towards a more enlightened and virtuous existence. Overall, this study highlights the significance of mythology in our cultural heritage, its relevance in contemporary society, and how this film serves as a powerful reminder of mythologies in shaping our beliefs and values.

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