

Logical Analysis and Impact of Character Development in Animated Films: A Case Study of Nezha 2

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Abstract. In the context of global media, animated films have become a crucial area for showcasing a nation's cultural soft power. A construction of effective characters is usually essential for the successful adaptation of intellectual property (IP). This study examined how *Ne Zha 2: The Demon Boy Churns the Sea* (2025) integrated traditional mythology with contemporary society through the analysis of the underlying logic in the construction of the characters. To analyze the narrative context of the "shared body" of the protagonist in the film and the enlarged set of secondary characters, this article uses literary analysis and textual analysis, combining the theory of the cultural representation of Stuart Hall with the theory of displacement of Northrop Frye. The results reveal that the film, through a strategy of familiarization with traditional IP mythology, transformed the relationship between Ne Zha and Ao Bing, passing from a binary opposition present in previous works to a shared destination. Use the dialectical logic of the "unity of opposites" to dismantle the stereotypes of traditional mythology. The extended list of secondary characters elevates the narrative of a simple, familiar story to a portrait of different social classes, deeply reflecting the structural prejudices of society. This film has great potential for intercultural communication thanks to its narrative structure, which effectively resolves the conflict between the essence of ancient ethnic culture and modern universal values. It provides new theoretical ideas about how to maintain ethnic identity while the IP of Chinese mythology is globalized.

Keywords: Nezha, animated film, cultural representation, archetype displacement, cross-cultural communication

1. Introduction

In the context of the global media, animated films have transcended their role of mere children's entertainment to become a vital platform for nations to show their cultural soft power [1].. Hollywood animated films and the Japanese anime industry have become very popular all over the world. This shows that animated films can unite people even if they speak different languages [2]. What contributed to the return of such popular animated films was the development and adaptation of intellectual property (IP). The IPs of successful animations are inseparable from the creation of the design of their characters. In addition to being the main force of the narrative, the characters also act as conductors so that the emotions of the public are connected with certain cultural values [1]. Through the continuous evolution of classic franchises, creators can respond and constantly

reformulate contemporary social problems within a shared symbolic universe [3]. The Chinese animated films are trying to show what the cultural identity of China means in a world where everyone shares the same symbols and ideas, and they are doing it using new versions of ancient mythological characters [4].

This study is really important because it helps to understand what factors contribute to the success of Chinese animated films. Examine how they can be popular in the whole world keeping at the same time their unique Chinese characteristics. A lot has been written about Ne Zha's series. Most of the comments focus on history or special effects. What is missing is an analysis of how the characters are created, and that makes them so attractive, which is a fundamental part of the success of the Ne Zha series. This study tries to understand something by analyzing how the ideas present in the ancient myths can be combined with the values that people create today. The study aims to analyze how ancient stories and new values can be connected in a way that has meaning. The logic of this study consists of finding a way to reconcile the profound meaning of traditional myths with the values of modern society.

This study selects the main case of the film Ne Zha 2: The Demon Boy Churns the Sea (2025) (hereinafter referred to as Ne Zha 2). Ne Zha 2 is the sequel to the popular film NeZha that premiered in 2019. This film explored the dynamics of the characters more radically, introducing in particular the concept of the "shared body" between Ne Zha and Ao Bing, transforming the binary opposition of ancient mythology into a shared destiny in a modern context [5]. The analysis in this article examines the internal organizational patterns that Nezha and Ao Bing demonstrate as main characters while showing how additional supporting characters enhance the film's traditional Chinese cultural transmission.

This paper uses a literature review to find and analyze materials and academic works. The advantage of this way is that it can combine Stuart Hall's Cultural Representation Theory with Northrop Frye's theory of Displacement. This combination gives us a base to analyze the strange character relationships in the film [6, 7]. Through the integration of textual analysis, we can thoroughly deconstruct the visual symbols and the narrative details present in the films. This way researchers can get an idea of how creators use defamiliarization to shake up the things that viewers think they know. The creative process of defamiliarization through disruption enables viewers to develop new perspectives which combat their first reactions [3].

