

Corporate Authorship in Animation IP Adaptation: Enlight Media's Chinese Mythology Universe

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ABSTRACT

This article develops a theory-led documentary and textual case analysis of corporate authorship in Enlight Media's animation portfolio. Drawing on published scholarship, public corporate documents, media accounts, and selected films, it examines creative control, stylistic continuity, creative intent, and brand image. The analysis interprets relationships between investment networks, producer coordination, IP strategy, and recurring cultural and aesthetic features. It distinguishes the company's stated Chinese Mythology Universe ambition from the wider portfolio and considers differences among films as well as shared traits. The argument suggests that corporate authorship offers a useful perspective on industrialized animation while preserving the significance of directors' and studios' creative agency. The article reports no researcher-conducted interviews or systematically coded empirical dataset; its conclusions are interpretive propositions based on public materials. It contributes a contextual application of corporate authorship to Chinese animation and identifies tensions between coordinated brand development and artistic variation.

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1. Introduction

In the past decade, the Chinese animation industry has undergone a structural transformation marked by the "rise of Guoman" (domestic animation). Its core feature is the transition from content dominated by "preschool-oriented" material to a diversified expansion into "all-ages" content (J. Lu, 2021). The 2015 film *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* (Tian, 2015) is regarded as a critical turning point; with a box office of 956 million RMB, it demonstrated that animation films rooted in native culture and produced with high quality can successfully enter the mainstream consumer market and attract adult

audiences (Top Data, 2025). Behind this shift lies a restructuring of the industry model: high-concept, high-budget “all-ages” animation demands a more mature industrial production system, requiring robust capital support, long-term IP planning, precise production management, and integrated marketing strategies. This has shifted the creative authority from individual creators to large corporate entities capable of integrating the entire industry chain.

Amid this wave, Enlight Media entered the animation field with a forward-looking strategy by establishing the animation label Coloroom Pictures. Its strategy is not to form a closed in-house team, but to build an “ecosystem” centered on Coloroom by investing in and holding stakes in over 20 animation studios. The pinnacle of this strategic layout is the aim to systematically develop Chinese classical mythology IPs and construct a “Chinese Mythology Universe” comparable to the Hollywood superhero universes (Beijing Dongcheng Official Release, 2025). Enlight Media’s chairman Wang Changtian explicitly stated that the company’s goal is to transform into an “IP creator and operator” akin to Disney (M. Yin et al., 2025), and the “Mythology Universe” is the core carrier of this grand strategy.

With the establishment of Beijing Enlight Animation Co., Ltd. on April 10, 2023, the company’s “Mythology Universe” strategy entered a phase of more centralized planning (Jiang, 2023). This development raises a problem for director-centered auteur theory: how should authorship be understood when capital allocation, production coordination, IP development, and brand positioning operate across films made by different creative teams? Traditional auteur approaches emphasize the director’s recurring artistic signature (Menne, 2008), whereas corporate authorship directs attention to the organization that connects creative work with institutional objectives (Christensen, 2012). This article examines Enlight Media’s role as a corporate author through that relationship. It asks whether shared features across its animation portfolio can be understood as expressions of corporate strategy, while recognizing that stylistic similarity alone cannot establish corporate causation or eliminate directors’ creative agency.

1.1 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the core question: How does Enlight Media, as a “corporate author,” systematically lead its adaptation practices of the “Mythology Universe” IP? Four sub-questions are derived from this:

- i. What kind of industrial layout and governance model does Enlight Media use to implement creative control?
- ii. What coherent creative styles are reflected in the texts of the “Mythology Universe” series?
- iii. What unified creative intent does Enlight Media attempt to convey?
- iv. How has it successfully shaped its brand image?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Classical Director-Author Theory

Research on film authorship has long been dominated by auteur theory, which emerged from the 1950s French *Cahiers du Cinéma* movement (Menne, 2008). In *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, Wollen (1972) discusses the auteur approach, which treats

recurring directorial styles and thematic patterns as important objects of criticism. The theory elevates the director to an authorial position comparable to that of a novelist or painter and encourages critics to examine visual styles, narrative motifs, and worldviews across a director's work. These recurring features constitute a recognizable signature used in artistic interpretation.

Auteur theory has also been criticized for idealizing individual agency and overlooking cinema's collaborative and industrial organization (Menne, 2008). Schatz (1996) emphasizes the studio system and its collective production practices, providing an alternative to explanations centered exclusively on directors. This critique is relevant to Enlight Media's animation portfolio, where investment, production coordination, and franchise planning connect films made by different creative teams.

