

The Relationship Between Color Language and Animated Film

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Abstract. The strategic use of color has significantly contributed to animated film creators, reflected in previous famous films such as *Lotus Lantern* and *Monkey King: Hero is Back*. The application of various colors expressed in animated films is in the areas of story narration, plot symbolizing, and affection transmission. By analyzing the popular Chinese animated film *Nezha 2*, this study identifies how color language enhances the film's impact through three main functions, in particular, narrative, symbolic, and affective. The narrative function in *Nezha 2* is reflected in describing the film backgrounds and Jade Void Palace. The symbolizing function is manifested in main scenes like Shenzhendao's forests, the soil fat slope, Chentang Pass and Shijiniangniang's place. The affection transmission function is reflected in conveying the different traits like Aoguang and Nezha. This paper suggests that animated filmmakers can enhance storytelling, deepen character representation, and foster emotional resonance by employing diverse color palettes strategically.

Keywords: Animated films, story narration, plot, affective transmission, *Nezha 2*

1. Introduction

Color is an element for expression of materials in real life, even the intuition of the material reality. It encompasses a wide range of tones, each carrying distinct connotations. Warm-tone colors, including red, yellow, orange, etc. are expressions of happiness and jubilation while dark-tone colors, like grey, black or brown, are manifestations of devil and wick.

Thus, colors are appropriately used by animated film creators in narration of their subjective feelings, by injection of these colors into film elements like characters or surroundings. Color allows the screen images to have more colorful and vivid language expression to convey different emotions. While different color application in animated films come from daily life, it is a valuable and irreplaceable language. Color language is a narration of mental imagination when people perceive colors under certain external environment and based on their own experience, they embed different colors into various works such as animated films to achieve comprehension cognition and explanation of external elements, in order to better express the topic and theme of the animated films [1].

Early animated films often relied on monochromatic palettes such as black and white. However, with the development of 3D animation technology, modern animated films incorporate increasingly complex and vibrant color schemes. A large number of colors used in the animated films manifests

that color plays an important role of films creation. Film creators use colors to highlight certain film plot, to stand out cultural elements, or to express strong emotions. While previous studies have explored various functions of color, including ideographic, aesthetic, and emotional rendering, few have delved deeply into a specific functional dimension [2]. Therefore, this study focuses on ideographic functions of color language by studying a famous Chinese animated film: *Nezha 2*.

The Chinese animated film, *Nezha2*, which was released on February 29th, 2025, has achieved great success both in China and in the world. The success of *Nezha 2* lies in 1) the appealing plot, 2) the interesting dialogues, 3) the strong color application. Successful integration of local cultural elements into the movies contributes to the good performance of *Nezha 2*. By integrating Sanxingdui Bronze motifs into dragon images, blue and cyan are mostly used in describing Aoguang and Aobing. Moreover, by reshaping the Chinese mythological elements to form a new good story, the animated film team has carried out analysis of multilingual effects on audience sentiment from different cultural backgrounds and has captured the core and common emotion of the general audience. With a current box office total of \$2.1 billion and continuing growth, the influence of *Nezha 2* has expanded well beyond China's borders [3].

Given this background, this study investigates the ideographic functions of color language to explore how these functions influence the creation of animated films. The ideographic functions of color language include narrative functions, symbolic functions and affective transmission function. By studying the popular Chinese animated film: *Nezha 2*, the research explores the application and expression of color language in the narrative function, symbolic function and emotional transmission function of animated films.

This research summarizes different functions of color language as ideographic functions and explores how these functions act in the process of animated film production. It provides effective suggestion on animation film makers to produce animation more distinctive by fully employing color language.

2. Overview of *Nezha 2*

Nezha 2 is the second edition of *Nezha: Birth of the demon child Nezha*, whose plot is the continuation of the previous film. When *Nezha 1* was released in 2019, the Chinese 3D computer animation fantasy film was the trial of the adaption of the traditional adventure. The central character, Nezha—originally born from the Demon Orb—is portrayed as a rebellious and unyielding figure, defying societal expectations and resisting predetermined fate. His closest companion, Aobing, born as the Spirit Pearl, understands him and always stands at his side. In the second edition, Taiyi Zhenren planned to rebuild the body of the two by seven-color lotus but Aobing's body was destroyed during a tangled warfare. In order to save Aobing, Nezha go to ask Wuliang Xianweng for help but unexpectedly, he and Aobing are made use of by Xianweng to use them for power improvement. Amid the ensuing battles and challenges, the two protagonists undergo significant personal growth. Ultimately, they come to a profound realization: that the world must be explored independently, through their own efforts and understanding [4].

3. Analysis based on the function of color language

Swarnakar points out in his research that color language is one of the most significant elements under many conditions, like painting, photography and film and even 3D rendering films. The effective employment of color language can influence people's opinions, mood, behaviors and

reactions towards a certain thing, thus application of color language in animated films can contribute to different actions, emotions and opinions of people towards this film [5].