The main goal of this study is to reveal the unique character development strategy behind Ne Zha 2. The method establishes a dialectical balance between ancient mythological symbols and modern universal values through a process which combines cultural defamiliarization with preservation of traditional elements. Broke it down to see how it works and how people from different cultures understand it. The aesthetic system of the Chinese animation can learn from this study. The movie is a tool for people to share ideas across cultures, but it is also limited by the culture it comes from [8]. This study wants to show how the movie can be used to help China's animation aesthetic system grow in the future.

2. Theoretical framework and background

The process of animated film production demands designers to create characters through multiple aspects during their design development. A good character design emerges when all elements unite to create a complete character through their appearance, their narrative, their spoken words and their actions in the film. The facial expressions which characters display in a story help viewers understand their emotional condition and personal characteristics. The dialogue between characters shows their emotions which leads to genuine communication between them. The musical elements

establish an emotional atmosphere that brings every dramatic scene to life. The design of the characters is really important because it must be in line with the story of the character and with the voices that the lives. The research of Claude Lévi-Strauss about mythical structures functions as theoretical evidence which enables the analysis of this complex system. He postulated that the true constitutive elements of myth are in their isolated relations, but these reflect the logic of binary opposition inherent in human thought. The various elements are combined and used together, giving the same sense to the myth [9]. The Ne Zha film series uses mythological storytelling to create an organized way of understanding how good and evil forces battle against the natural human need for independence and the fate that life has in store. The myth archetypes in the Ne Zha film series are like a tool create a simple way to understand how opposite things can work together.

Stuart Hall introduced semiotics as a research method for communication studies. He developed a critical theory about how culture is represented. The theory provides a method to study how filmmakers create their characters through their work in television and film production. Hall argues that film is essentially a process of recoding culture through audiovisual symbols [7]. The characters in this cultural symbol present a representation which shows how power operates and what values society holds in its social system [7]. When we look at the movie Ne Zha 2, we can see that it is taking myths and symbols and making them new again. The film presents modern Chinese characteristics through its depiction of character appearance, their spoken words and behavioral patterns. It shows how young people in China feel about who they're what they want to be. The film also shows how young people want to progress in life and be able to make their own decisions. The film uses elements of contemporary Chinese culture to connect the past with the present on the big screen. The animated film shows a story which examines how Chinese people view their cultural identity and their dreams for the future. The film presents Chinese concepts through visual elements that viewers can easily identify while showing their connection to modern concepts.

Northrop Frye's archetypal theory shows that the basic idea of adapting IP is found in the story structure. It argues that the essence of artistic creation can often be considered as repetition and the creative displacement of fundamental archetypes [6]. The process of creating successful IP adaptation needs designers to preserve their emotional connection with archetypes while they incorporate modern elements into their work. The demonic modulation technique serves as a solution to solve this problem because it enables designers to create new prototype designs which move past their established moral limits [6]. The way Nezha's character changed from being about doing what your family wants to being about going against what is meant to be is a great example of how a hero can be reimagined. This modernization process requires that creators deepen emotions that connect with the contemporary public, preserving at the same time the distinctive identity of intellectual property, which allows it to transmit deep national cultural feelings.

Character creation is really important for linking ideas with what is happening now and the key to making it work is finding a balance between keeping things traditional and making them new and different. The fundamental principle of defamiliarization theory demands artists to create new ways of observing which enable viewers to experience art in different ways [3]. The film Ne Zha 2 transforms the conventional depiction of a divine child who embodies sincerity and kindness and virtue into a contemporary human character. The artistic method of modernization through defamiliarization achieves a balanced state that maintains original elements while adding new elements to create maximum dramatic tension. The cultural modernization process allows IP transformation through these methods which generate fresh possibilities for IP development. Character development requires ongoing creative development with authentic cultural elements to function as an effective method for cultural representation.