2.2 Corporate Authorship

To address the shortcomings of the traditional auteur framework, scholars in film and media studies have progressively developed the theory of the "corporate author." This concept was most systematically articulated by Jerome Christensen in his book *America's Corporate Art: The Studio Authorship of Hollywood Motion Pictures (1929–2001)* (Christensen, 2012). Christensen argues that within highly industrialized production systems, the film studio or corporation, as the owner of capital, the legal holder of copyright, and the organizer of production processes, constitutes the ultimate source of a film's meaning (Christensen, 2012). Films, therefore, should not be seen merely as vehicles for a director's personal expression, but rather as manifestations of corporate strategy—"corporate speech" or "corporate acts" (Christensen, 2012). A company's brand image, market strategy, managerial culture, and even the business philosophy of its executives are systematically internalized into the coherent style, themes, and values of its cinematic output—thus transcending the influence of any individual director (Brower, 2024). This theory has been successfully applied to case studies of major Hollywood studios such as Warner Bros., MGM, Disney, and Pixar, demonstrating how corporate agency operates as the core force shaping a film's aesthetic and ideological identity (Christensen, 2012).

2.3 Research on Corporate Authorship in China

Research on film companies as corporate authors in China remains limited. The development of the film industry has been interrupted by war and political upheaval (Wei & Li, 2019). After the founding of the People's Republic of China, state ownership and policy control shaped film production and its institutional organization (Meyer-Clement, 2017). Questions of copyright ownership and enforcement further complicate analysis of corporate agency (Fu et al., 2023; Montgomery & Fitzgerald, 2006). These conditions make it necessary to examine authorship through both institutional histories and the legal and commercial organization of production.

Related scholarship addresses several dimensions of film-company authorship. Xu (2019) examines Yihua Film Company's enterprise operations and filmmaking; J. Zhang (2017) discusses Shaw Brothers films, cultural identity, and genre discourse; and Yang (2017) examines Dan Duyu and his Shanghai film company as a mediator of popular culture. These studies provide useful perspectives on organizational practice, creative style, and cultural positioning, although they do not directly analyze Enlight Media's contemporary animation portfolio.

These studies mostly concentrate on film companies from the Republic of China and post-1949 Hong Kong film companies. Research specifically addressing the corporate authorship identity of contemporary film companies in mainland China remains very limited.

2.4 Research Gap

Animated films, due to their inherently long production cycles, large creative teams, high capital requirements, and close integration with merchandising and franchise development, naturally exhibit a high degree of industrial organization and planning. This makes the animation industry an ideal field for testing and applying the corporate authorship framework (Heymann, 2009). Yet, while animation giants such as Disney are often cited as paradigmatic corporate authors, there remains a lack of systematic, operationalized applications of this theory to the analysis of emerging markets' cinematic universes. This study positions Enlight Media as a key case study to contribute new theoretical insight into this area.

At present, research concerning Enlight Media and its Mythological Universe primarily follows two separate trajectories.

First, financial and industrial analyses treat Enlight Media as a listed company, focusing on its profit models (Xiong, 2019), investment and merger strategies (Zhu et al., 2016), financial performance (Du, 2019), and operational practices in the animation sector (J. Zhang, 2020). However, these studies seldom delve into the internal structures of the films themselves or the concrete linkages between corporate strategy and textual production.

Film-textual scholarship examines mythological adaptation in *Ne Zha* (L. Liu, 2020), broader transformations of Nezha's screen image (Zhao & Zhou, 2021), narrative innovation (Sun & Xu, 2025), and posthumanist interpretation (Shao & He, 2025). Studies of *Jiang Ziya* address aesthetic value (Li & Li, 2021), narrative dilemmas (Huang & Tang, 2021), and genre hybridity (Feng, 2021). These approaches illuminate individual films but offer less explanation of the relationships among corporate strategy, production organization, textual features, and brand construction across Enlight Media's portfolio.

The article addresses this intersection through a theory-led analysis of public documents and films. Corporate authorship provides a framework for relating Enlight Media's organizational strategy to its creative portfolio and brand discourse. The aim is an interpretive account of those relationships, rather than a causal demonstration of how the company determines every creative decision.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Article Type and Case Selection

This article is a theory-led, documentary and textual case analysis of Enlight Media. It develops an interpretive application of corporate authorship using published scholarship, publicly available industry documents, media reports, and selected films. Case-study reasoning provides a way to relate organizational practices to their industrial context (R. K. Yin, 2018). The article does not report researcher-conducted

interviews, surveys, participant observation, or a systematically coded empirical dataset. Its conclusions are analytical interpretations of the cited materials, rather than verified accounts of confidential corporate decision-making.

Enlight Media is selected because its animation investments, producer-centered organization, and publicly stated universe-building ambition make corporate authorship particularly relevant to its portfolio. The principal mythological texts are *Ne Zha* (Jiaozi, 2019), *Ne Zha 2* (Jiaozi, 2025), and *Jiang Ziya* (Cheng & Li, 2020). *Big Fish & Begonia* (Liang & Zhang, 2016) and *Deep Sea* (Tian, 2023) provide comparisons within the wider Coloroom-associated portfolio; they are not treated as proof of a shared narrative universe. *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* (Tian, 2015) and *Da Hu Fa* (Busifan, 2017) provide additional industrial context.