The narrative function in animation films is a special function for human mental imagination. It refers to the ability of human beings to perceive colors under the external environment, and to judge based on their own experience in order to achieve a precise understanding of the things [2].

Ren defined symbolic functions as different colors having different meanings. The specific symbol for blue is depression and warm colors like red and yellow are exciting and nerve. Animation films are successful trial and use of warm and cold colors to symbolize characters in the aspect of their psychology and to put forward the film plot so that our mood and emotions can be affected [6].

Shen and Dong emphasize the emotional transmission function of color. Their research asserts that the aesthetic and emotional reactions of viewers vary according to the color palette employed in a film [7]. Color can express different feelings so under the guidance of color language, and human body will behave in different emotional fluctuations either consciously or unconsciously. Consequently, color language used in animated films symbolizes different backgrounds of this film, including culture, society, history, individual characters or the group characters [7].

4. Narrative function in animated films

The application of color language serves as a narration of nationality or culture of the characters in animated films. Typical examples are Chinese animated films *Nezha 1* and *Lotus Lantern*, as in these films, bright colors like red and brilliant colors like blue and yellow are used to narrate Chinese traditional culture. Bright colors used in Chinese animated films are narration of the prosperity and celebration of festivals so that audience can have feeling of excitement and a sense of vigor. In addition, Jing also argues that bright colors can be a representation of impulsion and anger. In *Monkey King: Hero is Back*, since the character is defined as ruthless, red is used in demonstrating his cloak by extending the cloak to the whole scene. Jing's research provides a compelling illustration of how color is utilized in Chinese animated films to support character development and thematic exposition. However, her analysis predominantly focuses on bright colors, with limited discussion of cooler tones [8].

Wang adds to the discourse by analyzing the narrative function of color in a broader cinematic context. Her study takes *Titanic* as an example to analyze red color. On the one hand, Red color symbolizes that Rose and Jack fell in love and they sought for freedom; on the other hand, red can also mean the blood spurting, indicating wars or fights. In addition, she also discusses the symbolic use of white in Japanese films, where it frequently denotes snow, thereby conveying themes of purity, tranquility, and elegance. Wang's study is a good expression of different colors including bright and cold ones; Nevertheless, the examples of the films are lack of animated films [9].

In *Nezha 2*, color is employed from the very beginning to establish a mythological tone. From the start of the movie, the chaotic nebulae is a replication of the conception that ink is split with five colors, by blending black and white. This narration of the story is more emphasized by using different colors and the idea is originated from Song Dynasty ink paintings, for film creators to create an atmosphere of restrain and profoundness. In addition, the main basic colors used in illustrating *Jade Void Palace* are white and blue. This is because the narrative base of *Jade Void Palace* is like a thin mist so that combining white and blue brings audience a sense of alienation and creates a place like fairyland. Moreover, weaving the two colors on surroundings of the Palace reflects the indifference of the place, indicating audience that people in this place is more inhumane.

4.1. Symbolic function in animated films

Ren pointed out in his study that color has aesthetic value in films and TV animations. The aesthetic value is mainly reflected in symbolizing function. The symbols of yellow are sun, harvest and hope, giving the sense of fullness, comfort and wealth. Heavy colors, such as black, represent night and shadow, giving people a sense of solemn, gloom, fear and depression. In TV animation, sad and miserable is symbolized by color grey while vivid live as well as vitality are represented by green [6]. Ren's research fully analyzes symbols that different colors represent, either in films or TV animation. Nonetheless, he does not focus specifically on animated films, nor does he provide detailed examples linking specific colors to particular elements or scenes.

In contrast, Wang offers a more precise explanation of the symbolic function of colors by referring to various objects. From the perspective of costume design, black is often used for emperor robes, symbolizing solemnity and authority, while green is associated with chivalrous figures, symbolizing ambition. From the environmental perspective, color also conveys emotion: wedding scenes often use red as the dominant tone to symbolize joy, while yellow is linked to Chinese history and culture, prompting reflection on tradition and evolution [9]. Although Wang connects color to specific items like costumes and environments, she does not provide concrete examples from animated films, which this study aims to address.

In terms of symbolic function in animation, blue is used extensively in the forest and waterfall scenes, illustrating the plot where Shen Zhengdao leads his disciples in practice. The serene, ink-painting-like background reflects Shen Zhengdao's ideals of tolerance, hope, and the pursuit of a free life. The yellow and gold tones of the Soil Fat Slope convey a sense of primitive nature, suggesting stability and symbolizing it as a secluded, otherworldly location. At Chentang Pass, blue is used on the eve of battle. Its proximity to black indicates the descent of night, symbolizing the imminence of destruction and the fading of peace, creating an atmosphere of doom. For Shiji Niangniang's realm, deep purple dominates, typically associated with nobility. However, in this context, it conveys strangeness and mystery, enhancing the enigmatic and eerie nature of the character.