3. Case study

3.1. Protagonist logic: Ne Zha and Ao Bing

In the character construction of the Ne Zha film series, Ne Zha and Ao Bing have been recoded as distinct cultural symbols. As the story's main character, Ne Zha's portrayal completely deconstructs the traditional concept of deities. The character's flat nose and dark circles appear differently than what most people expect to see in god images. The filmmakers depicted Ne Zha as a human figure to create sympathy in their audience. The creators wanted to portray Ne Zha as an outcast to create the strongest possible audience sympathy for this character. This design is adjusted to the psychological models of simplification and amplification, so that we configure its appearance and behavior in a way that evokes compassion in the viewers [10]. The tradition of Ne Zha's story deals with the rebellion against the patriarchal authority and, with the time, has become a fight against the destined forest. The presentation enables viewers to identify their individual concerns while showing how these concerns impact the social structure at large. The change affects people who did not belong to the original group. Ao Bing is a character of the Taoist concept of yin and yang, forming a symmetrical relationship with Ne Zha [11]. Ao Bing looks perfect on the outside, but he has a sad background. His family is treated badly because of their demon clan. The gap between the label that defines his identity and his personal freedom turns it into a projection of social stratification and identity crises.

In Ne Zha 2, the construction of the protagonists, Ne Zha and Ao Bing, experienced a revolutionary improvement with respect to the previous film NeZha. In NeZha, the conflict between them is derived from the existence of the "Spirit Orb" and the "Demon Orb", due to an imbalance between the yin and the yang. However, in Ne Zha 2, the creators put Ao Bing's spirit inside Ne Zha's body, which is called "shared body". This approach is a typical example of how to defamiliarize an existing IP. It completely changed what the audience thought about two heroes working together, and it transformed their relationship from merely feeling connected on the outside to being truly connected on the inside [3]. This setting is essentially the ultimate application of the displacement mechanism described by Frye in contemporary narratives [6]. Support the archetypes of ancient heroes and mortal enemies by a modern allegory on the coexistence of the self and the other. Visually, Ne Zha's actions blend Ao Bing's composure with ice-based magical powers. In addition to enhancing the character's psychological depth, this recoding of audiovisual symbols more deeply represents the mental propensity of modern people to overcome internal barriers and integrate multiple identities to seek deeper cultural recognition when confronted with unstoppable social structural pressures like identity prejudice and social class solidification. This strategy of "merging two into one" in character construction allows Ne Zha 2 to carry forward the successful IP's genes while achieving a narrative leap from individual growth to a shared destiny through a process of defamiliarization.

3.2. Supporting characters and antagonists

In the character construction of Ne Zha 2, the supporting cast has become a lot more interesting and complex. They are not family members anymore, but a big group of people from different parts of society. In comparison with the familiar narrative centered on the couple of Li Jing in NeZha, Ne Zha 2 presents a wider list of characters from the kingdom of the demons, the dragons, people from the heavens, building a more extensive panorama of social power. The expanded group portrait displays in art according to Hall's recoding theory demonstrate the complex social power structures

which operate in society [7]. The movie is not about Ne Zha's personal fate. It is also about the problems that the whole dragon clan faces. Live in the abyss, suffering an unfair treatment due to its lineage. This is why they feel like they do not belong. The movie shows how this unfair treatment affects all of them. The other characters in the film are not there to help tell the story of Ne Zha. They have their stories and meanings. The movie is now about how the whole dragon clan deals with the way they are treated. It is not just about Ne Zha and his problems. The dragon clan and their story help us think about how society treats people. The new way of thinking about characters moves away from family-based character development to include social environments and cultural limits.

