

Analysis of the Impact of Cultural Elements in Chinese Animated Films on International Market Dissemination - Taking Ne Zha 2 as an Example

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Abstract. In recent years, the frequency and number of Chinese animated films "going global" have been increasing year by year. The Chinese traditional culture contained in each film has also sparked a wave of discussions in the international market. This article takes the huge success of Ne Zha 2 as the starting point to explore the dissemination impact of Chinese cultural elements in animated films on the international stage. The research reveals that through industrial upgrading and content innovation, Chinese animated films have promoted the further development of the industry. However, they also face challenges such as a single industrial structure and intense international competition pressure and the limitation of the subject matter and so on. This article, based on case studies and theoretical analysis, proposes suggestions to promote the high-quality development of the Chinese animated film industry, in order to enhance cultural soft power and facilitate the dissemination and enhancement of the influence of Chinese traditional culture worldwide.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, Ne Zha 2, Chinese animated film

1. Introduction

This research focuses on the analysis of the influence of culture in Chinese animated films on the international market; this research is of great significance to both the Chinese animated film industry and the Chinese cultural entertainment industry; this research mainly elaborates specifically from aspects such as cross-cultural communication of Ne Zha 2 and the development of Chinese animated films; the literature analysis method was used to search and read relevant materials and literature, and this method has the advantage of being able to well analyze the communication strategies of Ne Zha 2 and the challenges faced by Chinese animated films, which is conducive to the progress of the research; the ultimate research goal of this study is to analyze how the culture in Chinese animated films spreads in the international market and the next development suggestions for the Chinese animated film industry.

2. Analysis of the dissemination strategy of Ne Zha 2

2.1. Support from technological innovation

Science and technology are the primary productive forces, and this is also true for the film industry. For a film to reach the global stage and become a renowned brand in the film market, it cannot do without strong technological support. The reason why Ne Zha 2 achieved such remarkable success is that the technological innovations involved in the film are also a significant factor. The number of special effects shots in the film is as high as 1,900, accounting for over 80% of the total shots [1]. These special effects shots were realized through meticulous technology and algorithms. Firstly, the production team of Ne Zha 2 independently developed a new technology, using some splendid special effects and large-scale battle scenes through the combination of the virtual and real elements of Chinese ink painting, thus achieving the effect of the "ink universe", presenting a cultural third space with Chinese style, and elevating Chinese aesthetics to a new height. This technological empowerment not only shocked the Chinese but also enabled Westerners to re-examine the excellent connotations of Chinese traditional culture. It is also an important opportunity to showcase the soft power of Chinese culture. Secondly, using AI technology to assist in animation production, reducing the workload of the original artists, accelerating the production process, and reducing costs. At the same time, integrating Chinese aesthetics perfectly into 3D models, maintaining the aesthetic unity of the entire film. The technological upgrade of Ne Zha 2 can reduce costs, enhance immersion, strengthen interaction, and at the same time achieve the transformation process from traditional technology to industrialization, breaking away from the high dependence of Chinese animated films on overseas rendering technologies, and further promoting the concept of "hard technology" and "soft culture" advancing in tandem.

2.2. National policy support

The "going global" of outstanding Chinese literary and artistic works requires the support of relevant national policies as the primary guarantee. An important meeting of the Communist Party of China has also set the promotion of building a socialist cultural power as an important goal. For Ne Zha 2, its success in breaking through the boundaries also cannot be separated from policy support, mainly including financial support for "cultural going global" and relevant tax preferential policies. Ne Zha 2 was rated as a major film support project in Sichuan in 2022 and received the top-level policy support of 15 million yuan that year [2]. This fund provided a good foundation for the high-level production of the film, such as technological research and development and international market promotion. When Ne Zha 2 was released overseas, the translation and dubbing costs of its English version, French version, etc. were covered by the "cultural going global" special subsidy, accounting for 30%. At the same time, relevant tax preferential policies also provided support for Ne Zha 2 to further "going global". The production company of Ne Zha 2, as a high-tech enterprise, can enjoy a preferential corporate income tax rate of 15% [3]. This preferential system reduces the production costs of enterprises and encourages them to continue to invest in special effects technology.