3.2 Source Materials and Interpretive Approach

The analysis draws on three types of materials already cited in the article. Corporate and journalistic sources primarily concern developments between 2016 and 2025; earlier scholarship supplies the theoretical and historical context. Materials are used for their relevance to the four analytical dimensions, rather than as an exhaustive or statistically representative sample.

3.2.1 Corporate and Industry Documents:

Enlight Media's annual report and bond prospectus, and official website support discussion of investment, organizational structure, and stated strategic priorities. Executive statements are taken from published interviews and reports, not from interviews conducted by the authors. Such statements are treated as public representations of corporate intent, with due attention to their promotional purposes.

3.2.2 Media and Promotional Texts:

News coverage, industry reports, and promotional discourse provide accounts of production, marketing, and reception. Where reports reproduce the same interview, they are treated as one account rather than independent corroboration. Media descriptions of public reaction are used as reported commentary, not as measured audience evidence.

3.2.3 Film Texts:

The films support comparative readings of narrative structure, visual design, recurring motifs, and thematic tensions. The three mythological films form the core discussion, while the wider portfolio helps assess both stylistic continuities and differences. Table 1 summarizes the comparative features; it is an interpretive synthesis, not a coding matrix or a measure of corporate influence.

3.3 Analytical Framework

Christensen's corporate authorship framework is used as an interpretive lens organized around four dimensions. These guide the discussion in Section 4:

- i. Creative Control: the power mechanisms and management system established by the company to realize its intentions.
- ii. Stylistic Continuity: the recognizable aesthetic and narrative features that repeatedly appear across different works.
- iii. Creative Intent: the top-down creative blueprint and value orientation of the company.
- iv. Brand Image: the stable public perception and identity symbol established by the company through its products.

The analysis relates the cited organizational accounts to textual features and brand discourse under each dimension. Agreements among sources strengthen an interpretation, while differences and the controversy surrounding *Jiang Ziya* are considered as limits to the claim of stylistic and managerial unity. This comparison does not establish causation, validate inaccessible internal decisions, or substitute for primary empirical research.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Copyright Owner and Creative Director – Enlight Media’s Power Base

This section interprets Enlight Media’s corporate authorship through its capital investments, production organization, and IP strategy. Publicly available materials indicate how the company seeks to coordinate its animation portfolio, although they do not provide complete access to project-level decision-making.

4.1.1 “Federation” and “Centralization”: From Investment to Control in the Creative Matrix

Enlight Media’s dominance stems from the animation industry ecosystem it has built through its label Coloroom Pictures. Enlight Media Co., Ltd. (n.d.) states on its official website that, since its establishment in 2015, Coloroom has adopted a “**federal**” investment layout, investing in over 20 potential animation companies through equity stakes rather than full ownership. For example, it invested in Kokodo Animation (producer of the *Ne Zha* films (Jiaozi, 2019, 2025)) and China Hedo (producer of *Jiang Ziya* (Cheng & Li, 2020)). This model initially demonstrated efficiency and flexibility: on one hand, it preserved the independence and vitality of creative teams; on the other hand, it deeply bound together China’s top animation production capacity through capital ties, laying a foundation of talent and projects for the “Mythology Universe.”

The controlling power of capital is not manifested only in equity stakes. Take Enlight’s collaboration with Jiaozi, the director of the *Ne Zha* films (Jiaozi, 2019, 2025), as an example: although Enlight only held a 30% stake in the parent company of Kokodo Animation, its initial investment came with a strict earn-out agreement that required the box office to reach 800 million RMB; otherwise, the creative team would have to relinquish the remaining 30% of their shares without compensation (J. Wang, 2025). This reported arrangement suggests that financial risk can constrain creative production and connect a project with investors’ objectives (J. Wang, 2025). It does not establish how every creative decision was made or how much autonomy the director retained.

When the enormous success of *Ne Zha* (Jiaozi, 2019) elevated the construction of the “Mythology Universe” to a core corporate strategy, the limitations of the “federal

system” became apparent: a loose alliance composed of independent studios with diverse styles could not guarantee a high level of unity and coherence in worldview, narrative, and style for a grand universe; at the same time, coordinating a large and dispersed production network faces enormous management challenges (Y. Liu, 2025). The evolution of this model reflects a responsive corporate strategy: the initial goal was to enter the market and recruit talent, for which a flexible “federal system” provided the best path; however, when the strategic goal upgraded to building a coherent IP universe, the original structure was no longer suitable, as it introduced risks of narrative inconsistency and fragmented IP management. Earlier reporting on Yi Qiao’s departure also illustrates the importance of leadership continuity in Coloroom’s investment network (Zheng, 2020).