The movie Ne Zha 2 tries to work to destereotype antagonist characters. The author has expanded the character of Shen Gongbao. The character started as someone who wanted power but he evolved into a tragic hero who battles against social obstacles which block his path to success because his birth position defined his social position. The current IP development needs researchers to perform complete investigations instead of using traditional villainous characters according to Chen and Gu [5]. The public will be able to better understand the social forces that will drive Shen Gongbao's actions by observing the different challenges hidden to those faced while ascending the heavenly kingdom. This transformation applies Frye's theory of displacement to convert the basic evil archetype from traditional myths into workplace injustice and social stratification which modern viewers can better understand [6]. The story of Shen Gongbao and his actions become more interesting when we see the challenges that were faced in the realm and how they will affect his life. Shen Gongbao is different in Ne Zha 2. He is not about one thing like he was before. Now he helps us see the problems inside the system. This shows that the Chinese animation is improving in the creation of antagonistic characters. They are not just good or evil anymore. The movies are showing that people can be complicated, like Shen Gongbao. Chinese animated films are making characters like Shen Gongbao more interesting and realistic.

The parental roles of Li Jing and Lady Yin develop in Ne Zha 2, transforming their roles from guardians to fellow travelers. The main function of Li Jing and his wife in NeZha was to provide emotional backing and defense to the characters. The characters in Ne Zha 2 actively fought against heavenly tribulation by joining forces to become essential fighting allies. The creator used this character to show his new approach for depicting equal partnership between modern dream family members. The film demonstrates how Li Jing couple demonstrates both strength and strategic abilities when dealing with major emergencies which creates a new perspective on parental characters. Yang argues that this contemporary reconstruction of traditional ethical relations has greatly strengthened the cultural sense of belonging between modern audiences [1]. The parental figures in the sequel show better survival skills and strategic thinking than the selfless behavior which appeared in the first story. The story places its supporting characters at advanced levels which allows them to develop stronger emotional bonds with Nezha. Through this multidimensional expansion of supporting characters, Ne Zha 2 ultimately forms a complete and dynamic reconstructed system.

4. Discussion

4.1. The impact of cultural transmission

The film Ne Zha 2 effectively shows how people outside society experience common fears and rebellious attitudes which young people in today's world commonly feel. The film shows Ne Zha and Ao Bing as two characters who share a single body which represents their destiny. The method

of character development enables viewers from different age groups to develop emotional connections through its outstanding incorporation of traditional cultural elements which boosts national cultural pride. The cross-cultural communication approach identifies the "merging two into one" framework as a fundamental universal concept which exists across all cultures. Yu's research shows that the modernization of Ne Zha, through a story that resonates deeply in the public, breaks national myths of the past and shows how people can transform and gain social acceptance [12]. The visual impact of sharing a physical body not only upgrades the close relationship between the two heroes in the previous work but also conveys the Chinese wisdom of cooperation, symbiosis, and harmonious coexistence to a global audience through the dialectical thinking of the unity of opposites on a philosophical level. The movie becomes more interesting when we get to know the characters better through their portrayal of the groups who face discrimination including the dragon clan. This makes the story of Ne Zha 2 interesting and close to people from other countries. The film shows that the Chinese animation can use narrative methods from other places to tell deeper stories about China and its culture. Ne Zha 2 is an example of how Chinese animation can make people think about important issues such as justice and equality. The film Ne Zha 2 uses characters in a way that helps us see things from a perspective. This helps Ne Zha 2 to connect with people from different cultures and make them think about how we must treat each other.

4.2. Limitations and challenges in cross-cultural communication

The effectiveness in intercultural communication is also limited because it is based on a creative model that depends to a large extent on the adaptation of IP. The main challenge is the issue of the cultural discount in terms of the translatability of the myths. Although concepts such as the common body create a powerful visual impact, the basic rationale for their dissemination is still based on the public's knowledge of the specific legendary context of China. This complex mechanism of symbolic displacement may create decryption barriers for audiences from other countries that are not aware of the relevant cultural context. As a result, they may only be able to perceive the surface-level spectacle of movement and not understand the deeper cultural representation intended [8]. The solution to this problem needs developers to create new IP adaptations which will develop narrative methods that connect with basic human emotions. According to Yang creators should use common human emotions which include family experiences and personal development to translate complex cultural elements into mythological symbols which will help them reach a broader international audience [1].