2.3. Contemporary reconstruction of values

From the perspective of values, the contemporary reconfiguration of values is more appealing to contemporary youth. The reconfiguration involves integrating traditional values with modern issues, adapting to the trend of the times, and making some excellent traditional values more inclusive and

dialogic. For example, the concept of "unwavering destiny" in the mythological story prototype of Nian was reconfigured into resistance against traditional authority oppression, such as the tragic ending of Nian in "The Legend of the Divine Comedy", while "The Second Nian" combines Taoist thought with the "individual awakening" in contemporary young culture, forming a value interface for cross-cultural communication. Secondly, unlike the individual heroism complex of Hollywood, Nian's resistance emphasizes the struggle against identity discrimination and social prejudice, which aligns with the collective anxiety in contemporary Southeast Asian society regarding the suppression of individuals by collectivism, and evokes deep emotional resonance within the Han cultural circle. The contemporary reconfiguration of values can rejuvenate some classic and excellent values in the new era, while promoting the improvement of ideological concepts and social progress.

3. Diversified communication strategies for the global market

3.1. Communication strategies for the Asian market

Cross-cultural communication should be based on values that are acceptable to all participants in the interaction, in order to generate resonance. However, each country has different cultural backgrounds and value systems, and the styles of the literary and artistic works that people like also vary greatly. Therefore, when China conducts cross-cultural communication, it needs to analyze specific issues on a case-by-case basis and create its own literary and artistic works according to the tastes and needs of specific audiences. From the perspective of the Asian market, due to the similarities in historical backgrounds between China and Asia and the proximity of geographical distances, in the process of communication, works with cultural similarities will be chosen. For example, *The Return of the Dragon Princess* (1998), after its broadcast, became popular in Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, etc.) and became a collective memory for a generation. A large part of the reason for this is that many cultural concepts in the drama, such as family ethics, seniority and hierarchy, are very consistent with the values of the Asian Confucian cultural circle. For example, the Korean drama "The Great Crown Princess" reflects the strict court style. Another example is *The Step-by-Step Shocking Story* (2011), which spread rapidly in South Korea and Japan. The main reason for this is that its time-travel theme meets the aesthetic preferences of the target audience in East Asia and is more acceptable, and these cases indicate that for markets with similar cultures, the cultural discount of Chinese literary and artistic works in the Asian market is lower, and thus the communication effect is better.

3.2. Communication strategies in the European and American markets

For the European and American markets, literary works with cultural similarities are relatively less popular. The export of Chinese culture needs to be combined with local aesthetic preferences and value orientations. European and American audiences have a special fondness for Eastern mythological themes and heroic sentiments. The mysteriousism and grand worldview contained therein are highly appealing to the audiences in the European and American markets. For instance, the global box office of the Disney animated version of *Hua Mulan* was 304 million US dollars, with the North American box office reaching 120 million US dollars. The reasons why this film was popular in the European and American markets were many, such as female independence and the oriental exoticism in the visuals. The Eastern mythological elements in *Ne Zha 2* were also highly favored by the markets in Europe and America. The film was released in 37 European countries, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, etc., and was shown in over 1,000 cinemas.

Moreover, in some European countries, the screening rate of Ne Zha 2 exceeded that of Captain America 4, almost reaching the upper limit of screening rates for foreign language films in American cinemas. The heroic sentiment refers to the cultural phenomenon of the worship and yearning for heroic figures and related traits in human culture. Its core features include the spirit of confrontation, sacrifice and redemption, etc. The acceptance of this culture in the European and American markets is relatively high. For example, the North American box office of The Wandering Earth 2 exceeded 5 million US dollars, setting a new record for Chinese science fiction films [4]. The innovative expression of collective heroism and the concept of community of common future expressed in this film were accepted by the European and American markets. There are also many cases in the gaming field. For instance, since the release of the game Genshin Impact, its global user spending has approached 2.7 billion US dollars. This game is very popular in the markets of Asia-Pacific, Europe and America, as well as Africa [5]. The innovation of the heroic element in the narrative structure of this game and the reinforcement of heroic narratives by the game institutions are all important factors for its success. The success of Eastern mythological and heroic-themed literary works in the European and American markets precisely aligns with this point.