To address this challenge, Enlight Media took decisive strategic action. In April 2023, Beijing Enlight Animation Co., Ltd. was officially established, positioned as the “chief designer” and “management center” of the “Mythology Universe” (Securities Times Online, 2023). This move marks Enlight Media’s transition in control mode from a loose “federation” to a highly “centralized” strategy. Enlight Animation is responsible for top-level planning and governance of the grand IP, unifying the worldview setting, and acting as the command center for large-scale production to ensure industrial-level quality. At the same time, as a “directly-affiliated force” fully under Enlight’s control, it aims to cultivate internal core creative talent, reducing long-term reliance on external talents. This strategic evolution clearly indicates that a “corporate author” is not a static entity, but an adaptive subject capable of dynamically adjusting its control structure in response to the needs of its creative objectives.

4.1.2 “Producer-Centric System”: Implementation and Execution of Corporate Will

If the capital layout is the macro framework, then the “producer-centric system” is the core mechanism for implementing corporate will at the micro project level. In Enlight Media’s system, producers are direct agents of the “corporate author” will, serving as the key nexus connecting corporate strategy and artistic creation (China Internet Information Center, 2024). The core producing team, represented by Coloroom Pictures’ CEOs Yi Qiao and Wang Jing, plays a leading role in the entire process from IP selection, script development, production management to marketing and distribution.

The producer-centered model provides a framework within which directors and production teams negotiate creative ambitions, budgets, and schedules. Reports describe a five-year development process and repeated script revisions for *Ne Zha*, followed by coordination among approximately 140 animation companies for *Ne Zha 2* (Y. Liu, 2025; J. Wang & Li, 2025). These accounts illustrate the organizational demands of large-scale animation. They suggest that producers connect project-level work with corporate objectives, but do not establish that directors lack creative autonomy or that every artistic decision is dictated by investors.

4.1.3 IP Ownership: The Legal and Commercial Foundation of Universe Development

IP rights connect creative production with franchise development and commercial returns. The published legal analysis of *Ne Zha 2* discusses the importance of production investment and rights allocation (F. Wang & He, 2025). For corporate authorship, the relevant issue is how ownership, licensing, and contractual arrangements enable coordination across projects. These arrangements should not be inferred solely from

Enlight Media's role as an investor or distributor; the public sources cited here do not establish its exclusive ownership of every work in the portfolio.

Coordinated rights arrangements can facilitate narrative planning and cross-film promotion. The post-credits promotion of *Jiang Ziya* at the end of *Ne Zha* is one example of how separate films can be linked through a common marketing strategy (Z. Zhang, 2020). Such a connection supports an interpretation of corporate coordination, while remaining distinct from evidence of a fully unified storyworld or exclusive ownership of both films.

Rights ownership and licensing also enable creative works to become assets for longer-term development through merchandise, games, and other uses. Enlight Media's publicly stated ambition to become an IP creator and operator links its film business with a broader portfolio strategy (K. Wang et al., 2025; M. Yin et al., 2025). This provides a basis for interpreting the company as a coordinator of creative and commercial activity, subject to the specific rights and partnerships governing each project.

4.2 Coherent Creative Style – The Aesthetic Imprint of Enlight's "Mythology Universe"

Enlight Media's animation portfolio shows recurring cultural references and approaches to adaptation alongside differences among its creative teams. These similarities can be interpreted in relation to corporate positioning, but they do not by themselves demonstrate that the company determines a single uniform style.

4.2.1 Narrative Paradigm: Chinese Story, Global Expression

Enlight's "Mythology Universe" follows a narrative paradigm of "Western structure, Chinese flesh." This is not a simple creative choice, but a precisely calculated commercial strategy aimed at maximizing global appeal and local resonance. It is an effective means of "de-risking" a high-risk cultural product.

"Western structure" refers to the widespread use of Hollywood's classic three-act structure and the mythic "hero's journey" model, which have high global market acceptance (Campbell, 2022). Take the *Ne Zha* films (Jiaozi, 2019, 2025) as an example: their developmental trajectories follow the classic narrative arc of "Departure – Initiation – Return," ensuring the story's commercial viability and watchability, and clearing structural obstacles for its global dissemination (Y. Lu & Tuo, 2025). Adopting this "safe" narrative structure, which has been repeatedly validated by the market, can minimize the commercial risk of narrative failure, thereby giving the corporate author the leeway to take culturally distinctive "adventures" in the core of the story.

Meanwhile, the "Chinese flesh" filling this universal structure is the key to igniting the domestic market. Enlight Media systematically conducts modern thematic reinterpretation of mythological texts: whether it is the *Ne Zha* series' "My fate is determined by me, not by Heaven," or the choice in *Jiang Ziya* (Cheng & Li, 2020) of "saving one person or saving all," these are underpinned by the core theme of rebelling against preordained "fate" and affirming individual value, intended to establish a deep emotional connection with contemporary young audiences (Yuan & Deng, 2024). At the same time, the series de-divinizes and re-sculpts mythological figures, endowing them

with complex humanity and mortal emotional dilemmas, such as the lonely rebellion in *Ne Zha* (Jiaozi, 2019) and the midlife confusion in *Jiang Ziya* (Cheng & Li, 2020), which greatly enhances audience empathy.