4.2. Affective transmission functions on animated films

Wu highlighted in his research that color represents emotions since during the long-term accumulation of life, people can form visual perception through different colors. For example, red and orange can transmit affection of irritation and hot while green can give people a sense of calm and cool. This is because according to daily life experience, people can associate red with fire and green with trees. Warm and bright colors convey excitement and passion and light and cold colors transmit quiet and easygoing. Wu used the Japanese movie "Dragon Cat" as an example. In the movie, the colors used are bright and cold ones like blue, white and green. The blue sky, white clouds and green trees combined together give people a sense of calm and relax, causing the authentic resonance [10]. Wu's study provides strong evidence of color's emotional impact, though more analysis of recent popular animated films would help further support the argument.

Similarly, Wang also thinks that colors used in films can cause affective fluctuation on people, giving people strong visual shock. Colors can convey affections and emotions since they represent people's life experience and trigger people to explore their deep memories. Therefore, Wang concludes that appropriate application of various colors in films can enhance the appreciation effects for films. However, there are no exact films or animated films as examples for proof [9].

As for the affective transmission function, cyan and vermillion are interweaved in describing the Dragon King Ao Guang, indicating him calm and profound. Cinnabar red is widely used on Nezha's appearance, conveying an affection of passion and rebelliousness towards the world. Vermillion manifests that Nezha is a child unrestrained to the traditional rules and customs. The combination of vermillion and cyan successfully creates a world that seems to be driven by a force, informing danger and romance to audience.

5. Discussion and suggestion

5.1. Discussion

This research used *Nezha 2*, a popular Chinese animated film as a studying subject to analyze how different colors used in the film exert different functions. The findings in case study can be concluded that: 1) Color application achieves positive narrative functions for an animated film; 2) Color use achieves positive symbolic functions for an animated film; 3) Color use achieves positive affective transmission functions for an animated film.

The film *Nezha 2* applies black and white as the background color to convey the cultural elements of ink paintings in Song Dynasty, which conforms to Jing's idea that color language narrates nationality or culture in animated films [8]. The color used in illustrating Jade Void Palace are white and blue to indicate the place is full of indifference and alienation, which agrees with Wang's view that color language fulfils story narration. *Nezha 2* supplements as another example of animated film, which is a more vivid reflection of Wang's research, considering it only focused on films [9].

The film *Nezha 2* uses green to symbolize tolerance and hope of the character to Shenzhengdao. Also, yellow and gold present a symbol of stability. In addition, the color in Chentang Pass is blue even dark blue to symbolize destruction and death. Moreover, the deep purple used in demonstrating Shiji Niangniang shows that she is more mysterious. These applications agree with Ren's study of dividing colors into bright colors and heavy colors to symbolize various conditions in films while *Nezha 2* is richer in adding animated films as study subject [6]. However, *Nezha 2*'s color language is more manifested in surroundings so it does not exactly aligns with Wang's idea, which is using colors on different items in the film [9].

The affections that colors express in *Nezha 2* are mainly calm, irritation, passion and rebelliousness, by using red, cyan and vermillion. This agrees with Wu's study that color is a representation of various emotions such as irritation, calm and cool. In addition, cyan is divided as cold color and vermillion is warm color, which conforms to Wu's classification of different colors [10].

5.2. Suggestion

Therefore, suggestions for animated film makers are based on the idea to create better films by applying color language more effectively. It is suggested that animated film makers should combine cultural backgrounds with different colors for culture narration and storytelling. For example, while red is related to happiness and joy in Chinese culture, white is more used in Japanese films. Film makers, no matter from China or western countries, should especially use colors to narrate cultural elements. In addition, to enhance the impression of the audience, animation film creators should refer to colors in different atmosphere to symbolize different features. Creators should be familiar with each color function, by studying various research on colors. Finally, to win the resonance of

audience towards the animate film, it is necessary for film creators list all the emotion and affections waiting to be characterized in the film and to match them with corresponding colors.

6. Conclusion

This research explores the functions of color language used in animated film, categorizing them into narrative, symbolic, and affective transmission roles. Through a case analysis of *Nezha 2*, the study finds that colors is a good reflection of story narration, show different symbols and transmit different affections. Thus, the suggestions for animated film makers are 1) to use typical color examples for cultural backgrounds narration; 2) to use different colors to symbolize different conditions for enhancing audience's impression of plots; 3) to use different colors to describe character's affection to trigger audience's emotion.

Nevertheless, there are still several limitations. Firstly, this research takes *Nezha 2* as a textual study but no specific data was collected and analysed. Textual analysis is full of subjective views so that different functions of color language of the films is lack of strong statistical support. Secondly, audience perspectives were not incorporated, which limits understanding of how color language is received by viewers. Thirdly, due to time constraints, in-depth data collection was not feasible [11].. Therefore, improvements are: 1) integrating statistical analysis by designing a questionnaire to collect data from respondents; 2) Carrying out interviews on audience to collect their textual views on color languages used in *Nezha 2*; 3) Extending the time for data collection or information collection is a necessity for further study.

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