4. The development and challenges of China's animation film industry

In recent years, the Chinese animation film industry has achieved a leap in quality while expanding in scale. According to relevant data, the total box office of Chinese films has exceeded 50 billion yuan in 2025, an increase of 22% compared to the same period last year. Among them, the box office of animation films exceeded 24.5 billion yuan throughout the year, becoming a major pillar of the film market [6]. The key driving forces for its transformation and upgrading mainly come from two aspects: industrial upgrading and content innovation. The synergy of these elements not only promotes the improvement and upgrading of the industrial system but also significantly enhances the influence and dissemination power of Chinese traditional culture on the international stage.

4.1. Industry upgrading

Since the "13th Five-Year Plan", the Chinese government has accelerated the development of the entertainment industry through a multi-dimensional policy framework. Supported by the construction of national cultural export bases, the "Belt and Road" cultural exchange mechanism, and the special fund for domestic animation, an industrial optimization framework has been established. The "Chinese Classic Folk Tale Animation Creation Project" has incubated phenomenon-level artistic works such as Ne Zha: The Demonic Child Descending and The White Snake: Origin. Through modernization of traditional IP and technological iteration, domestic animation has entered the ranks of the world's leading animation industries. The prosperity of the capital market has provided strong impetus for the Chinese entertainment industry. Internet giants (Tencent, Alibaba, Bilibili) have created a full industrial production chain covering IP development, production, and overseas distribution through strategic investment, ecosystem integration, and global layout.

4.2. Content innovation

The Chinese animation film industry has broken away from the traditional single-content production model and gradually established a new all-chain development model of "animation films + games + derivatives + offline experiences". This transformation marks a significant progress in the content

innovation and reform of the Chinese cultural entertainment industry. For instance, since 2019 when Ne Zha: The Demonic Child initiated the "Feng Sheng Universe", Light Media has implemented a multi-dimensional strategy for this IP. In the film and television sector, in 2020, Legend of Deification achieved a box office of 1.603 billion yuan, verifying the feasibility of continuing this strategy. In 2022, New Gods: Yang Jian further consolidated the industrialization level of the mythological system with a technological breakthrough in the Golden Rooster Award for Best Visual Effects and Created an unprecedented mythical world. In terms of game adaptation, the mobile game Ne Zha Reborn developed by Tencent Games was launched in 2024 and its first month's revenue exceeded 200 million yuan [7]. Moreover, the Ne Zha 2 released in the summer of 2024 was regarded by the capital market as a key work that contributed to the significant increase in the market value of Light Media. Its derivative products cover 23 categories such as figurines and cards, and all have achieved good results. For instance, on January 30th, Baipuma launched the Ne Zha the Demonic Child - Inception of the Divine Bond figurine blind box. Only 8 days after its launch, the sales exceeded 10 million yuan, and the average daily online search volume exceeded 20,000 [8]. In the process of international expansion of China's excellent traditional culture, only by examining the nationalistic traditional culture in the global cultural context and reconstructing it in the modern context can a cultural understanding that can be communicated be formed. This requires achieving the modern expression of traditional culture.

4.3. The core challenges faced by China's animation industry currently

Firstly, the Chinese animation film industry has the problem of over-reliance on traditional mythological IPs. The top-grossing films mostly focus on themes such as "Journey to the West" and "The Legend of Feng Sheng", while original realistic themes and science fiction themes are extremely scarce. Moreover, some works have narrative flaws, such as Liaozhai: Lanruo Temple, which has multiple disjointed story styles, resulting in confusion in audience positioning, and the box office and reputation not meeting expectations. There are also certain policy interventions and ideological differences that lead to chaos. For example, the animation Battle through the Heavens deleted some main plots to avoid some sensitive topics, which led to the inability to accurately connect subsequent plots, affecting the character portrayal of the protagonist and the viewing experience of the audience.