4.2.2 Visual Aesthetics: “Oriental Guofeng”

The most intuitive authorial imprint of the “Mythology Universe” is manifested in its consistent “New Guofeng” (new national style) visual aesthetic. The core strategy is to systematically draw visual elements from traditional Chinese culture and apply cutting-edge CGI techniques to modernize and spectacularize them through industrial “translation” (K. Wang et al., 2025). The Taoist symbols in the *Ne Zha* films (Jiaozi, 2019, 2025), the art style in *Jiang Ziya* (Cheng & Li, 2020) that references bronze ware and grotto statues, and *Big Fish & Begonia*’s inspiration from the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* and Fujian earth buildings together form the cultural basis of the “Coloroom style.”

4.2.3 Auditory System: Synergy of Guofeng Score and Pop Music

The auditory system of the “Mythology Universe” also constructs a coherent brand sound strategy. In terms of film score, its style mirrors its narrative paradigm: using majestic orchestral music as the foundation to align with the auditory logic of commercial blockbusters, while skillfully integrating numerous Chinese traditional instruments like suona, guqin, dizi, and xiao to strengthen the film’s Oriental atmosphere (Y. Liu, 2025).

Enlight Media’s films also use popular music to extend their promotional reach. The theme song “Big Fish” for *Big Fish & Begonia*, performed by Zhou Shen, illustrates how a song can connect a film with wider music audiences. This practice links artistic presentation with marketing and contributes to a recognizable brand presence beyond the cinema.

Table 1 compares four films across directors, visual aesthetics, narrative models, thematic concerns, and sound. It places the two mythological works alongside *Big Fish & Begonia* and *Deep Sea* to examine recurring features within the wider portfolio, rather than to assert that all four belong to one narrative universe.

Table 1: Analysis of Stylistic Continuity in Key Animation IPs of Enlight Media

Feature	<i>Big Fish & Begonia</i> (2016)	<i>Ne Zha</i> (2019)	<i>Jiang Ziya</i> (2020)	<i>Deep Sea</i> (2023)
Directors	Liang Xuan & Zhang Chun	Jiaozi (Yang Yu)	Cheng Teng & Li Wei	Tian Xiaopeng
Core Visual Aesthetic	2D Chinese-style; Fujian tulou architecture; imagery from <i>Classic of Mountains and Seas</i>	3D Guofeng style; Sichuan cultural elements; Taoist symbol (Taiji diagram)	Stark, desaturated 3D Guofeng style; drawing on bronze ware and grotto carvings	Proprietary “particle ink” technology blending 3D animation with traditional ink-painting aesthetic
Narrative Model	Female hero’s journey; sacrifice for love; coming-	“Hero’s journey”; narrative of an isolated outcast;	Post-hero’s journey; disillusioned	Psychological journey; dream-like narrative logic;

Feature	<i>Big Fish & Begonia</i> (2016)	<i>Ne Zha</i> (2019)	<i>Jiang Ziya</i> (2020)	<i>Deep Sea</i> (2023)
	of-age motif	defying destiny	hero; moral ambiguity	confronting inner trauma
Central Theme Inquiry	“What is the price of repaying a debt?”	“Can one rebel against a predestined fate?” (“My fate is determined by me, not by Heaven”)	“Is it worth defying the ‘greater good’ to save an innocent person?”	“How to find a glimmer of light in overwhelming darkness?”
Key Auditory Elements	Traditional instruments (guzheng, erhu, bamboo flute, gongs, drums, suona) creating a Guofeng baseline; pop singer Zhou Shen performing the Guofeng theme song “Big Fish.”	Suona, xiao, paiban, cymbals, and nao as primary instruments; incorporating Dong ethnic grand songs and Hoomai (Mongolian throat singing)	Guzheng, xiao, and banhu; bianzhong and bronze qing as primary instruments	Immersive electronic-style score emphasizing ambient sound to reflect psychological states; incorporating traditional instruments like guzheng/pipa and opera gongs and drums

Table 1 shows recurring Chinese cultural imagery and concerns with individual agency, but also contrasts 2D and 3D design, mythological and psychological narratives, and different sound strategies. The comparison supports a qualified interpretation of corporate continuity that allows creative variation. The table synthesizes the film readings (Cheng & Li, 2020; Jiaozi, 2019; Liang & Zhang, 2016; Tian, 2023) and related discussion of production and aesthetics (Gong, 2023; Huang & Tang, 2021; Li & Li, 2021).

4.3 Unified Creative Intent and Philosophy

Surpassing the personal visions of its various directors, Enlight Media leads the entire development process of the “Mythology Universe” IP with a coherent, top-down corporate philosophy. This creative philosophy is a multidimensional composite that encompasses commercial strategy, approaches to cultural adaptation, commitments to industrial upgrading, and the grand ambition to build a Chinese “**superhero**” system.