The harmony of aesthetic tastes and the loss of cultural excellence is also a challenge that cannot be ignored. Gu explained that Westernization of character designs through excessive Hollywood commercial animation emulation could create an aesthetic deadlock for domestic animation which would lead to the loss of its native visual identity [13]. The development of technology skills together with aesthetic abilities needs to become the highest priority. Digital technology has brought new changes to traditional Chinese artistic styles which artists need to understand about this process. The global animation market requires aesthetic innovation to achieve differentiated competition which will create an unreplaceable cultural presence [2]. The artists should attempt to combine Chinese painting techniques with modern 3D technology for their work. They can use Chinese ideas when designing the background and colors of a film. The special elements of Chinese art become visible through the clothing choices of characters and their detailed presentation and the way artists use light. The design approach will create an animation style which will draw international market interest. Animation companies can make a name for themselves by doing things this way.

The commercial approach threatens to harm the artistic subversive elements which creative work originally contained. As Amos Vogel pointed out, when profitability becomes the dominant standard, business success often inadvertently suppresses the most challenging and provocative artistic expressions [14]. The industry develops blind imitation of successful models which results in mythological theme overuse and creates a problem of homogenization [2]. Creators should maintain a clear and focused creative vision and avoid mechanical repetition of successful methods. Instead of making continuous concessions to meet the demands of the mass market, it is better to hold on to the critical spirit of myths that can penetrate reality and provoke deep thinking. Chinese mythological IP will maintain its enduring value through the prevention of excessive entertainment which threatens to diminish the authentic depth of mythological content.

5. Conclusions

Ne Zha 2 achieves its tremendous success primarily through its groundbreaking restructure and enhancement of character portrayal logic. The movie shows Nezha and Ao Bing as two bodies that belong to a destined group of people who successfully transform how people view their traditional mythological characters. The film presents Ne Zha and Ao Bing working together as a single heroic unit instead of depicting them as individual heroes. The film presentation makes viewers evaluate their understanding of heroic conduct. The "unity of opposites" concept helps us understand how heroic mythological stories evolve into stories that celebrate social unity by accepting different types of people. The current stories that people find relatable in today's world. The movie has a lot of characters. The story demonstrates how social institutions create different experiences for people who belong to different social classes through their encounters with prejudice and societal inequality. The story presents social systems as its main focus instead of personal courage because it demonstrates how various social groups must deal with obstacles and face discrimination. Believable characters enable us to connect vital cultural values from previous societies to common human values that every person worldwide possesses.

The two theories of prototype displacement and cultural representation theory explain how modern animation IPs function effectively. People continue to believe in myths because they actively modify the cultural narratives that already exist. The case of Ne Zha 2 delivers essential strategic direction that China should use to develop its animation sector. The contemporary application of national IP allows researchers to study human aspects in myths by using defamiliarization as their method. The system enables China to develop its own animation style while teaching vital methods for safeguarding Chinese national heritage through narrative adaptation when China engages in international cultural exchanges.

The creation of Ne Zha 2 is a step forward for the Chinese animation industry. The film brought commercial success to the market while Chinese animators used it to show their cultural heritage to viewers worldwide. The story uses Chinese elements to create a narrative that audiences from all over the world can relate to. The film established a common experience that brought together viewers who came from different cultural backgrounds. The presentation demonstrates that Chinese culture maintains its unique strength, which people worldwide can appreciate during the process of global integration. The film Ne Zha 2 demonstrates how Chinese culture maintains its authentic heritage while becoming known throughout the world.

The investigation analyzes the development of the characters in the film through systematic analysis, so it presents certain limitations. Due to the current lack of large-scale international market feedback data, this study mainly focuses on textual and logical analysis. Scientists cannot perform quantitative comparative research to study Ne Zha's impact on foreign audiences because there is

not enough data to determine how different cultural groups understand complex concepts about "shared body." Research conducted in the future needs to analyze Chinese mythological IP dissemination through specific audience psychological data to understand its effective spread and cultural bias impact on recognition across different cultural environments, which will establish the optimal path for Chinese animation worldwide expansion.

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