Secondly, the investment scale of this industry is concentrated within a narrow range of several million to several hundred million yuan, lacking the coexistence of multiple institutions, such as the large-scale investment and small-budget independent investment structure seen in Hollywood. Moreover, the profit model of China's animation film industry still largely relies on box office revenue, lacking a full-chain development. In terms of derivative product development and cross-media value exploration, it has a significant gap compared to the top global IP. For example, in Japan, the Pokémon franchise has a diverse derivative product ecosystem, ranging from card games to figurines and clothing, and it also sets related limited editions based on the animation plot. According to public data, the global sales of Pokémon's derivative products exceeded 10 billion US dollars in 2023, far exceeding other sectors such as animation broadcasting and in-game purchases [9]. At the same time, the extension of its offline scenarios is also worth exploring. It has rich offline scenarios, such as the Pokémon park at Universal Studios in Japan, theme restaurants, and offline events, converting the virtual IP into physical experiences. In contrast, the derivatives of Chinese animation films are relatively simple and homogeneous, and very few can extend the animation prototype to offline scenarios.

Finally, the international competitiveness of this industry is relatively weak, and it is difficult to break into the overseas market. The American and Japanese animation IPs and their derivative products have long dominated the international market. For instance, the American series Tom and Jerry and Zootopia, and the Japanese series One Piece and Doraemon, which have gained worldwide attention and affection, have already solidified the aesthetic preferences of global audiences. This has squeezed the survival space for Chinese animated films. At the same time, there is a phenomenon of cultural discount in Chinese domestic animation. For example, the Chinese domestic animated film Money King: Hero is Back won 956 million yuan in domestic box office and a high rating of 8.3 on Douban, but it received a lukewarm response in the international market [10]. One week after its release, the mainstream American box office statistics website still couldn't find any data records. The core problem lies in that the film deeply integrates the traditional Chinese mythological story "Journey to the West", and the storylines such as "Sun Wukong being imprisoned in the Five Elements Mountain" and "Xuanzang's previous life redemption" are cultural common knowledge for Chinese audiences. However, Western audiences lack knowledge of the corresponding information, so they are prone to be confused when watching, especially regarding some story settings and character designs. The core spirit of the protagonist "Great Sage" - "resistance against authority" - is universal, but the imagery such as "Jin Gu Bang" and "Flying Cloud" representing Chinese cultural symbols, even with direct translation through subtitles, cannot convey the deep meaning of "constraint and freedom" in Eastern culture. Ultimately, it is difficult to evoke emotional resonance.

In response to the challenges faced by Chinese animated films, the following aspects can be strengthened to enhance their own strength and strive to achieve cultural export, and enter the international market as soon as possible. First, it is necessary to strengthen the design of original IPs, avoiding excessive reliance on traditional Chinese myths and legends, which may cause a certain degree of aesthetic fatigue among audiences and affect the film's reputation and box office. The second point is that the profit model of Chinese animated films needs to be changed. It should not merely rely on box office revenue but strengthen the development of the entire industrial chain and cross-media value research and development. Specifically, this includes games, clothing, blind boxes, and offline theme parks, etc. These products can also bring certain commercial value to the IP. Finally, it is necessary to continue to cultivate internationalized film and television compound talents, using their novel international perspectives to further open the door to international dissemination, reduce cultural discounts, and enable Chinese animated films to go abroad and reach the world, rejuvenating with new vitality!

5. Conclusion

The research results of this study indicate that the culture in Chinese animated films has a significant impact on the international market, and thus the research conclusion drawn is that the key to the successful dissemination of Chinese animated films lies in the global localization strategy of Chinese traditional culture. This study provides many valuable references for future research in this direction, mainly influencing the Chinese animated film industry and the Chinese cultural entertainment industry. Future research should focus more on how Chinese animated films can further develop in this direction for in-depth exploration.

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