4.3.1 Market Positioning: Cultivating the “All-Ages” and “Adult-Oriented” Blue Ocean Markets

Enlight Media’s creative intent is first reflected in its precise market positioning strategy: consciously avoiding the “red ocean” of the preschool market and opening up the relatively under-supplied “all-ages” and “adult-oriented” blue ocean of animated films (J. Lu, 2021). This strategic choice has not only brought enormous commercial success, but more importantly, it has shaped Enlight’s brand image as a pioneer and leader. From *Da Hu Fa* (Busifan, 2017) (with its politically allegorical tone) to the *Ne Zha* films (Jiaozi, 2019, 2025) that sparked nationwide discussion, and to *Jiang Ziya* (Cheng & Li, 2020), which explores midlife crisis, Enlight Media has continually demonstrated that

the animated medium is fully capable of carrying profound, complex themes and engaging in intellectual communication with adult audiences (Kuang, 2019).

4.3.2 Creative Intent: Building China's "Superhero" System

Enlight Media's most grand creative intent is encapsulated in the concept of the "Chinese Mythology Universe" itself. It signifies a shift in the company's strategic focus from producing one-off individual films to systematically constructing a vast IP ecosystem. The company's top decision-maker, Wang Changtian, explicitly proposed the plan to, over the next 20 to 30 years, use more than 50 animated films to fully present the "Chinese Mythology Universe," with the ultimate goal of creating an Eastern mythological pantheon of heroes that can rival Marvel and DC (Ding & Shu, 2025).

From a deep industrial logic perspective, building the "Mythology Universe" is essentially a financial strategy aimed at transforming a high-risk, uncertain "blockbuster-driven" industry into a predictable, sustainable long-term asset. The box office volatility of a single film is enormous, whereas a mature cinematic universe can effectively hedge this risk (He, 2025). The overall brand value of the universe transcends any individual film: even if one film underperforms, it still contributes to the value of the entire IP asset. More importantly, it expands the company's profit model from a single source of box office revenue to more diverse and stable channels such as merchandise and licensing, which is exactly the "Disney model" pursued by Wang Changtian (M. Yin et al., 2025). Thus, the "Mythology Universe" is both an artistic project that carries national cultural confidence, and a profit project aimed at building long-term commercial barriers.

4.3.3 Creative Philosophy: Long-Termism and Quality-First Strategy under "Content Is King"

Enlight Media's creative intent is rooted in its corporate top philosophy of "content is king" and "long-termism" (Enlight Media, 2021). This philosophy puts the creation of high-quality content above all commercial considerations, serving as ballast to weather the cyclical fluctuations of the industry (Enlight Media Co., Ltd., 2016). For animated films with long production cycles and massive upfront investment, "long-termism" is particularly crucial. Enlightenment Media's continuous investment of over 2.5 billion RMB in the animation field over more than a decade has provided creators with a stable creative environment, allowing them to craft masterpieces in a "slow and steady approach" (Zheng, 2020). Chairman Wang Changtian repeatedly emphasized "respecting the laws of creation" (Y. Liu, 2025) rather than being blinded by short-term gains; it is this support from top-level strategy that has enabled phenomenon-level works like the *Ne Zha* films (Jiaozi, 2019, 2025) to come into being.

4.3.4 Core Concept: Cultural Inheritance and Innovation

Enlight Media, on one hand, faithfully inherits the rich heritage of Chinese mythological legends, and on the other hand, reinterprets them with modern sensibilities, making them resonate with contemporary social values and the psychological makeup of the audience, thereby ensuring that these ancient stories have real significance and communicative effectiveness in the context of globalization.

This strategy is vividly reflected in the core texts of the “Mythology Universe.” The core theme of *Ne Zha* (Jiaozi, 2019), “My fate is determined by me, not by Heaven,” is a modernization of the traditional rebellious story, redefining it as an individual’s struggle against prejudice, labeling, and predestined fate (Jiaozi, 2019). This narrative accurately addresses the common anxiety of contemporary youth caught between societal expectations and self-realization, and the production team’s exploration of character psychology endows the ancient mythological figure with the complexity of a modern personality. Furthermore, this reinterpretation extends to the reconstruction of classic scenes. For example, in *Ne Zha 2* (Jiaozi, 2025), the original harrowing “cutting flesh to remove bone” scene from the classic is innovatively reinterpreted as a painful but necessary “nirvana rebirth,” serving as a visual metaphor for the protagonist’s profound self-transformation (A Rui, 2025). Wang Changtian views this as a cultural responsibility, believing that film as a cultural product should possess the functions of “moving people, inspiring people, making people think, and promoting social change” (M. Yin et al., 2025).

4.3.5 Industrial Development Philosophy: The Balance Rule among Art, Technology, and Commerce

Enlight Media’s creative intent is an industrial development rule that seeks a sophisticated balance among art, technology, and commerce. The three support each other, forming a sustainable closed loop: commercial success feeds back into artistic exploration, with the box-office miracle of *Ne Zha* (Jiaozi, 2019) supporting technologically risky innovation projects like *Deep Sea* (Tian, 2023); technological innovation drives artistic expression, using proprietary technologies like “particle ink” to forge a globally recognizable “Guofeng” aesthetic paradigm; ultimately, art and technology together build long-term commercial barriers, driving the coordinated development of downstream industries such as merchandise, games, and live entertainment, achieving the transformation from a “film company” to an “IP creator and operator” (M. Yin et al., 2025).

4.4 Distinctive Brand Image – Enlight Animation as a Cultural Symbol

Guided by the unified creative intent, Enlight Media has successfully transformed its corporate will into a clear and powerful brand image in the public’s mind. Its animation label, “Coloroom Pictures,” has become not just a company brand, but a synonym for high-quality, adult-oriented domestic animation with distinctly Eastern aesthetic characteristics, profoundly influencing the market landscape and audience perception.

4.4.1 “Coloroom Production”: From Company Label to Quality Tag

The name “Coloroom” has evolved from a production label into a convincing quality tag. The cornerstone of this brand image is the cultural phenomenon created by its flagship work. *Ne Zha* (Jiaozi, 2019)’s box office of over 5 billion RMB completely shattered the stereotype that domestic animation is for young children, sparking nationwide cultural discussions (M. Yin et al., 2025). Its sequel, *Ne Zha 2* (Jiaozi, 2025), which followed, had exceeded 15 billion RMB in worldwide box-office receipts by the April 2025 report, further consolidating its market leadership (M. Yin et al., 2025).

On a deeper level, the brand is endowed with the cultural connotation of being the “conscience of Guoman (Chinese animation).” This is attributed to its presentation of high-level industrial techniques, the modernization of Eastern aesthetics, and its creative pursuit of telling Chinese stories imbued with modern ideas (Teng, 2019). Take *Deep Sea* (Tian, 2023) as an example: to realize the concept of “turning Chinese ink painting into 3D animation,” the film spent several years developing the new “particle ink” technology (Gong, 2023). This massive, high-risk technological development is essentially a corporate-level strategic action; its purpose is not only to create a film, but to forge a proprietary visual style with technical barriers that competitors find hard to replicate, thereby injecting a unique aesthetic gene into the “Coloroom” brand (Gong, 2023). Any animation company can adapt Chinese myths — that is low-barrier competition; but developing a proprietary, stunning visual technology builds an extremely high competitive barrier. This unique visual aesthetic becomes the core part of the brand’s identity, giving it a differentiated advantage in the global animation market.

4.4.2 Marketing and Management of the Brand

Enlight Media’s brand management goes beyond mere product promotion; its core lies in proactively constructing and popularizing the grand concept of the “Mythology Universe,” guiding audience consumption behavior toward long-term engagement with the entire IP ecosystem.

4.4.2.1 Universe Interconnection and Discursive Resonance: Constructing the Marketing Narrative

In marketing practice, Enlight Media cleverly combines “meta-narrative within” (internal connections within the universe) with “meta-narrative without” (real-world cultural context). Undoubtedly, the most successful “meta-narrative within” is the post-credits teaser for *Jiang Ziya* (Cheng & Li, 2020) at the end of *Ne Zha* (Jiaozi, 2019), a technique borrowed from Hollywood’s mature industrial system that successfully transforms a standalone viewing experience into an entry point into a broader world, dramatically announcing the ambition to construct the “Fengshen Universe” (Z. Zhang, 2020).

At the same time, in constructing the “meta-narrative without,” Enlight’s marketing discourse consistently ties its works to the era’s tide of “the rise of Chinese animation” (Li, 2021). Through this strategy, watching a Coloroom animated film is endowed with significance beyond entertainment consumption, becoming a quasi-patriotic act of witnessing, participating in, and even promoting the revival of national culture. As a result, the brand draws enormous energy from external cultural trends, and its own success in turn reinforces this cultural sentiment, forming a strong positive feedback loop between the corporate brand and national identity.

4.4.2.2 IP Derivative Ecosystem: Brand Ubiquity

The core initiative of Enlight Media’s brand strategy is the transformation from a “content provider” to an “IP creator and operator” (Wu, 2024). The tremendous success of merchandise based on the *Ne Zha* films (Jiaozi, 2019, 2025) not only generated astounding non-box-office revenue (with reports that related merchandise for the

sequel sold over 1 billion RMB in the first month alone), but more importantly, it extended the brand's influence from the ephemeral viewing experience into all aspects of consumers' daily lives (Wan & Yan, 2025). An action figure, a T-shirt — each becomes a lasting and silent advertisement for the brand, materializing the virtual movie world into tangible everyday objects. This strategy turns audiences from passive consumers into active collectors and propagators of the brand culture, achieving brand ubiquity and deepening emotional connections with consumers. This is exactly the core path of benchmarking against the “Disney model” to build a sustainable film ecosystem (Xiao, 2025).

4.4.3 Risks and Maintenance of Brand Image: Moving Forward Amid Expectations and Controversy

The lofty reputation that Enlight Media built through the “Mythology Universe” has greatly raised the public's expectations threshold, subjecting its subsequent works to more rigorous scrutiny. When *Jiang Ziya* (Cheng & Li, 2020) was released, its narrative pacing and emotional tone were completely different from *Ne Zha* (Jiaozi, 2019), which directly led to severe polarization of word-of-mouth. Despite its impressive box office, criticisms such as “dull story,” “heavy-handed preaching,” and “insufficient connection with *Ne Zha* (Jiaozi, 2019)” circulated incessantly online (Hu, 2020).

More challengingly, because the *Ne Zha* films (Jiaozi, 2019, 2025) and *Jiang Ziya* (Cheng & Li, 2020) lack a close narrative connection and have inconsistencies in some key settings, some critics argue that the so-called “universe” is more of a marketing “gimmick” rather than a rigorously planned unified worldview (Hu, 2020). This criticism directly targets the effectiveness of Enlight Media's creative control as a “corporate author.” It reveals the inherent tension of its “federation” model: integrating multiple independent studios can stimulate vitality, but it inherently carries the risk of failing to achieve absolute unity. Differences in the creative styles of different studios can cause the final product to deviate from the “corporate author's” top-level design. Therefore, the public controversy over *Jiang Ziya* (Cheng & Li, 2020) can be viewed as a stress test of Enlight Media's internal governance ability as a “corporate author,” examining whether it can achieve a higher degree of worldview consistency and stylistic coherence while maintaining creative diversity.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Research Summary: Enlight Media as a “Corporate Author”

This documentary and textual analysis suggests that Enlight Media can be usefully interpreted as a corporate author through its animation labels and investment network. Capital allocation, producer coordination, and IP strategy provide mechanisms for organizational influence. Recurring cultural imagery, adaptation motifs, and brand discourse connect individual works, while their stylistic differences show that corporate continuity coexists with directors' and studios' creative contributions. The framework therefore explains relationships between corporate strategy and creative output without establishing that a single corporate will fully determines every film.

5.2 Model Evaluation: Achievements and Dilemmas of the “Corporate Author” Model

The “corporate author” model has been the key driving force behind the great success of China’s animation industrialization, but it is not without inherent tensions and drawbacks.

Achievements: This model has greatly propelled the industrialization of China’s animation industry, raising production standards and the market ceiling; it has successfully opened up and dominated the “all-ages” animated film market, creating new growth space for the industry; and it has created domestically produced animation IPs with broad influence, demonstrating the global potential of Chinese cultural products (Y. Liu, 2025).

Dilemmas and Risks: Under the strong corporate will, the director’s individual authorship is inevitably constrained, and artistic choices must ultimately serve the overall blueprint of the “universe”; the strong “corporate author” style may lead products toward formulaic patterns, suppressing genuine artistic innovation in the long run and causing a risk of homogenization; a strong brand image creates a very high bar of expectation, forming a “brand burden,” making any stylistic deviation a high-risk experiment, and audiences may “punish” works that do not fully conform to the established brand image.

Further analysis reveals a fundamental paradox in Enlight Media’s model: in order to compete with Hollywood, China’s animation industry must take the industrialized path, but this inadvertently replicates the core contradiction of Hollywood’s “DreamWorks” system. While borrowing industrialized methods such as Hollywood’s producer system and universe-building and achieving tremendous success, it also introduces the power tension between “producers (representing enterprises)” and “directors (representing individual artists)” inherent in that system. How to achieve a long-term balance between the commercial demands of industrialized production and the protection of the diversity of artistic innovation will be the fundamental challenge facing China’s animation industry in the future.

5.3 Limitations and Future Outlook

The analysis is limited to published documents, reported executive statements, and interpretive film readings. It does not include researcher-conducted interviews, access to confidential project decisions, systematic content coding, or audience research. Public corporate statements may serve promotional purposes, and media reports may repeat the same account. Accordingly, the proposed connections among corporate strategy, creative practice, and brand identity should be understood as interpretive propositions requiring further empirical investigation.

Future research can proceed along three paths: comparative studies that compare Enlight Media with domestic and foreign animation companies such as Pearl Studio, to discern the forms of the “corporate author” model in different contexts; longitudinal studies that, as more works are released in the “Mythology Universe,” continuously observe the evolution of its “corporate authorial” voice; and audience studies that

empirically investigate how audiences perceive and interpret the “corporate author,” in order to fully understand the cultural impact of this model.

In conclusion, Enlight Media’s model is both a valuable exemplar of the Chinese film industry’s systematic development of domestic cultural IP, and a warning. It suggests to the industry that while embracing industrialization, it must be wary of the risk of singularizing creativity, and actively explore ways to preserve space for more diverse and personally distinctive artistic expression.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The article draws on publicly available documents and released films and reports no research involving recruited human participants. The main author’s proposal was reviewed by the Faculty of Film, Theatre & Animation (UiTM) Postgraduate Research Committee. Participant consent procedures are not applicable to the documentary and textual analysis presented here.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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